

Between Determination and Liberation –
Rethinking Christian Mystical Theology
and the Relation between
Existence, the Self, and Gender.

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Abstract

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In my thesis I am arguing for an inclusivist image of the Christian Divine which leads towards a spiritual notion of identity. The aim of my argument is to contradict, from a Christian point of view, exclusionary attitudes from fundamentalist Christian churches and groups towards queer people, but also to challenge queer-feminist criticisms on Christian beliefs. Possibly facing discrimination from both sides, queer people who also identify as Christian, find themselves caught between the worlds. As objections from either side rely on a dualistic, hierarchal, and patriarchal image of the Divine, I want to tackle this issue by dealing with underlying theological dimensions.

In my work I am referring to the German medieval theologian Meister Eckhart and the Spanish early modern Doctor of the Church Teresa of Ávila. By relating Eckhart's notion of the 'Ground of the Soul' and Teresa's notion of the 'Innermost Centre of the Soul' to Paul Tillich's notion of the 'Innermost self', I am attempting to develop a concept of the self which is based on a unified identity with the Divine. This notion not only evokes an existentialist courage to embrace creativity and diversity of life, but also, following Dorothee Sölle's interpretations of mystical theology, entails potential for spiritual empowerment and resistance. This can be seen as a first step towards a fearless encounter with Gender Theory and, in consequence, opens ways for Christian and queer journeys of life, based on equality, justice, and love.

Janet Smith

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To Dad who had to leave before I could finish this work.

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"To God nothing dies: All things are living in Him."

Meister Eckhart

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere. The work is my own and the collaborative contributions have been indicated clearly and acknowledged.

Janet Smith, July 2024

1 Introduction

My thesis deals with a dilemma that some people experience when being religious and queer, and the difficulties they might face because of being torn between seemingly oppositional groups such as faith communities and queer communities. As discussions of same sex marriage, adoption rights etc. show, some of the conservative and fundamentalist Christian churches discriminate or exclude queer people to various degrees. Very often these churches' argumentations refer to an image of the Divine as a God being like an engineer who designs people's bodies from a heaven above by following a certain plan, which leads to an allegedly fixed and unambiguous anatomy and biology, and an accordingly static self. Derived from that image these faith communities establish and justify certain ways of behaviour, gender roles, hierarchies and power relations within their communities, but possibly also in society. Departing from my observation of this societal phenomenon I am going to address this issue by dealing with underlying theoretical dimensions of it. I am going to suggest interpretations of Christian literature that allow conceptions of the Divine to overcome the separation of transcendence and immanence, the separation of the human and the Divine. Based on such theological hermeneutics I am going to develop a philosophical line of argument that, from a Christian point of view, contradicts dualistic, essentialist and queerphobic conceptions of the Divine to which some faith communities but also some queer communities with their criticisms refer, and oppose notions of the Divine that allow hierarchy and exclusion of human beings. More inclusivist as well as liberating conceptions of the Divine can be found in the literature of Christian contemplation and in the monastic tradition, as well as in lay and scholarly works of Christian mystics which, for now, I summarize as mystical theology. I am therefore not directly referring to biblical texts, but to works from ancient Christian authors, namely to the Spanish early modern Carmelite and first female Doctor of the Church Teresa of Ávila and the German medieval theologian, philosopher, and Dominican Meister Eckhart. To bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and modern ways of thinking about the self and gender I am then going to draw on feminist theology as represented by the protestant theologian Dorothee Sölle and on existentialist theology as elaborated by the also protestant theologian Paul Tillich. These findings I am eventually going to relate to Judith Butler's work and engage with their notion of the self, their understanding of subjection and gender theory. My claim is that understanding the Divine as not being separated from the human can have a fundamental impact also on the understanding of oneself and subsequently of one's identity. This understanding of the Divine and oneself, from my point of view, can help one, at least to

some degree, to detach from traditional or societal determinations, to build one's identity on other grounds, on spiritual grounds, and therefore to counter and reject societal contempt and hostility. My aim in this context is not to convince non-Christian people to believe in Christianity or to apply Christian ethics to everybody everywhere, but to suggest ways of thinking about one's own identity and/ or other people's identities when being Christian or when being interested in Christian thought, especially regarding the issues some queer people must deal with in the name of religion.

1.1 Caught Between the Worlds

If one assumes Teresa of Ávila's statement that no limits should be set to the Divine's creation to be true, this limitlessness also applies to the human being.¹ And if we pursue a holistic approach to comprehending human beings, this limitlessness does not only apply to the body, but also for the soul and mind, and therefore for our identity and being as a whole. The secular world, without referring to the Divine, but to the values of respect, dignity and integrity of human beings, strives and struggles to implement this freedom of being in many societies around the world through Human Rights and through national laws. These laws promise liberty and equality for all human beings independently from race, colour, sex, language, religion or nationality. Yet, in the religious realm (Christian as well as in other faiths) there are objections towards the full implementation of these rights. Until today the Vatican, for example, has still not signed the declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. The power of religious institutions in this context should not be underestimated as it is often objections from churches or faith communities that impede the full implementation of human rights on a societal level. This becomes apparent regarding gender rights, particularly homosexuality:

“But around the world, [...], there are, according to the Human Dignity Trust, seventy-nine jurisdictions which have laws which criminalize private, consensual sexual conduct between adults of same sex [...]. Often such legislation is justified on religious grounds.”²

¹ Compare Teresa of Jesus. *Book Called Way of Perfection* in: *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*. Edited and translated by E. Allison Peers. 3 vols. Vol. 2, (London: Burns & Oates, 2002), 203.

² Andrew Clapham, *Human Rights: A Very Short Introduction*. Very Short Introductions. Second edition. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 143. Update 2024: 29 out of 56 Commonwealth jurisdictions criminalise consensual same-sex intimacy, with sentences ranging from two years in prison to the death penalty. 9 jurisdictions worldwide maintain discriminatory age of consent laws between opposite-sex and same-sex acts.

Even though sex and gender rights are increasingly included in national laws they remain contentious, even more within religious areas as debates on same-sex-marriage and adoption rights show.

One could ask at this point, how relevant these issues regarding society really are, particularly in secular societies, as for example in the United Kingdom. What does it matter when in some religious communities LGBTQIA+ people cannot feel comfortable? Especially in liberal societies where it would be possible to dissociate oneself from these communities? First of all, the latter is often not as easy as one could think, and apart from that, the impact of some conservative Christian communities and groups is growing due to their increasing engagement with (nationalist) policies as the recent report *The Christian Right in Europe. Movements, Networks, and Denominations* reveals.³

Datta and Paternotte, authors of the essay “*Gender Ideology*” *Battles in the European Bubble* as part of the report initially concede that “it would be misleading to claim that all anti-gender actors active in European politics are inspired by Christian values” and that “*gender ideology* is not only a Catholic invention”, but they yet also very clearly point out that the battle against so called gender ideology “remains to a large extent a predominantly Christian battle, including in European institutions.”⁴ They explain that there indeed are European branches of US organisations, new European organisations, religious organisations and international fora expanding as a Christian Right.⁵ They explain that anti-gender activism started in the 1990s and has become “the focus of a range of conservative civil society groups” and has expanded, “with increased traction within European institutions“ into the realm of politics and into state policies.⁶ Altogether they have observed:

“Across countries such as Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and Slovakia, there are ample examples of leading political figures within national EPP [center-right European People’s Party]-affiliated parties playing key roles in

In at least 26 countries, authorities use public order, vagrancy and misdemeanour offences to harass, arrest and prosecute transgender people. Blackmail, extortion, and physical and sexual violence is commonplace. Compare: <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/>, accessed 28th June 2024.

³ Compare Gionathan Lo Mascolo, *Christian Right in Europe: Movements, Networks, and Denominations*. Edition Politik. (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2023).

⁴ Neil Datta and David Paternotte. ““Gender Ideology” Battles in the European Bubble.” In *Political Science Volume 129* (2023), 45.

⁵ Datta et al., “Gender Ideology”, 47-49.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

anti-abortion organizations and wider anti-gender campaigns [...]. All this has significantly transformed debates at the European Parliament.”⁷

Datta and Paternotte also have warily observed that “scholars and practitioners alike have long overlooked the emergence in Europe of a set of actors that could resemble the US Christian Right”, and that “most of the literature has focused on the national level, forgetting European institutions, despite their crucial role in the governance of contemporary European societies.”⁸

Looking at the United Kingdom, Andrea Hatcher reports that the situation is still a bit different as “the picture of religion in the 21st-century UK has been one of decline” and that a “Christian decline has occurred among the institutional churches”, although there also “has been a pattern of growth within nonconformist churches.”⁹ Hatcher explains, there seem to be no “religious elites, including denominations/networks, churches, and individual clergy who act to leverage their religious positions into political influence.”¹⁰ She also determines that “there is an absence of political leaders willing to provide, through their positions in parties or government, opportunities for religious actors to access the political system via electoral campaigns or policymaking.”¹¹ However, even though she cannot see an expansion of the Christian Right in the UK so far, she does notice that “for the Christian Right in the UK, the judicial process has broadened its platforms across employment tribunals, local magistrates, the UK Supreme Court, and the European Court of Human Rights”, and she therefore states:

“Although these efforts have not yet come together in a comprehensive movement with a coherent political agenda and real political outcomes, they have alerted the public, politicians, and scholars to look for a Christian Right in the UK, making them cast a wary eye toward the expansive reach of the transnational networks of Christian nationalism.”¹²

Concerning the global scale of such kind of movements Judith Butler in their recent book “Who’s Afraid of Gender?” gives a broad account of anti-gender activism and the expansion of the Christian Right worldwide.¹³ I cannot expand in more detail on this topic here and now, but what I am attempting to show is, that religious thought, despite in some parts of the world increasing secularism (a perception that is contested anyway) does indeed

⁷ Ibid., 52f.

⁸ Datta et al., “Gender Ideology”, 54f.

⁹ Andrea C. Hatcher, “The Christian Right in the UK.” In *Political Science Volume 129*, 365-74, (2023), 366.

¹⁰ Hatcher, “The Christian Right in the UK”, 367.

¹¹ Ibid., 367.

¹² Ibid., 372.

¹³ Compare Judith Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, (2024).

affect many people regardless of being a member of a religious denomination or not. And this can have devastating effects on queer people's lives, particularly in countries with rigid religiously driven governments.

All this, of course has an impact on societies and the way people act towards homo-, bi- and intersexual, non-binary and transgender persons (queer persons).¹⁴ Besides acceptance and support on the one hand, queer persons often still face incomprehension, rejection, injustice, discrimination, hate and violence on the other. Therefore, coming out as queer still can be difficult.

'Difficult' within this context of course can have many meanings. It can mean for a queer person to be forced to lead a hidden away life – in a closet – pretending to fit into a heteronormative environment and to suppress feelings, desires, thoughts and practices which can mean a great existential isolation. Or – when living out – facing prejudices, discrimination and objections that might lead to a general feeling of not being recognized and accepted as the person who one is, and being excluded from familiar communities or, even worse, being confronted with offenses, threats or violence. All this can happen in the more intense and fragile time of a coming out or transitioning but it can also be regarded as a challenge of a queer life in general, because coming out and dealing with a heteronormative environment for queer people is a lifelong task with changing phases of intensity.

The first place to turn to for help and unconditioned support usually is the family. But in case of queerness the family can become the place to be confronted with difficulties.¹⁵ If this is the case, disappointment and grief emerge, and queer people rather turn to queer support groups or communities to seek for help. Especially when being disowned by their families, facing problems at their workplace, struggling with social or mental health issues or need medical advice. These groups then are a refuge in which queer people can feel safe and accepted, speak openly, ask questions or just be and breathe and find friends. The stronger the experienced hostility through the environment the more important such groups can become.

There are also other groups that promise fellowship and support in difficult situations of life: churches and religious communities. Mostly, they understand themselves as a place of charity, shelter, mutual support and community. They also like to see themselves as open hearted and minded, kind and friendly to everybody, willing to help straightforwardly, from a

¹⁴ I use the term 'queer' to represent lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and non-binary people regarding these categories as fluid, interconnected and overlapping.

¹⁵ Compare for example: Jonah P. DeChants, Jama Shelton, Yolanda Anyon, and Kimberly Bender. "'It Kinda Breaks My Heart': LGBTQ Young Adults' Responses to Family Rejection." *Family relations* 71, no. 3 (2022).

Christian point of view following the claim to love one neighbour as oneself. Still, not everybody is treated as a neighbour let alone regarded as a fully accepted member of the community. For queer people, for instance, when struggling with specific problems related to their queerness, these offers of tolerance, acceptance or help can disappear and turn into ignorance, hostility, rejection and exclusion. Some churches also suggest or offer so called “conversion therapy” believing this could help the affected person to be liberated from its ‘problematic sexual issues’.¹⁶

The harsh refusal of queer people especially through fundamentalist churches, repeatedly appears in the media as reports on, for example, attacks against Pride parades or protests against LGBTQIA+ inclusive education programmes at schools reveal.¹⁷

As it therefore shows, it is not without reason that queer groups often are not only suspicious but rather dismissive towards religious communities or institutions as the journalist Lucy Knight diagnosis when describing how ““Go to hell” placards at Pride parades, “conversion therapy” and politicians such as Tim Farron haven’t exactly given Christians a good reputation among the queer community.”¹⁸

Additionally, queer communities’ theoretical alignment relates to feminist and queer theory, which promises a liberation by deconstructing narrow gender perceptions, regarding them as constructed by culture and social conditions and therefore neither being predictable nor a core element of the self. Turning to queer theory for religious queer people though, can be problematic due to it being strictly positioned within poststructuralist terms that fundamentally question positions of belief, mainly, by questioning traditional forms of knowledge and claiming for a new understanding of, for example, meaning or identity, and drawing new links between knowledge, power, justice, and morality. This has a great impact on what can be considered as possible to know and what the human being is. Thus, poststructuralism is a modern challenge to traditional beliefs: "Poststructuralism folds the limit back on to the core of knowledge and on to our settled understanding of the true and the good. It does this in a very radical way."¹⁹ For some religious people this questioning of their

¹⁶ Thomas G. Plante, "The Role of Religion in Sexual Orientation Change Efforts and Gender Identity Change Efforts." Chap. 5 In *The Case against Conversion "Therapy": Evidence, Ethics, and Alternatives*, edited by Douglas C. Haldeman, (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2022).

¹⁷ Compare Lucy Knight, "Being a Gay Christian Can Be Hurtful and Gruelling. But I Refuse to Lose Faith." *The Guardian*, (2019). The majority of participants in these protests are Muslims, but also supported by evangelical Christians and orthodox Jews, compare Sofia Lotto Persio, "Religious Conservatives Join Forces to Protest LGBT Lessons at Birmingham School." (2019).

¹⁸ Knight, "Being a Gay Christian Can Be Hurtful and Gruelling".

¹⁹ James Williams, *Understanding Poststructuralism*. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 2.

traditions and beliefs can be threatening and this might become another dilemma for queer and religious persons: staying committed to a religious community on the one hand might only be an option at the price of great self-denial in terms of sexual identity and/ or orientation. But turning to queer communities to find liberation, belonging and help on the other, seems to require a turn away from personal belief and faith, a spiritual life would fall by the wayside. Both ways seem to entail pain and grief. Therefore, being torn between different groups that possibly represent radical contrary positions regarding sexuality and spirituality – and actually being dependent on acceptance and support through both groups at the same time – can mean additional inner and outer conflicts for queer religious people. Specifically, when being in a situation of crisis and vulnerability.

To further compound the difficulty and presuming that sexuality is an essential dimension of the human being, for a religious person spirituality is just as essential and giving up belief is impossible and not a question of choice. Elizabeth Stuart takes up this matter and refers to Soskice: “As the feminist theologian Janet Martin Soskice notes, asking someone why they remain a Christian is a bit like asking someone why they are still in love [...].”²⁰ And referring to the lesbian theologian Alison Webster she explains that western culture often regards belonging to a religion “as an optional extra [...] rather than as an essential part of a person’s identity.”²¹ I clearly agree with Stuart though that:

“[...] the fact is that for many of us religion is an essential part of our identity – as much part of who we are as our race, gender and sexuality. To ask someone ‘why don’t you just leave Christianity?’ is as senseless offensive as asking someone ‘why don’t you just stop being gay and become heterosexual?’”²²

And following Stuart’s summarizing statement on this issue I also want to emphasize:

“This is not necessarily to say that sexuality is fixed and static, any more than religious affiliation is necessarily fixed and static; it is to say that neither are simply accessories to our personalities – both are intimately and inextricably bound up with who we are.”²³

²⁰ Elizabeth Stuart, *Religion Is a Queer Thing: A Guide to the Christian Faith for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered People*. (London, Washington: Cassell, 1997), 14.

²¹ Stuart, *Religion Is a Queer Thing*, 14.

²² *Ibid.*, 14.

²³ *Ibid.*, 14.

This lack of mutual interest and understanding can lead to reservations and prejudices towards Christianity and consequentially to rejection or even hostility. A Christian *and* queer life seems to be “incompatible” as Stuart reports:

“Christianity is fundamentally homophobic therefore you cannot be a proper Christian or a proper queer person if you proclaim yourself queer and Christian. This is the view of many Christians and queer people alike.”²⁴

This statement seems to be confirmed by an interviewee in the Stonewall report from 2018 regarding the queer community, in which they state that “among some LGBT people there is a complete lack of understanding that one can be Christian and gay.”²⁵ For queer religious people this means being caught between the worlds again. The sociologist Andrew Yip describes this gap which he regards as a “representational binary” between a liberal society and an outdated religious community, and he comparatively states:

“[...], this construction also casts the religious and the secular as opposing forces. This view is widely held by secular LGBTQI people, whose intolerance of religion and religious LGBTQI people could be as forceful as heterosexuals’ intolerance of LGBTQI people in another context.”²⁶

And indeed, queer religious people face discrimination within the queer community as the Stonewall report again reveals:

“A Stonewall report last year showed that one in 10 LGBT+ Christians experienced faith-based discrimination from within the queer community. This can be anything from creating an atmosphere in which it is shameful to admit that you are a person of faith, to outright aggression and insistent questioning about what you do or do not believe.”²⁷

Stuart describes the perception of such opposing forces too, and explains that “queer Christians are often heard to say that it is harder to come out as a Christian in queer circles

²⁴ Stuart, *Religion Is a Queer Thing*, 13.

²⁵ Kian, 67 (Scotland) in: Chaka L. Bachmann, Bekka Gooch. *LGBT in Britain. Home and Communities*. (Stonewall, 2018).

²⁶ Andrew K. T. Yip, "Coming Home from the Wilderness: An Overview of Recent Scholarly Research on LGBTQI Religiosity/ Spirituality in the West." Chap. 2 In *Queer Spiritual Spaces. Sexuality and Sacred Spaces*, edited by Kath; Munt Browne, Sally R.; Yip, Andrew K.T. (Farnham: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 42.

²⁷ Knight, "Being a Gay Christian Can Be Hurtful and Gruelling". Also compare Stonewall report, Chaka L. Bachmann, *LGBT in Britain*: “One in eight LGBT people of faith (12 per cent) have experienced discrimination and poor treatment from other LGBT people in their local LGBT community because of their faith. This includes almost one in ten LGBT people of Christian faith (9 per cent) and one in five LGBT people of other faiths, including Islam, Sikhism and Judaism (21 per cent).”

than it is to come out as a queer in church circles.”²⁸ For that reason, secular queer groups should be more open towards spiritual issues as the importance of religiosity often gets underestimated as Yip again puts it in a nutshell:

“This one-dimensional ideology could lead to norms and practices, however implicit, which undermine the sense of belonging of religious people within the LGBTQI community. They also refuse to recognise the importance of religion/spirituality as a resource for the construction of meaningful LGBTQI lives.”²⁹

This aspect becomes even more relevant when a person is disowned by a faith community what can mean a great loss as Stuart rightly remarks that “leaving a faith community is not as easy or straightforward as leaving a club.”³⁰

However, the world also is changing, and numerous opportunities have emerged and Yip and his colleagues in their book describe various spiritual spaces for queer people, for example the Quakers, Muslim and Buddhist strands, Dyke Spiritualities or the Community of Findhorn in Scotland.³¹ Yip also mentions the *Metropolitan Community Church* or the work of Rachel Mann who is establishing the *Open Table Network* in the Anglican Church. All this shows that “there is no denying that religious /spiritual spaces for LGBTQI+ people within religious communities have been expanding, [...]”³² Practically, queer support groups should be able to acknowledge the importance of spiritual issues and these topics should not be ignored. It would be important to differentiate between personal belief and institutionalized religion and to recognise marginalised strands within and outside mainstream religiosity as Browne states:

“Running parallel to the common sense thesis that queer and particular religious institutions are antithetical, is the understanding that alternative spiritualities are open, accepting, tolerant and suffused with sexual and gender pluralities.”³³

²⁸ Stuart, *Religion Is a Queer Thing*, 3.

²⁹ Yip, “Coming Home from the Wilderness”, 43.

³⁰ Stuart, *Religion Is a Queer Thing*, 14.

³¹ Compare Kath Browne and Elizabeth Dinnie. "New Age Spiritualities: Findhorn and the Sexual Self." Chap. 7 In *Queer Spiritual Spaces: Sexuality and Sacred Places*, edited by Kath Browne, Sally R. Munt and Andrew K.T. Yip, (Farnham: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010).

³² Yip, “Coming Home from the Wilderness”, 43.

³³ Kath Browne, "Queer Spiritual Spaces: Conclusion." Chap. 9 In *Queer Spiritual Spaces: Sexuality and Sacred Places*, edited by Kath Browne, Sally R. Munt and Andrew K. T. Yip (Farnham: Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), 237.

It would help that queer groups know about these queer spiritual spaces and acknowledge this diversity within religions so they could counsel accordingly, mediate information and contacts, but could be also more supportive in terms of the common struggle for visibility, acceptance, equality and justice. This requires though that these seemingly separated spheres know of each other and show mutual interest.

Unfortunately, an exchange between LGBTQI+ groups and religious communities often is hindered by more or less fundamentalist statements of some religious communities or churches against sexual minorities. The ignorance on human rights and the lack of equality within religious areas is significantly revealed through the refusal of same-sex-marriages. Despite some movement, dialogue and discourse, some faith communities still hold on to their rejective attitude as this exclusionary statement from the Church of England shows: “However we are all in agreement that the Christian understanding and doctrine of marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman remains unchanged.”³⁴ And even though some communities meanwhile act sympathetically and differently to the official doctrine, the official basic guideline of the church has not noticeably changed. This gets obvious when looking at the recent statement which says that “for Christians, marriage – that is the lifelong union between a man and a woman, contracted with the making of vows – remains the proper context for sexual activity.”³⁵ In these papers the House of Bishops refers to older documents as, for example, *Marriage: A Teaching Document* from 20th December 1999. But neither of these papers explain why queer people should be excluded from God’s love despite quoting the Biblical assurance that “God is love (1 John 4.16), and in creating human beings he has called us to love, both himself and one another.”³⁶

And even though not openly outlined in the statements of the Church of England traditional Christian communities often base their reasons for discrimination and rejection of queer people on a line of argument that refers to a certain image of God and moral and ethical derivations of this image. Religious authorities within Christian churches or communities in this context frequently refer to the Bible and the narration on the creation of man as the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church shows:

³⁴ House of Bishops. "Pastoral Guidance on Same Sex Marriage." (2014).

³⁵ House of Bishops. "Civil Partnerships—for Same Sex and Opposite Sex couples. A Pastoral Statement from the House of Bishops of the Church of England." (2019), Conclusion 35.

³⁶ House of Bishops. "Marriage: A Teaching Document." (1999).

"God created man in his own image . . . male and female he created them"; He blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply"; "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created."³⁷

Often this assertion is derived from the biblical narration read in a very literal and straightforward way to underline the unambiguous existence of male and female as for example published by the Evangelical Alliance:

“The binary ‘male’ and ‘female’ of Genesis 1 is developed into the nouns ‘man’ (‘ish) and ‘woman’ (‘ishshah), as these are applied to Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:23. Throughout the Bible, biological sex is binary and integral to personhood - biological sex should reveal and determine gender.”³⁸

Deviations of this ‘state’ are regarded as a “concern because it distorts the creational order of male and female”, and “is understood as a result of living in a fallen world”.³⁹ Such a stance can overlap, as Strømme and Schmiedel have shown, with far-right statements about family politics. They report that “prominent clergy spread ideas that have been latched onto by the far right in their own conceptions of a homeland in which gender roles are firmly fixed by Christianity.”⁴⁰ Against this background, I share their claim to “both Christians and non-Christians to claim to Christianity, to call each other to take responsibility for ‘our’ religions.”⁴¹ Therefore, with my work I am consequently attempting to follow their appeal to “intervene [...] by exploring creative and collaborative ways of reclaiming Christianity [...]”.⁴²

1.2 Research Questions

As the preceding section shows, biblical accounts were and still are used to stabilize misogyny and queerphobia within conservative Christian faith communities and fundamentalist churches to maintain heteronormative patterns and patriarchal power. These rigid and static interpretations and doctrines cause a great narrowness and are far from a comprehensive

³⁷ Congregation for Catholic Education. "Male and Female He Created Them."2020, no. 16.03. (2019): Catechism of the Catholic Church (1993); Part 3, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 6, Paragraph I.

³⁸ Evangelical Alliance. "Transformed. A Brief Biblical and Pastoral Introduction to Understanding Transgender in a Changing Culture."2024, no. 28. June. (2018),11.

³⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁰ Strømme, Hannah, and Ulrich Schmiedel. *The Claim to Christianity: Responding to the Far Right*. SCM press, 2020, 34.

⁴¹ Strømme & Schmiedel, *The Claim to Christianity*, 10.

⁴² Ibid., 9.

understanding of being and unconditioned acceptance of every human being. They rather discriminate and threaten all persons who do not fit into these traditional patterns and deny especially queer people's identity. Also, in terms of human rights and that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" these exclusionary and oppressive ways of reading biblical scriptures are contradictory. Moreover, they also oppose the biblical claim to love one's neighbour as oneself and they do not correspond with the conception that every human is a work of the Divine.

Contemplating these issues, it would be therefore of course desirable if there were no determinations that force people to "fit into a designated box" as Knight claims it.⁴³ But life seems to be a constant struggle between manifold and sometimes even contradicting determinations on the one hand and (promises of) liberation of them on the other. Trying to meet all these expectations and being true to oneself at the same time, can make people feel either lost or trapped. Struggling with gender roles, sexual orientation or gender identity in this context is no exception. Gender dysphoria and inner struggles can be caused or enhanced by outer pressures as gender is a common mean to determine a person's identity in a correct way as Judith Butler asserts when saying that "we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right."⁴⁴ Butler's description of the performativity of gender and particularly naming it as a "survival strategy in compulsory systems", points out to the existential dimension of issues regarding gender identity.⁴⁵

And indeed, several studies conducted in the UK and the US support the assumption that sexism, heterosexism and discrimination enhance mental health problems, substance misuse, self-harm and even suicide ideation for gender non-conforming people.⁴⁶ Taking this into account it becomes clear why the specific question of how to maintain a healthy and liveable life in a heteronormative and maybe even queer- or transphobic environment, is so important for queer people. And for queer people who also identify as Christian, this question is just as important in respect of a fulfilled life, as the Divine statement "I have come so they

⁴³ Knight, "Being a Gay Christian Can Be Hurtful and Gruelling."

⁴⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York & London: Routledge, 2007), 190.

⁴⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 190.

⁴⁶ Compare Louis Bailey, Sonja J. Ellis, and Jay McNeil. "Suicide Risk in the UK Trans Population and the Role of Gender Transition in Decreasing Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Attempt." *Mental Health Review Journal* (2014). Apu Chakraborty, Sally McManus, Terry S. Brugha, Paul Bebbington, and Michael King, "Mental Health of the Non-Heterosexual Population of England." *The British journal of psychiatry* 198, no. 2 (2011). Michael King, Joanna Semlyen, Sharon See Tai, Helen Killaspy, David Osborn, Dmitri Popelyuk, and Irwin Nazareth, "A Systematic Review of Mental Disorder, Suicide, and Deliberate Self Harm in Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People." *BMC psychiatry* 8, no. 1 (2008)

may have life and have it to the full” promises.⁴⁷ Especially, when society, family or faith community does not seem to allow the full unfolding of a life because it does not fit into predetermined patterns of gender roles. I therefore think that it is crucially important to develop other interpretations of biblical accounts and to reject religious doctrines, challenge religious authorities and question their sovereignty of interpretation. I therefore support Butler’s claim when for example referring to the Roman Catholic Pope:

“If religionists are to engage and challenge the papal authority within its own terms, they will have to offer ways of thinking through the relationship of embodiment and transcendence; biology and social practice and process; the meanings of justice, love, and equality; and the revisable character of papal authority itself.”⁴⁸

I understand this to be both an intellectual and spiritual task, and the questions I was initially posing myself were questions concerning theological hermeneutics: Is the misogynist and queerphobic way, the one and only way to read, interpret and reflect on religious literature? Is it possible to tackle homo- and transphobic religious attitudes through Christian lenses, and to not exclude individuals because of their desire and way of loving? In sum, I am asking: are there ways to comprehend the Divine as inclusivist and develop an image that open minds and hearts towards the diversity of life and its beauty, and that allows the constitution of the self and gender going beyond traditions and conventions, and therefore beyond narrow views on identity and gender?

In recent years many approaches have been developed to reveal and tackle misogyny, inequality, intolerance, patriarchy, hierarchies and injustice within religious hermeneutics, narratives and doctrines. Particularly within feminist theology and feminist philosophy of religion as well as in queer theology many and very diverse works have emerged. The ways of thinking within these disciplines are manifold and pleasantly interdisciplinary. Feminist and queer scholars of theology, philosophy and philosophy of religion constantly strive to include results from feminist and queer research into their works, and elaborate theories that allow the development of thoughts, images, symbols and language that welcome diversity and equality, and the divine likewise. Their works consequentially provide theoretical foundations that pave the way for beliefs and spiritualities that oppose oppression, injustice and violence. Yip rightly remarks:

⁴⁷ Jn 10:10.

⁴⁸ Butler in: Ellen T Armour and Susan M St Ville. *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, (Columbia University Press 2006), 289.

“While such developments are a modest step forward compared to the giant steps that have been taken by secular institutions in many Western countries in terms of legislation and social attitude [...], this silent revolution’ cannot be denied.”⁴⁹

Historically, female theologians began to engage with feminist claims and feminist theory. Mary Grey calls it a ‘new awareness’ and explains that “feminist theologies reflect all these strands of secular feminism: “indeed they are dependent on and in dialogue with the analyses of secular feminism.”⁵⁰ Additionally, black feminism had a strong influence on feminist theology as black women felt excluded from feminist movements because of being focused on topics of white western women as Tina Beattie explains: “Black American women have given rise to a new theological vision which has had a widespread influence on feminist theology.”⁵¹ Besides Grey and Beattie other feminist theologians such as Ursula King, Daphne Hampson, Carter Heyward, Sarah Coakley or Rosemary Radford-Ruether accomplished comprehensive works in various tendencies which led to great diversity and complexity within feminist theology, “and each would be worthy of a study in its own right.”⁵²

A prominent feminist theologian who precedes most of the works just mentioned, was Mary Daly whose approach is positioned within an early radical feminism, and I sympathize with Daly’s questioning images of God and human projections to these images of various qualities. Daly suggests – and this resonates with my approach – an understanding of God as “Be-ing” and she offers an assertion that resonates strongly with Meister Eckhart’s as well as with Paul Tillich’s ontology, as she proclaims: “Essentially it is being alive now, which in its deepest dimension is participation in the unfolding of God.”⁵³ Although my views differ in many aspects from Daly’s way of thinking, I consider many of her thoughts to resonate with my work: mainly her critical discussion of the different images of God and the different conceptions of transcendence. Also, I share Daly’s central claim that religion must be liberated from patriarchal language and symbolism, and I share her endeavour to gain a new religious consciousness and a new understanding of universal being. Yet, despite this strong resonance Daly throughout her work does not refer to mysticism at all and remains critically about Tillich because she thinks that his terminology fails to counter power relations and sexual

⁴⁹ Yip, “Coming Home from the Wilderness”, 42.

⁵⁰ Mary Grey. "Feminist Theology: A Critical Theology of Liberation." In *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, edited by Christopher Rowland. Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 107.

⁵¹ Tina Beattie, *A Culture of Life: Womens Theology and Social Liberation*. CIIR Comment. (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 2000), 28.

⁵² Beattie, *A Culture of Life*, 29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 43.

oppression.⁵⁴ Moreover, other than Daly in respect of universality, I aim for my approach to be non-essentialist and more diverse, therefore, not only aiming at women's liberation, but in a queer sense for everybody's liberation: women, but also men, non-binary, transgender and intersex people.

And indeed, out of feminist theology subsequently specific strands such as lesbian and queer theology developed. Queer theology is, as the collection of essays by Gerard Loughlin shows, very heterogeneous and includes many different tendencies.⁵⁵ For example, the liberational thread following liberation theology by the Peruvian Dominican Priest, theologian and philosopher Gustavo Gutiérrez. Or the relational thread emphasizing women's and lesbian's issues, represented by, for example, Audre Lorde or the works of Elizabeth Stuart. Moreover, distinguished queer theologians, for instance, Linn Tonstad (who works on the intersection of systematic theology with feminist and queer theology) and Susannah Cornwall (who works extensively on the topic of theology, sex and gender). Within the field of philosophy of religion, as an example, Luce Irigaray's work engages with particularly feminist issues, though not from a theological but rather agnostic position, and she predominantly refers to psychological and psychoanalytical aspects. Furthermore, the feminist philosopher of religion, Grace Jantzen also works on Christian mysticism through a feminist lens but from a rather critical perspective.

All these feminist theological and philosophical accounts call traditional beliefs into question and push or even cross their boundaries. Yet, I cannot follow every strand. Conceptions, as for instance represented by Irigaray, which consider the Divine to be a construction of the psyche and argue at the expense of the transcendent dimension are for me, as a religious thinker, not an option. My personal comprehension of the term 'religious' in this context is based on the etymological derivation of the term 'religion': to reread and rethink knowledge of the transcendent (coming from Latin 'relegere' which means to reread) and care about it (being based on 'religiens': being careful). Thinking and caring about life itself out of such *reconnections* and following an ongoing process of rethinking means, among other aspects, leading a religious life – a life of 're-search' in various dimensions, one might think. In this respect, the prefix 're' in 'reread' I also understand as a 'repetition', an activity of going back to certain kinds of knowledge again and again to discover unprecedented layers of depths. This also means to rethink, hence, to participate creatively with progressions of one's

⁵⁴ Ibid., 20f.

⁵⁵ Compare Gerard P. Loughlin, "Gay Affections." In *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by Adrian Thatcher, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

time and to therefore ‘(re)construct’ new knowledge. In this sense, my dissertation could be understood as a contribution to the strand of ‘constructive theology’.⁵⁶

Furthermore, I am a member of a Christian contemplative community, the *Frankfurt School of Contemplation*, which claims to practice a modern form of contemplation.⁵⁷ According to the *Frankfurt School*, contemplation on the one hand is considered to be a practice which helps to align and open one’s mind towards the divine reality of existence; on the other hand, it is also understood as a practice to integrate spiritual experiences in life and consequently lead an active spiritual life in the world. Moreover, connecting ancient wisdom from the Christian tradition to contemporary Christian theology, comparative reading of other religious traditions and secular philosophy, intellectual reflection as well as drawing ethical, social and political interconnections are crucial aspects of the school.⁵⁸ The overall theoretical grounding of the *Frankfurt School of Contemplation* is – inter alia – based on mystical theology.

The meaning of mystical theology is comprehensive as it entails concepts which transcend rational thinking. For this reason, mystical theology respectively contemplation overcomes not only the dualistic view of the Divine and the human, but also the dualistic view of a contemplative and active way of living. In this sense and roughly spoken, it also overcomes the dualistic view of a secular life and a life in faith. Such theological conceptions also question the image of God as a dominant creator-God and offer images of the Divine which point out to the oneness of the Divine with its creation. The Divine can be interpreted radically differently to prevailing images, and mystical images on the contrary hold hidden treasures that can mean an enrichment to a spiritual life even today. Such notions and the notion of being created in the image and likeness of the Divine, also contradict hierarchies in the valuation of creatures and people. This has impacts not only on one’s understanding of justice and acts of love of neighbour but also on notions of the self and subjection – including gender.

My research therefore stands in the tradition of Christian mysticism and contemplation. For this reason, not feminist or queer theologies are prominent in my research

⁵⁶ Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland. *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*. (Fortress Press, 2005), 1.

⁵⁷ See <https://kontemplation-frankfurt.de>, accessed: 25.06.2024.

⁵⁸ According to the Frankfurt theologian and philosopher Dr. Dr. Peter Lipsett, compare: <https://kontemplation-frankfurt.de/ueber-die-frankfurter-schule-der-kontemplation-fsk>, accessed: 25.06.2024. Also compare: Flender, Jürgen. "Getting Centered in Presence: Meditation with Gifted Students at Hansenberg Castle." *Interdisciplinary Handbook of the Person-Centered Approach: Research and Theory* (2013): 157-66.

but accounts on mystical theology. Altogether, I consider my thesis predominantly to be a project of mystical hermeneutics. Within this field I mainly engage with questions around the Christian image of the Divine on the one hand, and the process of creation and the origin of the self and gender on the other. In this respect, my approach depicts an attempt to make a new combination of ancient literature on mystical theology and modern theologies and philosophies.

In more detail this means that my dissertation interweaves three different strands of thinking: First, Christian mystical theology claiming non-dualist and panentheist conceptions of the Divine and contemplation as a spiritual concept of life. Latter because it considers such oneness of the Divine to be an experience that can be potentially made by everybody and leads to a change of consciousness and transformation of life. These processes of transcending the solely personal image of the Divine leads to, second, Christian existentialist theology. Within this field approaches exist which transcend theism and derive ontologies which take up mystical theologies in modern and more secular language. These approaches encourage to embrace participation in the divine as well as in social life and pave way to, thirdly, feminist philosophy which describes social processes regarding subjection, being a self and the emergence of gender. Herein finally lie my central questions:

How does ancient religious knowledge relate to modern and social concepts of the self, subjection and gender? Is there a way of connecting the dimension of an immanent transcendent with the social dimension of the embodied self? Do mystical theology and contemplation, including mystical (non-dualist) notions of the Divine, creation and being, withstand modern theories of the constitution of the self and subjection? And is it true that concepts, like ‘speech acts’ and ‘performativity’, from a Christian point of view, must be rejected? Is there a way of imagining the Divine without shifting into gender essentialism? Are ancient and modern ways of thinking crucial dichotomies? Or can they be thought jointly, like stitching several different threads into a completely new pattern, a completely new perspective whilst neither thread loses its validity? Can Christian existentialist theology in this context function as a bridge or translation of ancient terms into modern language and secular ways of expression?

My claim is that in mystical theology despite patriarchal and misogynist language, symbols and metaphors, interesting thoughts can be discovered that can be related to features of our contemporary world, and therefore have a meaning (and ethical implications) even for us today. In this respect, I regard my analysis as a carving out of perspectives and principles

that lead to positive aspects of spirituality such as transformation, development, vitality, agency and resistance. And I am hoping with this attempt to overcome and go beyond, at least to some extent, irritating gendered language and images. Altogether with this project I am hoping to suggest an existentialist account of Christian creation and becoming, including the constitution of the self, that empowers queer Christians to liberate from queerphobic constraints being imposed on them by some religious communities. Besides I am seeking to reveal in passing two overarching perspectives: Firstly, that Christianity is not (and never has been) a monolithic block of doctrines but rather an ongoing development and collection of experiences and interpretations in a progressing world, much more diverse than some utterances referring to biased mainstream statements might suggest. And secondly, a further 'mystical existentialist' view for Christians searching for a universalist approach to accept and embrace the reality and existence of queer people.

1.3 Literature Review

There are manifold difficulties concerning mystical literature and its Platonic and Scholastic tradition, beginning with the issue of what mysticism actually is, how it can be defined and who counts as a mystic anyway, continuing with, as mentioned, important feminist criticisms on intrinsic patriarchy, heteronormativity and misogyny. Additionally, some of the questions and issues that bothered monastic thinkers of a bygone era are not questions and issues that bother scholars today, and answers to some of these questions back then, cannot be answers to similar questions now. Yet, as mystical theology and contemplation play such a prominent role in my way of thinking, I would like to analyse but also advocate for mystical theorists who often have not been taken seriously and consequently been underestimated as theologians as well as philosophers. Therefore, the main part of my dissertation will engage with works by Teresa of Ávila and Meister Eckhart, two of the most outstanding mystical theologians and teachers until today. Their works express a particular conception of God which regards the Divine as underlying existence as such, and as an ongoing process of creativity and transformation which potentially can – according to their accounts – be experienced during one's lifetime. Their notion of a nondualistic Divine entails a specific kind of flexibility or fluidity of the Divine, which takes human identity into account as well, including bodies, sensual and emotional experiences, but also reflection and spirit. In this regard I consider their concepts of mystical theology and contemplation to still hold relevance today. Moreover, their image of God can have an impact on one's conception of the self and must not, as I am attempting to argue, stand against a queer identity.

As indicated mystical theology and contemplation are crucially intertwined, which means that my analysis will also follow the hidden thread of spiritual experience. A prominent example of mystical theology that entails extensive accounts on such experiences is the lifelong work of Teresa of Ávila. Despite being written on the one hand in a Roman Catholic, patriarchal and heteronormative framework her writings (books, letters, and poems) also reveal an open minded and open-hearted understanding of Christianity and a broad notion of expansion and flourishing of the human being. I am mainly drawing on her book *The Interior Castle* that rather meant to be a manual for contemplation and addressed to her sisters in her order, but in which she explains her image of God as well as her image of the human and the relationship to another. Even though she spends plenty attention to the body she likewise emphasizes the importance of spiritual processes within the soul. She describes the soul through the metaphor of a castle, and as something beautiful and unlimited, which can be imagined "without the least exaggeration."⁵⁹ She also uses the image of a crystal that should not be allowed to be separated from the "brilliant sun" by throwing "a thick black cloth" over it.⁶⁰ According to Teresa, a good relationship to the Divine does not exclusively depend on outer conditions or on certain moral behaviour, and neither should outer conditions nor certain moral behaviour be allowed to threaten this relationship. In this context the notion of transformation – I am referring to her metaphor of the caterpillar and the butterfly – becomes crucial, and Teresa regards it as an essential part of human being, which she therefore does not comprehend to be limited or determined.⁶¹ The outcomes of these transformations culminate into a spiritual state which Teresa describes in the Seventh Mansions of the castle, the Innermost Centre of the Soul. Within this context Teresa encourages religious people to cope with difficulties and suffering, and she also warns of outcries of others, for example friends that might desert one or pressuring religious authorities.⁶² These experiences might resonate with the experiences of queer religious people.

In respect of secondary literature, I engage with various works on Teresa coming from different perspectives, for instance the historical analysis by Jodi Bilinkoff, the feminist view from Grace Jantzen and Caroline Walker Bynum, investigations on language and writing by Emily Scida, Mirabai Starr and Alison Weber. Furthermore, I use philosophical, theological and spiritual accounts by Bernard McGinn, Rowan Williams, Christia Mercer and Beverly

⁵⁹ St. Teresa of Ávila, *Interior Castle* in: *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Avila*. Edited and translated by E. Allison Peers. 3 vols. Vol. 2, (London: Burns & Oates, 2002), 208.

⁶⁰ Compare Teresa 1M 2, 206.

⁶¹ Compare Teresa 5M 2, 255.

⁶² Compare Teresa 6M 1, 270-272

Lanzetta. Of course, this can only be a selection, and I am attempting to focus on examinations and interpretations of Teresa's works that neither focus too much on descriptions of supernatural events nor on narrow views on Teresa's biography and personal suffering. I am rather attempting to carve out Teresa's deep philosophical, theological and spiritual knowledge which, as I find, often gets lost in other accounts. Therefore, particularly in my analysis, I also draw heavily on interpretations given by the translators and editors of the German edition *Teresa von Ávila. Werke und Briefe: Gesamtausgabe* published in 2015 by Ulrich Dobhan OCD and Elisabeth Peeters OCD. I have decided to use these editions as the German version is excellent, very detailed and grounded in philosophical and theological knowledge and competence. As Dobhan and Peeters are members of the Carmelite order themselves, their work is based on a monastic life, contemplative experience and experience in pastoral care. Therefore, they are very experienced in teaching the contemplative way of life in contemporary time. Consequently, the translation is a modern German one, and the editor's comments cover modern issues as well as feminist aspects, but without departing from Teresa's ancient time and Roman Catholic background. All aspects which I consider to be indispensable when engaging with Teresa's mystical theology.

Regarding translations of Teresa's works, as for any translation, of course, what Amanda Powell states applies:

“Some are more conservative and others (especially in the later twentieth century to now) are freer in applying the content of Teresa's counsels to renewed spiritual criteria; according to its approach, a given translation will hew closer to or move further away from a representation of Teresa's sixteenth-century, Roman Catholic, Discalced Carmelite heritage and context.”⁶³

In respect of a translation from the English-speaking realm I decided to work with E. Allison Peers' edition from 1957 because Powell asserts that “for mid-twentieth-century readers of English, the central translation of Teresa was the magisterial version by Peers, in *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*”.⁶⁴ This is mainly because of Peers' translation into British English, but also because his language – despite sounding quaint at some points – is more lively than other translations, and therefore, in my view, captures the intensity and

⁶³ Amanda Powell, *Teresa in English Translation*, in: Weber, Alison. *Approaches to Teaching Teresa of Ávila and the Spanish Mystics*. *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*. Edited by Joseph Gibaldi, (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 30.

⁶⁴ Powell, *Teresa in English Translation*, 32.

vitality of Teresa's teaching best.⁶⁵ Quotes in Spanish I will take from the edition by Vincente de la Fuente: *Obras Completas De Santa Teresa De Jesús*.

The second mystical theologian I am referring to is Meister Eckhart because he offers a theology that transcends language, and therefore the naming and imagining of the Divine which has consequences for the comprehension of creation, becoming, the human being. His theology is known as an apophatic or negative theology that deconstructs any image of God altogether. Such a questioning of the quite common understanding of the Divine as a person subsequently questions the understanding of the human being derived from that personal image – including imaginations regarding gender. Eckhart with his central concept of 'detachment' invites to detach from all these imaginations and projections to eventually comprehend (intellectually but also bodily) one's oneness with the Divine which means to understand oneself not only as participating in divine being, but also as a concrete human being. This is a process of transformation which Eckhart calls Birth of God in the Soul (similar to Teresa's entering of the Innermost Centre of the Soul) and which depicts the process of becoming a subject, becoming a person.

Marie-Anne Vannier explains that Eckhart's notion of detachment, which is a crucial precondition for the Birth of God in the Soul, seeks to deconstruct individuality in a way that the human is able to recognize its soul and therefore can take on personhood. She underscores that within this process Eckhart neither seeks to deconstruct the self, or rather individuality, nor does he aim to enlarge the ego. In truth the aim is to make space for the eternal flowing of divine life and to make transformation (from being nothing to being a person) possible.⁶⁶ Vannier at this point affirms that Eckhart "offers an ontological and existential reflection that is still relevant for our time."⁶⁷

Eckhart's reflections show that taking on personhood, can be understood to not only be a social process but a spiritual one out of one's own internal origin as well. For Eckhart this comprehension does not only entail conceptions around detachment, the Ground of the Soul and the Birth of God in the Soul but also comprises – as Vannier's explanations imply – one's being; one's being in the world as such. Based on the notion of being created in the immediate

⁶⁵ Compare Alison Weber, *Approaches to Teaching Teresa of Ávila and the Spanish Mystics*. Approaches to Teaching World Literature. Edited by Joseph Gibaldi (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 19.

⁶⁶ Compare Marie-Anne Vannier, "Déconstruction De L'individualité Ou Assomption De La Personne Chez Eckhart?". *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 75, no. 4 (1995), 399-418.

⁶⁷ Vannier, "Déconstruction De L'individualité Ou Assomption De La Personne", 418.

likeness of God, Eckhart asserts that “you have your being directly from God.”⁶⁸ Grounded on these presumptions Eckhart establishes his ontology, particularly in his scholarly Latin work, where he claims that “Existence is God”.⁶⁹ This has far-reaching consequences also for the understanding of the self which I find essential for my interpretations, as I agree with Robert Dobie who remarks that “Eckhart develops the ontological approach with argumentation that is always grounded in lived concrete experience of the existing individual.”⁷⁰ But this individualistic perspective does also lead, as Dobie states, to a “mystical humanism”.⁷¹ At this point, one must concede though that Eckhart as well as Teresa at some points (but very rarely) utter prejudices or resentments towards others according to prevailing views at their time. Yet, the term of ‘mystical humanism’ is extremely important for my own way of thinking as it reveals that there are hermeneutics showing that Eckhart’s (but also Teresa’s) theologies are – sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly – welcoming and inclusive towards every human being (actually towards every single creature to be more precise), and that queer people by no means can be considered to be second class human beings.

To explain these interconnections, the focus of my major analysis lies on Eckhart’s notions of the Ground of the Soul and the Birth of God in the Soul because I consider these conceptions to be foundational for the understanding of Eckhart’s notion of being and of subjection. It is therefore important for me to read Eckhart’s theology as a mystical theology. Therefore, I am focusing on Eckhart’s Middle High German sermons, and I am working with the translation from Middle High German into modern German by Josef Quint and the English translation by Maurice O’ C. Walshe. All citations of Meister Eckhart I am going to quote are from Walshe’s volumes.

In respect of secondary literature, I have chosen works from scholars who have worked broadly and meticulously not only on Eckhart, but also on Christian mysticism in general. I am mainly referring to Bernard McGinn because his work appears to be the most exhaustive and thorough work on Eckhart in the Anglo-American realm. McGinn presents a complete account of Eckhart, including Eckhart’s history and context, but also in-depth insight into

⁶⁸ Meister Eckhart. *Predigten & Traktate in: Werke I & II*. Translated by Josef Quint and al. Edited by Niklaus Largier. Vol. 24 (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2008), 83.

⁶⁹ Meister Eckhart, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*. Translated by Armand A. Maurer, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 85/ DKV II *Prologus Generalis*, 472:” Esse est deus.”.

⁷⁰ Dobie, Robert. "Meister Eckhart's" Ontological Philosophy of Religion". *The Journal of religion* 82, no. 4 (2002), 565.

⁷¹ Dobie, "Meister Eckhart's" Ontological Philosophy of Religion", 584.

Eckhart's writings and teachings from a theological perspective. McGinn therefore sees a consistency in Eckhart's way of thinking and considers mystical interpretations to be possible. He consequently reads Eckhart from different perspectives, including the mystical view. Amy Hollywood follows a similar approach to McGinn and adds a strong focus on gender, which can be connected to Michael Sells work as he conducts a linguistic analysis and presents interesting results in terms of gender too. Moreover, I draw on the extensive comments and interpretations of Josef Quint. Concerning the ontological features in Eckhart's theology and the notion of becoming a subject I furthermore refer to Marie-Anne Vannier, and Kurt Flasch et al. I want to highlight though that I do not refer to all these named authors' works in terms of a critical analysis. I rather employ some of their findings to underscore certain hermeneutical possibilities within Eckhart's theology which I am attempting to reveal.

The second part of the dissertation will combine mystical theology with existentialist theology. This combination offers a framework in which I am attempting to carve out the interconnection between the Divine, creation, being, human, and the self. To do so, I am going to focus on Paul Tillich's theology because it provides a terminology that can help us to detach from gendered and patriarchal language and images, and therefore can function as a bridge between outdated expressions in mystical theology and modern language of gender theory. I am mainly referring to Tillich's book *The Courage To Be* because it summarizes elements of his ontology which I find valuable in order to understand human's being and becoming, especially his conception of 'being-itself'. I am particularly interested in his notion of the 'Innermost Self' because I consider the understanding of the self to be crucial to elaborate the relationship between the self and gender. The term of the Innermost Self therefore not only depicts the link in the chain between mystical theology and existentialist theology, but also between theological and modern concepts of the self. Tillich's account, in this respect, provides a foundation which makes it possible to relate the findings from my analysis on mystical theology to modern theories of subjection and gender theory. Within this part I draw on secondary literature by Robert Dobie, John Dourley and John Thatamanil as they too see links between Eckhart's ontology and Tillich's existentialist theology.

