

In the Beginning Was the Word

by Meister Eckhart

Meister Eckhart's sermon explores the profound theological implications of the Word as the divine Logos, its relationship to creation, and its illuminating power in understanding truth and justice.

Scripture: Matthew 13:43, Luke 8:11, John 1:1-14, Romans 1:20

Topics: "Divine Revelation", "Trinity Doctrine"

Description

Meister Eckhart delves into the profound meaning of 'In the beginning was the Word,' comparing John the Evangelist to the eagle who soars high to reveal divine mysteries and the Trinity, emphasizing the importance of understanding and interpreting the Word. He explores the connection between natural principles, philosophy, and sacred scripture, aiming to illuminate the truths of God's creation and power. Eckhart reflects on the eternal nature of the Word, its role in creation, and its significance as the light and life of humanity, shedding light on the deep spiritual essence of the Word.

Transcript

1. "In the beginning was the Word." "A large eagle with great wings, long-limbed, full of feathers and dappled plumage, came to Lebanon and took away the marrow of the cedar. He cropped off the top of its foliage and carried it away to the land of Chanaan" (Ezk. 17:3-4). John the Evangelist himself is the eagle who "makes the nest" of his attention, contemplation and preaching "among the steep crags and inaccessible rocks" (Jb. 39:27-28). "He came to Lebanon and took away the marrow of the cedar. He cropped off the tops of its foliage and carried it away to the land of Chanaan" when he drank in the Word who was in the Father's breast and manifested him to men with the words "In the beginning was the Word." He is "the first among the Evangelists in penetration of the depths of the divine mysteries," as Augustine says:

In the figure of the four animals of Ezekiel, chapter one, and Revelation, chapter four, he is compared to the eagle which flies higher than other birds and gazes at the sun's rays with undazzled eyes. He rested on the Lord's breast at the Last Supper and drank a draught of heavenly wisdom better than that received by the others from the source itself, the Lord's heart. His concern was to intrust us with Christ's divinity and the mystery of the Trinity.

This is what is said here, "In the beginning was the Word."

2. In interpreting this Word and everything else that follows my intention is the same as in all my works, to explain what the holy Christian faith and the two Testaments maintain through the help of the natural arguments of the philosophers. "God's invisible attributes are seen and understood from the creation of the world in the things that he has made, as well as his everlasting power (that is, the Son), and his divinity (that is, the Holy Spirit)," as the Gloss on Romans, chapter one, says. In the seventh book of the Confessions Augustine says that he read "In the beginning was the Word" and a large part of this first chapter of John in the works of Plato. In the tenth book of the City of God he speaks of a Platonist who used to say that the beginning of this chapter as far as the words "There was a man sent from God" should be written in golden letters and displayed in key locations.

3. Moreover, it is the intention of this work to show how the truths of natural principles, conclusions and properties are well intimated for him "who has ears to hear" (Mt. 13:43) in the very words of sacred scripture, which are interpreted through these natural truths. Now and then some moral interpretations will also be advanced.

4. The interpretation of "In the beginning was the Word" should be in accord with this intention. First note that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," as well as much that follows, are contained in the words: "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and light was made; and God saw the light was good

Second, it is preexistent in it as a seed is in its principle; and this is what the text says, "In the beginning was the Word." "The seed is God's Word" (Lk. 8:11). Third, note that what is produced from something is universally its word. It speaks, announces and discloses whence it comes - hence he says, "In the principle was the Word." The fourth point is that what proceeds is in its source according to the idea and likeness in which and according to which what proceeds is produced by the source. This is in the Greek: "In the principle was the Word," that is, the Logos, which in Latin is Word and Idea. (...)

9. In the tenth place, note that it is proper to the intellect to receive its object, that is, the intelligible, not in itself, insofar as it is complete, perfect and good, but to receive it in its principles. This is what is meant here: "In the principle was the Word." And again, "This Word was in the principle with God."

In the eleventh place, mark that the word, that is, the mind's concept or the art itself in the maker's mind, is that through which the maker makes all that he does and without which he does nothing as a maker. Hence there follows: "All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made."

10. Twelfth. The word in the mind or in the art itself is neither a word nor something already made, but it is art itself, is life, the vital concept of the maker. This is what follows: "What was made in him was life." Thirteenth. The word, as idea, belongs to the rational faculty, which is proper to man. For man is a rational animal, and "The human race lives by art and reason," as the first book of the Metaphysics says. Therefore, the word is not only life, but the life is the light of men. Hence there follows: "And the life was the light of men."

11. Fourteenth. The word, the idea and art itself, shines as much by night as by day. It illuminates things hidden within as much as those manifested without. This is what follows: "And the light shines in the darkness," to distinguish it from corporeal light, which is not life, nor properly the light of men, and which does not shine at night or illuminate things hidden within. Further, it is more correct to say that in the case of created things only their ideas shine. "The idea of a thing which the name signifies is its definition," as the Philosopher says. The definition is the way of proving, or rather the entire proof that brings about

knowledge. The conclusion is that in created things nothing shines except their idea alone. This is what is said of the Word here - that it is "the light of men," namely their Idea. So too the text, "And the light shines in the darkness," as if to say that among created things nothing shines, nothing is known, nothing brings about knowledge besides the "what-it-is," definition and idea of the thing itself.

12. Fifteenth. The word, Logos or idea of things exists in such a way and so completely in each of them that it nevertheless exists entire outside each. It is entirely within and entirely without. This is evident in living creatures, both in any species and also in any particular example of the species. For this reason when things are moved, changed or destroyed, their entire idea remains immobile and intact. Nothing is as eternal and unchangeable as the idea of a destructible circle. How can that which is totally outside the destructible circle be destroyed when it is? The idea then is "the light in the darkness" of created beings that is not confined, intermingled or comprehended. This is why when John said, "The light shines in the darkness," he added, "and the darkness did not comprehend it." In the Book of Causes it says: "The First Cause rules all things without being intermingled with them." The First Cause of every being is the Idea, the Logos, the "Word in the principle." (...)

14. If you consider the just man insofar as he is just in the justice that gives birth to him you will have an example of all that has been said and much else that we shall often mention. First, it is obvious that the just man as such exists in justice itself. How could he be just if he were outside justice, if he were to stand on the outside separated from it? Second, the just man preexists in justice itself, just as a concrete thing does in an abstract one and that which participates in what it participates in.

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