

Jean Bedard
jphbedard@globetrotter.net

Master Eckhart

Translation by Richard Clark

2003

PREAMBLE

We are in the year of grace 1345, in the month of the first tulips. The sun is shining and I am preparing to leave for Bruges. I have finally decided to pull the stone from the wall of my cell, the stone which has hidden for 15 years those strange notes I compiled. I don't have the courage to reread them. I will simply add to them this short preamble and a brief conclusion, and put them back in their hiding place. Really, though, I ought to destroy them.

When it was all over, and the Superior General asked me to turn in those notes he himself had ordered me to take, I did in fact hand them over, but not before I had made a copy. Just as I had predicted, the Superior General burned the pages without even so much as a glance. I don't know why I saved this copy, it's the only real disobedience I've ever been guilty of, and it is unlikely, given my age, that I will commit any others. Many times I thought of pulling out the stone, sometimes to reread my notes, sometimes to destroy them. Finally, I did neither of these two things.

Today I have been assigned my final mission to Bruges, so I am leaving our monastery in Cologne for good. Not being able either to bring these parchments with me or destroy them, I will quickly add a beginning and an end, and return them to their casket of stone. If they remain there eternally, my disobedience will never be imputed to me, but if by some misfortune someone finds and reads them, he will make my sin a reality, and for it I may fall to Hell from Purgatory. Because I didn't immediately carry out the General's order, a line runs out from this account all the way to me, to my eternal loss if the finder reads it; to my salvation if he destroys it. However, I must confess that I don't really know if this line binds me solely because of my disobedience, or because it relates the thoughts and actions of a possible heretic, thoughts which can twist the spirit and imprison it in a fatal labyrinth. In any case, if the Master is not a heretic, he is certainly a saint.

Does this line really tie me, then, to Hell? This I can't affirm beyond a doubt! It could be that someday someone will discover that this man was not wrong because of what he said, but simply because he said it too soon. If that is the case, it could be that the reader will promote me to Heaven by the good deed that I will accomplish in him, and through him, in his century and those that follow. Through the reader, my copy will have sent the word of the Master to the age where it should be understood. My manuscript will have served as a bridge for a man who was not born at the moment when he should have been. It may be then that my disobedience will not be accounted as evil, but as good! You alone know, you who decide whether to continue reading or to throw these pages away. If you close them again a better person, I will contemplate Heaven; but if you get caught in the snares of evil, I will writhe in Hell. Be that as it may, you will join me, wherever I

may be! We are bound one to another because the order of the Superior General has made me eternally responsible for this story.

All my life, I have never been able to be certain of a single one of my choices, so I decided to walk with one foot on one side, one foot on the other, telling myself that, if one of the two mountains crumbled, the other would remain. Yet I doubt even this choice, because it could well be I have done no more than set my feet in the void which separates these two sides of existence. Eckhart showed one side, the rest of the world showed the other, and I have not been able to choose. If someone ever gets to look at this text, I hope that he will make the right decision, that he will know what to do: destroy it or donate it, incinerate a wasp's nest or resurrect a Word.

Even though I am lost in doubt, I really ought to praise it. I have lived through moments where judgement was suspended to the point where suddenly every possibility seemed equally likely. This leads me back inevitably to one of the key events of my existence. I must have been about twelve when one Sunday, as I was going to church alone, I came upon a pack of wolves who were just as taken aback as I was. It was as if time had stopped and I perceived the equal probability of two series of events. In the first I was eaten alive, and in the second the pack ran away. It was up to the wolves to decide! The leader of the pack hesitated just as I did, as I could tell from the set of his chops, by turns enraged and fearful. These two possibilities were so exactly equal that neither he nor I budged, nor even felt anything in particular, for fear of activating one of the possibilities and destroying the other. The indeterminate reigned in this strange fragment of eternity, when suddenly a man from the village, arriving unexpectedly, accidentally struck his foot against a stone. At this sound, the wolves fled. Time resumed its course in such a way that my whole body began to tremble. Strangely enough, I experienced relief and terror simultaneously, and not one after the other. The emotion was so extreme that it squeezed up into my consciousness all of my life, making it suddenly infinitely precious to me. I fled at once the frivolities of the world, wishing to make sure of my future through a secluded life. My father consented and I entered the monastery. But there is no retreat in this world and all futures remain possible.

Doubt is so constituted that it equalizes possibilities and returns us to the indeterminate, where it is as if new beginnings were pouring out continuously, in which the past no longer decides the future and where Providence uses any means available. For one moment, all futures are revealed to be free, the future itself is set free. However, it will exercise that freedom only in the second when it plunges from the possible into the real.

Plato said the origin of the universe was a Good which contained, as ideas, all that will exist. For him, the future could only be the manifestation of what already exists in eternity. Eternity decides the future. Aristotle contradicted him by observing that effects follow causes and that, consequently, it is the past that decides the future. "Man," the Master observed, "is so afraid of the indeterminate that he consecrates all his efforts to stopping the future: science subjugates him to

the past, philosophy subjugates him to being, and ethics reduces him to the consequences of his actions. A future which holds no surprises is no future," the Master continued. "It is simply the projection of the present and the consequence of the past. Because men fear the future, they also fear women. Isn't every woman a new origin in which a thousand possible stories arise equally? Just as man seeks to tame the future, he seeks to dominate woman. Intelligence resembles a woman: it is a dynamic in which the future keeps itself constantly alive. If there is intelligence in God, then the future exists and science is no longer the act of subduing it, but a state of dialogue; philosophy is no longer a technique for reducing it, but the art of waiting for it; ethics no longer consists in vainly trying to suppress it, but aims instead at participating in it."

He said this, but I didn't understand. Today I realize that, among other things, his plan consisted of an attempt to revive the future. If Plato was correct and forms preexist, and if Aristotle told the truth and the future ensues in a linear fashion from the past, there would be no intelligence in the universe; only being and memory would exist, only imitators and machines. The Master, for his part, said that the First Cause was not swallowed up in being and that, because of this, becoming retains an infinity of possibilities. In short, the universe is not a moving object, but a flexible intelligence. God doesn't create objects - He is incapable of this; He creates intelligence, creativity, and persons, because nothing can enclose Him. That is what woman symbolises, woman sole carrier of the Word. God has no name because He refuses to hold still: He has, on the contrary, a Word which moves Him, a Word which can only be born of a woman. Eckhart believed in a Word which multiplies its modes, which is perpetually inventing expressions, which pursues and desires itself without ever letting itself be contained. He believed in the resurrection of the Word, which dogma tries to kill just as it does the future. That is why he consecrated his life to saving those futures which in time to come will multiply into others. And yet, faced with him, I have not been able to suspend my judgement as I did when the pack of wolves surprised me. I have not accepted the equality of possibilities with a quiet doubt. I am lost in suspicion. I wanted to hold the future on a leash, but it caught hold of me, because when man closes a door, God opens a window.

So then, the Word still flows in me and I have not destroyed this text as I should have. In your hands it leaves wide open and gaping the two supreme trajectories: Hell and Heaven. Like a pack of wolves, my notes are going off into the future, yes, I swear, with the power to open futures whose outcome no one knows.

CHAPTER I: The Beguine

In the year 1326, after a particularly cold winter, I am taking up my pen and beginning the writing of these notes without any other concern than reporting the facts I have witnessed. May God give me the courage to tell the truth.

Under the successive reigns of the Popes Clement V and John XXII, the ecclesiastical principality of Strasbourg was invaded by a considerable number of Beguignages. There were more than eighty-five in that city alone. Each Beguignage forms an enclosure, grouping together cottages where pious but dangerously emancipated women attempt the adventure of sainthood on paths approaching the foulest of heresies. They owe obedience only to their Mistress, their chief, who answers only to herself. Instead of vows, they make only promises, simple declarations of intent. They call themselves virgins but some of them serve priests of low degree whose morals ought to be deplored. During the day, they go about their business, but the doors of their enclosure are shut one hour before twilight. Who can check then on what they do there? The ceremonies, the preparations, the medicines, the salves for the sickly, the sufferers who swap the wounds on their bodies for sores on their souls. These women attribute their foundation to Saint Begge, which is impossible, since she died in 694, more than five centuries before their foundation.

This movement has the effect of removing women from the guidance of husbands or of monasteries, duly subjected - as they should be - to a masculine order. It is pathetic to see the aimless wanderings that result. You must have a vase to contain the water, otherwise it spills out and is lost in indetermination. "The unsubjected woman is indeterminate and undefinable," as the Philosopher put it. And if the indeterminate penetrates time, couldn't it go even so far as to destroy the City of God which is already awaiting us in the future on this earth? It will come, that great City of peace; some hope for it in the year 1500, and a greater number expect it in the year 2000. It will come - if women don't turn everything upside down. Today, we worry about the multitude of Beguignages. As early as 1250, Matthew Paris wrote: "In Germany there has appeared an innumerable multitude of celibate women who call themselves Beguines. A thousand or more of them live in Cologne alone." Ten years later, Matthew Paris continues, these poor women, by nature innocent and easily influenced, were carried away in a pernicious frenzy by the apocalyptic dreams of the priest Joachim of Floris. It appears that fear of hell and the end of the world - though it may at times lead to women's salvation by keeping them obedient to the Church - may also produce, in their unstable humors, vapors which cause them to swivel around into the shadows of Satan. These delirious Eves will then envelop wavering men in their uncontrollable lust, and the menace will spread like the itch through all Christendom, at the risk of running the course of history into a pit even deeper than the one into which our

first mother sunk us.

Visionaries, real or self-appointed, arose in Provence and went out preaching penitence, while processions of Flagellants went all over Italy, southern Germany, and Bohemia. While crying out loudly against their sins, they scarred with wounds every part of their bodies. The flesh against the flesh! Illusion of repentance. It only amounted to pagan rituals, wild emotionalism, spineless unbridled outbreaks of a pestilence of the soul. Certainly, there was Hadewijch, the Beguine whose novel poems inspired Peter of Dacia, an honorable Swedish Dominican who had studied at Paris and Cologne with our great Albert, but how many thistles for one single rose! Luckily, in 1273, the bishop of Olomouc, Bruno, assumed his responsibilities and denounced this licentiousness that permitted girls to escape both the necessary obedience due to priests and the indispensable coercion of the bonds of marriage. For this he suggested to the Pope the following remedy: "Make wives out of them or send them into authorized orders." Then the Council of Vienne was held, which condemned the errors of the Beguines' belief in a supposed state of perfection. "...that is why," His Holiness affirmed, "we have decided and decreed, with the approbation of the Council, that their mode of life should be forbidden definitively and excluded from the Church of God."

Closer to our time, in 1317, John I of Zurich instituted, on August 13, an action against the Beguignages. During the riots some of the faithful, outraged and overzealous, drowned a great number of these unfortunates in the Rhine, without the authorization of the Church. Fortunately, the bishop took matters in hand, with the result that the recalcitrant women were burned, with the opportunity to repent and the hope of divine mercy, rather than being plunged into the very symbol of their sex, to their eternal loss. The others submitted for the most part, and monks from our order redoubled their zeal for these poor women's salvation. Starting now, we must purge from time everything which seeks to make its arrow waver. If it is normal that Satan more often attacks the puniest fringe of the people of God, and through lust swallows a great number of them, there is no greater and more merciful work than saving them and assuring thus the future of mankind. It is commendable that, to bring these women back to God, the most dependable among us risk their own salvation by approaching them. We must put up with them nonetheless, even while maintaining the closest vigilance.

It was acceptable, then, although unusual, for the Master to be sent to one of them who has fallen into heresy and is preparing today to either be converted or to burn at the stake. They say that she is greatly loved by the people and plans to become Mistress of the Beguignage at Strasbourg, Cologne, or even Bruges. It was necessary to arrest her and mercifully propose to her another way. The Master was no doubt in the best position for such a dangerous task. Hadn't this Master lectured against the Franciscans at the University of Paris and the Studium generale of Cologne? Hadn't he, with the assistance of the Lector Nicolas of Strasbourg, been entrusted with the territory of Teutonia? The General had insisted then on the necessity of devoting particular attention to the Beghardi and the Swestriones who called themselves "brothers and sisters of the Sect of the Free Spirit and of Voluntary poverty." He preached to them and saved several. But

today one of them has been turned over to the Inquisition, one who not only went astray, but dragged along many in her fall. She is preparing to renounce her beliefs or profit from the fire to purify her soul so as to be able to catch the edge of purgatory in her fall and thus hold on to the hope of heaven.

Given that I am his secretary, I, Conrad of Halberstadt, signatory of these notes, accompany the Master so that he won't be exposed to the danger of being alone with a woman, and to be a witness to her statements so that the Holy Inquisition can seal beyond any doubt the tragic end of that woman's wanderings far from the path of obedience.

We were at the Strasbourg monastery between Ash Wednesday and Ascension. The mud of March made the jail filthy and noxious. The frail Swestrione was in danger of dying of colitis or dysentery. Since I had charge of her, I had her led up to the storeroom we had in the attic of the tower, next to a dovecote. We went up there.

We had sung Vigils, and breakfast had been particularly frugal, not only because of Lent, but especially because the supplies of vegetables had spoiled more rapidly than usual. In spite of the perfect weather that morning, there was something unhealthy in the air, like the odor of sulfur and putrefaction. All week, I had been prescribing decoctions of lupine and camphor to purge the surfeit of black bile afflicting several of the brothers. We suspected the Beguine of being the origin of this sickness.

While crossing the courtyard, I heard something like a stifled moan through the noise of oxen being readied for plowing, but it could have been something quite different. I have exceptionally good hearing, so I am told, but unfortunately the cry was not repeated and the oxen didn't stop bellowing their protest against the firm hold of the yokes placed on them. Slightly distracted, I approached the Master :

— It's only appropriate for me to remind you of the recommended procedures.

The aged man stopped and motioned to me to be silent, as if he were trying to discern a particular sound through the noise. I was surprised because the Master is a little hard of hearing and doubtless heard nothing of a cry which could have been anything at all.

— It was the call of a magpie, I said to reassure him. I saw it fly off somewhere down here.

He had no choice but to trust my hearing, which he knew to be acute. He got his breath back then and worked his face into a smile, but kept an eyebrow raised, listening intently. The sound was not repeated. A lay servant mistakenly let an ox loose, and the animal approached us. Father Eckhart patted him on the neck, and with his index finger signaled me to continue.

— The more a woman is sweet to look at, the more we need to fear her...

He beckoned me to come forward and addressed me with a touch of impatience :

— No, no, you have repeated all that to me a number of times already. Conrad, my friend, I would like to know something else instead. You are a physician...

— You have knowledge of it also.

No, I studied medicine so long ago and I never practiced it, so you will have to inform me. Where does the danger of women come from, according to medical science?

He picked up his pace. I believed that he simply wanted to hurry up and turn me away from my duty, so I answered him :

— Oh! Don't put up your guard, Master. Medicine confirms what Wisdom affirms. "For Wisdom," says the Proverb, "will enter your heart and knowledge will please your soul. Reflection will watch over you, understanding will guard you, to deliver you from the strange woman, the stranger who uses smooth words."

— Stranger, you said.

I wasn't in a hurry to get to the tower, and took the time to elaborate my answer.

— Yes, I replied. That's it. Woman is a stranger. Galen speaks of it in his Science of Causes: "To the South belong the hot and dry, fire, summer, yellow bile and the choleric temperaments. To the East belong the hot and moist, air, springtime, blood and the sanguine character. Man is hot and moist. The proof of this is that his organism is capable of purifying the components of his body to make a white, generative seed. But to the West belongs cold and dry, death, the earth, autumn, black bile and the melancholics. To the North belong the cold and moist, water, winter, and phlegm. Women, everyone knows, are colder than men. Lacking fire, they are unable to purify the constituents of their bodies. Instead of seed they let loose a flow that is almost black and incapable of producing life, scarcely capable of nourishing the man's seed. And when this flow erupts, it is poisonous, giving children measles and weak men the plague."

He had stopped walking.

— But isn't their milk white and essential to life?

— Pardon me, Master, but I notice that your memory is failing. The milk comes directly from menstrual blood; certainly it is purer than that, but it remains simply nourishing, not generative. A famous distich from Salerno reminds us that the first stage of the embryo, before the blood appears, is like milk, but even more vague and indeterminate. Should I remind you that Woman is closer to chaos than Man? It is Man who determines the organisation of life; Woman supplies only the indeterminate matter : menstrual for the fetus and milky for the nursing infant. Whereas Man gives of his brain through his spinal fluid and produces a seed capable of establishing life, Woman only succeeds in carrying and nourishing that

seed. What Man does in actuality, she receives in potentiality; that is indubitable since the Philosopher affirms it.

— Suspicions occur to me sometimes.

— Oh, I respect you so much, Master! Don't take it as if I were doubting what you were saying, no never!, but it is my duty to remind you that such doubts originate from an inclination we all have, and I am here to support you just as you support me. I have in mind an argument which is sure to restore your certainty and permanently reassure. Plato in his Timaeus, - I have it in a manuscript that belonged to Master Albert himself - Plato declared : "It is that marrow which in our discourse we have called sperm. It has a soul and it breathes. The opening through which it breathes gives it the vital desire to go outside. It is thus that the marrow has produced the love of generation."

— Do you wish to say that our weakness for women comes to us from what Galen defines as our force: the virility of our seed?

— Yes, in a way. Master Albert, who is fittingly called Great, in his Question on the Animals, supports the thesis of Avicenna : sperm is food that has reached the fourth stage of purification, where heat has given it the power to generate fire. But Woman can only reach the third stage, and then only in her milk which she can only produce if Man fertilises her. Obviously, Man wears out his brain, his eyes, and his marrow to disseminate his sperm; thus chastity is better for health and the subtlety of the spirit. The married man deadens his mind, but his sacrifice allows the perpetuation of the species. For that reason, there are two great vocations: chaste men who ensure the reproduction of the spirit and married men who guarantee the regeneration of bodies..The former is closer to the divine fire, and the latter to the feminine cold. After the chaste man and the married man comes the chaste woman, and finally, very close to the earthly cold, the married woman. Could there be any argument more convincing?

— It's convincing, Brother Conrad! It's convincing! So watch out then for your own inclination; because the more fire you have, the greater your risk of catching cold, and since I believe you are chaste, your fall could give you a bad cold.

He began a smile which would have turned into a laugh had he not controlled himself and continued:

— For my part, I fear that age may have gone through me to the extent that inclination might lead me elsewhere, to something colder than Woman. The end is knocking at my door. Is it a sin to let myself give in to it? However it may be, humility should make us observe that it's much more our heat that pushes us toward impurity than the supposed lukewarmness of the feminine body.

— Oh, that's not so! You know the foehn of the Alps, that hot dry wind that descends from the summits toward the south of Bavaria and Swabia. It clears up the weather and causes headaches; sometimes, it takes on an astonishing force:

then nothing can contain the hot air and prevent it from rushing into the valleys. It's a terrible thing that can flatten the wheat, tear the thatch off roofs, and cause lots of other damage. There it is, that's what we have to fear : burning in the heat of God, to be hurled into the bottomless gorges of a woman. If I weren't the doctor for the villages and the countryside that surround our holy monastery, I would have made a vow not to look at any of them and would have been afraid to be touched by even one of their poisonous looks. For when she is not in flower, the woman's venom is even more subtle : it goes out through the eyes and insinuates itself through the pores of the skin. If it doesn't inflict sickness on the body, it's only because it has gotten all the way to the soul, to bite and contaminate it. This is a fact demonstrated by their ability to tarnish mirrors and to kill their children by smallpox, dysentery, and many other forms of pestilence. Have you ever taken care of men who were sick from love? Their bowels tremble, they have difficulty breathing, their stools become soft, their vision blurs, they have a foul-smelling flatulence, they lose their strength, and even go so far as to let themselves be touched by the abject hand of the woman who seduced them. If she ever succeeds in touching them, even with the end of her fingers, they are lost; their will abandons them and they slide into the abyss of amorous madness. Gentile da Foligno warns us that, when the man who is thus subjected lets himself be touched, an invisible humor called Alwadi is ejected from his meatus before he even has time to contain it. He is thus, without his being aware of it, emptied of his cerebral substance, and loses a portion of his intellectual faculties.

Stupified, he approaches dangerously close to the level of women. They are no longer alien to him because he has lost that surplus of brain that had kept him raised above them. He can come to the point of feeling pleasure in talking to them and even end up understanding them. Rare are those who can get back up again after a fall. Woman is such a slippery slope that she leads the man who approaches her to forget his natural disgust for sex. She takes him into her spirit to weaken him, then into her body to bring him down. Don't you see, Master, that two paths of history appear before us: either masculine reliability or feminine uncertainty? We are speaking of the future of humanity! What will the men of the year 2000 say about us if, instead of the City of God, they find themselves in chaos?

— But, my friend, if the beauty of feminine forms didn't exceed the hideousness you speak of, it's the very existence of the future we need to fear for, the disappearance of the human race; incapable of reproducing, we would no longer have any future at all. If the future exists, it is free in its ways. A future that could be determined starting from now would not be a future, but a continuous past; a woman who was completely determined by a man would no longer be a woman, but a statue. However it may be, the distinctive thing about life is that it connects the determinate and the indeterminate, and that's what the intellect really is. It is important to get beyond the commonplaces thanks to a true intelligence of spirituality. If not, it will be the whole man that breaks in pieces. He will be mortally divided: on one side the hermetism of the sects and the circular time of the eternal returns, and on the other a science become linear with its future fishtailing abruptly to a close. Two ways of destroying intelligence, which prevent the opening up and multiplication of unpredictable futures. You should fear that

division a lot more than dialogue with women. It could be that the years to come will confront us with both of these two reefs: the gyratory religion of the sects and the rectilinear science of the logicians. Would you know how to slip between the two?

I was so disconcerted that I couldn't answer.

— There is one path that allows us to advance in complete confidence into the divine future, the true future, the one that can't be closed, and that is dialogue, Conrad, simple dialogue. Are you capable of it?

I shrugged my shoulders because the answer seemed so obvious.

— It won't be long before you'll have the opportunity to demonstrate that you are capable of it. As for me - is it age and the fact that my poor brain is wearing out? - I understand women a little better now than when I was young, and I am convinced that their company enriches me. However it may be, the Word is the God of equality, not of domination; of humility, not of pretention; of intelligence, not of knowledge.

— But, Master, what distinction do you make between knowledge and intelligence?

— You do have perhaps some knowledge about women, but in no way do you offer me any intelligence about them, and you cannot have any intelligence about women without changing your point of view, and you change your point of view by daring to hold a conversation. To converse, do you know that word? It doesn't have the same root as conversion: *conversari* means to keep company with, to frequent; *conversio* signifies to turn around. Intelligence requires both. Knowledge conserves, intelligence is converted by holding conversations!

— But the truth!

— Knowledge cannot possibly be true; however, certain kinds of knowledge are less false than others. But, Conrad, you must tell me someday why fear of the powers of the intellect is to such a degree associated with the fear of women, associated to such a degree that those who fight against spiritual intelligence are also always those who fight against the equality of women! The Inquisition persecutes both the Beguines and the philosophers, it is persecutes whatever can introduce uncertainty into time, that is to say intelligence and art. If it destroys intelligence and art, it divides man... but I've already told you this many times.

He gave a friendly tap to the rump of an ox which gave a start and splattered us with mud as it left the courtyard for the field. The Master burst out with a big childlike laugh as he did from time to time ever since old age began to erode his memory, and continued in another tone:

— I hope that what you have said, brother, will help both of us. God preserve us from our weaknesses which, I believe, result more from the images that we

maintain about ourselves and other people than from the temperature of bodies. If old age makes us a little colder, we have less chance of being carried away by what's down there, isn't it so?

— That's reassuring, but ...

I didn't have the leisure to continue, as he interrupted me:

— It's true, it's not in the nature of cold to rush into more cold. On the other hand, age can congeal ideas and obstruct the way, late in our lives. We should beware more of ideas that crystalize than of fires that go out. Let us go and meet this woman, and not be anxious. If it's any comfort to you, Herman of Summo, who taught her the catechism when she wasn't even seven years old, claims that she learned quicker than a boy.

— She is simply more curious ...

He signaled me to keep quiet, but this time with tightened jaws, the effect of one of his rare displays of impatience.

— What does the proverb say, Brother Conrad: "You may inherit from your fathers a house and riches, but an intelligent woman is a gift of the Eternal?" In this body that they say is a little colder than ours there exists a daughter of God. It is she whom we must console.

— Console! What are you saying! But that woman is ...

He turned, and with a raised finger, commanded me to be silent once again. It was, however, impossible to stop my increasingly agitated spirit. My Master didn't seem to understand that what he called that "daughter of God" was not only a female, but also a heretic and perhaps even a chiromancer, a thaumaturgist, a sorcerer, even a Circe sold to the Devil. That's what they said! Doesn't he know their powers? Their eyes and their tongues are able to cajole even the most valiant. In their seemingly healthy flesh there hides not only death, but the first blasts of hell as well. These poor wretches already breed worms and maggots, they twist and turn and move around not on their own accord - they no longer have the strength for that - but, by the power of Satan. We must never break their bodily envelope before burning them, for fear that their half-decomposed insides might spill out, spreading typhus or the plague in all directions. But that is nothing compared to their power over the intellect - they can even twist its logic. They can make the worst contradictions reasonable and blind men to the most obvious affirmations of the Fathers and even of the Gospels. A man affected thus can even reach the point of stringing together tirades into the form of syllogisms, but which lead to the futility of the world, to the casting off of God, and to the vassalage of man to his pleasures. Conversely, he is no longer able to understand reasoning as simple as Galen's on the subject of women ...

He stopped; we were on the stairs in the tower. I sensed that he wanted to take a moment of silence, and that is what he did. He seemed to be absorbed in a strange

meditation, and there appeared little by little a discreet smile in his delicately slanted and almost black eyes. His gaze plunged through a crenel of the tower, from which he seemed to draw out miracles.

— Breathe a little, my friend. See how wonderful and mild spring is.

I approached him to take my turn at looking out the arrow-slit. I shrugged: there was nothing there but the countryside.

— Some like to imagine God, he continued. I prefer to drink him and eat him.

— But there's nothing outside. Some fields, some peasants, that's all, I answered.

— That's it all right. There is what you say, my brother, and it's beautiful as heaven!

They say that the Master is a saint and that he has visions. Undoubtedly he saw an angel or perhaps the Virgin Mary...

— May God, keep you from envy, Brother Conrad, he continued, as if he had guessed my thoughts. Apparitions are the food of unbelievers; the majesty of the universe is a much better menu.

He opened the door, and a shaft of light forced him to close his eyes for a moment. The morning was truly superb. I turned around immediately so that the woman's glance would not touch me and sat down on the last step, back to the room. That was enough for me to hear and take notes, while praying to the saints to preserve my soul. He hesitated a moment, doubtless because of the light or out of simple prudence. I heard the woman moan, but so quietly that you would need to have keen hearing to discern the moan through the cheeping of the pigeons we had doubtless disturbed. He finally advanced into the storeroom and let out a cry he no doubt would have preferred to contain. Without thinking I stood up to look: the young woman was naked, her tunic at her feet.

— Bring me some water immediately, he demanded.

— But put her clothes back on, Master, I told him, almost shouting-.,

— Don't you see those lacerations all over her back? Is it you who had her beaten this way?

— But, Master, it is customary to weaken the prisoner before she meets her confessor.

— Is that the way? he demanded. What did they use to beat that woman? A rod with iron balls!

— No, no, I only ordered her to be beaten with horsehair, without undressing her like that. Her blood might have splashed on the brothers I sent to do the job, and

caused an epidemic. The fever is weakening us already; we mustn't add to it the plague or leprosy...

Shut up and bring some water.

Next to a cornice there was a vase for her to drink from. He ordered me to wash her wounds, but I trembled at the thought that she might look at me or that I might be soiled by her blood. He continued washing her himself while charging me to go and get oils and salves. I rushed to the dispensary and returned as quickly as I could to assist the Master who would have had to confront the danger alone for quite a while. On my return, he went to the window while I applied the salves on the woman's wounds.

I wanted to cover her nakedness, but he himself took the robe and covered the young woman with a gentleness that was not appropriate. A tear slid along his cheek, he seemed sad and almost despondent. He didn't stop repeating.

— Why? Why? What madness! What foolishness!

I went out as soon as possible and took my place on the last step of the stairway. I was ready to note all the details of the confession, but neither one of them said anything. Finally, it was she who was the first to open her mouth.

— You really are - and I'd hoped for this so much - the master who came to teach us at our Beguignage, quite a long time ago now.

— You are in no way obligated to speak to me, my daughter. Get your breath back instead and calm yourself, the Master answered.

— You told us such beautiful things.

By paying a little attention, you could bear in the darkness and silence sounds of an extraordinary subtlety which came to represent images more profound and truthful than the facts themselves. I perceived the Master who dove into this woman's sufferings like a duck into a lagoon. He plunged into it to rise back up with a minnow of hope he gave to her. One could have said that he wished to show her the "valley of the shadow" which, in the deepest of our afflictions abounds in nourishment. His voice took on a very gentle tone:

— It was such a beautiful spot and the Mistress was so attentive to the sermon! But the Superior General, Barnabas of Cagnoli, preferred that I limit my visits...

The Master may have wept, I wasn't sure, but there was something so sad in the silence which separated one phrase from the next, which dispersed them like a flight of birds, which undid them like wool borne away by the wind. They talked to each other even when silent, shaking up sadness to make of it melodies because, once it has become music, bitterness awakens new joys. But was it the sadness of man or just the natural melancholy of women in which the Master risked losing himself? I too trembled without really knowing the reason. Could she

carry me away in her languor? The winter had been too hard on my rheumatism, and, in light of this, my duty appear to me so overwhelming. No, I should have had confidence in the Master, he knew women and their black bile: he could conquer fits of black bile and melancholy worse than these. To take such a risk, a great deal of charity was required, and charity, he had it. There was even something sacred in what was taking place there, in the silence. I asked myself if I really should note everything down! At times that seemed to me a sacrilege. Luckily, obedience returned me to my duty. The General had clearly told me to note down everything, even the smallest details.

It was she who seemed to console the Master now:

— Don't be sad, kind Master. Oh, no! Rejoice instead.

— But look at you, my child, your wounds...

— Forget these sufferings, she answered him. Smile instead with me. It's a long time ago that the cup overflowed and I lost hold of it ... I don't suffer any more. Do you suffer from a flybite when you've been pierced through and through by a sword! I have become, with the help of God, a stranger to my body, a stranger to this world. The world is good for nothing. It is not the world which has been saved. You can see for yourself: rats and the plague, hatred and madness, war and blood... No, it is not the world which has been saved, it is the hearts of men and women who receive God. Suffering purifies us, helps us to detach ourselves from our bodies so that we can return to our home, in the spirit, because God is spirit. A pure being will never return here to this flesh and this suffering.

This was in all respects the teaching of the Free Spirit sect, exactly what I needed to note down and report to the General who would in turn transmit it to the Inquisitor. But the Master noticed this and interrupted:

— What are you telling me, my child! You don't know what you're saying! The fever is carrying you away. You're repeating the manifesto of the Free Spirit sect without understanding anything about it. Don't you know the price of that?

I perceived a sound as if she had let herself fall on her knees in the straw. Perhaps he had dared to whisper in her ear the reasons for my presence.

— Rest a moment, he said finally.

She didn't want to rest and continued:

— What difference does it make if they condemn me like they condemned Jesus? Let them finish this sacrifice that began when I was born! I want to drink the cup and never return.

—I see that you are wounded much more deeply than it appears. What did they do to you?

— In this world of sin, a girl rarely escapes brutality, she replied.