From a feminist point of view, I am following a non-essentialist approach, and therefore mainly engage with Judith Butler's work. Butler's thoughts, of course, are secular and remain exclusively on the social side of life and do not seem to relate to any transcendent dimension. Therefore, in this context the question arises if Butler's way of thinking indeed is a strict contradiction to the Divine as some fundamental Christians claim. Reflecting on these

questions I have then become increasingly interested in Butler's theory of subjection, and the constitution of the self. On the subject of gender I am engaging with Judith Butler's work, primarily because of their non-essentialist queer feminist approach and gender theory, but also because I realized that their comprehension of the self and subjection are crucial to capture alleged difficulties between Christian and queer feminist views on gender. Besides speech act theory and conceptualizations such as performativity, I therefore consider their notions of recognition and encounter as important aspects within this context. The works I am mainly referring to are *Giving an Account of Oneself*, *Recognition and Ambivalence*, *Bodies that Matter*, *Gender Trouble*, and *Undoing Gender*. To illustrate how I see the interplay between the spiritual processes that mystical theology encompasses, and cultural effects of societies as suggested by Butler, I am going to propose an interpretation of the Biblical story of *Jacob's Wrestling* in relation to *Scenes of Address* and Butler's notion of encounter. It will turn out that Butler's theories despite being secular in no way question or reject the Divine's creation or creative power. They rather affirm the sociality of life which from a non-dualistic point of view does not contradict the Divine at all and hence does not pose a problem for a religiously founded life.

As writing a dissertation is a journey, further authors and approaches became more important to me during the writing process. For example, the importance of panentheist approaches for my argument, especially when being connected to feminist theological ideas. In this respect I became increasingly interested in works created by the Roman catholic feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson and the Christian theologian Catherine Keller.

Elizabeth Johnson in her book *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* focuses, regarding gender, on the situation of women in church and society. The situation of LGBTQIA+ people, at least in this work, does not seem to bother her. Still, she formulates a strong claim and demands that "the whole structure of church and society needs to be transformed to make space for a new community of mutual partnership. The goal is a new justice."⁷² With this appeal she makes a call that I think should include queer people as well. To justify her criticisms, she carves out in which way the naming of the Divine effects the situation of women, and she enumerates three difficulties: First, taking the name of the Divine literally. In this respect she complains that "exclusively male language leads us to forget the incomprehensibility of holy mystery and instead reduces the living God to the

⁷² Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*. Continuum Studies in Philosophy of Religion. Pbk. ed. New York: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2011, 95.

fantasy of an infinitely ruling man.” Second, she points out that patriarchal language always leads to social effects, and she emphatically states: "One God, one pope, one emperor": from the time of Constantine onward these dominant male images have functioned to justify patriarchy in church and society.” And thirdly she criticises the idea that “maleness has more in common with divinity than femaleness” as this would imply that women do not fully meet the likeness with the Divine.⁷³ Eventually she articulates a vision that I clearly share: “If God is "she" as well as "he" – and in fact neither – a new possibility can be envisioned of a community that honors difference [...].”⁷⁴ Perhaps not surprisingly, such views seem to cause unrest in the Roman Catholic Church and Johnson’s book *Quest for the Living God* was assessed by the Committee on Doctrine, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in 2011. The final document after over a year of investigation states that “the problem is that the language used in the book does not adequately express the faith of the Church”, and that therefore, “for bishops, the book is a particular pastoral concern because it is written for a ‘broad audience’ rather than a more narrow scholarly audience.”⁷⁵ They conclusively emphasize that “the book is seriously inadequate as a presentation of the Catholic understanding of God.”⁷⁶ Sadly, as I find, such dismissive utterances from ecclesiastical and theological institutions, impede development and progression, not only of a living theology but also of living spirituality which could permeate people’s lives in a more inspiring and stimulating way to find resilience and joy.

Catherine Keller suggests another interesting approach which she explains in her work *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* which, although she draws strongly on the Hebrew Bible and Hebrew terms, resonates in many aspects with my attempt. Keller repeatedly refers to Meister Eckhart and other mystical authors and draws the connection to freedom, which becomes apparent in her statement on Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart:

“While the classical and medieval mystical discourses rarely address social relations, they articulate a bottomless freedom that in context was judged intolerably dissident. Thus Marguerite de Porete, a twelfth-century Beguine who

⁷³ Compare Johnson *Quest for the Living God*, 98f.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷⁵ Committee on Doctrine, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Response to Observations by Sr. Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., Regarding the Committee on Doctrine's Statement About the Book *Quest for the Living God*." (2020), 10.

⁷⁶ Committee on Doctrine, “Response to Observations by Sr. Elizabeth A. Johnson”, 11.

abandoned feminine habits to wander widely as a teacher, articulated a radical freedom influential of the “classical” mystics, such as Eckhart.”⁷⁷

And I am not surprised that this statement takes her almost immediately to Dorothee Sölle who in some people’s view counts as a modern mystical theologian. Like me, she refers to Sölle’s book *The Silent Cry*, and makes, in my view legitimate and important connections between mysticism, freedom and resistance:

“Yet the socially liberating potential of negative theology has remained largely unrealized, often occluded or occulted in a haze of otherworldly transcendence. We must ask how any mystical iconoclasm, preoccupied with divine names, would resist a socially oppressive context. Catholic [sic] activist-theologian Dorothee Soelle hears “the silent cry” of mysticism as a call to resistance.”⁷⁸

Johnon’s and Keller’s accounts are furthermore interesting concerning my work as they both relate their notions and thoughts to the theological concept of panentheism which is also present in Eckhart’s and Teresa’s theologies. It plays a decisive role in my argument as well and I therefore will address these aspects in more detail in my concluding chapters.

Regarding Dorothee Sölle I agree that her way of thinking is of relevance in this context. Besides Tillich, she represents another contemporary Protestant theologian with a detailed insight into mystical theology and aims at building bridges to contemporary ways of thinking and engaging in the world. Her explanations affirm my own understanding of a contemplative life in the respect of active participation as she proclaims that “most of the great men and women of mystical movements have also spoken clearly in their theory against a complete withdrawal from the world. For a time being, they indeed practiced the contemplative “way inwards”, but their aim was consistently the unity of the contemplative and the active life, [...]” And she subsequently contradicts common (often also feminist) objections by stating that the “notion of mysticism as a flight from the world is much more a result of the bourgeois idea that religion is a private affair.”⁷⁹ She continues to explain the connection between mysticism and resistance and suggests various ways in which this resistance materializes: “in different situations the notion varies between evasion, dissent,

⁷⁷ Keller, Catherine. *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003, 203.

⁷⁸ Keller, *The Face of the Deep*, 203.

⁷⁹ Dorothee Sölle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*. Translated by Barbara Rumscheidt and Martin Rumscheidt, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 196.

abstinence, refusal, boycott, strike, reform or counterproposal, dialogue, or mediation.”⁸⁰ I will repetitively refer to her thoughts, mainly taken from her Work *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* and will include them at various points in respect of different aspects regarding mystical notions and social/ political/ ethical engagement.

1.4 Structure

Regarding the structure of my argument my thesis is composed of five themed chapters. The now following chapter will discuss the spiritual practice of contemplation and the experience of non-dualism, and will also address key terms such as religion, spirituality and mystical theology. In connection with these topics biographical, historical and contextual information on Teresa of Ávila and Meister Eckhart will be explained.

The third chapter examines and discusses key aspects of Teresa of Ávila’s theology, mainly based on her book *The Interior Castle*, aiming to elucidate central notions such as mental prayer, the *Seventh Mansions* of the *Interior Castle* and the Innermost Centre of the Soul.

Similarly to the third chapter, chapter four will examine Meister Eckhart’s theology, mainly as presented in his vernacular sermons, focussing on essential conceptions such as the Birth of God in the Soul and the Ground of the Soul.

Chapter Five combines the findings of the analyses from chapter three and four and connects them to Paul Tillich’s existentialist theology based on his book *The Courage To Be*. This chapter explores Tillich’s conception of the courage to be and will introduce terms such as being-itself, self-being and Innermost Self, before continuing to explore Judith Butler’s theories of subjection. This chapter also presents the interpretation of *Jacobs’ Wrestling* in relation to Butler’s *Scenes of Address*.

The final chapter will connect the results of my analysis on different views on the constitution of the self to gender, and subsequently present my conclusions in respect of imagining the Divine, creation, becoming, the self, gender and what all of this could possibly mean for queer Christian people.

To sum up, my aim is to show that the process of the Birth of God in the Soul, the Ground of the Soul, the Innermost Centre of the Soul and the notion of the Innermost Self do not depict a once and for all formation of a subject, but rather an ongoing process of

⁸⁰ Sölle, *The Silent Cry*, 198.

incompleteness embedded in one's social world. Therefore, a spiritual understanding of becoming a self does not mean a fixed essence and predetermined life, and it does neither stand in contradiction to Butler's described cultural gender dynamics nor against a possibly ambiguous, genderfluid, queer life. Moreover, particularly Eckhart's ontology leads to a different understanding of creation which also means that gender theory according to Butler does not contradict any divine order. According to these conclusions no biological, moral, social or political oppressions – even claimed by religious authorities – are justified to condemn and limit any human being and way of life. My overarching goal therefore is to review and analyse different Christian literature in order to demonstrate, that within Christian theologies images of the Divine and of the human exist, which oppose an essentialist view of the self. My main aim is to illustrate various ways of argumentation and interpretation to reject oppressive arguments of religious authorities and to contradict these instances within their own terms.

In the sense of a counterproposal, I am attempting to develop a positive account of mystical theology and contemplation. This will be an account which reveals the potential of spirituality to develop a mental resilience which helps to set boundaries in order to protect one's own and other's integrity, but which also helps to push boundaries in order to resist narrow conventions and structures, including rigid views on sex, sexuality, gender identity and gender roles, but also biased views on Christian religiosity. I am seeking to reveal a Christian spirituality that emerges and flourishes fruitfully out of oneself and, therefore, is not grounded on doctrines and morality. This would be a spirituality which does not rely on the control of fear and therefore needs to use threat and rules to label, judge and eventually exclude persons who do not seem to fit, as for example queer people. Altogether, it would be an existentialist spirituality which can be integrated non-violently – with spiritual joy and queer pride – into one's difficult and tenuous worldly life.

2 Teresa of Ávila and Meister Eckhart

In this chapter I am going to introduce my main theorists, Teresa of Ávila and Meister Eckhart. I am going to describe their historical context and significant aspects of their lives and works. Remarkably, for both can be said that their lives and teachings were inseparably interwoven. Therefore, by focussing on their images of the Divine and notions of theology, particularities of their lives and teaching will be revealed as well as their differences and similarities. I am also going to sketch some of the difficulties they have been struggling with and their impact

on their work, legacy and reception which I partially consider to be relevant in my argument, sometimes quite obvious, sometimes more subtle. As a whole the intention of this chapter is to give an initial insight into the works of Teresa and Eckhart and an explanation of the position of these authors within the bigger picture of the contemplative Christian tradition. Within this chapter I am also going to indicate in which way Teresa and Eckhart frame the term of mystical theology before going into detail on their teachings in the following chapters. Furthermore, I am going to indicate difficulties of expressing mystical experiences and thoughts and related to these issues the limitations of language and its consequences. In this context, I will also touch upon feminist objections and work out my path on how I am going to read Teresa and Eckhart.

Teresa and Eckhart are, of course, representatives of their own very specific traditions. And although my aim is to carve timeless and universal aspects out of their works I, at this point, want to emphasize that I do not mean to harmonise all traditions by ignoring differences and violate their integrity. But I see a common source of all religious and spiritual striving which I presuppose throughout my thesis by referring to Joseph Milne: “If there is a unifying principle of all religious traditions, that principle lies above and beyond them in transcendent truth itself, as their source and their end.”⁸¹ I understand this transcendent truth because it lies beyond the materialised and embodied world as incomprehensible, immaterial, indivisible, infinite and ineffable. Eckhart explains this through answering the question on why and how to love the Divine, and gives his conception of God en passant:

“For God is nothing: not in the sense of having no being. He is neither this nor that that one can speak of: He is being above all being. He is beingless being. Therefore, the mode of loving Him must be modeless. He is beyond all speech.”⁸²

Nevertheless, within the Christian realm there have always been, and still are, people trying to speak of the unspeakable. These diverse attempts to express the experience of the transcendent in words are famously reflected in the lives and works of Teresa of Ávila and Meister Eckhart.

⁸¹ Joseph Milne, "Eckhart and the Problem of Christian Non-Dualism: A Comparative Study of Eckhart and Advaita Vedanta." *Eckhart Review* 2, no. 1 (21.04.2015 1993), 32.

⁸² Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 62, 317/ DKV II, Pr. 82 186/ DW 3, 431 (583): "[...], wan got ist niht; niht alsô, daz er âne wesen sî: er enit weder diz noch daz, daz man gesprechen mac; er ist ein wesen ob allen wesen. Er ist ein wesen weselôs. Dar umbe sol diu wîse wîselôs sîn, dâ mite man minnen sol. Er ist über allez sprechen.“ In every footnote the reference regarding DW gives the page of the sermon in MHG, the page number in brackets of the sermon in modern German.

2.1 Teresa of Ávila

2.1.1 Life and Historical Context

Teresa of Ávila was a Spanish nun in the 16th century. Her monastic life, and the spirituality she is famous for, were deeply rooted in the contemplative tradition. Her religious career began as a rather “mediocre religious” and “average nun, better than some, worse than others” as McGinn, slightly teasingly, describes her.⁸³ Amazingly though, she became a globally acknowledged spiritual leader and recognized as an outstanding phenomenon all over the world.⁸⁴ As she was famous for her spiritual experiences and reflections during her lifetime already, she counted as an expert on the contemplative way of praying. Therefore, she repeatedly received the specific order to explain the practice of contemplation to her sisters. These orders were mostly made through the so called *letrados*, theologically trained clerics, who functioned as confessors in the monasteries. Teresa’s focus, therefore, was on education and teaching contemplation as a monastic practice. Nonetheless, she developed and unfolded a theology and philosophy to underpin contemplation as a comprehensive theory of both praying and living and developed a unique approach.⁸⁵ In 1970 she finally was accorded the title “teacher of the church” as the first woman by Pope Paul VI. Against this background it is important to acknowledge, as McGinn does by relating Teresa’s works to the teachings of her friend John of the Cross, that “Teresa needs to be seen on her own terms and evaluated on the basis of her own contribution. [...] her mature teaching about the possibility, even desirability, of uniting apostolic action with deep contemplation.”⁸⁶ Saying this, I want to point out, that in modern times Teresa foremost has been regarded exclusively as a mystic and has not seriously been considered as a theologian or philosopher. In line with Christia Mercer, I think this to be a misjudgement though, as “her works are richly philosophical and deserve study.”⁸⁷

Teresa de Ahumada was born in the year 1515 and grew up in the Catalan town of Ávila, which at that time was changing from a rather rural atmosphere to a more dynamic one, hosting diverse social groups, as for example, a group of Muslims (*mudéjares*) living under

⁸³ Bernard McGinn, "Teresa De Jesús: The Contemplative in Action." *English Language Notes* 56, no. 1 (2018), 58.

⁸⁴ Compare Christia Mercer, "Descartes' Debt to Teresa of Ávila, or Why We Should Work on Women in the History of Philosophy." *Philosophical studies* 174, no. 10 (2016), 2543f.

⁸⁵ Compare Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, (Continuum, 2000), ix.

⁸⁶ McGinn, "The Contemplative in Action", 64.

⁸⁷ Mercer, "Descartes' debt to Teresa of Ávila", 2553.

Christian rule and later converting to Catholicism, then known as *moriscos*.⁸⁸ Teresa herself was of Jewish descent. Jews in Ávila represented an ethnic minority, but were a considerable community, living humble sometimes impoverished lives as artisans or shopkeepers, but also some of them successful in trade or medicine.⁸⁹ Just like Muslims, many Jews converted to Catholicism over the years and this new established group of ‘new Christians’ called *conversos* caused social problems, which often made them hide their Jewish past. These circumstances complicated *conversos*’ lives, as the important notion of true honour was increasingly defined by ethnicity, pedigree and rank within society. This was also an issue in Teresa’s family. The historian Jodi Bilinkoff therefore concludes that this must have had a profound impact on Teresa and her life.⁹⁰ I furthermore wonder if these circumstances also explain Teresa’s occasional antisemitic utterances in her writings.⁹¹ Rowan Williams however, emphasises that Teresa’s descent made her “a member of a disadvantaged and suspect group” which was “frequently regarded with resentment, contempt and suspicion”.⁹² Against this background and because of being a woman and additionally under the constant threat from the Inquisition, Williams acknowledges that her behaviour and success were “extraordinarily courageous”.⁹³

However, there were many societal changes going on in Spain at those times and even the Catholic Church opened a bit more towards women and laity. Yet, there was also the impact of Luther’s rebellion and the suspicion of Erasmian anticlericalism which threatened the integrity of the church. Amidst this environment various religious women’s movements emerged in Ávila, which presumably affected Teresa as well, something that Bilinkoff considers to be crucial to take into account:

“The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed an explosion of female religious activity and writing, a consideration that is critical for understanding the context of Saint Teresa’s life and work.”⁹⁴

A rather revolutionary women’s movement was called ‘little women’ or *mujercillas*, which Alison Weber describes as a “movement of evangelical democratization, transcending

⁸⁸ Compare Jodi Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 4-11.

⁸⁹ Compare Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, 11f.

⁹⁰ Compare Ibid. 14 - 20f.

⁹¹ See for example Teresa, 7M 4, 348f.

⁹² Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, ix & 16.

⁹³ Ibid., 18.

⁹⁴ Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, 96.

gender and class barriers”.⁹⁵ She suggests that we should regard Teresa as one of the *mujercillas* because she taught and engaged in theological discourses, which both were actually proscribed for women. Even though the term *mujercilla* was used in a pejorative way, Teresa, according to Weber, endured and embraced being given that name.⁹⁶ Another popular group were the so called *beatas*. Like the Beguines they were a group of women, mostly widows and daughters of knights and landowners, who founded religious houses, but did not enter a monastic order.⁹⁷ Teresa sympathised with these women because, just as she did herself, they organised their lives around the Divine, prayer, poverty and almsgiving.⁹⁸ Furthermore – and sometimes the *beatas* were (falsely) regarded as associated with them – groups of Illuminists, called *alumbrados*, appeared.⁹⁹ They comprised lay and religious men and women, who met at their homes to read and comment on the scripture. They did not follow a specific doctrine, but believed that everybody could understand the Bible by being illuminated through the Holy Spirit, as Weber explains:

“[...]: they denied the necessity of any sacramental intermediary between God and man and thus rejected the efficacy of external works as well as the authority of the Church to interpret Scripture.”¹⁰⁰

Their spirituality was centred around a loving and forgiving God which was an attractive alternative to ceremonial Christianity, and therefore many of them were *conversos* who faced much discrimination. They practiced, among other things, mental prayer, and women held major leadership roles in these circles. Their teachings circulated around a practice called *dejamiento* which Weber describes as follows:

“[...] a form of mental prayer that emptied the mind of thoughts. In the state of *dejamiento* the advanced adepts could surrender themselves God’s will, with the assurance that they would not be led into sin.”¹⁰¹

Teresa’s teaching in the view of some people in her environment appeared quite close to the spirituality of the *alumbrados*, which led to her first denunciation to the Inquisition in 1574/

⁹⁵ Compare Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 21.

⁹⁶ Compare Weber, *The Rhetoric of Femininity*, 18f.

⁹⁷ Compare Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, 38f.

⁹⁸ Compare Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 31.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29ff.

¹⁰⁰ Weber, *The Rhetoric of Femininity*, 24.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

1575.¹⁰² She was reported twice, altogether, which led to several investigations and reviews, mainly on her extensive work that later became the book called *The Life of the Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus*.¹⁰³ All the allegations turned out to be false and were based on lies and defamation but they caused uncertainty and tension in Teresa's life. Regardless of this constant threat though, Teresa was not intimidated and continued with her work and writing.¹⁰⁴ For this reason, however, Teresa was always careful to distance herself from the *alumbrados*, as despite all the misogyny she experienced herself, and despite all her personal struggles with clerical authority, she never questioned the authority of her Church as an institution, including the practice of Inquisition.¹⁰⁵

Coming into conflict with the church and its authority was neither new nor extraordinary though, as Bilinkoff reports that "in the late fourteenth century, concerned Catholics considered ways of countering the spiritual decay and institutional corruption they perceived in the Roman church."¹⁰⁶ Arguments took place all over Europe and led particularly in Spain to reforms of the clerical and monastic orders. Teresa, too, was affected by this and through her work finally rejected certain social and liturgical principles.¹⁰⁷ Thus, not only these outer conflicts, but also conflicts within her own order eventually led – due to Teresa's persistent engagement – to reforms and several new foundations of monasteries.¹⁰⁸ One can therefore easily imagine that her life was shaped by this engagement and that she was accordingly busy. Williams, as a brief diagnosis on Teresa's life, puts it in a nutshell: "It is a quite extraordinary record of almost ceaseless work and travel."¹⁰⁹ This high level of activity though, was also a response to underlying spiritual struggles. Teresa suffered from the situation in her order and missed determination and focussing on the Divine through practicing Inner Prayer as McGinn elucidates:

"Her slacker life was facilitated by the laxity of the current Carmelite Rule for female houses, which allowed for social distinctions within the monastery, various privileges based on class, occasions for frivolous visits within and outside the cloister, and, above all, a lack of attention to the inner prayer that Teresa later

¹⁰² Compare Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 32f.

¹⁰³ First, she was reported by the princess Éboli, Ana de Mendoza who temporarily lived in one of Teresa's monasteries and second by María del Corro a former novice of Teresa who left the order after four months. Compare Herder I, 1647.

¹⁰⁴ Compare Herder I, 1645-1648.

¹⁰⁵ Compare Weber *The Rhetoric of Femininity*, 34f. & compare Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 31-34, 138, 163ff.

¹⁰⁶ Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, 36.

¹⁰⁷ Compare Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, 109.

¹⁰⁸ Compare Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 7.

insisted on as central to her reformed houses. Teresa, however, was not happy with her slacker situation. Her conscience troubled her, although she did not have the power to make a break on her own.”¹¹⁰

It is no surprise, therefore, that all her life and effort were devoted to reforms and led to changes on a broad scale. Bilinkoff gives a farsighted summary of Teresa’s incredible influence:

“Teresa de Ahumada was deeply affected by Avila’s reform movements of the mid-sixteenth century. She attempted to adapt the features of apostolic service, religious autonomy, mental prayer, and asceticism, and the reception of direct religious experience, to a female, monastic, and contemplative context. Her ability to combine the structure and discipline of institutional reform with the emotion and spiritual authority of the beata resulted in the reform of the Carmelite order, one of the great achievements of the Counter-Reformation, and Avila’s most enduring legacy.”¹¹¹

Altogether though and as explained, being a woman and a *conversa*, her mystical experiences and her way of praying were regarded with great suspicion throughout her life.¹¹²

This pressure also had a strong impact on her language. In general, and according to Emily E. Scida, it can be said that “Teresa’s orthographic system is phonetic and reflects the speech and pronunciation of her time”: a sixteenth-century Spanish of Old Castile, which differs from Modern Spanish. But Scida also reminds us to “not forget that her strategies of language use contribute to the overall meaning of her work.”¹¹³ This is a finding which feminist scholars particularly emphasise, and its meaning becomes clearer by referring to Weber’s notion of a “rhetoric of femininity”:

“Her rhetoric of femininity was self-conscious, alternatively defensive and affiliative, and above all subversive; it allowed her to break the Pauline silence.

¹¹⁰ McGinn, “The Contemplative in Action”, 58.

¹¹¹ Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, 107.

¹¹² Compare *Ibid.*, 150f.

¹¹³ Compare Emily Scida, “The Language of Teresa of Avila”. In: Weber, Alison. *Approaches to Teaching Teresa of Ávila and the Spanish Mystics*. Approaches to Teaching World Literature. Edited by Joseph Gibaldi, (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009).

But her success also led to a self-subversion, for through her insistent writing she found the means to silence voices she did not want to hear.”¹¹⁴

Weber points out to subversive elements in Teresa’s writing, mainly her self-depreciation which Weber regards as a rhetorical means, functioning as a strategy by using stereotypes about women. She names this “covert strategies of empowerment”.¹¹⁵ More extensively Weber explains:

“Teresa’s defensive strategy was to embrace stereotypes of female ignorance, timidity, or physical weakness but disassociate herself from the double-edged myth of woman as seducible/seductive. [...] With disarming modesty she concedes to women’s intellectual inferiority in a way that frees her to explore a new theological vocabulary: [...]”¹¹⁶

I agree with Weber’s thoughts in terms with Teresa’s self-depreciation as a woman, but regarding Teresa’s humility in general, I only partially support the idea of a ‘rhetoric of femininity’ as I think that Weber (and other scholars) underestimate the intensity and impact of spiritual experiences on Teresa’s personality and life. But, of course, there must have been an extraordinary “persuasiveness in writing” alongside with character traits such as charm, humour and humility, that made her survive patriarchal conditions and the Inquisition as Weber proposes.¹¹⁷ This appears even more surprising considering that society was so extremely misogynist during Teresa’s life.¹¹⁸ But overall, as Williams rightly points out, Teresa was not a feminist.¹¹⁹ She also was neither a social radical or religious individualist nor a social reformer, but she was “claiming certain kinds of authority, at a time when any one of these would have guaranteed her not being taken seriously in Church and society, except as a threat and a pollutant.”¹²⁰ Consequently, Teresa did not present final answers or solutions to social issues within her order or society, but her teaching and living indicated and revealed conflicts, including the problematic situation of women.¹²¹ Thus, throughout her life, she struggled with both being a woman and practicing mental prayer which provided her with

¹¹⁴ Weber, *The Rhetoric of Femininity*, 16.

¹¹⁵ Compare *Ibid.*, 10-15.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 36 & 38.

¹¹⁷ Compare Weber, *The Rhetoric of Femininity*, 4f.

¹¹⁸ Compare *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹⁹ Compare Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 163f.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹²¹ Compare *Ibid.*, 168f.

such intense spiritual experiences. This way of praying was, as mentioned above regarding the *alumbrados*, warily observed as Weber, too, reports:

“Moderate theologians were willing to accept mental prayer, provided its practitioners did not reject the legitimacy of vocal prayer. But the opinions of theologians like Cano were in ascendancy: contemplative prayer should be limited to “learned men” with specialized theological training; it was not for women, be they religious or lay, and any opinion to the contrary had “the savor of Illuminist heresy”.¹²²

Teresa thus lived under the shadow of Illuminism and the ecclesiastical misogyny with which it was inextricably associated.¹²³ This distrust Weber thinks to be the reason for Teresa’s way of writing, constantly trying to differentiate herself from the *alumbrados*. Yet, Teresa succeeded and survived and thus Bilinkoff summarizes:

“Saint Teresa’s reform represented a daring alternative to the fundamentally aristocratic style of spirituality articulated in Avila during the first decades of the sixteenth century.”¹²⁴

2.1.2 Feminist Objections

Perhaps Teresa’s success can be explained as Mercer’s summary suggests:

“What makes Teresa’s meditative instructions so original and appealing is her skill in mixing intimate stories about her own personal struggle toward spiritual improvement with brilliantly clear analyses of difficult topics like the nature of humility and virtue, the role of the faculties in spiritual development, and the precise manner in which divine love functions.”¹²⁵

Having said that, there are many feminist criticisms of and objections to female mysticism and spirituality that must be mentioned. Examples are Caroline Bynum Walker’s elaborations on asceticism and ‘eating disorders’ among female mystics, or Grace Jantzen’s analysis in

¹²² Weber, *The Rhetoric of Femininity*, 34.

¹²³ Weber, *Ibid.*, 34.

¹²⁴ Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, 52.

¹²⁵ Mercer, “Descartes’ debt to Teresa of Ávila”, 2544.

Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism.¹²⁶ Jantzen for example, discusses questions such as what mysticism is and who can be regarded as a true mystic, and warily observes that “implicit in all of these questions is an agenda of power. [...], but rather because the answers to each of these questions are also ways of defining or delimiting authority.”¹²⁷ She explains that regarding mystical theology, particularly considering the theologies of Meister Eckhart and Bernard de Clairvaux, things did not “go well for women”.¹²⁸ Therefore, despite having elaborated a juxtaposition by describing and analysing the teachings of Julian of Norwich and Hadewijch, Jantzen finally concludes, while having Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida in mind, that:

“[...] if it is precisely the idea of God which requires the critique of every concept of God, then the deconstruction of mysticism and of contemporary spirituality is an urgent task. Perhaps, indeed, it is *the* mystical task.”¹²⁹

Putting aside at this point the crucial question on what Jantzen assumes “contemporary spirituality” to be, I can agree to some extent with the idea of wanting to deconstruct generalised and sometimes institutionalised presumptions of belief, doctrines and their implicit perpetuation of patriarchy, power, dependence and spiritual immaturity of believers in some religious groups, communities or institutions. Therefore, within this context, I find critical feminist approaches altogether and by all means crucial and appropriate. When analysing ancient literature and teachings, it is undoubtedly important to know to which extent historical context and living conditions might have had a harmful, even life-threatening impact on religious and spiritual ways of thinking, teaching and living. And, of course, regarding contemporary theological approaches as well, it is unquestionably important to know and understand dynamics and mechanisms of hierarchy, patriarchy, control, oppression, and abuse. It is indispensable to be able to recognise and reject dangerous teachings and practices as well as dangerous structures within religious communities and institutions and within spiritual relationships.¹³⁰ It is, again, important to learn and know what is unjust, false or harmful about

¹²⁶ See, for example Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics. 1 ed. Vol. 1, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

¹²⁷ Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1.

¹²⁸ Compare Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, 87.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 353.

¹³⁰ Compare Doris Reisinger, *Gefährliche Theologien: Wenn Theologische Ansätze Machtmissbrauch Legitimieren*, (Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2021), 7-15. & Nicholas Peter Harvey, and Linda Woodhead. *Unknowing God: Toward a Post-Abusive Theology*. (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022).

what one has been taught, maybe for decades, and what needs to be differentiated or deconstructed and cannot be believed in anymore.

Yet, I cannot agree with all, especially very generalized objections within the feminist critique. In this respect, I sympathise with Dorothee Sölle's discomfort regarding feminist dissent, which she describes in her work *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*. She complains, that feminist analyses on Christianity tend to be – understandably – embedded in, what Paul Ricoeur called the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'.¹³¹ Sölle goes as far to name the women's movement because of its, in her view, biased perspective on religion as "a master of suspicion, understanding religion as the self-transfiguration of patriarchy."¹³² She explains her thoughts on that and consequently formulates questions in which I feel – and share – a certain urge:

"Today, women can know that all biblical texts are formulated in androcentric language and thereby transmit patriarchal social structures, whether they want to or not. Suspicion is an element that critical consciousness cannot relinquish. But is it enough to enable women and men to put new questions to religious tradition? [...]. Is suspicion our only lens? Is critical consciousness the only consciousness we have? And is the self-attestation of negativity all we can accomplish?"¹³³

And indeed, some of the critical and very radical feminist works in and outside of (Christian) theology, appear biased and fixated on what to reject and not to believe in, but have no or only very few answers to the question if there is something left worthy to maintain or transform, and if so, what. This outcome leaves a (queer) feminist spiritual person out in the rain. To me, critical feminist analyses only become helpful and fruitful though, when also taking into account what can be believed in, and which experiences, thoughts, views and teachings can withstand questioning and critical discourses, and can be helpful and empowering for women, even in a modern, non-monastic life, even as a queer Christian today. I, therefore, do not mean to ignore feminist criticisms but wish, just like Sölle, to "move away, hermeneutically speaking, from feminism's basic interpretation of Christianity as an unbroken patriarchal tradition of oppression."¹³⁴ Differently from Sölle, though, who confronts the hermeneutic of

¹³¹ A term which was coined by Paul Ricoeur, compare Sölle, *The Silent Cry*, 46.

¹³² Sölle, *The Silent Cry*, 47.

¹³³ Sölle, *The Silent Cry*, 47.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

suspicion with a ‘hermeneutic of hunger’, I am hoping to develop an additional hermeneutic, a ‘hermeneutic of desire, courage and faith’.

2.1.3 Contemplative Ethics

Teresa’s theology seems to be right for such a task, because just like Williams, I recognize a “pattern of growth” and flourishing in Teresa’s theology, but also the appeal to reach out to others. Similarly to Mercer, Williams describes what distinguishes Teresa’s work from many other mystical authors, emphasising her ability to systematize her experiences and thoughts. He explains that on the one hand her teaching is embedded in an overarching Christian framework, but on the other hand describes an individual development of the soul to become – just as Meister Eckhart seeks – like Christ.¹³⁵ This seeking, which I regard as an inner spiritual desire, is essential for Teresa’s way of thinking, and underlies her way of praying, but also her way of acting in the world. Therefore, even though mental prayer is an inner prayer which appears to happen exclusively in the depth of the soul, Teresa’s theology, as Williams points out, is “far from individualistic”.¹³⁶

In this context I regard Beverly Lanzetta’s work on contemplative ethics in Teresa’s teaching as very important. Comparing Teresa’s and Julian of Norwich’s thoughts, Lanzetta carefully carves the ethical implications of Teresa’s theology. She explains, by referring to Teresa’s work *The Interior Castle*, that contemplation is a means to enter a spiritual journey which not only allows but also enables one to overcome fragmentation, self-denial, and inequality, as she puts it: “Prayer allows entrance into the castle, and is the surest method by which the soul moves from oppression and fragmentation to freedom and wholeness.”¹³⁷ Lanzetta furthermore highlights that “[...] Teresa cannot share in the fullness of an integrated intimacy, without accepting their self-worth and equality in the eyes of God.”¹³⁸ This aspect resonates with Eckhart’s teaching on equality and friendship with the Divine, and for both Teresa and Eckhart comprehending the relationship to the Divine as a friendship is essential. Moreover, for Teresa in particular this understanding also leads to a way of thinking which prefers friendship and social connectedness over social honour.¹³⁹ Consequently, Inner Prayer is not meant to stay self-contained within the person practicing, as Lanzetta underlines.

¹³⁵ Compare Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 146f.

¹³⁶ Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 22.

¹³⁷ Beverly Lanzetta, "Contemplative Ethics: Intimacy, Amor Mundi and Dignification in Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila." *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 5, no. 1 (2005), 7.

¹³⁸ Lanzetta, "Contemplative Ethics", 13.

¹³⁹ Compare Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 22.

According to Lanzetta, Teresa understands Divine love as a spiritual love which happens in the depth of the soul and merges into an intimate union with the Divine, out of which it eventually finds its way into the world. Lanzetta highlights: “Interior love becomes the primary basis of all external compassionate acts. Yet, the spiritual love Teresa describes is not self-centered or otherworldly.”¹⁴⁰ Deconstruction then can certainly also become an aspect of a contemplative life as Lanzetta indicates: “[...] and that its [inner prayer] intention is to transform or deconstruct traditional views of human behavior in order to bring the divine vision into the human sphere – [...].”¹⁴¹ Altogether, Teresa’s theology does not only process spiritual experiences, but also reveals that these experiences lead to an understanding that all life is interconnected, and that therefore divine self-acceptance generates ethical implications including an obligation to respect the dignity of other creatures.¹⁴² Teresa’s mystical theology, thus, stands for an integral and loving theology which Lanzetta’s summary shows:

“[...], they each [Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila] arrive at a theology of integration and affirmation based on profound conversion experiences of personal and Divine suffering, and develop distinct contemplative vocabularies to describe the process by which a person achieves and fully accepts oneself as God’s beloved.”¹⁴³

As this shows, Teresa’s theology resonates with contemporary feminist claims as it facilitates principles such as intimacy, relationality and dignity. Unlike Jantzen, Lanzetta concludes that mysticism and its spiritual equality become the ethical foundation of reflection and responsibility.¹⁴⁴ Finally, she highlights the power of integration of a contemplative practice and life and emphatically concludes:

“From mystical intimacy, they [Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila] discover God’s equality of love as they reach out to uphold this ethic of loving the world into being. But deeper still, they confront the primacy of dignity as an ethic that must become part of the social good. It is not enough to experience the heights of mystical union; this experience must become the fire that burns away the dross of

¹⁴⁰ Lanzetta, “Contemplative Ethics”, 11.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴² Compare Ibid., 2-4.

¹⁴³ Lanzetta, “Contemplative Ethics”, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 3.

inferiority, self-loathing, and self-doubt. Julian and Teresa risk bearing the *theosis* of the world.”¹⁴⁵

Apart from this enthusiasm that Lanzetta’s analysis provokes, Teresa’s theology appears outstanding to me, because she taught contemplation in such a very holistic manner and in contrast to many anti-worldly approaches of her time. Her mystical theology unites the technical side of contemplation as well as its theological foundation, thereby encompassing the spiritual and worldly dimension, the inner and outer condition of the human, the active and the contemplative way of being. Teresa elaborated inner prayer as a receptive technique of non-oral prayer and a way to move towards the Divine and the experience of its presence. But Teresa also understood contemplation as a practical technique of reflection and good works through which a transformed consciousness and constant awareness of the Divine could be integrated into one’s daily life. For her, these poles were not incompatible opposites, and she, from my point of view, succeeded in resolving any either-or-argumentation.

It is uncontested that Teresa was born into complicated social circumstances and that she lived through many changes in Europe as well as in the Church.¹⁴⁶ But due to her profound knowledge, her ability of writing, her enthusiasm and finally her loving and sharing way of being, she succeeded in changing her own conventions and tradition and became a famous and beloved spiritual teacher of contemplation and founder of an inspiring theology and philosophy. Mercer therefore pointedly sums up that “Teresa became a spiritual rock-star by transforming the traditional meditative genre into something poignant, subtle, and clear.”¹⁴⁷

Concluding this introduction to Teresa, I want to sum up that Teresa of Ávila’s teaching and spirituality can be regarded as unique and outstanding. Dorothee Sölle realises this too and indicates an important aspect by relating Teresa’s presentation of a “different freedom” with her different use of language.¹⁴⁸ She highlights that the Divine cannot be completely comprehended by the human mind and that therefore conventional language is utterly insufficient. With this emphasis, Sölle picks up another focus in analyses of Teresa’s writing, and also points out to the general difficulty, or rather impossibility, of expressing mystical experiences through words. The expression of mystical sensibility in conventional language, following Sölle, can only lead to ridiculousness.¹⁴⁹ Sölle therefore concludes that “what

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴⁶ Compare Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 8f. & 14.

¹⁴⁷ Mercer, “Descartes’ debt to Teresa of Ávila”, 2545.

¹⁴⁸ Compare Sölle, *The Silent Cry*, 75.

¹⁴⁹ Compare Ibid., 58f.

cannot be named positively can either be left in silence or must be named negatively.” She continues to state that “the stylistic figure of negation belongs to the experience that is inexpressible in words.” Accordingly, she names three forms of mystical expressions: negation, paradox and silence; and she identifies these in the mystical traditions of “the most diverse cultures”.¹⁵⁰ By pointing out to this “boundary between speech and speechlessness”¹⁵¹ Sölle illustrates that the way of negation (called *apophasis* in Greek or *negatio* in Latin) which entered Christian mysticism, mainly through the thought of the Christian philosopher Dionysius the Areopagite and initiated the development of the apophatic tradition, the formation of the apophatic and mystical theology.¹⁵² One of the most famous representatives of apophatic theology is Meister Eckhart.¹⁵³

2.2 Meister Eckhart

2.2.1 Life and Historical Context

Meister Eckhart was a theologian and priest of the Dominican Order in the 13th century in Germany. There are not very many biographical facts preserved, and so most of the following information is taken from monastic or church documents. Following Largier’s and McGinn’s summaries, Eckhart was named Eckhart von Hochheim and was born around 1260 in Tambach in Thüringen and entered the Dominican order in Erfurt as a young man, presumably at the age of eighteen years. He was later sent to Cologne to continue his education as a *Studium Generale* (study of arts and study of theology). 1293 he was then first mentioned at the university of Paris, the most famous university at that time. In Paris he completed his first degree and then taught as a junior professor in the academic year of 1293/94. Thereafter he returned to Erfurt as a prior and also became the vicar of other provinces. In that time, he founded three women’s convents and was responsible for their and other convents’ pastoral care. In 1302 he was sent back to Paris to teach and accomplish his master’s degree. From then on, he was called Meister Eckhart and held a professorship (for non-French lecturers) in the Faculty of Theology (which thirty years earlier was held by Thomas Aquinas). Eckhart taught for another two academic years. During these years he lived in a house with the Dominican inquisitor who was responsible for the execution of the Beguine Marguerite Porete. It was probably at that time that Eckhart got to know Porete’s work which, as recent

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 65.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 71.

¹⁵² Compare Ibid., 66.

¹⁵³ Compare McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 31.

research shows, was presumably an influence on his teaching.¹⁵⁴ Back in Cologne he held further leading positions within the Dominican Order and encountered the Beguines for the first time. Like Teresa of Ávila, he attempted reforms and was restlessly busy and travelling. After a third stay in Paris, he was sent to Strasbourg which was an important centre of female spirituality and debates on mysticism. His call was to provide pastoral care in seven convents of Dominican nuns and to the Beguines. This period can be regarded as quite important for his later work which was less academic and more about pastoral care and preaching. He therefore explained his notions in his sermons and wrote some of his treatises (*Liber 'Benedictus': The Book of Divine Comfort, The Nobleman*) in vernacular language. For unknown reasons he had to return to Cologne where he stayed until he was accused of heresy and needed to travel to Avignon to defend himself at the papal court. His defense must have been quite central to him, since McGinn notes that “Eckhart’s Avignon defense summarizes many themes that had been part of his preaching for more than three decades.”¹⁵⁵ It was during this stay, probably in 1328, that Eckhart died in Avignon.¹⁵⁶

2.2.2 Apophasis and Dialectical Language

Regarding his teaching Eckhart, unlike Teresa, did not focus so much on the technical side of contemplation. His teaching and preaching rather dealt with the underlying theology of a contemplative life. Fundamental to his work was his understanding of the Divine and that “God is nameless because none can say or understand anything about Him.”¹⁵⁷ This reveals his apophatic and sometimes paradoxical approach, which also constitutes the Divine’s relation to its creation:

“God is a word, a word unspoken. [...] who can speak this word? No one can do this, except him who is this Word. God is a word that speaks itself. Wherever God is, he speaks this Word; wherever he is not, he does not speak. God is spoken and

¹⁵⁴ Compare Niklaus Largier, *Meister Eckhart. Predigten. Werke I*. Translated by Josef Quint. Edited by Niklaus Largier. Vol. 24, (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2008), 715-719 & Amy Hollywood, “Suffering Transformed: Marguerite Porete, Meister Eckhart, and the Problem of Women’s Spirituality”. In: McGinn, Bernard. *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*. Edited by Bernard McGinn, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1994) & Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing*. (Crossroad Publ., 2001), 1-19.

¹⁵⁵ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 17.

¹⁵⁶ Compare Largier, DKV I & McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 1-19.

¹⁵⁷ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 96, 463/ DKV I, Pr. 83, 190/ DW 3, 441 (585):“Got is namloz, wan von ime kann niemant nit gesprechen noch verstan.“

unspoken. [...]. Whatever is in me proceeds from me; if I only think it, my word manifests it, and still remains in me. [...] And I have often said: “God’s going out is his going in.” To the extent that I am close to God, so to that extent God utters himself into me.”¹⁵⁸

According to McGinn it is especially in Eckhart’s Latin and German sermons that the “apophatic horizon” is expressed and “limits all forms of knowing and speaking about God.”¹⁵⁹ As I have already quoted above, but need to repeat here, this notion leads to Eckhart’s ‘negative’ definition of the Divine:

„For God is nothing: not in the sense of having no being. He is neither this nor that that one can speak of: He is being above all being. He is beingless being. [...]. He is beyond all speech.”¹⁶⁰

Lanzetta in this respect concludes that the negation takes place within the Divine and thus “God becomes and unbecomes.”¹⁶¹ And indeed, Eckhart’s negation of the Divine in the end also leads to the affirmation of everything there is and its fullness, thus, he insists:

"But God negates the negation: He is one and negates all else, for outside of God nothing is. All creatures are in God and are His very Godhead, which means plenitude, as I said before.”¹⁶²

McGinn in this context rejects criticisms of Eckhart’s comprehension of the Divine and notes:

“Thus, although Eckhart has been accused of confusion in his doctrine of God, at least by some critics, this does not seem to be the case. Alternatively, other scholars have looked for a progression in his views from an early, more Thomist position to a subsequent overturning of this in favor of a radical “henology,” or metaphysics of the One.”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Meister Eckhart in Eckhart, Bernard McGinn, and Edmund College, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, Classics of Western Spirituality, (London: SPCK, 1981), 204.

¹⁵⁹ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 99.

¹⁶⁰ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 62, 317/ DKV II, Pr. 82, 186/ DW 3, 431 (583), compare fn. 155 on page 44 in this thesis.

¹⁶¹ Beverly J. Lanzetta, "Three Categories of Nothingness in Eckhart." *The Journal of Religion* 72, no. 2 (1992), 264.

¹⁶² Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 97, 467f./ DKV I, Pr. 21, 248 / DW 1, 363 (514):“Aber got hât ein versagen des versagenes; er ist ein und versaget alle ander, wan niht ûzer gote enist. Alle crêatûren sint in gote und sint sîn selbes gotheit und meinet ein vûllede, als ich ê sprach?”

¹⁶³ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 99.

I find this a plausible position, because Eckhart in his discourse on his notion of plenitude connects nothingness and being with the oneness of the Divine and states that the “One is the negation of the negation”,¹⁶⁴ to then finally conclude that “God is one – He is a negation of the negation.”¹⁶⁵ At this point it appears that Eckhart’s use of dialectical language is a consequence of his philosophy also being rooted in Neoplatonism. This strand of philosophy was based on the idea of cosmic love and “the dialectical view of the One as the negation of negation”. The notion of the One and the return of the soul to the One, aimed to connect Plato’s metaphysics with mystical and later also Christian ways of thinking. It was mainly based on the ideas of mystical theorists such as Plotinus, Proclus and, as mentioned, Dionysius.¹⁶⁶ This integrative conception is constitutive and can be found consistently throughout Eckhart’s work.

Altogether, these apparently paradoxical aspects of speaking and writing about the Divine in mystical reflections emerge, I think along with Sölle, from the unavoidable predicament that the Divine can only be spoken of negatively. The resulting negation of negation and dialectical way of speaking is unavoidable because the human intellect is incapable of grasping the Divine, and human logic, thus, just as much as language does, reaches its limits. Eckhart pushes these limits as McGinn recognises and he diagnoses that “the negation of negation is Eckhart’s dialectical way of subverting the standard Aristotelian divide (both a logical and an ontological one) between ‘what is’ and ‘what is not.’”¹⁶⁷

Moreover, just as Sölle finds a “different freedom” in Teresa of Ávila’s elaborations, I perceive a profound momentum of freedom in Eckhart’s theology too.¹⁶⁸ Remarkably Lanzetta realizes this as well, and finds it exactly in the context of negation:

“It is this nothingness of the Godhead that liberates consciousness and that draws the soul through the metaphysics of being, beyond being and nonbeing, to the ultimate openness of the desert, and back again to experience liberation in history.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 97, 467/ DKV I, Pr. 21, 248 / DW 1, 361 (514):“[...] : ein ist ein versagen des versagennes.“

¹⁶⁵ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 97, 468/ DKV I, Pr. 21, 248/ DW 1, 364 (514):“Got ist ein, er ist ein versagen des versagennes.“

¹⁶⁶ Compare McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 92.

¹⁶⁷ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 93.

¹⁶⁸ Compare Sölle, *The Silent Cry*, 75

¹⁶⁹ Lanzetta, "Three Categories of Nothingness in Eckhart.", 264.

And she further elaborates on what kind of liberation she means:

“For the Meister, it is his seminal insight into the nothingness of the desert that frees him from the confines of a fixed and static theism and in which his a-theistic and unchristocentric theology can be understood.”¹⁷⁰

She rightly concludes:

“Thus in Eckhart's mystical logic these two categories – theism and a-theism, Trinity and nothingness – must remain in intimate relationship. It is because of the very openness of theism, which arises from its simultaneous birth out of nothingness, that the human person can return to the ground of divinity and salvation occurs.”¹⁷¹

Furthermore, as Eckhart, unlike Teresa, does not draw on visionary or imagistic modes or ecstatic spirituality, apophysis allows him an additional liberating movement regarding gender. The mode of apophysis subverts the association of women with the body and suffering as well as gendered language and images. Sells in his work on mystical languages, identifies gender subversion too, and enumerates three effects:

“Eckhart [and Porete’s] mystical language of unsaying entails an effort to overcome three forms of essentialism: (1) it unsays the “being” “substance,” or “essence,” of transcendent reality [...]; (2) it unsays the monotonic, male, “He-God,” and opens up the deity to a powerful and open-ended gender dynamic; (3) it unsays implicit gender essentialism within the roles of “male writers” and “female writers”[...].”¹⁷²

This dynamic is no coincidence. As recent scholarly works show, Eckhart was in constant dialogue with pious women, particularly with Beguines.¹⁷³ He had an intensive, occasionally

¹⁷⁰ Lanzetta, "Three Categories of Nothingness in Eckhart.", 264.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 265.

¹⁷² Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 144.

¹⁷³ Compare Hollywood, “Suffering Transformed” & Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*. Edited by Bernard McGinn, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1994).

critical, exchange with the latter.¹⁷⁴ Therefore his way of thinking was also influenced by female spirituality and transgressed medieval gender norms, as McGinn highlights:

“The new conversation between men and women in the vernacular mystical texts facilitated reexaminations of the gender roles that long tradition, both cultural and ecclesiastical, had made to seem inviolable to many.”

And McGinn builds the bridge between gender studies and mystical texts, as I am attempting to do as well:

“Modern gender studies have enabled us to be more sensitive to the remarkable ways in which medieval mystical texts challenge or subvert stereotypes about men and women both of the past and the present, [...]”¹⁷⁵

This versatility indicates, following McGinn, a further development and expansion regarding the audience of monastic mystics of early and then later Middle Ages.¹⁷⁶

Of course, Eckhart in his sermons did not talk about or refer to societal issues, let alone questions of gender. But his virtuoso use of metaphors, of language and some of his pivotal statements entail astonishing assertions, which reveal his broad and fearless approach to theological and spiritual themes, but also to life. Therefore, Walshe highlights that “Medieval exegesis was often pretty free, but Eckhart seems to go further than most.”¹⁷⁷ This broad scope allowed Eckhart, according to McGinn, to follow a developmental and progressive process, which was embedded in wider philosophical developments taking place in Germany around 1300, including as already mentioned, vernacular language and female mystics.¹⁷⁸ Altogether, Eckhart therefore counts, at least in some scholars’ views, as a Neoplatonist, but he was also rooted in the scholastic tradition as well as in the theological tradition of the Roman catholic church and the Dominican order. Beyond that, he was also influenced by non-Christian thinkers of other traditions, as for example Avicenna, Aristotle, Moses Maimonides, Averroes, Boethius, Cicero or Seneca.¹⁷⁹ This widespread mixture of philosophical knowledge provoked

¹⁷⁴ Compare Largier, comment in: DKV I, 720-723; also: Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*. Studies in Spirituality and Theology. Edited by Bernard McGinn, Laurence Cunningham and David Tracey, (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001) & McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*.

¹⁷⁵ McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 7f.

¹⁷⁶ Compare McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 10.

¹⁷⁷ Walshe in: Walshe, 232, fn. 13.

¹⁷⁸ Compare McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 47.

¹⁷⁹ Compare Largier, comment in: DKV I, 720-723; also: Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*; McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*.

creativity and caused new modes of thinking and believing adapted to the theological debates of Eckhart's time. McGinn furthermore observes that "his form of dialectical Christian Neoplatonism, is not really reducible to its sources – it is a new rendition of an old theme designed to fit a changed situation."¹⁸⁰ This is an aspect which I consider to be important for my argument: I do not recognise Eckhart as a theologian exclusively preserving and preaching traditional teachings, but rather attempting to carve out something unprecedented. McGinn's and Hollywood's meticulous works display that Eckhart's main goal was "to create a new mode of consciousness" by subverting the predominant scholastic philosophy and radicalizing Christian Neoplatonic thought.¹⁸¹ Hollywood, in this context, emphasises his outstanding theological position and states that "[...] Eckhart makes another departure from the standard position of theologians and religious of his age."¹⁸²

Overall, there have always been, and still are, various debates about Eckhart and where to position him and his teaching in the context of theology and philosophy. In McGinn's view Eckhart continuously combined different strands such as theology, natural philosophy and ethics and connected even almost opposed perspectives, such as theological and philosophical, philosophical and mystical, or theoretical and practical views¹⁸³. McGinn in this context insists that Eckhart did not consider referring to the Bible as well as to Plato to be contradictory.¹⁸⁴ Consequently, he has been perceived as a mystic and Dominican priest, but yet not necessarily representing, as McGinn recognises, the traditional spirituality of the Dominican order.¹⁸⁵ Eckhart, according to McGinn, referred to many different philosophical and theological traditions, but he yet remained a genuine teacher and preacher, as McGinn diagnoses: "Despite his debts to others, however, Eckhart's form of "mystical hermeneutics" is very much his own."¹⁸⁶ Outstanding in this context, following McGinn, are also discussions of whether to consider Eckhart to be a theologian, philosopher, or exegete as well as discussions of differences between his German and Latin works. McGinn in this respect concludes distinctively: "Eckhart was no less a theologian, philosopher, and exegete in his sermons than in his Latin works, though in different register."¹⁸⁷ Therefore, McGinn is concerned with an "either-or" approach of some scholars on Eckhart and insists on a combined

¹⁸⁰ McGinn *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 93.

