

Purpose: to encourage you to trust and obey the risen Messiah.
“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...”

Refuge in the Real, Part I

Written by: Mick Abraham

Mysticism and the Meister

Johann “Meister” Eckhart was a Catholic philosopher who lived in the 1300’s. He is known as the “father of German mysticism”. Mysticism is often associated with “eastern” religions, but it takes many other forms. Eckhart’s version included “western” elements and allusions to Christianity.

In March of 2005, I attended a funeral which began and ended with Eckhart’s teaching on prayer: “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is ‘thank you’, it will be enough.” This essay asks if such a minimized prayer—and the mysticism behind it—is truly adequate for the lives we must lead.

Our Tragedy

The funeral was for a customer/friend; I’ll call him “Peter”. In February 2005, Peter was accused of a crime and arrested. The accusations were reported in the newspaper and other channels. The weight of public shame and embarrassment must have been too much to bear, because a few weeks later, Peter took his own life. I have more to say about this tragic loss, but let’s first look closer at the spiritual discipline known as mysticism.

What is Mysticism?

According to Francis Schaeffer, the Eckhart-style mystics “believed in an objective, personal God. But, they said, though God is really there, the mind is not the way to reach him.”

Mysticism tries to remove obstacles between the (purported) spiritual essence of the person and the spiritual essence of the supreme One, so they can “blend”.

The human mind, being imperfect, is seen as a hindrance. As the mystic tries to transcend his own mind, he leaves language and declarations behind. This is why Eckhart’s prayer eliminates all questions and all affirmations; it leaves only an amorphous gratitude, with minimal words.



The Mystic as Iconoclast

In Exodus 32, Israel built golden calves to represent the supreme deity. This was a mistake; idolatry is always a mistake. Deuteronomy 4:15-19 states: “**You saw no form of any kind the day Yahweh spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore, watch yourselves very carefully so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape...**”

Eckhart rightly spoke against trying to contain God with our imagery: “To seek God by rituals is to get the ritual and lose God in the process...” In this sense, Eckhart was an iconoclast—a destroyer of idols.

Iconoclasm: How Far?

All idols are symbols, but some go further to say that all symbols are idols. “No idea represents or signifies itself,” says Eckhart, “It always points to something else, of which it is a symbol.” Symbols are of low value to the mystic, because they are at least one step away from the underlying reality.

To some people, even the letters of the alphabet are seen as “graven images”. A person who carves letters is called a “graver” or “engraver”. Printing companies are also called engravers, because the original movable type was carved by hand. The ten commandments were “**the writing of God, graven upon the tables**”. (Exodus 32:16, King James translation). These factors seem to support the idea that letters are a type of graven image. If we eliminate letters, we also eliminate words, phrases, sentences, questions, etc.

Before you conclude that all language is idolatry, consider that the Biblical Hebrew uses one set of words for the carving of images, and different words for the carving of letters. The former is forbidden; the latter is not. This point is lost on those mystic thinkers who would devalue language right along with all other forms of imagery.

Linking: Don’t link to this page directly; link to our ministry page instead.
“Not for profit” printing is OK, so long as you include author contact information.
Please respect our authors: maintain the original context of this work.

Purpose: to encourage you to trust and obey the risen Messiah.
“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...”

Page 2: **Refuge in the Real, Part I**

Any concept that can fit within the human mind is too small, say the mystics such as Eckhart. Therefore: definite ideas, specific things, and particular truths are all deemphasized in the mystical way.

The “Soft Focus”

The mystical “soft focus” on particulars reaches back to pre-Christian times, even in “western” thought. Plato believed in (and preferred) “universal ideals” over earthly particulars. To the Neoplatonists, our physical world was but the lowest and least important level in a supposed “celestial hierarchy”.

As part of this soft focus on specifics, the mystic method prefers a prayer with the least possible content. It favors a wordless chant over a song.

A Bible believer points to a portion of scripture and says, “That is valuable truth; I will cling to it.” A mystic, however, would try to reach beyond scripture, beyond truth, beyond language, and even beyond his own mind. Since the mystic is “farsighted”, he does not focus strongly on specific facts about our physical reality.

The Mundane...

The word, “mundane”, comes from the Latin word for “world” or “earth”. The “mundane” is the world we all know: dimensional, physical, and subject to laws like gravity. A mystic like Eckhart wishes to leave this world of time and space behind. “Nothing hinders the soul’s knowledge of God as much as time and space,” he said.

“Mundane” connotes a definite lack of glamor. In my home county, the mundane world is one of dirt roads—or muddy roads. Say what you will about the mundane, muddy world—but at least we know **it is real**.

Some believe that the visible world is truly all that there is. They either find no hope, or a strange sort of “hope in the fact that there is no hope”. To Albert Camus, for example, “The only serious philosophical problem is that of suicide.”



...and the Sublime

In addition to the mundane, there could be a “sublime” reality which is normally invisible to mortals. If so, either **(a)** it’s always walled off from us, or **(b)** it’s open for people to possibly enter, or **(c)** sublime elements may be able to enter the mundane world at times. A combination of **(b)** and **(c)** is also possible.

For Bible believers: “Heaven” as a home for disembodied people seems to be taught in some scriptures. Other Bible passages seem to encourage our hope in a physical resurrection and a restoration of the earth. Perhaps these two ideas do not exclude each other. In any case, most Christians probably agree that the “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” dwell in a sublime reality, and that the Godhead can intervene in the mundane.

Your own beliefs about the mundane and the sublime make up your “cosmology”. What is your cosmology? What do you believe about the cosmos?

A Look Ahead

In Part II of this essay, we’ll look at the peculiar “voices of accusation” that we all hear. These are the voices that drove my friend to suicide, so we’ll also look at ways to find refuge from them.

Written by: Mick Abraham • 124 Creekside Place • Pagosa Springs, CO 81147
Voice: 970.731.4675 • email: mick@abrahamsolar.com • Fax: 970.731-3292

Linking: Don’t link to this page directly; link to our ministry page instead.
“Not for profit” printing is OK, so long as you include author contact information.
Please respect our authors: maintain the original context of this work.