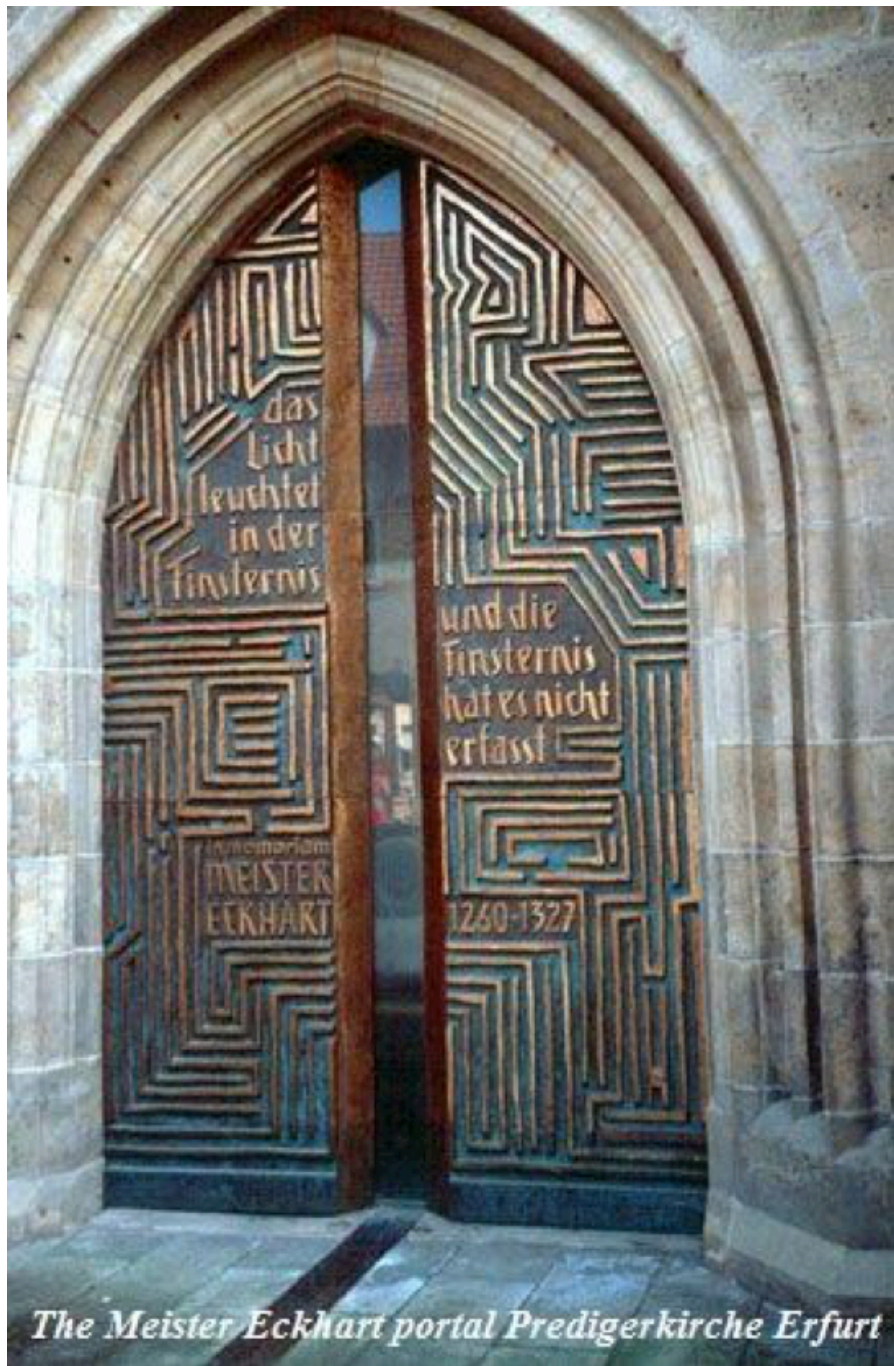


# Meister Eckhart: A Great Light

By Robert K. Clark



*The Meister Eckhart portal Predigerkirche Erfurt*

Meister Eckhart, renowned mystic and theologian, was born in 1260 A. D. in the village of Hochheim in Thuringia, Germany, and died in 1328 A. D.

Entering the Dominican Order at an early age, in 1302 he was promoted to Master of Theology in Paris, hence his title Meister (Master) Eckhart. He held high Church offices throughout much of his life and considered himself a true and loyal adherent of Christianity and the Church, yet at the end of his life he was accused of heresy. Despite Eckhart's protestation of innocence, in 1329 A.D. 17 of his statements were condemned as heretical and 11 as suspect, a verdict Eckhart did not live to hear.