¹⁸¹ See also Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 153.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁸³ See also McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 25 & 38.

¹⁸⁴ See also *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁸⁵ See also *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁸⁶ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 25.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

view as his following statement, which I embrace, shows: “Eckhart was both *lesemeister*, learned philosopher and theologian, and *lebemeister*, master of the spiritual life.”¹⁸⁸

Taking all these statements into account and regarding my own process of analysing Eckhart’s works, a childhood phenomenon comes to my mind: little fascinating ‘wobble pictures’ which depict a changing image depending on the perspective from which one looks at the picture.¹⁸⁹ The slightest change of angle suggests a movement and produces an astonishing and complete different image and perception, it is almost impossible to maintain a static impression. Therefore, I agree with McGinn’s suggestion and plead for an open-minded approach:

“Given the difficulty of attempts to find categories to describe the mysticism of Eckhart based on geography, religious order, and mode of thought, the wisest course might be to eschew general characterizations altogether.”¹⁹⁰

Largier too, points out to Eckhart’s broad scope and additionally mentions that Eckhart has influenced even modern philosophers such as, for instance, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Derrida. Besides this, his theology also plays a significant role in the interfaith dialogue between East and West.¹⁹¹

As this shows, “Eckhart’s exegesis”, in McGinn’s words, “emerges as both traditional and innovative”¹⁹². It is exactly this width, depth, open-mindedness, and flexibility of Eckhart’s way of thinking that encouraged me to relate his thought to questions on life in modern societies. I think that Eckhart transgresses boundaries by reluctantly withstanding any determination and rejecting any narrowness of thinking. I find this aspect in Eckhart’s spirituality intriguing as it is my aim to build bridges, not only between ancient wisdom and new thought, but also between the worldly and spiritual realm. For the latter purpose Eckhart’s theology seems to be suited as he presupposed, similarly to Teresa of Ávila, that a mystical and contemplative way of believing and living is possible for everybody – as a journey that can be undertaken by anyone who really wants to travel. He too, seemed to believe that everybody is potentially capable of reaching unification with the Divine, not monastic people only. This becomes particularly apparent in his understanding of *Abgeschiedenheit*

¹⁸⁸ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 21.

¹⁸⁹ Lenticular pictures.

¹⁹⁰ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 37.

¹⁹¹ Compare Largier, comment in: DKV I, 721 & John J. Thatamanil, *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament*, (Fortress Press, 2006).

¹⁹² McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 25.

(*abegescheidenheit*) and *Weiselosigkeit*, (*wise âne wise*), but also in his sermons in which he explained his theories to lay people outside the monastic realm as well.¹⁹³ Essential for him was the idea that it is not so important to lead a specific way of life, rather to strive for a transformation of consciousness as a result of contemplative practice. This enables his mystical comprehension of spirituality to permeate everyday life, as Hollywood stresses and summarizes:

“Eckhart, in bringing together action and contemplation, formulates a “mysticism of everyday life” that is not dependent on extraordinary experiences. His mysticism [...] is not experiential in the traditional sense, but rather initiates a change of consciousness, a new way of viewing the relationship between the self and God [...].”¹⁹⁴

McGinn relates this change of one’s consciousness to a spiritual state of mind which Eckhart describes with the metaphor of the Ground of the Soul (*Seelengrund, grunt*) to explain that spiritual transformation in one’s daily life is possible. McGinn explains that the use of this kind of metaphor means “to transform, or overturn, ordinary limited forms of consciousness through the process of making the inner meaning of the metaphor one’s own in everyday life.”¹⁹⁵ The interconnection between the Ground of the Soul and the new relationship between the self and the Divine will be elaborated in more detail later, as its understanding is fundamental to the notion of the Innermost Self which I am aiming at.

For now, I would like to point out to Eckhart’s revolutionary potential, which can explicitly be found in the notion of the Ground of the Soul as McGinn’s elaborations reveal. McGinn in relation to the Ground of the Soul uses the term “explosive metaphor” to describe Eckhart’s mysticism and to capture the expressive dynamic of Eckhart’s notions.¹⁹⁶ He enumerates words and phrases such as “simple and direct”, “profound and polymorphic”, “unprecedented and controversial” to describe Eckhart’s ideas on spiritual and mystical transformation. He points out to “dangerous aspects” in Eckhart’s thoughts and considers them to be characteristic of him.¹⁹⁷ Hollywood in this context underlines that Eckhart did not intend

¹⁹³ Compare, for example, Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 58, p. 301/ DKV II, Pr. 66, 14. Also compare Quint’s comment on Pr. 66 in: DKV II, 650. Or Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 78/ DKV I, Pr. 64 and McGinn’s comment on that sermon in McGinn *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 31.

¹⁹⁴ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 10.

¹⁹⁵ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 38.

¹⁹⁶ By using the term ‘explosive metaphor’ McGinn follows scholars of Middle High German (esp. Hans Blumenberg).

¹⁹⁷ Compare McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 38-59.

to question ecclesiastical structures and their hierarchies. It was rather his notion of the embodied divine soul, and human beings expressing the presence of the Divine in the world through acting in love and justice, which held a “revolutionary potential”.¹⁹⁸ I share McGinn’s and Hollywood’s speculation that Eckhart’s works have been “more potentially revolutionary than he may have intended” and I therefore think that it is possible to link his thought to current theological notions.¹⁹⁹

2.2.3 Heresy and Inquisition

Historically, Eckhart was the only medieval theologian who was accused of heresy and brought up before the local Franciscan-led Inquisition and eventually tried as a heretic by Pope John XXII.²⁰⁰ The reasons though, according to Largier, are not easy to figure out. One strand of argumentation follows the view that controversies about Eckhart’s teachings, Thomist versus Neoplatonic approach, led to allegations. A dispute in which the Neoplatonic stance followed Plato’s idea of Oneness (the transcendent as the absolute being immanent truth) whilst the Thomistic stance maintained the Aristotelian dualistic view. A dispute which was often handled as an either-or-question. Eckhart sought to develop an alternative approach by thinking both strands together. Another proposition sees a rivalry between the Franciscan and Dominican order as a reason for Eckhart’s difficult position.

Interestingly, Largier stresses another cause, which is related to Eckhart’s teaching environment in Strasbourg, and considers this to be more plausible. He explains that underlying problems during Eckhart’s years in Strasbourg were on the one hand conflicts between the clerical church and mendicant orders and on the other hand divisions and controversies within the Dominican order itself which probably led, in the end, to an official denunciation of Eckhart. Largier assumes that the accusation of heresy could be regarded as an excuse to charge Eckhart. Eckhart himself, Largier adds, considered the allegations against him to be the ignorance of his enemies of his views. Subsequent procedures eventually culminated in lists containing rejected or suspicious sentences and were later finalised in a bull. According to Largier, such procedures were not exceptional though, and he additionally highlights that Eckhart was not condemned as a person nor was his teaching as such. Largier rather points out that the difficulties were classified as hermeneutical issues, particularly in Eckhart’s vernacular teachings to lay people. These issues were indirectly related to

¹⁹⁸ See also Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 205.

¹⁹⁹ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 124.

²⁰⁰ Compare McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 1.

controversies about the Beguines in Strasbourg. I want to touch upon this topic in more detail briefly as I see a similarity here to Teresa of Ávila's struggles.

Regarding Eckhart, Largier assumes that these disputes with the Beguines must have had a strong impact on the pastoral care which was provided to the Beguines through the Dominican Order. Due to these controversies the Beguines in Strasbourg were initially banned, but finally integrated as a Third Order and the disputes were settled. In this context, Largier speculates that Eckhart has been ordered to work in Strasbourg to help with the new situation of pastoral care for the Beguines. Largier emphasises that therefore it was Eckhart's genuine intention to pick up specific aspects and elements of the Beguine's spirituality and to give it theological and philosophical grounding. Consequently, Largier insists that Beguines and female spirituality must have been inspiring for Eckhart's way of thinking. This aspect might have added to Eckhart's accusations though. The Beguines' spirituality, at least in its radical formation, was close to views of groups which called themselves 'Brothers and Sisters of the free spirit'. These groups were considered to be heterodox and were therefore rejected by the church. Ultimately, even though Eckhart's condemnation was not about his person or teaching, his writings consequently, could not be circulated under his name for a very long time.²⁰¹

This, I find, resembles Teresa of Ávila's difficulties to differentiate her own teaching from the teachings of the *Alumbrados*. As mentioned in the previous section, Teresa too was threatened by the Inquisition of her time and denounced twice. Although the allegations against her could not be sustained, she wrote some of her work under house arrest, her books were repeatedly assessed and corrected, sometimes even (temporarily) suspended. She was fortunate though, because she had, according to Williams at least, powerful friends, and because she – like Eckhart – never questioned the Church and its hierarchies as such. She remained within ecclesiastical piety, and therefore accusations of alumbradist tendencies could not be maintained.²⁰² Yet Teresa's position was not without a risk either, and Williams also indicates and highlights that Teresa's way of acting and some of her claims, indeed, could have been perceived as a threat to the Catholic Church. Williams therefore concludes that Teresa can be regarded as “an eloquent witness to essential elements of internal conflict in Christian tradition.”²⁰³

²⁰¹ Compare Largier, DKV I, “Der Prozeß“: 722-728.

²⁰² Compare Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 32-34.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 165.

This, in my view, can be said of both authors, as Teresa of Ávila's as well as Meister Eckhart's lives were influenced by incidents of this kind. Surely these events must have affected their work, as well as their legacy and the reception of their teaching in later years, for instance, in terms of its official inclusion in canons or being appreciated as officially acknowledged teachers. These "essential elements of internal conflict", as Williams names it, are enmeshed, I think, in critiques and general difficulties of accepting mystical hermeneutics, texts and theories until today. I think Eckhart's and Teresa's confrontations mirror issues between the mystical and doctrinal understanding of faith. In this respect, this tense relationship can also be regarded as typical between individual and clerical spirituality as Alison Weber explains:

"Historically the alliance between mysticism and Church has often been an uneasy one, for the mystic's ineffable, anti-intellectual experience of the divine is, ultimately, nonhierarchical and antiinstitutional."²⁰⁴

It is indeed the experience of the Divine which nurtures and shapes Teresa's and Eckhart's theologies. Therefore, having mapped out Teresa's and Eckhart's biographies and historical contexts as well as some of their main characteristics and issues of their work, the following two chapters will now explain key notions and conceptions of their teachings. According to my line of argument I will focus on ideas of an inner 'space' in the midst of the soul that will lead towards Tillich's term of the Innermost Self.

²⁰⁴ Weber, *The Rhetoric of Femininity*, 35.

3 Teresa of Avila: Living and Loving out of the Innermost Interior of the Soul

3.1 Mystical Theology and Contemplation

Regarding the shimmering term of ‘mystical’ or ‘mysticism’, Bernard McGinn subtly captures the ineffable meaning of the expression and compares: “[...] the word ‘mysticism,’ like ‘time’ is both commonly used and resistant of easy description and definition.”²⁰⁵ Additionally, should also be remarked, that ancient writers themselves, according to Louise Nelstrop, rather referred to their thoughts as ‘contemplation’ or ‘mystical theology’ and never talked about ‘mysticism’ or ‘mystics’ at all.²⁰⁶ Consequently, as the description is not straightforward, its definition, of course, is dependent on the interpretation of the term and therefore also on the perspective of the viewer.

Teresa of Ávila finds her definition of mystical theology on an experience which she vividly describes in her book called *The Life of the Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus (Vida)*:

“I was like a person who is blind, or in the dark: he may be talking to someone, and know that he is with him, because he is quite sure he is there – I mean, he understands and believes he is there – but he cannot see him.”²⁰⁷

Such experiences of the awareness of the Divine underlie her comprehension of mystical theology as she explains:

“I used sometimes, as I have said, to experience in an elementary form, and very fleetingly, what I shall now describe. When picturing Christ in the way I have mentioned, and sometimes even when reading, I used unexpectedly to experience a consciousness of the presence of God of such a kind that I could not possibly doubt that he was within me or that I was wholly engulfed in him. This was in no sense a vision: I believe that it is called mystical theology.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism. The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. Vol. 1, (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 266.

²⁰⁶ Compare Louise Nelstrop, Kevin Magill, and Bradley B. Onishi. *Christian Mysticism: An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

²⁰⁷ Teresa of Ávila, *Vida*, IX, 55/ *Obras Completas*, 189: “[...]”, que aunque habla con alguna persona, y ve que está con ella, porque sabe cierto que está allí, digo que entiende y cree que está allí, mas no la ve.

²⁰⁸ Teresa of Ávila, *Vida*, X: 57f./ *Obras Completas*, 193: “Tenia yo algunas veces, como he dicho (unque con mucha brevedad pasaba) comienzo de lo que ahora diré. Acaeciame en esta representación que hacia,

McGinn highlights “that Teresa identifies this conscious presence with mystical theology” and furthermore explains that “this goes contrary to the position of many modern students of mysticism who have wished to distinguish between mysticism and mystical theology, and between mystical experience and its theological interpretation.”²⁰⁹ This is an important aspect which McGinn depicts with this statement, as it precisely comprises essential issues Teresa of Ávila was dealing with all her life and in her overall work. She certainly did *not* consider experience and theological reflection to be and to have to be separated. Instead, she attempted in an ongoing way to understand each domain in itself (including categories of distinction between mystical experience and psychological phenomena), how they are related to each other, but to also capture the meaning of these complex interwoven perspectives *as a whole*. By doing this she developed her distinguished understanding and teaching of the monastic practice of contemplative prayer, also named meditation, Inner Prayer, Mental Prayer or contemplation.

In general, Christian contemplation – as a term derived from Latin *contemplatio* meaning ‘to look’ or ‘to observe’ –, can be traced back to practices of the desert fathers and early Christian circles as well as to ecclesiastical structures and the monastic realm. From early monasticism onwards, nuns and monks believed that experiences of God were possible and should not be separated from everyday living. Moreover, these experiences were believed to be of divine origin and extraordinary, but possible to perceive to “the one who walks the path”.²¹⁰ According to their belief monastic women and men developed a spirituality founded on their reflections of these experiences. The appearance of this spirituality was characterized by its relation to common life, its daily rhythm and included silence and solitude, but also prayer, reading, labour and hospitality.²¹¹ Besides practical nuances and varying contextual meanings contemplation was understood as “a Christian term for maintaining silent awareness of God.”²¹² Remarkably, it can also still be found in contemporary spiritual groups and

deponerme cabe Cristo, que he dicho, y aun algunas veces leyendo, venirme a deshora un sentimiento de la presencia de Dios, que en ninguna manera podía dudar que estaba dentro de mí, u yo toda engolfada en El. Esto no era manera de visión, creo lo llaman mística teología: [...]” Also compare Herder, 185, fn. 6: the authors assume that Teresa picked up the term ‘mystical theology’ from Francisco de Osuna, whose teaching was grounded on the medieval tradition which was influenced by the teachings of Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagita and Greek church fathers.

²⁰⁹ McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xiii.

²¹⁰ Douglas Burton-Christie, “Early Monasticism.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, edited by Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman. Cambridge Companions to Religion, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 39.

²¹¹ Compare Burton-Christie, “Early Monasticism”, 39f.

²¹² Compare Louis Komjathy, *Contemplative Literature: A Comparative Sourcebook on Meditation and Contemplative Prayer*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2015), 54.

communities within and outside Christian institutions or churches which underlines McGinn's diagnosis:

“Contemplation is only one of the historically and culturally conditioned forms in which Christian mysticism has come to birth, but it is one of the most ubiquitous and enduring.”²¹³

Teresa of Ávila who counts as one of the most famous teachers of contemplation, understands contemplation, according to her definition of mystical theology, as being based on the awareness of the Divine. She describes this experience as a shared presence between the praying person and the Divine and compares it with a conversation between two friends:²¹⁴

“[...]; and mental prayer, in my view, is nothing but friendly intercourse, and frequent solitary converse, with Him Who we know loves us.”²¹⁵

This initial encounter with divine presence furthermore holds the potential – with “love and the formation of a habit” – to develop into an ultimate unification with the Divine, as Teresa's account on her life *Vida* and her book *The Interior Castle* show.²¹⁶ Contemplation therefore has the potential to transform one's consciousness and being, as indicated by Louis Komjathy:

“[...], contemplative practice may result in transformed existential and ontological conditions as well as new ways of experiencing.”²¹⁷

I consider these interconnections to be essential: the inseparability of the spiritual and worldly sphere, and the inseparability of the human and the Divine can be experienced. This means that, potentially – through the process of unification –, one's consciousness and awareness can be transformed. Mystical theology therefore stands for a non-dualistic way of experiencing the Divine, creation and being.

To elaborate Teresa of Ávila's notion of contemplation (*contemplación*) and its role in relation to existential aspects as the Divine, the human being, the soul and how to lead a vital

²¹³ McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 24.

²¹⁴ Compare Herder, *Vida*, 8.5: 174, fn.15: the authors at this point emphasize – regarding their translation – that Teresa did not literally mean a conversation, rather a ‘being together’ without any kind of expectation, goal or purpose.

²¹⁵ Teresa of Ávila, *Vida*, VIII, 50/ *Obras Completas*, 183: “porque no es otra cosa oración mental, a mi parecer, sino tratar de amistad, estando muchas veces tratando a solas con quien sabemos nos ama.” See also Herder, 1663 & 1667; Compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 12: 102: “[...], in that selfsame birth He calls us His friends.” In addition: In Peer's translation the more general character of an analogy in this quote is not as clear as in the Spanish original and in the German translation.

²¹⁶ Compare Teresa of Ávila, *Vida* VII, 43.

²¹⁷ Komjathy, *Contemplative Literature*, 65.

life, I am going to focus on her last writing the *Interior Castle* which she completed in November 1577.²¹⁸ In that work – despite writing in an autobiographical manner – Teresa tried to direct her readers’ view away from herself as a person as well as away from overemphasizing supernatural events and experiences, which are partially considered to have been spectacular as contemporary observers, but also hagiographers later, have reported. Therefore, I am going to do what she teaches, and I will not focus on her biography, her manner and style of writing, on analysing visions and ecstasies, and I will not share speculations on her psychic life and/ or psychosomatic symptoms. I will rather focus on her acquired knowledge and insights which merged into her teaching of the spiritual practice of contemplation and mystical theology.

Her descriptions and instructions in this educational book on the ‘inner prayer’ reveal her image of the human soul, the Divine and her understanding of the relationship between the Divine and the human being. Her thoughts show that she considers an encounter between the Divine and the human to be possible – even a unification of the Divine with the human soul, and even during one’s earthly presence. This means a fundamental transformation of consciousness and personality, which again has an impact on her understanding of the Divine and the self, but also has ethical implications regarding the individual and communal life. It is this potential access to the inner midst of the soul and divine sphere I consider as revealing, particularly regarding the interconnectedness between this most interior spiritual space and the self. Therefore, this chapter is an attempt to explore Teresa’s notion of the innermost part of the soul and its impact on the outer self, its behaviour and its relation to others and its environment.

To explain Teresa’s framework of thinking and to show the interconnections of her notions in this context, I am going to give a brief description of the work of the *Interior Castle*, followed by summaries of each chapter on the single ‘mansions’. In doing so I am going to highlight mentioned aspects regarding inner prayer and gaining access to the ‘Innermost Centre of the Soul’.

3.2 The Interior Castle

The *Interior Castle* is a rather compact work which appears as a condensation of all Teresa’s spiritual, theological, and philosophical acquisition of knowledge throughout her life. The

²¹⁸ Contemplation (*contemplación*): intuitive experience of the Divine’s presence as a divine gift; see also Herder, Glossary, 1907f.

book sums up many reflections and explanations and counts as the most mature and balanced writing within her overall work.²¹⁹ The main intention of abbot Jerónimo Gracián and Teresa's confessor Alonso Velázquez to ask her to write another book, was to enhance the education of her sisters and teach them a content and ideal of life. Teresa's response to this order was to write an educational book on inner prayer, also named as 'mental prayer' (*oración*).²²⁰ She received this order at a time of many conflicts in Europe, in the Roman Catholic church and in her order.²²¹ Her friend John of the Cross, for example, a Carmelite friar and converso, too, just had been arrested and displaced. Her own works and reform efforts were disputed as well, and a major part of the *Interior Castle* was written while she was under house arrest herself.²²² Due to these pressures and to time constraints she completed this writing within less than three months.²²³ Peers admirably finds: "[...] we may well marvel at the serenity of mind which in so short a period could produce a work of this length, containing some of the very finest pages she ever wrote".²²⁴ Indeed, contrary to the restlessness of the world outside the cloister and herself, Teresa's mental state was very much calmer, especially compared to her younger years, described in earlier works, for example, in the book on her life. As Teresa's teaching is generally based on her experiences and includes personal anecdotes, the *Interior Castle* is to a certain extent autobiographical as well.

The work was first printed in 1649 in Salamanca and the original writing still exists and is kept at the Carmel in Sevilla. Moreover, there are also six transcripts preserved at several Carmels or libraries throughout Spain.²²⁵ The *Interior Castle* counts as a masterpiece, not only of Christian literature, but also in world literature.²²⁶ Her account entails outstanding metaphors which Teresa later became famous for. An example is the castle itself, or sometimes

²¹⁹ Compare Dobhan & Peeters, in: Herder, 1663-1669.

²²⁰ Inner Prayer (*oración*): active way of praying and practicing, turning to and dwelling in the presence of the Divine.; see also: Herder, Glossary, 1907.

²²¹ Dobhan & Peeters explain in their introduction that Teresa's attitude to this order was ambivalent: on the one hand she wanted to write another book as she felt the need and divine order to write down the experiences she had made since completing her book on her life, especially as that book was still not accessible because of the Inquisition. On the other hand, she wished to just continue her work in her cloister and leave the writing to the *letrados*. However, the final order was made on Pentecost 1577 by the abbot Jerónimo Gracián and her confessor Alonso Velázquez (capitular and future bishop of Burgo de Osma and Santiago de Compostela), see also: Herder, 1648.

²²² Compare Herder, 1642-1648.

²²³ Teresa herself gives dates in her afterword: 2nd June (in Toledo) to 29th November (in Ávila) 1577, but because of several interruptions the actual writing time was much less; see also Teresa, M, 200 & 301; compare: Dobhan & Peters, Zeittafel, Herder, 66 & Introduction, 1649; also: Peers, *Introduction* in: Teresa de Jesus. *Interior Castle*, 195.

²²⁴ Peers, Introduction in: Teresa de Jesus. *Interior Castle*, 195.

²²⁵ Compare Herder, 1648-1653.

²²⁶ Along with famous mystics as, for instance, Augustine, Bernhard von Clairvaux, Hildegard von Bingen, Hadewijch von Antwerpen, Meister Eckhart, Gertrud von Helfta, Mechthild von Magdeburg and John of the Cross; see also Herder, 1641.

palace, as an image for (the beauty of) the soul. Or there is the image of a fountain to explain the practice of contemplation as inner work. Furthermore, she uses the metaphor of the caterpillar and the butterfly to describe the transformation of the core being and, finally, the image of the bride standing for transcendental love and ultimate and irreversible depths of unification.²²⁷ Teresa was probably inspired by different spiritual and literary sources.²²⁸ Primarily, for instance, the castle is very well known in Christian as well as in Islamic tradition.²²⁹ This seems quite plausible as these images were common in her environment at her time and her spirituality frequently shows similarities with Sufism.²³⁰ However, her actual sources are hard to tell, and Peers points out that many speculations have been made around those questions.²³¹

The translators of the German edition of the *Interior Castle*, Dobhan and Peeters, summarize the spiritual content and central motifs of Teresa's teaching thoroughly and exhaustive in their introduction and comments. According to their interpretation Teresa deeply believed the Divine to be present in every human being, but also sensed that many people were not at home in themselves.²³² To gain access to this inner realm and therefore to the Divine sphere Teresa uses the image of the castle which stands for different levels of inner prayer, representing inner stages of spiritual maturing and personal transformation. This transformation means a life-changing process emerging into a new consciousness, which leads to a changed perception of life and way of thinking about the Divine, oneself and others. According to the structure of that castle, Teresa explains that the practice of inner prayer is divided into seven steps or seven mansions in the castle.²³³ She underlines though, that there are far more than seven mansions, and that the division into seven mansions does not mean that one has to undergo every single stage of inner prayer exactly in this chronological order; rather there can be many forward and backward movements and at times even simultaneity of different mansions. This would even be the case when having arrived at the *Seventh Mansions* which means a permanent change of consciousness. Within every chapter on a single mansion, she almost always follows the pattern of describing her experiences, the characteristics of the

²²⁷ Compare Herder, 1653f.

²²⁸ Compare Herder, 1654-1661.

²²⁹ See also Herder 1655 & compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 8. See also fn. 1 in this chapter.

²³⁰ Dobhan & Peeters dedicate a whole section on the allegory of the 'castle' in Islam to emphasise Teresa's closeness to Islamic mysticism and point out to several works on this topic, compare Herder, 1656-1663.

²³¹ Dobhan & Peeters here refer to E. Allison Peers *Study of the Spanish Mystics*, Vol 1; see also Herder, 1656.

²³² Meister Eckhart makes a similar statement, compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 69, p. 355: "God is always ready, but we are unready. God is near to us, but we are far from Him. God is in, we are out. God is at home (in us), we are abroad."

²³³ See also. Herder, 1652.

particular stage of inner prayer, its positive effects (e.g., knowledge, pleasures, delight) but also its difficulties (hindrances, suffering, pain) and how to cope with them. Interwoven in the seven stages of the mansions is also a division of inner prayer into stages related to its level of unification with the Divine: prayer of recollection, prayer of quiet and prayer of union. These are technical terms which Teresa took over from Franciscan spiritual authors.²³⁴ She had been developing this specific graduation of inner prayer in several works, mainly in her *Vida, Way of Perfection*, and *Interior Castle*.²³⁵ Throughout this development and over the years she changed and adjusted her teaching on these steps. These steps or stages partially intersect and are therefore complex, and I cannot explain them in detail here.²³⁶ Furthermore, to describe the nuanced stages of the prayer of union she also uses the metaphor of the spiritual engagement and the spiritual marriage, referring to the tradition of her time, in which an engagement was taken seriously, but could be dissolved whereas a marriage was regarded as indissoluble.²³⁷

In more detail, her often metaphorical descriptions display and emphasise that for her the Divine and therefore the spiritual realm is by no means separated from human beings and their lives. For Teresa it was absolutely clear, that the union with the Divine is entirely possible – for everybody who opens and turns towards the Divine and its ever-outpouring love. This act of turning towards the Divine is, in Teresa’s view, the contemplative practice of the inner prayer which therefore is essential for Teresa’s teaching, praying, and living. Teresa, of course, regards her teaching mainly set in a monastic framework in the Roman Catholic church. But she herself relativises these limitations at several points in her explanations. Peers in this respect notes:

“There is no doubt whatever that she considered mystical experience to be within the reach of all her daughters: [...]. She does not, of course, mean that every one of her nuns who prepares herself as far as she can to receive mystical favours does in fact receive them: [...]. But she evidently believes that, generally speaking,

²³⁴ Mainly Francisco de Osuna, compare Herder, glossary, 1903f. His spirituality was focused on spiritual care and the education of others in practicing love towards the Divine and love of neighbour; see also Peter Dinzelbacher, *Wörterbuch Der Mystik*. 2nd. ed., (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1998), 165.

²³⁵ I will focus on her final view on these different stages as outlined in the *Interior Castle*.

²³⁶ Compare Herder, glossary, 1903f. & 1907. For an exhaustive elaboration of Teresa’s stages of the Inner Prayer in relation to the contemplative practice in general as well as specifically in the Christian context, but also comparatively analysed with traditions of other world religions compare Peter R. Lipsett, *Wege Zur Transzendenzerfahrung*. Schriften Zur Kontemplation, (Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1992).

²³⁷ Compare Herder, 1874f., fn. 10.

infused contemplation is accessible to any Christian who has the resolution to do all that in him lies towards obtaining it.”²³⁸

Peers goes even further as do Dobhan and Peeters as well, to comprehend Teresa’s approach to be inclusive of everybody who seriously wants to lead life as a spiritual journey:

“She intended it [the book of the *Interior Castle*] for the instruction of her own daughters and of all other souls who, either in her own day or later, might have the ambition to penetrate either the outer or the inner Mansions.”²³⁹

Moreover, she understands the human being as a beautiful work of the Divine, but her thought also comprises the human as being flawed and vulnerable. Her thought therefore includes suffering and how to integrate and overcome all kinds of inner hardship. Yet, as explained earlier, her proclaimed spirituality does not result in an individualistic wellbeing-spirituality leading into self-optimisation.²⁴⁰ Instead she depicts a mental journey which enables one to cope with a life in which one experiences both: joy and grief. Therefore, Teresa’s explanations show the compatibility of a spiritual and contemplative as well as an active and creative life.

To summarize, the spiritual practice of contemplation, inner prayer, in Teresa’s *Interior Castle* is described and elaborated as a long journey (of life) which makes encounter and unification with the Divine possible, even in this life as well and not in the afterlife only.²⁴¹ Teresa’s spirituality comprehends freedom, breadth, diversity, and dignity, which consequently leads to a new ability to love, be more openhearted, turn and reach out to others and finally practice love of the neighbour. Eventually, inner prayer results in an ethical way of life and work.²⁴² As inner prayer can be integrated into daily routines, and as ethical works and practicing love of the neighbour are the main outcomes of a contemplative life, Teresa’s theology emerges into a down-to-earth spirituality. Therefore, her explanations in the *Interior Castle* also entailed critical views of certain spiritual experiences (even though she had some of them herself) and made her analyse and differentiate various phenomena. She (re)classifies asceticism, the meaning of sin and pain, melancholia, suffering, practicing virtues and different kinds of visions and ecstasies. Her theological reflections on these aspects and her

²³⁸ Peers, Introduction. *Interior Castle*, 192.

²³⁹ Ibid., 193 & compare Herder, 1652, 1718 fn.28, 1727 fn. 31, 1745 fn. 10.

²⁴⁰ Compare chapter 3.2 in this thesis.

²⁴¹ See also Herder, 1711, fn. 34. Compare Teresa, 5M 3, 260: “[...] both in this life and in the next as well.” and 6M 4, 290, V 18, 108.

²⁴² Compare Ibid., 1665-1674.

connected analyses and categorisation of spiritual experiences and phenomena, in my view, depict an advancement of spiritual practice. In this respect she differs from many other teachings and questionable narratives about so called ‘mystical’ or ‘gifted’ people who focus on paranormal events and miracles.²⁴³

Regarding gender, Teresa is not as free and playful as for example Meister Eckhart. Her images, particularly on the unification of the Divine and the human, remain strictly in the heteronormative setting of the bridal metaphor. Yet, in spite of her situation of being a woman, a *conversa* and a nun, she succeeded, as described in the previous chapter, in coping with, resisting and surviving patriarchal and theological authorities. Within this context of the *Interior Castle* most striking is, that she once more and most poignantly reveals her exceptional positive image of the Divine and the soul, her radical and unshakeable trust in her spiritual experiences, and resulting from this her deep conviction, growing confidence and passionate commitment to inner prayer. Therefore, leading a life out of her relationship with the Divine enabled her – with initial, but then decreasing, doubt – to combat oppressing power relations on a personal as well as institutional level, – not allowing anybody to mislead her thought. In this combat she relies completely on the inner centre and midst of her soul – and this is what the *Interior Castle* is about.

3.3 The Mansions of the Interior Castle

3.3.1 First mansions

In the first chapter of the *Interior Castle* Teresa introduces the image of the castle which she uses to describe the beauty and dignity of the human soul.²⁴⁴ The castle consists of many mansions which are arranged in a circle around an innermost centre.²⁴⁵ The mansions cannot be counted, and Dobhan and Peeters point out, that Teresa always – even in naming the chapters – speaks of the mansions in the plural to show their great number and wide variety.²⁴⁶ Altogether, Teresa refers to the image of the castle throughout the whole book to describe the contemplative technique of the inner prayer which she regards as the entrance into the

²⁴³ Compare Herder, 1675-1678.

²⁴⁴ See also Peers, Introduction. *Interior Castle*, 190.

²⁴⁵ Spanish for mansion = *morada*; Peers points out that this is derived from the Spanish word *morar* which means ‘to dwell’, see Peers, in: Teresa de Jesus, M1, 201, fn. 2. Other translators, as e.g. Mirabai Starr therefore use ‘the dwelling’ as a translation, compare St. Teresa of Avila. *The Interior Castle*. Translated by Mirabai Starr, (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003).

²⁴⁶ See also Herder, 1684, fn. 1.

castle.²⁴⁷ In her preface Teresa describes what immediately precedes the entering of the castle and she states that the “will very gladly resolves to attempt this task [...]”²⁴⁸ The interconnection between will and making a choice is significant for Teresa’s teaching. She emphasises this by repeating the technical term ‘determined determination’ (*determinada determinación*) throughout all her works and makes it therefore central.²⁴⁹

In the introductory chapter Teresa emphasises that self-knowledge, humility and their relation to each other play an important role in her teaching on inner prayer. She explains her thoughts by comparing the human soul with the castle, which in her imagination is as beautiful and incomparable as a gemstone: “I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of a clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many mansions.”²⁵⁰ Indicating, according to Christian theology, that the soul is created in the image and likeness of the Divine, she points out that the human intellect is too small and not capable of grasping this infinite magnificence by saying that “in fact, however acute our intellects may be, they will no more be able to attain to a comprehension of this than to an understanding of God; [...]”²⁵¹ To begin with the inner prayer and therefore to enter the castle of the soul, Teresa considers reflecting about oneself as crucial. She emphatically stresses the importance of self-knowledge:

“It is no small pity, and should cause us no little shame, that, through our own fault, we do not understand ourselves, or know who we are. Would it not be a sign of great ignorance, my daughters, if a person were asked who he was, and could

²⁴⁷ See *Ibid.*, 1689 & compare Teresa, *Vida VIII*, 52.

²⁴⁸ Teresa, *Preface, Interior Castle*, 199.

²⁴⁹ See also Teresa, CV 21, 89: “As I say, it is most important – all-important, indeed – that they should begin well by making an earnest and most determined resolve not to halt until they reach their goal, [...]” Peers indicates in fn. 3 on the same page to Teresa’s technical term of ‘determined determination’ (*determinada determinación*) which is a key term in Teresa’s spirituality, closely related to will, courage and faith. Compare Herder, 136, fn.11 and 1680 and see also Herder, 1719, 1784, 1854, 1885 & Glossary, 1902.

²⁵⁰ Teresa, 1M 1, 201/ *Obras Completas*, 1221: “[...] ; que es, considerar nuestra alma, como un castillo todo de un diamante, u muy claro cristal, a donde hay muchos aposentos; así como en el cielo hay muchas moradas.” This outstanding positive image of the Divine is constitutive for the Interior Castle, see also Herder, 1688, fn. 26.

²⁵¹ Teresa, 1M 1, 201/ *Obras Completas*, 1221: “No hallo yo cosa con qué compararla gran hermosura de un alma y la gran capacidad. Y verdaderamente, apenas deben llegar nuestros entendimientos, por agudos que fuesen, a comprenderla; así como no pueden llegar a considerar a Dios, pues El mesmo dice, que nos crió a su imagen y semejanza.” Teresa refers to Gen 1,26. & see also Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 42, 233: “Heaven is so vast and so wide that if I told you, you would not believe it.”

not say, and had no idea who his father or his mother was, or from what country he came?”²⁵²

In this context she complains that many people pay too much attention to bodily and exterior matters, instead of discovering the amazing goods concealed in the interior of the soul. At this point, she first mentions what I consider to be essential for her holistic understanding of being: the existence of a deep, innermost centre within the midst of the soul in which the Divine dwells:

“Let us now imagine that this castle, as I have said, contains many mansions, some above, others below, others at each side; and in the centre and midst of them all is the chiefest mansion where the most secret things pass between God and the soul. You must think over this comparison very carefully; [...].”²⁵³

Her descriptions on the *Seventh Mansions* later will reveal that this is essential: not only does she deeply believe that the Divine exists in the inner of one’s soul, but also that it is even possible to experience this during one’s worldly lifetime.²⁵⁴ Presupposing the imperative interaction of humility and love of neighbour, she appeals to her sisters to consider this divine grace as possible, not only given to others, but also to themselves and even to everybody:

„I am sure that anyone who finds it harmful to realize that it is possible for God to grant such favours during this our exile must be greatly lacking in humility and in love of his neighbour; for otherwise how could we help rejoicing that God should grant these favours to one of our brethren when this in no way hinders Him from granting them to ourselves, and that His Majesty should bestow an understanding of His greatness upon anyone soever?”²⁵⁵

²⁵² Teresa, 1M 1, 201f./ *Obras Completas*, 1221: “No es pequeña lástima y confusión, que por nuestra culpa no entendamos a nosotros mesmos, ni sepamos quién somos. ¿No seria gran inorancia, hijas mías, qué preguntasen a uno quién es, y no se conociese, ni supiese quién fue su padre, ni su madre, ni de que tierra?”

²⁵³ Teresa, 1M 1, 202/ *Obras Completas*, 1222: “Pues consideremos, que este castillo tiene, como he dicho, muchas Moradas, unas en lo alto, otras en bajo, otras a los lados y en el centro, y mitad de todas estas tiene la mas principal, que es a dónde pasan las cosas de mucho secreto entre Dios y el alma. Es menester que vays advertidas a esta comparación; [...].”

²⁵⁴ Teresa had to phrase this claim, particularly regarding the unification with the Divine, always very carefully. On the one hand she wanted to maintain her claim and witness her own experience of union, on the other hand she did not want to disobey orthodoxy; see also Herder, 1873 fn. 1.

²⁵⁵ Teresa, 1M 1, 202/ *Obras Completas*, 1222: “Tengo por cierto, que a quien hiciere daño entender, que es posible hacer Dios esta merced en este destierro, que estará muy falta de humildad y del amor del prójimo; porque si esto no es, ¿cómo nos podemos dejar de holgar de que haga Dios estas mercedes a un hermano nuestro, pues no impide para hacérnoslas a nosotras, y de que su Majestad dé a entender sus grandezas, sea en quién fuere.”

To discover and study the Divine's heaven within the soul does not only make one realize the Divine's greatness, but also the limitlessness of its works. This leads to one of what I find to be her most fundamental statements: „For God's will is that no bounds should be set to His works.”²⁵⁶ Gaining this knowledge is so important to her, that she regards contemplating as constitutive for any prayer in general. She vigorously underlines that she considers a prayer only to be a true prayer when coinciding with contemplation. Only in this sense is the inner prayer the entrance into the castle:

“As far as I can understand, the door of entry into this castle is prayer and meditation: I do not say mental prayer rather than vocal, for, if it is prayer at all, it must be accompanied by meditation.”²⁵⁷

Merely reciting an oral prayer learnt by heart, in Teresa's view, is no prayer at all, and once more she highlights the importance of knowledge, meaning the knowledge of oneself, of the Divine and of the relationship between both:

“If a person does not think Whom he is addressing, and what he is asking for, and who it is that is asking and of Whom he is asking it, I do not consider that he is praying at all even though he be constantly moving his lips.”²⁵⁸

Therefore, alongside with a desire for the good and a deep longing which comes directly from the heart, the willingness to self-knowledge and discernment are necessary preconditions to enter the castle and to begin a contemplative journey. Moreover, it is important not to hastily think that one does not belong to the ones participating in the Divine's presence, but to be patient and take one's time to make spiritual experiences.²⁵⁹ Patience (*paciencia*), as a result, is another strength of Teresa's spirituality. Continuing, she reveals her outstanding extremely positive image of the soul and emphasises that the soul's beauty cannot be destroyed or taken away.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Teresa, 1M 1, 203/ *Obras Completas*, 1222: “porque es muy amigo de que no pongan tasa a sus obras; [...]”

²⁵⁷ Teresa, 1M 1, 203f./ *Obras Completas*, 1223 : “Porque a cuanto yo puedo entender, la puerta para entrar en este Castillo, es la oración y consideración: no digo mas mental que vocal, que como sea oración, ha de ser con consideración; [...]”

²⁵⁸ Teresa, 1M 1, 204/ *Obras Completas*, 1223: “porque la que no advierte con quien habla, y lo que pide, y quién es quien pide, y a quién, no la llamo yo oración, aunque mucho menee los labios; [...]”

²⁵⁹ Compare Herder, 1691 & fn. 41, same page.

²⁶⁰ Compare Teresa, 1M 2, 206.

She explains that it is rather due to external opacities that the soul loses its brilliance, just as if a black cloth is laid over the crystal and covers the ever-shining sun in the centre.²⁶¹ From this centre, therefore, the soul's full diversity unfolds.

Based on this insight, Teresa repeatedly points out the importance of understanding that every work and good deed emerge out of this inner spiritual source. Consequently, the acknowledgment of this always leads to humility (*humildad*):

“[...] she had found it a mirror of humility, for it had made her realize that any good thing we do has its source, not in ourselves but rather in that spring where this tree, which is the soul, is planted, and in that sun which sheds its radiance on our works.”²⁶²

Despite all her enthusiasm, Teresa at this point wisely warns of exaggeration: “Humility must always be doing its work like a bee making its honey in the hive: without humility all will be lost.”²⁶³ And she highlights the close interconnection between humility and self-knowledge. She prompts:

“I do not know if I have explained this clearly: self-knowledge is so important that, even if you were raised right up to the heavens, I should like you never to relax your cultivation of it; so long as we are on this earth, nothing matters more to us than humility.”²⁶⁴

But it is important to know that this cultivation of self-knowledge needs to be related also to one's seeking to gain knowledge about the Divine: “As I see it, we shall never succeed in knowing ourselves unless we seek to know God: let us think of His greatness and then come back to our baseness; [...]”²⁶⁵ In her view, only turning to this inner source and strength makes

²⁶¹ See also Herder, 1693.

²⁶² Teresa, 1M 2, 206f./ *Obras Completas*, 1226: “un espejo para la humildad, mirando como cosa buena que hagamos no viene su principio de nosotros, sino de esta fuente, a donde está plantado este árbol de nuestras almas, y es de este sol, que da calor a nuestras obras.” Compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 6, 67: “For what they are, they are from God, and what they have, they get from God and not from themselves.”

²⁶³ Teresa, 1M 2, 208/ *Obras Completas*, 1227: “[...] que la humildad siempre labra como la abeja en la colmena la miel, que sin esto todo va perdido.”

²⁶⁴ Teresa, 1M 2, 208/ *Obras Completas*, 1227f.: “No sé si queda dado bien a entender, porque es cosa tan importante este conocernos, que no querría en ello hubiese jamás relajación, por subidas que estéis en los cielos; pues mientras estamos en esta tierra, no hay cosa que mas nos importe que la humildad.”

²⁶⁵ Teresa, 1M 2, 209 / *Obras Completas*, 1228: “Y a mi parecer jamás nos acabamos de conocer, si no procuramos conocer a Dios: mirando su grandeza acudamos a nuestra bajeza, [...]” Teresa in this context reflects on the notion what in modern language might be named as ‘spiritual narcissism’ and is still a phenomenon being discussed as contemporary works show, e.g. see Ann Gleig, “The Culture of Narcissism

good life and works possible.²⁶⁶ But then again, she also warns of a false humility that does not allow one to progress and unfold, but rather to remain in constantly thinking about oneself. She differentiates that true humility based on self-knowledge never leads into cowardness or servility:

“They think that all these misgivings, and many more that I could describe, arise from humility, whereas they really come from our lack of self-knowledge. We get a distorted idea of our own nature, and if we never stop thinking about ourselves, I am not surprised if we experience these fears and others which are still worse. [...] Our understanding, as I have said will then be ennobled, and self-knowledge will not make us timorous and fearful; [...].”²⁶⁷

Teresa, thus, holds differentiated views on humility. On the one hand she strongly asks to be humble, but on the other hand she reminds one not to underplay oneself. Similarly, she insists on pursuing self-knowledge but also warns of exaggeration in this respect. I find this integrative balancing of polar aspects remarkable and very far away from any ‘either-or’ argumentation.

Overall, all these efforts finally lead to mutual love between the human and the Divine, and Teresa would not be herself, if she would not point out to its importance: “This mutual love is so important for us that I should like you never to forget it; [...].”²⁶⁸ Consequently, this mutual love leads to a relationship between the Divine and the human based on a certain kind of equality which becomes clear as Teresa explains that the Divine “[...] told her that it was time that she took upon her His affairs as if they were her own and that He would take her affairs upon Himself; [...].”²⁶⁹ This aspect of reciprocity and implicit equality is immensely important for Teresa, and she frequently returns to it throughout her works, also to distinguish this kind of relationship from ‘false’ authority: “Although He is my Lord, I can talk to Him as

Revisited: Transformations of Narcissism in Contemporary Psychospirituality." *Pastoral psychology* 59 (2010).

²⁶⁶ See also Herder, 1697 and Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 13a, 105: “What is moved from without is not alive.” & Sr. 47, 256: “[...] if a man’s works are to live, they must come from his own, not from extraneous things or from without, but within himself.”

²⁶⁷ Teresa, 1M 2, 209/ *Obras Completas*, 1228: "que todo esto les parece humildad, y otras muchas cosas que pudiera decir, y viene de no acabar de entendernos: tuerce el propio conocimiento, y si nunca salimos de nosotros mismos, no me espanto, que esto y mas se puede temer. [...], y ennoblecerse ha el entendimiento, como he dicho, y no hará el propio conocimiento ratero y cobarde; [...]."

²⁶⁸ Teresa, 1M 2, 212/ *Obras Completas*, 1230: "Importa tanto este amor de unas con otras, que nunca querría que se os olvidase; [...]."

²⁶⁹ Teresa 7M 2, 334/ *Obras Completas*, 1348: "y le dijo, que ya era tiempo de que sus cosas tomase ella por suyas, y El ternia cuidado de las suyas, [...]" & see also Herder, 1874.

to a friend, because He is not, I believe, like those whom we call lords on earth, all of those whose power rests upon an authority conferred on them by others.”²⁷⁰

Moreover, a perception of the relationship between the Divine and the human as being less hierarchical is an exceptional opposition to the traditional theological teaching in Spain at her lifetime.²⁷¹ Additionally, avoiding every kind of behaviour that could damage this relationship, for Teresa, seems even more important than to avoid committing sins in the traditional sense.²⁷² The whole process of the inner prayer can be understood as a deepening of a friendship with the Divine.²⁷³ And it is exactly this friendship in the inner midst of the soul, out of which it is possible to gather strength and power to cope with the fragmentation of worldly experiences.²⁷⁴

Altogether, this leads to a new quality of the relationship with the Divine which on a psychological level includes processes of healing and liberation. This means more inner stability, less fear and a realistic knowledge of oneself. The *First Mansions* reveal that Teresa has such a positive image of the soul because she considers the soul to be the Divine’s ‘second heaven’ as will be described exhaustively in the *Seventh Mansions*.²⁷⁵ All these positive attributes, therefore, also count for the self which consequently can only be understood as being unified with the Divine. Practicing mental prayer, hence, is a means to gain knowledge of this union which includes a realistic, not only negative understanding of oneself (as a sinner only), but also in a positive way.

3.3.2 Second Mansions

In the chapter on the second mansions Teresa mainly addresses those who have already begun to practice inner prayer and might struggle to maintain their determination. She focuses on outlining how to be consequent and develop persistence which can appear as quite a combat. She reminds us to listen and follow the ‘soft voice’ which is calling and becomes audible often through friends, in literature, sermons, but also when facing difficulties or illness. She also

²⁷⁰ Teresa, Vida, XXXVII, 263/ *Obras Completas*, 390: "Puedo tratar como con amigo, aunque es Señor, porque entiendo no es como los que acá tenemos por señores, que todo el señorío ponen en autoridades postizas.". Peers’ translation here is descriptive. Teresa uses the term ‘*autoridades postizas*’. ‘*Postizas*’ means ‘prosthesis’. With this term Teresa refers to, from her point of view, artificial authority. Compare Herder, 459, fn. 9. Also compare Teresa’s interconnection of mental prayer and friendship as explained in chapter 2.1.2, fn. 168 & fn. 169.

²⁷¹ Compare Herder, 1685, fn. 9.

²⁷² Compare *Ibid.*, 1693, fn. 10.

²⁷³ Compare *Ibid.*, 1874, fn. 6.

²⁷⁴ Compare *Ibid.*, 1663-1666.

²⁷⁵ Compare Teresa 7M 1, 330 & chapter 3.3.7, fn. 435 in this thesis.

reminds us to follow the inner urge to do good. Otherwise, she recommends giving up bad habits and avoid the company of people who do not support one's choice to follow the path into the *Interior Castle*. Instead, one should search for role models and learn from people who are more experienced in the practice.²⁷⁶

Finally, she appeals to us not to get disheartened too easily by setbacks, but rather to be courageous and continue practicing: "If, then, you sometimes fall, do not lose heart, or cease striving to make progress, for even out of your fall God will bring good, [...]"²⁷⁷ Remarkably, even though she regards this orienting and determining phase within the practice as foundational, she does not claim a radical turn away from the world or self-damaging asceticism, what one could easily have expected considering the monastic and spiritual culture of her time. She rather suggests continuing to concentrate on inner alignment and to fully rely on the Divine's mercy and states that: "[...] recollection cannot be begun by making strenuous efforts, but must come gently, [...]"²⁷⁸ Courage (*ánimo*) and softness (*suavidad*), thus, are two further essential features of Teresa's teaching, and here again she interconnects two apparently opposing notions.²⁷⁹ Within this context she also mentions once more that she considers reaching the inner midst of the castle – as long as one focuses and trusts the Divine – to be possible even during lifetime:

"[...]: let them place their trust, not in themselves, but in the mercy of God, and they will see how His Majesty can lead them on from one group of Mansions to another and set them on safe ground [...]; and then they themselves – even in this life, I mean – will enjoy many more good things than they could ever desire."²⁸⁰

3.3.3 Third Mansions

In the *Third Mansions* Teresa predominantly explains how to deal with obstacles and setbacks when entering a life as a spiritual practice. Again she emphasises humility and

²⁷⁶ Compare Herder, 1705-1711.

²⁷⁷ Teresa 2M 1, 217/ *Obras Completas*, 1237: "Por eso no os desaniméis, si alguna vez cayédes, para dejar de procurar ir adelante, que aun de esa caída sacaré Dios bien, [...]"

²⁷⁸ Teresa 2M 1, 218/ *Obras Completas*, 1238: "y como no ha de ir a fuerza de brazos el comenzarse a recoger, sino con suavidad, [...]" 'Softness' is Teresa's way of accepting every individual's capability of pursuing the inner prayer. She relates this to Mt 11:30 by saying in Vida XI, 70: "Sweet is his yoke, and it is essential that we should not drag the soul along with us, so to say, but lead it gently, so that it may make the greater progress." This is very different to rigorous ways of teaching in her tradition; see also Herder, 1712 fn. 37, 1892 fn. 18 & Glossary, 1911.

²⁷⁹ See also Herder, 1712; courage is foundational in Teresa's spirituality, based on faith and determination, compare Herder, 1818 fn. 3, 1819, fn 10 & Glossary, 1910.