— Especially when she is favored with a beauty talked about in all the district.

— That makes her suffer more.

— How violent and weak men are!

— The body is only a tomb, and if the casket appears beautiful sometimes, that is only a trap...

There was a long silence.

— Thanks to that suffering, she finally answered, I have crossed over to the other side. Perishable beauty has been a calamity for me, but that calamity has been transformed finally into a benediction, it has pushed me to the eternal side of things. This valley of tears attracts me no more, I won't return to it...

— Do you truly believe there are two sides?

— You taught us that. You spoke of a summit of the soul. That summit is so totally simple, so transcending this or that, or any corporeal mode or even incorporeal, that neither power, nor woman, nor man can ever look at it, without being lost herself ...

— You have a good memory, my child. However, you are simply repeating, repeating without understanding...

— But, Master, I have experienced it.

— I am afraid that you are confusing spiritual experience with emotional experience. Suffering can lead women as well as men to strange states, even to the momentary dissolution of their consciousness of reality, but that has nothing of the spiritual about it. True spirituality is not state of intoxication, but on the contrary of full lucidity.

— There was a time when I suffered much, but I have learned how to leave this body.

— Shush! Shush! he mumbled, I am not alone.

The Master did everything to make her see reason and avoid denouncing herself, but she kept on even worse :

— It was the work of God, not of nature.

— You should perhaps have thought the opposite ...

— No, No. That deliverance is from God. The sensation gave me neither the hope

of living nor the hope of dying. In that state where living and dying are no longer separate as in this carnal life, I was filled with the sentiment of the Holy Passion. I wished that the sufferings of Jesus might become mine, together with compassion and thirst for God. I wanted to be immolated as a holocaust for the salvation of men. I desired to be flagellated, beaten and humiliated, I wished to suffer with Him as much as God would grant me the grace ...

— So who has hurt you to the point that you are as mixed up and confused as you are today? I beg of you, let's leave off there for the moment! Rest, my child. I'll see to it that no one comes to bother you any more.

And he withdrew immediately. Why hasn't he continued the interrogation? Confident in him, she no doubt would have recounted everything else: the rituals, the incantations, the ceremonies, the trances, the embracing of demons, the giving birth to the devil's spawn, the fraying of reason in the feminine temperament, the dissolution of humanity in the miry ocean of the Infernal Regions...

He waited to speak until he was in the courtyard. He looked all around, and when he was certain no one was there:

— Conrad, my secretary, you are one of those in whom I have confidence.

— I will never betray you, I replied without even waiting for the words to take time to touch any depth of truth.

— I'm not certain that you will understand my actions in the days to come. Have you understood me so far? But you will be loyal to me, won't you?

— I serve the Church.

— Your obedience is reassuring. I beg of you to be discreet in every respect and not speak to anyone about what I am asking you to do.

— But what is that, Master?

— That woman has not just been savagely beaten, those who struck her took advantage of her.

— What do you mean by that, Master?

— Don't pretend that you don't understand.

— You believe that she succeeded in leading one of our monks astray with her lust...

— Open your eyes, Conrad, just open your eyes. Two men came up, before Lauds perhaps, and beat and raped this woman not because of her concupiscence, but because of theirs, - theirs, not hers.

— But what you are saying makes no sense.

— No matter, I am ordering you to investigate this crime. You will report to me the names of those responsible and see to it that this doesn't happen again, do you understand? That woman is in your keeping and I will hold you personally responsible for her.

It was easy for me to establish the events of the night before, but I didn't say anything about it to the Master. The next day, seated on the last step of the tower, I noted down the remainder of the confession. He checked the prisoner's health and consoled her a brief moment. The salves had relieved her pain, and she felt rather well. Even so, he gave her permission to sit down and she did so. Then, when she began naively to launch into her confession, he stopped her once again:

— Katrei, I beg of you, stop kindling a fire which can destroy you. God cannot bear the sufferings we impose on ourselves.

— I am ready for this sacrifice, I want to resemble Jesus - Jesus crucified who came to save us. This body deserves to suffer, it is a disgrace. Did Jesus have pity on his body? No, he wished to suffer and keep on suffering to save us from our sins. I too should endure and wash myself with my own blood. I want to burn at the stake. I want them to burn me, I want to be done with it! I will return no more, I will be free!

— Oh God in Heaven, what have we done to the Word, to the Logos, to the Divine Intelligence! Who could have perverted to this point the meaning of her life, reverse it so radically? He who is wisdom has become madness, He who is justice has become injustice, He who is goodness has become stupidity. They have made a sheep out of an eagle! His death was not an immolation ritual to satisfy the vengeance of a god with a white beard and a fiery temper. He was the victim of your fear of the Word. It is not by sacrificial rites that you will save anybody, not yourself and not those who abused you either! It's an insult to God and to plain common sense. To embrace Christianity is to agree to pass through the Word in order to reach the depths of the spirit; that means crossing through the purest perspicacity and not allowing yourself to be carried away by a wounded emotionalism; that means passing through the most exacting intellectual rigor and the boldest science to reach what surpasses them. But you, you want to get there by sacrificing the Word within you, the desire to live, the necessity of thinking!

— But, Master, I no longer need to reflect with my head ...

— You have learned by heart all the lessons of Marguerite Porete who was burned at Paris one terrible afternoon in 1310. I was there, it was horrible: a doe in bondage in the fire. It was not she who bound herself; others bound her by manipulating her spirit. I know very well that you aren't speaking on your own accord; you are simply repeating. Throughout the centuries and in spite of the

diversity of styles, sects serve too often as a refuge for wounded hearts; they propose a spirituality of the heart at odds with reason, that is in fact a perversion of the heart..

He stopped suddenly, took a few nervous steps and continued:

— You are bewitched, beside yourself. So, for the time being, simply answer my questions, no more than that.

He had to sit directly facing her. Doubtless he was plunging his deep dark eyes into hers as he did with his students sometimes, with a goodness that was perfectly direct, and without the slightest indulgence:

— How did you come to go to the monastery school? he inquired.

— My mother died right after my brother Alberon was born. I wasn't quite five. It was in July, and I remember there was a crevasse in the hill just north of our hut; I ran and hid there. I was so lost, I was so afraid. I cried. I don't know how long. I must have fallen asleep. When the cock crowed, I didn't have any more tears. I don't believe I ever cried again after that. It was then that I received the gift.

— The gift! the Master exclaimed.

— There was a cat that was going to have kittens. I saw the little ones in her womb and their color, too. I told this to my big sister, and when the cat gave birth, she was very much afraid because everything I said was true. If a woman is carrying a baby, I see the position of the baby. If a cow is about to calve, I can draw the spots on the coat of her calf.

— A gift is nothing in itself, the Master interrupted, what is important is its use ...

— They encouraged me to develop this gift and use it whenever possible, she answered.

—Who did?

— Herman of Summo and William of Nidecke too, these were the ones who taught me. They wanted to help me develop this gift.

— No, what they wanted right from the beginning was to make you be suspected of sorcery. Were they the ones who asked your father for his permission for you to go with them?

— My sisters were gossips; before I was seven, the whole county knew about my gift. The midwives would call on me. So much so that a monk came to determine if my visions came from the Devil or from God.

— And what were the monk's questions?

— He asked me about the origin of the gift. I answered him that I hid in a little cave on the north side of the hill because I had lost my mother. A sweet smell, my mother's smell spread through the cave. I was so transported by joy that I began to laugh. Mama said to me: "You will see me always, and many other invisible things as well." I never do see Mama, but I smell her odor very often, and I have strange visions. The monk told me that he didn't know whether my gift came from God or from the Devil, but that, if it did come from God, I would follow and listen to it, and if it came from the Devil, I would flee and betray it. So I followed it.

— This monk, was he Herman of Summo, a Dominican like I am? Eckhart inquired.

— Yes, of course.

— But it is rare for a child to be taken to a convent free of charge, especially a girl.

— I had the gift, that was why they instructed me. Almost every day they had to test whether I was possessed by the Devil or by God. My father couldn't provide for all of us, my brother, my two sisters and me. He was happy to know that I was secure. He came a few times with the hope of meeting me, but the Fathers never gave him permission. They said that he was a peasant and that he could spoil my education.

— And what did they do to determine whether the gift came from God or from demons?

She said nothing, no longer moved, no longer breathed. I heard only the fibrous respiration of the Master.

— I'm an old man, Katrei, and the way things really are no longer frightens me. As a point of departure, the world of men seems very low and very poor, but even so a lot more valid than any illusion whatever. So speak to me frankly. A little girl as pretty as you were, thrown off balance to a certain degree by the death of her mother, is not necessarily sent to catechism through the pure kindness of disinterested monks.

These last words sank into a silence which took on a frightening gravity. This mortal silence was protracted for a period which seemed to me interminable. The pigeons had fled, the sound of plowing was no longer audible, the wind appeared to hold back, the Master's breathing diminished. One might have said that time turned solid and the memories that came from it were memories of stone. My pen remained suspended and a drop of ink fell on the parchment. The spot was terrible, yet even so I could not get out of my mind the image of the girl, naked and so fragile in the light. I was Prior at the convent when Herman and William were teaching there. The Devil knows every trick. Through a magic charm, the little girl must have subtly entered into them and conquered them. God save their souls! And now she was in my own insides like a Trojan Horse. The beauty of her exterior constantly risked unchaining in my heart her baleful troops and packs: the

most hideous desires and concupiscence. God preserve me! Fool that I am! I refused to see the fall of my own brothers Herman and William. Can I keep my eyes wide open today and still remain closed to women? It would be easier for me to vanquish devils in the form of Turks or Moors than in a veil this sweet. May God preserve us from Woman! The Master interrupted my reverie:

— What did they do?

— I don't know, she said finally, weeping, I wasn't completely there when they did it.

— They put a blindfold around your eyes, he continued, perfectly at ease, and when they lifted your dress, you were so afraid that you lost consciousness of what happened afterwards.

— You have the gift, Master!

— Age and observing people can easily compensate for the absence of the gift. But answer me again, what allowed them to know if you were inhabited by a devil or an angel?

— The devils, you must flee from them, they are in the body, they twist and turn in the body, which is only dirt. If I want to remain good, I let them punish my body, but never let them enter my spirit. I must not see them or pay attention to their presence. Besides that, the demons are always talking and they say obscene things, things which can't be, so we must never repeat them.

— If I understand correctly, the demons penetrated your body, but you could not say it. You could not even admit it to yourself.

— If you admit it to yourself, they have already penetrated your spirit and if they penetrate your spirit, they bring horrible dirty images into it.

— Can you describe to me one of those images?

— No, I never listened to them, I never let an image form.

— Then pay attention to this: it isn't the demons who penetrated you and chastised you, it is them, Herman and William. They lied to you so that you wouldn't denounce them. They took advantage of your innocence. They didn't want you to see them, they didn't want you to know that it was them. But you know it! Deep down you remember it because we can never totally tie up consciousness, there is always something which knows.

The Master's discourse became incomprehensible. It was she who penetrated these two poor monks first, it was she who aroused their concupiscence. It was she who made them act like that. She used them to give herself ignoble pleasures. Why was the Master seeking to suppress the numerous sins of this woman, a heretic who latched on to the robes of holy monks to make them fall into her own vices ... if I

had only had my eyes open at the right moment I would have chastised her myself with iron and with fire ...

It was Katrei who finally corrected the Master:

— But, Master, she replied, I've already told you, God gave me a gift, but nature, a defect. If there is a hollow in a courtyard, water comes and transforms it into mud. It was the beauty of my body which attracted them. It was they who were bewitched by my female body. I must hurt this body, punish it.

— What a disgrace to our community! How could they have gone so far in their intrigues and machinations, to take and to keep such a hold on you. And just look at you, you're accusing yourself of their sins, and if I don't succeed in making you listen to reason, you'll risk condemning yourself before a tribunal that they themselves have seized control of. You will let yourself be burned to save their poor souls. But if you truly wish to save them, give them the truth, don't perpetuate their lie. That lie has driven them out of themselves, and that is the worst of calamities. If you are still capable of a little bit of pity for these wretched men, give them their truth and their responsibility.

She must have taken notice of the nonsense of Father Eckhart's words and kept quiet. A few minutes later, the Master left in a huff; he seemed furious. I had never seen him that way. This was more than the simple breath of authority he showed when imposing through fear what he could not make comprehensible through reason. No, this was a volcano which seemed to want to burn and bury all of the monastery and perhaps the whole world. He took deep breaths, at least the best he could through the beginning of a consumption that was becoming more and more oppressive. At the bottom of the stairs, in the hope of lessening his anger I dared to whisper:

— That woman is not so crazy. She knows she is at fault and will spare us dishonor.

It was then that he seized my soutane with a terrifying force. But he took a breath, another deeper one and then another, and finally said:

— Shut up, God in heaven, shut up, you don't know what you are saying. A man is not a dead tree-trunk that falls simply by the force of its own weight, nor a leaf detached from a tree that twirls in the whirlwinds that go nowhere. A man is a terrible freedom, a freedom so great that he can choose to abjure himself. These criminals denied themselves before denying her. It's not this woman who has sinned, it's all of us, from the thickness of the clay that covers our eyes. It's not she who wore the blindfold, it's us, and I clearly see that you are still wearing it. Go and get me those two. Not only have they profaned this child, they have also perverted her thinking to the point where she can no longer defend herself either before men or before the tribunal which is preparing to sentence her.

I dared not answer, but prayed to God with all my heart to help the Master and set

him upright in his fall. She was on the point of carrying him away with her. In my prayer, there was the image of the young woman attached to the stake in a light whose impertinence I didn't understand, a light which should have fled away from her. Fortunately, the image was brief, and immediately reason put me back on guard again.

The night before Easter, the Master insisted that I speed up the inquest on the monks who had succumbed to the charm of Katrei and chastised her a little more than they should have. He demanded that William of Nidecke and Herman of Summo be brought to him. He insisted with such authority and such urgency that I had to reveal to him then what I ought to have told him the next day, after the Holy Day mass.

— Master, I said to him, the Superior General has asked you to come to Cologne as soon as possible.

— I will finish my visit here and return to Cologne next month as planned.

— You must, I am afraid, depart as soon as the Easter mass is finished, it is the written order of the Superior General.

— I have to meet the ones who are not worthy of our order and see to it that they are expelled; what's more, I must continue to hear the young prisoner before they sentence her. The real heretic is not the one who loses his way, but the one who, in full knowledge of the facts and after having been correctly instructed, stubbornly continues on the road to ruin and takes others along with him. Katrei is innocent, but her soul is confused and deserves consolation and correction, that is my greatest duty. So I will leave for Cologne on the date I had planned.

— Master, that's impossible!

— And why not?

— Those you wish to expel, those are the very ones who are asking for you at Cologne. They have presented a petition to the Archbishop, Henry II of Virneburg, to have some of your suspect teachings studied. They expect you there and, it is in front of them that you will have to clear yourself.

— Never! he curtly replied.

He took a breath so deep and so slow that I believed he was going to collapse. For a moment it was as if he were paralyzed. He slowly got his breath back. A few seconds later he sunk his gaze into mine and did it for such a long time I could stand it no longer. He seemed to capture in me images I couldn't see myself. Finally, he broke off his procedure:

— The landscape is clearing up, yes, it is clearing up and showing itself at last. Tell me, you have orders to note down the interrogation not only for her condemnation but also for mine, isn't that so?

— Master, I obeyed my Superior General just like you do every moment. In any case, I'm not afraid for you, not even after I heard your hesitations with the she-devil. Herman of Summo and William of Nidecke hold it against you because you keep on criticizing them for everything.

— They deserved worse than that, and you just as much as I are guilty of a tolerance more insane than Christian. The result of that tolerance is there, in the tower, and it calls into question our commonplaces, our ideas about nature and our moral opinions.

— But they can't do anything to you. Your conduct has always been irreproachable and your sermons, though they've been a little over-enthusiastic sometimes, are incontestably orthodox. It will only be an opportunity there to affirm your ideas and have them confirmed and if..

— I wanted to hold back the rest of my sentence but he wouldn't let me.

— If ... if by accident and without any ill-will on your part, certain expressions are judged offensive, it will be easy for you to adjust the wording. Besides, your position favorable to the Beguines, enemies of the Church and of the Pope, gives the impression - I say only the impression - that you could condescend to the opinions of Louis of Bavaria on the role of the Church and the State. You just need to accept from time to time...

— How much twisting and turning and above all how much naivete for a man of law and science like you! Politics is like the wind: sometimes it goes in one direction, sometimes in another. Whoever follows the wind necessarily walks in a zigzag, and through trying to avoid a head wind, ends up by hitting stone walls. The truth speaks of itself and needs only purity to be understood. Pay attention simply to that purity, and you will distinguish by yourself the just from the unjust. How can your superior have confidence in you if you can't judge for yourself the value of his words and actions? Starting from what will you choose your guide if you aren't capable of hearing inside yourself the one who recommends him to you? Obedience does not consist in trying vainly to give to others our most fundamental responsibilities.

He looked at the sky a long time. The stars twinkled strongly. He took another deep breath and then another. A cloud passed in front of the moon and covered little by little all the sky. I left without him giving any sign that he had noticed. From my cell I saw him again, he was still there.

At the first bells of dawn, I joined him in his cell. I noticed on his face that deep wrinkle between the eyebrows that only formed when he had stayed awake all night. He took me by the shoulder with a strange force and, after having cleared his throat with several dry coughs:

— It's a beautiful day, isn't it, my friend?

— Easter is a day of glory.

— The glory of God can flood the deepest abyss and the greatest disappointments. This will be my last sermon here in Strasbourg where more women than men appear to receive the word of God and be transformed by it ...

— And several of whom alas are Beguines or even sisters of the Free Spirit.

He paused then and plunged his gaze into my eyes. It was only then that I understood that he had carefully weighed the word "last." He saw that I had understood and continued:

— We love them, of course, each one of them. I will celebrate mass here in the monastery and not in the cathedral still encumbered with scaffolding. There will be plenty of people, the ceremony will take place in the courtyard, on the south side, in front of the wall which joins the tower to the refectory ...

He took another good breath and seized me by both shoulders:

— Obedience has its priorities, doesn't it?

— What do you mean, Master?

— That you owe me obedience only to the extent that obedience doesn't place you in contradiction with our General Barnabas of Cagnoli.

— That's correct.

— It's you who are in charge of Katrei the Beguine. I want her brought with us to Cologne.

I hesitated a moment. Should I inform him of this fact? Moreover, I wasn't able to evaluate the importance of the injunction I had received. Finally, I underestimated its significance and naively told him:

— The order has already been provided to me by those who want us down there.

He stared wide-eyed and seemed to read in my look what I didn't learn until much later, then he reflected a moment.

— You just confirmed the height of the mountain we will have to climb. He whispered a final wish. You will make sure that Katrei's father can enter the monastery and visit his daughter, alone, before the mass. I also want the lord knight Walter of Bruges and his wife, who are passing through Strasbourg, to be presented to me immediately after breakfast. You will tell them that it's urgent, they will come, and you will leave us alone.

He smiled at me while raising his eyebrows and continued:

— And that's an order. You will say to those who came to beat the prisoner to make her implicate me in her own condemnation, that they were not required to

sully her because she refused to perjure herself. I will add, and I insist on this, that this young, frail, fragile, and naive woman demonstrates a courage they will never be worthy of. As to you, Conrad, it was not necessary that you hide from me this despicable act of my accusers, because it didn't have anything to do with any order from the Superior General, but was simply an initiative of Herman of Summo with the complicity of William of Nidecke, and doubtless with the tacit approbation of Henry of Virneburg.

I was appalled, how could he have known?

— My brother, we have here only a simple deduction, but your expression just now shows the basis for it. It's only natural that you obey the General, but Virneburg, nothing obliges you to do that. You will have to confess this to Barnabas of Cagnoli.

It was, to say the least, unusual to celebrate mass facing the chapel rather than back against its immense and magnificent tangent wall supported by side aisles and pierced by magnificent but sober stained-glass windows. It was so that his voice would resound against that colossal rampart, he said. But it was while participating in the preparations that I understood that the Master wanted to be heard by the heretic. The tower was located just to the left of the preacher and, from the attic where she was, she could hear everything and perhaps even catch sight of the one she dared to call her Master. I remarked about this to the prior then, who answered rather curtly:

— Dominic, our holy founder, had preached with the Cistercians in the country of the Cathars and had seen the necessity of proposing spiritual models in accord with the new problems of our world marked by certain people of the Church who used her rather than served her and by so doing scandalized the people. The poor no longer recognized Jesus in the hierarchy of His earthly Church. Dominic founded our community on a strict return to poverty and on the preaching of the Gospel, to counteract through reason and example the decline of the powers of the ecclesiastical institution. That is how, after he created at Prouille the first convent for women - I did say women, Cathar women -, he established in the heart of the conquered Albigensian land, at Toulouse, to be precise, based on the Augustinian rule and the Premonstratensian customs, the first house of preaching brothers for the salvation of heretics. He was never in favor of oppressive methods and persecutions which only encourage the people to flee the Church rather than approach it. Isn't it only normal that one of the great teachers of our order follow our most fundamental tradition and seek to convert the Beguines by appealing to their intelligence! You should know besides that they aren't all heretics, and that in many respects they form almost a tertiary order of our community.

— But, Father Prior, I answered him, they keep their distance and refuse to make this subjection to our community official.

— Tell me, in what way are we worthy of them? We have more than once betrayed

our own vows by dishonoring them, they live in greater poverty than we do, they dedicate themselves to the needy and console many rejected women. It would benefit us to associate with them, but our perversity forbids it. Our Father Eckhart is one of those who have proved themselves more than worthy of their confidence, and it makes me worry to see you put it in his way like this. I forgive you because you don't know the ones who are manipulating you. The mass will be heard by Katrei and you will place her so that she can see the Master from the tower. Don't disobey this warning. Pay more attention to feeding yourself with the spirit rather than with rules and conventions. Carried by the spirit of our holy founder, in less than five years our order was set up in eight administrative provinces. Have you forgotten this? France, Germany, England, Spain, Hungary, Rome, Provence and Lombardy to which we must now add the Holy Land, Greece, Poland, and Dacia. It is not by establishing walls that one grows, but on the contrary by opening windows and doors.

I admit that at that time I didn't understand anything about the Prior's admonition. Be that as it may, under a radiant sun and, despite a coolness coming from the Rhine, the mass was held at the appointed time and place. The crowd was immense: they came from the town and the country, the children clutching their mothers'dresses, the men forming little groups and discussing, no doubt, the progress of plowing and sowing. Certain people had already knelt and were praying, others were standing on tiptoe and looking for the Master. Katrei's father and family were among those present. The peasant had met with his daughter for more than an hour. But what was the lord Walter of Bruges and his noble wife Jutta of Antwerp doing so close to this great big unwashed fellow, his eyes wide apart like those of an ox, and whose flattened nose fell over his thick red lower lip studded with yellow teeth? There was something out of place and shocking here, contrary to the natural order. The nobles of the city stood far away from them and averted their eyes while lifting their noses. Were it not for the rules of hospitality shielding these strangers one knew were protected by Louis of Bavaria himself, some of them would not have restrained their children from secretly throwing stones at them, or pieces of manure.

At the front, Tauler was speaking with Suso, from the convent at Constance, who was visiting with us. Inevitably, these disciples of the Master would be speculating about the sermon he will give. They were getting ready to drink in his words without much discernment. Didn't they realize that the Master should rein in his ardor, not because of his doctrine, but from the fact that certain impulses and images would be inappropriate for the unrefined ears of women and country people? The Master was attracting attention in all of Germany at a time when we need to be discreet. He taught in the vulgar tongue whoever wanted to hear him: Beguines, heretics, poor people, knaves or lords, priests, nobles ... He insisted on poverty and pointed his finger at clerics and even bishops, he intensified in this way the natural resentment poor people have against the noble clergy. This led smaller minds to believe that he was criticizing the Pope and because of this tolerated the attacks of Louis of Bavaria against Avignon. Women were transcribing his sayings in the northern and southern dialects and these were being spread without distinction all over the country. Others were translating them into

Latin and, in this way, they would grate on the ears of Franciscans all the way to England. Rivalry with that mendicant order, already intensified by the canonisation less than three years ago of our illustrious Father Thomas Aquinas is always increasing. We should have stuck with him and made sure that the Master (I don't doubt his willingness) agreed to obey the order of the Chapters General of 1309 and 1313, and conform in all respects to the learned theologian's teaching. What can we do if the Pope and the order most faithful to the Inquisition combine against us?

Nonetheless it is infinitely regrettable, I realize now, that Herman of Summo and his venomous acolyte got involved in this affair. The Superior General would have better succeeded with his plan without the vengeful intentions of these ambitious traitors and their affiliation with an archbishop whose conduct was doubtful, not to say detestable. Why then did I obey that unworthy archbishop?

My thoughts wandered in all directions, and when the Master mounted the wooden platform set up for the occasion, I was very sorry not to have heard anything of the Kyrie and the Gloria. I took out my pen to take notes on the sermon.

He gathered his forces which were still considerable. The silence covered the assembly which seemed suddenly to take notice of the importance of the moment, and he began this way:

— My very dear friends, noble people and you honest peasants still stiff from plowing and sowing, rejoice that our risen Lord was received by a sinful woman of no account before showing himself to his apostles, the most socially prominent of whom betrayed him. It is written in the Gospel: "Our Lord Jesus entered a little castle and was received by a virgin who was also a wife." Right behind me is a tower which ends in a conical roof pointed toward Heaven. Isn't this a beautiful representation of the little castle way up at the top of our soul that the Lord is speaking about? Oh well! Now pay careful attention to these words: it was absolutely essential that the human being by whom Jesus was received be a virgin. Virgin is not primarily a fleshly term. We need to rise higher than that. Virgin means nothing less than to be detached and freed from everything. The virgin runs freely, not through the imagery of religiosity, but through the reality of this world.

You might ask: how can a human being be as detached and free from all images as he was before he existed? Pay attention to the distinction that I want to explain to you. Even if I were gifted with intellect, if I had no selfish attachment to any image to the point where, in the present moment, I stood free and detached, in truth I would be as much a virgin then as when I did not exist. And that would be true even if my flesh had known the pleasure of procreation or the suffering of being defiled. Understand this - virginity is an attitude of freedom in regard to mental attachments, to their walls of prejudices, to their scaffoldings of ready-made ideas. What fool would attach himself to a wave in the sea which at one moment surges, only to sink the next? The virgin rejoices in the movement of the waves, but does not let herself be taken by any one of them.

I say in addition: if the human being is virgin, this doesn't remove anything at all from all the works she ever did; she stands there, virginal and free, without any hindrance in regard to the supreme truth, just as the Word is detached and free, and virginal in itself. From what the masters say - that only equal things are capable of union - you heard me well, only equal things are capable of union -, it follows that the human being who welcomes the creator Word must be intact and a virgin. Since you must be equal to the Word in order to receive it, he must then return us to our original equality, free and detached from all chains and images.

But now, take this into consideration! If a human being were to remain a virgin forever, no fruit could come from her. To become fertile, she must of necessity be a woman. 'Woman' is the most noble word that can be attributed to the soul, and it is much more noble than 'virgin.' It is a good thing for a human being to receive God into herself, and in that receptivity she remains intact. But for God to become fertile within her is even better; because the fertility of the gift is the gift's only gratitude, and the spirit is a woman, in gratitude conceiving in the heart of the Father, there where God begets His Word. The soul that is detached by its virginal attitude only has value when it is anchored in the flesh, which it must fertilise and render glorious.

Many precious gifts are received in virginity without being fertilized in turn by the woman's fruitfulness, with the praise of gratitude in God. These gifts spoil and all pass into nothingness, so that the human being is never the happier or the better for them. Her virginity then is good for nothing, because she has not added to it the full fertility of the woman. It is there that the harm lies. That is why I said: "Jesus entered a little castle and was received by a virgin who was a wife."

His strong and vibrant voice struck the north wall of the chapel which rose up as high as a cape, and from there echoed, even more clear and thunderous, over all the audience. Thus whenever he paused and took a breath they heard again, even more sonorously: "... received by a virgin who was a wife." The Master continued, adding more gentleness to his voice.

— Some are not very fertile. These are the ones who, with selfish attachment, are bound to prayers, to fasts, to vigils and to all kinds of exterior exercises, even including the virginity of the flesh. A selfish attachment, whatever it might be, to whatever work it might be, which removes the freedom to reach God right now, that is what I call a "year": because then our soul through its resistance, is adding to time. But to the degree that we through freedom are fertile and yield fruit, the "year" does not pass and we remain young in the present moment. The "year" measures the hesitation to yield fruit. The less there is of resistance, the more the present moment holds us in its breakthrough to eternity. The more there is of hesitation, the more we pass into the "year" and the century like a ship carried off by the wind and then the fruit is minimal because it has proceeded from attachment to work and not from freedom. That kind yield little fruit.

A virgin who is a wife, such a one is free and detached, without any selfish attachment. She is at all times equally close to God and to herself. She yields much

fruit and these fruits are great, no more and no less great than God himself. This fruit and this birth, this is what the virgin who is a wife gives birth to, and every day she yields fruit a hundred or a thousand times, and even beyond all number, giving birth and becoming fertile. From there, she becomes a co-begetter. For the Word - the light and the reflection of the heart of the Father - is united to her and she to it, and she shines and radiates with him as a unique One and as a clear and limpid light in the heart of the Father, as a pure light in the heart of God.

I say moreover that there is a power in the soul that touches time only to freely dance with it; it flows out of the spirit and yet stays in the spirit and is spiritual in every way. In that power, God is always greening and flowering in all the bliss and all the glory that He is in Himself. There, there is such felicity of heart, a bliss so inconceivably great that no one can speak of it. For the eternal Father engenders his eternal Word in this power unceasingly, with the result that this power co-engenders the Father's Word, and co-engenders itself as the same Word in the unique power of the Father. This is the resurrection of the Word which every moment rolls freely over the sea of eternity. Were the spirit to be always united to God in that power, Man would not grow old; for the moment when God created the first man and the moment when the last man will disappear and the moment when I am speaking are equal in God and are only one moment. Understand now, that this soul dwells in the same light as God; that is why there is in her neither pain nor succession, but an even eternity. In truth, that soul is delivered from all fear, and in her all things are found in essence.

He stopped for a moment. The poor people in the back seemed to understand him, but this was no more than a false appearance due to the charisma of the Master's voice. The women were obviously smiling and almost exulting, forgetting that the Master was speaking in symbols:

— There is one more power which is just as incorporeal; it flows out of the spirit and yet stays in the spirit and is in every way spiritual, that is to say, lively and dynamic in its essence. In that power God unceasingly gleams and burns with all his richness, with all his sweetness and with all his delights. In truth, in that power is a bliss so great and delights so marvelous and without measure, that no one can fully describe them. But I say: if there were a soul who could, for one moment, contemplate the bliss and delights that are there: then everything he might suffer would be to him a small thing, and even less than nothing.

"Jesus entered a little castle and was received by a virgin who was a wife." I have told you that Jesus was received; but I have not told you what the little castle is, and I want to speak about it now.

His voice had literally carried away most of the audience. It wasn't so much what he said that reached them, few understood him, no doubt, no, it was the resonance of his voice that involved his whole being. He projected himself completely into his voice, he preached, he let himself be swept away by his words and his words penetrated even more deeply into hearts than daylight does into the eyes. It was Easter and he succeeded in resurrecting the Word in everyone who truly listened.

