

A Fundamental Problem of Meister Eckhart's Mysticism

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In the present paper I pick up the ideas, 'detachment (abegescheidenheit),' 'birth (geburt) of the Son' and 'breaking-through (durchbrechen, durchbruch)' as most important in Eckhart's mysticism, and attempt at examining the relationship among them.

Firstly comes the idea of 'detachment.' Eckhart inculcates on his followers the importance of detachment, that is, detaching oneself from every creaturely thing and, more fundamentally, from self-will that lies deep at the root of attachment to creaturely things. This, however, does not mean an escape to some negative, self-closing tranquility of mind. Contrarily, detachment means for Eckhart piercing through every creaturely thing that comes over and thus making the mind more and more alert to the act of God, that is, to God's entrance into the soul, or God's bearing of the Son. Detachment is something to be renewed every now, until the 'birth' finally takes place.

Next comes the idea of the 'birth of the Son.' It is Eckhart's chief pattern of interpreting mystical experience. The characteristics of this interpretation lie in that (1) it is given throughout from the viewpoint of God's act or operation, and it comprehends mystical experience basically in terms of the birth of a new being, a new ethical being. It is suggested in (2) that where mysticism attains ethics is started.

Thirdly, the idea of 'breaking-through.' It is another interpretation of mystical experience. In this pattern of interpretation Eckhart asserts that the awakened soul breaks through the God in the trinitarian sense of the term as he corresponds to creaturely beings, and hovers in the vast nothingness of Godhead (gotheit). Its charac-

teristic lies in that it is given basically from the viewpoint of the dynamicity of the awakened soul. It is also in this connection that the remarkable antithesis between God and Godhead is brought about.

At the close, what does the existence of the above-mentioned two patterns of interpretation mean? Shall we assume two steps in the development of Eckhart's experience which correspond to those two patterns? My view is as follows:

We cannot but assume in Eckhart's experience an element of abrupt opening or breaking of something unconditional, an immensely dynamic element. The above-mentioned nature of 'detachment' may be said to foretell this. Eckhart interprets this element in terms of God's act, namely, God's giving birth to his Son. It clearly shows the Eckhartian way of thinking. He himself must have valued it, because he repeatedly brought it forth before his auditors. Nevertheless, he could not fully be satisfied with this interpretation and its variations as giving expression to that element. This took Eckhart to another pattern of interpretation in which he attributes that dynamic element not to God, but to man, the awakened soul. To be short, Eckhart produced two patterns of interpreting mystical experience: the one is developed basically along the traditional, trinitarian way of thinking and the other in an altogether original and radical way.