²⁸⁰ Teresa 2M 1, 217f./ *Obras Completas*, 1237: "confien en la misericordia de Dios, y no nada en sí, y verán como su Majestad le lleva de unas Moradas a otras, y le mete *en* la tierra [...], burle de ellas, y goce de muchos mas bienes que podría desear, aun en esta vida digo.

determination.²⁸¹ She encourages her sisters not to allow anybody to keep them from their journey and assures them that they will reach blessedness as long as they continue to practice inner prayer: “So I think, daughters, that the happiness we would pray for is to enjoy the complete security of the blessed; [...]”²⁸² What becomes more obvious here, even stronger in the German translation than in Peers’, is Teresa’s conviction that blessedness is possible – during life and with certainty.²⁸³ With such a conviction Teresa was opposed to the official teaching following which there never could be a certainty of blessedness. Such certainty was almost impossible to achieve in the medieval way of thinking as the understanding of the human being was rather pessimistic and focused on inadequacy and sinfulness. Teresa’s thinking, too, was rooted in such anthropology, but also already showed traces of a more optimistic and individualistic understanding of the human being of the early modern era.²⁸⁴ Her teaching therefore was at risk to be regarded in proximity to the *alumbrados* and to some extent considered as heretical. This is also a reason why her writings often have been corrected or amended by her confessors or other *letrados*.²⁸⁵

Also exceptional for her time was her view that leading a monastic life was not pivotal, but rather to align one’s whole life towards the Divine.²⁸⁶ This alignment must be based on love towards the Divine, but that it does not suffice to have this love in mind, it must result in works in the world, including, once again, determination and willingness:

“And this love, daughters, must not be wrought in our imagination but must be proved by works. Yet do not suppose God has any need of our works; what He needs is the resoluteness of our will.”²⁸⁷

Moreover, she insists that all effort to progress in this process of life should come out of the Divine, rather than due to rules, traditions or conventions. She warns of being paralyzed by anxieties and points out that it is important to practice self-abandonment. Continuing, she

²⁸¹ Compare Herder, 1714-1721.

²⁸² Teresa 3M 1, 219/ *Obras Completas*, 1241: “Por eso digo, hijas, que la bienaventuranza que hemos de pedir, es estar ya en seguridad con los bienaventurados; [...]”

²⁸³ Peers in his footnote points out that Gracián in his corrections added ‘in Heaven’, which then again was undone by Francisco Ribera (confessor and hagiographer) later. Dobhan & Peeters in their German translation refer to Teresa’s original version, too, and even underline the presence of the blessed by including a “jetzt schon” (‘even now’) in their translation. Compare Peers in 3M 1, 219, fn. 3; see also Herder, 1715.

²⁸⁴ See also Herder, 1716, fn. 11.

²⁸⁵ Compare *Ibid.*, 1714, fn. 4.

²⁸⁶ Compare Teresa, 3M 2, 225f.

²⁸⁷ Teresa, 3M 1, 222/ *Obras Completas*, 1243: “Y este amor, hijas, no ha de ser fabricado en nuestra imaginación, sino probado por obras: y no penséis que ha menester nuestras obras, sino la determinación de nuestra voluntad.” Compare Chapter 3.3.1 in this thesis.

downplays the importance of supernatural experiences of delight and emphasises love, justice and truthfulness:

“[...], for perfection consists not in consolations, but in the increase of love; on this, too, will depend our reward, as well as on the righteousness and truth which are in our actions.”²⁸⁸

Only blessedness which comes from the Divine – and not from supernatural pleasures – emerge into love and determination and courage, as Teresa insists:

“All the more so because, if they [pleasures and delights] come from God, they come laden with love and fortitude, by the help of which a soul can progress with less labour and grow continually in good works and virtues.”²⁸⁹

All these statements reveal once more that according to Teresa love and good, the Divine, must have its place in the soul as well.

Regarding life in a community, she far-sightedly points out the need to concentrate on one's own mistakes and to not compare oneself with others. She warns of setting one's own behaviour and choices as a benchmark for others and advises that one should not try to convince others from one's own way of living. Conceding that everybody makes mistakes it would be more important to follow the rule of the Carmel and live out of silence and faith:

„Let us look at our own shortcomings and leave other people's alone; for those who live carefully ordered lives are apt to be shocked at everything and we might well learn very important lessons from the persons who shock us. Our outward comportment and behaviour may be better than theirs, but this, though good, is not the most important thing: there is no reason why we should expect everyone else to travel by our own road, and we should not attempt to point them to the spiritual path when perhaps we do not know what it is. Even with these desires

²⁸⁸ Teresa, 3M 2, 227/ *Obras Completas*, 1248: "pues no está la perfección en los gustos, sino en quien ama mas, y el premio lo mesmo, y en quien mejor obrare con justicia y verdad."

²⁸⁹ Teresa 3M 2, 228 / *Obras Completas*, 1248: "Cuanto mas, que si son de Dios, vienen cargados de amor y fortaleza, con. que se puede caminar mas sin trabajo, e ir creciendo en las obras y virtudes."

that God gives us to help others, sisters, we may make many mistakes, and thus it is better [...] to try to live in silence and in hope, [...].”²⁹⁰

3.3.4 Fourth Mansions

Having already touched upon supernatural phenomena in her explanations in the *Third Mansions*, Teresa discusses these incidents in more detail in the chapter on the *Fourth Mansions*. This chapter marks the stage in the scheme of the inner prayer at which – for some contemplation-practitioners – mystical experiences begin. Even though not everyone necessarily must experience such episodes, this stage stands for the beginning of a contemplative transformation process.²⁹¹ For Teresa at this point, it is very important to teach how to distinguish between superficial emotional experiences of pleasure and deep mystical experiences given by the Divine as a merciful gift. As an indicator she introduces the notion of the ‘widening heart’, a perception and sense of increasing love arising immediately from the divine midst of the soul:

“I was thinking just now, as I wrote this, that a verse which I have already quoted, *Dilatasti cor meum*, speaks of the heart’s being enlarged. I do not think that this happiness has its source in the heart at all. It arises in a much more interior part, like something of which the springs are very deep; I think this must be the centre of the soul, as I have since realized and as I will explain hereafter. I certainly find secret things in ourselves which often amaze me – and how many more there must be!”²⁹²

Teresa at this point indicates to a source of love and happiness which lies in the “more interior part” of the soul which must consequently lead to a deeper understanding of the interior of the

²⁹⁰ Teresa 3M 2, 229/ *Obras Completas*, 1249: "Miremos nuestras faltas, y dejemos las ajenas, que es mucho de personas tan concertadas espantarse de todo; y por ventura de quien nos espantamos podríamos bien depender en lo principal, y en la compostura exterior y en su manera de trato le hacemos ventajas; y no es esto lo de mas importancia, aunque es bueno, ni hay para qué querer luego que todos vayan por nuestro camino, ni ponerse a enseñar el del espíritu, quien por ventura no sabe qué cosa es, que con estos deseos que nos da Dios, hermanas, del bien de las almas, podemos hacer muchos yerros; y así es mejor llegarnos a lo que dice nuestra Regla, en silencio y esperanza procurar vivir siempre, [...]." Peers translates ‘hope’, Dobhan & Peeters, members of the Carmelite order translate ‘silence and faith’: ‘Stille und Vertrauen’ (according to the Carmelite rules).

²⁹¹ The focus now lies less on an active way of praying and achievement, rather on passively receiving merciful gifts through love, compare Herder, 1729, fn. 1.

²⁹² Teresa 4M 2, 237/ *Obras Completas*, 1258: "Estaba yo ahora mirando, escribiendo esto, que en el verso que dije: *Dilatasti cor meum*, dice que se ensanchó el corazón, y no me parece que es cosa, como digo, que su nacimiento es del corazón, sino de otra parte aun mas interior, como una cosa profunda: pienso que debe ser el centro del alma, como después he entendido y diré a la postre, que cierto veo secretos en nosotros mismos, que me trayn espantada muchas veces; ¡y cuántos mas debe haber!"

self. This depicts her perception of the ‘Innermost Centre of the Soul’, her essential notion of the soul which she will describe more explicitly in the *Seventh Mansions* and which I am going to connect to Paul Tillich’s idea of an Innermost Self.

Even though Teresa admits that studying and knowledge are important, increasing love plays the more important role here. Moreover, she does not understand this as an experience only, but also as a guideline for one’s actions:

“I only want you to be warned that, if you would progress a long way on this road and ascend to the Mansions of your desire, the important thing is not to think much, but to love much; do, then, whatever most arouses you to love. Perhaps we do not know what love is: it would not surprise me a great deal to learn this, for love consists, not in the extent of our happiness, but in the firmness of our determination to try to please God in everything, [...].”²⁹³

This shows again, as this quote reveals, that Teresa’s notion of love is not as romantic as often depicted, but rather based on determination, therefore, will and intention. It is furthermore important to fully understand these interconnections in respect to inner and outer hindrances when practicing the inner prayer, what Teresa explains in this chapter as well.²⁹⁴ Notably, peace, tranquillity and gentleness are involved here, too, and they do not only comprise the soul, but the body, likewise. To explain this condition Teresa once more refers to her image of the ‘widening heart’ and relates this to the Innermost Centre of the Soul:

“Returning to this verse, what it says about the enlargement of the heart may, I think, be of some help to us. For apparently, as this heavenly water begins to flow from this source of which I am speaking – that is, from our very depths – it proceeds to spread within us and cause an interior dilation and produce ineffable blessings, so that the soul itself cannot understand all that it receives there.”²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Teresa 4M 1, 233/ *Obras Completas*, 1254: "solo quiero que estéis advertidas, que para aprovechar mucho en este camino, y subir a las Moradas que deseamos, no está la cosa en pensar mucho, sino en amar mucho, y así lo que mas os despertare a amar, eso haced. Quizá no sabemos qué es amar, y no me espantaré mucho; porque no está en el mayor gusto, sino en la mayor determinación de desear contentar en todo a Dios, [...]."

²⁹⁴ Compare Herder, 1729-1737.

²⁹⁵ Teresa 4M 2, 237f./ *Obras Completas*, 1258: "Tornando a el verso, en lo que me puede aprovechar, a mi parecer, para aquí, es, en aquel ensanchamiento, que así parece, que como comienza a producir aquella agua celestial de este manantial que digo, de lo profundo de nosotros, parece que se va dilatando y ensanchando todo nuestro interior, y produciendo unos bienes, que no se pueden decir, ni aun el alma sabe entender qué es lo que se le da allí."

What becomes clear is that these sensations, despite all determination, cannot be achieved through will or actions alone. They are a pure gift and incomprehensible.²⁹⁶ And even though these sensations are very gentle, even subtle, the soul now, according to Teresa, perceives them much clearer than before to be true. Teresa sees the reason for this in the source being of divine and not of human quality:

“Observe – and understand me here – that no heat is felt, nor is any fragrance perceived: it is a more delicate thing than that; I only put it in that way so that you may understand it. People who have not experienced it must realize that it does in very truth happen; its occurrence is capable of being perceived, and the soul becomes aware of it more clearly than these words of mine can express it. For it is not a thing that we can fancy, nor, however hard we strive, can we acquire it, and from that fact it is very clear that it is a thing made, not of human metal, but of the purest gold of Divine wisdom.”²⁹⁷

Another statement which shows that Teresa does not consider ecstatic or hallucinatory events to be essential, but something “more delicate”, something very special, which also seems to underpin her outstanding clarity and certainty.

Continuing, Teresa describes the width and softness of the soul, a soul being moved and transformed without losing its inner connection with the Divine.²⁹⁸ Resulting from this ongoing transformation, the soul feels less regulated and faces less fears of being troubled. This is yet another description which shows Teresa’s outstanding openness. With this openness she opposes many rather threatening sermons which predominantly been preached at her time.²⁹⁹

She finally concludes the chapter by discussing several distinctions between different kinds of hallucinations.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ Compare Herder, 1738-1743.

²⁹⁷ Teresa 4M 2, 238/ *Obras Completas*, 1258f.: "Mira, entendedme, que ni se siente calor, ni se huele olor, que mas delicada cosa es que estas cosas, sino para dárselo a entender. Y entiendan las personas que no han pasado por esto, que es verdad que pasa así, y que se entiende, y lo entiende el alma mas claro, que yo lo digo ahora; que no es esto cosa que se puede antojar, porque por diligencias que hagamos, no lo podemos adquirir, y en ello mesmo se ve no ser de nuestro metal, sino de aquel purísimo oro de la sabiduría divina."

²⁹⁸ Compare Meister Eckhart’s analogy on the door hinge in: Walshe, *On Detachment*, 571: "Here is an analogy: a door swings open and shuts its hinge. I would compare the outer woodwork of the door to the outer man, and the hinge to the inner man. When the door opens and shuts, the boards move back and forth, but the hinge stays in the same place and is never moved thereby."; compare also Meister Eckhart on the ‘unmoved heart’ in: Walshe, Sr. 7 and Sr. 64.

²⁹⁹ See also Herder, 1749, fn. 25.

³⁰⁰ Compare Herder, 1743-1752.

3.3.5 Fifth Mansions

In the chapter on the *Fifth Mansions* Teresa goes in even more depth and talks about first encounters with the Divine and differentiates between different preliminary stages of unification. In this context she expresses how difficult or rather impossible it is, to talk about the effects and developments within the *Interior Castle*, especially when progressing into the specific mansions she is now attempting to describe. She bemoans:

“I think it would be better if I were to say nothing of the Mansions I have not yet treated, for no one can describe them, the understanding is unable to comprehend them and no comparisons will avail to explain them, for earthly things are quite insufficient for this purpose.”³⁰¹

But despite everything appearing so vague and impossible to reach, she – according to her positive image of the human – remains confident and has trust in almost everybody to be able to attain these stages of inner prayer:

“Although I said “to some”, there are really very few who do not enter these Mansions that I am about to describe. Some get farther than others; but, as I say, the majority manage to get inside.”³⁰²

Once again, she promises that it is possible to be in heaven here on earth and she reinforces her belief that the Divine being within oneself is truly true.³⁰³ And as the Divine is always present, it is totally up to the human to find this hidden treasure in the midst of the soul:

“[...]; may He also show us the road and give strength to our souls that we may dig until we find this hidden treasure, since it is quite true that we have it within ourselves.”³⁰⁴

This statement shows once more that Teresa is deeply convinced that the Divine does not only exist somewhere far away and above but indeed within us. During this process, she explains

³⁰¹ Teresa, 5M 1, 247/ *Obras Completas*, 1269: "Creo fuera mejor no decir nada de las que faltan, pues no se ha de saber decir, ni el entendimiento lo sabe entender, ni las comparaciones pueden servir de declararlo, porque son muy bajas las cosas de la tierra para este fin."

³⁰² Teresa, 5M 1, 247/ *Obras Completas*, 1269: "Y aunque dije algunas, bien pocas hay que no entren en esta Morada, que ahora diré. Hay mas y menos, y a esta causa digo, que son las mas las que entran en ellas."

³⁰³ Compare Herder, 754.

³⁰⁴ Teresa, 5M 1, 248/ *Obras Completas*, 1269: "nos muestre el camino, y dé fuerzas en el alma, para cavar hasta bailar a este tesoro escondido; pues es verdad, que le hay en nosotras mismas: [...]."

that one must devote oneself completely to the Divine, individually though, just as much as one is capable of giving:

“I said “strength to our souls”, because you must understand that we do not need bodily strength if God our Lord does not give it us; there is no one for whom He makes it impossible to buy His riches, provided each gives what he has, He is content. [...]! But observe, daughters, that, if you are to gain this, He would have you keep back nothing; whether it be little or much, He will have it all for Himself, and according to what you know yourself to have given, the favours He will grant you will be small or great.”³⁰⁵

What distinguishes the experiences of these mansions from the previous ones, is the increasing clarity and lucidness with which they appear and lastingly affect the soul:

“God implants Himself in the interior of that soul in such a way that, when it returns to itself, it cannot possibly doubt that God has been in it and it has been in God; so firmly does this truth remain within it that, although for years God may never grant it that favour again, it can neither forget it nor doubt that it has received it [...].”³⁰⁶

This quote does not only point out to the Divine being in the soul, but the soul also being within the Divine – at the 'Innermost Centre of the Soul'. A description which touches upon a panentheist imagination of the relationship between the soul and the Divine. This perception will be expressed again in the *Sixth Mansions* in which she, in the context of explaining different kinds of visions and peculiar notions of sin, again presents a panentheist approach of understanding the Divine and its relation to the world:

³⁰⁵ Teresa, 5M 1, 248/ *Obras Completas*, 1269f.: "Dije «fuerzas en el alma», porque entendáis que no hacen falta las del cuerpo: a quien Dios nuestro Señor no las da, no imposibilita a ninguno para comprar sus riquezas, con que dé cada uno lo que tuviere se contenta. [...]. Mas mira, hijas, que para esto que tratamos, no quiere que os quedéis con nada; poco u mucho, todo lo quiere para sí, y conforme a lo que entendáis de vos que habéis dado, se os harán mayores u menores mercedes." Eckhart makes a similar remark: "In proportion to my nearness to God does He speak Himself in me.", see Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 22, 152/ DKV I, Pr. 53, 4464/ DW 2, 530 (732): "Als vil ich gote nâhe bin, als vil sprichet sich got in mich."

³⁰⁶ Teresa, 5M 1, 251/ *Obras Completas*, 1272: "Fija Dios a sí mesmo en lo interior de aquel alma de manera, que cuando torna en sí, en ninguna manera pueda dudar que estuvo en Dios, y Dios en ella: con tanta firmeza le queda esta verdad, que aunque pase años sin tornarle Dios a hacer aquella merced, ni se le olvida, ni puede dudar que estuvo: aun dejemos por los efetos con que queda, pues estos diré después; esto es lo que hace mucho al caso."

“[...] for this is not an imaginary, but a notably intellectual, vision, in which is revealed to the soul how all things are seen in God, and how within Himself He contains them all. [...]”³⁰⁷

Furthermore, Teresa makes it very clear, that she considers this experience to be an experience which lasts and cannot be forgotten. Which, in Teresa’s view leads to an exceptional and unique certainty:

“I am not saying that it saw it at the time, but that it sees it clearly afterwards, and not because it is a vision, but because of certainty which remains in the soul, which can be put there only by God.”³⁰⁸

She underlines that these changes are neither physical nor visible. Therefore, she herself cannot understand how it is possible to be so sure about all these effects.³⁰⁹ In this context she highlights once more how essential it is, to rely on the Divine wanting to enter the human soul: “His Majesty must put us right into the centre of our soul, and must enter there Himself; [...]”³¹⁰ Teresa regards all these gifts as a prevision to the *Seventh Mansions*. And to illustrate what it takes to receive these gifts she uses the famous metaphor of the caterpillar and the butterfly. Through this representation of the spiritual transformation process, Teresa radically explains,” that the silkworm has of necessity to die; [...]” Which means that the present self must die to enter a new life.³¹¹ A life in a new appearance, standing for a changed mind, consciousness and, thus, a new perception of being and the world.³¹² She clearly considers this process of being lifechanging:

“And now let us see what becomes of this silkworm, for all that I have been saying about it is leading up to this. When it is in this state of prayer, and quite dead to the world, it comes out a little white butterfly. Oh greatness of God, that a soul should come out like this after being hidden in the greatness of God, and closely united with Him, for so short a time – never, I think, for as long as half an hour! I

³⁰⁷ Teresa, 6M 10, 321/ *Obras Completas*, 1335: "porque no es visión imaginaria, sino muy intelectual, a donde se le descubre, como en Dios se ven todas las cosas, y las tiene todas en sí mismo: [...]."

³⁰⁸ Teresa, 5M 1, 251/ *Obras Completas*, 1272: "No digo que lo vio entonces, sino que lo ve después claro; y no porque es visión, sino una certidumbre que queda en el alma, que solo Dios la puede poner."

³⁰⁹ Compare Herder, 1759f.

³¹⁰ Teresa, 5M 1, 252/ *Obras Completas*, 1273: "[...]; su Majestad nos ha de meter y entrar en el centro de nuestra alma, [...]."

³¹¹ Teresa, 5M 3, 260/ *Obras Completas*, 1280: "que es necesario que muera el gusano, [...]."

See also Herder, Glossary, 1902: 'Einübung ins Ich-Sterben' (*mortificación*) & compare Rudolf Mohr, „Mors mystica“ in: Dinzelbacher, *Wörterbuch der Mystik*, 364.

³¹² Compare Herder, 1761-1764.

tell you truly, the very soul does not know itself. For think of the difference between an ugly worm and a white butterfly; it is just the same here.”³¹³

This description of transformation suggests that the Divine was not always in the soul which reveals the character of the *Fifth Mansions*: the consciousness, the awareness of the soul being one with the Divine, is not permanent yet, therefore the unification is incomplete. Such descriptions – along with Teresa’s division of mental prayer – show different stages of depths, different stages of contemplation and unification. It is one of Teresa’s great concerns to convey that this fundamental transformation has an impact on one’s existence altogether:

“Happy the soul that has attained to it, for it will live peacefully both in this life and in the next as well. Nothing that happens on earth will afflict it unless it finds itself in peril of losing God, [...]”³¹⁴

Having said that, she exhaustively explains that this does not mean to be untouchable and to act stoically:

“Do not think that if, for example, my father or my brother dies, I ought to be such in close conformity with the will of God that I shall not grieve at his loss, or that, if I have trials or illnesses, I must enjoy bearing them. It is good if we can do this and sometimes it is a matter of common sense: being unable to help ourselves, we make a virtue of necessity. How often philosophers used to act thus in matters of this kind, or in similar matters – and they were wise men! But here the Lord asks only two things of us: love for His Majesty and love for our neighbour.”³¹⁵

³¹³ Teresa 5M 2, 255/ *Obras Completas*, 1275, "Pues veamos qué se hace este gusano, qué es para lo que he dicho todo lo demás, qué, cuando está en esta oración bien muerto está al mundo, sale una mariposita blanca. ¡Oh grandeza de Dios, y cuál sale un alma de aquí, de haber estado un poquito metida en la grandeza de Dios, y tan junta con Él, que a mi parecer nunca llega a media hora! Yo os digo de verdad, que la misma alma no se conoce a sí; porque, mira la diferencia que hay de un gusano feo, a una mariposita blanca, que la misma hay acá." Compare Teresa, Vida XXIII, 145 & see also Herder, 1772 & 1881, fn 2.

³¹⁴ Teresa, 5M 3, 260/ *Obras Completas*, 1280: "Venturosa el alma que la ha alcanzado, que vivirá en esta vida con descanso, y en la otra también; porque ninguna cosa de los sucesos de la tierra la afligirá si no fuere, si se vé en algún peligro de perder a Dios, [...]." Compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 53, 282: "The right sort of fear is the fear of losing God."

³¹⁵ Teresa, 5M 3, 261/ *Obras Completas*, 1281: "No penséis que está la cosa en si se muere mi padre, u hermano, conformarme tanto con la voluntad de Dios, que no lo sienta, y si hay trabajos y enfermedades, sufrirlos con contento. Bueno es, y a las veces consiste en discreción, porque no podemos mas, y hacemos de la necesidad virtud: cuántas cosas de estas hacían los filósofos, u aunque no sea de estas, de otras, de tener mucho saber. Acá solas estas dos que nos pide el Señor, amor de su Majestad y del prójimo, [...]." Compare Meister

As this shows, in this context as well, all results in acting lovingly to the Divine and in loving our neighbour. Teresa's spirituality can by no means be regarded as separated from others as the principle of loving one's neighbour is the benchmark for one's love to the Divine – even for oneself:

“The surest sign that we are keeping these two commandments is, I think, that we should really be loving our neighbour; for we cannot be sure if we are loving God, although we may have good reasons for believing that we are, but we can know quite well if we are loving our neighbour.”³¹⁶

That is the reason why she, despite all her enthusiasm, also recommends proceeding gently and relying entirely on love: “For it is unthinkable that a soul which has arrived so far should cease to grow: love is never idle, [...]”³¹⁷

3.3.6 Sixth Mansions

The completion of the journey through the castle will result in entering the *Seventh Mansions* which Teresa metaphorically circumscribes as a Spiritual Marriage.³¹⁸ Consequently, she regards the *Sixth Mansions* as a preliminary stage of the marriage and equates them with an engagement. Engagement in this metaphorical framework means an engagement of the soul with the Divine. The soul now is fully determined and has no doubt to continue to follow the path into the very midst of the castle. From now on, the spiritual journey intensifies even more and therefore is accompanied by various kinds of sufferings. The chapter on the *Sixth Mansions* is the most detailed and far-reaching chapter of the book. In even more detail Teresa maintains her continuous and thorough analyses and descriptions of sufferings and supernatural phenomena. The *Sixth Mansions*, therefore, clearly appear as the most difficult ones concerning bodily, emotional, and mental sufferings one might have to deal with, when practicing inner prayer. Teresa again tries to comprehend these incidents professionally and

Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 9, 88: „Therefore I declare that no saint ever lived or ever will attain to the state where pain cannot hurt him nor pleasure please.” & 89:” Now our good people imagine they can reach a point where sensible things do not affect the senses.”

³¹⁶ Teresa 5M 3, 261/ *Obras Completas*, 1281: "La mas cierta señal, que, a mi parecer hay, de si guardamos estas dos cosas, es guardando bien la del amor del prójimo: porque si amamos a Dios no se puede saber, aunque hay indicios grandes para entender que le amamos, mas el amor del prójimo sí."

³¹⁷ Teresa, 5M 4, 267/ *Obras Completas*, 1285: "pues no es posible, que habiendo llegado a tanto, deje ir creciendo, que el amor jamás se está ocioso; [...]."

³¹⁸ Spiritual Marriage is a technical term within the mystical tradition. Teresa uses it exclusively in the chapter on the seventh mansions to describe the unique experience of unification with the Divine in that stage of inner prayer, compare Herder, 1867f., fn. 3 & Glossary, 1905: 'Geistliche Vermählung' (*matrimonio espiritual*) & compare Mohr, Rudolf, "Vermählung" in: Dinzelbacher, *Wörterbuch der Mystik*, 510f.

makes distinctions between different kind of miseries.³¹⁹ An ultimate feeling of loneliness and even a desire to die can emerge, thus, this stage of inner prayer in its most extreme presentation can become dangerous.³²⁰ Nonetheless, motions of gentleness, love and a pure heart become more prevailing here as well.³²¹

Regarding suffering in more detail, Teresa mentions gossip of other people, illnesses, and pain. In this respect she distinguishes between mental and bodily pain as well as between different kinds of pain. It is an agitated and aggressive sort of pain which predominantly occurs in the condition of the *Sixth Mansions*. Furthermore, she describes inner conflicts, which on occasion can be caused by “scrupulous and inexperienced” confessors.³²² Teresa in no way glorifies these sufferings, nor does she consider them to be wished for, but she points out that they do have an effect in sharpening the intellect.³²³ Moreover, in combination with visions and/ or ecstasies all these incidents can finally lead to a certain kind of knowledge. This is a knowledge that allows one to detach more easily from an exclusively material perception of the world. This aspect reveals, therefore, that contemplation leads to detachment and to spiritual development. It is not meant as a practice to disconnect from the world and thereby be rewarded with spiritual honour, as it often has been taught.³²⁴ To cope with all these challenges Teresa – repeatedly – recommends focussing on works and on love of the neighbour. She also – repeatedly again – claims to oppose anxieties with courage and faith.³²⁵ And she finally appeals, as she has done in earlier mansions as well, not to be frightened but to accept and embrace this process: “For several of the reasons already alleged I do not think there is much reason here for fear; one must endeavour to receive this favour and give thanks for it.”³²⁶

All these descriptions sound very harsh, but she also points out to more comfortable sensations, such as inner collection, peacefulness, and tranquillity. Discussing all these events she is constantly aware of false or pathological manifestations of spiritual experiences as well. She categorizes different types of melancholia and visions, which she divides into imaginative and intellectual visions.³²⁷ Moreover, as she has done in previous chapters, she elaborates

³¹⁹ Following the teaching of Augustine; see also Herder, Glossary, 1913.

³²⁰ Compare Herder, 1860 - 1866.

³²¹ Compare Ibid., 1839 - 1846.

³²² Compare Ibid., 1784 - 1793 & compare Teresa, 6M 1, 272.

³²³ See also Ibid., 1792, fn. 44.

³²⁴ See also Ibid., 1822, fn. 26.

³²⁵ Compare Ibid., 1817 - 1823.

³²⁶ Teresa, 6M 2, 278/ *Obras Completas*, 1297: "Tampoco me parece que hay aquí que temer, por algunas razones de las dichas, sino procurar admitir esta merced, con nacimiento de gracias."

³²⁷ Compare Herder, 1817 - 1823.

distinctive features of true visions to be able to distinguish them from hallucinations or imaginations. A striking clarity and certitude are prominent and proving features here again.³²⁸ She also touches upon different types of ecstasy and far-sightedly does not ignore exaggerated or untrue occurrences, including those frequently reported particularly by women.³²⁹ As Teresa explains again and again it is humility which counts as a crucial criterion of truthfulness:

“If gifts and favours come to it from the Lord, the soul should consider carefully and see if they make it think any the better of itself; and if, as the words grow more and more precious, it does not suffer increasing confusion, it can be sure that the spirit is not of God; [...].”³³⁰

Following these visions and insights Teresa then draws an essential conclusion, defining the Divine as being the absolute truth:

“It may also happen that, very suddenly and in a way which cannot be described, God will reveal a truth that is in Himself and that makes any truth to be found in the creatures seem like thick darkness; He will also manifest very clearly that He alone is truth and cannot lie.”³³¹

Continuing she then relates the divine truth to humility and makes one of her most fundamental statements in her teaching:

“I was wondering once why Our Lord so dearly loved this virtue of humility; and all of a sudden – without, I believe, my having previously thought of it – the following reason came into my mind: that it is because God is Sovereign Truth and to be humble is to walk in truth, [...].”³³²

³²⁸ Compare *Ibid.*, 798 - 1807.

³²⁹ See also Herder, 1809, fn. 6.

³³⁰ Teresa, 6M 3, 285/ *Obras Completas*, 1302: "Si son favores y regalos del Señor, mire con atención si por ellos se tiene por mejor, y si mientras mayor palabra de regalo, no quedare mas confundida, crea que no es espíritu de Dios, [...]"

³³¹ Teresa, 6M 10, 322/ *Obras Completas*, 1336: "También acaece así muy de presto, y de manera que no se puede decir, mostrar Dios en sí mesmo una verdad, que parece deja escurecidas todas las que hay en las criaturas, y muy claro dado a entender, que Él solo es verdad, que no puede mentir: [...]"

³³² Teresa, 6M 10, 323/ *Obras Completas*, 1336f.: "Una vez estaba yo considerando, por qué razón era nuestro Señor tan amigo de esta virtud de la humildad; y púsoseme delante (a mi parecer sin considerarlo, sino de presto) esto, que es porque Dios es suma verdad, y la humildad es andar en verdad, [...]" Based on Teresa, *Vida XL*, 291: "I saw nothing, but I understood what a great blessing it is to set no store by anything that will

In my view, this is the actual reason why Teresa considers humility as so ultimately essential regarding a spiritual and ethical life. Taking her intellectual and theological insights seriously into account, societal impacts and influences on Teresa's biography and therefore thinking, from my perspective, become secondary. According to Teresa humility is foundational for a spiritual life and consequently a crucial question: "Do you know when people really become spiritual? [...] For the foundation of this whole edifice, as I have said, is humility, [...]"³³³ This is not meant though, as she has already emphasised in the *First Mansions*, to make one excessively humble and therefore incapable to cope with life.³³⁴

Amidst all these overwhelming motions, Teresa reminds one to have faith in the Divine's grace and to believe the impossible to be possible:

"At the very least he will weaken the soul's faith, for it is most harmful not to believe that God is powerful and can do works which are incomprehensible to our understanding."³³⁵

Despite all these difficulties one might also feel urged to engage with the world and be active as she diagnosis: "On the other hand it [the soul] would like to plunge right into the heart of the world, to see if by doing this it could help one soul to praise God more; [...]"³³⁶ At this point Teresa's suffering from being a woman sharply reveals and she complains that "[...] a woman in this state will be distressed at being prevented from doing this by the obstacle of sex and very envious of those who are free to cry aloud [...]"³³⁷ She warns of the desire and temptation to escape all these worldly difficulties by remaining in the contemplative condition only. She observes that "there are some people [...] on whom Our Lord bestows

not bring us nearer to God. Thus I understood what it is for a soul to be walking in truth in the presence of Truth Itself. And what I understood comes to this: the Lord showed me that He is Truth Itself." See also Herder, 1859 fn. 18.

³³³ Teresa, 7M 4, 346f./ *Obras Completas*, 1358: "¿Sabéis qué es ser espirituales de veras? [...] porque todo este edificio, como he dicho, es su cimiento humildad, [...]"

³³⁴ Teresa here rejects prejudices against people practicing the inner prayer, see Herder, 1871, fn. 26.

³³⁵ Teresa, 6M 3, 282/ *Obras Completas*, 1300: "Al menos enflaquece la fe, que es harto daño no creer que Dios es poderoso, para hacer obras, que no entienden nuestros entendimientos."

³³⁶ Teresa, 6M 6, 298/ *Obras Completas*, 1315: "por otra parte se querría meter en mitad del mundo, por ver si pudiese ser parte para que un alma alabase mas a Dios, [...]"

³³⁷ Teresa, 6M 6, 298/ *Obras Completas*, 1315: "es mujer, se aflige del atamiento que le hace su natural, porque no puede hacer esto, y ha gran envidia a los que tienen libertad para dar voces, [...]" See also Herder, 1824, fn. 10.

perfect contemplation and who would like to remain in possession of it forever. That is impossible; [...].”³³⁸

The further one progresses in this stage of spiritual process and development, the weaker fear and doubt become. Thus, the development of the *Sixth Mansions* results in an exceptional clarity and certainty, underlined by a strong perception of outstanding beauty. This process is sustained by a certain vision which “must not be supposed that one looks at it as at a painting; it is really alive”. She furthermore adds:

“[...] the brilliance of the sun [...]. The brilliance of this vision is like that of infused light or of a sun covered with some material of the transparency of a diamond, if such a thing could be woven.[...] the sight is the loveliest and most delightful imaginable, even by a person who lived and strove to imagine it for a thousand years, because it so far exceeds all that our imagination and understanding can compass, [...], without being told, the soul knows Who it is, [...].”³³⁹

These insights might have been the reason for Teresa’s remarkably positive image of the Divine, which make her speak of “the Lord’s eyes – those eyes so lovely and tender and benign.”³⁴⁰ An image which is so very different to the taught image of the Divine during her lifetime. It is in this chapter, that for the first time, she makes very clear statements on her image and understanding of the Divine, almost definitions, which I will outline in more detail later.

Concluding can be said that no matter, though, how miraculously her descriptions might appear, she always insists and wants everything to be understood and believed in connection with and based on humility and truth.³⁴¹

³³⁸ Teresa 6M 7, 305/ *Obras Completas*, 1321: "Hay algunas almas, y son hartas las que lo han tratado conmigo, que como nuestro Señor las llega a dar contemplación perfeta, querríanse siempre estar allí, y no puede ser; [...]."

³³⁹ Teresa, 6M 9, 315/ *Obras Completas*, 1330: "porque su resplendor es como una luz infusa, y de un sol cubierto de una cosa tan delgada, como un diamante, si se pudiera labrar. [...], porque con ser la mas hermosa y de mayor deleite, que podría una persona imaginar, aunque viviese mil años, y trabajase en pensarlo, porque va muy adelante de cuanto cabe en nuestra imaginación, ni entendimiento, [...], sin que se lo hayan dicho, que se da bien a conocer, [...]."

³⁴⁰ Teresa, 6M 9, 316/ *Obras Completas*, 1330: "estos ojos tan hermosos y mansos y beninos del Señor, [...]." & see also Herder, 1853.

³⁴¹ Compare Herder, 1856 - 1860.

3.3.7 Seventh Mansions

The final mansions eventually complete the developmental process of the inner prayer, but do not mean the end to it. As explained earlier, the process of passing through the inner castle is not straight forward anyway and contemplation is not a practice of prayer only, but a practice of ongoing life. Yet there are significant differences regarding the outcomes of experiencing the *Seventh Mansions*, which distinguish these mansions from every other mansion. Referring to the image of the butterfly Teresa explains:

“As we are saying, then, this little butterfly has now died, full of joy at having found rest, and within her lives Christ. Let us see what her new life is like, and how different it is from her earlier one, for it is by the effects which result from this prayer that we shall know if what has been said is true.”³⁴²

The most important difference now is that the awareness of the Divine and the human as being one, cannot be reversed. To consider the human and the Divine to be separated is no longer possible, and to view it from this perspective is ultimately no longer a question of choice:

“For you must understand that there is the greatest difference between all the other visions we have mentioned and those belonging to this Mansion, and there is the same difference between the Spiritual Betrothal and the Spiritual Marriage as there is between two betrothed persons and two who are united so they cannot be separated any more.”³⁴³

She outlines this by comparing the engagement with the Divine with the state of two candles being melted into each other, but still being separable after being extinguished. The marriage, in contrast is a unification like rain falling into a river, or a river flowing into the sea.³⁴⁴ Dobhan and Peeters in this context point out to the most significant aspect, that in the innermost core of the soul, the Divine is always present, but that now – in the moment of unification – this presence comes to consciousness. During engagement this is only preliminary, in the stage of marriage, the complete union, it becomes a permanent

³⁴² Teresa, 7M 3, 338f./ *Obras Completas*, 1352: "Ahora, pues, decimos, que esta mariposica ya murió, con grandísima alegría de haber hallado reposo, y que vive en ella Cristo. Veamos qué vida hace, u qué diferencia hay de cuando ella vivía; porque en los efetos veremos si es verdadero lo que queda dicho."

³⁴³ Teresa, 7M 2, 334/ *Obras Completas*, 1348: "Porque entended, que hay grandísima diferencia de todas las pasadas a las de esta Morada, y tan grande del desposorio espiritual al matrimonio espiritual, como lo hay entre dos desposados, a los que ya no se pueden apartar."

³⁴⁴ Compare Herder, 1876 & Glossary, 1905: 'geistliche Vermählung' (*matrimonio espiritual*).

awareness.³⁴⁵ These explanations once again show that the completion of the unification of the soul and the Divine is a question of consciousness. The Divine is always in the soul, soul and Divine are always one, but the completion of the process of gaining awareness of this is the fully completed process of unification. In the Christian mystical tradition this is called *unio mystica*.³⁴⁶

All this seems very miraculous and is therefore difficult to explain convincingly. Teresa at this point indicates once more her struggles to find adequate images and phrases, but she insists: "These comparisons make me smile and I do not like them at all, but I know no others. Think what you will; what I have said is the truth."³⁴⁷ Source of this certainty of truth is, according to Teresa, the knowledge of the Divine itself and she repeats:

"The difference between this Mansion and the rest has already been explained. [...] the soul is almost always in tranquility. [...] retains the unwavering certainty that it comes from God."³⁴⁸

Interconnecting this new consistency with a strengthening of the soul, Teresa assumes that this effect is caused by the Divine itself, too. She comments pensively: "Perhaps the reason is that the Lord has so greatly strengthened and dilated and equipped the soul [...]."³⁴⁹ At this point though, Teresa also forewarns, that this inner tranquillity will not lead to a relaxed life in everyday life, rather the opposite:

"You may think that I am speaking about beginners, and that later on one may rest: but, as I have already told you, the only repose that these souls enjoy is of an interior kind; of outward repose they get less and less, and they have no wish to get more."³⁵⁰

³⁴⁵ Compare Herder, 1876, fn. 18. & Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 12, 100: "And if a man has once tasted this sweetness, then indeed he can no more turn away with his love from goodness and from God, [...]."

³⁴⁶ Compare Figura, Michael (1998): *Unio mystica*, in: Dinzelsbacher, *Wörterbuch der Mystik*, 503-506.

³⁴⁷ Teresa, 7M 2, 338/ *Obras Completas*, 1351: "Riéndome estoy de estas comparaciones, que no me contentan, mas no sé otras: pensá lo que quisierdes, ello es la verdad lo que he dicho."

³⁴⁸ Teresa 7M 3, 341/ *Obras Completas*, 1354: "La diferencia que hay aquí en esta Morada, es lo dicho, [...], sino que está el alma en quietud casi siempre. [...], sino estar en un ser con seguridad que es Dios; [...]."

³⁴⁹ Teresa 7M 3, 342/ *Obras Completas*, 1355: "Quizá es que la ha fortalecido el Señor y ensanchado y habilitado; [...]."

³⁵⁰ Teresa 7M 4, 347/ *Obras Completas*, 1358: "Pareceros ha que hablo con los que comienzan, y que después pueden ya descansar: ya os he dicho, que el sosiego que tienen estas almas en lo interior, es para tenerle muy menos, ni querer tenerle en lo exterior."

But she also points out that despite all the bustle “the soul remains all the time in that centre with its God.”³⁵¹ And she does not lose its peace either: “The soul, as I have said, neither moves from that centre nor loses its peace, [...]”³⁵² This leads to, what I would like to call a spiritual resilience and power which reaches and includes the body.³⁵³ In Teresa’s view, this is caused by the unification with the Divine and she emphasises that “it cannot be doubted that, if we are made one with the Strong, we shall gain strength through the most sovereign union of spirit with Spirit, [...]”³⁵⁴ And it is exactly this unification which, according to Teresa, gives life to the soul:

“This, with the passage of time, becomes more evident through its effects; for the soul clearly understands, by certain secret aspirations, that it is endowed with life by God.”³⁵⁵

This quote indicates what I consider the most existentialist aspect of Teresa’s theology and understanding of the human being: her perception that there is a most interior space in the soul in which the Divine dwells and therefore gives life to everybody. This depicts a notion which echoes, as we will see later, Eckhart’s and Tillich’s ontological statements. Peers highlights this in his introduction to the *Interior Castle*:

“Yet many have supposed the Interior Castle to be concerned solely with raptures, ecstasies and visions, with Illumination and Union; or to be a work created by the imagination, instead of the record of a life. There is no life more real than the interior life of the soul; there is no writer who has a firmer hold on reality than St. Teresa.”³⁵⁶

Teresa’s descriptions of the *Seventh Mansions* reveal that she regards the *Interior Castle* to be the Divine itself, as she has explained in the *Sixth Mansions*: “Let us imagine that God is like a very large and beautiful mansion or palace. This palace, then, as I say, is God

³⁵¹ Teresa 7M 2, 335/ *Obras Completas*, 1349: “[...] porque siempre queda el alma con su Dios en aquel centro.” Compare also with Eckhart’s metaphors of the door and its hinge or the centred heart: Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, *On Detachment*, 571/ DKV II, Traktat 3, *Von Abgeschiedenheit*, 451 & Walshe in: Walshe, Sr. 9, 90, fn. 13. He refers to Sr. 7, 75f./ DKV II, Pr. 76, 135f.

³⁵² Teresa 7M 2, 336/ *Obras Completas*, 1350: “Ella, como he dicho, no se muda de aquel centro, ni se le pierde la paz; [...]”

³⁵³ Compare Herder, 1893.

³⁵⁴ Teresa 7M 4, 347/ *Obras Completas*, 1358: “no hay que dudar, sino que estando hecha una cosa con el fuerte, por la unión tan soberana de espíritu con espíritu, [...]”

³⁵⁵ Teresa 7M 2, 336/ *Obras Completas*, 1349: “Y esto se entiende mejor, cuando anda el tiempo, por los efetos, porque se entiende claro, por unas secretas aspiraciones, ser Dios el queda vida a nuestra alma, [...]”

³⁵⁶ Peers, Introduction. *Interior Castle*, 193.

Himself.”³⁵⁷ This is an interesting statement considering that she has already stated in the *First Mansions* that "we ourselves are the castle."³⁵⁸ And at the same time, she thinks this innermost mansion of the castle to be the centre of the soul: “When our Lord brings the soul into this Mansion of His, which is the centre of the soul itself [...].”³⁵⁹ Interestingly, this is another assertion that the soul, the Divine and the self are/ become one which also reminds me of Eckhart’s Ground of the Soul or Tillich’s Innermost Self.³⁶⁰

The *Seventh Mansions* are therefore indeed the Innermost Centre of the Soul and related to this knowledge, Teresa again discloses her positive image of the Divine and the human. Subsequently this overwhelming knowledge engendered, at least as far as I can tell, one of Teresa’s most beautiful images of the relationship between the Divine and the human: the human soul as the Divine’s second heaven comprising a hidden interior light:

“For He must needs have an abiding-place in the soul, just as He has one in Heaven, where His Majesty alone dwells: so let us call this a second Heaven. It is very important, sisters, that we should not think of the soul as of something dark. It must seem dark to most of us, as we cannot see it, for we forget that there is not only a light which we can see, but also an interior light, and so we think that within our soul there is some kind of darkness.”³⁶¹

She emphatically highlights that there is a difference between merely being taught about these insights and being able to comprehend them as really true by oneself through experience; presumed one is connected to the innermost depths of the human being:

³⁵⁷ Teresa, 6M 10, 322/ *Obras Completas*, 1335: "Hagamos ahora cuenta que es Dios, como una Morada, u palacio muy grande y hermoso, y que este palacio, como digo, es el mesmo Dios."

³⁵⁸ Teresa 1M1, 203/ *Obras Completas*, 1222: " pues sé es el mesmo: [...]."

³⁵⁹ Teresa, 7M 2, 337/ *Obras Completas*, 1350: "Pues tornando a lo que decíamos, en metiendo el Señor a el alma en esta Morada suya, que es el centro de la mesma alma, [...]."

³⁶⁰ Eckhart’s term ‘Seelengrund’ is a well-known term within the German contemplative tradition and plays an essential role in Eckhart’s theology as I will exhaustively explain in chapter 4. The term ‘Innermost Self’ by Tillich I will explain in Chapter 5.

³⁶¹ Teresa, 7M 1, 330/ *Obras Completas*, 1345: " porque así como la tiene en el cielo, debe tener en el alma una estancia, a donde solo su Majestad mora, y digamos otro cielo: porque nos importa mucho, hermanas, que no entendamos es el alma alguna cosa oscura, que como no la vemos, lo mas ordinario debe parecer, que no hay otra luz interior, sino esta que vemos, y que está dentro de nuestra alma alguna oscuridad."

“What a difference there is between hearing and believing these words and being led in this way to realize how true they are! [...] they are in the interior of her heart – in the most interior place of all and in its greatest depths.”³⁶²

She furthermore specifies that she regards this innermost space (*muy mas interior*) as the core part of the soul:

„It seems that the Divine Majesty, by means of this wonderful companionship, is desirous of preparing the soul for yet more. [...] The person already referred to found herself better in every way; however numerous were her trials and business worries, the essential part of her soul seemed never to move from that dwelling-place.”³⁶³

Her statements show that her mystical theology is based on the deep conviction that the Divine and the human are and can be perceived as being irreversibly unified in the inner midst of the soul. She then repeats, using the words of the "deepest centre of the soul" (*el centro muy interior del alma*) to describe this transcendental love as a marriage because the union is completed compared to the stage of engagement:

“[...], for this secret union takes place in the deepest centre of the soul, which must be where God Himself dwells, [...]. But what passes in the union of the Spiritual Marriage is very different. [...]. For He has been pleased to unite Himself with His creature in such a way that they have become like two who cannot be separated from one another: [...].”³⁶⁴

³⁶² Teresa, 7M 1, 332/ *Obras Completas*, 1346: "¡Cuan diferente cosa es oír estas palabras y creerlas a entender por esta manera cuan verdaderas son! Y cada día se espanta mas esta alma, porque nunca mas le parece se fueron de con ella, sino que notoriamente ve, de la manera que queda dicho, que están en lo interior de su alma, en lo muy mas interior, en una cosa muy honda, [...]." Dobhan & Peeters translate "greatest depths" with the German adjective "abgrundtief"; See also Herder, 1871. A term which again immediately resonates with Eckhart's term of 'Seelengrund'.

³⁶³ Teresa, 7M 1, 333/ *Obras Completas*, 1347: "Parece que quiere aquí la divina Majestad disponer el alma para mas, [...].Y así fue, que en todo se hallaba mejorada, y la parecía, que por trabajos y negocios que tuviese, lo esencial de su alma jamás se movía de aquel aposento, [...]." Dobhan & Peeters translate "essential part of her soul" with the German term of "Wesenskern der Seele" what, in my view, underscores the resilience of the innermost soul. Compare Herder, 1872. Compare also Meister Eckhart on the 'unmoved heart' in: Walshe Sr. 7 and Sr. 64.

³⁶⁴ Teresa, 7M 2, 334f./ *Obras Completas*, 1348f.: "porque pasa esta secreta unión en el centro muy interior del alma, que debe ser a donde está el mismo Dios; [...]; mas lo que pasa en la unión del matrimonio espiritual es muy diferente. [...]. mas lo que pasa en la unión del matrimonio espiritual es muy diferente."

And she consequently frames the oneness of the Divine and the human in her Christian understanding as a trinitarian union:

“[...] the Most Holy Trinity reveals itself, in all three Persons. [...]. It sees these three Persons, individually, and yet, by a wonderful kind of knowledge, which is given to it, the soul realizes that most certainly and truly all these three Persons are one Substance and one Power and one Knowledge and one God alone, [...].”³⁶⁵

But Teresa’s teaching does not remain in such abstract terms. All spiritual work and life is lost, she proclaims, if it does not lead to give birth to good works in the world: “This, my daughters, is the aim of prayer: this is the purpose of the Spiritual Marriage, of which are born good works and good works alone.”³⁶⁶ Leading a contemplative life alone does not suffice, it crucially needs practical good works to unfold and develop:

“I repeat that if you have this in view you must not build upon foundations of prayer and contemplation alone, for, unless you strive after the virtues and practice them, you will never grow to be more than dwarfs.”³⁶⁷

Teresa acknowledges and appreciates a deep longing for inner prayer, but she also reminds to gather strength to be able to do practical works. Referring to the biblical narration on Martha and Mary, being interpreted as standing for apparently opposing active and contemplative ways of living, Teresa emphasises that these two aspects belong together and should be integrated through and within the union with the Divine: “[...]: believe me, Martha and Mary must work together when they offer the Lord lodging, [...]”³⁶⁸ This interpretation of the story about Martha and Mary is very similar to Eckhart’s interpretation of that biblical account.

Living and working out of such a spiritual depth leads to strong love towards the Divine and results in ongoing growth and progress, as Teresa states that “anyone who fails to go forward begins to go back, and love, I believe, can never be content to stay for long where

³⁶⁵ Teresa, 7M 1, 331/ *Obras Completas*, 1346: "se le muestra la santísima Trinidad todas tres personas, [...]. y estas personas distintas, y por una noticia admirable, que se da a el alma, entiende con grandísima verdad ser todas tres personas una sustancia y un poder y un saber y un solo Dios; [...]."

³⁶⁶ Teresa, 7M 4, 346/ *Obras Completas*, 1357: "Para esto es la oración, hijas mías: de esto sirve este matrimonio espiritual, de que nazcan siempre obras, obras." & see also Herder, 1775, fn. 31.

³⁶⁷ Teresa, 7M 4, 347/ *Obras Completas*, 1358: "Torno a decir, que para esto es menester no poner vuestro fundamento solo en rezar y contemplar; porque si no procuráis virtudes, y hay ejercicio de ellas, siempre os quedaréis enanas; [...]."

³⁶⁸ Teresa, 7M 4, 348/ *Obras Completas*, 1359: "[...]: créeme, que Marta y María han de andar juntas para hospedar al Señor, [...]."

Teresa claims to integrate the contemplative and active way of life, see also Herder 1873, fn. 32. Compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 9.

it is.”³⁶⁹ But in this context, she wisely warns of being too ambitious as well, and recommends contemplating comprehensively, but to focus on what is individually achievable concerning one’s works. In addition, she highlights that it is not so much the outward importance of one’s works that counts, but the inner love with which they are performed:

“In a word, my sisters, I will end by saying that we must not build towers without foundations, and that the Lord does not look so much at the magnitude of anything we do as at the love with which we do it. If we accomplish what we can, His Majesty will see to it that we become able to do more each day.”³⁷⁰

Altogether, I find Teresa’s thoughts much more detailed, unique and outstanding than one would think when reading and being distracted by descriptions of supernatural experiences, and her language is, as she had no access to higher education or a university, not scholarly. Yet her findings are very similar to essential aspects of Eckhart’s theology even though it is extremely unlikely that Teresa knew or had heard of his teachings. Eckhart’s reflections on the relation between the Divine and the soul and its consequences I am therefore going to explain in the following chapter.

4 Meister Eckhart: The Ground of the Soul and the Birth of God in the Soul

4.1 Introduction

Teresa of Ávila uses the metaphor of an interior castle to describe the spiritual journey of the human mind to experience the oneness of the human being with the Divine. Eckhart in his theology uses the notion of the Birth of God in the Soul (*Gottesgeburt in der Seele*) with the same intention. As explained in the previous chapter, according to Teresa the unification takes place in the soul, in an incomparable depth which she calls Innermost Centre of the Soul. Eckhart in his teachings calls this place the ‘Ground of the Soul’ (*Seelengrund*). Therefore, I agree with McGinn’s observation that regarding Eckhart’s Ground of the Soul “in the Spanish-language mysticism of Teresa of Avila [...] the ‘center of the soul’ (*centro del alma*) plays a

³⁶⁹ Teresa, 7M 4, 347/ *Obras Completas*, 1358: "que quien no crece, descrece, porque el amor tengo por imposible contentarse de estar en un ser, a donde le hay."