He had espoused the order of Preachers and he was the preacher, the activator of the resurrection of the Word. The majority of the women, especially the peasant women, had tears in their eyes. They seemed aglow with a kind of joy. Several peasants stood open-mouthed with eyes full of wonder, so it appeared. He could have swept them away to the Holy Land to sacrifice their lives, but he rose as always to a level so incomprehensible that nothing concrete could result from his sermons.

— I have sometimes said that there is a power in the spirit which alone is free. At times I have said it is a rampart of the spirit, at still other times that it is a little spark. But I say now: that it is neither this nor that; it is however something even more interior than these. That is why I am naming this power in a more noble manner than I have ever named it. And this, even though it makes light of nobility and manners and is above all this, and, especially, more interior than all this. It is free of all names and devoid of all forms, unattached and free just as God is unattached and free in himself. It is as fully one and simple as God is one and simple, so that in no way can one look upon him. If you could see it with my heart, you would understand well what I say, for it is true and the truth says it. And if you know that power, you would know that the Father is begetting the Word in you now and you would be filled with joy that such a Life, that such a creative Intelligence lives in you.

I have to leave now for Cologne in order to justify what is simple for the simple but crooked for the crooks. This will probably be my last journey because I feel tired of this world. Have no fear and keep the Truth which dwells in you and grows like the springtime. Amen.

The remainder of the mass took place in a silence that was inexplicable considering the nature of the crowd - craftsmen, peasants, women, children, poor people, cripples, defectives and, without any doubt, hidden under all sorts of appearances, heretics, the possessed and the insane. Closing my eyes for a moment, I saw Katrei, the heretic, smiling, walking on burning coals and fleeing on a horse draped in black. I heard these words from the Book of Revelation: "When the dragon saw that he had been cast down on the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. And the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she flew away to the desert, to her place, where she was nourished far from the face of the serpent." When I opened my eyes, it was as if my heart was frightened. I couldn't grasp the meaning of that strange vision.

After the ceremony, many people stayed behind, waiting for the departure of the Master. The old man gave the impression of being at the top of his form, greeting some people, counseling others, having a good word for each one. The poorer they were, and the longer they took to express themselves, the more he paid attention to them. Once he even went so far as to play with a group of children, as if he had completely forgotten the urgency of his departure and the gravity of the situation. I was impatient, and expected the prior to hurry him up, but he did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, the prior asked me to go find Father Tauler,

for he was assigning him, though he had only just now completed his theology, the task of ensuring the safety of the Master and the Beguine. I was disconcerted by this and indicated to him that, given the situation, the Master should have a better escort. On this point he did not budge.

Tauler is a strong and stocky man, with a square, flat nose sunk deeply in a wide and enigmatic face. He is particularly gifted and, I must admit it, irreproachable in every respect. He had been chosen to perfect his studies at the Studium of Cologne and eventually, be sent to Paris. Cologne constitutes our most illustrious intellectual center. It was founded by the wisest of us - Albert the Great; the first, after the Fathers of the Church, to interest himself in the pagan manuscripts of ancient Greece and even in the Arab writings of Avicenna and Averroës that were brought back at different times from the Crusades. He cherished the dream of a synthesis of philosophy and theology. It was at Cologne that his student Thomas Aquinas developed his earliest attempts at unifying the essence of Aristotle's speculations with the Christianity of the Fathers. He had been sent to the University of Paris to confront and counteract the pernicious philosophy of the Franciscans which risked forever separating intelligence from the whole, severing faith and science. And here the prior was commanding Tauler, a disciple of the Master, intelligent certainly but naive, to go complete his education at Cologne. But since Tauler refused to study Thomas Aquinas and only paid attention to Johannes Eckhart, he couldn't help but aggravate people. I admit to having experienced one of my numerous fits of jealousy, I the good student who could never study at such a noble school.

The crowd did not disperse until late afternoon, and even afterwards, a large number of men and even more women lingered around the educator. Among them there were likely many heretics sympathetic to Katrei's cause. Probably to keep me at a distance, the prior sent me to help Tauler make the preparations. The Master was still there in the courtyard. Women had brought him bread and cheese, and he ate and talked. The prior seemed delighted with everything he saw. It was only at the last bell that the people resigned themselves to leaving him. He was visibly exhausted, and fell asleep next to the well where the superior went quietly to find him and lead him back to his cell. The next day, after singing Matins and Lauds, we finally departed in a small boat in the direction of Cologne.

On the wharf, the prior seemed particularly anxious. It wasn't difficult to foresee that the Master's departure would accentuate the division among the monks: on one side, those favorable to the prior who evidently would show themselves sympathetic to the thought and action of Eckhart, and on the other, his sworn enemies who feared the severity of the king as much as the Pope if, mistakenly, the Dominicans lined up around the indefensible position of the Master. Fortunately the Superior General of the order was on guard and insisted on Aristotelian logic in philosophy and allegiance to the Pope in politics. To all that, no doubt, more violent passions were added. For some people, to choose Eckhart was to choose rigor of thought and action; to depart from him was to slide little by little into mediocrity. For others, the monastery was a place of protection against the insecurity of the times rather than a place for spiritual engagement, and it was

foolhardy to ask of all the monks an equal concern for perfection. For these, the Masters departure would remove an obstacle which prevented them from calling for the prior's head. How to cement the minimum of unity necessary for the harmony of the convent when, with all his authority, the Master withdraws, he who, even while being a cause for division, provided the precarious balance of the parties?

Two mercenaries dressed as peasants had been requested by Tauler to accompany us. They carried hidden weapons in case these were necessary. Suso came because he too was going to continue his studies for a while before returning to Constance. For propriety's sake, given the presence of Katrei, a woman had been designated to accompany us. We chatted as we waited for her in the boat. Finally, she arrived. The hood of her coat of rough brown wool almost completely hid her face. She had a funny way of acting for a peasant. But when the Master took her delicate hand to help her get over the edge of the wharf, I recognized her; far from being a peasant, this lady was none other than Jutta of Antwerp, the wife of Lord Walter. As we moved away, I noticed that the eyes of several people, the prior in particular, were filled with tears.

CHAPTER II : The Heretic Priest

The boat slid along the river as the valley came to life under the effect of springtime. Rounded mountains shaggy with forests, hills bustling with copses, small valleys covered with fields and meadows, south slopes carpeted with vineyards, - all these seemed to bow before the river and reverse themselves in its green waters, so still and confident in their flowing. Here and there, smoke from cottages or from burning weeds, the wail of an infant piercing through those of animals, a church bell recalling God and then wild and silent shores modestly draped by the dark fertility of the earth. Sometimes a barge loaded with wood or merchandise, propelled by powerful rowers; sometimes the sumptuous craft of a lord taking his lavish dinner in the company of cheerful and frivolous ladies. The variation of the world passed by in the periphery of our vision lowered in prayer and observance of the rule. It was necessary to grasp the permanence of the divine in the furrows of the passing age, or be carried away like waves in the diffusion of the spirit.

Father Tauler had carefully prepared for the voyage. Thanks to a small sundial which he consulted regularly, we sang and prayed the hours, we respected the times of silence and orison, and we did our mealtime readings. Except for the movement of the landscape, we maintained the essentials of the monastic invariability which preserved us from the extravagances of the world. It might have been necessary to do more, however, for the variability of the panorama multiplied the occasions for error. Tauler did less. He permitted Katrei and her companion to sing with us, and all my complaints against this accomplished nothing. I must admit that the two women had very beautiful voices and knew the prayers, hymns, and psalms perfectly. I succeeded in controlling my eyes in accordance with the rule, but the scents of amber and civet penetrated the opening of my hood and blurred my vision. At times, my concentration dissolved to the point where I made mistakes in the simplest prayers. I had a lot to do to struggle against these temptations of the flesh, and when we sang: "Happy all men who fear the Eternal ... his wife is like a fruitful vine within his house, " I had the tendency to imagine the corporeal rather than the figurative. At forty, I was subject to doubts and suspicions about my vocation, doubts I ought to fight while tightening my hairshirt and imploring Heaven.

The Master knew about my struggle and sought to draw my attention toward distinctive things in nature, a remarkably picturesque tree, and amazingly agile bird, a graceful deer bounding along the shore. That relieved me for a moment. Father Suso maintained such an even gaze, appeared so drawn into himself, one might have said he kept himself in eternal permanence even as space seduced and time delighted. Was he even aware of these two women? As to Father Tauler, he no doubt took refuge in a different limbo, displaying a face that was strangely

ingenous, mouth half-open and eyes unfocussed. Did he smell their odor? Both of them were truly monks, indifferent to women, But me, to hear them, smell them, glimpse them made me enter into strange and frightening vapors. I could no longer put together a single *Pater* without mistakenly inserting one of the syllables of their names. These female devils wormed their way into me, softening my will as well as my intellect. What a disgrace! Even one of the bodyguards seemed more insensible to them than I was! The other looked at Katrei with all the innocence of a brother for his sister. Was I truly a monk, or had I simply taken refuge in a monastery to flee what a peasant could confront better than I? As to the Master, he smiled and talked to the women with a heart so light one might have thought he was the father of each of them. Between two sentences where he pointed out to the two women the play of light on the waters he remarked to me, without any warning:

— My friend, look at that little drop rolling so happily on that wave, that is what I mean by "being detached;" to be unbound means to dance, to play with life without fear and resistance, without letting yourself be swallowed up by fears and useless worries. Evil, Saint Augustine said, is the absence of being, and if you amuse yourself with being, you won't offer much hold to the images you yourself are producing.

I remained silent, hidden in my hood. Did he notice the inexplicable tear on my cheek that his words caused to flow? He didn't say a word about it. I tried to calmly observe, like the others, all he was describing about the thousands of details that presented themselves to us.

— How beautiful life is! he exclaimed every now and then. Jesus said: "I am the Life," the Word is Life and I have the pleasure of seeing it, feeling it, joining with it. The woman who touched Jesus'garment was cured because the Word held her up above the emptinesses and absences that were carrying her away. The Word binds each of our words to prevent them from dropping away into the intervals that, in appearance, separate ideas. The Word saves the individuality of our words through the overall meaning of the sentence. Life is the Word of the universe.

He took some water in his hand and drank it. I was shocked at how he seemed to mix two things as different as the mortal life of corporeal things and the eternal Life of God. He must have guessed this from my sceptical look:

— My friend and faithful brother, if you are lost in the forest, the best way is to continue in the direction of your choice. If not, you will go to the left, then to the right, and to the left again in a way that lengthens your route or, worse, turn around in circles indefinitely. Each person can only express one way of living, and in general it does no good to regret your choice. If each one keeps up his way, he will cause all the other ways to enter into it and he will put into his way all that is good in all the other ways. You can be fruitful in your way, that is the important thing. I will tell you another thing: men and women may well be afraid and discouraged at the idea that the life of our blessed Lord and some of the saints was so difficult and hard that we aren't able to equal it. If you find that your way

doesn't pass at all through many good works, great labors or great privations (besides, this isn't important), if you don't find all this in yourself, calm down and don't worry about it. God views equally what seems small and what seems great. After all, did our Lord not say, "All the hairs of your head are numbered?"

This made everyone laugh, because what was left of my hair could be counted on one hand; yet, however, as soon as I became worried or distracted, I slid my hand into my hood to smoothe or curl it. Jutta remained pensive however and asked her own question:

— But I am noble, rich, and married. I have beautiful children, I adore my husband and I take pleasure in life. Because of this I am worried about my salvation. Should I withdraw from the world?

— People ask me that question quite often, the Master responded: many people would like to withdraw from the world and live in solitude to find peace. Is that the best thing to do? No, is what I say! The person whose attitude is right is at home everywhere and with everybody. But the person who lacks rectitude is ill at ease everywhere and with everybody. The important thing is not so much making the right choice as it is the way you carry it out. A poor choice taken on with consecration and rectitude leads to joy, whereas a good choice lived out in mediocrity leads nowhere.

The more the Master spoke, the more wretched and despicable I felt. I promised to give myself ten, no twenty, blows of the rod before lying down on my hemp hairshirt. But the Master continued to speak to Jutta in these terms:

— There are two kinds of repentance: one is temporal and perceptible; the other, divine and supernatural. Temporal repentance plunges a man down into a distress in every way like despair. There, the repentance is confined to his suffering; it excludes any progress and nothing comes of it. But divine repentance is totally different. As soon as the man becomes aware of the evil in himself, he immediately goes up to God to be held by Him.

This sentence which was really intended for me did not help me at all; on the contrary it depressed me even more, so much that my imagination sank into an image-laden agitation where women and demons succeeded one another, each one devouring a portion of my heart. Sometimes I struck one of these female demons, at other times I lightly and tenderly touched their hands. Which of these gestures was the worse crime? Breaking my meditation, one of the two bodyguards, the younger one, naively hazarded this question:

— Is it true what they say, that a good mother who dies giving birth has a good chance of getting into heaven?

— That's obvious! Do you see, my friend, all the beauty of this world, all the intelligence overflowing this world? Then tell me, how can it be possible that, in a world so wonderful, there exists something as atrocious as the death of a Mama?

The man dared to answer the Master in a familiar tone:

— But there are Mamas who die when their child is born, that's not wonderful at all. The world is not so wonderful.

— You have certainly suffered from this a great deal, and I can clearly see that you are outraged by it. This outrage was perhaps your first spiritual reaction ...

— It wasn't spiritual! I was mad at God! he retorted.

— That answer was only possible because you recognized that what happened was not in accordance with justice. You were shocked by it because you understood deep down what should have been. The invisible confronted the visible; justice, injustice; and there was a spot on the majesty of nature. Revolt against God is necessary for our existence, for it allows us the distance necessary for the formation of our own being. But it is also an invitation to change your point of view. If a person stubbornly settles on one way of seeing, he loses sight of the whole, and it is the whole that redeems the particular. After the revolt, it is good to resume the dialogue, accept the dialogue which, between the invisible and the visible, weaves wisdom. The world is so great, so intelligent, so majestic that the faults you see in it are more likely to be errors of perspective than scandals of inconsistency. I am not asking you to believe that the world is beautiful, I am inviting you to discover it by renewing the dialogue.

Katrei could not restrain herself from continuing from where the Master had stopped:

— Certainly, if you believe our mother is no more, the world for you is a world where cruelty wins out, a world not wonderful at all. But then it's in your mind that Mama continues to be dead ...

The bodyguard was none other than Alberon, Katrei's younger brother. How could Tauler have allowed ... ?

The next afternoon we disembarked on the wooden wharf of a hamlet nestled on an especially deep meander of the Rhine. The sky was gray and a rocky hill formed a wail which darkened the locality even more. We were near Bingen, but I wasn't familiar with this village. The cemetery was located on a verdant slope facing south and overlooking the river. They were burying a little child there, but the crowd exceeded in number what the ceremony justified. Naturally, we came closer in order to participate in the event. The winter must have been cruel for the local priest: he displayed an appallingly thin face and his patched soutane failed to conceal his state of extreme emaciation. I realized that, to a lesser, but still great, extent, most of the peasants must have suffered from it as well. The country priest, whom everyone called simply Walter, harangued the crowd with a raucous and quavering voice:

— The child we are burying puts one more stone on our broken hearts. Too many innocent little ones died this winter because the land rents, the cropshares, the serf

taxes, the market fees, the head taxes, and whatever else, paid to the lord for his feudal rights, have left us already with very little. To that we have to add the tithes and the taxes for the bishop who lives in luxury, gluttony, and the sin of the flesh. If the lord of the fief uses our sweat and our arms for our well-being and protection, the Church does it for her shame, for she uses the fruit of our labor not for the glory of God but to deform the life of His son Jesus. She duplicates the part of Caesar instead of consoling us. The only thing left to the peasant is a plot too small to feed his family. Here is the truth: the Church finishes what the lord has begun. She kills there where he wounds.

Ought we to submit to the point of contradicting the duty to live and perpetuate the message of Christ? If we allow our children to die of hunger, what will remain of the faith that we carry from father to son and from mother to daughter? I am not saying this to push you into a revolt that would lead you to an even more immediate death. Think of what happened to the peasants who wanted to raise the sickle against the sword! No, I am expressing this as a plea in the face of God that He might hear us. I am weeping like Job, unhappy and impotent. If our Church, the one Jesus gave to the poor as a tower of hope, is carried away in the torment of the world and its injustice, if it adds to the lord the crozier and the mitre, if it betrays the indigents whom Jesus loves, what is left of it for us? We are plunged into this world without belonging to it. So we accept its madness, it is our trial and our challenge, but we belong to the Church and we love it; that is why we are demanding that she correct herself. We cannot save the world carried off into death by the whirlwinds of its faults, but we can save the Church which emerged from the waves like an ark to rescue us from the world before it collapses.

It is written in Job: "Since man has been placed on the earth, the triumph of the wicked has been short. When he ascends to heaven by pride, and his head touches the clouds by an illusion of science, he will perish forever like refuse. He will fly away like a dream, and will no more be found. He will disappear like a vision of the night. His sons will be assailed by the poor, and his hands will restore what he has taken by violence." That is what will inevitably happen to the mighty of this world and to the Church if she does not correct herself. Schism after schism she will fall to pieces, and then she will dry up like a tree cut off from its roots and at that point one generation will suffice to overthrow it. Already the Eastern Church is moving away from us and threatens rupture because the Pope resembles more the Roman emperor than Peter's successor. John says in Revelation: "I will cause her children to die the death: and all the Churches shall know that I am the one who searches reins and hearts, and I will render unto each of you according to your works." What will he render to the one who practices simony and oppresses the faithful of God's Church in order to pay the king and the Pope for a bishop's or archbishop's place? If we were to be the arm of that punishment, would we have reason to fear the Judgement? Is it a sin to correct sin? Is it evil to be indignant at evil? Wouldn't it be, on the contrary, a sin to submit to the vices of the imposters who have stolen our Church from us and made it a den of thieves?

My brothers, my friends, look at the face of that mother who mourns her last child, look at the faces of all the mothers who, with her, mourn for a child! If it

had been through bad weather, vermin, or rats that God brought us this suffering, it would run off like a river to the sea, which brings new life. But the suffering of these women is not appeased, it resists, it turns and twists in the heart, in the guts; you want to shame it, curse it, vomit it out, because it does not come from God, but from men, and, worse, it comes from men who say they are of God but who, however, by stealing our food devour the very life of our children, the life of our future, the life of the true Church...

The priest hadn't had time to catch his breath when Katrei, our prisoner, kept going with a voice more powerful than is possible for a normal woman:

— The true Church is made up of the saints of God and not of a hierarchy of impostors who overwhelm it. There is a great Church, that of God and the saints, that of those who have left everything, that is the one we must follow. There is a little church, that of brigand bishops and robber archbishops, directed by the Antichrist pope. That little church is pathetic and we don't have anything to do with it. Be confident and pray to God, for these imposters and swindlers disguised as bishops are not long for this world. It is also written in John's Revelation: "How long, holy Master, will you delay to judge, and draw down vengeance for our blood? A white robe was given to each of them; and they were told to rest a little longer, until the number of their companions was complete." We must put on the white robe, of purity of heart ...

At these words and without warning, we were surrounded by four knights in coats of mail, armed with clubs and scourges, and about ten archers with short bows and daggers in their belts. They ordered Walter to follow them. Katrei wanted to intervene, but this time Father Tauler placed his hand solidly over her mouth and the Master interceded:

— You will have to excuse this woman we are escorting to Cologne ...

— To Cologne, the leader of the group repeated from up on his horse. But aren't you the Dominican they are taking to archbishop Henry of Virneburg to answer for questionable teachings, and wouldn't this woman be the heretic people say you're fond of?

At these words, the archers began to snigger in the most vulgar way. Alberon would have returned the insult, but was restrained by his companion. Tauler took over from Eckhart:

— I am responsible for taking the Master and this woman to Cologne. The monk who just spoke to you is among the greatest theologians of the Christian world. He taught at Paris, and if he weren't so merciful, he could have well have failed to pardon you for what you said. As for me, I could report your words, but I simply observe that you have been misinformed. The Master is going to Cologne in obedience to his General and not to the archbishop. As to the woman, we are bringing her before the Inquisition, and it wants her alive and able to answer for her acts and declarations. I have here the order from my Superior General

Barnabas of Cagnoli, and I wouldn't want him to be bothered with a delay ...

In answer to the imperious look of his commander a soldier came up to Tauler and pressed his dagger forcefully against his back. We were compelled to follow them up to the castle where they imprisoned us in the tower while Walter was thrown into the dungeon.

The modest manor-house was nestled on a promontory near Rupertsberg, a few leagues distant from the monastery founded by Hildegard. From the window one could observe, in the waters of the Rhine, the "mouse tower" on a rocky island. People everywhere recounted how Hatto the bishop of Mainz had amassed supplies of grain there during a famine, and how, exasperated by the complaints and demands of the poor and hungry, he had them imprisoned in a barn which he then set on fire. "Do you hear my mice whistling inside?" he said as he listened to their cries. That very night, hordes of mice invaded his palace; he jumped into the Rhine to escape them, but they pursued him and ate him alive. So, at the sight of the rock, Katrei began to shout, as if she could do even more for her own condemnation:

— God devoured Hatto because he loves his Church, and he wants to cleanse it of the arrogant crooks you are obeying. When we have overcome the trial of their yoke and gained its power, all the true Christians will crush the episcopal serpent.

To this the guards responded by yelling and striking the heavy wooden door with clubs:

— Make her shut up! If you don't, we'll cut her throat right now!

The other one added:

— We'll burn her alive with Walter the heretic.

Alberon rushed toward the door crying out:

— You'll have to kill me first!

— Right away if that's what you want, they answered as they opened the grill.

Katrei threw herself at her brother to make him step back as Tauler approached them with this forceful answer:

— The Inquisition is no laughing matter. Whoever gets in the way of the Inquisitor runs the risk of becoming a suspect himself!

They stared, but as Tauler did not flinch, they closed the grill again. He turned toward Katrei and crisply warned her:

— If you want the stake for yourself, that's your business. But if you bring the Master into this and drag him into the fire with you, you are holding up and

strangling the word of the true Church you talk about. If you love Christ, take care and think of your brother who risks joining you. As for you, Alberon, remember the oath I made you swear before accepting you among us.

These words struck both of them, and it was never necessary to repeat them after that. Katrei took refuge in the silence which is appropriate for women.

In the three days which followed we never met the lord of the premises. They told us simply that he had gone on a journey. It was just as impossible to address any mail and all our threats were of no avail. Our jailers provided us with food and water but remained mute on the reasons for our imprisonment. We could only wait. To the rhythm of the bells, we continued our prayers in conformite with our rule.

The Master appeared to be preoccupied with Katrei's salvation, consecrating all his free time to this. Having been deprived of quill and parchment. I can transcribe here, from memory, only certain portions of their conversation.

— My daughter, he said one time. Why do you want to destroy your body this much? Doesn't anyone here make a distinction between the body and the flesh?

As he did not hear from each of us anything more than a questioning silence, he continued.

— It can be useful to distinguish, without separating them, the soul and the body, because otherwise death would leave us without hope, but it is highly dangerous, in this life as in the other, to separate the flesh from the spirit.

We were all taken aback, unable to grasp anything of the Master's words. Since things got no farther than that, Jutta made herself our spokesperson and questioned him:

— But doesn't the book of Revelation say: "And I saw an angel who stood in the sun. And he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that flew in the middle of heaven: come, assemble for the great feast of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of commanders of armies, the flesh of the powerful, the flesh of horses and of those who ride them..." Doesn't God destroy the flesh of the wicked, doesn't he destroy their bodies?

— You know the texts well, so search with me for their meaning. Why did the author insist so much on the destruction of the body? It is only natural and no one can escape it. But the destruction of the flesh results from sin and the greatest of sins, the sin against the spirit. It touches only the wicked.

— But, Jutta answered, don't we read in the Acts of the Apostles: "This man, having purchased a field with the reward for his crime, fell, splitting the middle of his body open, and all of his intestines were spread out?" They were certainly speaking about the body here.

I was most impressed. Jutta demonstrated an amazing knowledge of the Texts. How was a woman able to converse with the Master like this?

— What the author meant without a doubt is that sin, the sin of Judas in this case, separates and divides the flesh from the spirit while death, on the other hand, touches only the relationship between the body and the soul. Sin consists essentially of separating while virtue consists of uniting.

We were all astonished, for no one had ever proclaimed such a teaching. He understood this and went one step further.

— The Word is equality and sin destroys equality. Take for example attachment to a parcel of land. In order to gain possession of ten acres of land, you have to separate it first of all from the rest of the country and look at it differently from the surrounding country. You have to destroy the equality of the way you look at things. The root of sin consists of losing the equality of looking at things that little children naturally have. We become the owners of a piece of ground when we can say of this ground that it is ours, that is to say when we affirm that the rest is not ours. To appropriate a small thing is first of all to renounce a great thing. In that way, we deprive ourselves of the infinity of what is left and content ourselves with these miserable few acres of land. The rich man is infinitely poor in terms of what he does not possess, but the poor man has for a house all the earth and all the heavens, as much of it as he can see. The separation and privation that the rich man imposes on himself shatters the integrity of the world to such an extent that he can neither grasp nor comprehend the majesty of the cosmos. He cannot comprehend the meaning of a thing or an event because he has cut the threads that connect that thing or that event to a living totality. Judas sold the Word for the price of a few acres, and so produced a fracture in his vision of the universe. By that very fact, the world lost all its sense. Understanding nothing, he felt lost, abandoned and infinitely alone. This miserable person's insides had thus been broken and torn, and his anguish was extreme because, for him, the universe no longer made any sense. Whoever separates the earth which is in front of him from the Word which is in him divides his flesh and his heart.

— But what is this flesh you are speaking of?, Jutta asked.

— The flesh is the inclination which pushes a man to separate himself from the universe and say "me." It captures the body and makes it its territory. "I am not everything but only this, the flesh affirms. I renounce being everything to become this." Starting from there, "this" becomes the center. The flesh makes me exist while reducing my existence to almost nothing. It is an inclination that is necessary though perilous, because if we imagine that all we see exists only to answer to that little bundle of appetites that we call "me," we are quickly disappointed with the world and it is not long before we find it cruel and even insane. And if I see the world as cruel and insane, I necessarily become the same way myself.

Fortunately the spirit, that is to say unity, remains primordial. Division presupposes unity, the flesh presupposes the spirit. The spirit goes through the

flesh like water goes through waves. It produces an attraction contrary to the flesh, an attraction toward Unity, toward the Source, toward the Foundation. Doesn't the Book of Acts that you were quoting relate further on: "in the last days, says God, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters will prophecy, your young people will have visions, and your old men will dream dreams?" The spirit glorifies the flesh, it connects what the flesh separates, it connects the interior and the exterior, the past and the future so as to restore to the world its true meaning so that it can testify to the grandeur, the goodness, and the majesty of God. You can read still further in Acts: "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; and even my flesh will rest in hope, for you will not abandon my soul in the abode of the dead, and you will not permit your holy one to see corruption." The flesh escapes death, then. The flesh is an inclination in the soul which resists God's attraction just enough to provide me with my own existence. It is necessary for me to the extent that it doesn't carry me away in its illusions. Without it, we would return so instantaneously into the unity of God that nothing of us would remain any longer. Through its distance, it produces space, through its hesitation, it creates time. The flesh is the bending of the gaze that makes consciousness possible.

— All that is so obscure, Jutta answered.

— You have children and they are grown up now, the Master continued.

— Yes. I have a son and two daughters, and one of them has made her vows at Bruges.

— You love them more than yourself, so you ought to try to make return to your womb and dissolve once again ...

— No, Master, I never wished for that. On the contrary, I have always wanted each of them to be different, to take their flight, to follow their way, because I love to see them live.

— You are a wise and loving mother, Jutta, and I think I know what sacrifice you can make for your children. God cannot be inferior to you, and will the dissolution of his children in his bosom. That is why He lets us have the flesh. Do you know what "Israel" means.

— I remember the passage from Genesis: God said to him: what is your name? and he answered: Jacob. He said again: Your name will no longer be Jacob, but you will be called Israel, because you have wrestled with God and with me, and prevailed."

— That's it, my daughter, Israel means "Strong against God." Man should be strong against God, and have a flesh that opposes him, so as to be held far out of balance, at a distance sufficient for him to exist as himself. But if the flesh carries him away, there is separation, cutting off, the rupture of the internal organs, the dividing of the heart, madness, war and death. I spoke in my last sermon about

fertility. The fertility of God presupposes the flesh.

We heard cries in the courtyard. Around twenty peasants had assembled there together with a few women of the same class. They cried out:

— Let Walter go, let our priest go...

The prisoner heard them and started to yell from the depths of his jail:

— Go away. Go away. They will kill you.

But the priest's words produced the opposite effect. They grew impassioned, tore the clothes off their backs and began to flagellate themselves violently. The guards laughed at them rather than taking pity. One of them even took one of their rope whips and began to strike one of the women, crying out:

— You want the whip, come and I'll show you just how to do it.

And he struck her with an atrocious violence. She fell to the ground, but he kept on hitting her. One of the men, her husband perhaps, jumped on the guard. A mace struck his skull and he fell down dead. A struggle ensued, but it was most pathetic: those who were not killed by the first blows were whipped to their last breath. Not knowing what to do with the bodies, the soldiers loaded them onto the cart that had taken them to the manor, striking the horse, which then ran off, probably to the wretched priest's village.

We were all thunderstruck, incapable of speaking, incapable of praying, as if plunged into a deep meditation where fear and incomprehension were blended. Why such madness, so bloody, so senseless? How far can Man go in the negation of himself and in hatred for his fellow humans ...

It was only on the next day that we were able to resume our conversation on the flesh and the spirit. This time, it was Suso who approached Katrei:

— When I first entered the monastery, I asked permission to discipline myself with the rod every evening. They allowed me to do it only one day a week. Today I ask myself how I am different from you, Katrei, you who want so much to destroy your body. I would like it, Father Eckhart, if you would continue your lesson from yesterday.

— The negation of the body has been, ever since the earliest days of the Church, the greatest heresy. Saint Augustine was especially tormented by this heresy which came to him from his father's Manicheism. Suso, you are familiar with the texts ...

Suso continued, quoting Muhammad ben lahaq: "Mani was the son of Fataq Babak. It is said that Mani was bishop of Quna and the Bedouins of the clan of Huha and that he had a crooked leg."

It was, I believe, at the beginning of the third century, he continued. Now, it is

recounted that one day Mani heard a loud voice which called him from the altar: "O Mani, eat no meat, drink no wine, have no relations with women." Manicheism claims to bring the fundamental Knowledge, the Gnosis, which will reveal to the initiate the beginning, the middle, and the end of all things. The Gnostics believe that Truth is absolutely inexpressible and ineffable, untranslatable. It necessitates waiting and mediation, ecstatic contemplation, immersion in the Truth of God, fusion in the primordial Substance ...

For them, Eckhart continued, matter is the opposite of spirit, the body is the enemy of the spirit. They identified the body with the flesh. That is why they say that virginity and perfect chastity is what all men should aspire to. Mani believed that the body was only a prison, a stain which blurs the soul's view and hinders it from reaching knowledge. "Purity," he said, "the truest purity, is that which is attained by means of Gnosis. Gnosis delivers the soul from death and destruction." He meant that knowledge comes, supposedly, from detachment from the body. There he made a very grave error.

— But, Suso went on, didn't you say in your Easter sermon that the soul should be detached from the body?

— You misrepresent my thought, my brother, but I know that you don't do it deliberately. Nevertheless you treat yourself badly, and you do it a lot, without any scruples. Can I speak to you frankly?

— I want it with all my heart, Suso replied.

I knew how much Suso worried about everything. He had previously confided to me that he believed he was damned because his father had purchased a dispensation that allowed him to enter the convent before his fifteenth birthday.

