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Mysticism in the Middle: The Mandorla as Interpretive Tool for Reading Meister Eckhart

JEFFREY COOPER

The spirituality of Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) is fundamentally *chiaroscuro* in form and expression. This word, coming from the world of art, represents in itself the collision of clarity and brightness (*chiaro*) with obscurity and darkness (*oscuro*). In one single word we have two opposites existing side-by-side creating a tension out of which arises the transformative interplay between darkness and light. The word, *chiaroscuro*, therefore is also an example of a language *mandorla*. This is another word arising from the world of art, but in this case specifically from the world of religious art and architecture. The mandorla is the almond-shaped space that results in the overlap of two complete circles.¹ It represents a middle, or in-between, space where opposites collide and “conflict-without-resolution” and arises as the “direct experience of God.”² Meister Eckhart is both a master of the *chiaroscuro* and the *mandorla*. His spiritual art, founded on *incarnatio continua*, issues forth in both structure and expression through the on-going interplay between human and divine often represented in his works by the relationship between darkness and light. In this essay then I will seek to demonstrate how the *mandorla* can serve as an interpretive tool for reading the *chiaroscuro* language art of Meister Eckhart. In doing so I hope to provide readers today with a means to grapple with, and more deeply appreciate, the German Dominican’s mysticism *in* and *of* the middle. First, though, a word from the middle space.

READING FROM THE MIDDLE

In order to honor the self-implicating nature of my own academic discipline of Christian Spirituality, as well as my own pedagogical goal of always bringing into relationship the theoretical-conceptual and the experiential, I must locate myself here as a man in the middle. At midlife I have found my own sense of “self” suddenly revealed as liminal. My own lived experience is teaching me that the primary paradox that haunts the heart of the journey through midlife is the *chiaroscuro* collision between limitation (darkness) and limitlessness (light).³ One discovers with age the reality of limitation, but yet, if attentive, one also experiences the expansiveness of a limitlessness that appears as well. When the two collide the experience provides an existential shock that shatters



Sad Girl © Photographer NL

the illusion of any sense of self as fixed and final, revealing it instead as a fluid entity at play between opposites. Midlife, where the first half and the second half of life collide, is in itself a mandorlic experience, and it has provided me a lived experience of faith that has shaped the lens by which I have been reading Eckhart over the last decade from age 40 to the edge of 50. So for me this lived experience of the liminality that results from the interpenetration of limitation and limitlessness, along with the symbol of the mandorla itself, provides an entrée into Eckhart's thought. Reading Eckhart from the middle I believe offers unique insight into the structure, content and articulation of his spiritual thought. Now then in order to begin exploring Eckhart's mysticism in the middle, it is first necessary to more fully explore the mandorla.

THE MANDORLA AND THE MIDDLE SPACE

In Italian *mandorla* simply means almond. Therefore, as mentioned above, the mandorla is the almond-shaped middle space created both visually and verbally when two complete, opposing circles or ideas overlap. Perhaps the most well-known mandorla is that of the ancient Christian symbol, the *ichthys*, or in popular parlance: the Jesus fish. The *ichthys* is the mandorlic symbol, used by the early Christian community, to express the incarnational reality of Jesus as both fully human and fully divine.⁴ According to Jungian psychologist, Robert Johnson, this almond-shaped middle space is where opposites meet and conflict-without-resolution occurs as the direct experience of God.⁵ In terms of the spiritual journey at midlife, in particular, “th[is] middle space is a

mandorla.”⁶ Midlife is rife with the on-going collision between the increasing reality of limitation, the revelation of limitlessness and the realization of self as fundamentally liminal. Johnson states that “whenever you have [such] a clash of opposites in your being and neither will give way to the other . . . you can be certain that God is present.”⁷ The mandorlic experience overall, though tension-filled, is directed primarily toward healing. This healing “proceeds from the overlap of what we call good and evil, light and dark”⁸ and I would add for Eckhart, human and divine. And it is the relationship between this last pair that the mandorla expresses in the art of iconography.