³⁷⁰ Teresa, 7M 4, 350/ *Obras Completas*, 1360: "En fin, hermanas mías, con lo que concluyo es, que no hagamos torres sin fundamento, que el Señor no mira tanto la grandeza de las obras, como el amor con que se hacen; y como hagamos lo que pudiéremos, hará su Majestad, que vamos pudiendo cada día mas; [...]."

somewhat comparable role [...].”³⁷¹ To explain the meaning of the Birth of God in the Soul and the Ground of the Soul within Eckhart’s thoughts is the main goal of this chapter. Therefore, I am going to explain Eckhart’s central notions of Birth of God in the Soul and the Ground of the Soul, and – as they are all interconnected – relate them to other essential conceptions of Eckhart, such as detachment, including the metaphor of the Virgin Wife, the relationship between contemplation and action, including the metaphor of Martha and Mary, and finally justice, including love of neighbour. With these elaborations I am attempting to explain the link between the experience of the Birth of God in the Soul, the transformation of human consciousness and the meaning of the Ground of the Soul in this context. This will also reveal the role of the Ground of the Soul in terms of the relationship between body and soul and, in conclusion, identity and gender. The final section of this chapter will therefore finally lead to the following chapter, in which I will discuss the interconnections between Eckhart’s Ground of the Soul, Teresa’s Innermost Centre of the Soul, the self, identity and gender identity. In this introductory section now, I will begin by briefly providing some general information on Eckhart’s vernacular sermons which I am mainly working with, including methodological questions, before continuing with more content-related reflections concerning the idea of living a vital life.

Eckhart’s works comprise scholarly writings in Latin – some of them have only survived in fragments, as manuscripts or are incomplete – and sermons in Middle High German, yet not written down by himself, but presumably by members of his order or other attentive listeners.³⁷² Therefore careful study regarding authenticity is necessary. Following the editor of Quint’s translation, Niklaus Largier, at least two thirds of the vernacular sermons connected with Eckhart’s name can be regarded as authentic though. Largier also points to Quint’s references to historical documents concerning Eckhart’s condemnation, which testify to the genuineness of the Middle High German sermons of the collection I am mainly working with.³⁷³ Moreover, Amy Hollywood summarizes:

“The Latin works that survive [...] are textually quite secure; [...]. The sermons, on the contrary; both Latin and German, are most likely the product of professional copyists, students, or women who had heard and transcribed them.

³⁷¹ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 39.

³⁷² Compare Largier, comment in: DKV I, 715-719 & 729-733.

³⁷³ Compare Largier, comment in: DKV I, 730.

The authenticity of the primary themes and images found in the sermons is attested to by their repetition and elaboration throughout the corpus.”³⁷⁴

Nevertheless, the German sermons are of great importance, as they too do express what Eckhart has elaborated in his scholarly Latin works, even though he was preaching to laity and women: lay women and nuns from other women-orders. Beyond that, as explained in Chapter Two, Eckhart’s thoughts were also influenced by medieval women writers, especially the Beguines Marguerite Porete, Hadewijch from Flanders and Mechthild of Magdeburg.³⁷⁵ In this context McGinn makes the point that debates on alleged differences between Eckhart’s scholarly work and preaching continue, even though the opposition of Latin “ontological” writings and German “ethical-mystical” sermons, following McGinn, does not survive anymore.³⁷⁶

Moreover, McGinn and Marie Anne Vannier both determine that most of Eckhart’s sermons in Middle High German were probably written during Eckhart’s time in Strasbourg and in Cologne, focussing on the “birth of the Word in the soul” and deliberately intending to “create a new vernacular theology”.³⁷⁷ Referring to Vannier again, McGinn diagnoses that the focus in Eckhart’s sermons from Strasbourg lies on the Noble man (*edler mensch*), justice (*gerechtigkeit*) and the just person (*gerechte*). He furthermore identifies central themes in this context such as detachment, the return of the soul to the Divine, reflection on the Divine, and the purity of the Divine nature, which means the Divine as an unspoken word. Besides the sermons, Eckhart’s work on vernacular theology in Strasbourg also led to further treatises, namely the *Blessed Book (Liber Benedictus)*, consisting of *The Book of Divine Comfort* and *The Nobleman*. It was particularly the views displayed in the Book of Divine Comfort, as McGinn reports, which led to misunderstandings and put Eckhart’s teaching in proximity of heresy.³⁷⁸

Another field of debate regarding the vernacular sermons is the supposed opposition of theology and philosophy in Eckhart’s work. McGinn maintains, however, that it was Eckhart’s intention to consider reason and faith, philosophy and theology as well as thought and practice, not as opposed subjects, rather as interconnected and compatible. Crucial for

³⁷⁴ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 120. In this context the treatise *On The Nobleman* counts as the only vernacular writing which was surely written by Eckhart; see McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 12.

³⁷⁵ Compare Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife* & McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*.

³⁷⁶ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 33.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 10f.

³⁷⁸ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 11-13.

Eckhart in this context is the conception of natural reason being illuminated in order to have access to this deeper knowledge and therefore to the Ground of the Soul.³⁷⁹ He considered this, as McGinn argues, to be possible for non-Christian philosophers as well, especially for Plato, which made it possible for Eckhart to think in theological as well as in philosophical terms. McGinn states by answering the discussed question in relation to the ground: “More precisely, does his teaching on the ground belong to Christian theology or to general philosophy? I believe that we should say it belongs to both.”³⁸⁰ McGinn highlights that Eckhart consequently did not differentiate between teachings of the Bible and teachings of philosophy. For Eckhart, as McGinn affirms, theology, natural philosophy and ethics all work together, and this, as McGinn adds, enabled Eckhart to talk and preach about the Bible also in philosophical terms.³⁸¹ This also counts for Eckhart’s comprehension of the Trinity, which he considers to be generally incomprehensible to humans, and therefore his conception is, as McGinn acknowledges, “among the most complex aspects of his thought.”³⁸²

The complexity of Eckhart’s thought and the notion of the Ground of the Soul also have an impact on his use of language, as his speech tries to overcome boundaries to perform the return into the divine ground as well.³⁸³ Interestingly this shows that Eckhart relies on maternal rather than paternal language by using the metaphor of birth to express the process of the return into the divine ground. Altogether, Eckhart’s aim in preaching therefore was to evoke a spiritual movement which enables the hearer to breakthrough “the surface of the biblical word to reach the hidden inner meaning that negates ordinary reason and the created self”.³⁸⁴ This implies, as McGinn explains in more detail, that Eckhart did not seek to analyse biblical accounts and theological texts on a literal and linguistic level only, but tried to capture the meaning “hidden beneath the shell” too.³⁸⁵ All these statements and explanations reveal the “spirit-centered dimension” of Eckhart’s mystical theology.³⁸⁶ For this reason, methodologically I am following, as Meister Eckhart himself, the tradition of ‘spiritual exegesis’, reading and thinking through the mystical lens.³⁸⁷ This means that I am not referring to interpretations which remain exclusively in the dualistic view of the human and the Divine. Rather I am going to take Eckhart’s understanding of oneness with the Divine and the process

³⁷⁹ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart.*, 22f.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 89f.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁸⁵ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart.*, 27.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

of gaining awareness of this into account, including his mystical comprehension of the Trinity and mystical interpretations of the Bible.

As my overall work is related to questions about how to live a liveable life, I will now explain Eckhart's central understanding of a vital life as a preparation for his main theological notions of the Birth of God in the soul and the Ground of the Soul.

4.1.1 Living A Vital Life

Eckhart in his sermon on how the Divine discloses its love to humans, poses the question "What is my life?" and states: "That which is moved from within by itself."³⁸⁸ Eckhart's answer to this question reveals that he presumes that there is an inner space within the human being and that life dwells out of this inner space. Further explanations show that Eckhart considers the Divine to also be within the human being, and furthermore, that humans need to perform out of this inner source: "[...]: just as God does all things of his own and through himself, so we must work from our own, which is He in us."³⁸⁹ Eckhart seems to assume that humans need to live their lives out of themselves, which is out of the Divine within the human. This idea of being moved from the inside and therefore through the Divine itself is, in Eckhart's view, crucial for a life not only being a life of one's own but also for being vital. Being disconnected from the inner Divine and being moved exclusively by outer motions leads towards a dead life, as Eckhart radically states: "What is moved from without is not alive."³⁹⁰ This notion also applies to human works and he explains that "[...] if a man's works are to live, they must come from his own, not from extraneous things or from without, but within himself."³⁹¹ According to Quint's comments, the idea of vital works is directly related to the common ground, the ground which the Divine and the human share. Only works that are performed out of this shared ground are vital, as opposed to those works that are

³⁸⁸ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 13a, 105/ DKV I, Pr. 5A, 62/ DW 1, 80 (447): "daz von innen bewegt wirt von im selber."

³⁸⁹ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 13a, 106/ DKV I, Pr. 5A, 62/ DW 1, 80f. (447): "[...]; also als got alle ding würt uss sinem aigen und durch sich selber, also sullen wir uss demm aygen würken, das er ist in uns." I understand 'work' in this context not so much as an active operation or labour, rather as an almost passive 'emerging'/'resulting' of something out of something. Compare also Teresa 7M 1, 213: "For as He has a dwelling-place in heaven, so has He in the soul, where none but His Majesty may abide and which may be termed as another heaven."

³⁹⁰ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 13a, 105/ DKV I, Pr. 5A, 62/ DW 1, 80 (447): "daz enlept nit, daz von ussen wirt bewegt."

³⁹¹ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 47, 256/ DKV I, Pr. 46, 494/ DW 2, 384 (708): "[...]: suln des menschen werk leben, sô müezen sie genomen werden von sinem eigene, niht von vrenden dingen noch ûzer im, sunder in im." See also Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 59: 306/ DKV I, Pr. 39, 425.

performed to serve a certain outer end only.³⁹² Eckhart also discusses this relationship between the inner and the outer work in *The Book of Divine Comfort* and explains:

“And so the outer work can never be small if the inner work is great, neither can the outer be great or good if the inner is little or nothing. [...]. The inner work draws and derives its entire being only from God and God’s heart; [...].”³⁹³

Therefore, for Eckhart, it is absolutely clear that “we can and must work from our own power from within.”³⁹⁴ Eckhart’s comprehension of life at this point is quite radical, as he says that this inner power does not only help us to detach from outer determinations and pressure, but rather *demands* that we do so. The divine inner source therefore enables and encourages one to be true to oneself and build an authentic and vital life. This does not mean, as Quint describes it and as I will further explain later, to lead a *certain way* of life, but rather to be constantly aware of the divine presence in one’s own being, in everything there is and in everything one does.³⁹⁵ Continuing from the question ‘what life is’, the question of ‘why life is’ emerges. And again, Eckhart’s answer aims immediately at the inner of the soul and its deepest ground. He explains once more that life lives itself out of itself and out of its own and he now also emphasizes that this has no special reason:

“If a man asked life for a thousand years, ‘*Why* do I live?’, if it could answer it would only say, ‘I live because I live.’ That is because life lives from its own ground, and gushes forth from its own. Therefore it lives without *Why*, because it lives for itself.”³⁹⁶

As this shows, according to Eckhart, there is no special reason for life to live. The creature, following Quint’s comments, receives its being from the presence of the Divine on which it therefore is dependent.³⁹⁷ And it is in this respect that Eckhart regards everything that is

³⁹² See also Quint on Pr. 46 in: DKV I, 1032.

³⁹³ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, *The Book of Divine Comfort*, 541; DKV II, *Buch der göttlichen Tröstung*, 279: “Dar umbe enkan daz ûzer werk niemer kleine gesîn, ob daz inner grôz ist, und daz ûzer enmac niemer grôz sîn noch guot, ob daz inner kleine oder niht enist wert. [...]. Daz inner werk nimet und schepfet alles sîn wesen niergen dan von in gotes herzen; ez nimet den sun und eirt sun geborn in des himelschen vaters schôze; [...].”

³⁹⁴ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 13a, 106/ DKV I, Pr. 5A, 62/ DW 1, 80 (447): “Wir mugen und müssen uss unserm aigen wûrken uon innan.”

³⁹⁵ See also Quint on Pr. 5A in: DKV I, 798.

³⁹⁶ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 13b, 110/ DKV I, Pr. 5B, 70/ DW 1, 91f. (450f.): “Swer das leben vrâgete tûsent jâr: war umbe lebest dû? Sollte ez antwûrten, ez sprâche niht anders wan: ich lebe dar umbe, daz ich lebe. Daz ist dâ von, wan leben lebet ûzer sînem eigenem grunde und quillet ûzer sînem eigene; dar umbe lebet es âne warumbe in dem, daz ez sich selber lebet.”

³⁹⁷ See also Quint on Pr. 4 in: DKV I, 779.

created as ‘nothing’ (*niht*), while the Divine (as Godhead) is pure being in itself, as Hollywood describes:³⁹⁸

“God, understood as the source and font of all being and existence, alone has being; all else is nothing. [...]. Yet because of the radical dependence of creation on God as its source, it is nothing in itself.”³⁹⁹

Moreover, receiving being through the divine presence should not be understood as a single event, but as a continuous self-expression of the Divine within the created in every single moment in time.⁴⁰⁰ This expression of the Divine through its creation means that life constantly creates itself out of itself without any certain purpose. It is pure wanting of existence, which Eckhart therefore regards as God’s will and confirms: “Be sure, if it were not God’s will it would not be.”⁴⁰¹ Hence, according to this notion of life, which includes the divine dimension of being as well, Eckhart does not regard creatures to be bodily only; rather, he looks beyond that and states that “where creature stops, God begins to be.”⁴⁰² Remarkably, he goes as far to claim that the human being is capable of gaining awareness, a consciousness, of the Divine and the human as not being separated. This process Eckhart calls the ‘Birth of God in the Soul’.

4.2 Overcoming Duality in the Birth of God in the Soul

4.2.1 The Birth of God in the Soul – A Transformation of Awareness

This notion is central in Eckhart’s theology and crucially connected with his notions of being, life, love and justice. In his sermon on the interconnection of life and justice he explains these aspects and shows that they are linked and actually cannot be seen as separated from each other.⁴⁰³ In my view this sermon is one of the strongest on the Birth of God in the Soul and its effects. Eckhart in this sermon initially describes the process of being spiritually born as a child of the Divine and not as a worldly human being only:

³⁹⁸ The term ‘nothing’/ ‘*niht*’ is an important term throughout Eckhart’s sermons; it can mean both ‘nothing’ and ‘not’, see also Walshe in: Walshe, 111, fn. 2.

³⁹⁹ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 161f.

⁴⁰⁰ See also Quint on Pr. 4 in DKV I, 792.

⁴⁰¹ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 40, 224/ DKV I, Pr. 4, 46/ DW 1, 62 (442): “[...] enwære ez gotes wille niht, sô enwære ez ouch niht.” See also Sr. 43, 240/ Pr. 41, 441/ 443.

⁴⁰² Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 13b, 110/ DKV I, Pr. 5B, 72: “Dâ diu creature endet, dâ beginnet got ze sîne.”

⁴⁰³ Compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 65, 328-333/ DKV I, Pr. 6, 77-87.

"My bodily father is not my real father except for one tiny bit of his nature, and I am distinct from him: he can be dead while I am still alive. Therefore the heavenly is truly my father, for I am His son and get all that I have from Him, and I am that same Son and no other."⁴⁰⁴

Quint in this context explains that, from Eckhart's point of view, the being of the Divine and the being of the human coincide: the Divine's being is the creature's life and vice versa.⁴⁰⁵ Eckhart regards the Divine and the human not only as closely related, but even as *one*. In his words: "God and I are one in this operation: He works, and I come into being."⁴⁰⁶ This reveals once more that Eckhart, similarly to Teresa, does not regard the Divine to be exclusively above in heaven and separated from the human being down on earth. Eckhart emphasizes that this is not the case:

"Some simple folk imagine they will see God as if He were standing there and they here. That is not so. God and I are one. Through knowledge I take God into myself, through love I enter into God."⁴⁰⁷

This quote is an outstanding statement on the oneness of the Divine with the human, and in Eckhart's interpretation this process describes the unification:

"[...] the very moment body and soul were aware of his [Christ] presence, he knew himself as uniting human and divine nature, as true God and true man, Christ who is God."⁴⁰⁸

At this point I want to indicate though, that Eckhart does not confuse the divine and the human dimension. He makes an important distinction between the Divine as 'Godhead' (*Gottheit*) as the Absolute, and its Trinitarian facets, which he generally calls 'God'.⁴⁰⁹ Regarding the latter facets, Eckhart does not always explicitly name these distinctions in his

⁴⁰⁴ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 65, 331/ DKV I, Pr. 6, 84/ DW 1, 110 (454): "Mîn lîpflicher vater ist niht eigentlîche mîn vater sunder an einem kleinen stûckelîn sîner natûre, und ich bin gescheiden von im; er mac tût sîn und ich leben. Dar umbe ist der himelische vater wærlîche mîn vater, wan ich sîn sun bin und allez daz von im hân, daz ich hân, und ich der selbe sun bin und niht ein ander."

⁴⁰⁵ See also Quint on Pr. 6 in: DKV I, 809 & McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons*, 51.

⁴⁰⁶ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 65, 332/ DKV I, Pr. 6, 86/ DW 1, 114 (455): "Got und ich wir sîn ein in disem gewûrke; er wûrket, und ich gewûrde."

⁴⁰⁷ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 65, 332/ DKV I, Pr. 6, 86/ DW I, 113 (455): "Sumlîche einveltige liute wænent, sie sûln got sehen, als er dâ stande und sie hie. Des enist niht. Got und ich wir sîn ein. Mit bekennenne nime ich got in mich, mit minnenne gân ich in got."

⁴⁰⁸ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 89, 436/ DKV I, Pr. 49, 520/ DW 2, 439f. (717): "[...], in dem selben puncte verstuont er sich geeiniget menschlich natûre und götlich natûre, wârer mensche, éin Kristus, der got ist."

⁴⁰⁹ See also Quint on Pr. 5B in: DKV I, 803.

sermons, and it is therefore necessary to reflect and identify in which respect he talks about the Divine in each case. Obviously, these elaborations lead to Eckhart's understanding of the Trinity, which I can only sketch very briefly here.

The term 'Godhead' Eckhart associates with the absolute transcendent and 'pure being' (*esse purum*), whilst its first facet, in Eckhart's mystical hermeneutics, depicts the transcendent being which holds the potential to become immanent by the process of creation. This, according to Eckhart, is the Godhead as creative power, which gives every creature its being. In the patriarchal Christian tradition this facet is named as the 'Father.'⁴¹⁰

The second facet of the Godhead in Eckhart's view is represented by transcendent spirit (*logos*), a transcendent image of the Divine. This second facet of the Divine in the Christian tradition is described as being born as a child of God and in the patriarchal language named as the Son, and Eckhart in his mystical language calls this process Birth of God in the Soul. It is in this respect that Eckhart assumes that there are two ways of being born, as he states that "man has a twofold birth: one *into* the world, and one *out of* the world, which is spiritual and into God."⁴¹¹

The third facet emerges from Father and Son as spiritual power which is immanently incarnated and embodied in the world. Following Eckhart, this outpouring of the Divine into the world leads, on the human level, to an unceasing striving for good and just acts and works, which depicts the manifestation of the Divine in the material world. This third facet is closely interlinked with love from and towards the Divine, and merges into utterly wanting the good in the sense of wanting everything and everybody to be – wanting everything and everybody to have a vital life. In the Christian tradition this wanting of a good life for everything and everybody is named the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, Eckhart considers human beings to be potentially capable of having an awareness of the transcendent being immanent in its creation, which means that they are able to realize the Divine's incarnation within themselves and the world. They can express – speak

⁴¹⁰ Compare Meister Eckhart in DKV II: *Prologus Generalis*, 473-483 & McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons*, 33-39. Also compare Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 67, 341-346/ DKV I, Pr. 9, 104-116 & Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 49, 262-265/ DKV II, Pr. 77, 138-144 & McGinn 2001, 223, fn. 60.

⁴¹¹ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 7, 75/ DKV II, Pr. 76, 134/ DW 3, 325 (564): "Ez ist zweierleie geburt des menschen: ein in die werlt und ein üz der werlt, daz ist: geistliche in got."

the word (*logos*) – that they are of divine as well as of human nature in one. Similar to Teresa’s descriptions on gaining awareness in the *Seventh Mansions*, this realization depicts the core of the ‘Birth of God in the Soul’ in Eckhart’s account too.⁴¹² Eckhart discusses this concept in various sermons from various perspectives. Of course, it is a complex matter with many layers. The following quote from McGinn though summarizes the most fundamental aspects and alludes to the Ground of the Soul:

“There can be no distinctions in the innermost ground of God. [...] In other words, the dialectical relation between oneness and threeness in God is isomorphically similar to the transcendent-immanent relation of God to creatures.”⁴¹³

Marie-Anne Vannier in this context emphasises that in Eckhart’s conception of the Trinity, the notion of the Eternal Birth stands for the potential possibility of participation in Trinitarian life, through which the realization of the subject – the Birth of God in the Soul – happens.⁴¹⁴ It is in this very moment, that the human being realizes itself as a whole. The gaining of such a unified consciousness – knowing oneself to be of human *and* of divine nature – one overcomes the dualistic perception of transcendence and immanence and reaches a holistic process of transformation of mind and daily life. This unification of the divine dimension with the human mind is completed in this very moment. This is Eckhart’s way to explain, in more scholarly than imaginary words than Teresa, the *unio mystica*.

As abstract as all these explanations may appear, Quint points out that Eckhart thinks it is possible for this union to happen in every human being.⁴¹⁵ And indeed, Eckhart considers the process of unification to be not only a great joy, but also to be experienced by everybody as he emphatically proclaims:

⁴¹² Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 65, 331: „I say even more: not only does He beget me as His Son unceasingly, and furthermore, I say, He begets me as His Son, but He begets me as Himself and Himself as me, and me as His being and His nature.”/ DKV, Pr. 6, 82/ DW 1, 109 (454): “Ich spriche m̄r: er gebirt mich niht aline s̄nen sun, m̄r: er gebirt mich sich und sich mich s̄n wesen und s̄ne nat̄re.“ . Compare also Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 68, 348/ DKV I, Pr. 11, 134 & Walshe, Sr. 10, 92: “[...] then the heavenly Father bears His only-begotten Son in Himself – in me. [...], in that act the Holy Ghost receives his being.” / DKV I, Pr. 25, 288/ DW 2, 11 (640): “[...] s̄o gebirt der vater von h̄melr̄iche s̄nen eingebornen sun in sich in mich. [...], und in dem werke d̄a enpf̄ahet der heilige geist s̄n wesen und s̄n werden von mir als von gote.“ & Walshe, Sr. 42, 234/ DKV II Pr. 69, 44 & Walshe, Sr. 372/ DKV II Pr. 73, 96 & DKV II, Sermones, 571-577.

⁴¹³ McGinn, *Meister Eckhart : The Essential Sermons*, 36f.

⁴¹⁴ Compare Marie-Anne Vannier, "Eckhart und die Frage nach dem Subjekt." In *Texte Und Studien Zur Europ̄ischen Geistesgeschichte*, edited by Johann Kreuzer, Reinhardt, Klaus, Schwaetzer, Harald, 17-2, (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2011), 22f.

⁴¹⁵ See also Quint in: DKV I, *Stellenkommentar*: 798f.

“But I say yet more (do not be afraid, for this joy is close to you and is in you): there is not one of you who is so coarse-grained, so feeble of understanding, or so remote but he may find this joy within himself, in truth, as it is, with joy and understanding, before you leave this church today, indeed before I have finished preaching: he can find this as truly within him, live it, and possess it, as that God is God and I am a man.”⁴¹⁶

McGinn, too, demonstrates that Eckhart does not consider the Birth of God in the Soul to be an experience that can only happen to him or a few exceptional outstanding people. It is rather one of Eckhart’s wishes to share the experience of a new consciousness by “[...] inviting the hearer to perform the same breakthrough in life.”⁴¹⁷ To emphasise that he considers these processes as possible for everybody, Eckhart even refers to himself, which otherwise in his sermons he barely does, and McGinn notes that “in one of the few places where he speaks of his own consciousness of God, Eckhart makes it clear that he thinks of his own union with God as a grace for all: [...]”⁴¹⁸ This thought leads Eckhart to a question which, as I think, one quite likely could pose oneself also today, when thinking about theology and its connections to a spirituality of everyday life:

“What good would it do me for Mary to be full of grace if I were not also full of grace? And what would it profit me that the Father gives birth to His Son unless I bear Him too?”⁴¹⁹

Consequently, Eckhart does not regard the Birth of God in the Soul to have been a single event that happened only once, a long time ago at the historical birth of Jesus, but as a matter which can be true for everybody at any time:

⁴¹⁶ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 58, 301/ DKV II, Pr. 66, 14/ DW 3, 113f. (525): “Ich spriche aber mê – erschricket niht, wan disiu vröude diu ist iu nâhe, und si ist in iu - : ez enist iuwer keinez sô grop noch sô kleine von verstantnisse noch so vêrre, er enmüge dise vröude in im vinden in der wârheit, als si ist, mit vröude und mit verstanne, ê daz ir âlanc ûz dirre kirchen komet, jâ, ê daz ich tâlanc gepredige; er mac ez als wærlîchen in im vinden und leben haben, als daz got got ist und ich mensche bin!”

⁴¹⁷ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 51.

⁴¹⁸ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 31, referring to Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 78/ DKV II, Pr. 64.

⁴¹⁹ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 88, 429/ DKV II, Pr. 75, 122/ DW 3, 300f. (561): “Waz hülfe mich daz Mariâ »gnâden vol« wære, ich enwære den ouch »gnâden vol«? Und waz hülfe mich, daz der vater sînen sun gebære, ich engebære in denn ouch?”. He’s referring to St. Augustine, see also Walshe, Sr. 1, 29.

“People think God only became man *there*, but that is not true, for God became man here as well as there, and the reason why He became man was that He might bear *you* as His only-begotten Son, no less.”⁴²⁰

Quint notes that with this sentence Eckhart criticizes constrained theological interpretations of the incarnation, which distinguish between the here and now and the historical event. In contrast Eckhart teaches that God’s becoming human takes place in every human being who is open towards God.⁴²¹ In this respect McGinn infers that “this is why Eckhart has so little interest in the historical reality of the events of Christ’s life in his homilies. It is the presence of the Word made flesh here and now that is his concern.”⁴²² And with Hollywood I want to highlight this opinion as well:

“The singular historical event itself is consistently downplayed in favor of a cosmic and spiritual reading of the Incarnation – one that makes it an experience obtainable by every human being in any historical moment.”⁴²³

Regarding the notion of unification or unity with the Divine though, McGinn points to a central issue within theology, which is to maintain the line of difference between the human and the Divine. Eckhart’s insistence on the term *unio* though, as McGinn observes, indicates Eckhart’s genuine position within the theology of his time once more, and remarks that “the language found in these texts shows how the mysticism of the ground challenged traditional Christian understandings of union with God.”⁴²⁴ However, the unification with the Divine marks the key spiritual process of being born in and out of each other.⁴²⁵ Hollywood calls this moment the ‘breakthrough’ and relates it to the sermon on the unified soul as being virgin and wife:

⁴²⁰ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 18, 134/ DKV I, Pr. 30, 340/ DW 2, 98 (657): “Diu liute wænent, daz got aleine dort mensche sî worden. Des enist niht, wan got ist hie als wol mensche worden als dort, und dar umbe ist er mensche worden, daz er dich geber sînen eingebornen sun und niht minner.“

⁴²¹ Compare Quint on Pr. 30 in: DKV I, 970f.

⁴²² McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 30.

⁴²³ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 155. Compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 53, 279/ DKV I, Pr. 22, 255 & Quint on Pr. 22 in DKV I, 936f.

⁴²⁴ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 46.

⁴²⁵ The operation of gaining awareness of the unification complies with Eckhart’s understanding of gaining knowledge of the Divine: Compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 69, 352-356/ DKV II, Pr. 68, 33-41. See also Quint on Pr. 68 in DKV II 661f. & 666.

“In the breakthrough the soul becomes completely one and undifferentiated from the Godhead. Both are equal to nothing and contain no images, forms, or will. This is the virgin soul who lives without a why.”⁴²⁶

Both, Hollywood’s term “breakthrough” and Eckhart’s own wording as “the very moment” might be a bit misleading at this point though. In Eckhart’s further explanations in his other sermons and treatises it shows that this happening is not meant to be a single and acute ecstatic event. It is rather a constantly repetitive moment, a consecutive now, happening again and again, eventually as a lifelong and never-ending process as Eckhart explains:

“God creates the world and all things in one present Now: and the time that passed away a thousand years ago is now as present and as near to God as this very instant. If a soul stands in this present Now, the Father bears in her His only-begotten Son, and in that same birth the soul is born back into God. It is one birth: as often as she is born back into God, the Father begets His only-begotten Son in her.”⁴²⁷

In one’s human life, the soul being born into the Divine and the Divine being born into the soul is a moment of a new comprehension of existence, a new way of being in the world: being and knowing that one is of divine and of human nature. This process therefore depicts a transformation of consciousness which makes it possible to resurrect in life, in the here and now. Remarkably Eckhart furthermore regards this state of consciousness as irreversible and as independent from outer circumstances too:

“Now if a man truly has God with him, God is with him everywhere, in the street or among people just as much as in church or in the desert or in a cell. If he possesses God truly and solely, such a man cannot be disturbed by anybody.”⁴²⁸

⁴²⁶ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 148.

⁴²⁷ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 66, 338/ DKV I, Pr. 10, 128/ DW I, 171 (470): “Got schepfet die werlt und alliu dinc in einem gegenwertigen nû; und diu zît, diu dâ vergangen ist vor tûsent jâren , diu ist gote iezuo als gegenwertig und als nâhe als diu zît, dieu iezuo ist. Diu sêle, diu dâ stât in einem gegenwertigen nû, dâ gebirt der vater in sie sînen eingebornen sun, und in der selben geburt wirt diu sêle wider in got geborn. Daz ist ein geburt, als dicke si widergeborn wirt in got, sô gebirt der vater sînen sun in sie.“ Other sermons in which Eckhart explains his understanding of the ‘Now’ and its crucial relation to the Birth of God in the Soul, which I am going to refer to in more detail in chapter Six.

⁴²⁸ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, *Talks of Instruction*, 490; DKV II, *Reden der Unterweisung*, 344/ DW 5, 201 (509): “Wer aber got rehte in der wârheit hât, der hât in in allen steten und in der strâze und bî allen liuten als wol als in der kirchen oder in der einœde oder in der zellen; ob er in anders rehte hât und ob er in aleine hât, den menschen enmac nieman gehindern.“ This echoes Teresa’s idea of irreversibility in the *Seventh Mansions*.

Maintaining such a state of mind is central and is possible through spiritual practice which opens one's heart and reason. According to Eckhart this means practising virtues and detachment.⁴²⁹ The very particular meaning of the latter in Eckhart's teaching becomes clear in his notion of the Virgin Wife.

4.2.2 Being a Virgin Wife and Detachment: Entering the World by Leaving it Behind

Eckhart discusses this topic broadly in almost every sermon and in his treatise *On Detachment* which is a fascinating discourse in itself.⁴³⁰ For now, it must suffice to say though, that becoming unified with the Divine is a merciful gift, a gift which the Divine is always keen to make, as Eckhart is convinced:⁴³¹

“[...] and God is at great pains to be always with a man and to lead him inward, if only he is ready to follow. No man ever wanted anything so much as God wants to bring a man to knowledge of Himself.”⁴³²

This process entirely depends upon grace, as Eckhart further concludes, and he points out “[...] that is its [grace] work, that it brings the soul back to God.”⁴³³ Therefore, the Birth of God in the Soul cannot be achieved by conscientiously following concrete steps of praying or asceticism. Hollywood indicates:

“For Eckhart, [...], the emphasis is placed on attaining a state of disinterested love, or of detachment from self-will, in which the soul recognizes the absolute presence of the divinity.”⁴³⁴

Thus, Eckhart throughout all his sermons explains and emphasizes numerous forms of spiritual practice. This is not in the sense of techniques, but in the sense of how the mind, mainly spirit and love, needs to be aligned and opened towards the spiritual realm and the Divine. If this succeeds, it is even possible with “contemplation and peace”, as Quint indicates,

⁴²⁹ According to Teresa the practice of contemplation/ Inner Prayer.

⁴³⁰ Compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, *On Detachment*, 566-575; DKV II, *Von Abgeschiedenheit*, 435-459.

⁴³¹ An outline of Eckhart's understanding of 'mercy' can be found in Walshe, Sr. 72, 367-369; DKV I, Pr. 7, 89-95.

⁴³² Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 69, 355/ DKV II, Pr. 68, 40/ DW 3, 151f. (534): „[...] und got ist sêre vlîzic dar nâch, daz er alle zît bî dem menschen ist und lêret in, daz er in her in bringe, ob der menschen wolde volgen. Ez begerte nie mensche einiges dinge sô sêre, als got des begert, daz er den menschen dar zuo bringe daz er in bekenne.“

⁴³³ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 97, 468/ DKV I, Pr. 21, 250/ DW 1, 367 (515):“ [...]daz ist ir werk, daz si die sêle wider ze gote bringet.“

⁴³⁴ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 9.

to compel the Divine to enter into this unification.⁴³⁵ Hollywood, too, picks up this detail in her explanations of detachment:

“The soul becomes nothing and as nothing is equal to the divine. To the soul, insofar as she is equal with God, God gives everything that he can achieve. He must do this, according to Eckhart, for he and the soul are one, and therefore, in complete detachment she compels and forces God to give her everything he possesses. [...]”⁴³⁶

And indeed, Eckhart in his treatise *On Detachment* states that detachment forces the Divine to love the human.⁴³⁷ But Eckhart also explains that the human mind is often not alert to these continuous moments in which the Divine discloses itself, and he warns that “God is always ready, but we are unready. God is near to us, but we are far from Him. God is in, we are out. God is home (in us), we are abroad.”⁴³⁸

These aspects might appear to be strenuous tasks and Eckhart indeed admits that it is not easy to enter such a process of transformation, but he also promises that it is worthwhile to follow this spiritual practice and affirms that “it is true that it is a little difficult in the beginning in becoming detached. But when one has got into it, no life is easier, more delightful or lovelier: [...]”⁴³⁹ Additionally, in another sermon he cheerily remarks: “No one should think it is hard to come to this, even though it sounds hard and a great matter.”⁴⁴⁰ As promising as this may sound, following Eckhart, all this in the end though must paradoxically result in a complete abandonment of every desire – even of the desire for the Divine itself – which then leads to a specific kind of state of unknowing. Yet it is exactly this state of unknowing that takes one’s consciousness back into the presence of the Divine, as Eckhart explains:

⁴³⁵ See also Quint on Pr. 22 in: DKV I, 938; compare also Quint on Pr. 13 in: DKV I, 153-159.

⁴³⁶ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 151.

⁴³⁷ See also Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, *On Detachment*, 566/ DKV II, Traktat 3, *Von Abgeschiedenheit*, 435.

⁴³⁸ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 69, 355/ DKV II, Pr. 68, 40/ DW 3, 152 (534): “Got ist alzît bereit, mêt: wir sîn sêre unbereit; got ist uns nâhe, mêt: wir sîn im sêre verre; got ist inne, mêt: wir sîn ûze; [...]” Teresa would agree as she states that to find the Divine “it is quite that this is the best way: we need not got oHeaven, nor any farther than to our own selves, [...]”, see Teresa, *Vida* 40, 293.

⁴³⁹ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 69, 355/ DKV II, Pr. 68, 40/ DW 3, 151 (534): “Daz ist wol wâr, daz ez in dem beginne etwas swære ist in dem abescheidenne. Mêt: als man dar in kumet, sô enwart nie einic leben lihter noch lustlîcher noch minniclîcher; [...]”.

⁴⁴⁰ Meister Eckhart in Walshe Sr. 69, 355/ DKV II, Sr. 68, 41/ DW 3, 151 (534): “Nieman ensol denken, daz ez swære sî, her zuo ze kome, aleine daz ez swære und grôz lûtet.”

"Sometimes I say, if the soul is to know God, she must forget herself and lose herself: for if she were aware of herself, she would not be aware of God: but she finds herself in God."⁴⁴¹

According to McGinn this loss of self-awareness fundamentally underlies Eckhart's idea of detachment:

"Considered from the point of view of the ground, however, [...], losing our self-awareness allows us some access to this inner unity. [...] Giving up self-awareness, of course, is nothing else than Eckhartian detachment, true poverty of spirit, and the "deconstruction" (*entbilden*) of all images and quotidian consciousness."⁴⁴²

And Hollywood points out that this aspect applies likewise to the detached, virgin and therefore unified soul:

"To be truly detached and virgin, the soul must let go of all images, attachments, will and selfhood. When the soul is completely empty, wholly one, simple and free, she is equal to and undifferentiated from the divine."⁴⁴³

This agrees with Eckhart's definition of a virgin, as he explains that a "Virgin" is as much as to say a person who is void of alien images, as empty as he was when he did not exist."⁴⁴⁴ Eckhart regards this spiritual state of being as a crucial precondition for experiencing the Birth of God in the Soul and he reinforces once more that "[...], therefore that man must be a maiden, a virgin, who would receive the virgin Jesus."⁴⁴⁵ Besides this, Eckhart uses the term of a 'virgin' to distinguish the detached soul from "other wedded folk" who to him are "[...] all those who are bound with attachment to prayer, fasting, vigils, and all kinds of outward

⁴⁴¹ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 69, 354/ DKV II, Pr. 68, 38/ DW 3, 149 (533): "Ich pflige underwilen ze sprechene: sol diu sêle got bekennen, sô muoz si ir selber vergezzen und muoz sich selber verliesen; wan bekennte si sich selber, sô enbekente si got niht; mêr: si vindet sich wider in gote."

⁴⁴² McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 50.

⁴⁴³ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 151.

⁴⁴⁴ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 8, 77/ DKV I, Pr. 2, 24/ DW 1, 24f. (434): "Juncvrouwe ist alsô vil gesprochen als ein mensche, der von allen vrenden bilden ledic ist, alsô ledic, als er war, dô er niht enwas."

⁴⁴⁵ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 8, 77/ DKV I, Pr. 2, 26/ DW 1, 26 (434): "[...], her umbe sô muoz der mensche maget sîn, juncvrouwe, diu den megetlichen Jêsum enpfâhen sol."

discipline and mortification.”⁴⁴⁶ Therefore, the human being practicing detachment is not separated from the world and untouched by others, emotions or experiences.

Accordingly, Eckhart’s understanding of detachment does not entail “an insensibility to the surrounding world”,⁴⁴⁷ as his account of love and the saints shows as well.⁴⁴⁸ Eckhart at this point rejects a rigid stoic understanding of detachment and explains that humans who live a contemplative life, are not untouchable, but indeed are moved by emotions. Yet, within these movements, they are never moved away from their orientation towards the Divine:

“Now our good people declare that we must be so perfect that no joy can move us, we must be untouched by weal and woe. They are wrong in this. I say never was there a saint so great but he could be moved. Yet on the other hand I hold that it is possible for a saint, even in this life, to be so that nothing can move him to turn from God. You may think that as long as words can move you to joy or sorrow you are imperfect. That is not so. [...]. Therefore I declare that no saint ever lived or ever will attain to the state where pain cannot hurt him nor pleasure please.”⁴⁴⁹

Walshe sees in this declaration a contradiction to Eckhart’s statement in another sermon saying that the heart should not be moved.⁴⁵⁰ But in line with Eckhart’s analogy of the door and its hinge in his treatise *On Detachment*, I think Eckhart here spells out what he is trying to say with the metaphors of the door or the centred heart:⁴⁵¹ the woodwork of the door moves back and forth, but the hinge stays in its place. Thus, one can say that an unmoved heart does get touched, but it stays – no matter what – in the centre of the soul, hence, in the loving union in the Divine. A view which Teresa holds too, as I have mentioned in Chapter 3.3.7.

Being detached and dealing with the world, therefore, do not exclude each other. The relation becomes clear through Eckhart’s metaphor of the virgin wife in which he describes

⁴⁴⁶ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 8, 78/ DKV I, Pr. 2, 26/ DW 1, 28 (435): “[...]: alle die mit eigenschaft gebunden sint an gebete, an vastenne, an wachenne und aller hande ûzerlîcher üebunge und kestigungne.“

⁴⁴⁷ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 168.

⁴⁴⁸ Compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 9/ DKV II, Pr. 86.

⁴⁴⁹ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 9, 88/ DKV II, Pr. 86, 224/ DW 3, 490 (597): “Nû sprechent unser guoten liute, man sül alsô volkomen werden, daz uns kein liep bewegen müge und daz man unberüerlich sî von liebe und von leide. Sie tuont im unrechte. Ich spriche, daz heilige sô grôz nie enwart, er enmöhte beweget werden. Sô spriche ouch dâ wider: daz wirt heiligen wol in disem libe, daz in nihtes her abe von gote gewegen mac.“

⁴⁵⁰ See also Walshe in: Walshe, Sr. 9, 90, fn. 13. He refers to Sr. 7, 75f./ DKV II, Pr. 76, 135f.

⁴⁵¹ See also Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, *On Detachment*, 571/ DKV II, Traktat 3, *Von Abgeschiedenheit*, 451.

an immensely important shift: the journey of emptying oneself and becoming virgin is the move to become spiritually receptive and therefore a move towards the Divine.

But this journey, in Eckhart's conception, does not halt here. The Birth of God in the Soul as a peak of spiritual experience and transformation of consciousness also marks a beginning. This is the beginning of the same journey to continue and to return into the world. The spiritual transformation of consciousness needs to be integrated into the world (of everyday life) and ought to result in fruitful acts.⁴⁵² Another similarity with Teresa's perspective. Eckhart equates this with his understanding of the being as a wife and even favours this kind of state of being over the being as a virgin:

“If a man were to be ever virginal, he would bear no fruit. If he is to be fruitful, he must be a wife. ‘Wife’ is the most noblest title one can bestow on the soul – far nobler than ‘virgin’. For a man to receive God within him is good, and in receiving he is virgin. But for God to be fruitful in him is better, [...].”⁴⁵³

Michael Sells at this point indicates Eckhart's exceptional position within his tradition and he explains that “[...] the sermon gives a direct response to tradition, extending from Jerome to Augustine to Aquinas, that places the virgin over, against, and above the wife.”⁴⁵⁴ Following Eckhart's line of argument further, it becomes clear that one must be a virgin *and* a wife – be receptive *and* fruitful – simultaneously. This paradox is what the Birth of God in the Soul finally and essentially is about, and Eckhart summarizes:

“A virgin who is a wife is free and unfettered by attachment; she is always as near to God as to herself. She brings forth many and big fruits, for they are neither more nor less than God Himself.”⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵² This is also the topic of Eckhart's sermon on Martha and Mary (Walshe, Sr. 9, 83-90/ DKV II, Pr. 86, 209-229). Both sermons, Virgin and Wife (Walshe, Sr. 8, 77-82/ DKV I, Pr. 2, 25-37) and Martha and Mary are based on the same biblical quote, but each time differently, very freely translated and interpreted by Eckhart (e.g. the term ‘virgin’ in the biblical Latin translation does not appear at all, see Walshe in: Walshe, 81, fn. 1).

⁴⁵³ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 8, 78/ DKV I, Pr. 2, 26/ DW I, 27 (434): “Daz nû der mensche iemer mê juncvrouwe wære, sô enkæme keiniu vruht von im. Sol er vruhtbære werden, sô muoz daz von nôt sîn, daz er ein wîp sî. Wîp ist daz edelste wort daz man der sêle zuo gesprechen mac, und ist vil edeler dan juncvrouwe. Daz der mensche got empføhet in im, daz ist guot, und in der enpfenclicheit ist er maget. Daz aber got vruhtbærlich in im werde, daz ist bezzer; [...].“

⁴⁵⁴ Sells, *Mystical Languages*, 201.

⁴⁵⁵ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 8, 78/ DKV I, Pr. 2, 28/ DW I, 30 (435): “Ein juncvrouwe, diu ein wîp ist, diu ist vrî und ungebunden âne eigenschaft, diu ist gote und ir selber alle zît glich nâhe.“

Sells, by relating the virgin soul to the Virgin Mary emphasises the importance of the soul, and explains her active role within the Birth of God in the Soul:

“At this point, the virgin soul, the Virgin Mary, has a real role in the birth of the deity. She is revealed to be the mother of God in a literal sense, rather than the “catatonic” virgin whose motherhood of God is so often treated as a kind of purely formal honor.”⁴⁵⁶

To summarise, Eckhart’s notions of the Birth of God in the Soul and of the Virgin Wife connect the spiritual process of transformation of consciousness with an incarnated, embodied, and fruitful life in the material world. Eckhart’s concept of the Virgin Wife reveals again that he does not regard the spiritual and the worldly life as being separated from each other and that detachment does not lead to an escape from the world, rather the opposite, and he claims that “no one possesses the world so truly as he who has abandoned all the world.”⁴⁵⁷ This notion is possible because Eckhart considers apparently opposed aspects – receptivity and fruitfulness – to be integrated into each other and unified. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Eckhart at the beginning of *On Detachment* refers to the figure of Martha, as her character stands exactly for this integration of these apparent opposites. This becomes even more clear when looking at Eckhart’s sermon on Martha and Mary in which he correspondingly explains the relationship between the contemplative and the active way of being.⁴⁵⁸

4.2.3 Being as Martha *and* Mary: The Integration of Contemplation and Action

Even though detachment plays such a significant role in Eckhart’s teaching, being active in the world is just as important, and Hollywood recognises that “despite first appearances, however, Eckhart’s thought is not other- or anti-worldly.”⁴⁵⁹ This is particularly reflected in Eckhart’s view of the relationship between contemplation and action. He explains this in his interpretation of the biblical story about Martha and Mary.⁴⁶⁰ In this sermon Eckhart, similar to his notion of virgin and wife, questions traditional views of his time, which consider

⁴⁵⁶ Sells, *Mystical Languages*, 199.

⁴⁵⁷ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 29, 180/ DKV I, Pr. 38, 414/ DW 2, 241 (682): „Niemannes enist diu werlt alsô eigen, als der alle werlt gelâzen hât.“. A possible way to understand Mt 10:39: “Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it.”

⁴⁵⁸ Compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 9/ DKV II, Pr. 86. Eckhart uses similar analogy referring to Rachel and Lea, compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 88/ DKV II, Pr. 75.

⁴⁵⁹ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 186.

⁴⁶⁰ Compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 9/ DKV II, Pr. 86.

contemplation to be more valuable than practical work, as Sells by comparing Eckhart with Porete finds, and he states that “both authors ultimately challenge the distinction and hierarchy between contemplation and works.”⁴⁶¹

Eckhart’s reading of the story about Martha and her sister Mary shows that he does not consider contemplation and action as opposed and incompatible binaries. His account reveals a profound complexity and is not only a simple inversion of common interpretations of that Biblical narration. Eckhart rather describes a process of development from a praying Mary (who in her exclusively contemplative love to the Divine is a receptive virgin only) to a Martha, whose being is wholly merged into the union with the Divine, therefore has integrated the praying/ contemplative *as well as* the practical/active aspects of life into her being – consequently as a fruitful virgin wife. She is Martha *and* Mary, wife *and* virgin, fruitful *and* receptive *simultaneously* and it is this comprehensive integrity that engenders her whole being. Eckhart highlights this by asking: “Why did he [Christ] name Martha twice?” and replies: “He meant that every good thing, temporal and eternal, that a creature could possess was fully possessed by Martha.”⁴⁶² Therefore, contemplation is not an obstacle to an active life, nor is being actively engaged in the world an impediment to leading a contemplative and active life in unison. Eckhart explains that “Martha was so well grounded in her essence that her activity was no hindrance to her: work and activity she turned to her eternal profit.”⁴⁶³

Martha in Eckhart’s view “is perfect in action and in contemplation” as Hollywood puts it.⁴⁶⁴ Quint would agree with this, as he explains in this context that Martha is an example of a human being who lives out of the union with the Divine, which is unceasingly happening within this human being.⁴⁶⁵ According to Quint, Martha stands for the ultimate connection of an active and contemplative life, practicing diligence and virtue in her outer work while maintaining the awareness of divine presence in her inner work. Outer work therefore is no hindrance to a spiritual alignment, and one must not give up an active and engaged life to lead a contemplative one, nor vice versa. Martha therefore is not a preliminary stage of Mary, rather the opposite: Martha (more experienced and mature) represents the completed Mary (who

⁴⁶¹ Sells, *Mystical Languages*, 196.

⁴⁶² Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 9, 85/ DKV II, Pr. 86, 214/ DW 3, 484 (594): „Wâ von nante er Marthen zwirunt? Er meinte, allez, daz zîtliches und êwiges guotes wære und daz créature besitzen sölte, daz daz Marthâ zemâle hâte.“

⁴⁶³ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 9, 89/ DKV II, Pr. 86, 226/ DW 3, 491 (598): „Marthâ was sô weselich, daz sie ir gewerp niht enhinderte; werk und gewerp leitete sie ze êwiger sælde.“

⁴⁶⁴ Hollywood, Amy. *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, 267.

⁴⁶⁵ See also Quint on Pr. 5B in: DKV I, 805.

otherwise remains in contemplation at the beginning of her spiritual journey). Martha embodies the completion of the human being by integrating the active and contemplative life as *one*, which can only succeed through the Birth of God in the Soul.⁴⁶⁶ Eventually, a fully unfolded and completed contemplative life expresses itself through action. Consequently, Eckhart's focus without doubt lies on, in McGinn's words, a "living union between action and contemplation"⁴⁶⁷. Connecting this now to the notion of the Virgin wife, Sells gives a pointed summary of Eckhart's interpretation of Martha and Mary:

"Contemplation, as figured by the empty, silent, virgin soul, is no longer placed above activity (as figured by the wife who gives birth). The silent Mary is no longer put above the silenced Martha. Martha is now the prototype of the virgin who is a wife, the *wip*, who represents the fullest life (for male or female), or life itself, as birth (and self-birth) in every moment. Contemplation and proclamation are part of the same moment, as dialectically linked as are letting go and giving birth."⁴⁶⁸

Following Eckhart, it is life itself that teaches this, as his comment on Martha reveals, saying that "Martha knew Mary better than Mary knew Martha, for she had lived long and well, and life gives finest understanding."⁴⁶⁹ Both Quint and Hollywood emphasise that Eckhart presumably developed and discussed this topic so broadly based on discourses with Beguines and nuns, aiming to stress the importance of social and practical engagement and to limit ambitions to escape the world through excessive isolation or withdrawal and being captured by ecstasy and rapture.⁴⁷⁰

Besides this, I consider the account of Martha and Mary to be essential within Eckhart's theology, as it is immensely important to him to explain how the divine work expresses itself in the material world. This thread leads to Eckhart's notion of justice.

Hollywood shows that the figure of Martha is linked to justice rather than to the love of the neighbour and she explains that "[...], Martha and Mary are one with each other and they are one with Christ. For Mary and Martha, as for Christ, there is no part of their bodies

⁴⁶⁶ Compare Quint on Pr. 86 in: DKV II, 739-743.

⁴⁶⁷ Mc Ginn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 67.

⁴⁶⁸ Sells, *Mystical Languages*, 202.

⁴⁶⁹ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 9, 84/ DKV II, Pr. 86, 210/ DW 3, 482 (593): „Marthâ bekante baz Marien dan Mariâ Marthen, wan si lange und wol gelebet hâte; wan leben gibet daz edelste bekennen.“

⁴⁷⁰ See also Quint on Pr. 86 in: DKV II, 742 & compare Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia*, 261 & 264f. & 370, fn. 28.

that does not share in the work of the divine, which is justice.”⁴⁷¹ And Hollywood furthermore indicates a new emphasis within Christian tradition and highlights the importance of justice in Eckhart’s Christology:

“This action may seem far removed from the love of neighbor traditionally associated with Martha, yet for Eckhart, the son, Jesus Christ, is the just human being. To give birth to the son is to give birth to justice; moreover, the virgin soul is united with the son and with the ground of the son and so *is* justice.”⁴⁷²

For that reason, being active in the world by engendering justice and love of neighbour are best discussed in relation to each other.