— My friend and one of my best students, Eckhart continued, I want so much for you to remember this: we cannot destroy our natural inclination by a life-and-death struggle against ourselves. On the contrary, this wears us down and risks exacerbating our natural tendencies. Fear only renders us more vulnerable. No, I was not talking about that kind of detachment which is really only a fierce determination. No, I said in my sermon that we need to be free and unattached in this world, not cut off from it. What would you say about a horseman who starved his horse and beat it harshly? If he wanted it to leap up off the ground and run freely through the fields, that's not the way to do it! To be released, to be unbound, is, on the contrary, to become one with our flesh, not so that it can drag us into the abyss of its selfishness, but so as to go back to its source like a fish swims up a river, like a horse rushes off into the prairie and goes to the top of the mountain.

— But how can we go back through the flesh? Jutta asked.

— Through equality. Unlike the lord who wants ten acres of land for himself, the poor in spirit look at all things equally, they like equally well everything that is before their eyes. God is so well pleased with this Equality that he causes all his

Nature and all his Essence to circulate through it together. He experiences a joy the same as the one a horse feels when it runs on a green moor, completely even and flat. It is the horse's nature to race with all its strength and rear up in the moor; this is its joy and corresponds to its nature. Likewise, God's joy and delight is to find equality, because He can pour out into it all His Nature and Essence.

— But Master, Katrei said, didn't Paul say: "Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

— The same Paul also says: "For when we were in the flesh, the sins provoked by the law acted in our members so that we bore fruit for death. But now, we have been released from the law; dead to the law to which we were captive, so that we serve in a new spirit, and not according to the letter which has grown old. Without law, sin is dead. As for me, when I was without law, I lived, but when the commandment came, sin came to life, and I died." That's what Saint Paul says. The law destroys equality. Certainly, even the person who is delivered from the law feels the appeal of selfishness, but he also feels the attraction of the spirit drawing and calling him through love. He no longer fights so much against sin, then, but lets himself be drawn away instead, in a love story. Katrei, my dear child, this body was given you so that you would carry it with joy and pleasure. Don't destroy the opportunity you have been given to surpass yourself in this body. Aren't you familiar with the famous saying of Hildegarde, who lived not very far from here: "The soul and the body are one, each with their own strengths and names; in the same way that the flesh and the blood are one; and by these three, that is, by the body, the soul and the spirit, the human being is completed and produces works?"

The next night was stiflingly hot. You would have thought it was the middle of the summer. There was dust everywhere; a smell that was depressing and mysterious, shadowy, wild and acrid crept into the room. I felt heavy and particularly exhausted. The wind which rushed in through every opening whistled against the iron slats of the grilles. It seemed to bring with it sand covered with the blood and sweat of the Moors who were saying and soiling Christians in the Holy Land. Or perhaps a fire, lit by the guards, was ravaging villages and vineyards, forests and pastures. The cause remained unknowable, but a kind of fiery exhalation lulled us into a strange bilious sleep, bewitching and inescapable. Was a drought coming to cheerfully destroy the young shoots as soon as they emerged from the ground? Was the plague going to break out again? Were barbarians going to swoop down on the castles, to burn and destroy, massacre, exterminate, and skin alive? So many images crowded my mind. My will gave way, my imagination crawled with dark things, terrible and then shameful. I felt it. I hardly breathed as if, by holding my breath, I could suppress my torments. And here I was running through the flames. I was holding a beautiful young woman by the hand, and children followed. I was wearing a peasant's robe and, she, rags so wretched they were falling to pieces. I had under my arm an urchin covered with soot and another on my shoulders. My feet were rubbed raw by the rocks. We were running as fast as we could, but were so exhausted we made only slow progress. A terrible black horseman caught up with us. Seated on a dark and shining trapping, he was flagellating his mount. The barbarian was dressed only in a soot-streaked coat of mail and straps of buffalo-

hide. Huge veins furrowed his enormous shoulders and blood oozed from his powerful arms. He brandished a terrible battle-axe which was about to land on the neck of my companion. She let out a horrible yell ...

— Aaaah! Katrei cried out simultaneously.

I burst out in sobs and woke up in a cold sweat. The Master was already at her side. To see her alive and more beautiful than ever changed my tears of pain to tears of joy. I was distraught, suddenly anxious and guilty. My belly hurt me, desire and the sweetness of that desire were so profound, as if within my bones and the marrow of my bone. Slowly I regained my spirits, praying God to deliver me from women, and to grant me sufficient suffering to tear me away from their fangs.

The Master was reassuring Katrei, who sat huddled on the straw, her head almost touching her knees. She was stunned, as if she truly had just escaped from the horror. Not from death, she made light of that, no, from something much more terrifying, Hell, no doubt, and in Hell shadowy appalling specters. It is said that the succubi are so cruel that they don't devour their victims immediately, but soften them with false hope and light of every kind. When their victims are completely won over and their souls opened as it were, these evil spirits penetrate them, passing through their bodies which, though torn with terrible pain, knit themselves together again for a new round of torments.

The Master placed his large hand on the middle of her back. The woman calmed down a little.

He said softly:

— Speak, if you want to, I am listening.

She got up on her knees. Her face expressed an unspeakable terror. Her words seemed to dry like ashes in her mouth; with great difficulty she stammered and said this:

— A sky, a blue firmament, dark but mild. That was the beginning. Under the azure expanse, a green plain, a prairie, a grassland as far as the eye could see, a supple and undulating ocean everywhere I looked. The horizon separating the blue sky from the infinite prairie formed a line of brilliant fire which burned my feet but did not harm the growing grass at all. There was a white horse. no, brighter than white! Dazzling like an immaculate light, a sun at its zenith. Its shoes and its eyes, black as graphite, pierced and penetrated in every direction. I mounted the horse and we ran without holding back, yes I said, without holding back at all, like a hurricane. The horse's limbs were so nimble and clever, so powerful and precise, its responses so immediate, its obedience so perfect and discerning that it seemed to fly on the fire without ever touching the grass, to anticipate my desire for purity well before I spurred it on. My ivory robe and my long silver hair covered all the horizon behind me, stretched out like a flame in the sky and on the prairie, uniting them in a single milky light. I was so free and so vibrant. My body had become my

soul, so light it was and quick to follow. But even so, I did exist. I existed in union with the earth and the sky, it was I who united them in fact, I united them in my embrace. I was incorporated into the universal yet I knew that I was incorporated. I had the color of all the colors, the odor of all the odors, the form of all the forms, yet I perceived the movement of my soul in the movement of life.

Suddenly something horrible! An arrow struck the horse's thigh and it toppled, taking me with it. All of the universe seemed joined to the horse in such a way that the azure sky, the green prairie, the fire separating them and my hair uniting them were carried off with the horse in a terrible whirlwind. This whirlwind raced into the vacuum which formed in its center, as if time were called back to its origin and all that exists were now contained in a minuscule black hole. This hole was in the middle of a skull. Nothing existed any longer but this skull, and it was inert. The firmament was no longer anything but an image in this skull, the prairie, an illusion in this skull, freedom, an impression in this skull. Of all the universal there existed nothing but this human skull. The skull was not even surrounded by any empty, quiet space, for it existed only in its own imagination. Space was only an idea in that skull and the skull itself was only a thought, and this thought - I sensed it then - was in the process of freezing, and that when this process was complete, nothing would remain any longer, not even any awareness that there was nothing. When it had frozen, the skull would take away everything and nothing into its own nothingness. Absolutely nothing would remain any longer. Yet I was not the only one to have been swept away by this reversal of the universe. It seemed to me millions and hundreds of millions of consciousnesses had been annihilated in this despair of despairs. I said to myself that Hell is nothing in comparison to this, since Hell at least is something. When it was all over, all that remained was anguish, simply anguish, just anguish.

Katrei wept copiously, at first from anxiety, then from suffering. Little by little she seemed to savor this suffering, even to the point of taking pleasure in it as in something which certifies our existence. Completely relaxed in the Master's arms, she cried for hours. There was no end to her tears. I didn't know there could be that many tears in a woman. I sat huddled and silent, fearful of interrupting this landslide of sufferings in a woman's heart. Then a ray of the dawn touched her hair even before the rooster crowed. The others, already awakened by the cry, quietly arose to sing matins, but Father Eckhart made a sign for the silence not to be broken.

Katrei removed her hands from her face. For a moment it seemed as if she were petrified. You would have said she was a tombstone on a grave. Then the Master touched her hand.

— This seems like a burial to me.

She began to cry again, even more unconsolable than before. Then I remembered something I hadn't seen, or rather something I hadn't wanted to see. I trembled from head to toe. Was she going to tell him? Was she going to burst out with this horrible truth in the light of day? Was this confession necessary? Should this sin

come out in the open? I had buried it forever. It no longer existed for me, me the prefect of these two monks. So it was I could not help but cry out:

— No!

— But immediately I got hold of myself:

— Yes, say it, say it, Katrei.

There was a huge silence, the hiatus of one of those moments when everything gets ready to pass from the possible to the real.

— They took away my baby, the baby they made me have, they took it away, they slit its throat in front of me and said it was the devil and they threw it into the garbage.

As she said these words, her suffering was transformed into a singular rage and her fingers and nails pierced the Masters thick soutane. As for me, I beat my forehead with my hand. I had seen something of the scene, but had refused to confront it. Herman of Summo and William of Nidecke had murdered their own child. Deep within my heart, in some shameful fissure, I had shut my eyes. My sin was as grave as their sin, it was a sin of cowardice, a terrible sin of mediocrity as all my life had been.

When Katrei's rage had abated and she settled down in the Master's arms, Tauler began matins. We all prayed together. Jutta's voice seemed for a moment to contain all the others and to drive out, little by little, the suffocating air that had swept into our cell. Everything became calm. Something serene and quiet gradually set in, as after a storm, the air purified by the thunder and lightning, the wind and the showers, enters more keenly into our nostrils, drives evil out and revives the spirit. This air restored our serenity. Then Jutta ventured the first question:

— What was the arrow that killed the horse?

Father Eckhart gave this simple answer:

— I believe that the horse was killed by its own image.

— In all humility I confess that I don't understand anything at all about this, Suso responded after a moment of silence. Could you give us a lesson on this?

— If that's what all of you want, he added.

The early morning light was already so beautiful and the peace it held so sweet that it appeared as if the only appropriate thing for such a beautiful day would be a lesson.

— My good friends, open wide your intelligence, he asked us. At my Easter sermon, I spoke to you about virginity. I asked you to understand this word in a

sense beyond that of the flesh. Does anyone remember what I said?

— You said, I believe, responded Suso, whose memory rarely failed him: "The person by whom Jesus was received could only have been a virgin, that is, a person free of all foreign images, just as receptive as he was before birth."

— Very well answered, the Master continued, but what is an image?

— The image permits a thing to be here even as it stays in the beyond, Suso answered.

— That's accurate, Suso, now, let's go a little further. The sun is burning, but the sun's image is not. There is a difference between the sun and its image. But how could you distinguish two perfect images of the sun?

— You could very well replace one with the other without anyone being able to notice the difference, responded Tauler, whose intelligence was a little more concrete.

— It's true, no one could see the difference, not even God. Images are equal. The image is what invents equality. Virginité consists of a transparency that permits the sun to produce perfect and equal images. If goodness enters a pure heart, that heart becomes good with all goodness and its goodness is equal to that of the Word. For this to occur, the intellect must direct itself toward goodness and not toward consciousness of itself. If consciousness turns toward itself, it blurs the light. There is only one fault, and that is egoism; this is what is produced when the flesh turns toward the flesh, either to take pleasure in it, or to detest it. To hate the flesh is just as harmful as to be obsessed by it. The horse in Katrei's vision is an image and, whether the horse admires or hates itself, still, it revels in itself. It is as if you placed a mirror facing another mirror; the second mirror is interposed between the original mirror and the sun, so that it blocks the light. This is what happens to us, to you, Katrei, and to all of us, to the degree that we pay attention to ourselves.

But, Master, I am only trying to lose myself in God, Katrei replied, attempting to justify herself.

— Yes, I know that your intentions are pure, but I believe that you are mistaken. When the horse, that is to say the image, is freed from itself, it runs freely and without restraint between heaven and earth. It unites heaven and earth according to its nature, because the nature of intelligence is to unify. But when the horse wants nothing else than to be unified, to taste only that unity, this comes from his desiring the effect more than the cause. By the cause, the horse unifies, and as long as his gaze is turned toward the light, he unifies heaven and earth, the spirit and the flesh. That is his nature. So long as you are turned toward truth and goodness, you are active; you strive relentlessly to make the spirit enter into your own actions. It is the body which purifies the soul and not the opposite. Light is a flow and, if you turn it on itself, you conceal it and it dies.

— Like Katrei, I too am in search of a state of perfect unity, Suso admitted.

— Right there is the great temptation. It's very well to desire this unity, on condition that you don't turn this desire back on itself. To want the unity that is ours, a unity always dynamic, always alive, always desiring, is to let ourselves be penetrated by spirit. But to want a definitive unity, static and lifeless, this is an escape, a refusal of what God is with the intention of pursuing a chimera that we pretend is God. Katrei has been hurt more than any of us, so it is understandable if she tries to lift herself beyond the green prairie and fly without hindrance through the sky. But that is not her nature. Her nature is the dynamic intelligence which unites in love without melting down in death.

— But what is the meaning of the skull in Katrei's dream? Jutta asked.

— If faith is cut off from intelligence, it no longer exists, because faith is a state of intelligence. When faith disappears, beliefs appear. But beliefs inevitably disappear in the face of reason. This condemns reason to be self-sufficient, to depend on itself. Since reason is only an image, all it can do then is annihilate itself. If Man attempts to reason with the universal he cannot have its intelligence. Science is the dialogue between the intelligence of humanity and the intelligence of the universal and religion is the dialogue between the intelligence of humanity and the intelligence of God. It is intelligence that has the power to reason; reasoning cannot do this work of the intelligence. Intelligence envelops reason like eternity envelops time. Reason can only be an instrument. Without the finality of intelligence, it may come about that reason will not have any relations with the universe other than a relation of utility and exploitation; to use the universe and exploit it to try in vain to gratify the appetites of the flesh, that would be terrible! The fate of a people who had only this concern would be terrible, they could do nothing more than devour themselves, driven by the anguish of the absurdity of a world they themselves had rendered incomprehensible and absurd. Intelligence alone can grasp the sense of the divine intelligence which manifest itself in nature.

— But Master, what should I do? Katrei inquired anxiously.

— What you should do, is what you have done tonight, my child. In one moment, the fear of suffering has untied its cord and pain has been given its freedom. Released, it flowed out, is still flowing out, and will probably keep flowing out for quite a long time, but suffering once released loses its rage little by little, softens and pours out gently toward the sea. It is no longer an obstacle, but is on the contrary a motor. All that remains for you to do now, then, is to keep on going and don't worry, attracted as you are by your desire for purity. There is a power in the soul: the intellect. Scarcely does it become aware of God and begin to savor Him when right away it has five properties. It understands that it is rooted in an eternal Depth which flows through space and time; that it is equal to nothing in its Depth but equal to everything in its image; that it is pure and unalloyed; that it works and seeks in and of itself; that it is an image of the Source which rebounds without ever turning back on itself. "Let us make someone in Our image, according to Our likeness: neither you the Father, nor you the Son, nor you the

Holy Spirit, but we, in the council of the Holy Trinity, let us make someone in Our image, according to Our likeness." When God created Man in this way, He worked His own work within the soul, equal to Himself and continuously working, never dead or static. This work was so great that it became nothing other than the soul; but the soul is nothing other than the continuous work of God. The nature of God, His Essence and His Deity depend on the necessary work that He accomplishes in the soul. Wherever the soul may be, there it is that God performs his work, and that work is so great that it cannot be anything else but Love. It is necessary for you, Katrei, and for you too, Suso, to allow your soul to work and do its works. To do this, you must not flee the life of the flesh, but, on the contrary, you should enjoy going back through the flesh, making it your pleasure and your joy.

— But you also said that we must ignore created things.

— I said that we must ignore created things inasmuch as they are created things, the image inasmuch as it is an image. If you observe the sun in a mirror, it is not the image in the mirror that you admire, but the sun itself. The image is nothing, absolutely nothing without its source. When you know created things such as they appear, what I call an evening knowledge, you have a mosaic of individual and separate objects. But when you know created things as they are in God, what I call a morning knowledge, you see Creation in its very unity. We ought to learn how God's goodness compels Him to launch the creative movement that provides Him with enjoyment of His goodness and intelligence. The soul which opened itself to the natural love of God would be like that of the seraphim. Since it would have become pure emptiness, God would pour Himself out in it as perfectly as in the seraphim, but not to enjoy Himself without fruit, but on the contrary, to provide fruits; that is why I said that a wife is superior to a virgin, for the virgin is only a virgin so that she might become a wife by producing fruit.

When night came, we all slept deeply as if bathed in our last chant. I dreamed that night of Katrei; she was walking in a field. I found her beautiful and yet my body remained calm. I realized that she was an image of God and that it was my fear of the flesh that had soiled this image, and not the woman herself.

Starting at dawn, there had been loud noises in the courtyard and we could see through the trellised windows laborers busy at something, horses pulling loads, foremen yelling orders and, all around, a hustle and bustle of poor people, shady characters, and goliards who had come to loaf around, have fun, or relieve people of their money. On one side, a platform was under construction and on the other a stake for burning. We had almost forgotten Walter, but they had not. The unfortunate man was only a simple cleric under the direct authority of the lord who had appointed him, without episcopal approval, in return for a payment from the family. However, Walter's grandfather subsequently disowned him and no one was in a position to intervene. "The eagle loses interest in every eaglet which cannot endure the sight of the sun, and a good father abandons every son who

wanders away from the Church," the adage is well known and well applied. Without family or money, who could pay the ransom to redeem the guilty party? Could he exonerate himself by the exculpatory oath of a specified number of valid swearers? Not likely: his parishioners were only rascally serfs, peasants without tenure or young evildoers. It was not impossible, though this was done less and less often, that they might submit the man to the ordeal of boiling water or red-hot iron. But in these cases, only one of God's saints or an exceptionally vigorous man could hope to obtain clemency: the others, whose wounds took more than three days to heal, could only worsen their case. Abandoned as he was by God and lacking human protection, his lord didn't need to bother the Inquisition in order to get rid of him. Why then burn him as a heretic rather than hang him without any other procedures? Doubtless to serve as a warning. But in this case, had the count obtained the seal of the archbishop, his friend? Was that the reason for his absence? However it may be, all this commotion signified that the lord of the manor had returned and would soon liberate us with a thousand excuses before sending the ill-fated Walter into the flames.

He did actually invite us into the great hall, even before five o'clock. A copious meal sat on the tables, and the host presented a profusion of halfhearted and unconvincing excuses. Neither Tauler nor the Master wished to respond to this poorly feigned contrition. We only touched the bread and soup and said nothing about the meal. When, with the rattling of dishes and the crude laughter of petty courtiers, the noise was at its loudest, I whispered to Tauler that the set-up appeared so deliberate that I would not be surprised to learn that the count hadn't even left his domain, but had simply been awaiting the archbishop's instructions. Tauler answered that he was certain of this. To our great surprise, even before the end of the meal, Father Eckhart addressed the count in these terms:

— It is possible that the good priest who three days ago buried the little child who starved to death might be mistaken about several points of religion or public order. Error is a matter of intelligence which can be corrected by instruction, but heresy is a matter of will. So, I would like ...

— Good Master, celebrated in theology and a former prior of your order, the count responded in honeyed tones, I have the answer to your quite legitimate concerns. No injustice will be done, I have here an order from the archbishop, the great Lord Henry of Virneburg himself. What is more, the order is countersigned by the Inquisitor Master Reyner, a doctor like you in sacred theology. These two have dismissed him from his charge as pastor and given him over to the secular arm so as to provide him with the opportunity for salvation through fire according to his contrition and by the mercy of God ...

— Who tells you that the one in front of me, the one I am speaking to now is a vassal lord who does nothing more than lend his arms to those who make the decisions? I would hope rather to speak to a man capable of catching sight of the justice which springs from the depths of his own heart. In the just man, justice engenders itself. The just man receives all his being, knowledge, love and action, from the heart of justice and from it alone. But I have not seen that man here, I

have only encountered the tributary of a sovereignty that is very much terrestrial. Wha could I say to the vassal that I could not say myself to his superior? So please conduct me immediately to the condemned man so that I might hear his confession and answer for him directly to the archbishop.

— Oh, but no! Should I remind you that you yourself stand under accusation and that the accused is guilty until he has proved his innocence? I have here a second letter which orders me to escort you to Cologne. For the time being, I must make sure that you and your pretty protegee are well placed to see the burning, so that you might reflect on the consequences of the pride of those who pretend to elevate their personal sovereignty over that of the Church.

For a moment, the Master sat speechless, his mouth half-open, and I thought he was beaten. I too was stupified; I hadn't known that the proceedings had gone this far, and to make sure of this I read with my own eyes the archbishop's order and checked the seal. When I signaled to the Master that the parchment was authentic and that its contents publicly impugned his reputation, for an instant the old man seemed shattered and ready to give in. But this was not taking into account the profound resources that this Master could draw up from the deepest reaches of his soul.

— A hundred years is like a day in the eyes of God, he answered, with great certainty in his voice and unshakeable confidence. So then, at the end of this day we will both of us be before the same mirror of the archangels with the pure truth as our only protection; would that we had known our own heart before that moment, for if not, our conscience will make us suffer more than we can believe! The man you are going to burn, thanks to your behind-the-scenes machinations and the extra tithes you paid, that man has a right to this meeting with himself, and I am going to find him before you perpetrate your sin. Finally, you should know that, for matters of conscience, a Dominican does not have to answer to the archbishop, but directly to the superiors of his order, and that my position allows me to appeal to the Pope whenever I wish it.

He rose and ordered one of the soldiers standing next to the lord to lead him to the dungeon where the condemned man was. Afraid of losing face, the lord motioned to the soldier to take him there. Tauler followed him. A moment later, it was announced that the Prior of Angers, Father Gervais, was arriving with a mandate from the Pope; he was accompanied by Benoit de Côme and Nicholas of Strasbourg. I threw myself at the Prior of Angers' feet to explain to him our situation. He received me rather coldly, however. He had already been informed of our presence at the castle and came to make sure, among other things, that the lord did not exceed the archbishop's order and that the Master be brought safe and sound to the General of his order, in Cologne. And he read to me an excerpt from the message: " ... so that he can answer, before the Inquisition, for multiple articles in his sermons and treatises judged to be offensive, erroneous and tainted with heresy as much by the sound of the words as by the meaning of the sentences."

The Prior of Angers appeared very worried, and the opening of a trial directed at

the Master seemed to be just one hot coal in the inferno he had to extinguish.

— The Church is in great danger. The emperor is seeking to stifle its authority and dismantle its government. He himself is fomenting heresy and revolt against the Church so as to add to the power he has over bodies those that the Pope has over spirits. Walter and most of the heretics are only the foam from this brewing. We must get away from this. You should convince your Master to follow the moderate voice of our brother Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Distraught and not knowing how to answer, I turned toward Nicholas of Strasbourg, one of the Master's great friends, a scholar who had taught at Cologne and written a comprehensive survey of philosophy inspired by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. Taking him aside, I complained:

— I have an order from the Prior to accompany the Master to the Studium. I knew that the Prior wished to reprimand him for the risks that, through innocence and ardor, he was making our Order take. Our friend is sometimes so inflammatory in his speaking that, without any malice on his part, he risks leading astray simple and uneducated souls, especially those of women. But for him to be brought before a court of the Inquisition set up just for this by an archbishop more concerned with his lands and property than with the sanctity of the Church, I find this hard to endure. It's a dishonor to all the holy Dominican order.

— Have confidence in the Church, my brother, Nicholas answered. The men who lead Her aren't always worthy of Her, but She has springs that transcend them; Her justice emerges from between the injustices of men and Her mercy bursts forth through the hardness of time. Accident will never win out over essence.

My heart calmed down a little bit. Nicholas was right. Something unpredictable, an overhang of Providence might catch hold of destiny at its most tragic moment. We must have hope.

Finally, the candle went out, giving the signal for the eighth hour, the hour at which we were supposed to go out into the courtyard. All of the county must have been present. There were people everywhere, perched on improvised stands, on the parapet, on the rampart walk, between the crenels and even in the scaffolding on the towers. The periphery of the courtyard bristle with soldiers armed with halberds and lances, while archers stood watch from high on the walls. The merchants had been informed of the day and the hour of the execution, and, wishing to profit from the occasion, had set up a fair: coal, glassware, brocade, silk, hats, armor, jewels, carpets, and even spices, everything was there. The nobility took advantage of this by taking a look at the merchandise or sending a steward to do it. The poor, the needy, the lame, the one-eyed, the widows cast envious looks at the meats, the breads, and the cheeses strewn over the low counters. Only one small silent group had assembled around the stake and the speaker's stand; it seemed to be preparing itself for the drama which was going to unfold there.

The Master and Tauler finally came out of the manor house and approached the

stand. From their expressions, I understood that they could do nothing more for the condemned man. They took their places next to us. Katrei pressed against Father Eckhart; she was even more pale than usual. Alberon was squeezing his sister's hand. A cart approached, and on it was poor Walter, gagged and tied. Eyes closed and hands joined, he was murmuring some prayers; his forehead and all his face was covered with sweat, he trembled, and his breathing was labored. Once, he opened his eyes but his gaze was as absent as that of a demented person. They attached him so securely to the stake that the rope around his neck nearly strangled him. They placed the heretic's bonnet on his head. To ensure their own survival, the people pretended to laugh at him, and the most vulgar hurled stones and dung, but the majority of those who approached found it hard to hold back their worry and affliction. Visibly, they loved this man.

It was rumored that the emperor would put the Church in its place, that he would soon name his own Pope because he didn't accept the abuses of the Church and its insubordination to the empire. People rejoiced at this. What difference did it make, whether the yoke came from the king or the Pope! The important thing was that there be only one yoke rather than two. When the Church added its rights and taxes to those of the lords, things became unbearable, they said. It would be better to return to the earliest times of the Church: a lord who oppresses and a priest who consoles. Deep down, these people simply wanted to render to Caesar what belonged to Caesar and to God what belongs to God; they rejected the complicity of the two Caesars who rivalled each other in tyranny and malice. This is in part the thought of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis, this was the reason for their breakthrough in poverty; they wanted to lift the Church up by the humility of the saints rather than leave it to be humiliated by the pride of the powerful. However, they wished to do it by cultivating good fruit and not by revolting against questionable authorities.

A crier silenced the crowd and introduced Father Gervais as a representative of Avignon who had come to pronounce a papal bull. Surprise and fear swept the crowd, and then a solemn silence. The Prior of Angers began this way:

— Lord, nobles, artisans and good people, listen attentively, I am not speaking in my own name but in that of the father of us all, His Holiness the Pope. He says and I quote: "I, John XXII, one hundred and ninety-fourth successor of Peter, representative of Christ on earth and servant of the servants of God, in eternal memory of the affair, in the field of the Lord, of which, by disposition of Heaven and without deserving it, we are the guardian and the laborer, we should take care that no one comes to poison the good grain. Our mission is to turn souls away from hell in order to lead them toward the supreme throne. But now Louis of Bavaria, a son every bit as perverted as his father Frederick of Austria, is menacing the authority of the Church by pretending to dispose of the papacy as if it were his vassal. It is, however, written in Heaven and in the canons of the Church that the reign of the spirit has dominion over the reign of the flesh and that, consequently, it is the responsibility of the servant of the servants of the Church to crown the emperor, one who has made himself worthy of, Christianity and holy catholicity. Now, it is not our intention to crown Louis of Bavaria, an unworthy

servant, but on the contrary, to condemn him. Our compassion for souls and our concern for their salvation oblige us to drive the wolf out of the sheepfold. At the very hour that I placed the seal on this bull, even before it is pronounced by the one I am sending you, Louis of Bavaria is cursed by the church, excommunicated, relieved of his powers, and will bear the anathema until he returns to rectitude and submits himself to the reign of God. Those who follow him, obey him, pay him a tax he no longer has the right to, recognize him as legitimate when he no longer is, speak to him with the intent of helping him in any way whatever, are to be considered from the present moment as excluded from the Church and as apostates. It is forbidden to provide them help, to give them anything to eat or drink, to sell them anything whatsoever, to smile at them or simply to let them go by without cursing them or chasing them with blows of a stick, for they deserve it. May it be heard as I have written it and as my emissary promulgates it."

This message, my brothers, Gervais continued, is unequivocal. I know that there are rumors of animosity against certain prelates who appear, to your carnal eyes, unworthy of the Church. But we, the preachers, and also the order of mendicants, we have been chosen by the Church to testify that the blood in its veins and the strength of its nerves have never ceased feeding themselves from the very life of Jesus, in humility and simplicity. We live in poverty, are close beside you like your brothers, we work every day without stopping to build the City of God, the kingdom of peace and order. But Satan lays waste our efforts. So I am warning you. It is true that Satan pushes certain prelates into carnal pleasures, but take heed, this does not at all destroy their authority and the power conferred upon them. Think about it: if authority depended upon the weaknesses of those who hold it, it would be up to each one to judge his superior and certain chaos would result. I have heard from the mouths of certain people some insane statements; they let it be understood that it was up to each one and everybody, on the the one condition of purity, to hear the voice of God and to judge good and evil. What madness! Demonic madness! The law that is written in men's hearts is inscribed there to the extent that the Pope, the Apostle of Christ, pronounces it, and if not, there would be as many laws as there are men of good will. How many sincere people have been mistaken, have admitted their mistakes and have had to correct themselves; this demonstrates that the truth is not a simple flower that it is up to each one to cut, with the result that there would be as many flowers as cutters.

There has risen up in your midst a priest who has deceived you. In the beginning he was only a person duped by Satan, but he has been interrogated and has demonstrated his stubbornness, he has testified against himself and condemned himself. Today, that man is a heretic, his soul the victim of a plague, an enemy of God, a servant of Satan. Yet look at how merciful the Church is: it has delayed its verdict, waited three days for his conversion. Even at this moment, She awaits it. One word from him and he will be spared. If he doesn't say that word the fire will be lit. Yet even then, if he repents as the fire is consuming him, the flame will purify him and he will be able to reach purgatory, to suffer until he is worthy of being presented to God and finally find himself back one day with the saints of the Church. Can there be a greater mercy than that! Don't attach too much importance to this world, submit yourselves and you will lessen your pain. Now,

let's be done with this man!

At this the lord made a sign to his chaplain, a tall thin man dressed like a noble, to read the sentence drawn up by Henry of Virneburg. The text provided no explanation as to what had led the heretic to his loss but merely warned the man that unless he repented and renounced his errors without any reservation, he would find in the earthly fire his last hope of salvation. And that if he could not suffer in silence and contrition, he would sink into the horrors of hell, that his spirit would plunge ever more deeply in despair while his sufferings, scarcely begun here in the earthly fire, would intensify and never, ever diminish. The more he would suffer, the less resistance he would have to his suffering, and his desperate soul would grow larger again and again in order to suffer ever and ever more.

At the end of this the chaplain, dressed in linen, silk, and gold embroidery, approached the unhappy man to enjoin him to retract. The man stuttered a few words but could hardly speak, so paralysed was he with fear and panic. As the torch was about to touch the clump of dry conifers prepared for the lighting, he managed to pronounce these words:

— You don't know what you are doing, chaplain, you don't know what you are doing, so, Father, forgive him for what he is doing.

There was something like a glint of madness in his eyes. The chaplain, a noble, was offended and answered him:

— Do you know who you are speaking to?