In iconography the mandorla is either the inclusive (circular) or exclusive (oval) nimbus around images of Christ, and sometimes of Mary, especially if she is presented as pregnant with the Word.⁹ Christ is surrounded by the mandorla most often in images of the resurrection or the ascension, but perhaps most powerfully in images of the Transfiguration. In Transfiguration icons, the mandorla around Christ represents the revelation of God’s glory. This divine glory, or the *kabod YHWH*, is depicted, according to the Jewish tradition, in two ways: the circular mandorla represents the *shekinah*, or divine dwelling, while the more oval mandorla represents the *yeqara*, or God’s glory as the “splendor of light.”¹⁰ Different Transfiguration icons might emphasize one or the other by use of the more inclusive or exclusive mandorlas, but in general, Transfiguration icon writers depict Jesus as both God’s dwelling and the light of the divine glory. Jesus, surrounded by the mandorla, is the middle, interpenetrating reality between the two complete circles of human and divine, created and uncreated, heaven and earth, spirit and matter. In whichever form it is depicted the meaning is clear: God is revealed in the collision of opposites which Christ himself embodies. But the visual is not the only way a mandorla is created, it also occurs in language as well.

Again, according to Johnson, “the verb is holy ground, the place of the mandorla”¹¹ and “our principal verb *to be* is the great unifier. A sentence with the verb *to be* is a statement of identity and heals the split between two elements.”¹² Johnson provides the example of the “burning bush” from Exodus chapter 3. God identifies himself to Moses as Being itself: “I am who am,” out of the mandorlic vehicle of a bush burning yet unconsumed.¹³ Another enlightening example of this can be found in the Muslim tradition in a treatment of the Arabic word *kun* or *Be*. According to Salman Bashier, and his work on the Sufi mystic Ibn al-‘Arabi, in the Qu’ran, Allah commands “Be!” and all things come into existence. But in Arabic the word *kun* is made up of two “manifest” letters *k* (*kaf*) and *n* (*nun*) surrounding the “nonmanifest” letter *u* (*waw*), therefore existence itself consists always of the interpenetration of manifest with nonmanifest, invisible with visible, spiritual with material.¹⁴ To *Be* then is to be in the middle. This basic mandorlic structure of existence and how it is

expressed in language, is also vividly seen in the construction and use of paradox. According to Peter and Linda Murray, “A mandorla results in language when one juxtaposes two terms forming a paradox and creating a tension that might lead to insight if the tension is held and not prematurely resolved.”¹⁵ I suggest Eckhart is a master of such language mandorlas. He does this in how he seeks to articulate the spiritual life, both because of his own understanding that God is Existence¹⁶ and also due to his particular understanding of Incarnation as the on-going act that places humanity, and all creation, in the healing and transformative middle.

INCARNATION: A MANDORLIC EXPERIENCE

Meister Eckhart understood incarnation as *incarnatio continua*, which basically means he “applied to the human person not just the logic of, but also the claims of, Christian belief about the Incarnate Christ.”¹⁷ Eckhart insists that at the Word become flesh, God in Jesus Christ did not just take on a “human body” but rather human nature.¹⁸ For Eckhart the human person is fundamentally always a person in the middle. As he states in his Sermon 5b: “God did not only become man—he took human nature upon himself.”¹⁹ He writes in his *Commentary on John*, “It would be of little value for me that ‘the Word was made flesh’ for a man in Christ as a person distinct from me unless he was also made flesh in me personally so that I too might be God’s son.”²⁰ So as Bernard McGinn has stated, for Eckhart, “the word taking flesh is not a past event we look back to in order to attain salvation, but rather is an ever-present *hominification* of God and *deification* of humanity and the universe.”²¹ Therefore “Christ is not a stage in the history of salvation but rather the salvational inner structure of history.”²² In short then, since the event of the incarnation all humankind is now participating in the on-going human-divine collision. Therefore the heart of the spiritual life is learning how to live in this mandorlic space of on-going hominification-deification. It is this understanding of incarnation then that sets a discernable pattern early on in Meister Eckhart’s spiritual thought. It is a pattern that perdures throughout the entirety of his writing and preaching career. As a means of examining this further I now want to look at two sets of sermons Eckhart gave during the same liturgical time of the year, but set nearly twenty years apart.