4.2.4 Being Justice – Care and Share

As mentioned, Eckhart’s teaching in various sermons shows that the ultimate realization of the unification with the Divine is justice. Eckhart makes it clear:

“That man is just who is informed with and transformed into justice. The just man lives in God and God in him, for God is born in the just man and the just man in God: [...]”⁴⁷³

Eckhart explains this more extensively in *The Book of Divine Comfort* in which he relates wisdom, truth, justice and goodness to each other and once more emphasises the dependency of these relations on the Birth of God in the Soul.⁴⁷⁴ Sells accordingly explains the interaction between the Birth of God in the Soul and the birth of justice:

“The just act is the birth of the son in the soul, the only just act that ever has occurred and ever is occurring. The contemplative and the active are fused into the one eternal work and birth that always has occurred and always is occurring. Mystical union is not an experience of the extraordinary, it is a new vision of the ordinary; the most humble act of justice, insofar as it is just, is nothing other than

⁴⁷¹ Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia*, 268.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 266.

⁴⁷³ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 59, 305/ DKV I, Pr. 39, 420/ DW 2, 252 (684): “[...] daz ist ein gereht mensehe, der in die gerehticheit ingebildet und übergebildet ist. Der gerehte lebet in gote und got in im, wan got wirt geborn in dem gerehten und der gerehte in gote; [...]” (See also Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 66, 339/ DKV I, Pr. 10, 131)

⁴⁷⁴ Compare Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, *The Book of Divine Comfort*, 524-527.

the birth of the “only-begotten” son of God. It is not some grand one-time experience, but a work that must be realized anew in each moment.”⁴⁷⁵

Justice, therefore, and as Quint elucidates, is something one receives from the Divine, not one’s own will being oriented towards oneself.⁴⁷⁶ And even though I cannot illustrate in more detail at this point how Eckhart defines justice, a brief quote might give a preliminary, but sufficient idea of his notion through his question of “who are the just? [...], ‘He is just who gives to each what is his’: who gives to God His due, [...], and to his fellow man what is his.”⁴⁷⁷ In this respect Hollywood spells out:

“The just human being is the one who gives to each his or her due, therefore the one who gives all to God from the perspective of religion, and the one who gives to each human being that which is his or her due as a human creature endowed with being by God.”⁴⁷⁸

Moreover, the process of being and becoming one with the Divine does not only entail the emergence of being just and engendering justice, but also holds a subtle and underlying notion of equality. The Birth of God in the Soul, as Eckhart understands it, depicts a transformation that not only has an impact on the soul itself and its consciousness, but also on the relationship between the soul and the Divine.⁴⁷⁹ The Divine being born in the soul and the human being subordinated to the Divine at the same time according to this statement cannot be, and Eckhart ensures that “[...] among all creatures He does not love one more than another: [...]”⁴⁸⁰ Even more, Eckhart claims that in the moment of detachment and the Birth of God in the Soul, the Divine and the human become equal. He emphasises that “[...] if God is in me and I am in God, then I am not meaner and God is not higher.”⁴⁸¹

Eckhart illustrates this through the example of the servant and the master and states that “between the servant and his master there can never be equal love. As long as I am a

⁴⁷⁵ Sells, *Mystical Languages*, 202.

⁴⁷⁶ See also Quint on Pr. 6 in: DKV I, 809.

⁴⁷⁷ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 65, 328/ DKV I, Pr. 6, 76/ DW 1, 99 (452): “Welhez sint die gerehten? [...]: »der ist gereht, der einem ieglichen gibet, daz sîn ist«: die gote gebent, daz sîn ist, [...], und dem ebenmenschen, daz sîn ist.“ Following Walshe’s comment Eckhart’s elaboration of his notion of justice in this sermon was condemned; see also Walshe in: Walshe, Sr. 65, 328 & 332, fn. 2&3

⁴⁷⁸ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 194.

⁴⁷⁹ Compare *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁸⁰ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 88, 427/ DKV II, Pr. 75, 116/ DW 3, 293f. (559): “Und under allen créatüren sô enminnet er eine niht mê dan die andern; [...]”.

⁴⁸¹ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 12, 101/ DKV I, Pr. 27, 310/ DW 2, 49f. (647): “Dâ aber got ist in mir und bin ich in gote, sô enbin ich niht snæder noch got niht hœher.“. See also Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 65, 330/ DKV I, Pr. 6, 83.

servant, I am far from the only-begotten Son and unlike him.”⁴⁸² This statement reveals that an equal love between the Divine and the human is not possible as long as there is a hierarchical relationship between them. But this relationship is transformed in the moment and state of unification. Thus, the Birth of God in the Soul fundamentally cannot be, as long as there is a hierarchical difference between the Divine and its creature.⁴⁸³ Only in the very instance of the Birth of God in the Soul, when human and divine being fall together, hierarchy disappears, and equality emerges. It is from that perspective that Eckhart negates any hierarchical moment. At this point, the Divine is not a superior authority anymore. And it is in this very respect, that the Divine is like a friend and is not an entity anymore that sets morality or rules and judges or punishes.⁴⁸⁴ Eckhart says that “[...], in that selfsame birth He calls us His friends.”⁴⁸⁵

Regarding the equality between the servant and the master Quint argues that it was Eckhart’s strong intention to understand the relationship between the human and the Divine – in line with Biblical statements – as a friendship.⁴⁸⁶ Yet again a view that Eckhart and Teresa share. Quint furthermore explains that Eckhart thinks the Divine’s goodness is the aspect through which it shares itself and gives creatures their being. Consequently, Quint furthermore emphasises that according to Eckhart, insofar the Divine shares itself with its creature, the Divine must love it, as love is constituted out of a relationship between equals.

What I hope to have revealed through my explanations on the Birth of God in the Soul, justice and equality is that Eckhart has no doubt that "God is equally near in all creatures" and that the Divine enters the world by loving every creature without making any difference.⁴⁸⁷ In this respect Quint explains, and I share his perception, that Eckhart did not have societal criticisms and changes in mind, but that within his notion of incarnation and the Birth of God in the Soul an “egalitarian note” can be found.⁴⁸⁸ And McGinn additionally remarks that Eckhart does not distinguish between clergy and laity regarding the Birth of God in the Soul.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸² Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 66, 337/ DKV I, Pr. 10, 126/ DW 1, 169 (470): “Zwischen dem knechte und dem herren enwirt niemer minne glich. Die wile ich knecht bin, sô bin ich dem eingebornen sunne gar verre und unglich.“.

⁴⁸³ See also Quint on Pr. 27 in: DKV I, 957.

⁴⁸⁴ An image of the Divine which is very different to the image critics, as for example Daly or other feminists, have in mind.

⁴⁸⁵ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 12, 102/ DKV I, Pr. 27, 312/ DW 2, 52 (647): “[...], in der selben geburt sprichet er uns sine vriunde.“.

⁴⁸⁶ See also Quint on Pr. 10 in: DKV I, 857.

⁴⁸⁷ See also Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 69, 353/ DKV II, Pr. 68, 35.

⁴⁸⁸ See also Quint on Pr. 10 in: DKV I, 861 & on Pr. 6 in: DKV I, 809.

⁴⁸⁹ See also McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 70.

Consequently, the Birth of God in the Soul also underlies Eckhart's ethical implications regarding the biblical imperative to love one's neighbour as oneself. In this context, Eckhart comprehends the essential relation between self-love, equal love for all human beings and the Birth of God in the Soul:

“If you love yourself, you love all men as yourself. As long as you love a single man less than yourself, you have never truly learned to love yourself – unless you love all men as yourself, all men in one man, that man being God and man.”⁴⁹⁰

Hollywood realises these interconnections too and stresses:

“Perhaps even more strongly, Eckhart insists that one should love one's neighbors not for God's sake, but as oneself – love for God and love of neighbor, like the soul insofar as she is just and divine, are equal.”⁴⁹¹

Therefore, loving the Divine does not take away attention from one's neighbour, and loving one's neighbour does not take away attention from the Divine. From my point of view, this leads to a deep notion of connectivity which Eckhart suggests as follows:

“You must love all men equally, respect and regard them equally, and whatever happens to another, whether good or bad, must be the same as if it happened to you.”⁴⁹²

Remarkably, Eckhart also quite radically claims that whoever has experienced the unification of the Divine and the soul, should not stay self-contained. One should turn towards others, leave boundaries behind and not hold anything back, but rather share oneself and one's gifted blessedness, as Eckhart urges:

⁴⁹⁰ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 57, 296/ DKV I, Pr. 12, 144/ DW 1, 195 (476): “Hâst dû dich selben liep, sô hâst dû alle menschen liep als dich selben. Die wîle dû einen einigen menschen minner liep hâst dan dich selben, dû gewünne dich selben nie liep in der wâhrheit, dû enhabest denn alle menschen liep als dich selben, in einem menschen alle menschen, und der mensche ist got und mensche; [...]“.

⁴⁹¹ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 194.

⁴⁹² Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 13a, 105/ DKV I, Pr. 5A, 60/ DW 1, 79 (447): “Du solt alle menschen dir gelich liebhaben und gelich achten und halten; waz einem andern geschicht, es sy bösz oder güt, daz sol dir sin, als ob es dir geschehe.“.

“He must not keep himself to himself: he must make free with himself and pour himself out with everything he has, with body and soul, as far as he ever can, and whatever anyone demands of him.”⁴⁹³

From this statement Eckhart derives a universal idea of neighbourly love that not only applies to the direct neighbour but to everybody:

“Yet God as being pours Himself out into all creatures, to each as much as it can take. This is a good lesson to us to love all creatures equally with all that we have received from God, and if some are by nature nearer to us by kinship or friendship, that we should still favour them equally out of divine love in regard to the same good. [...]. Thus God loves all creatures equally and fills them with His being. And thus too, we should pour forth ourselves in love over all creatures.”⁴⁹⁴

The awareness of this radical connectivity is – again – crucially dependent on the spiritual state of the Birth of God in the Soul. Yet, I would like to suggest that this notion, even from a contemporary point of view, could be read in a comprehensive and global way. Eckhart says:

“Whoever would exist in the nakedness of this nature, free from all mediation, must have left behind all distinction of person, so that he is as well disposed to a man across the sea, whom he never set eyes on, as to the man who is with him and is his close friend. As long as you favor your own person more than that man you have never seen, you are assuredly not right and you have never for a single instant looked into this simple ground.”⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 64, 325/ DKV II, Pr. 81, 176/DW 3, 402 (579): “Er ensol sich aleine niht enpfâhen noch haben, sunder er sol sich gemeine machen und ûzvliesen mit allem dem, daz er hât an libe und an sêle, als verre als er iemer mac und waz ieman von im begert.“ This is not meant in the sense of limitless altruism, s. Eckhart’s understanding of the relation between inner and outer human, see also. e.g. Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 6, 70/ DKV I, Pr. 1, 23

⁴⁹⁴ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 88, 428/ DKV II, Pr. 75, 118/ DW 3 III, 295f. (559f.): “Aber got der giuzet sich doch wesentlîche in alle crêatûren, in ieglîche, als vil si enpfâhen mac. Diz ist uns ein guotiu lêre, wie wir alle crêatûren glîche minnen sûln mit allem dem, daz wir von gote enpfangen hân; ist uns joch einiu nâher von sippshaft oder von vriuntschaft natiurlîche, daz wir doch von götlicher minne glîchen gunst tragen des selben guotes. [...]. Alsô minnet got alle crêatûren glîche und ervüllet sie mit sînem wesene. Und alsô sult wir mit minne vliezen ûf alle crêatûren“.

⁴⁹⁵ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 13b, 109/ DKV I, Pr. 5B, 68/ DW 1, 87f. (449): “[...]: swer in der blôzheit dirre natûre âne mittel sol bestân, der muoz aller persônen ûzgegangen sîn, alsô daz er dem menschen, der jensît mers ist, den er mit ougen nie gesach, daz er dem alsô wol guotes gûnne als dem menschen, der bî im ist und sîn heimlich vriunt ist. Al die wîle dû dîner persônen mêr guotes ganst dan dem menschen, den dû nie gesæhe, sô ist dir wærlîche unreht noch dû geluogest nie in disen einvaltigen grunt einen ougenblick.“.

As this shows the process of unification is closely related to connectivity and love of neighbour, which culminates in justice. Hence, summarizing and referring to Hollywood again, it can be said that the virgin soul compels the Divine to perform its self-creation within the human being by engendering justice.⁴⁹⁶ In this context Hollywood also points out that the just human being must be “radically equal to his source”.⁴⁹⁷ Consequently, living a detached life in the union with the Divine, and wanting nothing but the good is based ultimately not only on equality, but on identity with the Divine, as Hollywood concludes: “The work of the divine, the just act, is both the mark and fruit of identity with the Son and the divine ground.”⁴⁹⁸ The ‘divine ground’ to which Hollywood refers here is Eckhart’s most central notion: the Ground of the Soul, the ground which the Divine and the human share in the Birth of God in the Soul.

4.3 Living out of the Ground of the Soul

4.3.1 Ground of The Soul

The notion of the ‘ground’ (*grund/ grunt*), following McGinn is central to Eckhart’s thought, and McGinn regards Eckhart’s “mysticism of the ground” as a significant expression of Eckhart’s unique theology.⁴⁹⁹ Besides this, Eckhart with this notion also introduced a new emphasis on interpretations of biblical texts. In his analyses McGinn explores how Eckhart’s use of the term ‘ground’ is specific to Eckhart’s teaching in late medieval mysticism and was formulated to meet the spiritual needs of a late medieval audience. This audience was striving for a total transformation into God. The mysticism of the ground, McGinn suggests, could be regarded as an expression of a union going beyond the distinction between creator and creature. In this respect the dialectical understanding of the ground had an advantage over other descriptions relying on non-contradictory logic only⁵⁰⁰. Therefore, McGinn describes the term as an “explosive metaphor” because he thinks that, by using this metaphor, Eckhart succeeded in breaking “through previous categories of mystical speech” and created “new ways of presenting a direct encounter with God.”⁵⁰¹ The notion of the ground can be considered as fundamental and literally ground-breaking in Eckhart’s teaching, as McGinn

⁴⁹⁶ See also Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 186.

⁴⁹⁷ See also *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁹⁸ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 150.

⁴⁹⁹ See also McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 37.

⁵⁰⁰ Compare McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 37-47.

⁵⁰¹ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 38.

further elucidates: “Consciousness of the ground, a form of awareness different from all other forms of experience and knowing, is the foundation of Meister Eckhart’s mysticism.”⁵⁰²

Taking a closer look at Eckhart’s teaching on the ground and the soul shows once more that his thinking is deeply rooted in his apophatic theology. He understands the soul to be – just like the Divine – ineffable, and he develops his thoughts by referring to different views on the soul, but finally clarifies that “they called her [the soul] after the barest and purest, but still this falls short of the ground of the soul. God, who has no name – He has no name – is ineffable, and the soul in her ground is also ineffable, as He is ineffable.”⁵⁰³ This shows that Eckhart believes that in the depth of the soul – the ground – the soul is as ineffable as the Divine, indistinct from the Divine and therefore one with the Divine. Eckhart stresses strongly again that “the soul is one with God and not united: “[...] she [the soul] becomes one with God and not united, for where God is, there the soul is, and where the soul is there God is.”⁵⁰⁴ At this point, according to Eckhart, the term ‘united’ becomes irrelevant as the Ground of the Soul is the ‘source of unity’ (*Urgrund der Einheit*).⁵⁰⁵ As already mentioned, Eckhart believes that this unity can be experienced by the human mind, as he also reveals at the end of one of his sermons by addressing his audience and affirming that “this power seizes God naked in His essential being. It is one in unity, not in likeness. May God help us to come to this experience.”⁵⁰⁶

In terms of an experience and as a spiritual process, the Ground of the Soul emerges through the effects of detachment.⁵⁰⁷ In this context, detachment depicts a state of consciousness which, according to Peter Lipsett, can be regarded as a radical orientation of attention towards the Divine itself, and marks the entrance of the mind into pure contemplation.⁵⁰⁸ This fundamental orientation inwards to the inner human and innermost heart, following Lipsett, depicts the moment of the Birth of God in the Soul, the moment the

⁵⁰² McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 38.

⁵⁰³ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 21, 148f./ DKV I, Pr. 17, 200/ DW 1, 284 (496): “Dar umbe nennet man sie bî dem blæzesten und bî dem lûtersten, und ez enrûeret doch den grunt der sêle niht. Got, der âne namen ist – er enhât enkeinen namen –, ist unsprechlich, und diu sêle in irm grunde ist si ouch unsprechlich, als er unsprechlich ist.“

⁵⁰⁴ Walshe, Sr. 78, 392/DKV I, Pr. 64, 670/ DW 3, 86 (519): “die sele die wirt ain mit gotte vnd nit veraint. [...]; die [sele] wirt ain mit gotte vnd nit veraint; won wa got ist, da ist die sele, vnd wa die sel ist, da ist got.“

⁵⁰⁵ See Walshe, Sr. 78, 392/DKV I, Pr. 64, 672/ DW 3, 88 (519): “art der eini(kait)“.

⁵⁰⁶ Walshe, Sr. 24 (a), ??/ DKV I, Pr. 13, 158/ DW 1, 221f. (482): “Disiu kraft nimet got blôz zemâle in sînem istigen wesene; si ist ein in der einicheit, niht glîch mit der glîcheit. Daz uns daz widervar, des helfe uns got.“

⁵⁰⁷ This correlates with Teresa’s Mental Prayer.

⁵⁰⁸ Compare Lipsett, *Wege zur Transzendenzerfahrung*, 155; This correlates with the ‘*Gebet der Ruhe*’ in Teresa’s work.

Divine enters the soul.⁵⁰⁹ Eckhart makes it clear that “here God enters the ground of the soul. None can touch the ground of the soul but God alone.”⁵¹⁰ According to Eckhart’s teaching, this process is initially an active move by focussing the powers of the soul (*Seelenkräfte*) such as will and reason.⁵¹¹ This then transitions into a state of radical passivity and, as Lipsett furthermore explains, into a spontaneous – merciful – integration of the soul and the Divine.⁵¹² This repetitive and momentary process depicts the ‘time’ and ‘place’ in which the Divine’s ground and the soul’s ground become one, and Eckhart affirms this experience by reconnecting to his thoughts on living a vital life: ”Here God’s ground is my ground and my ground is God’s ground. Here I live from my own as God lives from His own.”⁵¹³

Quint, just like Lipsett, highlights the important role of detachment and additionally mentions the importance of ‘*Weiselosigkeit*’ in this context. He subsequently explains that it is exactly out of detachment, the immediacy of the Birth of God in the Soul – the Ground of the Soul – that the Holy Ghost emerges. Moreover, Quint also explains that the Ground of the Soul equates with the “onfold One” (*einfaltigen Ein*), with the Godhead, which points out to Eckhart’s mystical interpretation of the Trinity once more. In more detail Quint shows that in such an encounter of the Divine with the soul, the Godhead that unfolds in the soul becomes the ‘Son’, and blooms into creation as the Holy Ghost, being (re)connected with the Divine (Father). The precondition is, following Quint – and here Eckhart’s neoplatonic way of thinking becomes obvious – a rise of the soul to become one with the Divine. Through this rise, according to Quint, the soul overcomes its categorial determinations in space and time, as well as the Divine overcomes its transcendental determinations in terms of truth, goodness and justice. In short: the soul and the Divine become one with the unnamed Godhead.⁵¹⁴ Quint therefore concludes that detachment is the common ‘place’ of the Divine and the human, and from out of which the human can work and act immediately out of the divine ground.⁵¹⁵ He finally concludes and affirms that the union (*Einung/ unio*) in Christ occurs in the Ground of the Soul.⁵¹⁶

⁵⁰⁹ Compare Ibid., 158f.

⁵¹⁰ Walshe, Sr. 1, 3.

⁵¹¹ Compare Lipsett, *Wege zur Transzendenzerfahrung*, 159. See also Walshe, Sr. 2, 41f.

⁵¹² Compare Ibid., 161. See also Walshe, Sr. 1, 34. See also Teresa’s exhaustive and meticulous works on Mental Prayer and its several stages, especially in her *Vida* and *The Interior Castle*.

⁵¹³ Walshe, Sr. 13b, 109/ DKV I, Pr. 5B, 70/ DW 1, 90 (450):”Hie ist gotes grunt mîn grunt und mîn grunt gotes grunt. Hie lebe ich ûzer mînem eigen, als got lebet ûzer sînem eigen.“

⁵¹⁴ See also Quint in DKV I, *Stellenkommentar*, 803.

⁵¹⁵ See also Ibid., 805.

⁵¹⁶ See Ibid., 807.

And indeed, all these elaborations show that Eckhart, as McGinn precisely stresses, “does not qualify the *gruntlos grunt* as either God’s or the soul’s. It is both.”⁵¹⁷ In this context Eckhart additionally highlights the importance of the “present now” (*Nu*), and that only in the moment when all multiplicity is left behind, the soul returns entirely to the Divine in unity.⁵¹⁸ This is the premise of the Ground of the Soul, and Eckhart underlines that “in *this* part the soul is the same as God and not otherwise.”⁵¹⁹ It is exactly in that Now in which human and divine being are the same. In that moment, in the depth of the Ground of the Soul, the human and the Divine are the same, and therefore human and divine being and life fall together into one: “[...] – one life and one being.”⁵²⁰

Such an attitude requires an openness towards differences in people’s lives. In this respect Quint explains, that for Eckhart it is possible to embrace the plurality of ways of living, because Eckhart remarkably insists that there is no specific way of life to receive the gift of entering into the Ground of the Soul. Interestingly, despite being a theologian, priest and leading a monastic life, Eckhart repeatedly considers the inner spiritual journey to be genuine to each individual being, and that it cannot be determined externally.⁵²¹ This is an aspect which, in my view, is important regarding the understanding of identity and the self, including gender and gender identity, as will become clearer later. At another point Quint, by relating to one of Eckhart’s statements on incarnation, explains that this notion is possible because Eckhart thinks that the Divine does not take on the individuality of a human person, but human nature in general. In this regard Hollywood, additionally emphasises the importance of detachment:

“Eckhart is not simply conflating the human and the divine, as many of his critics certainly believed to be the case, for only when the soul becomes nothing and gives up her will and creatureliness is she transformed into equality and oneness with the godhead. Only when she has become detached from all will and images is she assumed into a univocal relationship with God and united with him without distinction.”⁵²²

⁵¹⁷ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 44.

⁵¹⁸ See also Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 51, 271/ DKV I, Pr. 15, 174.

⁵¹⁹ Walshe, Sr. 8, 81/ DKV I Pr. 2, 36/ DW 1, 44 (438): “Mit dem teile ist diu sêle gote glîch und anders niht.“

⁵²⁰ Walshe, Sr. 51, 271/ DKV I, Pr. 15, 174/ DW 1, 246 (489): “[...]: ain leben vnd ain wesen.“

⁵²¹ See also Quint on Pr. 4 in: DKV I, 781.

⁵²² Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 149.

Quint explains that, consequently, for Eckhart to follow Christ one must strive to detach from all individuality and from all differentiation to finally become one with the Divine.⁵²³ McGinn explains this as follows:

“For the Dominican, [...], the goal of the Christian life was union of identity or of indistinction (*unitas indistinctionis*) in which there was no difference at all between God and human: “God’s ground and the soul’s ground is one ground.”⁵²⁴

This identity with the Divine, as McGinn interprets, can be regarded as a fused identity.⁵²⁵

4.3.2 Fused and Dynamic Identity

It is particularly in his vernacular sermons that Eckhart emphasises the union between the Divine and the human by using the term ‘grunt’. This also goes for Eckhart’s Latin works though, in which Eckhart uses the term *unum* to name the union.⁵²⁶ Referring to these terms McGinn introduces the term of ‘fused identity’ to describe the union with the Divine, and he explains that “in such passages, *unum*, like *grunt*, is employed to express *both* the divine and the human poles of fused identity.”⁵²⁷ For this reason, the grounding of the soul and the grounding of the Divine are not separate realities, it is not a question of either/ or, and McGinn emphasises that “it is not because *either* the soul is grounded in its essential reality, *or* God in his, but because they are *both grounded in the same ground* in a fused identity [...]”⁵²⁸

Moreover McGinn highlights that Eckhart does not only consider this to be a fused identity, but also to be dynamic.⁵²⁹ According to McGinn this becomes apparent in the way Eckhart uses language and he explains that “identity without distinction is a paradoxical notion, and Eckhart delights in creating seeming contradictions, oxymora, and other forms of wordplay in speaking of the ground.”⁵³⁰ This can cause confusion, but is intentional as McGinn further explains:

⁵²³ See also Quint *Stellenkommentar* on Pr. 46 in DKV I, 1031; see also Walshe in: Walshe, Sr. 47, 257, fn.2.

⁵²⁴ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 47, referring to Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 51, 273/ DKV I, Pr. 15, 180/ DW 1, 253 (490): “»[...] du bist der verborgen got« in dem grund der sele, da gottes grund vnd der sele grund ain grund ist.“. See also Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 13b, 109/ DKV I, Pr. 5B, 70/ DW 1, 90 (450): “Hie ist gotes grunt mîn grunt und mîn grunt gote grunt.“.

⁵²⁵ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 43.

⁵²⁶ Compare *Ibid.*, 42f.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 45. McGinn here refers to Michael Sells, see *Ibid.*, 206, fn. 66 fn.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

“[...] the opportunity for word games that are meant to be both playful and serious insofar as they ‘play’ a role in the practice of deconstructing the self and freeing it from all that pertains to the created world. Identity in the ground is a “wandering and ‘playful’ identity in the sense that we are often unsure whether the language used is meant to refer to God, or to the soul, or to both – or maybe even to neither, at least insofar as we understand them. This is exactly what Eckhart had in mind.”⁵³¹

Therefore, the inner of the soul, the oneness with the Divine, is not meant to lead to a fixed, once and for all state of being. Being identical with the Divine in the deepest ground of the soul means a dynamic, creative, and active way of being as McGinn further elaborates:

“This identity is a dynamic identity. *Grunt*, therefore, should be understood not as a state or condition, but as the activity of grounding – the event or action of being in a fused relation.”⁵³²

This intrinsic idea of mutual relation and of vitality takes me back once more to the introductory paragraph of this chapter. I associate this with another statement of Eckhart on life in relation to oneself as he repeats his question on “What is life?” and he concludes that “God’s being is my life. If my life is God’s being, then God’s essence must be my essence, and God’s self-identity my self-identity, neither more nor less.”⁵³³ Hollywood consequently spells out what this means for the finite being:

“Through this process the created world is sanctified, not in some future time, but in the eternal and always occurring *now* of the birth of the Son. Through this eternal rebirth, time is transcended *and* sanctified.”⁵³⁴

Being grounded in this innermost level of being, as Hollywood observes, makes it potentially possible to overcome boundaries:

“For Eckhart, insofar as one recognizes the equality of all things, an equality grounded in the absolute immanence of the divine that is the source of its

⁵³¹ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 49.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵³³ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 65, 330/ DKV I, Pr. 6, 80/ DW 1, 106 (453): “Waz ist leben? Gotes wesen ist mîn leben. Ist mîn leben gotes wesen, sô muoz daz gotes sîn mîn sîn und gotes isticheit mîn isticheit, noch minner noch mêr.“

⁵³⁴ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 199.

transcendence, imagination becomes transfiguration and the limitations of being are overcome.”⁵³⁵

Reconnecting these thoughts to the notion of the Ground of the Soul, the particularity of Eckhart’s understanding of identity becomes apparent: through this kind of identity, an identity that is grounded in the Birth of God in the Soul and out of Divine’s grace, the soul becomes “God-conformed” (*gottförmig*).⁵³⁶ What does this mean in terms of embodiment?

4.3.3 Body and Soul

All this, following Eckhart, does not happen outside of the body in a separate spiritual or otherworldly place. In contrary, the precondition to gain knowledge of spiritual processes is to understand that all three dimensions of the human being are indissolubly intertwined. Eckhart does not regard the previously elaborated processes around the Birth of God in the Soul as remaining limited to the spiritual realm, as Hollywood’s analyses of Eckhart’s discussions of justice as well as detachment show. In relation to justice, for instance, Hollywood stresses that “most important, it cannot even be argued that Eckhart saw a disjunction between embodiment and justice, for it is precisely by *embodying* Christ on earth that the work is performed.”⁵³⁷ And as detachment is the precondition for the Birth of God in the Soul to be potentially possible to happen, detachment plays a crucial role in this context too. Through detachment even the body becomes transformed and divine, as Hollywood states:

“Once this movement of detachment has been made by the will, however, creatureliness or corporality is itself transformed and recognized as sharing in the being of the divinity.”⁵³⁸

Therefore, detachment leads to a perception of the relationship of body and soul which seems in opposition to notions often assumed in a Christian context. Hollywood explains that according to Eckhart the “body is fully available to the soul and worthy of attention”, and detachment “is not depicted as a struggle between the body and the soul or the body and the will.”⁵³⁹ The Birth of God in the Soul, therefore, not only has a fundamental impact on the

⁵³⁵ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 199.

⁵³⁶ Walshe, Sr. 62, 316/ DKV II, Pr. 82, 186.

⁵³⁷ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 198.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 187f.

relationship between the human and the Divine, but also on the relationship between body and soul. Hollywood underlines that “by focusing on the relation between the created and the creator, Eckhart displaces the dualism between body and soul.”⁵⁴⁰ And indeed, Eckhart throughout his sermons mentions various deductions from his understanding of the relation between body and soul. For instance, he explains that because of the union of body and soul, the soul is as present in every single part of the body as it is in the body as a whole and he explains that “because of the close union that the soul has with the body, the soul is in the least member as perfectly as in the entire body.”⁵⁴¹ Particularly the latter statement reveals Eckhart’s holistic comprehension of the human being. In various sermons he states clearly that he considers the human being to consist of both, body and soul in a non-competitive, non-hierarchical way, as I will explain in more detail in Chapter Six.

Moreover, body and soul seem to operate together in terms of a spiritual integration of disparate experiences in life. Eckhart claims that the soul does not need to be separated and leave the body behind:

“The soul is purified in the body so that she may collect what is scattered and dispersed. When that which the five senses have dispersed comes back into the soul, she has a power in which it all becomes one.”⁵⁴²

Summarizing, by quoting Hollywood again, it finally can be said that “the body and its sensations cannot be destroyed; rather the attitude of the soul toward these created things must be transformed through loss of self-will and detachment.”⁵⁴³ Therefore “a new relationship to corporality (as well as to time and multiplicity) is made possible.”⁵⁴⁴ Altogether, once again Eckhart’s theology reveals how exceptional it is through the notion of the Ground of the Soul, which, as Hollywood finds too, sanctifies the created world, not only the soul, but even the body. She states that “Eckhart through his dialectic of immanence and

⁵⁴⁰ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 187.

⁵⁴¹ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 23, 157/ DKV I, Pr. 47, 502/ DW 2, 407 (711): “[...]: durch die grôzen einunge, die diu sêle ze dem lîbe hât, sô ist diu sêle in dem minsten glide als volkomenlîche als in dem lîbe alzemâlê.”

⁵⁴² Walshe, Sr. 82, 405/ DKV I, Pr. 8, 102/ DW 1, 136 (461): “Diu sêle wirt geliutert in dem lîchnamen dar umbe, daz si samene, daz zerspreitet ist und ûzgetragen. Waz die vûnf sinne ûztragent, als daz wider înkumet in die sêle, sô hât si eine kraft, dâ wirte z allez ein.“. Eckhart with this statement also indicates to the relation of this process to the spiritual practice of contemplation as ‘purification’ is a technical term within the tradition of contemplation. See also Quint on Pr. 9 in: DKV I, 834.

⁵⁴³ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 168.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

transcendence, attempts to achieve both the soul's freedom and the body's sanctification."⁵⁴⁵
What does this imply in terms of gender and gender identity?

4.3.4 Gender Fluidity

By deconstructing the duality between human and Divine as well as between body and soul, Eckhart additionally makes another important shift regarding gender. Hollywood points out to this shift and states:

“[...], Eckhart avoids the traditional identification of the body as feminine and of women with the body. Where such traditional imagery plays a role in his sermons, Eckhart almost immediately undermines this gender ideology.”⁵⁴⁶

She also describes that Eckhart does not refer to bridal or heterosexual love images, rather that “his language for the soul is consistently feminized even in and through her divinization”.⁵⁴⁷ Hollywood therefore precisely describes the turn in Eckhart's teaching on the Birth of God in the Soul: the initial importance of the Father and the Son, which then transitions into the notion of the neutral divine ground and the soul as the divine mother of the Divine. Hollywood furthermore diagnoses that Eckhart downplays the Divine as feminine love, and therefore highlights the superiority of the feminine soul in the process of the Birth of God in the Soul.⁵⁴⁸ In this context, Sells makes an additional important distinction:

“Eckhart's language at times seems to dwell repetitively on the “fatherly heart.” A central danger in Eckhart's birth imagery would be that it represents yet another appropriation by the male power (in this case the deity) of female power and creativity. However, the birth imagery occurs when and only when the univocal maleness of the deity is most radically undone.”⁵⁴⁹

Sells thereupon far-sightedly adds that “birthing becomes the central event in divine and cosmic history.”⁵⁵⁰ Additionally, Eckhart's essential teaching on being a virgin wife reverses the traditional understandings of gender, of being a virgin, of being a wife and of what it means to be wedded or not. And I agree with Hollywood that his unique interpretations altogether

⁵⁴⁵ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 200.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵⁴⁸ See also *Ibid.*, 127 & 152.

⁵⁴⁹ Sells, *Mystical Languages*, 198.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

bring “female imagery to the center of Eckhart’s mystical thought.”⁵⁵¹ Even more so when also considering his use of the account on Mary and Martha. All these images stand for spiritual processes or states and Eckhart does not mention once that one of them should only apply to either men or women only. But like Sells I also want to acknowledge the neutrality of the divine ground which will become more obvious later when Eckhart’s comprehension of the Divine being existence will be discussed.

The idea that any creature is unified in the Divine and the Divine is unified with all its creatures, consequently, leads to a fundamental change of perception of being, life, creation, nature and human existence.⁵⁵² Being unified in mutual participation integrates every kind of being, no matter how opposite it may seem. And Eckhart himself goes as far to say that the unified soul enters a being in which even opposites do not exist anymore, and he questions: “What are the opposites? Joy and sorrow, white and black are opposites, and they cannot subsist in being.”⁵⁵³ If in the Ground of the Soul such opposites do not subsist, other opposites I suppose, such as male and female, for instance, cannot subsist either. And indeed, Eckhart says that through the boundless love which arises from the Birth of God in the Soul, differences for the unified soul do not endure: “A woman and a man are unlike, but in love they are alike.”⁵⁵⁴ Quint, referring to this quote, explains that the love which ensues from the equality with the Divine in the Ground of the Soul, is a crucial precondition for this kind of likeness. In that moment, men and women still are different as a person, but they are alike in terms of their nature.⁵⁵⁵ It is in the spiritual state of the Ground of the Soul in which the soul unfolds its ability to “collect what is scattered and dispersed”.⁵⁵⁶ McGinn describes this as follows:

“This new mode of supernatural operation removes all conflict between images and quiet silence. When God acts in the place of the agent intellect, “he engenders many images together in one point” [...].”⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵¹ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 201.

⁵⁵² In this context Quint explains that Eckhart’s conception of the Eternal Birth connects creation, incarnation and eschatology into the perspective of the unification, based on the Eternal Birth as its common denominator, see also Quint on Pr. 22 in: DKV I, 936.

⁵⁵³ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 82, 405/ DKV I, Pr. 8, 102/ DW 1, 136 (461): “Waz ist widersatzunge? Liep und leit, wîz und swarz daz hât widersatzunge, und diu enblibet in wesene niht.“.

⁵⁵⁴ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 12, 101/ DKV I, Pr. 27, 308/ DW 2, 48 (646): “Ein vrouwe und ein man diu sint einander gar unglîch; aber in der minne sint sie gar glîch.“.

⁵⁵⁵ Compare Quint on Pr. 6 in: DKV I, 81 ff.

⁵⁵⁶ See also Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 82, 405/ DKV I, Pr. 8, 102.

⁵⁵⁷ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 67.

Hollywood, too, discusses these moments when apparent contradictions paradoxically are being brought together by Eckhart in his sermons and argues:

“This incongruity, however, is only a problem for Aristotelian logic, grounded in the rule of noncontradiction, and not for the mystical or “dialectical” logic of the sermon. The contradiction creates an aporia, a breakdown of logical categories and human reason, and provides a glimpse into the mystery of nondualistic reality which Eckhart is trying to engender.”⁵⁵⁸

Of course, without doubt, differences and opposites do exist in the world, and especially binary or non-binary views on gender are currently controversially discussed. But whatever appears binary or opposing in the outer world, becomes one in the depth of the Ground of the Soul.

Taking these latter thoughts and the explanations on the fused and dynamic identity into account, I infer that if God’s self-identity is a dynamic identity, then human self-identity must be dynamic too, and not a set and static state of being. Considering the notion of gender identity, which sometimes is being regarded as a (pre)determined, unchangeable and lifelong manifestation of God’s plan and will, I share Sells’ conclusion that “[...], Porete and Eckhart unsay both medieval and modern gender essentialisms [...]”⁵⁵⁹

Is it then possible to think that Eckhart’s notion of the human and the Divine as not being separated could be true? And is it possible to assume that McGinn’s, Hollywood’s and Sells’ interpretations of this nondualistic reality are plausible? If so, the Birth of God in the Soul and the Ground in the Soul depict a process and power of integration and transformation through which whatever appears binary or opposing in the outer world, is and becomes one in the inner world. According to Eckhart’s mutual relationship of the inner and outer man as well as of body and soul, this would mean that the Ground of the Soul would also have an impact on one’s perception and comprehension of the outer life, including one’s identity, one’s gender identity and altogether what generally is called one’s ‘self’.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁸ Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 153.

⁵⁵⁹ Sells, *Mystical Languages*, 195.

⁵⁶⁰ On the relationship of outer and inner man compare Walshe, *On Detachment*, 570f./ DKV II, 449.

5 Paul Tillich and Judith Butler: Living out of Different Selves

5.1 Introduction: Existence is God

Teresa of Ávila and Meister Eckhart both insist that the Innermost Centre of the Soul or the Ground of the Soul are an essential part of every human's being. There is a 'place' in the innermost depth of the soul as well as a transformative process which can receive the divine gift of unification and leads to a permanent change of consciousness. Williams identifies such a spiritual journey as "the hardest thing any human could presume to undertake".⁵⁶¹ It is indeed not an easy path and needs effort, and 'determined determination' as Teresa names it, but it is yet open to everyone who chooses to follow this inward journey. I find that William's statement implies the existential urgency of a spiritual life though. This underlying existential grounding of mystical theology also becomes apparent in Teresa's confrontation with suffering and the threat of death, particularly described in the fifth and *Sixth Mansions*, and in Eckhart's metaphor of birth and the repetitive connection of his thoughts to questions of a vital life.

Nevertheless, mystical theology, which takes the oneness of the Divine with human existence so radically seriously, can appear as a rather abstract concept. Moreover, Teresa's and Eckhart's writings, language and images admittedly are antiquated – and therefore also gendered, patriarchal and heteronormative. In this respect, mystical theology can not only appear abstract, but also outdated. Considering this, the question arises, how the relationship between the Innermost Centre or Ground of the Soul and the outer materialised embodied world, hence the nondualistic view of the Divine, can be expressed in more modern terms. Terms that are more secular and less gendered and therefore could function as a 'translation' or 'bridge' and reveal that ancient wisdom does contain knowledge that can still hold relevance today and allows new ways of thinking – including contemporary views and questions on gender – whilst staying connected with one's individual cultural roots.

A mode of expression regarding Mystical Theology can be found in the terminology of the existentialist Protestant theologian Paul Tillich. I find that Tillich offers options to express essential features of religious thought not only in a religious but also in a secular

⁵⁶¹ Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, 161.

language which by many might be considered to be more adequate today. Terms such as 'being', 'being-itself' or 'power of being' might be more acceptable than ecclesiastical terms such as Holy Ghost or Trinity. He uses these rather secular words to talk about theological respectively religious content and his descriptions are therefore not crucially connected to a certain religious tradition or institution, in contrast to Eckhart's and Teresa's writings which are generally embedded in Roman Catholicism. Although terms such as the Innermost Centre of the Soul or the Ground of the Soul might be easily acceptable for some people, others might find them too religious, too spiritual or too cheesy and would prefer Tillich's existentialist way of expression. Tillich's language, hence, could help in two ways: first, it might be more tolerable for people who are either detached from any religious background or – as it can be the case for queer people – *want* to detach from religious institutions and language because of having made traumatic experiences in churches or other spiritual communities. Second, a more secular terminology can help to speak and share spiritual experiences even outside of spiritual communities and enhance conversation and dialogue between communities of different faiths but also between the religious and secular realm. Conversation on essential aspects of life can be shared between religious and secular people and would help mutual understanding and discourses on values and ethics. I believe that Tillich implicitly describes similar processes as Eckhart and Teresa do, and by doing so he (just as Eckhart) succeeds to reveal that it is being-itself that gives life to all creatures, and that it is shared by all creatures equally: being is universal. And such an expression of universality can be understood by religious and secular people likewise. Furthermore, his way of expression additionally emphasizes what Eckhart and Teresa also taught through her works as well as through their lives: leading a spiritual life means to lead a life out of a profound relationship to the divine or being-itself, respectively. Such a life is not a certain way of life, as Eckhart repeatedly highlights, but an essential way of being. It is exactly this way of being rather than membership that constitutes relationality and universal and global community with all creatures.

As it shows, Tillich's elaborations echo Eckhart's teaching even though he does not directly refer to Eckhart. Indeed, Dourley confirms that "[...] Tillich approaches, if he does not repeat, Eckhart's famous affirmation that God and the human see each other through the same eye."⁵⁶² Dourley finds that Tillich mainly argues against religious and biblical personalism and "that Tillich's case against theism is most radical and drives to the God

⁵⁶² John Dourley, "Tillich's Appropriation of Meister Eckhart-an Appreciative Critique." *Correlatio* 4, no. 7 (2005), 19.

beyond the God of theism.”⁵⁶³ Similar to my own reading of Eckhart and Tillich, Dourley realizes parallels between their theologies and finds crucial features they share, such as “[...] Eckhart’s universalism based on humanity’s native divinity and the subordination of his Christology to the religious anthropology this universalism implies.”⁵⁶⁴ Therefore Dourley confirms that “[...], Tillich rightly understands Eckhart simply to remove “... the difference between the sacred and the secular worlds.”⁵⁶⁵

Another theologian who identifies similarities between Tillich and Eckhart is John J. Thatamanil. In his comparative work on Sankara and Tillich, he diagnoses:

“To read Tillich is to hear again in modern idiom the voices of Meister Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa, and the many other Christian thinkers who kept alive a radical sense of divine presence. As a result of Tillich’s extended engagement with mystical thought, his theology offers one of the most robust accounts of divine immanence available in twentieth-century Protestant theology.”⁵⁶⁶

In his work Thatamanil wonders if a Christian nondualism is possible and finds a “partial”, but “decisive” answer in Tillich’s “antidualistic rejection of supranaturalism”. In Thatamanil’s view Tillich contradicts accounts which “depict God as a supranatural deity who inhabits another world and only subsequently enters into the human world by supranatural means in a singular, exceptional, and once-for-all moment of radical immanence.”⁵⁶⁷ According to Thatamanil Tillich “suggests the possibility of a different kind of immanence than that offered by Sankara, an immanence that also might be called nondual.”⁵⁶⁸ In this context Thatamanil is concerned with how the distance of the Divine and the human can be transcended, and he hypothesises that “in Tillich’s theology of Spirit, God comes to human beings when they are grasped by the power of being-itself and driven beyond themselves into ecstatic union with the divine life.”⁵⁶⁹ Overall, Thatamanil concludes though that “as central as these transformative experiences are in Tillich’s religious imagination, he understood them to be

⁵⁶³ Dourley, “Tillich’s Appropriation of Meister Eckhart”, 20.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁶⁶ Thatamanil, *The Immanent Divine*, 9.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 11.

episodic and impermanent.”⁵⁷⁰ I find this statement needs differentiation and it is at this point that Eckhart’s, Teresa’s and Tillich’s accounts come together.

As we have seen, Eckhart’s and Teresa’s theological accounts explain and describe in manifold ways the relationship between the creative power and creation. Descriptions that reveal a conception of the Divine and creation which does not regard these two dimensions as being separate. Both authors describe that it is potentially possible (although not easy) to gain an awareness of this oneness through spiritual processes which can be initiated by spiritual practises such as contemplation. In contrast to Eckhart, it is particularly Teresa’s account that entails detailed instructions of the practice of contemplation and descriptions of mystical experiences. For this reason, among others, I considered it to be essential to include Teresa’s work in my analysis, especially as the aspect of ‘spiritual experience’ is an aspect Tillich does not refer to either and to which I will come back to later. It is therefore important, to understand these three accounts in relation to each other. What is furthermore fundamental in all three accounts is the notion that the process of gaining awareness of the transcendent and immanent realm being one, is the ‘moment’ the human being gains an in depth awareness of itself: of its being as a self, being endowed by some unfathomable power by being-itself which expresses itself through concretely lived and embodied being which desires to be and – ideally – feels vital. Hence, creative power and creation being one, of course, is permanent, only the moments or phases of the human perceiving this oneness do not last. However, these experiences have life changing consequences because even though they do not last, the perceived knowledge of the Divine’s presence and reality remains conscious and cannot be forgotten or suppressed any longer, which can have a transformational impact on one’s life. The *Frankfurt School of Contemplation* in this respect distinguishes between different level of depths of experiences of transcendence.⁵⁷¹ All three accounts, therefore, offer conceptions – developed at different times using different images – to comprehend the moment of understanding oneself as a subject/ as a person, to understand one’s existence. Obviously, I am here already drawing on Tillich’s terminology which I am going to outline in detail in this chapter. Firstly though, before moving on to Tillich’s theology and the essential term of the Innermost Self, I will discuss Eckhart’s *Prologus Generalis* to clarify that Eckhart’s notion of “God is existence”

⁵⁷⁰ Thatamanil, *The Immanent Divine*, 198.

⁵⁷¹ See Lipsett, Peter R. *Wege zur Transzendenzfahrtung*. Schriften Zur Kontemplation. Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1992, pp.22.

and Tillich's conception around 'being-itself' and 'self-being' overlap.⁵⁷² In this respect, Dobie's analysis of *Meister Eckhart's "Ontological Philosophy of Religion"* offers an introductory exploration of the connections between the Divine and being as well as between Tillich and Eckhart.

5.1.1 Prologus Generalis

Regarding Eckhart's Latin work *Prologus Generalis* in *Opus Tripartitum*, Dobie emphasises that "[...], Eckhart reaches the heart of his mystical philosophy: that existence itself can be nothing other than God."⁵⁷³ And indeed, in this text Eckhart leaves no room for doubt that he considers God to be existence. He discusses this in detail and deduces that "Existence is God."⁵⁷⁴ This to him is also a proof of the Divine's being: "Now existence is God. Therefore it is true that God exists."⁵⁷⁵ Existence, from Eckhart's point of view, is the Divine's essence which give's being to all things: "Existence is the very essence of God. So all things receive existence from him and from him alone."⁵⁷⁶ In the sermons, yet again and following Dobie, the "[...] metaphysics of the *Opus tripartitum* finds its experiential basis and completion in the soul's own inner experience of God's "is-ness", or *istichheit*, as the primal identity that is the *prius* of the separation of subject and object."⁵⁷⁷ Eckhart summarizes this notion in Sermon 49 and relates it to the "I":

"[...] where the text says, "I" that means in the first place God's self-identity, the fact that God alone is, for all things are in God and from Him, since outside of Him and without Him nothing truly is: [...]. Therefore what they are in truth they are in God, and thus God alone is in truth. And therefore the word "I" means the

⁵⁷² Here I must point out though that in Tillich's terminology the term of 'existence' stands for the concretely embodied being which Eckhart would name as 'being'. Existence in Eckhart's terminology would rather stand for 'being-itself'. In German versions of the *Prologus* this becomes clearer as it says "Gott ist Sein", which, as Eckhart later explains, means "das Sein-Selbst".

⁵⁷³ Robert Dobie, "Meister Eckhart's" *Ontological Philosophy of Religion*." *The Journal of religion* 82, no. 4 (2002), 571.

⁵⁷⁴ Master Eckhart. *Parisian Questions and Prologues*. Translated by Armand A. Maurer, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974), 85/ DKV II, *Prologus Generalis*, 472: "Esse est deus".

⁵⁷⁵ Master Eckhart. *Parisian Questions and Prologues*: 87/ DKV II, *Prologus Generalis*, 474: "Sed esse est deus. Igitur verum est deum esse."

⁵⁷⁶ Master Eckhart. *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 91/ DKV II, *Prologus Generalis*, 482: "Esses est deus per essentiam. Ab ipso ergo et solo ipso accipiunt esse omnia."

⁵⁷⁷ Dobie, "Meister Eckhart's" *Ontological Philosophy of Religion*", 566.

self-identity of divine truth, for it is the proof of one is [Bezeugung eines Seienden].”⁵⁷⁸

And he continues:

“For goodness and wisdom and whatever may be attributed to God are all admixtures to God’s naked essence: for all admixture causes alienation from essence. And so the word ‘I’ denotes God’s purity of essence, which is bare in itself, free of alien elements that make it strange and distant.”⁵⁷⁹

Therefore, Dobie considers it to be a “sin” to comprehend the Divine’s qualities in the same way as human qualities.⁵⁸⁰ And he rightly derives the conclusion that “[...] to know God all we have to do is look into ourselves and more fully exist”⁵⁸¹, which resonates with Teresa’s appeal that in order to find the Divine: “[...] we need not go to Heaven, nor any farther than to our own selves, [...]”⁵⁸² Dobie continues to explain that therefore the Divine “[...] is the basis of any truly authentic, concrete existence that lives and acts not out of some particular nature or existent but out of existence itself in practical freedom.”⁵⁸³ Dobie also identifies that reflection alone cannot lead to such a knowledge of God and he indicates the importance of experience and the innermost ground which he describes as “[...]the primal “is-ness” that is both manifest in all things and, at the same time, hidden in them.”⁵⁸⁴ Dobie consequently concludes that “this means that even God must cease being a god, that is, a “this, [...]”⁵⁸⁵ and indicates fundamental aspects in Eckhart’s teaching: detachment, Birth of God in the Soul, experience and innermost existence:

“[God] must divest God’s self of all God’s properties (*eigenschaften*) as a “this” and unite God’s self to me and my “is-ness” if God is truly and really to be God

⁵⁷⁸ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 49, 263/ DKV II, Pr. 77, 140f. / DW 3, 339 (567): “[...] daz diu geschrift *saget* »ich«, meinet des êrsten gotes ichticheit, daz got alein *ist*; wan alliu dinc *sint* in gote und von im, wan ûzwendic im und âne in *enist* niht in der wâhrheit: [...] Dar umbe: waz sie sint in der wâhrheit, daz sint sie in gote, und dar umbe *ist* got aleine in der wâhrheit. Und alsô meinet daz wort „ich“ die isticheit götlicher wâhrheit, wan ez ist ein beweisunge eines »istes«.” Walshe at this point in his footnote (Walshe, p. 263, fn. 9) notes that “newer research indicates that *istikeit* is better translated as ‘self-identity’ and is derived from *istic*.”

⁵⁷⁹ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 49, 264/ DKV II, Pr. 77, 143 / DW 3, 341 (567f.): “Wan güete und wîsheit und swaz man von gote sprechen mac. Daz ist allez mitewesen gotes blôzen wesens; wan alliu mitewesen machet ein vremde von dem wesene. Und alsô meinet daz wort »ich« gotes lûterkeit des wesens, daz dâ ist in im selben blôz âne alliu mitewesen, diu vremde und verre machent.“

⁵⁸⁰ Compare Dobie, 2002: 582.

⁵⁸¹ Dobie, "Meister Eckhart's" Ontological Philosophy of Religion", 581.

⁵⁸² Teresa, *Vida XL*, 293/ *Obras Completas*, 417: "y no es menester ir al cielo, ni mas lejos, que a nosotros mesmos, [...]."

⁵⁸³ Dobie, "Meister Eckhart's" Ontological Philosophy of Religion", 582.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 582.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 583.

and know God's self as God just as much as I must divest myself of all creatureliness and unite myself to God's "is-ness" if I am to know and experience God as my innermost existence."⁵⁸⁶

And Dobie expresses exactly the claim I am attempting to make:

"God is no stranger to us because our very "is-ness" is God's "is-ness" – human nature in its purity is nothing other than the divine nature itself. For existence or "is-ness" is God; and to the degree that we live out of our own "is-ness," we live out of God's "is-ness."⁵⁸⁷

Dobie reports that "Tillich sees this approach used with greatest vigor and clarity in the thought of Meister Eckhart, [...]"⁵⁸⁸ but yet does not expand on the reasons and ways that make Eckhart's mystical theology so persuasive. Therefore, in the following section, I want to examine Tillich's way of expression as developed in *The Courage To Be* and explain its interconnection with Eckhart's terminology and notions. By doing so I am going to focus on Tillich's ontological thought and the term of the 'Innermost Self' as explained in his book *The Courage To Be*, which depicts a kind of condensation of his thinking on the Divine and being.