— To the Lord's chaplain, he replied, almost strangled by the rope.

— And it is you, a poor man without family, who dares to remind me of the words of the Lord Jesus, me, a noble!

— I know, Walter answered in a strange illuminated state, that you are no greater than Christ and I hope to be no worse than the devil; since Christ listened peaceably when the Devil quoted scripture to Him, why won't you accept the Scripture, you who are less than Christ, from me, a little more than the Devil?

And, addressing the crowd in a voice that was low and barely understandable:

— Don't you think that those who are condemning me resemble the Pharisees and that the secular arm that is executing me are washing their hands like Pontius Pilate? My good friends, you know me and you know from the bottom of your hearts that I am with you and that I wanted, just as Jesus did, to help the poor, the widows and the children without families. I am neither a brave man nor a saint, I am trembling with fear, I will moan in the fire like a woman in labor, but I am confident because a monk, a Master and a holy man, came to reassure me this morning. He told me that anyone whose conscience is sincere, even if he is mistaken, is not on that account a sinner; God will receive him and if necessary

enlighten his intelligence and incline him toward the truth. He told me that if you can't in all sincerity trust your own intelligence, what can you trust! I am confident because I am sincere. If I did not have confidence in God who enlightens my intelligence, how could I trust that intelligence when it counsels me to obey this one and disobey that one? Sincerity, sincerity, always more sincerity, that is our only guide, the monk told me, a holy man ...

But already the fire was beginning to dance in front of his eyes. Seized with panic, the poor man began to scream at the top of his lungs, to writhe in terror as much as in pain, so much so that he strangled himself before really feeling the fire's claws.

Katrei, who was already holding her brother's hand, seized that of the Master, and he did not refuse her. How that old man could let himself ... A little later, she leaned her head on his shoulder to cover it with her tears. And he, the height of unseemliness, put his arms around her ... I motioned Tauler to intervene, but he reproved me harshly:

— You don't understand a thing. That woman who has come back to herself and gained new life now finds herself facing the spectacle of the agony she may soon have to go through herself! She is a little like Christ in the Garden of Olives: agonized by death. At the moment when we are sleeping like the apostles he consoles her. Isn't he doing the right thing?

My desire was chilled by this, for it certainly was desire that I was feeling, even if I didn't yet admit it to myself. But more deeply, in a secret place in, my heart, I was becoming strangely sensitive to Katrei, as if she could not suffer without my apprehending it.

Walter, the heretic, was dead. The fire crackled and a good number of people returned to their usual selves. Some of them were still sniggering at the poor man's panic, the crudest ones pretended to writhe and choke, and then burst out laughing. The rich proceeded to their purchases, the poor to their tasks, the children twirled their tops, and some of the women chatted about cheeses or fabrics. It might have been said that, for those people, nothing had happened. Several, however, close friends of the priest, seemed pensive or held back tears that must not be shed as long as the guards remained in the area. However it may have been, little by little order was restored, and submission returned each one to his place. As a stone never remains in the air very long, a bird will always fly away in the end, a wolf will attack, and the ordinary human being will give in.

We again took our places in the boat, en route to Cologne. The escort followed. Nicholas of Strasbourg came with us, and Gervais and Benoit de Côme remained with the papal guard and the lord's soldiers. The quiet river carried us off and no one dared to break the silence of its meditation. It was impossible to not reflect on our own deaths, at the ease with which the body comes apart under the sword, fire or sickness. What difference does this life make provided that the other one leads us to the light! A drop of blood falls into the river and after a minute no one can

distinguish it any longer. So our life is here on earth.

Between Mainz and Cologne, the Rhine glides in solemn majesty between capes, hills, and imposing forests. From meander to meander, the bells of castles, monasteries, and churches sing the glory of God from the tops of headlands. The waters carried us gently and without effort. There was a radiance of peace which, little by little, dissolved the vision of the fire.

Finally, and despite the gravity of the events, Nicholas ventured this question.

— I am quite confused today about the power of the intellect. As Dominicans we fervently defend faith as acquiescence to the light of the spirit within the intelligence. We think that every sincere spirit that lets itself be grasped from within recognizes the hidden truth in the scriptures and in nature, and manages to understand and follow it. We think then that authority is above all a matter of competence, competence to convince and persuade through the word, but even more through holiness in living. We think that faith is a question of interior conversion. We are convinced that science, the knowledge of nature, it too is accessible to the intelligence. For us, the intelligence is capable of God, capable of the universe and capable of itself. Now there is arising in the Church an idea completely contrary. The Franciscans, headed by William of Ockham, are advancing a nominalist philosophy by which they are attempting to demonstrate that the faith is not accessible to reason and that consequently the believer should bow down, blindly so to speak, before the authority of the written revelation interpreted in detail by an exegesis. Moreover, they also affirm that the omnipotence of God, who is indebted to no one, could have created another world quite different from this one and perhaps in fact the world that God created is not this one, but another that we don't know about. They say that our senses and our poor intelligence can deceive us completely. Science is simply the act of a subject aiming at his own perfection. No science really deals with things that are outside the imagination, the science of nature in fact only deals with the intentions of the soul. Everything is in thought and the imagination, which are themselves only a thought and a product of the imagination.

— The fall into the skull, Jutta continued.

Nicholas of Strasbourg, who knew nothing of Katrei's dream, could not understand Jutta's remark. He shrugged his shoulders and continued:

— In short, for them, in matters of faith, the authority of scripture is sufficient for us and, in matters of science, the rigor of reasoning, confronted with the experience of the subject, constitutes our sole guide. In both cases, intelligence cannot accede either to God or to nature. So, Master, you who have struggled to maintain and even develop a faith which bursts forth from the intellectual light and a science which leads even to the knowledge of the meaning of the world, what do you say about this at the very hour when the Inquisition wants to interrogate you and when the Pope is asking for William of Ockham so that he too might answer for his words?

— I don't know, Eckhart answered, what the West will choose: William of Ockham and the abdication of Man in the face of the transcendence of God and the world or Albert the Great and the hope for a communion with the Real. I only know that if the West chooses William of Ockham and his philosophy of Man as his own instrument, this West will find itself with a God and a universe that are incomprehensible. But that may only be an event in time that another time will cover with a beautiful shroud of hope and flowers. Man can deny himself for a time but not forever. Conrad told me how much you relieved him by reminding him that essence is never fundamentally touched by accidents. I know nothing of the future, but of that I am sure.

CHAPTER III: The Master's Challenge

As soon as I caught sight of the pinnacles and buttresses of the new Cologne cathedral, I felt an urgent need to enjoin the guards to go faster so that we could reach the monastery before nightfall and regain the safety of the fold. In the evening, work horses are eager to return to the stable. The twilight blurs their vision: they are impatient to get back to their stalls. Monks feel something like this about their cells and their monasteries. Even more so since Cologne is solid, and its roots are deep. The old city, which the general Agrippa gave to the Germanic tribes to settle under the surveillance of the Roman camp, has amassed a huge weight of civilisation, a weight and a memory that today reassures the most confused souls. I really did feel confused. They could just as well have named it "Column," a vertical force holding back the waters of heaven, preventing them from plummeting down into the empty spaces of the soul, to annihilate it in a horrible deluge. "Column" is also the perpendicular link, the vertical aqueduct directing the waters of heaven to the deserts of the earth, so that they may come to cleanse us of our sins, dissolve our desires and fertilise our lives. And now that the chancel of the cathedral has been completed, less than six years ago, it is the light of heaven that enters the bowels of the city.

The new architecture employed comes from the North of France: it is lighter, all in stone filigree, and allows the enclosure to open its flesh to the light of heaven in a multiplication of colors. Nowhere else do the rays from heaven better succeed in touching men's hearts than through these great windows, bays open to the embrace of the heavens. The cathedral is three hundred cubits long and almost ninety high. It radiates such an impression of strength and life that our hearts find peace in it, our souls rise up and ascend the light as if on Jacob's ladder. The ancients said that when light is reflected in the soul and returns to its source, it converts all it touches and restores the intellect to its own depth so that it resonates in its own essence. How I need this conversion of light in the bottom of my own troubled heart! Yes, Cologne! Come and cover me with your grandeur and your stability, for I fear the straying that women have induced in my weak spirit and the turmoil caused by the audacity, almost without limit sometimes, of our Master and guide, Eckhart.

When we had debarked, I nearly ran to meet our Superior General, Barnabas of Cagnoli, the head of our order, the one who would know how to make everything volatile fall back into place. He is invested with the power and authority to discern the essence of the community so as to direct it in all safety on the path of its destiny. He will make Master Eckhart understand that he only needs to come back a little closer to the happy medium, that of Thomas Aquinas, and that he simply needs to moderate his verbal excesses while perpetuating our tradition of clarity, rigor and discipline. I, too, have gone too far. Yes, it's true! I shouldn't have given credence to the archbishop's orders, at least without seeking advice from my superior. I regret it, but Barnabas will know how to seal the breach- As always, he will know how to defend the order against the machinations of the world and the

greed of the powerful.

How well I did to enter orders! The world is only disorder, a wild dance, a peasant gavotte and a perpetuity of passions which come and go, tear the soul and carry it off everywhere like a dust of images which are refracted in every direction and disappear in their own vanity. To obey is the sure way. To be controlled by a rule is the only means of escaping the drifting away of the intellect, its descent into its own possibilities, its descent into feminine dissipation. Order is the rectitude of thinking constrained by divine law, consecrated to the glory of God and which allows nothing to be lost in the outbursts of the Devil, in women's imagination, in the madness of desire. It seemed to me that in embracing the Father Superior my heart and soul would find their order once again; that, as before, everything would find its place in the tranquillity of established concepts, laws already anchored in eternity so that they might retain permanently all souls tempted by dispersion. But it was the last hour of the day, and we needed to join the others immediately for prayer and return at last to the silence of our cells. That is what we did. There, all grew calm within the monastery's strong stone walls, in the masculine force of this rock which alone obstructs the haunting of the feminine north wind.

The next day, the Superior called us in to the common room. In spite of his age, which was gradually slowing down his temper and its outbursts, this big and energetic man radiated almost every moment an exceptional force. This morning in particular, he seemed to have gathered all his human and spiritual powers, giving off a most lively assurance and displaying an especially alert spirit. Full of life, he approached the Master with open arms.

— Dear Father Eckhart, he exclaimed, how I've wanted to see you again! This trip must have been a real trial!

—Not as much for us as for the poor people burned like torches to frighten a population who understands nothing about it. God have pity on us!

— The Church is at a very crucial crossroads and I'm counting on you to help us. She is being attacked on all sides and is losing her head. On one side is the very noble and spiritual path of the Beghards, but some people have dug some terrible pits and traps along it. I am thinking of the sect of the Free Spirit which has pushed the Manichean and Cathar heresy to unheard-of extremes, even to the point of absolute identification of the soul with God. This is the loss of human identity, nothing less; creation would have no other value than as a purifying valley of tears. To seek to transform the world would only be a waste of time; only the transformation of the self would count. There you have a kind of return to the mystery religions and the revival of a purely individual spirituality. If it happens that humanity returns to this path, the consequences in the long term will be disastrous! On the horizon, there will be a society of visionaries disconnected from all reality, grouped into ten thousand disparate little sects no longer hoping for anything but the end of the world. But it will do no good to burn them. The Dominicans, spurred on by our holy founder, have always reacted to this pagan seduction by appealing to the human intelligence, the only base of support valid in

the long term. We must convince the people by the example of our lives and by a teaching addressed to the best in each one. We are a preaching order, preachers every moment of our lives and in every one of our acts. The order made the right bet when it chose you to succeed Albert the Great, and accomplish in Germany what Thomas Aquinas accomplished elsewhere. It is probably your last battle, Father Johannes Eckhart, and it is extremely perilous.

Katrei has become a leading figure throughout Germany. They are comparing her to the greatest of the Beguines: Marie d'Oignies, Christine the Admirable, Marguerite d'Ypres, Julienne de Mont-Cornillon and, why not, the purely virginal Beatrice of Nazareth, or even the famous Hadewijch of Antwerp who was so attached to the lofty philosophy of William of Saint Thierry. This is clearly exaggerated, even though the woman has spirit. Our order has led a large number of Beguines up to the highest summits of philosophy and sanctity. I read with great pleasure *The Life of the Beguines* written by Mechthild of Magdeburg under the direction of the Dominicans. I looked through with great admiration the *Book of Special Graces* by Mechthild of Hackeborn and *The Herald of Divine Love* by Gertrude the Great. We can be proud of these women whom we, by grace and duty, have guided in the right way. It is of the highest importance to return the sect of the Free Spirit to the true foundations of the Beguine movement, and we can only do this by saving Katrei from heresy and sending her back to convert her followers. She will accomplish in a few years what would take us decades without her. She will stay with us then and you will be able to see her every day with the assistance of Conrad of Halberstadt who will be your secretary in the coming months. Nicholas of Strasbourg will take it upon himself to testify to her conversion before that old fox, Henry of Virneburg, his censors and his prosecutors.

Perhaps you know that Nicholas of Strasbourg has been mandated by the Pope to expel officially and without further procedure those two black sheep who are trying to cast Katrei into the fire. Her drama is being recounted as if it were a saint's legend, leading astray the honor of our Order. He has also been mandated to pursue other investigations, for scandal has slipped into the church due to the negligence of certain ...

Feeling that these remarks were aimed at me, I couldn't keep myself from interrupting:

— It's my own grievous fault, Father Superior, I should have punished Herman and William myself when I had authority over them ...

— It's too late, Father Conrad, and the only way you can redeem yourself is by doing your duty ... and don't be overzealous, because good judgement is not one of your qualities. I have been especially hurt to learn of the way in which Henry of Virneburg has succeeded in manipulating you even at the convent in Strasbourg. Don't pay attention to anything but my orders and my orders only. As of now, don't interrupt me any more ... Where was I?

— You clearly explained to me my mission in regard to the Beghard movement,

Eckhart recalled, and probably you were getting ready to speak to me about a second task.

— Yes, the Church is being fought against on another front, much more pernicious, and much more difficult to conquer because the enemy is within the Church, even in its innermost recesses. The Franciscans carry to extremes their theology of God's transcendence, His omnipotence, and the primacy of will over intellect, forcing intelligence to surrender when faced with nature and with faith. I have read attentively the early works of Roger Bacon, an admirable doctor, it is said. Born of parents who were rich, noble and powerful, this sincere man studied at Oxford and at Paris. He came under the influence of Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln, chancellor of the University and promoter of the study of optics and mathematics. Bacon wished to achieve a synthesis of all the sciences. But he ran up against that famous rock called Bonaventure, and his writings were banned by the Franciscans themselves. After this he was alas supported by the overly tolerant authority of Cardinal Guy de Foulques who, as you know, later became Pope, and this Pope ordered a copy of his work. I willingly accept, along with this Pope, that science ought to serve the overall progress of humanity by becoming the producer of universal happiness. But I oppose him with all my strength when he asks us to renounce knowledge as the primary destiny of man and the foundation of beatitude. Roger Bacon makes the end of human activity reside in life, its maintenance, and its fulfillment, in the belief that by material goods the human condition can be alleviated and perfected in all its dimensions, including the moral. It is true that it is necessary to work in concrete terms for the material development of the City of God, but if man ever loses his spiritual and intellectual destiny, if knowledge ever becomes a means rather than an end, then man will be driven to despair by the absurdity of life to the point where he won't even want to survive. At the very moment when he will have everything he needs to live agreeably, he will simply stop loving life.

As if to depose knowledge and relegate it to the rank of means were not enough, the Franciscans even go so far as to block the access of intelligence to divinity and to nature, even. William of Ockham first of all reduces the intellect to the simple logic of the Peripatetics, and once he has established that terrible reduction, he affirms that logical speculation can say nothing about God and even more, can't even say anything about the very substance of the world. Man only has enlightenment enough to describe singular individualities, their interactions and their sequences along the thread of time. If Christianity ever falls into that trap, it will take a fourfold fall: first, the division between faith and reason, a faith, however, without intelligence and so restricted to the authority of Scripture, a reason without intelligence and restricted by that very fact to what is useful; secondly, the shattering of the world into an infinity of singularities and atoms abandoned to their own solitude; thirdly, the setting adrift of man in the absurdity of an incomprehensible world; and, finally, instruments and machines put to the service of a desperate humanity, falling all over each other in their own egos' self-destructive madness. It is fortunate that the new Pope, although not much aware of these terrible perspectives, is trying to rectify this man's crack-brained mindlessness.

— Nicholas of Strasbourg has informed me that inquisition proceedings have been initiated against this strange monk who has broken with the Ancients.

— This man is presently in Avignon with his Master General, Michel de Cenese, to answer for his errors. But what you can't know is that Cardinal Jacques Fournier, the one whom most think will be John XXII's successor, is presently a judge in Ockham's case, and will also be one of your magistrates, if it happens that you have to go to Avignon. They say that Ockham is criticizing the pontifical constitution which does not allow theologians to approve or disapprove any proposition submitted to the Holy See before a decision is made. The Franciscans, he says, no longer have the right to assert that the world has existed from all eternity, or the contrary; or that there is a distinction between the divine persons; I quote his own words: "Ail the absurdities that have been maintained by a certain master in theology of the order of preaching Brothers, a certain Eckhart of Germany."

— You know my cautiousness and all the nuances of my thought on those subjects, Eckhart answered.

— Exactly: nuances that very few people can understand. I implore you once again, Father Eckhaft, avoid preaching subtly reasoned sermons to men and women who are simple and unprepared for them. We aren't in Paris speculating about the prime ether or the dynamics of the stars; we are here, in Cologne, in the midst of a battle for a faith which is trying to survive such terrible assaults. They are distorting and disfiguring our most beautiful sermons and using them to embroider wild philosophies that put the Church and the future of men in peril. We must bring these people back to the truth and save the Dominican order from humiliation.

— I can answer for my acts and words but not for what they say about me or the words they put into my mouth. My struggle is first of all as a Dominican. We are brothers so as to demonstrate by our lives, our works, our science, our sermons, and our commentaries that the intellect is the best foundation for faith, hope and charity; that it is the guarantee of our future and that it is on this that the Church should place its hopes. The intellect, which we should never confuse with reason, is the very life of the Word.

— Your defense should be convincing, Master Eckhart, and it should be convincing to some especially obtuse minds. Virneburg is only interested in arguments that are useful for his power. You have, at present, the order of Preachers behind you, supporting you. However, if you happen to get carried away, I will have no other choice but to cut the cord for fear that we ail might be dragged down in your fall. Do you understand me?

— Your responsibilities would obligate you to do this. But, for my part, I will remain a Dominican until the end. I have taken as a guide none other than Albert the Great himself, as well as his best students. They, too, had to defend themselves against the Church. I have the honor of being part of a solid tradition that I hope

with all my heart to continue ...

— You are right and I don't doubt at all your sincerity or your abilities. On the contrary, your philosophy proceeds straight as an arrow in the direction of our traditions. I have asked Nicholas of Strasbourg to carefully examine the development of the Studium's philosophy and make a report on it for me. Read it yourself. He handed the Master several quickly scribbled pages on which was written:

"I cut to the shortest and surest. The primary vocation of the Studium of Albert the Great consists in transcending the theology of being to attain a theology of becoming. According to Parmenides, being is a given from all eternity: life here is only an imperfect manifestation of the movements of that Being. Time, then, produces nothing in itself, it is not a creator, it does nothing more than unroll eternity. For the Hebrews, time is a story. Sin, the rupture of the alliance between man and God, can deflect the human adventure from its trajectory. This detour of man into error is not solely negative; it allows the creation of additional virtues, such as courage, mercy, and joy. Albert the Great wished to unify the theology of being and the theology of becoming by transcending both of them. He arrived at the idea that the First Principle is not being, but an Over-Being. Being is equal to itself, but the Over-Being is more than itself, it is an Overflowing, a dynamic Goodness, a pure Act. The Being of God, the Trinity, like the being of man, the soul, plunge their roots into a pure eternal dynamism, the Deity.

"A friend of Albert, Hugues Ripelin of Strasbourg, was one of the first to clearly perceive that the First Cause is first of all a spring of dynamism that expresses itself in an interior way in the Trinity and in an exterior way in Creation. As the pagan masters so well observed, it is spring of dynamism which can only be an intellect or a super-intellect. The intellect is by definition a creativity which acts on itself, in itself, and for itself. The essence of the intellect is to make being. Hugues Ripelin observed that, since the universe is a substance that transforms itself unceasingly before our eyes, it can be nothing other than an intellect within the divine Intellect, and all of science consists in engaging in dialogue with this intellect. The science of God seeks to engage in dialogue with the divine Intellect, and the sciences of nature, with the universal intellect.

"One of Albert's most famous students, Ulrich of Strasbourg, considered the intellect to be first of all a transparent medium in which the light of knowledge is diffused. He insisted on saying that this turning of the intellect into itself, what Saint Augustine called conversion, is not only the natural movement for individual souls, but also the movement of the entire universe. It was he who elaborated the first principle of a spirituality of intelligence. The light transports the divine intelligence even into our shadows. Each being's intelligence is drawn naturally to the Source-Intellect, and that ensures the conversion of every truly sincere soul as well as the conversion of all the universe. Yes, the universe becomes like God when it participates in His Intelligence.

"A little later, Thierry of Freiberg went even further than his predecessors in the

desire and hope for knowledge. He said that man never knows himself as a 'me': his 'me', on the contrary, consists of that portion of ignorance resulting from his attention to himself. Thierry said that man knows himself more as an act of knowing. Man's thought is essentially the thinking of the Thought. Thus the soul unites the inferior and the superior, the body and the spirit. The return into God, conversion, is accomplished in the profoundest depths of the soul of the world and the soul of each person, in their very substance, the Intellect, the Word. In this secret closet, in this Bottom of the soul, is found the original and dynamic principle, the Source which gives birth to all that we accomplish in our thought. We find there this first principle where the intimate Word is engendered which is not of any language; and it is like the science of a science, the vision of a vision, the intelligence of a thought in our memory of God. It is this principle which draws us near to God, and the Vision of the blessed.

"In everyone's opinion, Father Eckhart is continuing, as much through his life as through his thought and words, the path blazed by his predecessors. Purity of heart brings an interior transparency to the work of the Word which not only converts us, but embodies itself in order to establish a new covenant. That covenant is the joy which results from the coming into being of the relationship of the soul with God within the Deity. We can have no doubts about this man: he constitutes one of our Studium's most fundamental links."

— I, too, have concluded, the General continued, that you are grafted to this vision, Father Eckhart. You are grafted to it in obedience and in lucidity. For that reason you will succeed. The order of Dominicans is rooted in the Word, it has a strong sap, and if you drink that sap, you will pull us all up a cubit higher. If, on the other hand, you cut yourself off from the order and the Church, you will fall alone. Go to the combat, it is with love that I order you to do this.

— If that is what God asks ...

— Be learned, be obedient, but be crafty also, like a serpent. Henry of Virneburg thinks with his purse and it would be very much to this old fox's advantage if the Dominican order were to plunge into the abyss, taking with it all the spirituality of the intelligence which poses an obstacle to his perfidious ways. It is more opportune for the archbishop, at this time, to embrace the point of view of the Franciscans. Not for their poverty, which he abhors, but because it is easier to exercise authority over men cut off from their capacity to think than over men who are enlightened. But if he is obtuse in regard to theology, never underestimate his powers and his influence. He has friends everywhere, and they are your enemies. If you fall here, you will, however, be heard in Avignon, I will see to that.

— I will attempt, Father Superior, to be equal to this mission I feel very unworthy of. With the help of God and my brothers, we will succeed.

— While we're on this subject, I am going to introduce you to a very promising young monk. He is from Ratisbon. He has come to complete his studies, and arrived here only a little while ago. He is making some impressive discoveries

regarding optics and will be able to help you fight the Franciscans on their own ground.

The Master left the room pensive or sad - I couldn't tell which - because he refused to speak to me. For my part, I couldn't understand why the General had asked Nicholas, the pontifical visitor, to write what everyone knew.

Several days later, I was supposed to get together with Nicholas of Strasbourg at the archbishop's palace for a first meeting intended to inform us of the list of accusations concerning the Master and the direction our defense would need to take. On the way, I witnessed a scene that previously I would simply have turned away from as if nothing had happened. For the first time, I dared to look, and the spectacle seemed to me as grossly unjust as it was unworthy of the Church.

On the square of the Romanesque basilica of Saint Martin the Great, surrounded by rows of narrow little houses each window of which displayed the silhouettes of several curious onlookers hiding their faces, a large number of women had been assembled who were said to be Beguines, as well as several men accused of being Free Spirits. In a peremptory manner, a cleric read the condemnation. It was then that I opened my eyes. How could they be certain of the crime of each one of these women? They couldn't have been able to investigate that many people! Most of them had probably been denounced by a husband who wanted to get rid of them, by a suitor whose pride had been wounded, by a woman wishing to eliminate a rival or even by a father seeking to save the price of a dowry. If they didn't have enough of a family; or if they were repudiated, they wouldn't be able to find a man of honor for the purgatory oath or to pay the fee that would buy their freedom. If there were one or two innocent among a hundred who were guilty, it would be acceptable, but if, through force of numbers you attempt to punish only a few guilty ones, this suddenly appeared to me unjust as well as contrary to charity. What good is it to seek to purge the world of Satan if, to do it, you make yourselves his accomplices? That day I understood the prior of Strasbourg who rebuffed me and recalled to me the very great wisdom of our founder Saint Dominic who wished to correct error through knowledge and mistakes through example.

After the reading of the indictment, they assembled the women in close ranks and, striking them with sticks, drove them toward the stone pier. Along the way, they were pushed, shoved, and thrown one against the other. As they moved forward, they got in each other's way, fell, and trampled each other in spite of themselves ... It was pathetic. Their sympathizers had fled, and villains, brigands, beggars and vagabonds came near, to laugh and to throw stones. On their arrival at the pier, they were forced to advance in groups of four or five on the landing stage. When their feet touched the beam where travelers would have boarded boats, they were struck hard from behind and thrown into the water. Some of them resisted, and were hit even harder; others threw themselves into the water and tried to swim to shore, but the peasants and paupers who understood nothing threw stones at them until they sank for good. This sad spectacle lasted for a period that seemed to me interminable. Their cries of fear or rage, their prayers of contrition or lamentation,

their screams of anguish or of terror, but above all, their silence - of dread or of resignation - came to tear the scales from my eyes. It seemed to me that these noises and cries, like falcons of coal and ether, carried away the protective plates that held tight my heart. It seemed to me that my heart of stone became a heart of flesh, that my eyes of earth became rivers of tears. A sort of strange compassion I didn't understand invaded me down to depths beyond measure. I believed that I fell in, rolled in the river with them, lost in that sea of floating hair, in the wild eyes of the drowned, in the blank abyss of Hades perhaps, shadowy and cold forever. I would have wished to disappear with them, traverse the depths of the abyss, and what difference would Hell make if only this spectacle ceased, for it makes a scandal of the Church, wounds it and destroys it.

But all of a sudden, there was a sort of coma in the course of time and I sank beneath the surface of things. I was immediately caught up by a whirlwind of black and terrifying anguish which I confused with conscience at first. But it transmitted hatreds and anathemas, torments and distresses capable of cancelling any glimmer of peace, crushing the soul without pity in its rage. It was not conscience, but culpability. But I did not understand this at the time. I was horribly afraid! I thought I heard one of the voices of the men in armor, an Austrian knight armed with an enormous sword able with a single blow to split a warrior from end to end. The austere and somber voice hammered out: "Might you be a Beghard, too? Might you be a heretic? Where do you get it, this weakness and pity for women, for witches? Has Satan carried you off?" I began to tremble and in desperation ran up to the cathedral.

Enveloped by the immensity of the nave, the immutability of the stone, the splendor of the light, I gradually regained my calm. I approached the high altar. Behind it, the reliquary containing the ashes of the Magi formed the largest gilded shrine in all of Christendom. The agates on the candelabras sparkled, the pink marble of the altar glistened, the velvet of the draperies rippled, the colonnades rose to a dizzying height, the stained-glass windows poured out deluges of colors and light. The harmony of that immense sculpture of stone and glass radiated a reassuring serenity, solidity, and immutability. What beauty, what magnificence! Didn't such wealth secure the power and magnanimity of the Church? Regardless of the accidents or even the errors along its path, the Church reigns, invincible, as the citadel in the forefront of the Kingdom of God, and this Kingdom inevitably infiltrates human decay like yeast in dough. Soon the glory of the Lord will invade us with its splendors. The world becomes Christian and drives out Satan; it is purified by the blood, enlightened by the divine intelligence, made wise by the spirit. The City of God will invade all the earth. Cologne reigns in the trinity of the great citadels of God - Cologne, the third city of Christianity after Paris and Constantinople. It exceeds them even with its six hundred hectares of land, its thirty thousand inhabitants, its ramifications extending here and there great distances like an irresistible glory. It is a star that advanced in the barbarian night, an intelligence besieging the beast, a soul which springs up in the depths of original sin. It is not surprising to find there again for a time some vestiges of the bestiality and sulphur of the demon. But the essence is there, in the depth of its divine enclosure - it swallows up disorder, evens out, little by little, the rough spots;

the mountains are gently rounded, the crevasses filled in where Hades sighed, madness and meanness dissipated.

Certainly, there will be no end of suffering and groaning, terrible upheavals, shakings, outpourings of fire, bottomless whirlwinds, all that and worse, since the flesh must give way before the spirit, matter broken up by the power of Life, heresy be shattered by doctrine. I pass, I age, I die; but on this death a flower rises, and on this flower a dove, and this dove flies off on the wings of peace.

This essential certitude calmed my whirling anxiety. My spirits lifted, I returned to the bridge. They were bringing the corpses back on shore. A young man had jumped into the water and was going at it wholeheartedly. He took pleasure in pulling them out of the water by the collar or the skirt so as to uncover their bosoms or their legs. I drove him away brusquely and took his place. After much effort, when I had finally brought the last woman back to shore, I turned her over and noticed she was clutching a little square of parchment in her hand. I pulled it loose and read:

"We have been instructed by a Dominican Master, Johannes Eckhart of Hochheim. He taught us that God and the soul are one and that he created everything with his little finger."

On the shore lay several examples of this unbelievable calumny. What had happened? What madness, what treachery, what contempt for everything! I was no longer sure whether I should go to the archbishop's palace as planned or immediately notify the General. I spotted Nicholas of Strasbourg on the bridge, ran to meet him, and showed him the parchment with its horrific slander.

— I know, he said to me, it's horrible. Herman of Summo and William of Nidecke have numerous accomplices among the city's notables. They handed out these ridiculous pamphlets, incriminating, defamatory, and false as they are, to women without families in the city's poorest neighborhoods. Less than an hour later, they sent guards to arrest them for being sisters of the Free Spirit. They are trying to discredit the Master in the people's eyes in order to avoid a riot if the accusations against him bear fruit.

— But don't you have an order from Avignon to expel those two crooks?

— I have the authorizations. I met with the archbishop on this subject. He suggested strongly that I deal with the leader rather than the servants, with the spring instead of the brooks, and he assured me that the two monks were in his keeping and were his responsibility. For the moment there was not, according to him, any proof that would allow one to believe that the rumors concerning their morals had any foundation. I learned a little later that Virneburg is in debt to their family and will protect them no matter what. The debt is beyond his means, so the old man is in a stranglehold, and obliged to save his own and his family's honor.