ABOVE-BELOW-WITHIN: THE PATTERN OF INCARNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Between 1303–05, Eckhart gave a series of four sermons known today as his Christmas Sermon Cycle, a sermon cycle that McGinn has described as the summa of the Meister’s mystical thought.²³ These sermons were likely delivered to Eckhart’s own Dominican brothers in his new role as Provincial of Saxonia



Circle © Muhammad Bashir Osman

which he undertook in 1303.²⁴ One of the scripture passages that is primary to the development of this sermon cycle comes from *The Book of Wisdom* 18:14–15, which likely served as an invitatory antiphon for the Christmas liturgies, it reads: “When all things lay in the midst of silence, then there descended down into me from on high, from the royal throne, a secret word”²⁵ For Eckhart, this sets the very pattern of *incarnatio continua*: that which is *Above*, the divine, descends *Below* to the human, and enters *Within* thereby resulting in an existentially destabilizing experience which fuels on-going transformation. The mandorlic intersecting of Above (Divine) and Below (Human) occurs *Within* the human in the space that Eckhart identifies as the “silent middle.”

In his Sermon 1, the first of this Christmas cycle, Eckhart, referring back to Wisdom 18:14–15, locates the “place” where the “Above” and the “Below” collide, that is *Within*, as he states:

First we will take the words: “In the midst of silence there was spoken within me a secret word.”—“But sir, where is the silence and where is the place where the word is spoken?”—As I said just now, it is in the purest thing that the soul is capable of, in the noblest part, the ground—indeed, in the very essence of the soul which is the soul’s most secret part. There is the silent “middle”²⁶

Eckhart goes on to preach that “. . . in that ground is the silent ‘middle’ Here God enters the soul with His all, not merely with a part.”²⁷ For Eckhart this “silent middle” is where the Divine intersects the Human and enters within and is the place where the destabilizing reality of on-going transformation occurs. As he will write nearly a decade later, around 1313, in his *Commentary on John*, when he compares the act of incarnation with the work of an artist:

The work that is “with,” “outside” and “above” the artist must become his work “within,” by informing him so that he can make a work of art, as it says in Luke chapter one: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you (Lk. 1:35), that is, so that the “upon” may become within.”²⁸

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The “silent middle” of course is also Eckhart’s *vünkelin*, his “spark” or “something uncreated in the soul” which is also the *grunt* (*ground*), or more specifically “the ground that is groundless.”²⁹ It is the place within the human person where opposites collide and “conflict-without-resolution” occurs as the “direct experience of God.” Eckhart will return to these themes and ideas nearly twenty years later in another place and before a different audience.

During the Advent-Christmas liturgical season of 1325–26, the Meister delivered a series of sermons that seemed to echo his earlier Christmas sermon cycle, except these latter sermons are not given to a gathering of his own brother friars but rather to several different women’s religious communities, which Eckhart was serving in the *cura monialium*.³⁰ For our purposes here I will focus on just one of the three, Sermon 14, which was likely given on the Feast of the Epiphany to the Dominican nuns at St. Gertrude’s Convent in Cologne.³¹ In this sermon Eckhart does a couple of things that are relatively rare. First, he engages in language that echoes Bridal Mysticism,³² and second, he shares what seems to be a personal experience, both of these allow him to express, in more experiential language, the same themes he had developed, perhaps more theoretically, some twenty years earlier.