5.2 Paul Tillich: The Innermost Self

Tillich's work *Courage To Be*, which was first published in 1952, begins with a broad account of history of philosophy around the term 'courage' and outlines Tillich's understanding of its relation to 'being'. Subsequently he explains the meaning of 'nonbeing', and by referring to different historical eras, he introduces three types of threat emerging out of the fear of nonbeing:

"Nonbeing threatens man's ontic self-affirmation, relatively in terms of fate, absolutely in terms of death. It threatens man's spiritual self-affirmation, relatively in terms of emptiness, absolutely in terms of meaninglessness. It threatens man's moral self-affirmation, relatively in terms of guilt, absolutely in terms of condemnation."⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁶ Dobie, "Meister Eckhart's" Ontological Philosophy of Religion", 583.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 584.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 564.

⁵⁸⁹ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014), 39.

He describes this diagnosis as a “threefold threat” and regards anxiety as the awareness of it. According to this he deducts three types of anxiety: the anxiety of fate and death, the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness, and the anxiety of guilt and condemnation. Tillich notes that “the anxiety of the one type is immanent in the anxieties of the other types.”⁵⁹⁰ He regards them crucially connected to life, and he states that “in all three forms anxiety is existential in the sense that it belongs to existence as such [...]”⁵⁹¹ In my view, this also means that these anxieties cannot only be identified as general or communal fears of humankind over time and history, but also as internal in the psychic structure of the individual human being over its particular lifetime. Moreover, I also believe that these anxieties on a societal level might not be predominantly (or maybe rather not openly) debated anymore today but I consider them yet to be implicitly still existent and of relevance. In addition, Tillich also determines that these anxieties entail a countermovement out of which three types of courage emerge: the courage to be as a part, the courage to be as oneself and the courage to accept acceptance. As Tillich’s notion of anxiety and courage are crucial and key to his theological conclusions, I am going to explain Tillich’s conceptions which are important for my analysis along the structure of the threefold threat. Additionally, I think that this structure helps to gain an overview of the interwoven spiritual strands which Tillich describes within his explanations.

5.2.1 Essential Self – the Mystical Way and the Courage to Be as a Part

Tillich begins his explanations illustrating the anxiety of fate and death which he assigns to the era of antiquity, and it depicts, in his view, the threat of “our ontic self-affirmation” by nonbeing.⁵⁹² Tillich uses the syllable ‘ontic’ to describe this fear because it emerges out of the threat to ‘being’. Being in this context, he understands as “[...] the basic self-affirmation of a being in its simple existence”⁵⁹³, and he highlights that “[...] existentially everybody is aware of the complete loss of self which biological extinction implies.”⁵⁹⁴ One way of coping with this anxiety is, according to Tillich, the mystical way, the striving for unification with the Divine, and he by referring to Spinoza proposes that “[...] all mystics draw their power of self-affirmation from the experience of the power of being-itself (*Macht des Sein-Selbst*) with which they are united.”⁵⁹⁵ This is because, as he suggests, “[...] everything that is participates

⁵⁹⁰ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 50.

⁵⁹¹ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 39. Tillich differentiates these existential anxieties from neurotic and psychotic anxiety which he outlines in a separate chapter.

⁵⁹² Compare *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

in being-itself (*Sein-Selbst*), and everybody has some awareness of this participation, especially in the moments in which one experiences the threat of nonbeing.”⁵⁹⁶ This explanation also reveals, as Thatamanil confirms, that “[... Sankara and] Tillich characterize divinity not as an infinite being among beings but rather as being-itself, that which gives being to all beings but is not itself one of those beings.”⁵⁹⁷ This is crucial in Tillich’s thought because it is foundational for his concept and the source for the courage to be:

“If one is asked how nonbeing is related to being-itself, one can only answer metaphorically: being “embraces” itself and nonbeing. Being has nonbeing ‘within’ itself as that which is eternally present and eternally overcome in the process of the divine life. The ground of everything that is is not a dead identity without movement and becoming; it is living creativity. Creatively it affirms itself, eternally conquering its own nonbeing. As such it is the pattern of the self-affirmation of every finite being and the source of courage to be.”⁵⁹⁸

Tillich’s terminology in this context shows that at this point he regards ‘being-itself’ as the ‘ground of being’, the Divine in its unfolding as the creative Divine, therefore God-Father in Eckhart’s Christian terminology.⁵⁹⁹ Accordingly, the power of being is the power which expresses being-itself in the world and reveals the transcendent being immanent. Therefore the ‘power of being-itself’ can be equated with the Holy Spirit.

At this point it also becomes clear that being, being-itself and self are crucially interconnected, and that the ground of being is the place of the ‘essential self’ as Tillich’s statement that “[...] the ascetic and ecstatic mystic affirms his own essential being over against the elements of nonbeing which are present in the finite world, [...]” once more reveals.⁶⁰⁰ Tillich expands on this spiritual process and specifies that “[...] the individual self strives for a participation in the ground of being (*Seinsgrund*) which approaches identification.”⁶⁰¹ As the source of the courage to be here is based on a mystical process alone, Tillich categorizes the courage to be as the *mystical* courage to be. At this stage Tillich rightly remarks that “the

⁵⁹⁶ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 144.

⁵⁹⁷ Thatamanil, *The Immanent Divine*, 10.

⁵⁹⁸ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 33.

⁵⁹⁹ At this point I would like to remark though that Tillich often uses the term ‘being-itself’ in a similar way as Eckhart uses the term ‘God’: in an unspecific way which means in an overarching way and not in a differentiated way regarding a peculiar unfolding of a person of Trinity. One must take the context into account to derive which unfolding of the Trinity is meant at that particular point.

⁶⁰⁰ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 145.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

mystical courage to be lasts as long as the mystical situation.”⁶⁰² This means that the experience of unification does not last, which does not mean though that the unification as such is not permanent. Moreover, the transformation of consciousness through such experiences is enduring, as Teresa emphasises in the *Seventh Mansions*.

Lastly, it is important to also mention that the mystical courage to be is, because it is based on participation in being-itself, the ‘courage to be as a part’ of a greater whole, and therefore must be distinguished from the ‘courage to be as oneself’.⁶⁰³

5.2.2 Individual Self – Personal Encounter and the Courage to Be as Oneself

According to Tillich the courage to be as oneself is the response to the fear of guilt and condemnation, to the threat to one’s moral self-affirmation as it was predominantly experienced in medieval times.⁶⁰⁴ Tillich sees its root lying in “a profound ambiguity between good and evil” that “permeates” personal being and is again threatened by nonbeing because “nonbeing is mixed with being in his moral self-affirmation as it is in his spiritual and ontic self-affirmation. The awareness of this ambiguity is the feeling of guilt.”⁶⁰⁵ This is an important aspect as I will show later when looking at Butler’s Scenes of Address and Jacob’s Wrestling, as in both accounts the feeling of guilt plays a significant role. The desire in this realm is not the unification with the Divine and experiencing oneself as a being essentially participating in the power of being, but to be recognised and accepted as the individual self as which one exists. It is not participation, the mystical character, which is paramount here, but the personal character which thus means individualisation.⁶⁰⁶ The courage to be as oneself therefore is the courage to affirm one’s own essence, one’s ‘self-being’. Tillich eventually relates this to Martin Luther and the Reformation and points out that because of the personal character of this process the personal relationship and encounter with the Divine stand in the foreground. Therefore, Tillich here categorizes the courage to be as a courage of confidence:

“[...] – the courage of the Reformers is the beginning of the individualistic type of the courage to be as oneself. [...]. In comparison with the mystical form of

⁶⁰² Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 147.

⁶⁰³ See *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶⁰⁴ See *Ibid.*, 48 & 105f.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶⁰⁶ See *Ibid.*, 144f.

courageous self-affirmation the Protestant courage of confidence affirms the individual self as an individual self in its encounter with God as a person.”⁶⁰⁷

At this point I want to highlight the importance of the courage of confidence (*Mut des Vertrauens*) because it is, according to Tillich (and I wholeheartedly agree), “[...] in no way based on anything finite besides oneself, not even on the Church. It is based on God and solely on God, who is experienced in a unique and personal encounter.”⁶⁰⁸ This is a statement which strongly resonates with Teresa’s statements on clarity and certainty of knowledge being gifted directly from the Divine.⁶⁰⁹

All this does not stand against the mystical courage to be though. Tillich rather understands the personal approach as the flip side of the same page. Explaining this he also highlights once more the crucial interrelation of participation in the power of being – the religious experience as such – and of self-affirmation of any finite being:

“Since everything that is participates in the power of being, the element of identity on which mysticism is based cannot be absent in any religious experience. There is no self-affirmation of a finite being, and there is no courage to be in which the ground of being and its power of conquering nonbeing is not effective. And the experience of the presence of this power is the mystical element even in the person-to-person encounter with God.”⁶¹⁰

Therefore, the courage of confidence mirrors the relation between participation and individualisation as Tillich’s summary clarifies:

“The pole of individualization expresses itself in the religious experience as a personal encounter with God. And the courage derived from it is the courage of confidence in the personal reality which is manifest in the religious experience [...] a personal communion with the source of courage. Although the two types [mystical courage and courage of confidence] are in contrast they do not exclude each other. For they are united by the polar interdependence of individualization and participation.”⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁷ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 150.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 150.

⁶⁰⁹ Compare Peers, *Interior Castle*, 251 & 341.

⁶¹⁰ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 147.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 148.

The fusion of polar elements underlines Tillich's conclusion that "[...] the courage to be as oneself [...] is both affirmed and transcended."⁶¹² This assessment eventually points out to the third way of experiencing the Divine, which transcends both the mystical and the personal poles of the courage to be. This third type of courage Tillich calls the 'courage to accept acceptance' or 'courage of faith' (*Mut des Glaubens*), which leads to 'absolute faith' (*absoluter Glaube*).⁶¹³

5.2.3 Innermost Self – Absolute Faith and the Courage to Accept Acceptance

Absolute faith is based on the courage to accept acceptance (*Mut, sich zu bejahen als bejaht*) which conquers the spiritual fear of emptiness and meaninglessness, and Tillich relates it to Modernity. He considers this fear to come out of the threat to one's spiritual self-affirmation. Spiritual self-affirmation he understands to be present "[...] in every moment in which man lives creatively in the various spheres of meaning", and he furthermore explains that "creative, in this context, has the sense not of original creativity as performed by the genius but of living spontaneously, in action and reaction, with the contents of one's cultural life."⁶¹⁴ This resembles, as I find – particularly because of Tillich's emphatic descriptions – Eckhart's notion of a vital life and maybe even Teresa's image of the widened heart.⁶¹⁵ The importance of creative participation in "various spheres of meaning" becomes obvious.⁶¹⁶ I regard this to be essential for my way of thinking as well. Tillich underlines:

"Such a participation is creative insofar as it changes that in which one participates, even if in very small ways. [...]. Everyone who lives creatively in meanings affirms himself as a participant in these meanings. He affirms himself as receiving and transforming reality creatively. He loves himself as participating in the spiritual life and as loving its contents. He loves them because they are of his own fulfillment and because they are actualized through him."⁶¹⁷

⁶¹² Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 150.

⁶¹³ Compare *Ibid.*, 148 & 158f.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 43f.

⁶¹⁵ *Dilatasti cor meum*, compare Chapter 3.3.4 in this thesis.

⁶¹⁶ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 43.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

Based on these existential considerations Tillich draws a fundamental conclusion as he states that “such an experience presupposes that the spiritual life is taken seriously, that it is a matter of ultimate concern.”⁶¹⁸

At this point the crucial dynamic between different types of anxiety and different types of courage becomes apparent, and with it the connection to transcendence as Tillich states at the beginning of his final chapter: “The courage which takes this threefold anxiety into itself must be rooted in a power of being that is greater than the power of oneself and the power of one’s world.”⁶¹⁹ Following Tillich’s further explanations now the notion of ‘God above God’ – the Godhead in Eckhart’s conception – becomes vital because God above God is “the content of absolute faith [...]” and it “[...] transcends the theistic idea of God.”⁶²⁰

Tillich then goes further into detail and identifies three types of theism which all must be transcended: First, an unspecified affirmation of God which he regards as an “empty theism and “vague”.⁶²¹ Second, the divine human-encounter. In this respect Tillich explains in detail that this is the theism of the Jewish-Christian tradition that concentrates on personalistic passages of the Bible and therefore prioritises the personalistic image of the Divine and the divine-human encounter. The “word”, according to Tillich, here is understood as a “tool of creation and revelation” and entails notions such as the kingdom of God, a personal nature of human faith and divine forgiveness, a historical vision of the universe, divine purpose, an infinite distance between creator and creature, ongoing conflict between the Divine and sinful humankind, and last but not least the absolute separation between God and the world.⁶²² He concludes that “theism in this sense is the nonmystical side of biblical religion and historical Christianity.”⁶²³ The third strand of theism is a theological theism which Tillich is rather critical:

“Theism has a third meaning, a strictly theological one. [...], dependent on the religious substance which it conceptualizes. [...] a doctrine of God which transforms the person-to-person encounter with God into a doctrine about two

⁶¹⁸ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 44.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶²² See *Ibid.*, 169.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 169.

persons who may or may not meet but who have a reality independent of each other.”⁶²⁴

Tillich considers all types of theism to be “irrelevant”, “one-sided” or “wrong” and “bad theology” unless they are transcended.⁶²⁵ He determines that particularly in theological theism the Divine is seen as an entity of its own which estranges one from oneself and he formulates a critique which I share:

“He [God] is seen as a self which has a world, as an ego which is related to a thou, as a cause which is separated from its effect, as having a definite space and an endless time. He is a being, not being-itself. As such he is bound to the subject-object structure of reality, he is an object for us as subjects. At the same time we are objects for him as a subject. [...]. For God as a subject makes me into an object which is nothing more than an object. He deprives me of my subjectivity because he is all-powerful and all-knowing. [...].”⁶²⁶

Absolute faith overcomes this kind of theism and its division, and Tillich repeats its relation to the mystical and personal way of having faith and different types of courage to be:

“Theism in all its forms is transcended in the experience we have called absolute faith. [...]. It transcends both mysticism and personal encounter, as it transcends both the courage to be as a part and the courage to be as oneself.”⁶²⁷

Absolute faith therefore opposes the loss of oneself as a subject:

“Therefore our self is not lost in a larger whole, which submerges it in the life of a limited group. If the self participates in the power of being-itself it receives itself back. For the power of being acts through the power of the individual selves.”⁶²⁸

Tillich with his ontological terminology describes a dynamic of subjection in a spiritual framework which he in his other work *The Eternal Now* phrases differently:

⁶²⁴ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 169. A perspective which reminds me of Teresa’s observation of some of her “confessors” whom, as she complains, talk of the Divine as “of some person heard of long ago.” Compare Teresa in *Sixth Mansions*.

⁶²⁵ See *Ibid.*, 169f.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

“In these moments of solitude something is done to us. The center of our being, the innermost self that is the ground of our aloneness, is elevated to the divine center and taken into it. Therein can we rest without losing ourselves.”⁶²⁹

This description, I find, echoes Eckhart’s *Birth of God in the Soul*, and I therefore want to take up the term ‘Innermost Self’ and relate it to Teresa’s *Innermost Centre of the Soul* and Eckhart’s *Ground of the Soul*.

The descriptions of the internal process of unification (according to Tillich, Eckhart and Teresa) show that the term Innermost Self stands for one’s transcendent self out of which the power of being acts, in detail: out of the integration of the essential self (mystical courage to be as a part) *and* the individual self (courage of confidence to be as oneself). This depicts the union and transcending of divine and human nature, and its awareness of it which in the Christian tradition is named Christ (God-Son). Tillich in this respect points out though that within the framework of courage and transcendence this process “[...] is not a justification of one’s accidental individuality. It is not the Existentialist courage to be as oneself. It is the paradoxical act in which one is accepted by that which infinitely transcends one’s individual self.”⁶³⁰ The Innermost Self therefore reveals itself to be the actual “source of the courage to be”.⁶³¹ Accordingly Tillich summarizes:

“The courage to be which is rooted in the experience of the God above the God of theism unites and transcends the courage to be as a part and the courage to be as oneself. It avoids both the loss of oneself by participation and the loss of one’s world by individualization. The acceptance of the God above the God of theism makes us a part of that which is not also a part but is the ground of the whole.”⁶³²

In conclusion can be said that this comprehensive complex describes the Trinitarian participation of a human being in being-itself and becomes – once experienced as Teresa confirms in her *Seventh Mansions* – an irreversible state of consciousness which is grounding for a spiritual life as Tillich emphasises:

“Absolute faith, or the state of being grasped by the God beyond God, is not a state which appears beside other states of the mind. It never is something separated

⁶²⁹ Paul Tillich, *The Eternal Now*, (Scribner New York, 1963), 8.

⁶³⁰ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 152.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 172f.

and definite, an event which could be isolated and described. It is always a movement in, with, and under other states of the mind. [...]. It is not a place where one can live, it is without the safety of words and concepts, it is without a name, a church, a cult, a theology. But it is moving in the depth of all of them. It is the power of being, in which they participate and of which they are fragmentary expressions.”⁶³³

I consider Tillich’s composition of fear of non-being and courage to be, participation and acceptance, being-itself and self-being, and especially his notion of the Innermost Self to be fundamental for my understanding of the self and its constitution which I am seeking to conceptualize in a framework of mystical and existentialist theology.

Having said that, I am aware that conceptualizing a framework is a theoretical endeavour and seems far away from everyday life and lived spirituality. Yet, central to this framework is Tillich’s claim, as stated above, that the courage to be “is rooted in the experience of the God above the God”.⁶³⁴ Therefore, questions concerning spiritual experiences that have been resounding throughout all my elaborations, what exactly they are and how they can be attained, become more prevalent. Neither Eckhart nor Tillich address this issue directly though. For this reason, I regard Teresa’s accounts as indispensable because she belongs to the few authors who try to describe and categorize spiritual experiences whilst relating them to theology and doctrines of the church. Of course, this is a comprehensive question as spiritual experience is an essential feature in almost every religion all over the world and over all times. Indeed, people over hundreds of years have repeatedly reported such phenomena and the vast number and perseverance of such accounts can be taken as a testimony at least regarding their importance for humans and plausibility.⁶³⁵ Outside the official ecclesiastical canon, often orally transmitted, many reports (frequently also in form of pictures, poems or music) of great mystics – not only from the Christian tradition – exist that bear witness of experiencing the Divine. Also, secular accounts, for example reports from mountaineers or people being at sea or in the desert, but also being immersed into nature, music, arts or sex, are common.⁶³⁶ These accounts can only be taken as approaches in expressing the unspeakable and are of course subjective and personal and depend on the time

⁶³³ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 173f.

⁶³⁴ Ibid., 172f.

⁶³⁵ Lipsett, *Wege zur Transzendenzerfahrung*, 24.

⁶³⁶ This includes, for example, indications to tantric ideas and practices in Hinduism or Buddhism.

and space of the person reporting. In a general sense though, such experiences can be named as experiences of the transcendent.⁶³⁷

The difficulties which now emerge is how to categorize these accounts and how to determine their depth, and if they can be classified as spiritual/ mystical or rather as exceptional emotional states. A challenge which Teresa, particularly in her elaborations from the *Fourth Mansions* onwards has already tried to tackle – long before she could draw on psychological knowledge accessible for us today. Moreover, this question touches upon the challenge to speak about the unspeakable. According to Lipsett and the *Frankfurt School of Contemplation* it is necessary to differentiate between different layers of such experiences. Lipsett (briefly spoken) distinguishes between relative and absolute experiences of the transcendent.⁶³⁸ Tillich's utterance as well as Eckhart's notion of the Birth of God in the Soul and Teresa's notion of the *Seventh Mansions* fall into latter category. Hence, many other accounts – also secular ones – can be investigated in respect of relativity or absoluteness and often rather describe observations of the first category. Of course, in this context definitions of transcendence or metaphysical statements about spiritual experiences still cannot be made as it remains impossible to speak about them in an immediate way (a fact which particularly Teresa elaborates). There are no finalised assertions about the transcendent that can be expressed in a definite manner. What can be examined and systematically compared though are these manifold processes which mystics or others who testify such experiences describe.⁶³⁹ Moreover, these accounts also teach us something about ways to attain such experiences.⁶⁴⁰ Accordingly, the examination of experiences can only be conducted in accordance with the examination of spiritual practices and vice versa. Lipsett gives an exhaustive, detailed and systematic account of spiritual practices and their effects on the human, comparing Christian and non-Christian practices and literature.⁶⁴¹ Based on these elaborations, Lipsett and the *Frankfurt School of Contemplation* differentiates “four culture-independent principles of meditation called preparing, focusing, centering, and opening of consciousness [...]”⁶⁴² What unites these experiences and stages – as differently as they might

⁶³⁷ See Lipsett, *Wege zur Transzendenzerfahrung*.

⁶³⁸ See *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶³⁹ See *Ibid.*, 21-24

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ Lipsett systematically compares four Christian (Philokalie, Johannes Cassian/ Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, Henrich Seuse/ *The Cloud of the Unknowing* and related writings/ Teresa of Ávila, Francisco de Osuna, Ignatius von Loyola) and three Non-Christian (Yoga, Zen and Daoism) traditions.

⁶⁴² → Jürgen: Flender, Jürgen. "Getting Centered in Presence: Meditation with Gifted Students at Hansenberg Castle." *Interdisciplinary Handbook of the Person-Centered Approach: Research and Theory* (2013): 157-66. + Peter: Lipsett, Peter R. *Wege zur Transzendenzerfahrung*. Schriften Zur Kontemplation. Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1992.

be depicted in terms of language and images – is their existential quality and their transformative power on lives. What one perceives through these experiences is, religiously spoken, knowledge of the Divine or, secularly spoken, knowledge of pure being and its creative power. Other conceptions of the Divine, non-dualist and non-personal, within the terminology of Being-itself and Being then can be imagined. Such concepts then allow humans to – religiously or not – experience themselves as purely existing without and beyond any cultural norms, including gender norms, which can be received as feeling ultimately vital and interconnected, absolutely certain about one’s existence as such, and outstandingly empowered in shaping one’s individual and communal life.

Regarding Christianity though, practices of prayer dominantly have been compartmentalised between ecclesiastical liturgy and shared oral prayers in church communities or family settings, and contemplative inner prayer taking place almost exclusively in cloisters. But having, for instance, religious structures of Hinduist or Buddhist societies or some Muslim traditions in mind, it shows that to which extent contemplative practices are implemented, elaborated and taught, not only in monastic environments but also individually and within communities, and to which extent accounts and descriptions of experiences of the transcendent are being received, shared and debated, is, at the end of the day, a question of culture and choice. The institutionalised landscape of Christian religiosity and arranging communities in ecclesiastical structures do not need to be the one and only ways of living Christian faith. Indeed, a contemplative way of life means practice, commitment, change and effort, sometimes suffering, and it is not easy. A religious way of life is genuinely not an easy way of life as Teresa and Eckhart exhaustively tell us. Yet, this does not mean, as it can be learned from other cultures and religions, that such experiences with their effects are impossible.

However, these numerous manifestations in diverse cultural surroundings seem to confirm Eckhart’s and Tillich’s claim that the Divine as Being or Being-itself is entailed in everything that is. This perspective is theologically captured in the concept of panentheism. The concept of panentheism and its possible connection to gender, at this point leads me to elaborations of Elizabeth Johnson and Catherine Keller.

Similar to Tillich Johnson criticises what she calls “modern theism”, a theism which is based on a certain image of the Divine as remote and distant, and “at the summit of hierarchical power, reinforcing structures of authority in society, church, and family.”⁶⁴³ She

⁶⁴³ Johnson *Quest for the Living God*, 14.

wonders, as I often do as well, why this picturing of an “invisible, greatly powerful, grand old man in the sky” is not more seriously questioned, not even by critics of theism or religion. She explains that this narrow-minded image of a male He-God has been developed as a reaction to rational arguments during the enlightenment, and concealed the former trinitarian view which was more open to interpretation. She concludes:

“The resulting construct is known today by the shorthand term “modern theism.” In a fascinating way it compromises both the transcendence and immanence of God as honed in classical Christian theology. The Enlightenment goal of a clear and distinct idea of God, although worked for with good apologetic intent, led theology to miss the mark.”⁶⁴⁴

The endeavour in her work is to show that “God cannot be classified among other things or agents or located closer or farther away”, and she claims – as I do – that “God can also be most immanently present everywhere, within the world but not contained or confined by it, nearer to us than we are to ourselves.” And I endorse her attempt to reclaim “radical transcendence and radical immanence in equal measure”, in order to “expand divine graciousness beyond the boundaries of Christianity to include all peoples, and beyond the human race to include the whole natural world.”⁶⁴⁵

Moreover, I also agree on her view that the cause of issues around gender lies in the strict dualistic view of matter and spirit, and she consequently asks a question which I would like to pose in respect of the situation of queer people too, when she asks:” Opposed to the old dualism is a new question: What indeed is woman's nature, and, even more critically, who gets to decide?”⁶⁴⁶ In terms of a theological concept her approach results in advocating for panentheism and she makes a statement which I certainly share:

“The mystery of the living God, utterly transcendent, is also the creative power who dwells at the heart of the world sustaining every moment of its evolution. The mental model that allows for the most intelligible interpretation of this presence is panentheism (all-in-God) [...], panentheism envisions a relationship whereby everything abides in God, who in turn encompasses everything, being “above all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:6).”⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 15f.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.,16f.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 108f.

⁶⁴⁷ Johnson *Quest for the Living God*, 188.

This echoes Eckhart as well as Tillich and I can therefore easily follow her conclusion which means “[...]to envision God not at or beyond the apex of the pyramid of being as in modern theism, but within and around the emerging, struggling, living, dying, and renewing circle of life and the whole universe itself.”⁶⁴⁸

Keller too, struggles with the image, or rather with the naming of the Divine, and by referring to Meister Eckhart she indicates that she prefers his terminology being embedded in negative theology:

“God. Gott . Its consonants grind like teeth. G-d. Who, saying this name, does not take it in vain? I have hardly been able to write it, to subject it to sentences that start “God is,” “God does.” As though “God” identifies something, some One, rather than, as Meister Eckhart insists, “a non-God, a nonspirit, a nonperson, a nonimage.”⁶⁴⁹

Consequently, she poses the coherent question: “if we delete the theos from theology, what does it leave?”⁶⁵⁰ Her proposition then is an approach which she calls “tehomitic theology”, a theology that is centred around the abyss, “the deep, salt water, chaos, depth itself.”⁶⁵¹ She does so, because it is important to her that theology should not contain a rigid and static structure, but should reveal itself as a vital, flexible and dynamic source of knowledge. She emphasizes that

“a tehomitic theology will reflect in style the flows and eddies of its content. Its language crosses media, genres, disciplines, sexualities, economies, spiritualities – as theology always has. But a tehomitic theology does so openly and affirmingly.”⁶⁵²

Altogether, a perspective I certainly welcome, and which is also mirrored in Keller’s style of writing which at times appears almost poetic. I consider her approach also to be interesting as the term ‘tehomitic’ in a way resembles Eckhart’s term of the Ground of the Soul, but I also share her comprehension of creation, particularly her understanding of incarnation. She does not regard the process of incarnation as a straightforward, punctual one-way and one-time process, but rather as an emergence of plurality – and I am reminded of Eckhart’s term of ‘outboiling creation’ at this point. She explains that “at the heart of the creation, there takes

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 189.

⁶⁴⁹ Keller, *The Face of the Deep*, 172.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 172.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., xvi.

⁶⁵² Ibid., xviii.

place always, in endless quantities and qualities of difference, deformation and transformation, the incarnation.”⁶⁵³ And in respect of creativity she introduces the notion of a ‘matrix of possibilities’ that does, as I understand it, justice to both divine creativity and human social reality:

“The creativity is not a cause, not even the First Cause, but rather the condition that conditions all causal processes. The creativity itself does not become; it makes becoming possible. We imagine it therefore as the matrix of possibilities. [...]. In other words our responses become us. They generate our own plurisingular inter-subjectivities— out of the multiples of elemental energies, codes, socialities, ecologies that any moment constellate our cosmoi.”⁶⁵⁴

She therefore consequently appeals to accept one’s ‘polar’ (as Tillich would express it) being, and embrace it (affirm it, according to Tillich):

“Pastorally, therapeutically, politically: we find ourselves in some densely textured flux, some difficult mix of indeterminacy and constraint. [...]. Or we may read this difficult milieu for its freshly emerging order.”⁶⁵⁵

At this point her account reminds me once more strongly of Paul Tillich’s theology, but surprisingly she does not openly refer to any of his works. It is only in one footnote in which she indeed concedes to be “of course indebted to the spirit if not to the ontology of Paul Tillich’s classic redefinition of faith in terms of courage, in *The Courage to Be* [...].”⁶⁵⁶

Regarding gender, she argues with Judith Butler against “the univocal posturing of the creator.”⁶⁵⁷ She explains that tehomitic theology does not claim purity:

“But a tehomitic theology does not aspire to a new feminist purity, free of patriarchal residues, numb to such heuristically queer, infinitely multiplicative, experiments. The recapitulative flow of a becoming-feminism depends upon the emancipatory force of sheer plurality. They will keep the grammar of “God’s creation” ambiguous.”⁶⁵⁸

In this respect her account of a tehomitic theology works towards Butler’s (and my own) claim that the idea of creation should entail incompleteness and ambiguity. Although Keller’s theory

⁶⁵³ Keller, *The Face of the Deep*, 219f.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 293 n5.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁶⁵⁸ Keller, *The Face of the Deep*, 179.

of creation seems to, as she herself articulates it, “smudge” the “difference of divine and cosmic” or depicts an “overlap, of divinity with world, of world with divinity,” she insists that “a tehomie All-in-One is not a pantheism.”⁶⁵⁹ She rather makes a claim that implicitly expresses a panentheism:

“The all in the divine, the divine in the all [...] does not name two Gods, or even two Persons. Yet it does echo the trinitarian intuition of complex relationality immanent to an impersonal Godhead and personalized in the oikonomia of the creation.”⁶⁶⁰

Obviously, it is not only the abyss and negative theology that links her account to Eckhart, but also the concept of panentheism.⁶⁶¹

Against this background I am now returning to my research question and ask: How then is the relationship between Being-itself, creation, Innermost Self and gender constituted? To eventually explain this relation of the Innermost Self to gender I am going to outline modern, feminist, and in particular Butler’s, concept of selfhood as it is foundational for their gender theory which I am going to discuss in the final chapter.

5.3 Judith Butler: The Constructed Self

I am aware that modern theories of the self differ from Eckhart’s or Teresa’s idea of an innermost space or from Tillich’s notion of an Innermost Self, even more so from the feminist philosophical perspective. The authors of the article *Feminist Perspectives on the Self* in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* explain that modern western philosophy focused almost exclusively on the self as an individual being rational, free, autonomous and therefore always in possession of agency. This view was mainly based on either Kant’s theory of an ethical subject or on the utilitarian notion of the “homo economicus”. From this perspective the individual seems to be apart from its environment and detached from its relationships. Such a conception, in many feminist philosophers view, makes the self appear to be an inner place being neither touched by structural impacts from the outside nor being affected by the inner psychic world, including its aspects of unconscious fantasies, fears and desires. Moreover, neither the body nor its features seem to play a role at all.

⁶⁵⁹ Compare Ibid., 218f.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 219.

⁶⁶¹ Compare Ibid., 219.

According to the article, particularly feminist philosophers therefore picked up on these aspects and questioned the concept of an independent ‘pure’ self and eventually determined that such a concept is “misleading”.⁶⁶² They consequently sought to develop other ways of imagining and thinking of the self. Feminist philosophy therefore emphasizes that features such as interdependence and vulnerability, sociality and relationality of the self must be taken into account and need to be valued rather than devalued. The “free agency of a self”, according to the authors, must be rejected as it conforms with the masculine ideal.⁶⁶³

Following further explanations, various feminist accounts and theories have emerged out of this philosophical development, for instance new conceptions of autonomy that do not devalue abilities which conventionally count as feminine, suggested for example by Seyla Benhabib. Or phenomenological analyses have been undertaken, for example by Edith Stein, on how feminine-coded values affect women’s daily lives and their moral way of thinking. From an existentialist point of view Simone de Beauvoir suggested that women should reclaim their freedom and autonomy, and “reassert their transcendence through productive projects.”⁶⁶⁴

In more recent accounts feminist theorists increasingly understand the body as constituting part of the self as well. Within this field claims are being made to radically rupture the self/ other distinction or reject the existence of a self entirely. Consequently, new (poststructuralist) strands have emerged such as ‘new materialism’ by Luce Irigaray, psychoanalytical works by Julie Kristeva and intersectional approaches by African American feminists, as for example by Kimberlé Crenshaw who argues for intersectional or even multiple selves. Also, somatic and organic factors are increasingly considered to be crucial when thinking about selfhood, and the idea of intersectionality has been taken further and includes mixed-species communities as expressed by Donna Haraway, which lead to new strands of feminism such as eco-feminism that include environmental issues too. Altogether, their claim can be summarized by saying that “it is precisely the failure to acknowledge that the question of the self is not narrowly metaphysical.”⁶⁶⁵ Queer and trans* theory also draws on these accounts.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶² Compare Diana Meyers, "Feminist Perspectives on the Self." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008).

⁶⁶³ Compare Meyers, "Feminist Perspectives on the Self."

⁶⁶⁴ Compare Ibid.

⁶⁶⁵ Compare Meyers, "Feminist Perspectives on the Self."

⁶⁶⁶ Compare Ibid.

A prominent representative of this stance is the poststructuralist and gender theorist Judith Butler. They claim that ideas such as self or identity are merely discursive and in this respect an illusion. Butler refers to feminist theories of narrative identities and draws on Adriana Cavarero's term of a "narratable self".⁶⁶⁷ This comprehension of the self as being constructed through giving an account of oneself to an 'other' also underlies Butler's gender theory. In their work *Undoing Gender* they introduce their way of thinking by describing the situation of grief as a situation which one cannot control and that therefore one then is "beside oneself, not at one with oneself, [...]". They additionally remark that such a situation "will constitute a loss, a disorientation, but one in which the human stands a chance of coming into being anew."⁶⁶⁸

A description of such a situation which, as I find, holds the potential for transformation in the sense of a Birth of God in the Soul, a process of becoming a subject anew, is the Biblical story of Jacob's Wrestling what I am going to demonstrate the next section. Butler in this context rather emphasizes embodiment and sociality, and underlines that embodied being is always social because one is "already given over" and therefore "beyond" oneself.⁶⁶⁹ In more detail they explain that "we come into the world on the condition that the social world is already there, laying the groundwork for us", and they declare:

"I cannot be who I am without drawing upon the sociality of norms that precede and exceed me. In this sense, I am outside myself from the outset, and must be, in order to survive, and in order to enter into the realm of the possible."⁶⁷⁰

At this point, I ask myself though, beyond or outside which 'self' one is in the moment of being given over, particularly when holding the position that there is no 'self' preceding one's social existence? However, Butler from this perspective derives that embodiment "is not understood as a static and accomplished fact, but as an ongoing process, a mode of becoming" and that in this respect "possibility is not a luxury" but as "crucial as bread".⁶⁷¹ Despite my issues regarding the idea of being beyond or outside oneself, the latter statement to understand embodiment as an ongoing process of becoming is an important assertion which I, as will become clear later, share.

⁶⁶⁷ Compare Ibid.

⁶⁶⁸ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*. 1 ed., (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), 39.

⁶⁶⁹ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 22.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 29.

Butler's elaborations then lead to another important idea in which I am particularly interested in: the notion of 'recognition'. In Butler's view being recognized by the 'other' is crucial as one otherwise would be "foreclosed from possibility". Being consistent in their way of thinking Butler relates these aspects to norms again and goes as far to assert that "norms of recognition function to produce and to deproduce the notion of the human."⁶⁷² As this shows, the interconnection of recognition and norms, for Butler, is crucial for one's humanity and therefore existential:

"I have tried here to argue that our very sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition, and that desire places us outside ourselves, in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose, but that provides the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we have. *This means that the ec-static character of our existence is essential to the possibility of persisting as human.*"⁶⁷³

In their correspondence with the German philosopher Axel Honneth, published in the book *Recognition and Ambivalence*, Butler explains that one's desire for recognition "leads to the general claim that the identity of the subject comes from elsewhere, and is not generated from within, nor accomplished through introspection."⁶⁷⁴ Indeed, throughout their work it becomes obvious that Butler negates the existence of an interior essence completely. What I am seeking to argue though is that the notion of the Innermost Self can be understood as an interior self which entails existence and being as essence, but yet not a completed self or identity which then serves as a template one has to attempt to match (and fail) during one's entire life. To clarify how I see the relationship between an Innermost Self and the social or cultural construction, I will illustrate Butler's notion of subjection in more detail referring to their description of *Scenes of Address* before relating their conception to *Jacob's Wrestling*.

5.4 Overcoming the Binary of the Constructed and Innermost Self

5.4.1 Butler's Scenes of Address

In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* Butler describes her understanding of subjection referring to Althusser. According to Althusser, so Butler, it is a 'calling' ("hailing"/

⁶⁷² Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 31f.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶⁷⁴ Judith Butler, Axel Honneth, Lois McNay, Amy Allen, Jean-Philippe Deranty, Robin Celikates, and David Owen. *Recognition and Ambivalence*. Vol. 77, (Columbia University Press, 2021), 35.

“interpellation”) by a person who represents the law through which the individual being becomes a subject, a subject which then has no choice but to be submissive. It is only through this shift that the subject becomes. It is a shift, as Butler puts it, from an “indifferent, questionable, or impossible being“ into the “discursive or social domain of the subject“.⁶⁷⁵ According to this narrative the subject needs a calling from the law, a normative order, to gain a consciousness of itself. The process of gaining this consciousness is caused by perceiving a disparity between its own being or its behaviour and the existing normative order. According to Butler, Althusser comprehends the call as “a unilateral act, as the power and force of the law to compel fear“.⁶⁷⁶ The power of the law, Butler consequently concludes, also causes – besides recognition – fear of punishment.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* Butler describes a similar procedure. Here, too, they see “the force of morality in the production of the subject“, this time referring to Nietzsche.⁶⁷⁷ According to Nietzsche, Butler explains, the self gains consciousness of itself because it must give an account of itself. This is caused by a preceding injury and following suffering. The self must question itself (am I the cause for what his happening?) in order to claim for justice and punishment regarding the originator of this injury and suffering. Butler states: “In this context, we find ourselves in the position of having to give an account of ourselves” and “giving an account thus takes a narrative form“.⁶⁷⁸ This is how Butler initially describes a process of subjection and summarizes:

“If I give an account of myself in response to such a query, I am implicated in a relation to the other before whom and to whom I speak. Thus, I come into being a reflexive subject in the context of establishing a narrative account of myself when I am spoken to by someone and prompted to address myself to the one who addresses me.”⁶⁷⁹

So far, I find these arguments plausible. Regarding gender and being queer these thoughts could mean that particularly queer people who do not match existing gender norms evoke due to their (conscious or unconscious) behaviour or due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, a call and/ or also experience injuries with following suffering. They

⁶⁷⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 82.

⁶⁷⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 82.

⁶⁷⁷ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 10.

⁶⁷⁸ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 10 & 12.

⁶⁷⁹ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 15.

experience a disparity, a lack of conformity. Their ‘own’ inner perception of the self does not match the expectations of others which are shaped by the existing norms. Only because of the deviation (in this respect of the heteronormative matrix) the self questions itself, becomes reflective, realizes its ‘queerness’ and must give an account, a narrative.

Referring to Foucault Butler goes further than Nietzsche though. According to Butler Foucault presupposes that “certain historically established prescriptive codes compelled a certain kind of subject formation”⁶⁸⁰ and that the subject is formed through relating to many codes, rules and norms as an “‘effect’ of discourse”.⁶⁸¹ Butler concludes:

“This work on the self, this act of delimiting, takes place within the context of a set of norms that precede and exceed the subject. These are invested with power and recalcitrance, setting the limits to what will be considered to be an intelligible formation of the subject within a given historical scheme of things.”⁶⁸²

Butler emphasizes that subjectivation is possible exclusively within a social framework and in relation to an ‘other’. Additionally, the formation of the subject always remains incomplete as the subject cannot be fully grasped by the other and therefore “the subject is opaque to itself” and subjectivation always comes along with “misrecognition”.⁶⁸³ Having Tillich in mind, Butler’s *Scenes of Address* – based on Althusser, Nietzsche and Foucault – seem to emerge out of the fear of guilt and condemnation (Althusser: calling of the police and fear of punishment, Nietzsche: giving an account in a legal system including a claim for punishment, Foucault: prison).⁶⁸⁴

At this point I asked myself, and apparently Butler too, if there are other ways of being addressed, other ways for the subject to be constituted than by law or norms. Butler asks: “Are there other ways of being addressed and constituted, [...], that disarticulate the power of punishment from the power of recognition.”⁶⁸⁵

I also wonder: what about, for example, the power of praise and appreciation when successfully behaving according to the normative order? Do they not have the power to constitute the subject as well? Even though Butler does not articulate this explicitly at this

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁸² Ibid., 17.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 18 & Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 82.

⁶⁸⁴ Compare Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 184.

⁶⁸⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 82.

point, I assume they would reject this option and would consider the uniformity of the subject as an illusionary expectation which is impossible to meet altogether and right from the start. I suppose Butler would believe the expectation as such to be wrong or at least inadequate. Yet, they clearly insist though, that laws can be “refused“, “ruptured“ and therefore ”rearticulated“. This depicts how they imagine potential “disobedience”:⁶⁸⁶

“Where the uniformity of the subject is expected, where the behavioral conformity of the subject is commanded, there might be produced the refusal of the law in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity that subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command, a repetition of the law into hyperbole, a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it.”⁶⁸⁷

Butler sees a way of enabling “[...]; that estrangement or division produced by the mesh of interpellating calls and the “I” who is its site is not only violating, but enabling as well, [...]”⁶⁸⁸ She quotes the term “enabling violation” from Gayatri Spivak and explains:⁶⁸⁹

“The “I“ who would oppose its construction is always in some sense drawing from that construction to articulate its opposition; further, the “I” draws what is called its “agency” in part through being implicated in the very relations of power that it seeks to oppose.”⁶⁹⁰

In this context Butler highlights that the calling, the use of language, depicts a crucial condition because only “been called a name”, the “occupation of the name” depicts the procedure through which one is “quite without choice, situated within discourse.”⁶⁹¹ This – and, according to Butler, only this – is what makes one a subject. I find this aspect interesting, and it is exactly this aspect which I associate with the Biblical story of *Jacob’s Wrestling*. Therefore, I would like to suggest an interpretation of *Jacob’s Wrestling* and relate that to Butler’s scenes of address. Of course, different translations of this scene exist, and biblical exegesis on it is manifold, reaching from interpretations as a fight about life and death to psychoanalytical analyses about relationships between siblings or historical readings in the context of biblical ancestry. My intention here though is to show that *Jacob’s Wrestling* can be read as a calling and becoming of a subject which involves disobedience as well but does

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 82.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 82.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 82.

not result in fear of punishment, rather in courage. I am attempting to show that in the spiritual dimension a process of subjection is possible which is based on divine and therefore existential recognition.

5.4.2 A Mystical Response: Jacob's Wrestling

The story is told in the first book of the Hebrew Bible. Jacob has ignored a traditional rule and used a trick to secure himself the position as the first born. He now fears an encounter with his brother Esau (a feeling of guilt). He fears a calling and that he will have to give an account of himself and might be punished. In the middle of the night, what one could read – as a suggestion – as a dark time in his soul or life, Jacob feels he must let go of everything and detach from his life, his family, possessions. He feels that he must cross a river (make a step, a decision, a change to his life) alone, all for himself. He realizes the discrepancy between himself and the others and cannot overcome it. He stays back in – with Butler – “an outer region of indifferent, questionable, or impossible being”.⁶⁹² The family, his servants move on, but he is left behind without any social relationships. He is a, in Butler's words, “not fully social subject”.⁶⁹³ In Tillich's words: in a moment of solitude.

Suddenly a ‘man’ wrestles with him and at first there's no further information on the identity of that man. Maybe Althusser's police man? Maybe the calling and power of the laws? Maybe a divine authority? During this wrestling (during this dealing with the existential crisis) darkness fades and the sun rises. It is in that moment (or phase) that Jacob experiences an injury and it is (interestingly) the man who asks him to let go and to stop wrestling (not the injured Jacob himself!). But Jacob, still not understanding with whom or what he's wrestling, insists despite his injury – or maybe even because of being enabled through this injury (“enabling violation”) – on continuing his struggle: he does not listen, he is disobedient and resists the calling.⁶⁹⁴ Instead of giving in, he claims a recognition of his existence through the Other, he insists on being called again and being recognized in a positive way, a spiritual way: he demands a blessing. On this level of the process the question of being a culprit or fearing punishment does not play a role anymore. The ominous power Jacob is wrestling with does not want to punish, rather the opposite: the power appreciates that Jacob does not cease struggling and discloses that he has been wrestling with the world *and* the Divine in unison: with the worldly *and* divine dimension – on a social (normative) *and* spiritual (existential)

⁶⁹² Butler, *Bodies That Matter.*, 82.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁹⁴ “Enabling violation”: Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 83, see quote above in section 5.4.1.

level. It is in this very moment that the revelation of the Divine happens, and Jacob realizes what he has been wrestling with. In this very moment of recognition Jacob gains a ‘new’ consciousness. The Divine then asks for Jacob’s name and blesses his embodied and timely being through giving him a new name, making him a recognized subject again. Jacob is now able to comprehend himself as a concrete and conscious being, as a subject. After his encounter with the Divine (according to Tillich: being-itself), Jacob has a sense of himself (knowing *that* he is) and is able to situate himself in his concrete life (a notion of himself as *what* he is), a sense of his self (following Tillich: self-being). Jacob’s courageous insistence evokes a “rupture” and leads to a “rearticulation”.⁶⁹⁵ This is his blessing which also describes a subjection based on spiritual grounds.

Other than Butler’s account this story does not turn into “parodic inhabiting of conformity”.⁶⁹⁶ At the end of this story there stands neither punishment nor parody, but the courage to affirm oneself as oneself and as part of the world. This is a process of self-affirmation which is grounded on a transformative encounter with the Divine and worldly life. Jacob becomes a concrete human being, a subject because of accepting the Divine’s acceptance – because of having faith.

5.4.3 What’s Gender got to Do with It?

The story of *Jacob’s Wrestling*, in my view, exemplarily describes experiences which reveal human’s unification with the Divine. Tillich describes this as participation in the power of being-itself. As *Jacob’s Wrestling* shows, but also following Eckhart and Tillich, the Divine expresses itself through allowing the concrete human being to participate in the Divine. Therefore, becoming a subject, realizing one’s Self-being, happens through the unification of oneself with being-itself. It is the realization, gaining awareness, of being *one* with the divine being-itself, the transcendent being immanent. This spiritual dimension of self-affirmation leads to a comprehensive transformation of consciousness which unites the affirmation of being as oneself (ones’ concrete embodied being wrestling with the materialized world/ Butler’s wrestling with normative orders) *and* the affirmation of being a part (one’s concrete being participating in being-itself/ Jacob’s (humans’) wrestling with God). Acknowledging and affirming both these processes and poles is what Tillich calls ‘affirmation of being’,

⁶⁹⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 82.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

altogether acceptance of acceptance. In Eckhart's theology this is named as the Birth of God in the Soul and in Teresa's thought the process of the *Seventh Mansions*.

Of course, one is always socially connected in some way and therefore embedded in social norms, out of which callings emerge. Butler is right by saying that we cannot wish our sociality away.⁶⁹⁷ I also agree that these mechanisms and dynamics shape human's *ways* of being (how or who we are). But this does not mean, to me, that the transcendent dimension does not exist, is not accessible or does not play any role in this complex. I find that *Jacob's Wrestling* can be read as a scene focussing on a call coming out of the innermost depth of the soul. Regarding people's daily lives such kind of callings, similar to Jacob's situation, often (but not only) happen in times or moments of crises, when being existentially questioned, when one is thrown back into loneliness and finds oneself in a situation of the, in Butler's words "most real, most pressing, most undeniable".⁶⁹⁸ Or when, for example, one is mourning, when one feels, as Butler writes, "beside oneself". Then, Butler continues "we lose our composure in some fundamental sense: we do not know who we are or what to do".⁶⁹⁹ As Jacob's story shows though, such situations hold yet the potential to give access – as a merciful gift – to the transcendent. This means that on a spiritual level, human beings can – despite being subjected to norms and laws, feeling of guilt, loss or grief, being hurt or experiencing emotional fragmentation – experience existential divine recognition, a recognition of their pure being and own being as a subject. I find that *Jacob's Wrestling* describes such a self-realization of a subject. In other words: one experiences one's being as a self, self-being.

Moreover, in which *way* one's existence eventually expresses itself is always, as Butler says, dependent on concrete cultural conditions in which one is born into, and one must – again and again – performatively shape one's own life, including, if necessary, insist on, defend or fight for one's dignity and fundamental rights. But these spiritual processes depict the human's innate power to rearticulate one's being, to transform oneself – again and again in every single now; but also one's relationship to existence as such, to one's neighbours, one's loved ones, to one's community and the world.

It is important to understand though that this realization and transformation of consciousness can only happen in a Trinitarian union when one is, to put it in a secularly phrased nutshell, one with existence, with oneself and with the world. This then holds true

⁶⁹⁷ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 22f.

⁶⁹⁸ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, ix.

⁶⁹⁹ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 18f.

even in situations when other humans attempt to deprive one of one's being – they do not necessarily have the final say. This kind of spiritual recognition goes beyond social recognition, and therefore it depicts, from my point of view, the very first and minimal steps into the direction of autonomy and freedom; and they are therefore the crucial foundation for every kind of agency and liberation – including Butler's comprehension of agency within social norms.

In Butler's understanding of recognition, the notion of encounter now plays a prominent role as well. Other than Eckhart's, Teresa's, Tillich's and the presented interpretation of Jacob's Wrestling though, Butler's attention lies completely on the encounter and relationship between human beings. They only describe the possibility of an encounter on the outer side of life, a relationship outside of the human:

“An encounter with an other effects a transformation of the self from which there is no return. What is recognized about a self in the course of this exchange is that the self is the sort of being for whom staying inside itself proves impossible. One is compelled and comported outside oneself ; one finds that the only way to know oneself is through a mediation that takes place outside of oneself, exterior to oneself, by virtue of a convention or a norm that one did not make, in which one cannot discern oneself as an author or an agent of one's own making. In this sense, then, the Hegelian subject of recognition is one for whom a vacillation between loss and ecstasy is inevitable.”⁷⁰⁰

In this context they describe a specific understanding of ecstasy: a motion outward, to build a relationship with an other. Such encounters, according to Butler, can enable or inhibit the constitution of a self, enable or inhibit the recognition of a human as a subject:

“But given how contested the visual representation of the ‘human’ is, it would appear that our capacity to respond to a face as a human face is conditioned and mediated by frames of reference that are variably humanizing and dehumanizing.”⁷⁰¹

Following Butler, this depicts the moment when the formation of the concrete being is taking place and accordingly the formation of language. Language which as they state, “frames the encounter, and embedded in that language is a set of norms concerning what will and will not

⁷⁰⁰ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 28.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

constitute recognizability.”⁷⁰² So far, their account remains exclusively social and secular although they indicate towards an other (transcendent?) dimension by referring to Levinas and his notion of the preontological:

“In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas makes clear that, before we can speak about a self who is capable of choice, we must first consider how that self is formed. This formation takes place, in his words, “outside of being [essence].” Indeed, the sphere in which the subject is said to emerge is “preontological” in the sense that the phenomenal world of persons and things becomes available only after a self has been formed as an effect of a primary impingement. We cannot ask after the “where” or “when” of this primary scene, since it precedes and even conditions the spatio-temporal coordinates that circumscribe the ontological domain. To describe this scene is to take leave of the descriptive field in which a “self” is formed and bounded in one place and time and considers its “objects” and “others” in their locatedness elsewhere.”⁷⁰³

I by no means want to simply equate neither Levinas’ nor Butler’s thoughts here with Eckhart’s or Teresa’s idea of a mystical unification. Especially the understanding of ‘being’ and ‘essence’ as well as their understanding of creation would need further and thorough investigation. But yet, Levinas’ and Butler’s utterances indeed do resonate with Teresa’s description of spiritual states of mind and experiences of which one can only talk about once one has left behind the state of ecstasy, and in which one gains knowledge of the Divine being embedded in a great certainty.⁷⁰⁴ Moreover, Teresa’s account on ecstasy is more differentiated as she considers ecstasy and the loss of oneself as a condition of being within the Innermost Centre of the Soul, so rather a deeply inward movement. She distinguishes such an ecstasy from ecstasies as being outside of oneself which she discusses from the *Fourth Mansions* onwards but does not consider to be expedient regarding one’s orientation towards the Divine. The loss of the self can take place at various stages of a spiritual process, but it can eventually lead to an encounter or even unification with the Divine in the *Seventh Mansions*. This Birth of God in the Soul (Eckhart) in the Innermost Centre of the Soul (Teresa) constitutes the Innermost Self (Tillich) which is different from the social self which Butler refers to. It is important though to remember that according to Eckhart, Tillich and Teresa such inner spiritual processes which appear to be happening outside of “spatio-temporal coordinates” yet

⁷⁰² Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 30.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, 85f.