— Might this prompt him to favor the Master's condemnation? Because if the Master were found guilty, they would be innocent victims,

— Exactly, but I must add to this that they have every interest in eliminating Katrei in a fire which would permanently remove, with her, the allegations of bad morals which damage their reputations. The people love and respect the Beguines because they speak in favor of the poor and protect them. The Beguines consider Katrei one of the greatest among them. In short, Virneburg must save his honor and his powers by avoiding riots. A while ago, they drove a bishop out of his city and that could happen again. The persecution of the Beguines are, so to speak, preventative. Virneburg is pointing out to the public that he won't accept any sexual misconduct. In reality, it makes very little difference to him whether they are really Beguines or not, and he cares even less about finding out whether they are heretics or not.

— The prior of Angers and Benoit de Côme will certainly intervene under papal mandate.

— They do, in fact, have a mandate from the Pope but returned this very morning to Avignon.

— But that is impossible!

— For Virneburg, the Pope isn't much more than the archbishop of Avignon, and he is one of his principal electors. The Pope can't intervene in any archbishopric in Germany or anywhere else, unless he can convince the six other electors that the great lord of these places can no longer enjoy the confidence of the Church or the king. No archbishop will betray one of his own. Virneburg and his family have their powers, their rights and their privileges. They will certainly not renounce these things. Such a man, so long as he has not consistently set his own death in the center of his existence, fears that it will completely collapse in a moment like a hundred-year-old lie that breaks from the impact of a few true words. What he fears is that from his birth to his death, all his life might disappear in his own vanity, and carry his family's honor with it. That he can't do, and he can never do it. The solution is not here but in Avignon.

— But how can we persuade Virneburg that the Master, a German who has lived most of his life around the Rhine, ought to be heard in Avignon?

— The matter won't be easy, but I have hope that we can succeed with it. We will as planned receive the official list of the passages that have been considered doubtful and presented as evidence. The commissioners have already finished their inspection. I've heard that they've judged to be suspect forty-nine propositions taken from Eckhart's works: fifteen, from the Book of Divine Comfort, twelve from his first commentary on Genesis, sixteen from his sermons more or less faithfully transcribed, and six drawn from Eckhart's response to previous accusations.

— The Master has already defended himself against those!, I exclaimed.

— Not exactly. Some propositions and accusations have already been freely circulated. It's a fairly common thing to leak a few propositions so that the suspect can submit his preliminary arguments. This allows the censors to sharpen their weapons. The Master had briefly responded in a short treatise. And now, listen to this, they are using six propositions from this short response against him. For our part, we will not be disputing the grounds of the case, but rather the procedure and the jurisdiction. The life and the status of the Master are our best arguments. By his influence, by his writings, by his responsibilities, by his status as a high-ranking Dominican, Eckhart transcends the one archbishopric of Cologne, and he should be heard by theologians of equivalent reputation.

The palace of the lord Henry II of Virneburg gave me a strange impression of luxury and ice. The grey marbles, the huge paintings where the color of blood emerged from dark and twisting greens, the finely carved woodwork of mahogany and cherry, almost black, all this seemed to project the walls against us. Everywhere we went, this impression of being hemmed in and confined followed us, despite the grandness of the place. One might have said that a powerful and austere authority watched over this place. It was difficult for us to free ourselves from the oppression it exerted upon us.

The commission made us wait until late in the evening. We did not have anything to eat or drink, and for my part I was frozen as if I had just left my cell in the middle of the winter. I had recurrences of rheumatism which numbed me with a stiff and penetrating pain as if, through its bite, death were reminding me of its appetite, its impatience, and its eagerness. A deep anxiety worked its way into me and, when finally we were introduced into the courtroom, where torches and lamps made flashes of blood run along the crimson tapestries, I had a dizzy spell which made me faint. Nicholas helped me sit down on the seat reserved for me next to him, facing the court. I slowly regained my spirits.

Virneburg was there in the middle of the court, behind a massive carved wooden balustrade where angels and demons fought above the infernal regions; at least, that is what I remember about it. The bony old man, lost in his heavy linen vestments embroidered with gold and jewels, looked at us absent-mindedly before plunging into a meditation which transformed him into a bronze statue. A secretary seated at his side, just as broken by time as he, rose without saying a word, approached us and gave me the act containing the list. I handed it immediately to Nicholas who refused to take it. The secretary of the commission, having inspected Nicholas' imperturbable face and returned, limping a little, to his place, finally opened his mouth:

— Read this and speak. The archbishop is tired from his day and must soon leave for prayer.

Nicholas got up, spread his legs slightly to get a more solid footing, and after waiting a moment, said this:

—Lord of Virneburg, you who rule Cologne as uncontested master, I have a mandate from the Pope to investigate the actions and the thoughts of those whose orthodoxy in mind or morals could be placed in doubt. I have finished my investigation and I intend to severely punish certain monks of my order whose names I have given you in this list. As you have noticed there is on this list no Master or prior of the order of Preachers, and this is for two reasons. The first is because I have found none of them to be unworthy, and the second is because, if there had been one, it would have been my duty to report on it to Avignon.

Without even raising his eyes or coming out of his bronze meditation, the archbishop violently struck the balustrade. The secretary rose immediately:

— The archbishop has read the bull, the authority of Avignon is uncontestable, but this in no way limits that of Cologne. Whether Avignon proceeds or does not proceed, that is its business, but Cologne is proceeding. You have the accusation: tell us the direction your defense will take, that's all!

— I have announced it and I support it, Nicholas retorted, without for one moment raising his voice, yet placing emphasis on each word; I have the duty of recalling to you that the man you are speaking of is not a simple monk ...

— We know it, the secretary continued, spare us ...

The archbishop raised a finger indicating that he was ready to listen. Nicholas continued:

—I would be obliged, lord, if you would grant me the time allotted for the hearing. If not, the master's secretary, Father Conrad of Halberstadt here present, may note an infringement of the procedure.

The lord raised on Nicholas an eye charged with thunder, clenched his teeth for a moment, and pronounced with force:

— I am hearing you for the sake of justice, not to obey any procedure, young monk. Keep to yourself, I beg of you, your impertinent threats.

Nicholas appeared happy to have shaken the enigmatic iron monument seated in front of us.

— I will be brief without abridging the essential, lord. In 1248, Father Albert of Lauingen, called Albert the Great, scholar as well as saint and wise man, founded the very prestigious Studium General of Cologne, a place of learning and wisdom which redounds to Cologne's honor as the University does to Paris. Twelve years later, Johannes Eckhart was born to a Thuringian family of Hochheim, residing in Tambach near Gotha. At the same time, a learned man, William of Moerbeke, translated the treatises of Aristotle and other Peripatetics. The very great enterprise of the Studium was to unify - as much as it could be done - the wisdom of the Ancients with the Gospel of Christ. The Dominican order maintains, with Saint Augustine, that the wisest of the pagans unwittingly prepared the ground for

the intelligence to receive the revelation of Christ. The light of intelligence and the light of the spirit are good one for the other, and it is to their great benefit to unite so as to convince the whole man that the faith is right.

— This enterprise gave the Studium a prestige rivaling that of Paris. The Italian Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican as you know, who lived until 1274, the date when Eckhart took holy orders, was canonized in 1323, demonstrating to all that philosophy and theology could join together to heighten the sanctity of conduct and emotion. He was the first to combine Aristotelianism and Christianity in a complete comprehensive survey. This confident doctor held classes at Saint Jacques, the famous Dominican convent in Paris. For a while he was the victim of a dispute with those who didn't have sufficient intelligence to understand him. In 1255, the convent even had to call for the protection of the royal archers, but Thomas Aquinas continued to teach at Saint Jacques. Three years later, he left Paris for Italy. It was there that he undertook his great Summa Contra Gentiles, addressed to all who wished to see something of the astonishing intellectual harmony of the Christian mysteries. This work was written against those who, by their arguments, aimed at demonstrating its vanity. A new reasoned connection could be seen in it between philosophy and what is rightly called "sacred doctrine." "It is impossible for the truth of the faith to be contrary to the principles that reason knows naturally." There is the basis of his argument. In 1267, at the Curia of Viterbo, Thomas Aquinas composed the great survey of theology whose aim was to expound the Christian religion in the way most convenient for the instruction of beginners. The next year Thomas Aquinas returned to Paris during the quarrel against the privileges of the mendicant orders and was confronted with the crisis posed by the radical Aristotelianism of the arts. The Faculty of Arts was undergoing massive changes under the impetus of Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia, those great Aristotelian masters and defenders of Averröes. They had to be countered, because if reason leads to faith, this is not so naturally, but by grace as you know ...

— The defendant here is not the monk you are talking about ..., Virneburg's secretary tried to interrupt.

— No, but one of his most worthy successors, Nicholas continued immediately. I wish to attract your attention to the fact that a theology can be heterodox in appearance and through misunderstanding, yet afterwards turn out to be among the most reliable. The Master you are speaking of is continuing in Germany and elsewhere what Father Thomas began in Italy and France.

The extension of a healthy tree can hardly be unhealthy. On the other hand, the elevation of something that is already very high can easily rise above most things. The summit attained by Eckhart perched on the shoulders of Thomas, himself astride the Ancients, is hidden high in the heavens and can generate confusion even among the most learned.

— The image is hackneyed and hurtful to the lord who is before you, the secretary replied. Rather than insinuate offenses, provide facts, facts.

— I'm getting there. At the time when Albert the Great was finishing his earthly life, Johannes Eckhart, the son of a knight, entered the monastery of Erfurt. Very soon, because of his exceptional intellectual and spiritual capacities, Eckhart was named prior of Erfurt, then Vicar General of Thuringia. From 1285 to 1286, he was chosen to complete his studies at Paris. He returned there in 1293 as a sententiary bachelor. His inaugural lecture, the *Collatio in libros Sententiarum*, was held on September 14 and October 9, 1293. The monk had perfectly mastered by then the loftiest methods of speculation and had given proof of a rare, even exceptional capacity of surpassing apparent contradictions to enter into the very heart of the dialectic of being. Few men, very few men reach this point. Those who don't reach it see every kind of contradiction there where the masters discover the very life and dynamic of Unity. At Paris, the Master met the renowned Majorcan, Raymond Lull - theologian, missionary apostle and mystic. He learned there all the details of the great difficulties raised by the promoters of the separation of faith and philosophy, and rebelled particularly against the idea that reason and faith could be opposed. He defended equally an intelligence of spirituality and a spirituality of the intellect. From 1294 to 1298, Eckhart was once again prior of the Dominican convent of Erfurt. He composed his first major work: *Spiritual Conversations*. In 1303, at Pentecost, the Chapter General of Besançon, as you no doubt know, resolved to separate the large Dominican province of Germany in two: Saxonia and Teutonia. The convent of Erfurt belonged, of course, to Saxonia and Master Eckhart became its Provincial. Even at that time, Saxonia contained forty-seven convents of brothers, representing eleven different nations, including Holland. It was an important province then and Eckhart remained there until 1311. But in 1307, the Chapter General of Strasbourg had named him in addition to this, Vicar General of Bohemia. Two Chapters General required the Preachers to conform to the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas. Eckhart followed this edict, as he has always been faithful to his predecessor even while opening windows which go beyond. In 1313, Eckhart arrived at Strasbourg, in Teutonia, called there by the General of the order, Beranger of Landora, who gave him, among other things, this special mission: to undertake the *cura monialum*, the spiritual direction of a vast female population composed of Dominican nuns, members of tertiary orders and Beguines who are orthodox and faithful to the Church. Master Eckhart enlightened, taught, and inspired an ever more lively intellectual expression of the very orthodox doctrine of Saint Thomas.

— The quality of the Master does not foretell that of the disciple; Judas is the proof of that, the secretary responded. What is more, to teach speculation to women is rash, dangerous and immoral.

— Your example is particularly contemptuous and your insinuations are insulting to the daughters of God. Rather than insinuating offenses, propose some facts, Nicholas replied, turning the secretary's own arguments against him. And among those facts, should I recall to you that the mother of Jesus was a woman?

— Jesus did not instruct her, but directed her, sir, directed ...

— Whatever our disagreements on points of doctrine may be, I have demonstrated unquestionably that the theologian you presume to be unorthodox has, in fact, the status of master; that he is indisputably a theologian of a very high level; that he has at his disposal a reputation which extends through all of Christendom; that he has occupied - and occupies - offices which surpass Cologne; that his work radiates to the limits of civilization; and that, for these reasons, he can only be judged by theologians certified in Paris and by a court with a mandate on the whole of the civilized world - Avignon, as I have said.

After a brief silence:

— There it is, you have been heard ..., the secretary began.

But Virneburg placed both hands on the balustrades, stiffly arose as if sealed in a suit of armor, stared at Nicholas and retorted:

— What would you think then, young man? I have invited none other than Master Reyner Friso as inquisitor. As you know, he is a doctor in theology. At his side is Pierre Estate, Friar Minor, former prior of the convent of Cologne, and Albert of Milan himself will be there to assist him. The court of Cologne is ready to hear any master whomever, be he doctor of Paris or patriarch of Constantinople. As to the jurisdiction of the tribunal, Eckhart is presently in Germany: that is enough. The next time, I will be obliged if you would shorten your preambles that are somewhat removed from your role as a minor official of the archbishop of Avignon.

With that, he left the courtroom to go to his prayers. Nicholas nimbly went out and I had to run to catch up with him. As I ran, Virneburg's power, having worked its way into me, drew me into doubts which shook one by one my certainties concerning the Master. Could it be that Eckhart may have been drawn, in spite of himself, into feminine uncertainty as the orthodoxy he guarded slowly sank into the slime of the world?

We arrived after compline. The Master, accompanied by the Father sacristan, had brought Katrei to the baptistry for her prayers. This was because Katrei, a heretic until proved otherwise, did not, as would be expected, have access to the chapel. However, the Master had received the General's permission to bring the women to the portico of the Church early at night, once the monks had retired.

We arrived rather hastily, but, in the baptistry, a singular solemnity prevailed that we could not disturb. I was instantly bedazzled, as it were, by what I saw. The moon which, as is known, lightens as if from the interior the flesh of women, illuminated the golden-haired heretic like a virgin in a window of milky stained-glass. If I had not known the medical science of the ancients and the Arabs, she would have easily seduced me and borne me away in her sparkling - though deceptive - luminosity. Demons no doubt possess the power of deadening the guilt and anxiety of straying souls, since women's smiles always have something innocent and pure about them that exceeds in splendor the discreet tranquility of

the saints. Jutta, who left the young woman only very rarely, was seated a little to one side and seemed especially concerned. Perhaps she was worried that her husband had not returned to find her. Fortunately, a cloud came to cover the moon and the yellowish gleams of the candelabra began to slide their myriad long and sinuous fingers over the grey stone, extinguishing the illusory brilliance of the women. The livid claws and teeth trembled on the damp and oozing stone and began to moan, to lament like pernicious souls in Gehenna. The dubious sublime transformed itself into evidence of the macabre. Yet who, without wavering, can discern the clarity of the facts through the discord of the Infernal Regions? I have never arrived at this, and, at the moment when my doubts became clear, it was as if I fell down behind myself and, seeing myself doubt, I doubted and this made me see the same scene in another fashion.

The Master was on his knees, right next to the heretic, his face enveloped in the shadow of his hood. Nicholas approached to speak with him, but the Master signaled him to be silent, adding:

— Don't you think that this night is lovely, and that we shouldn't trouble it with the worries of this world?

— Worries, you say. It's the Church that's in question, Nicholas said, the Church that is wounding itself and putting itself in deadly danger.

— My good friends, the Master replied, it is appropriate to leave this burden here in this spot where the catechumens come to leave the anguish of the world to enter into the quiet of the Kingdom.

— But I need to talk to you, Father Eckhart, Nicholas insisted.

— Not tonight, not at this time, Father Nicholas, it is too good to be here in the peace of God. Join our vigil, and you will see how the bottom of an ocean stays quiet despite the agitation of winds and surfaces.

The gentleness of the Master's voice in the resonance of the air charged with wax and incense made me sink into a terrifying corner of my heart. I found myself at the bottom of one of the deepest abysses of my being, there where the terrible fracture opens that leads on one side to the infinity of nothingness and, on the other, to the infinity of being. Two ways so opposite in their ending and yet so difficult to discern at their origin: on one side, force, authority, the impact of Virneburg's court; on the other, the immensity and the enigmatic impenetrability of the Master. On one side the sureness of the Church which goes its way with an unfaltering step, which certainly can err for a while or even a long while, but which necessarily returns, to the truth of its purpose, by reason or by fire. Virneburg may fall in many ways, but supposing even that he is wrong, the truth of the Church in which he participates will, in ten years, in a hundred years, in a thousand years, bring its little ones back to the fold. An archbishop passes, but the destiny of the Church does not pass. To lose my way while following it is truly not to be lost for all Eternity, it is no more than to zigzag for awhile in one of the meanders

of a river which in fact already touches the sea. Perhaps Eckhart already is the sea, perhaps he already is the Kingdom, but not necessarily. If he is already in the Kingdom and I am running there with him, I am only shortening the trip. On the other hand, if he is deluded, if, rather than the Kingdom, he had simply laid hold on the curtain of serenity which surrounds the madman or the heretic and I follow him, I run with him in the shadows and the eternal flames. With Virneburg, I risk little and am certain to win, with Eckhart I risk much and can win only time, simply time. This is what distinguishes obedience to the hierarchy from obedience to a Master: time.

All this was clear so long as I turned my eyes away from the scene taking place in front of me, but when I looked at the Master's face and even that of the young woman, everything became blurred. Why did reasoning as perfect as this leave such a doubt in my heart? Why, while looking at the Master and his protegee, did I have the feeling that to follow Virneburg was a sin, even though all my reason told me the contrary? I was torn, I was lost in the very place where Judas stood before deciding his betrayal, except that I felt forced to betray. I must betray either Virneburg or Eckhart. I could not escape this choice. But who was the true Master? The man consecrated archbishop or the erudite monk, the institution or the individual? Katrei broke the horrifying silence I was in:

— Father Eckhart, when I spoke to you about the disgraceful things in my life and the death of my baby, it was as if I broke open a dike and, since that time, a suffering that has no end pierces me through and through.. It seems as if a torrent of tears flows without resistance in the middle of my heart. I don't know how long I can survive this hemorrhage, how long a time I can suffer this much. It seems as if I'm in much more pain now than in those days when they hurt me and defiled me.

He placed his hand on the young woman's head and remained silent. After long moments marked by the fibrous sounds of his difficult breathing, he slid his finger under the woman's chin and gently raised her face so that she could look into his.

Then a smile slowly formed on his face, as if he himself had plunged into her pain and come out of it affirmed, reinforced, and consolidated. He probably wanted to show her the way, the one that allows us to pass by memory's noise, and seize its substance. She finally responded to his smile by a very delicate movement of her eyelids.

— Father Eckhart, you wrote a Consolation to Queen Agnes of Hungary shortly after her mother's death. I've read this text, which is circulating in all the beguinages, but also under the coats of artisans and clerics from Strasbourg and Cologne. It has done me an immense amount of good. It's too bad I'm no longer able to remember it. I'd like it so much if you'd remind me of the main points.

— I'm afraid that it might not be much help to you. So rarely can words do more than silence.

— There are times when silence shouts, and far too many silences cry out at one time, too many to contain. This silence kills, it buries even the breath of prayers. It is then that we feel the need to hear our fellow humans, to hear them run and jump in a green moor, to hear them remind us that something exists and not nothing. I need to listen to your voice, to listen to the consolation you wrote for Agnes.

— Now you know your suffering because you have finally accepted your incarnation in this woman's body. Consolation does not come from the exterior of suffering like the water which extinguishes a fire. On the contrary, it comes from within suffering just as a fire's first source is within the fire. The first property of the source of fire is to never be totally consumed by the fire it engenders. No movement of being destroys being.

This argument seemed to me so incongruous that, forgetting all propriety, I interrupted the Master:

— But that makes no sense ...

— We must always get past our first impressions, Father Conrad, Eckhart responded.

It often happens that appearances are deceptive. For fire to burn, it is necessary to have at one's disposal two things and not just one: first a source of fire and then a substance which is not fire, wood, for example. But these two things tend to become one thing and they do this indeed, so that it is demonstrated that they have always been, in fact and in their essence, one thing only. We have an obvious example of this when physical fire sets wood ablaze. First, a spark receives the nature of fire and becomes like fire. When fire acts, when it lights the wood and sets it ablaze, it renders the wood subtle, removing from it what is gross and cold, its heaviness and dampness, and making it more and more like itself. But neither the wood nor the fire find relief or repose in any heat, cold, or resemblance, as long as the fire does not engender itself in the wood, and communicate to it its own nature and its own being, in such a way that there is no longer anything but one single fire, the same for one as for the other, without distinction, no more, no less ... Once all dissimilarity has been removed and rejected, the fire calms down and the wood is silent. Therefore, the masters say: to become fire is impossible without resistance, pain, agitation and time; but the birth of fire and joy has neither distance nor duration. Consolation is within suffering in its deepest depths. Suffering passes, but consolation remains.

— I understand the image, but cannot grasp its application, could you explain this to me? Jutta asked.

— Let us search for the principle behind the image, Eckhart continued. A first principle says that all things and all persons are necessarily bound to each other in some way, if it is only through the space that surrounds them and penetrates them. However, a second principle affirms that what binds things and persons together

cannot be passive like space. It is something much more fundamental than space...

— And why then?

— Space possesses a principle and this principle obviously has no space. You see, space is here and there. If what unites all things was here and there, it would itself be a thing, for example, an extension. It would be necessary then to ask the question: what unites that thing, extension, to the things that are in the extension? One is then forced to consider that what unites all things cannot be a thing; it is necessarily a dynamic principle, a living reality which is always here and always now.

— Isn't this principle of unity what Albert the Great called the transphenomenal point? Nicholas asked.

— Perfectly. In every person, in every being, in no matter what reality, there is a point which is the same point for all and this point is necessarily here now. From this point spring all realities.

— All this seems so abstract to me, Jutta observed, and so remote from the question of suffering and consolation.

— Hold on, I'm coming to it. If we exclude for the moment physical suffering, we observe that suffering requires two things and not just one: an internal principle and something which is not this principle. For example, injustice, the opposite of justice, cannot by itself create suffering, just as fire cannot by itself create fire. Fire needs fuel and fire cannot be its own fuel. Likewise, injustice causes suffering only to those who desire justice. There is in each person a point that is very intimate and very inward, always here and always now, the same for all, and this contains a sufficient image of justice, a desire for justice sufficient to engender suffering from injustice. On the other hand, starting from this point I cannot set forth the idea of justice, because an idea is necessarily limited while justice is not. Unlike Plato, I believe that the expressions of justice are free. Justice can take an infinity of forms and it is incumbent upon intelligence to invent them and multiply them. Starting from this very inward point, here and now, I can invent expressions of justice but not justice itself. I am able to feel in my conscience that this world is not just. This suffering and this desire push me to become just and, in becoming just, I pass beyond injustice, I revel in the justice which works in me and transforms me. More than that, I raise justice above itself by inventing works for it which continually raise it higher.

At that moment, the Master turned toward me and, looking me straight in the eye, with neither scorn nor kindness continued:

— It even happens, my friend Conrad, that this intuition of justice impels us to do something contrary to what we customarily consider reasonable: it is at this moment that we feel the pain of a dilemma and a choice that stand out. What we have here is not the leprosy of suspicion, but on the contrary, the leaven of a faith

which continually invites us to surpass ourselves.

— But how can we be certain of our choices? I asked him.

— We cannot be sure of a choice and we cannot force a choice. We can only allow justice to ripen in us so that it can guide and transform us. In the good person, goodness engenders itself with all that it is: being, knowledge, love and action. It infuses all this into the good person, and the good person receives his heart from the depths of goodness, and from there only, all his being, his knowledge, his love and his action. Goodness and the good person are one sole and unique goodness, absolutely one in everything, with this restriction - that the second is engendered, while the first engenders. And what is engendered by goodness and the engendered-being of the good person are one and the same being, one and the same life. Everything that pertains to him, the good person receives from goodness and in goodness. It is there that he is, that he lives and dwells. In practicing justice, the just and good man feels a joy incomparably, indeed undescribably, superior to all the joys and delights that he or even the highest angel in the hierarchy can experience in his natural essence or in his life.

— Yes, I'd like to believe it, I retorted, but it does happen that an unjust person inflicts suffering on us.

— Evil is the raw material for good; it is starting from evil that justice, surpassing itself, can attain mercy, that truth can overflow into authenticity, that beauty pours out into the sublime. Without this plunge into being, there would be no courage, no fidelity, no faith, no confidence, no hope, no desire, no perseverance, no magnanimity, no humility, no virtue, not even any emotion. When the Over-Being plunges into being, it is in order to emerge from it as more than being. If not, there is no dynamism, no life, no creation, no art, no intelligence. But the pain, the plunge into being, contains in itself a natural bitterness which pushes us to ascend and return. Food lasts only for a moment, an ox does not live twenty years, in the village a house burns every year, a treasure is only worth what you can get for it. A wave on the sea returns into the sea, a sound is lost in the silence, a friend goes far away: this, this is what they are not, but what they are remains. A thing passes, but what it says to me stays on. If I suffer because I have lost a thing, this is a sure sign that I love that thing and that what I love in reality is the loss, the pain of losing, and not what that thing has revealed to me. All things are partially unjust, if not, how could justice surpass itself? How could a wave roll without the sea? The wave needs the not-wave. How could fire burn if there were only fire? The fire needs not-fire. We should release ourselves from things just as things themselves are released and free to move. The just and perfect man ought to be so accustomed to float in being that he finds his happiness in crossing it without attaching himself to things.

— But isn't that exactly what you criticize me for, Master? Katrei objected.

— No, you should make a distinction between fleeing the body and releasing the spirit. We should not flee the world, for if we did, how could we participate in its

transformation? But we should release ourselves from the world. If a man attaches himself to a wave, he rolls with it and drowns; if he adopts God's point of view, he enjoys the passing of the waves and profits from their movement. For the man who is released, all problems become pleasantness, and suffering is changed into love. He does not flee; on the contrary, he penetrates life to taste its meaning, to gather its honey.

— But why all this suffering? Katrei asked.

— We can understand nothing of the accidents and vicissitudes of life unless we adhere to God's plan, which is to produce the divine. The divine can only be the surpassing of oneself, and the surpassing of oneself is impossible without suffering. But suffering is not the opposite of joy; it is its prerequisite. If I were sure that all stones would be transformed into pure gold, the more stones I had and the bigger they were, the more I would prize them. Difficulties are given to me as a stepping-stone. For one who travels horizontally, a wall is an obstacle; but for one who travels vertically, a wall is a way.

— Then I want suffering, Katrei spontaneously answered.

— To want suffering is to bind yourself to created things. You should on the contrary release yourself from created things in order to bind yourself to the creativity that is in created things. If a receptacle is to hold wine, it is necessary to empty it of water: it should be simple and empty. Likewise, for you to receive divine joy, you absolutely must empty yourself of illusions of created things and drive them out of yourself. To release yourself from the sufferings that come to us is just as important as to release yourself from the attachments that hold us back. In the Roman aqueducts, it is the emptiness that causes the water to climb toward the mountain summits ...

— But how can I make this emptiness? Katrei asked.

— You must not try to make emptiness through a method or a mental technique as the Gnostics do. To do this is to pursue your own purpose. The just man does not pursue his own purposes. He becomes aware that all things are only movement, and that all movement is equal. Thus the just man casts an equal glance on all things and perceives in this way the movement, the dance and the charm. In all things, and particularly in the divine nature, equality is the birth of the One, and that birth of the One, in the One and with the One, is the principle and origin of love which swells and opens. Love, on the other hand, tends by its very nature to burst out of duality, and to spring out from it as one. One as one does not give love, two as two does not give love, but two as one necessarily gives a natural, voluntary and ardent love. This is the principle of dialectic and few, very few, grasp it.

— I'm lost, Master, I can touch the idea, but as soon as I think I hold it, it gets away from me, Katrei admitted.

— God is the surpassing of Himself. The Trinity constitutes this surpassing. There must then be something more intimate and more elevated, something uncreated, without measure and without mode, where the Heavenly Father can form His image, infuse Himself and witness to Himself: it is the Son and the Holy Spirit. No one can stop this interior operation any more than they could stop God. This operation shines and glitters night and day, it praises God and sings His glory in a new song. God so much loves begetting His Son in the human soul that it absorbs Him completely and He does nothing else. We have an obvious proof of this teaching in stones: their outward operation is to fall and stay motionless on the ground. This operation can be prevented; this is why stones don't always fall unceasingly. But there is still another operation, which is more interior: this is their permanent tendency to fall and this tendency is innate. Not God, nor any creature, nor any person can remove it. This is an operation that stones perform ceaselessly, night and day. If they were to rest up above a thousand years, they would still tend to go down, no more and no less than on the first day.

— So then beatitude exists and is felt in the measure that it has not been attained, Katrei observed.

— You understand well, Katrei, you understand very well. For the just person, all her complaints and all her pains - if, however, any pain can touch her - is solely that this pain is too small for God and that all her exterior and temporal works are too small for her to testify through them and develop herself fully and completely. By exerting herself, she gains strength, and grows rich by giving all away. She would not want to surpass or surmount pain and suffering; she wants and would want to suffer always and unceasingly for the love of God and the Good. All her beatitude is to suffer for God, not to have suffered. But she suffers without suffering, her pains are drowned in an inexpressible joy because she has God's point of view at her disposal.

— Could I one day participate in this state of blessedness? Katrei inquired.

— Now, not tomorrow or any other day. Now the Son is in your heart because you are pure and virginal, unbound. You are not physically or emotionally unbound, you are unbound in your essence; your nature consists in being unbound, this is the property of created beings. Thus unbound, you feel an aspiration and a deep and limitless desire for justice, truth, and goodness. This desire proves that the Son is being born in you. For, without any doubt, no one loves God as much and as purely as they must, unless it is the Son of God.

— But the Son has already been begotten.

— Quite obviously God would never have begotten His only Son, if to have begotten Him were not the same thing as begetting Him. That is why God created the world as well and unceasingly continues to create it. And that is why God loves and works unceasingly: to work is His nature, his being, His life, His beatitude.

I couldn't accept the Master's ramblings and couldn't keep myself from objecting:

— Saintliness, I interrupted, can't be the simple consequence of a realization, it's the result of great efforts and a constant struggle against sin ...

— Conrad, Conrad, my friend, saintliness is not a feat of physical and intellectual gymnastics, it is not a feat of the will, it is the natural state of human beings. You must understand that, in nature, a pressure and an influence from the superior nature are, for every being, more agreeable and delightful than his own nature and his own essence. Water naturally descends toward the valley because its essence wills it so. But under the pressure and influence of the sun and moon in the heavens, it abandons and forgets its own nature and rises upward, toward the mountains, and this backward surge toward the heights is much easier for it than the flow toward what is lower. Saintliness is obedience to our most inward nature.

— But Jesus asked us to carry our cross, I objected.

— "He who would come to me must go out of himself and withdraw from himself and he must take up his cross," that is to say, he must get rid of and deliver himself from all that is cross and suffering. For certainly, for the one who would withdraw himself and go completely out of himself, there can no longer be cross, nor suffering nor hardship; for him, all would be enjoyment, joy, and heartfelt pleasure ... It is absolutely impossible for all of nature to break anything at all, to corrupt it, even simply to touch it, without tending toward something better. Saintliness and surpassing of self work in all things for the glory of God.

I wasn't able to perceive the slightest rationality in his views. I saw only contradictions, contradictions and confusion. He had probably very well summarized his treatise on divine consolation, but strictly speaking, I understood nothing about it. I dove back into the split in my conscience between the Master and Virneburg. I was searching for a decisive reason, something which could close the terrible debate taking place within me. "The Church, the Church, there is my salvation, I repeated to myself. Obedience, obedience, there is the sure road." But obedience to whom? Who is the Church? She suddenly had so many contradictory faces. I left in a hurry. I hadn't returned to my cell when Nicholas caught up with me.