In Sermon 14 Eckhart states “to that which is high, one says ‘Come down,’ and to that which is low one says ‘come up.’” He then goes on to say: “If you were below and if I were above you, I would have to come down to you, and that is what God does: when you humble yourself, God comes down from above and enters you.”³³ He then follows with this striking image:

The earth is furthest from [heaven] and has crept into a corner, being ashamed. She would like to flee the beautiful heavens from one corner to the other, but what would her refuge be? If she were to flee downwards, she would come to [heaven]. If she flees upwards, she cannot escape either. [Heaven] chases her into a corner and presses his power into her, making her bear fruit. Why? The highest flows into the lowest.³⁴

He then follows this foray into unusual Eckhartian territory (i.e. Bridal Mysticism) with what appears to be another unusual moment, he seems to share a more “personal” insight directly while stating: “The thought came to me last night that God’s [height] depends on my lowliness; by my lowering myself, God is exalted.”³⁵ Then he goes on to declare:

Further, it occurred to me last night that God should be brought down, not absolutely but rather interiorly. This “God brought down” pleased me so much that I wrote it in my book. It says therefore: “a God brought down,” not in everything, rather within [the soul], that we might be raised up. What was above is now within. You shall be united of yourself into yourself so that he is within you.³⁶

The Meister then concludes the sermon with the rather provocative declaration: “. . . for my humility gives God his divinity. ‘The light shines in the darkness and the light grasps nothing of the darkness’ (Jn. 1:5).”³⁷ Here then, in a later iteration of the same themes, Eckhart again demonstrates the fundamental structural role *incarnatio continua* has in his spiritual thought. And as we see here, it is also fundamental to his expression of the lived experience of on-going hominification-deification as an experience of being in the middle. Living faith for Eckhart is basically a mandorlic experience, and he also strives to articulate this, across the genres of his works, through the crafting of paradox and most significantly perhaps through the paradox of darkness and light.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS: AN ECKHARTIAN MANDORLA

In my own on-going research in Eckhart I have come to discover what I suggest is a hermeneutical key to his thought. It is the biblical passage John 1:5. In the prologue to the Gospel of John it reads: “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot comprehend it.” Eckhart’s multiple references to, and treatment of, this single biblical phrase, I believe, gives it pride of place as a means for understanding his spiritual thought. The Light comes from Above to shine Below and Within the middle space of incomprehensibility. For my purposes here I want to focus on Eckhart’s treatment of this phrase in his Latin Commentary on the Gospel of John. This Latin commentary, written between the two sermon cycles treated above (approximately 1313), offers a primer on his mandorlic thought. The darkness and light of John 1:5 serve as the primary mandorla through which he sought to express the on-going transformational relationship being worked out between human and divine as a constantly colliding and interpenetrating chiaroscuro experience. But first it will be helpful to introduce two technical terms from Eckhartian scholarship to assist us in our interpretation.

These two terms are *Principial Knowledge* and *Perspektivenwechsel*, and they come from the scholarship of Donald Duclow and Oliver Davies. Duclow develops the term “Principial Knowledge” in his own work on Eckhart as a means to explore how Eckhart, in his writing will often seek to express things from the divine perspective. He writes:

Rooted in the divine intellect’s revelation in the incarnate Word, [Principial] knowledge requires an astonishing reversal of perspective. [P]rincipial knowledge sees all at once in an inclusive simplicity; it sees all things *in principio*, that is “in” and “as” the divine intellect itself.”³⁸

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For Eckhart, because we are all participating in on-going incarnation, we all have access to this inclusive perspective; we can see as God sees. But because we remain human and limited we fluctuate in our perspective; we live in a *perspektivenwechsel*. This German word, coming from the work of Oliver Davies, means simply, “a fluctuating perspective.”³⁹ God’s vision is non-dualistic in nature while our human way of seeing is dualistic. According to Eckhart, for human beings always in the middle between *hominification* and *deification*, we move back and forth between a both/and (divine) and an either/or (human) way of seeing. I will apply these two terms, in what follows, as a means to help interpret Eckhart’s commentary on John 1:5.