His teachings were influenced by Neoplatonic tenets, including those of Dionysius the Areopagite, as well as by Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus and others. In turn, the Rhineland mystics, including Tauler and Suso, as well as Nicholas of Cusa and Martin Luther, benefited from his wisdom, and he is represented in the works of thinkers as different as Hegel, Fichte and Heidegger.

Eckhart's many writings, both in German and Latin, reveal a deep understanding of the immanence as well as the transcendence of God, the nature of the mystical path and its stages, the relationship of soul to Intellect, and the place of the powers (faculties) of the soul, and ultimately her essential unity, in attaining to her final goal.

*The soul is created for a good so great, so high, that she cannot rest in any mode: all the time she is hastening past modes to the eternal good, to God who is her goal. And this is not to be gained by assault, in the stress and strain of action or of passion, but by gentleness and true humility and self-abnegation.*

~ Meister Eckhart, Sermon LV (6)

## Select Passages from Eckhart's Works Illustrating Aspects of His Thought and Experience

"God works beyond being, in the unconditioned, where He can move. He works in non-being. Before ever there was being, God was working. He created being where there was no being. Those masters who lack subtlety say that God is pure being. He is as high above being as the highest angel is above the gnat. If I were to call God a being it would be as wrong as to say that the sun is white or black. God is neither this nor that."  
*(Sermon LXXXIV (9))*

"There is a power\* in the soul which alone is free....It is free of all names and void of all forms, altogether free and exempt, as God is free and exempt in Himself." \*i.e. Intellect  
*(Sermon VIII (2))*

"When all images are detached from the soul and she sees nothing but the one alone, then the naked essence of the soul finds the naked, formless essence of the divine unity, the superessential being, passive, reposing in itself."  
*(Sermon XCIX (83))*

"If a man should withdraw into himself with all his powers, outer and inner, then he will find himself in a condition in which there is neither image nor motive in him, in which he is without any activity, within or without. He should then observe whether activity comes to him of itself. But if he is not drawn to any work and does not want to undertake anything, then he should force himself to engage in some activity, whether inner or outer...."

"Not that one should flee from, neglect or reject one's inner life, but one must learn to work in it and with it and from it in such a way as to let the inner break out into activity and the activity lead back to the inner, and so train himself to act in freedom."  
*(The Talks of Instruction 23)*

"The eternal Word is spoken inwardly in the heart of the soul, in her inmost and purest recesses, in the summit of her rational nature, and there the birth takes place....The soul in which God is to be born must drop away from time and time from her. She must soar aloft and stand gazing into God's richness."  
*(Sermon XXIX (38))*

"Blessed is the man who diligently listens to what God is saying in him. He is directly exposed to the divine ray of light. The soul that stands with all her powers under the light of God is fired and inflamed with divine love."  
*(Sermon XXX (45))*

"This is the Now of eternity, when the soul knows all things in God, as new and fresh and present and lovely as I have them present."  
*(Sermon XXIX (38))*

## Comments Illustrating the Place Meister Eckhart Holds In the Western Mystical Tradition

"No mystic has ever dropped his plummet deeper into the mysteries of the Godhead, nor has there ever been a bolder interpreter of those mysteries in the language of the common people."

(Rufus Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*)

"...one the greatest mystics of all time. He was undoubtedly a religious genius."

(Rufus Jones, *The Flowering of Mysticism*)

"Pure and unworldly, with a remarkable instinct for metaphysical realities, and an intellectual passion for clearness even in the most ineffable reaches of spiritual experience, he pushed to an extreme that Neoplatonic conception of Reality which had always formed a part, but never the whole, of the mystical tradition of the Church."

(Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church*)

"His daring—indeed sometimes dangerous—speculations and profound insights... greatly enriched and spiritualized the general "sense of God".

(Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church*)

"His mysticism is quiveringly *alive* and of powerful vitality."

(Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West*)

"The greatest of all speculative mystics...his transparent intellectual honesty and his great powers of thought, combined with deep devoutness and childlike purity of soul, make him one of the most interesting figures in the history of Christian philosophy."

(William Ralph Inge, *Christian Mysticism*)

"Eckhart's experiences are deeply, basically, abundantly rooted in God as Being which is at once being and non-being: he sees in the 'meanest' thing among God's creatures all the glories of his is-ness (*isticheit*).

(D. T. Suzuki, *Mysticism Christian and Buddhist*)

*The photograph shows the memorial door to Meister Eckhart at the Predigerkirche (Preacher's Church) in Erfurt. Meister Eckhart was Prior of the Dominican monastery at Erfurt. Above the inscription 'In Memoriam Meister Eckhart' and his dates there is an inscription from John 1:5 "Das Licht leuchtet in der Finsternis, und die Finsternis hat es nicht erfasst"*

*(The light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not).*

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