— Conrad, I couldn't help but notice your hesitation, your doubts, really, he said to me. I couldn't choose if I were in your position. But if this is any comfort to you, doubt haunts me every day. It is there and I no longer try to avoid it; it reminds me that no created being in this world, not even the Master, not even the archbishop, not even the Pope, can be a true master for me, nor a substitute for my conscience. The true master must of necessity live in my most intimate interior, in the very heart of my doubts and anxieties. I can do nothing else than consult with him, even if it is so he can help me distinguish just men from deceitful men, those I should obey from those I should disobey. But if this discernment seems too difficult for you right now, bear in mind that your superior is the General of the Dominicans and not the archbishop. In this disagreement,

make your confession to him and follow his commands.

This last sentence comforted me more than any other. I swore to leave it up to the General rather than Father Eckhart or Virneburg. I went to sleep completely confident, exhausted but serene. A dream took me close to Katrei, however, and this troubled me painfully. I woke up swearing to confess even my dreams. This gave me the rest I had such need for.

CHAPTER IV: The Master's Legacy

I no longer remember exactly when, but it happened that Jutta fell gravely ill. I was immediately called to her bedside. She was suffering, so it seemed to me, from the burning fever that is also called Saint Anthony's fire. She had swallowed a rye gruel that Katrei, not having much appetite, had refused. I prepared different decoctions to irrigate her stomach, free her of impure blood and purge her bile, but the woman became so weak and so feverish that I feared for her life. Everything I undertook after this only made her weaker. As for Katrei, she was afraid of once again losing a mother, and the General feared she was giving up the struggle: if such were the case, according to him, all the Dominican order would suffer from this loss. We had, nonetheless, to leave it in God's hands. But the General refused to give up and went so far as to consider Father Eckhart's request. To help me, he had called for the assistance of a Franciscan who was said to be extremely learned and an able practitioner, educated first in England at Grosseteste and Bacon's school, then in Spain with the Arabs. He was presently staying for a short while at the Franciscan monastery here in Cologne. The General finally gave me the authorization, saying that it was good for the Dominicans to grow rich, with all humility, from the most diverse of sources. "Because," he said, "the valley never lacks water while the mountaintops dry out quickly." He had gotten this saying from Eckhart's own mouth, and he seemed to support it unconditionally. I couldn't have been more indignant, yet I held to my obedience as my last hope and that excluded any feelings to the contrary.

The mendicant named John measured at least a head taller than the tallest men I knew. Despite being built like a belfry, he walked with such agility and vigor that it was difficult for me to follow him. He dodged the lintels and cornices with the ease of a dancer. You could hear the soft hiss of his soutane as he gracefully displaced the air; he didn't keep his hands in his sleeves as is the rule. On the contrary, he made use of them at all times as a second vision. He brought nothing with him that could aid him in his work: neither plants, nor drops, nor cleaver. When he entered the women's cell, he advanced directly toward Jutta who lay nearly dying on a straw mattress that was kept clean, but that he wanted to replace with layers of sheets washed in very hot water. He looked her straight in the eye with an intensity which offended the reserve normal for monks. He put one hand on her forehead, the other on her wrist, and placed an ear against her chest, remaining in that position for several long minutes. If he hadn't worn a soutane, one would have thought he was a man lying with his woman.

He didn't ask her any questions about the days of her menstruation or about the red highlights in her hair. However, everyone knows - and this has been demonstrated by Pliny - that menstrual blood, especially in redheads, prevents grain from sprouting, sours grapes; at its contact, grasses die, trees lose their fruit,

iron is attacked by rust, bronze objects blacken; dogs which absorb it contract rabies ... He didn't even ask why the men hadn't been contaminated by the rye gruel; when it was she who was dying. It was obvious, however, that the flow of her blood had affected the rye, that she had then in a way poisoned herself and that, as a consequence, it would be necessary to bleed her properly to reduce in her the cause of the contamination. All of this was perfectly well written in authentic manuscripts whose age guaranteed the contents. He, for that matter, was not accompanied by any book, and he never asked to consult any. One might have said that he was seeking his remedies in the woman herself or in everything that occurred to him as he touched her. What a strange kind of medicine if, indeed, it truly was one at all!

Slipping his hands under her gown, he gently auscultated her, taking note of every spot where he saw her wince. He finally arrived at her abdomen, hesitating over certain intestinal regions he said were compact, and making little circles to facilitate the circulation, or at least that is how it looked to me. He appeared to know each convolution of the digestive tube. The woman gave herself up to this singular manoeuvre. After a while, she seemed more relaxed. He turned her over on her stomach, stretched her neck, and with his long fingers ran down her spinal cord. When he encountered painful spots, he drew little orbits around them. After more than an hour of this perilous touching, he confirmed the verdict of rye poisoning to which he added, as if it were necessary, an overtaxing of the liver and a weakness of the kidneys. In spite of the similarity of our diagnoses, he altered radically the diet I had prescribed. He proposed a very clear and clean oat gruel to which a sweet spice syrup should be added. He didn't give any indication as to the source of the water to be employed, nor as to the quantity of spice to give to her. He insistently demanded that I perform on her, every hour of the day, the palpations I had seen him do. Jutta was supposed to show me the exact points on her abdomen. I trembled over her body, but obedience reassured me so well that at the end of the first day I could do as well as he. This is what Jutta maintained. No other prescriptions, besides keeping her warm while letting fresh air circulate through the room. There, too, he didn't say anything about the direction of the wind to let in, nor that of the one to be held in check.

In spite of the heterodoxy of these treatments which did not appear in any standard work and for reasons I was unaware of, after the second day and on succeeding days, the noble woman gained strength. He came every afternoon, sitting next to her for long hours to listen to her as if the sallies of words she let out would purify her blood. During all this time, he would touch her joints, her belly, and the back of her neck. He showed no sign of impatience with this chattering where she would go so far as to talk about the feelings she had for her husband whom she missed a great deal. Katrei joined the conversation and added anecdote on anecdote. At times, they laughed unreservedly, like badly brought-up children, forgetting that death watches every moment with its gates already half open on Hell or Purgatory. I was disgusted, but the General ordered me to accompany them without interruption and learn by heart everything John might tell me about his techniques which to me seemed closer to licentiousness, recklessness and incompetence than to tradition, knowledge, and exactitude.

Nonetheless, before condemning him, since I could grasp nothing of the principle of his medicine, I had to make myself explicit. So it was that, out of obedience, I asked him to make things clear. He went away from the bed and asked me to take his place next to Jutta. He went to the window and, while walking back and forth across the room, began thus:

— Knowledge does not result from the connection we have with books, but from the connection we have with things. Those who wrote the books have experienced this connection, but the others are satisfied with hearsay. Among the learned, some say that knowledge consists of appropriating the universal form which resides in each thing, through extraction of the spirit if they follow Aristotle, or through purification of vision if they adhere to Plato. To know a dog would be equivalent to grasping the whole of the characteristics which pertain to all dogs and which determine that that animal is a dog and not something else. There would exist a universal dog somewhere in Heaven if one believes Plato, or concealed in the animal itself if one believes Aristotle. Dogs would only be more or less successful copies of that information. Similarly, there would exist a health in the mind of God and to know that health, would be sufficient to cure people. What foolishness!

When he uttered that exclamation, I felt a jump in Jutta's heartbeat. I myself was very offended that John didn't even manage to distinguish the thought of the Studium from the parody he made of Plato. Katrei didn't say a word but her look obviously condemned the monk who was walking always more and more rapidly. He continued without taking much account of our unanimous disapproval:

— Grosseteste said that even supposing that such ideas exist in God's spirit, the distortions produced by sin and the poverty of our intelligence surely render us incapable of grasping them and clearly conceiving them. Roger Bacon maintained that this knowledge would moreover surely be useless for curing men and women, since sickness comes to us from our human condition and not from divine forms.

Katrei flashed me a look commanding me, so it seemed, to answer him, if not for myself, at least in the Master's name. Katrei's look and Jutta's proximity led me to forget my reserve and answer him on the Master's behalf.

— But the goal of man, I retorted, is not health; the goal of man is knowledge. Health is a means of knowledge before being an object of knowledge. With knowledge one attains beatitude and with beatitude, everything else. What good would health be if the goal of life were only health ...

— That is certainly laudable and nobly Christian, but for the time being we are living on earth and on earth health is not our natural state, sickness is. It is more important, then, to reduce our illnesses than to dream of the state of health which will be ours when we glorify God in Eternity. Roger Bacon, unlike your Master, refused to see in knowledge the ultimate destiny of man. For him, the goal of human activity resides in earthly life, in its maintenance and in its fulfillment. He even believed that through material goods the human condition in all its

dimensions, including the moral dimension, would be alleviated and improved.

— It's true, I answered, Saint Augustine said it: The City of God is at the same time terrestrial and celestial. However, one constitutes the goal and the other the means, one is reality in its essence, the other the manifestation. We cannot reverse this idea without risking the destruction of all the wisdom of the Ancients. Thy elaborated this indisputable knowledge thanks to Aristotle's principle which consists in passing from the particular to the general and from the general to the particular; the world of forms and of ideas cannot, then, be put in question again.

— Aristotle's principle is of great use to us, but when we go from the particular to the general - for example, from the singular suffering of Jutta to all ergot poisoning from rye - we pass from the concrete to the abstract, from the real to the intellectual, from the consistent to the inconsistent. We change planes completely. An idea is only a representation, a word is only a sound, whereas concrete things have the status of existence. In fact, only singularities exist, unique persons, particular things and specific events; all the rest is just the soul's intentions.

— But that is a terrible error that leads straight to nothing. All we obtain from things are their representations and if these representations are nothing, we can't know anything, and nothing remains of the world for us, not even the certainty that it exists.

All of a sudden, I understood Katrei's dream where all the universe collapsed into a skull which was only an empty image of itself. I was suddenly afraid that humanity would turn into that road that leads necessarily to nausea and the absurd. I was so shocked by this man's words that I now had difficulty in restraining my anger and continuing my obedience.

— That is the same error as William of Ockham's, I managed to say, the one now being interrogated as a heretic at Avignon.

— He is not, John immediately interjected.

— However that may be, your Master's philosophy would have as a consequence that goodness, truth, the ideas that we feel most deeply in ourselves would have no reality in themselves. Intellectual objects would have no real existence! How can you, without denying God and science itself, challenge the existence of abstract realities? This is completely the opposite of Plato for whom material and singular realities contained much less being than the abstract world of mathematics, music, logic, the divine essence ...

— Isn't your Master a disciple of Plato and therefore suspected of heresy ...

— There is nothing of the heretic in him or in any of his words, I immediately retorted. Certainly he knows Plato and Aristotle, yet, through their disagreements and continuing the path set out by Albert the Great, he has freed himself from the trap of ideas and forms so as to be beyond the pagans. It's your Master who has

just opened a terrible trapdoor through which, I fear, many will slide into nothingness. Not realizing the contradiction I was creating for myself, I continued thus:

— Do you realize that your Master is placing in question the certainty of all knowledge by condemning knowledge itself ...

— We must go much further, he answered, and consider as false all that we have learned, apprehend each situation as if it were completely new and distinctive, experiment and carefully observe. You see, Conrad, you were attempting to care for an abstraction, a woman suffering from food poisoning, while I encountered Jutta who was suffering from an illness which presented itself in her with all sorts of particularities. I cared for her the best that I could. I observed her, listened to her in her individuality and singularity. Today, this seems to have helped her, but somewhere else, with another person, it is possible that I wouldn't accomplish anything. That is the truth and it demands courage ...

— What destruction! What ruin! What despair! No more science, only trial and error, I answered. No more ideas, only mental computations. We will be condemned to build scaffoldings piece by piece without ever being able to steady ourselves on any stay, on any rock. The past, memory, our books, our culture, all that will only be dust. The sole challenge to intelligence would consist in undoing illusions until nothing would remain, absolutely nothing, not even concrete things because, to put it briefly, since the intellect would have nothing to do with the concrete, the concrete would be inaccessible to it. What an error! What a tragedy! What civilization could survive such a collapse?

— It's our human condition. There is a rampart between our intelligence and God's, between our intelligence and the world's, an infinite distance that we cannot cross on earth. We are behind a curtain; the vision of the blessed is incompatible with bodily nature. On the other hand, we do have faith.

— But what is faith if it isn't the adherence of all our intelligence!

— Faith has nothing to do with intelligence; it is a condition of love.

— Such a faith risks being nothing more than a collection of beliefs and emotions that aim only at compensating for the intellect's despair. It can only be the prelude to fanaticism.

— You don't understand anything, he said, raising his voice. The originality of Ockham's theses results essentially from his conception of the relationship between faith and reason. He rejects the Thomist synthesis between philosophy and theology. Ockham's position is above all critical. He criticizes philosophy in the name of faith, demonstrating the precariousness of all human knowledge, but at the same time his logic leads him to question traditional theological positions. For him, man's intelligence is too perverted to attain the knowledge of God; that is why Jesus came to reveal to us what we need to know to approach him and this

is enough for us. As far as the universe is concerned, it is one possible creation, a collection of very singular things which almost entirely escape us.

— We grasp the logic of the universe because it is also our own ...

— You're wrong! Many universes could be logical and because of this, logic does not guarantee us that we are touching this universe, and this universe could be illogical.

— Yes, but our eyes see it, our hands feel it.

— Certainly, we see and feel something, but if I had you touch something that was covered with a curtain, you could only guess and could easily be deceived. God is so powerful that he can deceive us.

— Do you realize that your doubt could be extremely subversive? It's an explosive scepticism that denies to any idea, whatever it may be, any character of irrevocability.

I was so carried away that I spoke with the poise of a Master, and this made me forget my timidity. However, my emotion was increasing continually and was in danger of reaching a threshold that could paralyze me.

— Exactly! Everything is revocable, Father John answered without even hesitating, and this is true for the theory of knowledge, the universals, the traditional proofs of the existence of God, the relation of cause and effect, the destiny of the universe, in a word, for all of traditional metaphysics.

— But, God is in Heaven, what is there left?

— Just that, God; and also singular things. There remains an infinitely powerful God and an infinitely humble creature who through his fault must crawl on the ground and untie his own knots in the hope of grubbing out some knowledge useful for his survival. As to faith, it can simply trust, in all confidence, to revelation. Following the first article of the *Credo*: "I believe in God almighty..." Ockham stresses the omnipotence and freedom of a God who is no one's debtor. God is so powerful that all the rest, principally we men, become infinitely relative. The fact of taking divine omnipotence into account becomes with us a methodical reflex revealing our strength, our capacity to break any pretention to knowledge.

I remained speechless as if disgusted by such an assertion. What horrible doubt! Who could defend himself against such a doubt? I feared being carried away by this, but John interrupted my meditation and kept on even stronger:

— We are working to develop a method of thought which will help us pass from useless spiritual speculations to a greater efficiency of action.

— But why develop useful knowledge about a world that is inaccessible in itself? Why develop a passion for method based on so absolute a scepticism? You

confiscate reality and transform science into a simple method of thought which is supposed to be the sole and unique valid ascetism of the spirit, an abnegation of the soul, a sacrifice of the intellect in its own rationality ...

This time Jutta pressed my hand. I became aware that she had encouraged me all this time by her glances of approval, and that she had done this in spite of the fact that she owed a great deal to John. I wanted to withdraw my hand, but she would not give in. I was so busy defending the Studium's thought that I forgot the rule and looked at her face for a moment. She was pale but determined. She smiled at me like a mother, and this moved me deeply. I turned my eyes away so as not to cry. It was the first time that I truly looked at a woman. I believed for a moment that my soul was exalted by this. If Master Eckhart were right about Plato and the true religion, perhaps he was right about women: they might be as near to God as we. John took me brutally out of my distraction:

— You are going much too far, Conrad, be satisfied with taking one step at a time.

I realized that I, who was perpetually ambivalent about everything, was supporting that day unreservedly what I believed to be the Master's thought. The excessive scepticism of the school of Ockham seemed to have relieved me of my doubts. I felt within myself the happiness of conviction, and this happiness gave me presence of mind. I continued, with a kind of lightness I had never known before:

— Universals like beauty, goodness, and truth demonstrate that we have access to the ideas of God.

— "I firmly hold," Ockham maintained, "that outside the soul, there is no existing universal, but that all that can be attributed to any of them, exists only in the spirit. The singular and particular complexes known by natural science are not composed of sensible things or of substances, but are composed of intentions or conceptions. And that is why, properly speaking, natural science does not deal with things subject to generation and corruption, nor with natural substances, nor with mobile things; for things of that sort are not the object of any conclusion of natural science. Natural science deals with the intentions of the soul."

— By the ineptitude of what you are saying, you confirm for me that Father Eckhart is right, I answered, that he must be right if you want life to have any meaning. Thanks to you, I finally leave my doubts behind ...

But he didn't understand anything any longer and continued, while I, not really listening any more, took notice of Jutta's hand, which was speaking to me in a language I didn't know. This debate with John had caused me, in a manner of speaking, to slip into Father Eckhart's skin so perfectly that I felt neither fear, nor temptation, nor guilt at being in contact with a woman. It was as if I were drunk; of what came out of John's mouth I heard, so to speak, only the sounds. I vaguely remember that the man continued in these terms:

— ... When, by critical thinking, we have destroyed our illusions one by one, there remain for us the true God and the true Life. It is a small thing, perhaps, but it is true. Starting from there we can construct in our minds images which, when we apply them, are effective. The cure of this woman is proof of this.

At that Jutta signaled me to answer him, that I mustn't just let him go on, or at least that is how I interpreted her look. So, then, I dared to speak what I thought:

— The result of chance, if you want my point of view. I have been observing you, you don't know a thing about medicine. When you prescribe water, you don't even say if it should come from the Nahe which invigorates, from the Meuse which makes the skin clear and light, or from the Glon which makes food more stimulating. You know nothing about the temperament of plants,,,,,,,,, - the hot, the cold, the dry and the wet. You did not try to purge this woman of the excess of black bile which gave her melancholy. In her diet, you have ignored spelt, chestnut, and fennel. You should have ground chestnut, and fennel. You should have ground some thyme into a powder and mixed this powder with wheat flour and water from the Danube, made some flatbread with it, and lowered her temperature that way.

John, not being a man to let a challenge pass, retorted without the slightest hesitation:

— Yes, and I could give sulfur to women in labor, and fennel and ginger to relieve their pains. I could check the fidelity of women with a loadstone which, if they were unfaithful to their husbands, would make them turn on their stomachs in their sleep. I could prescribe aloes, muskrose, myrrh, camphor, sandalwood. I might give opine for male sterility, and prescribe escarole for you - and I've seen you take it - to calm your amorous desires! You take too much of it though.

I was terribly shocked by this insinuation and unconsciously released my hand from Jutta's grasp. I clenched my fists in rage and felt my face turn scarlet in spite of myself ... He continued in the same thrust with a tone that became more and more cynical:

— I ought to take some roses and almost as much sage, reduce them to powder and blow them in your nostrils to calm down the anger I see climbing up your cheeks. Yes, I could do all that, carry out recipes and hand out philtres according to the books, but that would be ridiculous.

He let a moment of silence pass as if to confirm that I was beaten, and since, paralyzed by anger and humiliation, I didn't say a word, he continued, resuming his habitual calm and composure:

— For the moment, the important thng is to move ahead with our work rather than continue our dispute. Jutta is out of danger, but there remains a second question.

— What question?

— Who tried to poison these women?

— What are you talking about?

— How do you explain that Jutta was the only one to be poisoned by the Saint Anthony's fire? In principle, Katrei, too, was supposed to have eaten it. She was probably the one they wanted to poison.

The women were dumbfounded; they had never thought of that possibility. I hadn't either.

— But we all ate this rye, I retorted, except that men are more resistant than women, as is well known.

— The poisoner probably calculated that we would all follow this same reasoning. Except that it is nothing but superstition. I will investigate and prove it to you.

All at once I was brought down to earth. This time he was right. I had allowed myself to get carried away in a whirlwind which had dragged me outside of my nature, so when I fell back abruptly, it was into a world I knew very well, the concrete customs of monks, the poisons, the rivalries, the controversies.

It was September 26, 1326. The General had gotten us an audience with Virneburg. Our mission consisted of presenting the defense written by Eckhart several months ago now at Strasbourg, at the time of the first rumors of a trial. Different versions of his *Apology* and his *Tractatus requisitus* had been made public so as to, on the one hand, encourage Virneburg to show his cards and on the other, to influence the position of the nobles and the guilds. The political card could not be underestimated, especially since William of Nidecke and Herman of Summo, of rich and noble families, were playing it to the hilt. It was necessary, moreover, to try to measure the sum of money sufficient to encourage the archbishop to mercifully abandon the cause. Virneburg was very open to this kind of argument.

This time, we were there in the middle of the afternoon and not the evening, so Nicholas and I were in better form than at the first hearing. The encounter with John had pushed me so to speak in the Master's direction, so much so that Jutta and Katrei listened to my words with as much attention as to the Master's. Forgetting my fears most of the time, I took pleasure in this. Furthermore, the General did not intend to reduce his unconditional support for the Master. As to Father Eckhart, he had moderated his language, not because of the trial, it seemed to me, but much more likely because he had been able to observe, in Katrei and the sisters of the Free Spirit, how far a too radical interpretation of his theses could lead. Now he consecrated numerous hours of his precious time to rectifying one by one the distortions, more intellectual than fundamental, of the young woman who could not, according to the Master, be apostate. It happened that I was completely in agreement with him. She showed such zeal for understanding the Master's teachings in their smallest subtleties, as well as the

commentaries I made on them that - despite her errors - it could scarcely be that her will had followed her thought into the abyss. By this very thing she was demonstrating - and the General himself confirmed it - that she was leaving heresy behind, if she had ever been in it. In short, John's rational extremism with its English theses and the irrational extremism of the Free Spirit sects formed in a way two opposed pits so obviously shadowy and horrible in their consequences that they caused the right path to stand out with more clarity and certitude, like a crest between two bottomless ravines.

Nevertheless, John was right about one point. There truly had been an attempted poisoning. The cook had confirmed that the monk who would normally have brought the women their meal had been absent without explanation and that another, whom no one seemed to know, had discharged that task. John wasn't able to follow the trail farther back than that, but there was no longer any doubt in my mind that William and Herman were directly or indirectly involved. They had no doubt about winning their case in the procedure they had undertaken against Katrei, and their financial means, compared to hers could easily make up for any lack of proof. However, the rumor was circulating that one of them had gotten her pregnant, she who didn't have a drop of noble blood. No one knew that the bastard had been strangled and several invented stories about his return and his vengeance. It was also not impossible that they had been informed of Jutta's origins, of her nobility and her husband's considerable fortune. However it may have been, we now had to maintain a constant watch over the two women and I personally attended to this, even to the point of sitting for hours next to them, enduring their continual gossiping which, happily, I was able to shorten with my wise words.

Virneburg received us alone, accompanied by his secretary. His attitude of marble no longer disturbed me, and neither did the splendor of his authority, since for me that of the General was alone legitimate. By way of introduction, Virneburg simply raised his little finger. Nicholas waited patiently without saying a word but, seeing that Virneburg seemed much more likely to leave the room than open his mouth, he got up and read:

— After having removed the repetitions and ineptitudes obviously added to discredit the Master, the list of suspect propositions, so it seems to me, comes down to these:

As soon as God existed, He created the world. The world exists from all eternity.

In all works, even bad ones, the glory of God is manifested.

Those who seek neither fortune, nor honors, nor usefulness, nor inward devotion, nor saintliness, nor recompense, it is in those men that God is glorified.

We are transformed into God and changed into Him, to the point of losing all distinction.

All that the Father gave to the Son, He also gave to each man and woman in this world.

Everything which belongs to God also belongs to the just man and woman.

If I ask something of God, I would be His inferior; this is not the way we should be in eternal life.

·God loves the soul and not the outer works.

The noble man is that only Son of God, which the Father has engendered from all eternity.

All creatures, inasmuch as they are creatures, are pure nothingness from the point of view of essence.

There is in the soul, however, something which is uncreated and uncreatable, which is not a creature; if the entire soul were such, it would be uncreated and uncreatable; and this is the intellect.

Three observations should be made about these propositions.

Firstly, I protest that in virtue of the freedom and privileges of my order, I am not required to appear before the archbishop's commissioners, never having been accused of heresy nor suspected of bad morals. If I had less of a reputation among the people and less of a zeal for justice, I am quite sure that such accusations would never have been raised against me by jealous persons. I recall that Saint Thomas Aquinas and even Albert the Great were not spared. Many have written and preached publicly that Saint Thomas taught errors and heresies. And yet the bishop of Paris, the sovereign Pontiff and the Roman curia approved his life and his doctrine.

Secondly, a large number of the propositions written in the list are incorrectly quoted or even complete fabrications. They have been reported by uneducated people who have not grasped anything of the sermon and so not been able to make a draft of it that is anywhere near correct. Moreover, I spoke in the vulgar tongue and the translation into the Latin language suffers on several points. Finally, the sentences are reported out of context, and because of this are subject to several interpretations which for the most part are false. Only a judicious reading of the texts correctly transcribed and translated by a person who seeks to understand the true sense and not the distorted sense, only this can result in a satisfactory understanding of the philosophy and theology in question, a philosophy and theology that it would be wrong to consider original. From Saint Augustine to Saint Thomas Aquinas, and passing through Saint Dionysius the astronomer who was converted by the eclipse, it is possible to demonstrate the main theme approved by the Church numerous times and corroborated by the Scriptures. I have done no more than underline the most inward aspects by using strong images which touch the soul rather than deadening minds through repetitions devoid of vitality.

Thirdly, I am surprised that my detractors haven't retained a greater number of articles against me: I have written more than a hundred of them (here, I rose and handed the document over to the court secretary) that the grossness of their intelligence probably was unable either to grasp or to understand. They condemn as errors all that they don't understand and condemn as heresy every error as well, even though it is only the obstinate adherence to error that makes heresy and heretics. As for the propositions I really have said or written, I am convinced of their truth, although several are rarified and subtle, and should be understood in their context. However, I am prepared to retract them to the degree that it can be demonstrated to me that they are false. One can doubt my sayings, I confess that they can probably be improved in their expression and said otherwise, attain a greater precision, but it would be out of all proportion to doubt my good faith, my adherence to the Church and the sincerity of my heart.

Those were the arguments of the Dominican Master driven to defend himself through the fault of two monks unworthy of our order whom I am authorized to expel and that you forbid me to meet. Even if your family is noble and wealthy, the Dominican order is not without power in Germany. The people love us ...

— Enough! , Virneburg intervened. The dogs who lick you Preachers are closer to animals than men. They have darkened faces, hideous teeth, callused hands and eyes as wild as their calves.' They are gullible and you can tell them anything. They would swallow camels if you asked them to. If the Preachers left Germany it would make no difference, the Mendicants would know how to fill the void well enough. And besides, a good number of your own are opposed to Eckhart. I have been informed this very night that the prior of the convent at Strasbourg, who supported Eckhart, was severely beaten by his own monks. At the moment we are speaking, he is dying or perhaps already before his eternal judges ...

I was flabbergasted by this news, and understood as if in spite of myself the prior's words and his concern the day of our departure. I was terribly ashamed of having doubted him and of having myself maintained through my hesitation and ambivalence the climate of suspicion which reigned in that convent. Nicholas succeeded in keeping his composure and, as if he hadn't heard anything, continued with even greater vigor.

— You are forgetting the Pope, Lord Virneburg. It is known by all that Elizabeth, the wife of Henry of Austria and the sister-in-law of Agnes, the one to whom the Master sent his *Divine Consolations*, is a Virneburg. It is known that this book has divided your family and that your intentions of vengeance join those of Herman of Summo and William of Nidecke to try to discredit a man who has touched your pride. It is also known that you yourself feed the rivalry between Franciscans and Dominicans so as to weaken the two orders at the same time, for their way of living makes a scandal out of yours. However, these two orders are mandated by the Church to cross the hierarchies, preach a reform and re-illumine the evangelical virtues in the house of God there even where those who represent it fail because of offending charity. You are not ignorant of the fact that I have a direct contact with Avignon and the successor of Saint Peter ...

— Stop threatening me, little monk, or I'll have you imprisoned within the hour.

— Do it, sir, do it, I'm only waiting for that.

— Get out, get out, he cried out, coughing.

Two guards swiftly grabbed hold of us and shoved us all the way to the palace entrance. Nicholas was so happy he had gotten at the old fox that he could hardly keep from laughing. As for me, I was very afraid: an angry bear can even go so far as to delay its own death simply in order to satisfy its vengeance. It was now obvious that Virneburg would not back off. On the contrary, he wouldn't be satisfied until he had brought down not only Eckhart but all the Dominican order in Germany.

The trial was now inevitable. It would be the first trial of the Inquisition against a Dominican, the first time that a monk and - much more than that - a Master of the order of Preachers, the very ones whom Saint Dominic dedicated to the struggle against heresy, was going to be dragged before a tribunal for a crime that was the very reversal of his mission. For me it was a deep pain which almost brought me back among my doubts; but the meanness, the shameless wealth of Virneburg confirmed to me that he was leading the church astray and showing himself unworthy of it.

While meeting with Katrei that evening, I realized that she had taken upon herself the fear of burning and, when she spoke to me about it, I became aware that I myself was not shielded from this eventuality. Some notaries had already been executed alongside heretics because they had supported them. I was seized by a terrible anxiety when I saw once more, in memory, the butchery of Walter. I felt totally incapable of assuming that horrible possibility.

The General Barnabas of Cagnoli had convoked a meeting to discuss a discovery by Berthold of Moosburg. Eckhart, Suso, Tauler and myself were to be present at this meeting, to be held in Berthold's laboratory. It was not common to employ a formal procedure for a simple intellectual seminar. In principle, Berthold should have shared the fruits of his experience at a regular assembly where all the monks of the choir would be present. Certainly, it happened that some might discuss a point or share a reflection, but no one required that the discussion be noted in full and the resolutions be recorded. Despite the official character of the meeting, the General appeared relaxed, happy even, as if the community were preparing to pass the Franciscans in the very field of natural sciences.

Even though still young, Berthold had studied at Oxford in 1316, and knew very well the Franciscan theses of Grosseteste, Bacon, and even William of Ockham. He was particularly well-versed in optics and, thanks to the principle of analogies, he was attempting to better understand, one by means of the other, spiritual light, intellectual light, and natural light. He was a man typically phlegmatic, meditative and very cautious. He appeared almost always to be so withdrawn into himself that he seemed to live alone with God, living among men as if he were not there.

Since leaving Ratisbon to come to Cologne, he had accomplished the feat of passing almost totally unnoticed; no one, except for the General, spoke about him. He did not display at times, like Suso, a face that was radiant and illuminated by grace, nor, like Tauler, breakthroughs of peace and joy that could not be concealed. No, Berthold in no way attracted attention, especially since, by special permission, he passed all his times of work and recreation at the library or in his laboratory. However, this morning he could not contain his emotion. The General began:

— We are all present, the conference has begun in this fourth hour of Saint Michael's Day ...

He motioned to me to take note of those present.

— First off, I would wish that our brother Berthold share his discovery with us.