In his *Commentary on John*, particularly in his treatment of John 1:5, Eckhart begins by emphasizing the relationship between light and a given medium, as a means to emphasize the role of grace over nature in the human-divine relationship. He writes how a luminous body enlightens immediately any medium. And that the light does not inhere in the medium (the human person for example) nor does the medium become the “heir of the light.”⁴⁰ Eckhart writes:

[The luminous body] does impart something to the medium reciprocally and impermanently, in the manner of reception, something transitory that happens in it so that it is said to be illuminated. It does not impart its light to the medium in the manner of a received quality that is rooted and inherent so that the light would remain and inhere and actively give light in the absence of the luminous body.⁴¹

Here Eckhart makes clear that the “luminous body” (God) is existence itself while the “medium” (human existence) is completely contingent upon it. He then goes on to state how “God speaks once and for all,” that is *in principio*. God speaks non-dualistically. “[B]ut two things are heard, as the Psalm says”⁴² as we humans hear and see dualistically or in a *perspektivenwechsel*. More specifically, in terms of the incarnation, he writes:

[B]y means of a single action [God] both generates the Son who is his heir, light from light, and creates the creature darkness, something created and made, not a son or an heir of light, illumination, or the power of creating.⁴³

Therefore, he continues, concerning the phrase: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it”; “the ‘light’ is God and everything that is divine and perfect; ‘darkness’ is everything that is created.”⁴⁴ Here Eckhart has drawn the two complete circles of uncreated light (God) and the created darkness (human/material), as well as, the opposing perspectives of “in principio” and *perspektivenwechsel*.

Moving forward in the text then, Eckhart begins to enumerate how this relationship between light and darkness develops. He writes of how the “principle” (light) gives a name to what comes from it, and not vice versa.” That is the medium is illuminated by light; the light is not illuminated but is illumination itself.⁴⁵ Next he writes how the nature of light is to be transparent, and it does not appear to shine unless something dark is added to it.⁴⁶ He follows this by stating, “‘the light shines in the darkness’ because in every case the principle lies hid in itself, but shines out and is manifested in what proceeds from it, namely in its word.” He then adds: “What is false is not recognized outside the truth, privation is not known outside possession, nor negation outside affirmation. Thus good shines in what is evil, truth in falsehood, and possession in privation.”⁴⁷ Eckhart then turns to Bede who wrote in his *Homilies*, “There is no false teaching that does not have some truth mixed in with it.”⁴⁸ At this point in the commentary we notice how Eckhart begins to bring the two complete circles, light and darkness, into relationship by troubling what at first seemed to be an easy dualism between them. He starts to construct the mandorlic or middle space.

The mandorla begins to come into view when Eckhart writes, “Earth is to be understood as darkness, heaven as light,” but immediately adds, Daniel says, “Bless the Lord, light and darkness” (Dn. 3:72).⁴⁹ Then he leaps to the Gospel of Matthew where it is written that “[God] makes his sun rise on the good and the evil” (Mt. 5:45).⁵⁰ Now, here in the text, darkness begins to take on the quality of liminal or transformative space.⁵¹ Eckhart briefly explores how darkness is necessary, for the silence and stillness one must seek apart from the commotion of creatures if one is to hear God’s voice, or be interpenetrated by his Light. Next he begins to build toward a rather grand conclusion. He writes: “‘The light shines in the darkness’ is not only verified because opposites are more evident when placed next to each other . . . but also because darkness itself, privations, defects and evils praise and bless God.”⁵² To illustrate he provides the example: “Judas damned praises God’s justice; Peter saved praises God’s mercy. These two, justice and mercy, are one thing.”⁵³ The mandorla comes into focus then as he reaches this very striking conclusion:

“The light shines in the darkness,” because detestation and hatred of evil always come from and are born of love of the good. So Augustine says that in the same measure that someone delights in his own justice, he is displeased with that alien injustice that belongs to others, according to the verse in Matthew, “When the wheat sprang up . . . then the weeds appeared too” (Mt. 13:26). Thus, the darkness glorifies God, and the light shines in it, not so much as opposites placed next to each other, but rather as *opposites placed within each other* (emphasis mine).⁵⁴