⁷⁰⁴ See Teresa 5M 1, 251.

always fall in one with worldly coordinates as shown through notions depicted by Martha and Mary or the Virgin Wife. For a religious person this would mean that when leading a spiritual life, one builds one life not on social interconnectivity only but also on the relationship to the transcendent at the same time.⁷⁰⁵ The existence and importance of the relationship with latter I have tried to underline with my interpretation of Jacob's Wrestling. A mystical (non-dual or panentheist) view of the transcendent, the world, the human and the Divine embraces both the spiritual and the social realm as one. Hence, Butler's way of thinking should not pose a problem for a religious person as their approach does not include the divine dimension but does neither depict a contradiction nor a threat to divine creativity nor to interhuman connectivity. This also applies, to Butler's theory on the social formation of gender.

Altogether I therefore conclude that the ability to accept acceptance, the ability to have faith (out of which often also hope, and love emerge) is the source and power of human agency. Furthermore, I believe these findings to have an impact on one's understanding of gender because I do not regard one's essential being to be gendered but rather consider gender to be a worldly matter, an admixture which "causes alienation from essence", according to Eckhart.⁷⁰⁶ Therefore, I can fully agree with Butler's description, especially in respect of their insisting on difference and inconsistency:

"Gender is performed a certain way over time; its effect is sedimented, and in that way can become naturalized as an essence, but not for all people under all circumstances, and not consistently in any case. My argument against gender as an interior metaphysical essence gives us a way of understanding the enactment of gender norms as something other than an outward expression of such an internal essence."⁷⁰⁷

And I can also agree with their term of a gender matrix as a gateway for becoming:

"Human beings come into the world through a gender matrix, such that that being called a girl or a boy is mandatory gateway for becoming human. In this way,

⁷⁰⁵ Martin Buber, for example (and to whom encounter was an important aspect as well), phrases this as follows: "The relation with man is the simile of the relation with God; [...]." See: Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith. Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2010, 103.

⁷⁰⁶ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 49, 264/ DKV II, Pr. 77, 143 / DW 3, 341 (567f.): "Wan güete und wîsheit und swaz man von gote sprechen mac. Daz ist allez mitewesen gotes blôzen wesens; wan alliu mitewesen machet ein vremde von dem wesene. Und alsô meinet daz wort »ich« gotes lüterkeit des wesens, daz dâ ist in im selben blôz âne alliu mitewesen, diu vremde und verre machent." (MHG: mitewesen = Beisein = Accidens, compare Prologus Generalis, DKV II, 469).

⁷⁰⁷ Butler et al., *Recognition and Ambivalence*, 38.

gender is there as a matrix of subject formation – and so not merely a set of characteristics attributed to an already existing subject.”⁷⁰⁸

Yet, my overall claim though is that one’s worldly being is one with one’s spiritual/ essential being and that therefore one’s existential becoming is given through Divine power which means that the Divine’s power provides one coming *into* being but does not shape this being. Therefore, from a mystical and Christian point of view, as Eckhart’s and Tillich’s ontology as well as *Jacob’s Wrestling* elucidate: spiritual and worldly aspects, need to be affirmed equally in order to lead a vital life, and need to be taken equally into account in order to understand the structure of human being to which I will turn to – in respect of the self and gender – in the final concluding chapter.

6 Living in an Embodied and Gendered World

6.1 Self and Gender

In their work *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* Butler engages with the term of ‘gender’ as the “foundational premise of feminist politics”, and questions the “stable notion of gender”, particularly the distinction between sex and gender. They hypothesise that “gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” which therefore, in their view, questions the unity of the subject. Moreover, they claim that “the sex/ gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders” which also questions the static view of a binary sex, and they conclude that “there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two.” Both these statements, the questioning of a stable unity of the subject and the exclusivity of a binary sex, are essential thoughts which Butler maintains throughout their entire work. They furthermore state that they understand gender to be constructed and, according to their notion of the subject being formed by rules and laws, they conclude that “gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation. In such a case, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny.”⁷⁰⁹ A precise diagnosis as I find (which, by the way, does not only hold true in terms of gender but also in terms of a static imagining of the self in general or, in this context, a narrow image of the Divine because culture then might become destiny based on rigid social rules or doctrinal theism and fanatic religiosity). Throughout their work they

⁷⁰⁸ Butler et al., *Recognition and Ambivalence.*, 41.

⁷⁰⁹ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York & London: Routledge, 2007), 7-11.

explain that “gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time” and in this context Butler introduces the term “compulsory heterosexuality”.⁷¹⁰ They assume that “a stable and oppositional heterosexuality” is necessary to maintain such a “binary gender system”.⁷¹¹ A viewpoint I can concur with as well. Based on these assumptions Butler continues to explain that therefore “gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence.”⁷¹² This also counts for the notion of gender identity, and they affirm that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender and that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results.”⁷¹³ They therefore state:

“Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”⁷¹⁴

A statement which, until today, is subject of controversy and of many public debates in different contexts, such as in different feminist strands as well as in the conservative Christian realm.⁷¹⁵ Regarding the latter realm this is understandable as such an assertion immediately questions conceptions of the Divine which view the Divine to be an engineering creator ‘making’ substantial things in a certain look which leads to a certain (prescribed) way of living.

In their subsequent work *Bodies That Matter. On the discursive limits of “sex”* Butler picks up these threads and explains once more that they consider this “repeated stylization of the body” to be “performative acts” and “authoritative speech”.⁷¹⁶ Gender, therefore, in their view is not the body, but an inevitable “sign” of it, and they state: “What is “performed” [...] is, of course, the sign of gender, a sign that is not the same as the body that it figures, but that cannot be read without it.”⁷¹⁷

Altogether, Butler therefore asks “if gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently, or does its constructedness imply some form of social determinism, foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation?”, and also “what sense can we make of a construction that cannot assume a human constructor prior to that construction?”⁷¹⁸ These

⁷¹⁰ See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 22-24.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷¹² *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷¹⁵ Both discourses Butler addresses extensively in their recent book *Who's afraid of Gender?*

⁷¹⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 171.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁷¹⁸ See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10-11.

questions depict that “the sex which is not one, then, provides a point of departure for a criticism of hegemonic Western representation and of the metaphysics of substance that structures the very notion of the subject.”⁷¹⁹ This paves the way for Butler’s central criticism of both the metaphysics of substance and humanist feminism:

“What is the metaphysics of substance, and how does it inform thinking about the categories of sex? In the first instance, humanist conceptions of the subject tend to assume a substantive person who is the bearer of various essential and nonessential attributes. A humanist feminist position might understand gender as an attribute of a person who is characterized essentially as a pregendered substance or “core”, called the person, denoting a universal capacity for reason, moral deliberation, or language.”

This is a criticism which is based on a metaphysical view which I hope, with Eckhart, to have relativised. In his conception the essence of the human is one with the divine essence, and therefore the core self does not depict a predetermined person but a person comprising a self as the full potential of creative unfolding, to which attributes (such as gender) are being attached (coming from each particular cultural context, hence, Eckhart’s emphasis on detachment as a spiritual manner to gain awareness of one’s divine nature). The universal aspect in this conception is an ontological respectively existentialist one, the sharing of being and the ability to know about it, the (conscious) affirmation of participation in being-itself according to Tillich. Following Eckhart and Tillich, being human (potentially having a consciousness of one’s being, one’s human and divine nature) is universal; whereas Butler in their account articulates a different appeal aiming at the displacement of universality, being replaced by sociality:

“The universal conception of the person, however, is displaced as a point of departure for a social theory of gender by those historical and anthropological positions that understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts. This relational or contextual point of view suggests that what the person “is,” and, indeed, what gender “is,” is always relative to the constructed relations in which it is determined.”⁷²⁰

They reveal the interconnection of the subject and gender by explaining that “the very notion of the subject, intelligible only through its appearance as gendered, admits of possibilities that

⁷¹⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 13f.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

have been forcibly foreclosed by the various reifications of gender that have constituted its contingent ontologies.”⁷²¹ Based on this they determine:

“Because there is neither an “essence” that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; [...]; the construction “compels” our belief in its necessity and naturalness.”⁷²²

This is a conclusion which, following what I have argued above, does not contradict the ontology based on Eckhart’s explanations which are, beyond that, based on his claim that “God is existence.”

Additionally, Butler diagnoses that even Beauvoir’s proposition that “the female body ought to be the situation and instrumentality of women’s freedom, not a defining and limiting essence” is “clearly limited by the uncritical reproduction of the Cartesian distinction between freedom and the body” and that “it appears that Beauvoir maintains the mind/ body dualism, [...]”⁷²³ Regarding the philosophical tradition altogether Butler therefore pronounces:

“In the philosophical tradition that begins with Plato and continues through Descartes, Husserl, and Sartre, the ontological distinction between soul (consciousness, mind) and body invariably supports relations of political and psychic subordination and hierarchy. The mind not only subjugates the body, but occasionally entertains the fantasy of fleeing its embodiment altogether.”⁷²⁴

They therefore appeal that “any uncritical reproduction of the mind/ body distinction ought to be rethought for the implicit gender hierarchy that the distinction has conventionally produced, maintained, and rationalized.”⁷²⁵ I share their concern over the mind/ body split and gender hierarchies. I am still convinced though that Eckhart’s theology resists this separation which also allows him to be more flexible in respect of gender as his varied use of metaphors show. I am going to address these issues in more detail in the next but one sections. Butler meanwhile suggests assuming an “essential incompleteness” which “permits that category to serve as a

⁷²¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble.*, 46.

⁷²² *Ibid.*, 190.

⁷²³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

permanently available site of the contested meanings. The definitional incompleteness of the category might then serve as a normative ideal relieved of coercive force.”⁷²⁶

In this context they also point out to antiquated Christian views of the body as an “inert matter, signifying nothing or, more specifically signifying a profane void, the fallen state: deception, sin, the premonitional metaphors of hell and the eternal feminine.”⁷²⁷ Butler subsequently explains their thoughts on the soul and concludes by referring to Foucault that “the soul is not imprisoned by or within the body, as some Christian imagery would suggest, but “the soul is the prison of the body.”⁷²⁸ They eventually relate this to their notion of compulsory heterosexuality and explain its function within this concept:

“In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purpose of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality.”⁷²⁹

And they conclude:

“If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can neither be true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity.”⁷³⁰

From these thoughts they derive that “gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, [...] and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. [...] one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality.”⁷³¹ They extend their notions to substance and insist that “the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment [...] in the mode of belief”, and that therefore “gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody. [...], then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true

⁷²⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 21.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 185f.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed a regulatory fiction.”⁷³² And they finally state:

“Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically incredible.”⁷³³

I can agree with Butler’s conclusions that gender is a human idea and category which through performative speech acts shapes and forms human’s embodied being. I also share some of the criticisms they mention in this context regarding certain strands of Philosophy or Christianity. And I assume that Butler probably regards the process of naming as described in *Jacob’s Wrestling* as a patriarchal act because they, referring to Lacan, understand the act of naming as a psychological procedure in which the name “stands for the Name of the Father, the law of sexual differentiation.”⁷³⁴ I agree on this, too, and Sölle connects the act of naming with dominance as well: “The relationship of dominance is established in the act of naming.”⁷³⁵

Having said that, I want to highlight though that I regard this view as being based on actions belonging to certain traditions, and traditions I consider to be humanmade as well. This also counts for traditions of the Judeo-Christian religious realm. Therefore, at this point, it becomes clear why I believe the mystical approach to be so crucial. I find, as Sölle does, that “all mysticism is part of the endeavor to escape from this fate of language that serves the exercise of power, control, and possession.”⁷³⁶ Mystical theology, including its practices and processes of detachment (Eckhart) or contemplation (Teresa), can enable human beings to overcome these traditions with its coercive powers by transcending the personal as well as theological theism as Tillich crucially claims. This is why I have suggested a reading of *Jacob’s Wrestling* through a mystical lens, to show that the story can be apprehended as an act of naming which, despite appearing as a personal encounter, transcends the theistic notion of the Divine. I am therefore convinced that it is possible, with some effort, to detach from patriarchal images, metaphors and terms, and develop – in the long term – new (feminine) images, expressions and languages as it already happening for many years as the notion of ‘theaology’ and various works by for example, Christ, Mollenkott, Ruether, Daly and Stuart

⁷³² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 192.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁷³⁴ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 96.

⁷³⁵ Sölle, *Silent Cry*, 63.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

show.⁷³⁷ A change of language into a more feminine language (or a view of the Divine as Goddess) is not my aim though, as Eckhart's premise that the Divine is existence contradicts an image of the Divine being male or female altogether.

Moreover, I find that such endeavors can easily lead into a feminist essentialism which contradicts my understanding of gender. Therefore, I prefer Tillich's gender-neutral vocabulary. Yet, I consider projects on new developments of language, images and terms to be utterly important because I indeed do believe that 'rearticulation', as Butler demands, in the religious realm, too, is possible – without shifting into essentialism though. This is why I do neither follow essentialist nor post structural approaches of some feminist theologians in the first place but rather draw on existentialist theology, particularly according to Tillich and his specific existentialist terminology.

As Butler specifically mentions the metaphysics of substance, essential and nonessential attributes, the Cartesian mind/ body dualism, and being imprisoned by the soul, I would like to briefly highlight three aspects of Mystical Theology which in some respects differ from traditional Christian conceptions as indicated by Butler: First, the conception of body and soul, second, the image of the soul, and third the process of becoming in every single now.

6.1.1 Body and Soul

Concerning the first aspect, Butler mentions in respect of the body a "fantasy of fleeing its embodiment altogether".⁷³⁸ In feminist literature this depicts a common view of spiritual accounts of ecstasy being just another attempt by patriarchal culture to abandon the body. Sölle rightly points out though that "the mystical ecstasy of losing oneself does not dismiss the body as an ill-functioning machine; rather, it sets the body free for a different and new self-expression", and she spells out that "what is left behind in being-outside-of-oneself is not the body but the body's instrumentalization as a tool for work or as a sex-object; [...]"⁷³⁹ Moreover, Eckhart's theology also reveals that ecstasy, the moment of unification, does not

⁷³⁷ For example: Rosemary R Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, (Beacon Press, 1993). Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female*, (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014). Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christians Origins*, (Crossroads, 1985). Carol Christ, "Theological and Political Implications of Re-Imagining the Divine as Female." *Political Theology* 8, no. 2 (2007) & Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, *Goddess and God in the World: Conversations in Embodied Theology*, (Fortress Press, 2016).

⁷³⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 17.

⁷³⁹ Sölle, *Silent Cry*, 47f.

mean a split of body and soul which the image of the Virgin Wife also strongly implies. He clearly states that “all things” will return in every moment of being present:

“Whoever had gone out of himself like that would be given back to himself in a truer sense; and all things as he had fully abandoned them in multiplicity, will be entirely returned to him in simplicity, for he finds himself and all things in the present ‘now’ of unity.”⁷⁴⁰

And he emphasizes a person being a Virgin Wife, desires life in a wholistic sense and “is not satisfied with the being that the angles cognize without form and depend without means [...]”⁷⁴¹ And he makes it very clear that he does not consider body and soul to be separate entities, as already quoted in Chapter 4.3.3:

“For just as the soul is bound up with the body and material things, so whatever spiritual things are to be shown to her must be bound up in material things before she can recognize them.”⁷⁴²

This quote seems to back Butler’s reference to the Christian image of the soul being encapsulated in the body. But looking at Eckhart’s conception in further detail reveals that the mystical approach transcends this state. He explains that “my body is more in my soul than my soul is in my body. My body and my soul are more in God than they are in themselves, [...]”⁷⁴³ He repeats this statement at another point phrasing his concept ontologically and he emphasizes that “my body and my soul are united in one being, [...]”⁷⁴⁴ It is exactly the knowledge and awareness of this oneness that, in Eckhart’s view, makes a human being human:

“But although the spirit is rational and does the entire work that is wrought in the body, yet we should say, my *soul* knows or does this or that, but rather we should

⁷⁴⁰ Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 51, 270f./ DKV I, Pr. 15, 175/ DW 1, 246 (488):“ Dirre mensch kumet richer wider hain, denn er us gegangen was. Des alsus usgegangen ware sin selbes, der solti im selber aigenlicher wider geben werden. Vnd allû ding, als er sù gar gealssen hát in der manigualitkait, das wirt im alzemal wider in der ainualitkait, wán, er sich selber vnd allû ding in dem gegenwürtigen nu der ainikait vindet.“

⁷⁴¹ Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 51, 272f./ DKV I, Pr. 15, 179/ DW 1, 251 (490):“ Nun sprich ich, das disem edlen menschen genuget nit an dem wesen, das die engel begriffent vnformlichen vnd das an hangent sunder mittel; [...]“

⁷⁴² Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 62, 314/ DKV II, Pr. 82,181/ DW 3, 423 (581):“ Wan alsô diu sêle bewunden ist in dem lichamen und in materielîchen dingen, waz man ir geistlîcher dinge bewîsen sol, diu mûezen bewunden sîn in materielîchen dingen, ob si ez bekennen sol.“

⁷⁴³ Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 66, 334/ DKV I, Pr. 10, 118/ DW 1, 161 (467):“ Mîn lip ist mêr in miner sêle, dan mîn sêle in mînem lîbe sî. Mîn lip und mîn sêle ist mêr in gote, dan sie inin selben sîn; [...]“

⁷⁴⁴ Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 72, 367/ DKV I, Pr. 7, 88/ DW 1, 119 (456):“ Mîn lip und mîn sêle diu sint vereinet an einem wesene, [...]“

say, I do or know this or that, on account of the close union between the two: for both together make up a man.”⁷⁴⁵

And this comprehension has a profound impact on the view even of the body as such, as he states that “in the body, all members are united and one, such that eye belongs to foot and foot to eye.”⁷⁴⁶ As this shows the body is being perceived as permeable rather than being like an apparatus consisting of isolated compartments. So, to Eckhart it seems very clear that body and soul are dependent on each other and that therefore fragmentation of the unity of body, soul and the Divine deprives them of their being:

“But the best comparison to be found is that of body and soul. These are so tightly knit that the body can do nothing without the soul or the soul without the body; and just as the soul sticks to the body, so God sticks to the soul, and when the soul leaves the body that is the death of the body. So too the soul dies if God leaves her.”⁷⁴⁷

Consequently, Eckhart considers the soul to be the feature that gives life to the body, which is linked to a process of renewal as he points out that “renewal also befalls the soul insofar as she is called soul, for she is called soul because she gives life to the body and is a form of the body.”⁷⁴⁸ Interestingly he considers the soul to be a form of the body and Walshe at this point makes an important remark in his footnote, in which he explains that in Eckhart’s commentary on St. John’s Gospel explains “that *anima* is so called because it *animates* the body [...]. ‘Form’ here means an active, formative agent.”⁷⁴⁹ This is an understanding, as I find, which

⁷⁴⁵Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 23, 157/ DKV I, Pr. 47, 500/ DW 2, 406 (710f.):“ Swie doch der geist ist vernünftig und er daz werk zemåle wûrket, daz dâ gewohrt wirt in dem libe, sô ensol man doch niht sprechen: mîn sêle bekennet oder tuot diz oder daz, mêr: man sol sprechen: ich tuon oder ich bekenne diz oder daz, durch die grôzen einunge, die sie mit einander hânt; wan sie beide mit einander sint éin mensche.“

⁷⁴⁶ Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 7, 73/ DKV II, Pr. 76, 128/ DW 3, 317 (563):“ In dem libe sint alliu diu teil des libes geeinigt [...].“ An idea that can be found in Traditional Chinese Medicine as well: “The meridians, pertaining to the viscera in the interior and connecting with the limbs and joints in the exterior, can circulate essence, qi, blood and body fluid so as to nourish and coordinate various organs and tissues. [...]. If a pathological change takes place in a local area, there will be functional disorders not only in this specific region, but also in its related organs or even in the organs and tissues of the whole body.” In: Hongzhou Wu, Zhaoqin Fang, Panji Cheng, and Yebo He, *Fundamentals of Traditional Chinese Medicine*. World Century Compendium to Tcm; Volume 1, (Hackensack, NJ: World Century, 2013).

⁷⁴⁷ Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 85, 416f./ DKV II, Pr. 85, 206/ DW 3, 470 (590): “Daz nehiste glichnisse, daz man vindin kann, daz ist lip vnd sele: di sint also foreinit, daz der lip inmac nicht gewirkin on di sele vnd di sele nicht on den lip; vnd also sich di sele heldit zu dem libe, also heldit sich got zu der sele, vnd also sich di sele scheidit fon deme libe, daz ist des libis tot. also stirbit di sele, so sich got fon ir scheidit.“

⁷⁴⁸ Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 96, 462f./ DKV II, Pr. 83, 190/ DW 3, 440 (584):“ An die sel vellet och nvwent als verre sel heiset, wande si heiset dar vmbe sel, wand si dem libe leben git vnd ein forme des libes ist.“

⁷⁴⁹ Walshe, Sr. 96, fn. 4, 465.

is far from Butler's allusion to Christian views of the body as an "inert matter, signifying nothing or, more specifically signifying a profane void, the fallen state: deception, sin, the premonitional metaphors of hell and the eternal feminine."⁷⁵⁰

I find that Eckhart's view of body and soul is consistent with his understanding of a vital life, and I also think that these findings can be related to Tillich's account in which he connects his notion of the courage to be with biology and vitality. He explains that life as a "life process which shows this balance and with it power of being has, in biological terms, vitality, i.e. life power. [...]. The courage to be is a function of vitality."⁷⁵¹ He continues to emphasize that "vitality is the power of creating beyond oneself without losing oneself. The more power of creating beyond itself a being has the more vitality it has. [...]. It is the source of his vitality."⁷⁵² And he then rearticulates, as I find, Eckhart's concept of the human being:

"But in man nothing is "merely biological" as nothing is "merely spiritual." Every cell of his body participates in his freedom and spirituality, and every act of his spiritual creativity is nourished by his vital dynamics."⁷⁵³

I embrace Eckhart's and Tillich's wholistic view of body and soul, mainly because I regard it consistent with their ontological/ existentialist theological conceptions which I am convinced of. Moreover, their comprehension coincides with experiences I have made over many years working as a nurse in palliative care as well as on a – literally – 'psychosomatic' ward in a general hospital in Germany. I have therefore always been doubtful in respect of Descartes' split of body and mind, including modern medicine, but also other academic fields. Furthermore, the perception of the soul in Mystical Theology does not merge into an image of a regulatory faculty, but rather as the source of joy, life and beauty as I will show in the following section.

6.1.2 The Image of the Soul

"Freedom and spirituality", Tillich's comprehension of the soul being the divine dimension of giving life respectively vitality, points out to a very different perception of the soul than envisioning it as a prison, and Eckhart too emphasizes that in the soul existence finds "delight and joy".⁷⁵⁴ Even more emphatic are Teresa's descriptions of the soul in the *First Mansions*.

⁷⁵⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 176.

⁷⁵¹ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 73.

⁷⁵² Ibid., 75.

⁷⁵³ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 76.

⁷⁵⁴ Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 57, 296/ DKV I, Pr. 12, 144/ DW 1, 194 (476): "Hie hât got lust und wunne in der vüllede."

There she describes the soul, as I have quoted earlier, as “a castle made of a single diamond or of clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in Heavens there are many mansions.”⁷⁵⁵ And she enthusiastically continues that she “can find nothing with which to compare the great beauty of a soul and its great capacity.”⁷⁵⁶ For Teresa, it is not fragmentation that is a hindrance to life, but being covered by dark material which separates one from the divine innermost source, as her remark on the indestructibility of the soul shows:

“It should be noted here that it is not the spring, or the brilliant sun which is in the centre of the soul, that loses its splendour and beauty, for they are always within it and nothing can take away their beauty. If a thick black cloth be placed over a crystal in the sunshine, however, it is clear that, although the sun may be shining upon it, its brightness will have no effect upon the crystal.”⁷⁵⁷

And she finally insists that:

“[...] we must always think of it [the soul] as spacious, ample and lofty; and this can be done without the least exaggeration, for the soul’s capacity is much greater than we can realize, and this Sun, which is in the palace, reaches every part of it. It is very important that no soul which practises prayer, whether little or much, should be subjected to undue constraint or limitation.”⁷⁵⁸

As this shows, although in Teresa’s account body and soul are regarded as separate entities, and even though especially for Teresa the body is the place of many somatic sufferings, she succeeds in maintaining a view of the soul as a liberating power to overcome boundaries.

Altogether therefore, Eckhart’s and Teresa’s notion of the soul promise a vital life of growth and expansion, and, in this sense, a liberation within embodied life to be able to lead a, probably not always happy and certainly not infinite, but always vital life. Such a notion

⁷⁵⁵ Teresa, 1M 1, 201/ *Obras Completas*, 1221: “como un castillo todo de un diamante, u muy claro cristal, a donde hay muchos aposentos; así como en el cielo hay muchas moradas.”

⁷⁵⁶ Teresa, 1M 1, 201/ *Obras Completas*, 1221: “No hallo yo cosa con qué compararla gran hermosura de un alma y la gran capacidad. Y verdaderamente, apenas deben llegar nuestros entendimientos, por agudos que fuesen, a comprenderla; así como no pueden llegar a considerar a Dios, pues El mismo dice, que nos crió a su imagen y semejanza.”

⁷⁵⁷ Teresa, 1M 2, 206/ *Obras Completas*, 1226: “Es de considerar aquí, que la fuente y aquel sol resplandeciente, que está en el centro del alma, no pierde su resplandor y hermosura, que siempre está dentro de ella, y cosa no puede quitar su hermosura; [...]”

⁷⁵⁸ Teresa, 1M 2, 208/ *Obras Completas*, 1227: “porque las cosas del alma siempre se han de considerar con plenitud y anchura y grandeza, pues no le levantan nada, que capaz es de mucho mas que podremos considerar, y a todas partes de ella se comunica este sol, que está en este palacio. Esto importa mucho a cualquier alma que tenga oración, poca u mucha, que no la arrinconen ni aprieten: [...]”

has indeed nothing in common with a prison, but rather with freedom as Dobie's summarizing remark shows:

“The realization of this primal identity both presupposes and is perfected by the soul's detached freedom in which the soul no longer relates to God merely speculatively as an object of knowledge but practically or ethically as the ground and perfection of its own inner freedom.”⁷⁵⁹

6.1.3 Becoming out of Every Single Now

Another aspect of being which is closely related to the soul is Eckhart's understanding of becoming as he believes that “God gives Himself to the soul ever anew in one becoming.”⁷⁶⁰ He in more detail explains that “whatever the soul desires is now ready. Whatever God gives has been eternally becoming: its becoming is now new and fresh and altogether in one eternal Now.”⁷⁶¹ Eckhart's comprehension of the eternal Now is closely related, and actually unthinkable, without his notion of the Divine being existence and being one with its creation and can therefore not be understood in a dualistic way. Kurt Flasch in his essay on the *Prologues on the Opus Tripartitum* spells out what Eckhart means and indicates that one who is attached to a dualistic view of the Divine, as I assume Butler is according to their comments, cannot fathom this facet of the Divine's creative process. Flasch explains:

“Someone who demands that there be a difference between God and the world is still attached to the idea of independent individual things that God placed into Being at some point. But here God is Being, present, always setting things into himself anew. Someone who is fixated on difference has not conceptualized Being.”⁷⁶²

Flasch's realization is the quintessence of Eckhart's theology and depicts the turning point for my own understanding of the Divine and of (present and future) creation. In this light the prologue of St. John's Gospel for instance reveals its genuine meaning encompassing creation, the Birth of God in the Soul, human being, life and vitality. Without doubt this must have an impact on how to understand divine creativity and human becoming. In this respect, Flasch continues to describe a common phenomenon on how the process of creation often is

⁷⁵⁹ Dobie, "Meister Eckhart's" Ontological Philosophy of Religion", 566.

⁷⁶⁰ Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 32(b), 198/ DKV I, Pr. 20B, 240/ DW 1, 349 (511):” Got gibet sich der sêle alles niuwe in einem gewerdenne.“

⁷⁶¹ Meister Eckhart in Walshe, Sr. 32(a), 193/ DKV I, Pr. 20A, 228/ DW 1, 335 (507):” Swes diu sêle gert, daz ist nû bereit. Swaz got gibet, daz ist iermermê geworden; sîn geworden ist nû niuwe und vrisch und alzemâle in einem êwigen nû.“

⁷⁶² Kurt Flasch, Anne Schindel, and Aaron Vanides. *Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2015), 83.

understood, and he explains, implicitly revealing Eckhart's panentheist way of thinking, Eckhart's specific view:

“[...] we know that Being is directly present in continual self-positing. People say that God created the world, but we know that Being continuously posits itself anew in the present. People think that God released the world from within himself, but we know he actually placed it into himself. [...], for Eckhart's Being is *always* Being.”⁷⁶³

And Flasch sums up that “[...] creation is to be interpreted as the presence of Being [...]”⁷⁶⁴ Such a view contradicts conceptions of creation and becoming as singular events which then, regarding the human being, release a person as a completed, fixed and static self with a prescribed plan, being fit for purpose, into a fully materialised and already completed world in some distance from the Divine. One's individual task then would be to just find the 'right' identity and live happily on until the 'real' redemption is going to happen in some unknown and far away future or on the occasion of one's personal death.

Eckhart's assumptions are very different, and they also must mean, as indicated, something very different regarding the self, one's identity and individual life. And this finally takes me back to Tillich and his theory of the self and the process of accepting acceptance as a process of self-affirmation as he summarizes:

“Ontological self-affirmation precedes all differences of metaphysical, ethical, or religious definition of the self. Ontological self-affirmation is neither natural nor spiritual, neither good or evil, neither immanent nor transcendent. These differences are possible only because of the underlying ontological self-affirmation of the self as self.”⁷⁶⁵

This summary reveals in Tillich's words that Eckhart's theology and conception of Trinity realizes and acknowledges the Divine to be present in the world, and that this state precedes everything – it also precedes all categories, including gender.

Taken together all these thoughts I draw following conclusions which I am now going to present in the final section.

⁷⁶³ Flasch et al., *Philosopher of Christianity*, 83.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷⁶⁵ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 80.

6.2 Conclusions

My conclusions are based on presumptions I hope to have elaborated throughout this dissertation: that mystical experiences can be made, inform one's life and can also be retraced through reflection, eventually constituting notions and a framework for coherent theologies. If individuals or spiritual communities then are able to comprehend themselves and their existence in such a framework, which means to accept a non-dualist view of the Divine, upholding an exclusively dualistic view of the Divine is out of question. A rather rare situation of an either-or. In the context of this dissertation, such a conception of the Divine requires the acceptance that being-itself endows everything and everybody with being, and it is then impossible to lead a religious life without affirming LGBTQAI+ lives. Declaring anybody's being as not being (fully) real (or as being a second- or third-class human) would mean a contradiction in itself and a push against being-itself expressing itself through concrete being, in the religious language: against the Divine and derived mystical humanism. It would mean the denial of reality – but queer people are a reality and have always been.

Having some churches critical position on what they call 'gender ideology' in mind, another central question at this point becomes prevalent, the question concerning Christian identity. This is a question which Strømmen and Schmiedel in *Claim to Christianity* (although engaging with the Christian Right and issues regarding Islamophobia) in their concluding chapters also ask: "What does it look like to be followers of Jesus Christ?". They propose to understand a Christian identity not as a possession but as a project. I find, this applies on an individual level as well: identity (let it be in respect of religious denomination or in respect of gender) is a project of becoming, and this is universal to Christians and non-Christians, queer and straight people alike. Such a stance claims as Strommen and Schmiedel suggest not for a politically neutral position as some churches try to hold, but for openness. They consequently make a claim which I strongly support:

"Openness, however, is not neutrality. There can be no neutral position in the face of the persons who are turned into non-persons, whose dignity is neither acknowledged nor accepted."⁷⁶⁶

Following conclusions therefore refute arguments coming from religious, mostly evangelical or fundamentalist communities which rigorously defend a literal reading of the Bible and support a dualistic, personal image of the Divine only. A theism which Tillich particularly

⁷⁶⁶ Strømmen & Schmiedel, *The Claim to Christianity*, 140.

warns of. Theories such as theories on gender as elaborated by Butler then become a threat or are being constructed as such. But such moves, from a non-dualist point of view are not apt because gender theory, as I hope to have shown, does not contradict the Divine nor does the Divine contradict gender theory. Gender theory despite its strict secularity, does not argue against the divine being-itself and the transcendent realm which is accessible to religious people who commit to spiritual community, practice and experience.

6.2.1 The Divine is Existence

Understanding the Divine to be existence (Eckhart) or being-itself (Tillich) leads to the conclusion that every creature that exists, exists through the Divine's creative process. Therefore, the Divine dwells as existence as such in every creature and gives every creature its being. Consequently, the Divine is not separated from any creature, and it therefore welcomes every creature. In respect of human creatures this means that the Divine gives each individual person its being and wants it to flourish.

Moreover, creaturely life comes into being in the image of the Divine, which means that Divine existence expresses itself in the materialised and embodied world. In the Christian language this is called 'incarnation'. This means the divine's existence as being-itself is always immanent in its creation. Consequently, the reality of being of every existing creature must be acknowledged, it cannot and must not be discussed away, and the world will have to face it: also Queer people do exist and are a reality.

Moreover, if there is something like a divine will, it does not depict an intentional will of an entity that has a certain plan, or projects purpose onto human beings, or delivers a sense or content of life. The Divine's all mighty power lies in its power to express itself as created and as ongoing creative existence and flourishing. There are no limits being imposed by the Divine to its own creative process and therefore Teresa demands to not set boundaries to the Divine's creation.⁷⁶⁷ Limitations are worldly matters, caused by creaturely respectively human developments and actions.

It is a constant question and challenge to understand and differentiate which limitations are expressed through, for example, nature or biology or rather through human ways of thinking and categorizing. The divine's immanence and creativity as pure being remains in any case untouched – and so does the human's innermost existence.

⁷⁶⁷ Compare Teresa, 1M 1, 203 & Chapter 3.3.1 in this thesis.

For that reason, Butler's questioning of gender and its genesis is a legitimate, and from a queer person's point of view, also important question. Therefore, as this shows, the Divine as existence respectively being-itself is pure being, and it is not gendered – neither is, logically, human's innermost existence. And if one can accept human's innermost existence to be named as Innermost Self, it must be understood to be an essential self, which is different from the (constructed) social self and different from many other conceptions of an essential self as a fixed and static figure from which certain looks, behaviours and ways of life can be derived. The Innermost Self does not hold certain predetermined individual characteristics or attributes but is the innermost place in which existence as such and worldly being fall into one, and one therefore constantly becomes a concrete being, a person with a personality. As such the Innermost Self is an innermost spiritual or mental source of each person's life and vitality.

In this respect, I regard Butler's investigations on gender as valuable contributions in order to better understand human's comprehension of themselves and subsequent social effects, particularly in respect of communal living and sharing a planet. Rules, laws and also discrimination and exclusion rely on these human-made principles. Questioning or even wanting to change these categories and rules does neither mean to question the divine order nor does it mean acting against the Divine's process of creation. I consider these questions and thoughts rather to be the opposite: an opportunity to better understand human ways of being, and to break open restrictive categories. Possible chances for rearticulation, to refer to Butler again, of human made patterns of life can give even more way to the Divine's 'outboiling' creativity.

6.2.2 The Divine is Unified with Every Creature

The Divine is equally close in every creature, Eckhart diagnoses. Human beings, accordingly, are of divine as well as of human nature, and they can gain an awareness of this which means the completion of the spiritual process of unification (as a merciful gift and in correspondence with detachment respectively contemplation). Such a process of gaining spiritual knowledge and conscience of being unified, leads to a new consciousness, a new way of being in time and in the world, in the here and now, and also to overcome the perception of body and soul being separated. Consequently, the soul can be experienced as place of freedom and growth.

In Tillich's terminology this process means to accept one's being as being a part and as being oneself: accepting to be accepted. In other words: this is to embrace to be alive and to consciously comprehend one's creaturely existence as one, consisting of the spiritual,

individual, and worldly dimensions. Such a comprehension of life can be regarded as a holistic, a mystical or just as well as a Christian way of life. Altogether a life which opens one's heart and mind to affirm the Divine's creativity and therefore celebrate diversity.

This is even more so important when considering that being fulfils itself differently in every individual life. There is no *one way* of life – participating in being-itself is universal (and makes us creatures to be creatures), but different ways of living are not. True life in and through the Divine, from a mystical point of view, is therefore not dependent on a specific way of life, for instance on being married or not, on being a single mother, a patchwork family or on clustering together as a traditional family. It does not make a difference if one lives in a same sex relationship or as a heterosexual couple, as a single, in a monastic order or in an open polyamorous relationship. No differences and hierarchies between different ways of living, including views on gender and gender roles, can be derived from such divine presence, and no discrimination and exclusion of humans can be implemented on behalf of the Divine, for example, the exclusion of women from priesthood or the exclusion of gay people from sacraments, blessings, or other ecclesiastical institutions.

To understand that the Divine is equally close in every creature makes it clear that it is wrong to discriminate, exclude – or even worse – wanting to annihilate human beings because of their being different and not fitting into human made normative boxes. Therefore: neither biology, nor culture, nor religion, nor gender must be destiny.

6.2.3 Becoming out of Every Single now and the Fluidity of Being

As elaborated the mystical way comprehends the Divine's creativity as an ongoing and outboiling process (*ebullitio, creatio continua*). This shows that the Divine is not a creator operating as a heavenly engineer, who is engineering from above and external of creation and of the human being by following some arbitrary opaque plan. In this respect I can agree with Butler's assessment that there is no one creator. There is no divine predetermination to found human existence and its fulfilment, but the freedom to just be and let life make its own way. Therefore, human's life is not planned and predetermined.

This could mean, for example, that somebody who is born in a female body, is not determined to give birth and raise children, as everybody's life can develop in uncountable ways and none of these ways would contradict a divine plan or intention. In this respect, there are many ways of reading and interpreting biblical texts, and I want to highlight that a literal reading of, for instance, the narration of creation excludes the spiritual dimension of the

human being and reduces it to a separated soul and (unambiguous) body. This includes a rigid binary view of (biological/ anatomical) sex and (social/ cultural/ psychological) gender (roles). Consequently, a dualistic understanding of being and its strict solely binary (and therefore heteronormative) deduction into the material world and bodily life cannot be retained. Every way of life, including a queer way of life, consequently, cannot be regarded as a violation of divine predetermination.

Particularly for queer people this can mean a new understanding of oneself and that one's being is in no way predetermined but an ongoing project of becoming and must not be coerced into an external and narrow view of a static self – like a lifelong prison cell to which one must adapt. This is even more so as being of divine and human nature means a fused identity and therefore also a dynamic identity, as McGinn has put it. Indeed, according to Eckhart's mystical and ontological theology there is no primary static identity, rather being which participates in being-itself, and through this participation fulfils itself in a dynamic way. The notion of identity becomes more fluid, and this also includes gender identity and gender relations as Sells indicates when stating that for Eckhart “the divine “work“ within the soul transforms the monotonically male “He-God” of the onto-theological tradition into an open and dynamic series of gender relations.”⁷⁶⁸

Considering the notion that the Innermost Self is grounded on such a fused and dynamic identity, can lead to a more differentiated view of one's social self and subsequently of one's social identity. This includes the rejection of a rigid and binary view of gender. Besides, insisting on a binary view of gender only, in this context, proves to be wrong anyway, as non-binary, intersexual and transgender persons do exist and therefore participate in the Divine's existence as much as every other creature does. Such knowledge and regarding one's Innermost Self not as a static and gendered being, but as a source of a dynamic, fluid, and vital way of living, can have a fundamental impact on one's life.

For a transgender person, for instance, this could mean, that when being born in a male body but identifying as a woman, one does not have to stick to one's physical appearance. If transitioning, for instance, would lead to a better connection of the person to their innermost divine source in the soul – and consequently feeling alive and building a true life of one's own – this would rather mean leading a life according to the Divine, than staying in a closet and strictly following the outer rules of a heteronormative and maybe even transphobic (faith) community.

⁷⁶⁸ Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 195.

Altogether, the divine source asks and encourages us to give individuality, growth, development and changes way as far as possible, and without regarding anyone as a sinner. Neither should anybody regard oneself as such. From the Divine's point of view, only one's being counts, and its expansion without any divine determinations or limitations to crucially develop into a certain form. Divine creativity is a manifestation of development, transformation, and diversity, and comprises manifold forms and constant change. Therefore, I welcome Butler's rejection of a preexisting identity, a core or a pregendered substance as coercive forces, and embrace their idea of incompleteness as a normative ideal.

Furthermore, this knowledge could lead to a new confidence which is independent from other's judgement and enables one to proudly come out and lead a different life. To understand subjection not as a once in a lifetime procedure but as an ongoing dynamic process means to accept that identities are fluid, and that acting against this fluidity means to act against the Divine's genuine outboiling creativity and diversity.

Moreover, such an understanding also opens ways to experience every single Now in its existential relevance, and that the reality of the present must be acknowledged. Such experiences hold the potential to – mentally and bodily – perceive that everything and everybody is interconnected – over space and time – because we are all sharing our self-being in the power of being-itself. Therefore, we have responsibility for each other no matter how different from each other we may be. This means that we should care and share, with Teresa's and Eckhart's words: practice love of neighbour and justice, but do not renounce, ignore or fight each other.

Altogether I think becoming out of every single now holds the potential to experience out of the depth of one's soul the Divine's presence in the world. In particular, being a Christ would mean to bear witness to this presence by leading a conscious life out of such knowledge and experience. The knowledge and experience of feeling vital, realizing the preciousness and reality of creation and of one's own existence, the existence of oneself and that of others. Leading such a conscious life out of every single now, again, does not mean to lead a certain way of life, but affirm and accept being accepted, in short: to lead a life out of faith which is accepting towards every creature.

6.2.4 Equality and Friendship

The oneness of the Divine with its creatures implies that the Divine is not something far away and above and approachable for a few exceptional persons only, but is always present

in every creature and moment, and unceasingly urges its fulfilment and flourishing in the world. Being one with the Divine means having a ‘fused identity’, which presupposes ‘sameness’ with the Divine. The relationship with the Divine therefore cannot be vertical, as it is based on Oneness it is rather horizontal. Realizing this can be considered to be a side-effect of Tillich’s notion of transcending theism, and an important point considering Butler’s concerns of underlying relations of hierarchy.

This complex also comprises a relationship which is based on mutual love as Quint points out to in his comments on Sermon 4.⁷⁶⁹ In this context Quint furthermore also emphasizes that for Eckhart love has no limits which allows him to be accepting of plural ways of living and does not rigidly insist on a strict view of how to lead one’s life.⁷⁷⁰

The notion of sameness and equality is also the reason why Teresa emphasises the notion of friendship with the Divine so much.⁷⁷¹ It is exactly this knowledge of equal value and love that constitutes the closeness and intimacy between the Divine and the human, not leading a life tailored in a certain way. The name of the Divine cannot be used to deny somebody’s closeness and love to the Divine or vice versa. A mutually loving relationship to the Divine is therefore possible for everybody and is not dependent on gender, sex, colour of skin, nationality, or any other outer category. Nor is it founded through church memberships, ordinations, theological studies, apostolic succession, a monastic way of life or other sacraments.

The Divine is neither a moral instance, nor does it label anybody as a sinner.⁷⁷² No clerical authority therefore can use the name of the Divine to reject people or refuse them a full participation in any Christian faith community. There is no Divine scale to categorize humans and no category that justifies their exclusion. If there are structuring criteria, for what reason howsoever, to organise a faith community or institution they are worldly, and human made and should be named as such.

Also, as they are human made and not given by the Divine, they can be changed. They rather should be changed, if necessary, into being welcoming to everybody and not frightening anybody away, as Eckhart emphasises that humans should not be frightened, but to be assured that they are loved:

⁷⁶⁹ Compare Quint in DKV I, *Stellenkommentar*, 783.

⁷⁷⁰ Compare *Ibid.*, 781.

⁷⁷¹ Compare chapter 3.3.1 in this thesis.

⁷⁷² Compare Walshe, Sr. 74, 375f.

“A man should not fear God, for he fears Him, flees Him. Such a fear is harmful fear. The right sort of fear is the fear of *losing* God. Man should not fear Him, he should love Him, for God loves man to the highest perfection.”⁷⁷³

According to this quote, it is wrong to regard any kind of people as less valid in the eyes of the Divine. Making differences in terms of belonging is against the limitless love of the Divine and reveals a presumptuous abuse of power of spiritual leaders.

For a faith community this should mean to share and live out of the spirit, that one should love the “man who is across the sea, whom one never has seen...”, as one of one’s own. Such a community would not need to reject the ‘stranger’: let it be humans who are different from oneself, or humans whom one has not met before, because they come from far away. Such a community could welcome the different other, practice empathy, solidarity and welcome diversity and seek to include everybody – despite all differences and uncertainties.

If a community would share and live out of the spirit, that one should “pour oneself out” and therefore would perform sharing and caring towards everybody, such a community would not need to feel threatened and seal itself off from the worldly world, and refuse to be integrated in society, not following its changes and progressions and ignore scientific knowledge, including, for example, current and relevant scientific knowledge on (homo)sexuality, gender (roles/ relations), identity etc. Such a community could be outpouring and embrace creativity and could, therefore, worship curiosity, listening and learning and reach out for dialogue, enhance development and flourishing, not only of its members but of everybody.

Finally, a community, which strives out of divine friendship could live out of a spirit, that is deeply connected with every creature. And this interconnectedness would include interhuman friendship. Such a spiritual community could be built on faith and courage, and ensure, that nobody feels guilty or threatened by the Divine, but would rather support everybody to approach and become friend with the Divine.

Taken together these findings show that there is no reason why Christians would set up boundaries and defend their religious identity through constructing and excluding 'the other'. Yet as explained in the introduction recent research on the Christian anti-gender-

⁷⁷³ Meister Eckhart in: Walshe, Sr. 53, 282/ DKV I, Pr. 22, 260/262/ DW 1, 385f. (519): “Der mensche ensol got niht vürhten, wan der, der in vürhet, der vliuhet in. [...]. Daz ist ein rehtiu vorhte, der dâ vürhte, daz er got verliese. Der mensche ensol in niht vürhten, er sol in minnen, wan got der minnet den menschen mit aller siner höchsten volkomenheit.“.

movement in Europe and elsewhere reveals that misogynist and queerphobic attitudes and campaigns are increasing again. The reasons for this development are arguably manifold and cannot be found within the religious realm alone. Still, the questions remain why particularly Christians are not more immune and resistant to such rising inhuman hostility. I have of course no answers to that, but the intention of this thesis is to complement many already existing Christian approaches that contest and contradict fundamentalist lines of arguments against queer people with "kaleidoscopic identities" – the more accounts the merrier, I think.⁷⁷⁴

In this respect, this project has provided a deeper insight in mystical hermeneutics which allow a line of argument to support panentheist approaches and a non-dualistic image of the Divine. And although I often, like Teresa of Ávila, feel to "mechanically as birds taught to speak [...], repeat the same things again and again", I believe this thesis to be the first comprehensive investigation of mystical theology with a focus on Eckhart's ontological assumptions in combination with Tillich's existentialist theology, and relating these results to concepts of becoming of life, the human, the self and gender.⁷⁷⁵ In this respect I consider my contribution neither to be a specifically feminist nor specifically queer approach, rather a mystical-ontological one with a strong emphasis on non-dualism and existentialism. This combination implies that spiritual experience and theological knowledge allow a personal relation to the Divine without imagining the Divine as a personal gendered God holding certain attributes which then are projected onto humans and against their different ways of living. This leads to the realization of the existential equality of all creatures as well as of interconnectivity and universality, and in this sense to mystical humanism.⁷⁷⁶

To understand the human to comprise a social self and an Innermost Self is not a contradictory assumption but a holistic comprehension of the human including its spiritual dimension. Denying queer people access to their Innermost Self I therefore consider to be a form of spiritual violence, and I understand my thesis as a counterproposal to many Christian narratives which use literal biblical accounts and draw on dualistic, personal and theistic views of the Divine to discriminate against queer people. These implications of my research are also of interest for queer communities as they show that intolerance towards queer Christians is inappropriate, as Christian spirituality and leading a spiritual life can indeed mean transformation, courage, empowerment, resilience and resistance. This means that queer

⁷⁷⁴ Diego: "'I have one of those kaleidoscopic identities.'", in: Jess T. Dugan, and Vanessa Fabbre. *To Survive on This Shore*. 2 ed. (Heidelberg, Berlin: Kehrer Verlag, 2019), 134.

⁷⁷⁵ Teresa, *The Interior Castle*, 199.

⁷⁷⁶ Dobie, "Meister Eckhart's" Ontological Philosophy of Religion", 584.

Christians do not need to be apologetic, neither towards Christian nor towards queer communities. And Christians should be able to be queer people's allies as well as queer people should be able to ally with Christians – making a joint effort in struggling for justice for all of us and in protecting creation.

Not surprisingly, the scope of this study was limited as there is a whole array of theological and philosophical aspects I could not expand on in the framework of a dissertation. Hence, it would be interesting to investigate several further topics in future research and publication projects focussing on the Innermost Self. So far, I can identify three threads which I would like to follow up on: First, deepen my understanding of the Innermost Self through working on more different aspects of Teresa's, Eckhart's and Tillich's theologies which I could not address in this thesis, and furthermore analyse comparatively with other religious traditions as similar notions can be found for example in the Upanishads or in the Spirituals.⁷⁷⁷ These and other traditions would be interesting to investigate and would provide material to enhance multicultural exchange and interfaith dialogue. A second thread to follow would be to examine the role of the Innermost Self regarding spiritual resilience, psychological wellbeing, mental health, self-confidence and self-efficacy, especially concerning anxieties and the relationship between the human being and AI. A third thread could be to have a closer look at lines of arguments of strategies of the anti-gender-movement within the Christian Right and its expansion into the nationalist political realm.

However, whichever direction my journey is going to take, I deeply believe in mystical humanism, a universalism from which nobody can be excluded, and my work therefore will always have a strong impetus on affirming life and celebrating diverse being, which means nothing else but to knowingly participate in the Divine and the other's life, and to live and think courageously out of faith.

⁷⁷⁷ Compare Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Human Being, Bodily Being: Phenomenology from Classical India*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2018 & James H. Cone, James H. *The Spirituals and the Blues*. Orbis Books, 2022.

Abbreviations

Teresa of Ávila

- M Moradas del Castillo Interior **St. Teresa of Ávila.** *Interior Castle* in: *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Ávila*. Edited and translated by E. Allison Peers. 3 vols. Vol. 2, London: Burns & Oates, 2002.
- Vida Libro de la Vida de Santa Teresa **St. Teresa of Ávila.** *The Life of the Holy Mother Teresa of Ávila* in: *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*. Edited and translated by E. Allison Peers. 3 vols. Vol 1. London: Burns & Oates, 2002.
- CV Camino de Perfección **St. Teresa of Ávila.** *Book Called Way of Perfection* in: *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Ávila*. Edited and translated by E. Allison Peers. 3 vols. Vol. 2, London: Burns & Oates, 2002.
- Herder **Teresa von Ávila.** *Werke und Briefe: Gesamtausgabe*. Edited and translated by Ulrich Dobhan OCD and Elisabeth Peeters OCD. 2 vols. Vol 1, Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Verlag Herder GmbH, 2015.
- Obras Completas **Santa Teresa De Jesús.** *Obras Completas De Santa Teresa De Jesús*. Edited by Vincente de la Fuente. Ebookklasicos, 2020.
- ## Meister Eckhart
- DKV **Meister Eckhart.** *Predigten & Traktate* in: *Werke I & II*. Translated by Josef Quint and al. Edited by Niklaus Largier. Vol. 24 & 25, Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2008.
- DW **Meister Eckhart.** *Die Deutschen Werke*. Vol. 1-5: W. Kohlhammer, 1958-1976
- Walshe **Meister Eckhart.** In: *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*. Edited and translated by Maurice O' C. Walshe. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009.

Sr.

Sermon

MHG

Middle High German

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