As we read through this rather brief section of his *Commentary on John* we can discern the pattern of Above-Below-Within in both the structure of Eckhart’s thought and how he seeks to express the experience of it in the paradoxical relationship between darkness and light. In the Meister’s interpretation of the single biblical phrase John 1:5, “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it,” we see how the preexistent Light (the principle) by its necessary descent creates the Darkness which it penetrates and, to borrow an image from his Sermon 14, impregnates it, and the Word made Flesh is borne within the mandorlic space of the on-going collision between these opposites not “placed next to each other, but rather . . . placed within each other” (*perspektivenwechsel*). Eckhart creates the language mandorla of darkness-light as a primary representation of his understanding of *incarnatio continua* as a lived experience of faith. An experience all humankind is both caught up in and is being transformed by in the depths of their being. Awakening to this experience then is the heart of Eckhart’s spiritual message. What, though, might this look like from the lived experience of being in the middle?

LIVING IN THE MIDDLE

At the beginning of this essay I located myself as a man in midlife and suggested how the lived experience of being in the middle, in this case, living between limitation and limitlessness, which has revealed an existential liminality in myself, has provided a lens by which to read the works of Meister Eckhart. This interpretive lens is the mandorla. I now not only know theoretically what a mandorla is and how it functions in the realms of art, language and psychology, but I also am becoming familiar with what it means to “Be” mandorlic; to live as a human being caught up in the great on-going, transformative collision of my own *hominification-deification*. And, in keeping with Eckhart’s own radically inclusive and ordinary spirituality, this is not an experience that happens in the spectacular, but in the very simple and everyday, if one is paying attention. For the sake of example allow me to be a bit more personal here.

From the day of my fortieth birthday until these latter days of my I waning forties I have encountered a profound darkness in my own spiritual, emotional, and psychological life. This darkness welled up quite simply as a need



Yearning, courtesy Michal Mandelman

to grieve. A need, which at first, did not have any particular object attached to it. It felt like a pervasive desire to grieve the years gone by, the ideals not achieved, a growing sense of self shattered and unmasked as a lie. Then external events began to occur: my grandmother, the only grandparent I ever knew, died at age 97, next my father died unexpectedly at 71 and in the midst of it my own dreams and desires to become a Trappist monk were dashed seemingly by God himself. I have therefore spent much of my midlife wondering: “What does any of it mean?” What matters and doesn’t matter? I have questioned why life seems to only be made up of a long line of shattered and shattering illusions. I began to feel disturbingly self-less, not in the sense of other-centered, but in the sense of no-center. That which I thought was my firm, fixed center had collapsed completely. All the planning, plotting and the potential seemed to slip away as my illusion of a self, fixed and permanent, began to be revealed as fluid and evanescent.

The above experiences exposed the depths of my own human limitation, but the more I am becoming acquainted with these limitations, the more a source of limitlessness is revealed. “The light shines in the darkness even if the darkness cannot comprehend it.” I have begun to realize a freedom that I have been strangely unfamiliar with, that somehow facing limitation alone can expose the reality of limitlessness, which renders the “self” both frighteningly, but liberatingly, liminal. I have found myself suddenly in a mandorlic space, between the two complete opposing circles of limit (human and darkness) and limitless (divine and light). It is out of this middle space of lived faith experience (liminality) where I have been reading Meister Eckhart and discovering his texts “reading” me.

CONCLUSION: MYSTICISM AND THE MIDDLE

For Meister Eckhart mysticism *in* and *of* the middle is not just the experience inherent to a particular stage of the human life cycle, but rather it is inherent to what it means to be human in general. According to Eckhart we are all living in a world where the collision between human and divine, which occurred historically in the person of Christ, continually reverberates and restructures the daily lived reality of the on-going human-divine relationship. Cultivating awareness of this incarnational reality is at the heart of Eckhartian spirituality. This is why the Meister himself seems to only recommend one sole spiritual practice: *abegescheidenheit* or *detachment*. The more one learns to let go the more one will break through to the mandorlic experience of living in the middle of on-going hominification-deification. Such experiences as midlife may be especially rife with this potential, but, for Eckhart, everyone, at whatever stage of life, is already a potential mystic in the middle.

NOTES:

1. Robert A. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow: Understanding the Dark Side of the Psyche* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 98.
2. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*, 107.
3. I want to clarify a little my use of the word “experience” throughout this essay. Most simply put I understand the academic discipline of Christian Spirituality to be the study of the lived experience of faith. In terms of what that experience is, I find Sandra M. Schneiders, in her work on the Gospel of John, very helpful. Schneiders writes, regarding the “man born blind” in Chapter 9 of the gospel text, that: “The man’s capacity for salvation seems to lie in his openness and utter fidelity to reality and to his own experience of it, a fidelity that perhaps reflects a lifelong practice of Torah, which forbids the bearing of false witness.” She also writes that, “authenticity [is] fidelity to experience, which opens one to God’s action in one’s life.” Sandra M. Schneiders, I. H. M., *Written that You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, Revised and Expanded Edition* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 156 and 168. When I write about my own experience or Meister Eckhart’s articulation of experience I am thinking about it in terms of “utter fidelity to reality” and attempts to articulate that reality.
4. Peter and Linda Murray, *The Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 300.
5. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*, 107.
6. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*, 111.
7. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*, 107.
8. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*, 111.
9. An example of this would be the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe who is presented as pregnant with the Christ child and is surrounded by a mandorla.
10. Andreas Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 87. Andreopoulos’ text is very rich with theological insight on the art of iconography, especially concerning the icon of the Transfiguration and the role the symbol of mandorla plays in it. Other texts I would suggest for further reading would be: Constantine Carvarnos, *Guide to Byzantine Iconography, Second Edition, Volumes 1 & 2* (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2010), and also Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1952).
11. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*, 105.
12. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*, 104.
13. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*, 107.
14. Salman H. Bashier, *Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 3. The Islamic concept of the *barzakh*, that which separates two entities while also providing for their interpenetration, has a lot in common with the symbol of the mandorla and a comparative study of the two could be quite interesting.
15. Murray, *Oxford Companion*, 300.
16. According to Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, “It is well known that in the only surviving part of the *Work of Propositions*, its prologue, Eckhart begins his systematic *summa* with an analysis of the proposition *Esse Deus est*, ‘Existence is God . . .’” They go on to state that Eckhart’s thought on this is complicated as sometimes he states that God is beyond existence, but his understanding of “Existence is God” makes for an intriguing connection with the mandorlic structure of his thought and how he conceptualizes Incarnation as *incarnatio continua*, the on-going interpenetration of human and divine in which all humanity and creation participates. Edmund Colledge and Bernard

- McGinn, eds., *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 32.
17. Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 166.
 18. In Meister Eckhart's Sermon 5b, he proclaims: "I shall say something else that has more application to us: God did not only become man—he took human nature upon himself. The authorities commonly say that all men are equally noble by nature. But truly I say: Everything good that all the saints have possessed, and Mary the mother of God, and Christ in his humanity, all that is my own in this human nature." Colledge and McGinn, *The Essential Sermons*, 182. Also different Eckhart scholars have used different numbering systems to catalogue Eckhart's sermons. Scholars like Colledge and McGinn have used the numbering system of Josef Quint, whereas M. O'C Walshe, whose translations of Eckhart's work I will also be using here, depends on the older system of Franz Pfeiffer (1857). To avoid confusion, and to help the reader find information more easily, when I quote from Colledge and McGinn's collection I will use their enumeration system and Walshe's system when quoting from his translations.
 19. Colledge and McGinn, *The Essential Sermons*, 182.
 20. Colledge and McGinn, *The Essential Sermons*, 167.
 21. Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), 151.
 22. Dietmar Mieth, "Meister Eckhart: The Power of Inner Liberation," in *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 326.
 23. According to Bernard McGinn, ". . . so many of the major themes of Eckhart's preaching appear in this Christmas cycle that it can be described as a vernacular *summa* of his mysticism." Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man From Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 54.
 24. Alois Haas, *Meister Eckhart und Seine Zeit* (<http://www.eckhart.de>).
 25. For the translation of *Wisdom* 18:14–15, I am using the English translation of Eckhart's Middle High German rendering of this passage within his sermon text which is found in M. O'C. Walshe, ed., *Meister Eckhart: Sermons & Treatises, Volume 1* (Rockport, MA: Element, 1979), 1.
 26. Walshe, *Sermons and Treatises*, Vol. 1 and 3.
 27. Walshe, *Sermons and Treatises*, Vol. 1 and 3.
 28. Colledge and McGinn, *The Essential Sermons*, 136.
 29. Eckhart states in his Sermon 80 (Walshe): "Understand: all our perfections and all our bliss depends on our traversing and transcending all creatureliness, all being and getting into the ground that is groundless" (M. O'C Walshe, ed., *Meister Eckhart: Sermons and Treatises, Volume 2* [Rockport, MA: Element, 1979], 238).
 30. The *cura monialium* is the Latin phrase for "care of women's religious houses." Both the Franciscan and Dominican friars had a long standing, and complicated, relationship in the middle ages with their female counterparts. Friars were assigned to serve convents of sisters (Franciscan, Dominican, Cistercian, etc., as well as Beguine communities) in supplying the sacraments, as well as preaching and spiritual guidance. Meister Eckhart served in this capacity in Strassburg (then German territory) from approximately 1313–1323.
 31. This historical information is again from the work of Alois Haas as found at the website: *Meister Eckhart und Seine Zeit* (<http://www.eckhart.de>). Haas suggests, concerning the dating of this series of sermons I am referencing here, that Eckhart preached them between 1325–26 in or around Cologne, Germany at the Convent of St. Gertrude (Do-

- minican nuns), the Convent of Mariengarten (Cistercian nuns), and the Macchabaeorum (or the Benedictine Convent of St. Maccabees).
32. According to Colledge and McGinn: “Although bridal imagery is relatively rare in Eckhart’s writings, when he does make use of it . . . it is in perfect harmony with the distinctive traits of his mystical theology. The mutuality of love between the God who ‘loves for love’ and invites man to love him ‘for sake of loving God’ is a constant theme in Eckhart” (Colledge and McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 49).
 33. Bernard McGinn, ed., *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986), 272.
 34. McGinn, *Teacher and Preacher*, 272. I have inserted the word “heaven” into this quote, where McGinn translates more generically “the sky.” In using the term “heaven” I am staying closer to Walshe’s translation of the same passage, which I prefer.
 35. McGinn, *Teacher and Preacher*, 273. In this translation McGinn prefers “majesty” rather than “height.” I insert “height” here as it makes the Above-Below relationship clearer.
 36. McGinn, *Teacher and Preacher*, 273.
 37. McGinn, *Teacher and Preacher*, 274.
 38. Donald Duclow, “‘My Suffering is God’: Meister Eckhart’s *Book of Divine Consolation*,” *Theological Studies* 44 (1983): 577–78.
 39. Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1991), 42.
 40. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 147.
 41. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 147–48.
 42. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 148.
 43. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 148.
 44. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 148.
 45. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 149.
 46. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 149.
 47. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 149.
 48. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 149.
 49. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 151.
 50. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 151.
 51. Here I am thinking about Eckhart’s understanding of “darkness” as a site of “potential receptivity.” In Middle High German the term is one of Eckhart’s own invention in his “constant pursuit of inward receptive stillness . . .” (McGinn, *Mystical Thought*, 63).
 52. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 152.
 53. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 152.
 54. McGinn, *Essential Sermons*, 152.