Somewhat intimidated, Berthold placed in front of the window a thick parchment blackened with charcoal and made perfectly rigid thanks to a wooden frame. He sealed the frame with a little wax so that no light would be able to get through the cracks, which plunged us into total darkness. But after a moment we all perceived a minuscule little pinhole in the middle of the parchment: one might have said a little star in the night. He placed an especially smooth and white parchment in front of that minuscule star. He moved this white parchment forward and backward. The closer he brought the parchment to the star, the smaller the halo became, and the farther he moved it away the wider it grew. He had drawn concentric circles on the parchment and could tell us with precision the distance from the parchment to the little hole according to the size of the halo. He moved the white parchment forward until it touched the black parchment. The star disappeared, but reappeared because he had pierced in advance a small opening in the white parchment, which he adjusted perfectly in front of the star. He placed a circle of finely polished metal in front of the minuscule ray of light, which refracted a halo on the parchment now glued to the window. By playing with the mirror, he caused the halo that he projected around the little star to move. Then, thanks to a support, solidly attached to the desk, he succeeded in adjusting the mirror to a position that was perfectly vertical and totally centered on the pinhole, so that the halo projected by the mirror formed a circle with the star at its center. The prior exclaimed, but I didn't see anything in particular which deserved so much attention and admiration. After a moment, the prior tapped Berthold on the shoulder and he removed the parchment from the window, dazzling us for a moment, since the sun at that hour shone directly into the laboratory and it was extremely radiant.

Besides the General and Berthold, we all had raised eyebrows; they appeared to savor our stupefaction and were hesitant to answer before one of us admitted his ignorance. It was the Master who first broke the silence:

— It seems to me, he said, that the most extraordinary thing about this experiment took place in your minds, so please, don't keep us in suspense any longer.

With a glance, the General gave Berthold permission to explain himself. He placed his hand on a manuscript which was lying nearby.

— This manuscript which is supposed to have been written by Aristotle is not by him, but by Proclus, a disciple of Plato, of the school of Athens.

— Since its translation in 1268, few have been interested in this manuscript, Tauler continued, just because it didn't fit in with Aristotle's metaphysics.

— You are forgetting Thierry and Henry Bate, Berthold added.

— There is in Proclus, Eckhart continued, a principle which has particularly fascinated me and which seems to be a fundamental and cosmic exposition of conversion as Saint Augustine conceived it. The light of God descends into the soul, into the universal soul and into the human soul where it turns around as if in a mirror and returns to God. The first movement, the descent, is the procession of the One into the multiplicity of created things, and the second movement, the ascent is the conversion of the multiple which returns into the One.

— There's the confirmation of the experiment you just did, the General interjected.

— If I understand correctly, the Master continued, the light which came through the opening could not do otherwise than expand and multiply in a halo, exactly like when a stone is thrown into the water.

— It's the undulation of the ether, Berthold added. The primordial substance resembles a kind of water. Much more fine, infinitely fine, light is like the wave of this substance. A wave, unlike other things, diffracts itself. If an archer fires an arrow at me, I can hide behind a wall to protect myself, but the sun can reach me through diffraction.

- In procession, Tauler continued, the One reduces itself into the Trinity then into light and finally, reaches men and women. On the other hand, the soul is a mirror, it reflects the divinity and returns from multiplicity toward unity ... We know all this, but why are you amazed at this beam of light on the parchment? I don't understand it at all.

Berthold closed his eyes a moment, gathered his thoughts, and regained control of the discussion:

— Master Eckhart, in your commentaries on the apostle John, you have outlined the progress of the Studium in a very clear fashion. You said there: "It is our intention, in all these works, to set out through the natural reasoning of philosophers what the Christian faith affirms." Proclus is not only the subtle philosopher who best presents the most penetrating metaphysics of Antiquity, but he is above all the pagan who climbed to the summit of the contemplation of God through the assiduous exercise of philosophy, and who testifies personally, in his writings, to the astonishing potentialities which lie dormant in nature. He has

demonstrated through his own experience that it is natural for intelligence to raise itself to the level of spirit, and that the scriptures, then, are not necessary for the spiritual adventure but simply stimulate it. What we were contemplating a little while ago, and in real life, was exactly this eternity pouring itself out into time, with the result that we now know from experience what sort of link eternity maintains with time. In brief, what we have seen confirms that Master Eckhart, successor of Albert the Great at the Studium of Cologne has seen correctly, that what he writes is correct and that this was demonstrated here and now by the behavior of the light.

— Explain, commanded the General, who could scarcely contain his impatience, explain!

— First of all, you must understand that time is the condition for space, Berthold began.

— That is simple, Tauler interrupted, space is the expression of the distance between things. Now, that distance is defined by the time it takes for one thing to draw near to another. If all things were infinitely near to each other, there would no longer be any space since there would no longer be any time for approaching. In brief, space is the effect of time, its expression.

— It is also the condition for the multiple, Suso continued, since if the time it takes for things to approach each other were abolished, these things would be perfectly fused to the perfect Unity, and so without multiplicity. There would only exist one infinitely minuscule point in space that would, however, be infinitely grand in spirit as when the white parchment touched the black parchment.

— So you would agree to say, Berthold continued, that time is the condition for multiplicity, and that space is the expression of time, in a way, - its memory.

— Its memory? Tauler interjected.

— When an object moves in space, Berthold continued, it is possible to establish its point of departure, its past, its point of arrival, its future. Isn't that the function of memory? The Ancients defined the eternal Father by memory since He contains in Himself, in the same instant, the past, the present and the future. Space is the memory of time as the Father is the memory of eternity. Now that you have correctly grasped this first principle, I will replace the parchments on the window and the mirror in front of the parchments.

And he did this with great precision.

— You see that the light opens and diffracts following a precise angle. A ray thus becomes multiple. Each point on the halo is at a distance from the others, and so would take a certain time to approach the center. When the ray is reflected on the mirror, the halo opens even more. In this way, you can distinguish the ray which arrives from the ray which departs by its distance in relation to the center. Light tends naturally toward multiplicity, it fabricates time and space. But what takes

place precisely at the center, there where the reflected light returns directly and perfectly upon the descending light?

Eckhart exclaimed:

— Wonder of wonders, I see with my eyes of flesh what happens in my soul. Natural light shows us the way of spiritual light. Yes, exactly at the summit of the soul, in the stronghold, procession and conversion blend in the same ray. There, there is neither time nor space. More than that, cause and effect can no longer be distinguished; they coincide.

— Explain yourself, Master, asked the General, who perceived the impact of this discovery for the Master.

— Imagine two children, one at each extremity of a jump rope that, in order to send messages, they cause to oscillate, but each one at the same time. Who could distinguish the message of the sender from the message of the receiver? At that precise place in the soul, the Creator and the creature, the one who accords being and the one who receives it, participate in one and the same dynamism.

— Perfectly, Master, Berthold continued. Cause and effect can only be distinguished by time, the hiatus between the two; the cause obviously precedes the effect, but at the center, exactly at the center, cause and effect cannot be distinguished. In brief, the Trinity creates itself "at the same time" in the Deity and in the soul, Creation comes into being at "the same time" in God and in the soul. Proclus said that the soul creates the world. You are perfectly right to say that there is a point in the soul, uncreated and uncreatable, outside the multiple, where the Father begets His son, where the divine memory becomes dynamism, where the Deity becomes intelligence. Not the intelligence of reasoning and deduction which presupposes time, an excess of effects in relation to causes, corollaries in relation to principles, no, an intelligence in actuality ...

Tauler raised his eyebrows and began to smile; he had suddenly understood the importance of the experiment and wished to share his point of view:

— There was a tension that some perceived as an opposition between Saint Augustine's model of conversion, which took time and effort, and Saint Dionysius' model of ecstasy which abolished time, but here we see that the two models are juxtaposed. Certainly, there is a point where all distinctions are absorbed in the depths and the essence of the soul, but all around, life continues, goes toward the conquest of the infinite darkness, grows vaster to await it, to make it vibrate. Contemplation is a dimension of the human state which only has meaning in the action of spreading the light.

— And darkness, Suso continued, night, the unknown, extends to infinity. It is the very Depth of the Deity, the reservoir of everything that can be, the ocean of all possibilities. The soul communes with itself and draws on the intelligence of God. It stretches out in action, but also and perhaps even more deeply, it trembles

in full confidence in the contemplation of the undefinable Deity.

— Yes, you are perfectly correct, dear Suso, Berthold kept on, and that demonstrates that the future is never predictable in how it will show God. Yes, we know that it will always be God, hence goodness, beauty, truth, and justice, but no one can know the mode since we participate in this, and by this very fact the effects participate in the causes and thus liberate the future from all possible determinations. The future is not independent of the present and the past, but it goes beyond them, it escapes from them, it builds on them, it adds intelligence to memory. Through the future, the divine becomes really divine, that is to say, more than being, more than itself surpassing itself.

— If not, there wouldn't truly be any intelligence in the universe, Eckhart continued, the universe would only be the tracing of a treasure totally created in advance. Intelligence can only be a surpassing of being, an overflowing of being. Yes, the universe is an overflowing of joy, and intelligence bursts forth as much from us as from God in a creativity which does not rest until it surpasses itself.

After these words, it was no longer possible to speak. The silence became deep and light at the same time. The white parchment slipped a little so that it extinguished the little star which alone had illuminated us. We were plunged into a deep obscurity that no one wished to break by either a movement or a sound. Then there took place, in the deepest part of my soul, or at least that is how I felt it, a conversion, a turning of the light toward its origin. Beneath a thousand confusions, doubts, worries, and without any of these demons truly disappearing, I felt for the first time the trembling of a child's confidence, an original tranquility, like the silence of the night. And I tasted how marvelous it was to be a man, close enough to God to grasp Him completely and far enough to desire Him. All our heart is there, deep enough to feel desire, wide enough to explore the darkness and held in complete security by the taste of a God who finds His pleasure in pouring Himself out into our souls. Truly the way of a continuity of God's intelligence with human intelligence is much greater and much richer in hope than the break that William of Ockham practiced between the fallen soul and God omnipotent ...

The General coughed a little, assumed a deep voice and, while removing the parchments which blocked the window, called out to us:

— I have brought you together here, apart from the community, to announce to you first what I will soon confirm to the whole community. Our enemies are not lacking for weapons. They are closed to all argumentation. It doesn't make much difference to them whether we are right or wrong, they are seeking a pretext to destroy the influence of the Dominicans in Germany. In brief, they want to destroy any embryo of reform, such as Saint Dominic so much wanted and also Saint Francis of Assisi. The thirst for riches has made them crazy. I am very much afraid for our friend and the Master of us all, Eckhart. The trial cannot be avoided. Eckhart will be the first Dominican to pass formally before the Inquisition. We will support our brother to the end of this road. "Blessed are the persecuted for my Name's sake," Jesus said. This word applies perfectly to the

situation. But even while upholding our friend and our brother, we should anticipate the worst. We must think of the general good of our order and of its mission in the Church. That is why I must as of now arrange for a successor to Eckhart at the Studium of Cologne. I have chosen for that end our brother Berthold of Moosburg.

I repressed a touch of envy that I hoped I was the only one to feel, and congratulated with the others the young man who must prepare to accept the enormous challenge. Each of us began to dread a defeat before the Inquisition and was forced to reflect, for the good of the community, on the implications of that defeat. It was necessary to continue, in spite of everything, a path of thought, an intelligence of spirituality which, if it gave way, would break every link between the intellect and the spirit, and throw humanity into wandering and absurdity. It was imperative that this path survive the worst, even the defeat of Eckhart. He understood this more than anyone else.

— I'm old, he said, and Inquisition or not, I am going to depart. You must continue without me. But if by misfortune the Church's hierarchy does not support me, your task will become truly very difficult. May God help us.

He fell silent, as if smothered by his pain, and withdrew into his cell. I felt that moment as if a flame were licking my back and I was fearful of the stake.

I couldn't knock at his door and bother him. No one, unless there is a fire, an attack of demons or other calamities, can permit himself to disturb a monk in his cell. But that night was exceptional. There was in fact an odor of death and desolation, an attack of melancholy and dejection. The Master had been abandoned to himself; this is how the passing of the torch to Berthold must be understood. It was not that the General had been unjust, any prior would have done the same, but the result was no less terrible for all that. The man had to find his way himself, attended no doubt by packs of demons who fiercely go after our fears like dogs with pieces of meat. I knew that the Master was behind that door, in prayer probably, seeking to dodge and dart between his torments, through his setbacks and his solitude to the opening of his soul, the stronghold, as he so well put it, there where the depth of Man touches the depth of God. He had to be left alone to conquer by himself; I shouldn't have knocked on his door, but I did it all the same. He opened the door with a smile which said much about the pain he was covering up through modesty or for my peace of mind.

— I only wanted to pray with you, Father Eckhart, I dared to tell him.

For I don't know how long, we remained one next to the other praying in a silence which left no place either for words nor even for images, nor even for the wavering of emotions. Nonetheless, at times a tear ran down the Master's aged face, but so gently, without any trembling, simply to free the heart of a surplus. He was offering to God what is most beautiful in this world and perhaps in all the universe: the sentiment of a human heart arrived at its term, the sentiment carried by a whole life totally consecrated to its mission, a sentiment that no word could

better express than a simple exhalation.

The candle was about to burn out, and I was going to get up to leave, but he lit another and sat down on the edge of his straw mattress.

— I have a secret to tell you, Conrad my friend, he said softly.

— Yes, Master, and I have many things to confess, I answered.

— Don't confess your doubts, Conrad; doubt is not a sin, but it is on the contrary the courage of conscience. You have never fallen into suspicion, which is the gangrene of the soul. You haven't sinned, but I have sinned against you; I have often happened to envy you.

— To envy me!

— I would have liked to have been a simple monk without responsibilities and led a quiet life completely consecrated to reading, writing and praying, preaching once a month and not being known by anyone. But I have had very great responsibilities, up to forty convents of men, twenty convents of women and a large number of beguinages. You had to think of everything: the organization, the food, the supplies, the selling, the possessions, the transactions, the discipline, the chastising of unworthy brothers, the successions, the supervision of the farms, the breeding of animals, the quality of the wine, the defense against enemies and whatever else! I used to live on the roads between one monastery and another and prepare for the visits, ask myself how much I could rely on the prior of the place, choose the points I could let pass and those I had to make sure of. What a bother! And then, there were the intellectual responsibilities, the disputes at the University of Paris to keep Dominican thought at the forefront against the Franciscans, the preparation of courses for students often more occupied with carving out a place of honor than with discussing Aristotle ...

— But it is not me you have envied, it's my mediocrity instead. If you had been in my place, you would have applied so much force and passion to it that you would have ended up as a prior or a general.

— Conrad, it's your heart that I envied, the simplicity of your heart. I would have liked simply to obey without asking myself too many questions, but I can't help it, I need to understand, to make connections, to check the coherences, to see the implications and the consequences, etc. I cannot bear to bow down without understanding. And then I have to get carried away, get excited, put all my heart into it and risk making the words whirl around on their bases and fall down far from common sense. So, then, I have envied you and, so that I may be pardoned, I would like to leave you a legacy.

— But you have nothing to be pardoned for ... However, I do want very much to receive your testament.

— Listen closely to what I am going to tell you. There is in it a very important

key, one of the most beautiful keys to happiness. It is a treasure purified and distilled by centuries of reflection, prayers and efforts. Take it like a grain of rare seed which may well be the only one capable of overcoming the invasion of weeds we see proliferating everywhere. Here is the innermost of Plato's thought, restored to life by Proclus, exalted by Saint Dionysius and displayed again by our Master Albert the Great: the Source of being is much more than being, it is an overflowing, a goodness, an intelligence, and if ever your own intelligence or that of anyone else communes with it, it instantly tastes the joy of the blessed. Death is not a necessary condition for beatitude. You know the different doctrines of life after death! There is that of the disciples of Socrates: after death the souls of fulfilled persons return to their beloved stars. Next is that of Pythagoras' partisans, reincarnation, a doctrine which Plato himself seems to have upheld, while reserving, however, this "transcorporatio," to those who have refused justice and pity; the others being definitively liberated from the body's weight. There was that of Anaxagoras which was taken up again by certain Arab philosophers: after death, nothing remains ... nothing but the light of the First Intellect, the agent Intellect, the unique and universal cause of generation, this is the fusion, the disappearance of the soul in God. There is that of Avicenna and al-Ghazali which leads to the state of Paradise: once separated from the body the human soul remains turned toward the light of the agent Intelligence which showers it with its intelligible forms in a supreme delight. As for Isaac Israëli, he takes up the theses of the ancient Epicureans: after death, the souls of the just are assembled in a choir in the supreme orb to sing and practice justice, while those who have given in to obscenity burn in a great perpetual fire. Christianity is very much tempted by this idea; many believe in Hell. But here is what I propose following my Master Albert the Great: love is so natural to the soul that, without it, it breaks itself apart with inner sufferings that kill it. God loves the soul so much that to wish to prevent it from loving is to remove from it its life and essence and destroy it .. It is enjoyment that is natural; it results from the fulfillment of love whose innate function consists of creating being, of energizing it, of surpassing it. The commandment of love is for the soul the beginning of being. Truly, the conversion of the Intellect — the movement by which the soul turns through its agent intellect toward the uncreated light of the First Intellect — is not only generative of knowledge: by its very status as intellectual activity it is, for the soul, constitutive of its being. Without love the soul is nothing; with it, it is blessed. Love is the jubilation of the intelligence in the divine intelligence. You have correctly grasped today what Albert the Great's "point of knowledge" is; it is the interior stronghold, the summit where the Deity makes being, creates the universe. This point which condenses everything that, in the Universe and in the Intellect, is differentiated. This point is none other than the light of the Intelligence in the "now," from where it boils out toward the exterior. That power of the soul does not grasp God only there where He is good, only there where He is true; it seeks further and goes all the way to the Depth and grasps God in His unity and in his solitude, it grasps God in his desert and in His own Depth. What, then, is the purpose of the soul?

— I don't know.

— On the contrary, I believe that you do know. The purpose of the soul is the same as that of the universe: conjunction with the overflowing of intelligence and joy called God. The purpose of the soul is the ultimate exquisite delight of a knowledge of self, of the knowledge that God has of himself. And that is not solely a matter of individuality. Dante - you know him perhaps, he passed away recently - developed a new watchword: life according to the intellect is the aim of all of human society, of all of civilization. This is an enterprise to which no one individual can attain, no one family, no one village, no one city, no one particular kingdom, nor even a monastic order; the enterprise is intended for all of humanity. In sum, wherever you may turn, the fruit of love is the joy of a knowledge unceasingly rebounding back on itself.

— But then, Master, tell me right now, what is the secret of this conversion of the human intellect into the divine intellect?

— It is the humility of silence, the vacuity. Humility is not primarily a psychological attitude, it is the natural state of the universe which is converting itself in God, exalting Him and glorifying Him in all His stars, in all his worlds, in all his plants, His animals and humans also. The humble man immediately receives the flow of grace. In this flow of grace, the light of intelligence rises up immediately, and God streams down in a light which cannot be veiled. If someone were to be girded with this light at this point, he would be so much nobler than other men that he would be to them what a living man is to a man painted on a wall. Humility, that is to say the place where love curls in on itself, the place beneath being where more-than-being bounces back into its origin, constitutes the very source of Deity. In truth, starting from what is creation possible? Starting from the uncreated. Starting from what is being possible? Starting from Nothing. Now this Nothing in Everything, this is humility. It is the source of the Trinity and that of the universe. What the noble man seeks is not primarily a psychological state of ecstasy, but the awareness that he is what is not yet, that his essence is becoming, the surpassing of himself. Humility is primarily the state of the universe. In recognizing this, the human being accomplishes his mission in the deity: the conversion of love and the surpassing of being. Humility is union with the source of conversion. In union, it is God Himself who finds in Himself the place of His operations on the soul. Said otherwise: it is in God Himself that the poor man's soul suffers God and enjoys him.

— But how can I arrive at this humility? I asked him spontaneously.

— Humility in the human being is poverty, that is to say the abandonment of a partial point of view through the widening of intelligence embracing the Intelligence of God. In sum, for being to be fulfilled, the Deity must hollow out in it a point empty of all being, so humble, so poor that all divine power finds its glory there. Make way for the expression, for the realization of all life by grace! The wise man recognizes that he is first of all this point, savors this humility as a privileged place where God becomes truly God, God of overflowing, of surpassing, of creative effervescence. If it is incumbent upon the intellect to pass beyond all thoughts so as to lead the soul into its depth, it must also, just when it

succeeds in this, lose itself.

— Should I deny myself?

— Life takes it upon itself to hollow out a void in each of us, by its disappointments, its suffering; its humiliations, its shifts of direction ...

— All that seems to be crowding into your life recently at an age when one would much prefer tranquility.

— Because life is good, it wants to take from me everything, even my dignity. And if I let it take everything, humility will create itself in me, an emptiness, a depth of emptiness, exactly what is necessary for the divine intelligence to turn on itself and produce all of creation. Thus, I will be a witness, I who no longer have anything, that the universe is an overflowing of joy and intelligence. This is my legacy, this is what it is - a spirituality of the intelligence. This spirituality must continue its way no matter what, in spite of Virneburg, in spite of the Inquisition, in spite of my death.

— But what will remain of you on this earth?

— The deepening of human feeling constitutes man's greatest contribution to God. When the human being arrives in the arms of the Trinity, his heart will be utterly exalted. While man contemplates in tears the ultimate object of his aspirations and says to Him, "Alleluia, you are my All," God will contemplate him just as much, and tell him: "Blessed be you, son of man, for in your pupils I contemplate a depth that would otherwise remain forever hidden to Me. You are My faith, My courage, and My joy." The human being is called to the conquest, by faith, science, and participation, of the Deity in its entirety; that must be said, that must be transmitted without reservation. I entrust this mission to you also, Conrad. What will remain of me for you is the feeling of joy that the awareness of living in God gives me, and that is certainly sufficient. Change your timidity into humility and go preach that extraordinary new thing that Jesus came to demonstrate by his life.

— You've certainly made up for your desire for tranquility and simplicity by entrusting so heavy a responsibility to so crude a mind.

At that he smiled at me with such confidence that for a moment I believed myself worthy of what he had entrusted me.

CHAPTER V : The Trial's Implications

We must be wary of it. Thomas Aquinas had instructed us on the subject: "Commerce, considered in itself, has a certain shameful character, because of the desire for gain, the love for riches, for the fact that it allows money to engender money." On the other hand, its vice is fortunately limited by the effort and work necessary for the movement of merchandise. You cannot say as much for the usury that is proscribed in all of Christendom. It can open the way to an overbidding without any other limits than those of human madness. A Franciscan provided me the other day with this image: "Imagine, he said to me, a rich but lazy noble. He disguises himself as a merchant and solicits passers-by - not to sell them anything - but to lend them fifty gold shillings from sunrise to sunset the next day in return for five shillings of usury. A curious passer-by adheres to this idea. He leaves with the fifty shillings, waves them in front of a shopkeeper who, believing he is rich, agrees to sell him clothing and fabric to be paid for the next day. Dressed in grand style, he runs to meet the bishop and persuades him to buy the fabric at a high price. After this transaction - which was basically nothing more than robbery - the passer-by pays the shopkeeper as agreed, returns to the merchant and gives him back, in time, the fifty gold shillings and in addition the five shillings of usury. From this transaction, the passer-by keeps twenty shillings, but his day was exhausting, so much so that, the next day, he sits down a little farther along the same street where the idle rich man is still in the loan business and, no dumber than he, also proposes to those walking by that they dispose of their money at his place so that, without doing anything, he could continue to grow rich thanks to the usury of his assets. A few months later there are ten on the same street doing the same thing. What we have there is the multiplication of a new kind of beggar, except that these new beggars are not poor but rich. Their only work consists of taking with one hand a little more than they give with the other. However, unlike beggars, what they take serves them not only for food and drink, but also for a luxury which slowly makes them rotten. No, we must never permit it: it is enough to give charity to the poor without giving it to the rich." Since that day, I have always asked myself what would be the future of a society where usury is not forbidden. That could only accelerate the fall of men into the chasm of extremes: some would be lost in their surplus while others would perish in their poverty. Without a doubt there will come a time when these men will have gone mad to such a degree that they will have lost all religion except, perhaps, that of the golden calf. Wealth should not result from the aptitude for trickery but from work that is reasonable and honest. You will understand then my hesitation when the General ordered me to serve as secretary to a merchant from the Low Countries, Guglielmo Berberi, who came to do business with none other than the archbishop.

This short and stout man truly had in the place of eyes little black marbles, lively

and mobile, which caught the gaze of those he spoke to and drew it wherever his talk proceeded. Even though this merchant talked without stopping, I was unable to discover what he came to Cologne to do nor what were his intentions and plans. Nevertheless, I was under orders to follow him and assist him in everything. After a meticulous preparation during which he made me practice my skills in the smallest details, we went to meet Virneburg in his palace and his private apartments.

— What an honor for me, Guglielmo began, to meet the lord of one of the greatest cities in the world, celebrated for its commerce, its arts and its Christianity. The house of Virneburg, of which you are the summit, is without any doubt among the most powerful in Germany and maintains by its authority and commerce the cohesion of the State while your king fights in Italy to rebuild the Empire. God, how fortunate it is that the Church, of which you are the power, provides your order in this poor world where the savagery of the barbarians still smolders under the ashes. I love my humble trade now more than ever since it permits me to meet such an exceptional person ...

— I am grateful for your compliments, sir, but I have much to do these days when it is necessary to do battle not only with the laziness of the people, but also with the heresy of some who have the authority to direct them.

At this moment I ought simply to have humbly lowered my head. This I did with much difficulty.

— I have been informed of your concerns, Guglielmo continued, and the question is so far beyond me that I have made it a habit not to speak about it. I will go straight to my point. Here is Mr. Riccardo degli Alberti whom you know, I believe ...

— He sells me on occasion some rather rare cloth which comes to him from Italy as payment for the right to do business at the fairs of Milan, Venice and Bologna where my family occupies an important place ...

Even though the archbishop managed to maintain the natural rhythm of his voice, I saw him withdraw a trembling foot behind the chair so as to hide any sign of anxiety. As for me, I concentrated on holding so perfectly still that they came to forget my presence for a moment.

— Just now, he advanced me six hundred Venetian grossi ...

— Six hundred you say, the sum is large.

The quantity and quality of the currency seemed to rekindle his quietude and inspire his curiosity.

— I agree, Guglielmo continued, but it was necessary for my tapestry purchases here in Cologne. I am going down afterwards to sell them in Milan.

— You are going to my brother, then, who does business in tapestry there.

— Alas, I had a higher offer yesterday at the Dominicans.

— At the Dominicans.

— I stayed with them - the security there is well known - and I met an acquaintance, the wife of Walter of Bruges, from the most noble house in the North. She offered me a deal I couldn't refuse. She wanted, though, some Barcelona money to pay a bill of exchange and that is how I came here in the hope that you would agree to exchange my Venetian grossi.

I was very surprised. I had escorted Guglielmo in one of his meetings with Jutta at the monastery and he had never spoken of a transaction of this kind. Guglielmo had never stopped talking about the beguignages in Bruges, of the faith and fervor of these women, and the donations he and his friend Walter made to them, but he had never spoken of the business conducted by that woman.

— And why would I do it, the prince asked.

— It would so much please my friend, the lord of Bruges, if you would agree to do this service. It might allay Riccardo degli Alberti's sentiments and assure you of Walter's greatest fidelity.

At these words, the archbishop became very reflective. For a long time, he remained silent and pensive. He seemed to be making calculations that were as much political as economic ... As for me, I explicitly raised an eyebrow while coughing absentmindedly as if I understood nothing of the depths of their exchange, which was true. Finally, he opened his mouth:

— Let us suppose that I do accept your currency and that I take personal responsibility or your friend's wife's bill of exchange ...

I could not see how that proposition could be acceptable. Guglielmo would risk everything without any security, but I had to suppress all surprise and put on the purest naïveté in regard to these negotiations which really did go beyond me. Even so I had to make a slightly silly smile that pained me.

— That would suit me wonderfully, Guglielmo answered as simply as anything.

I had to show that I was absolutely ingenuous, even if the deal were to end in some purely fantastic result. Now for Guglielmo, Virneburg's proposition amounted precisely to a throw of the dice of over six hundred silver grossi!

— You have doubtless foreseen that possibility! the archbishop put forward.

— I have the letter here. He really did have the bill of exchange that didn't look like one, and gave it to him. I no longer understood anything about it. The archbishop read, raised his eyebrows and finally smiled.

— Give me the sum and I will do the lady honor, he concluded. Make sure, however, that the operation takes place with perfect discretion.

I had to show that I found the affair perfectly normal, since, being without any familiarity with business, I detected no irregularity. As agreed, I cast an affirmative glance at Virneburg to convince him of a discretion that would be all the surer since I understood nothing about the business.

— I will attend to it on my honor and that of the Count of Bruges, Guglielmo affirmed without hesitating. From your side, I believe that you will understand me if I ask very humbly for a word in your hand and certified by your seal before giving you such a large sum.

He handed the archbishop a note to copy. Virneburg read it attentively and hesitated, tightening his lips. Guglielmo brought out the very heavy purse and the thick silver coins jingled. Finally, the archbishop quickly scribbled the few words, signed, placed the seal and gave it to Guglielmo, who read the parchment and, pointing with his finger, made this suggestion:

— If it were possible to add here "within thirty days after today's date."

Virneburg hesitated once more, then corrected and folded the letter.

I had written a report of the transaction which had little to do with what really happened. In fact, I had simply written from memory what Guglielmo had dictated to me the night before. The merchant pretended to read the document and signed it, then handed it to Virneburg who initialed it and gave it to me to undersign as a witness and ensure that it be preserved in the monastery archives. We withdrew from the palace. Guglielmo appeared fully satisfied with his business. He refused to answer my questions, though. When I reported to the General on the mysterious transaction, he simply told me not to speak about it to anyone. Moreover, no one seemed aware of it, not Master Eckhart, nor Tauler, nor even Jutta. No one above all seemed to pay attention to what was going on.

Guglielmo remained several days at the monastery; he participated in our prayers and sang astoundingly well. He tried to respect the Dominican rule, but regularly contravened the required silence. As a merchant, he was accustomed to make the shuttle between the north of Germany and the north of Italy. He was acquainted not only with the business of commerce, but also with the world and the nobility, even the loftiest. He related all sorts of anecdotes, one of which seemed particularly informative about the character he attributed to Louis of Bavaria.

— The night of the king's coronation, he recounted, there was in the city a magnificent masked ball attended by the empress. A cavalier dressed entirely in black invited her to dance. A masked man then leaned over to the emperor's ear and asked him if he knew who it was the empress was with: "With some sovereign prince, no doubt," he replied. "Less than that," said the man. Lord, count, baron, knight, squire, page, valet, groom, villein, all the conditions were

named, but each time a scornful "less than that" reached the emperor's ears. Unable to endure any more of it, he went up to the black cavalier, tore off his mask and recognized the executioner. Furious, the emperor drew his sword, but the executioner did not lack for wit: "Even if you kill me, the empress will have none the less danced with me and, if there is dishonor in that, she would be none the less dishonored by it. Make me knight instead and if someone attacks the glory of your lady, with the same sword with which I do justice, I will make it right. - The advice is good, the emperor answered, however knight is too much, why not man of justice? Henceforth, you will no longer be called the executioner, but the terminal judge. Beginning now you are the last of nobles and the first of burghers." Starting that day, the executioner truly did walk alone, behind the nobles and ahead of the burghers, in all the ceremonies, including the promenade through the city that condemned men were forced to complete before they were invited to the executioner's banquet, where this official drank with the authorities and dined copiously in order to give himself more courage for the task.

The merchant never stopped holding forth about the struggle between the civil and religious authorities to vest themselves with the whole of the imperial throne with all powers on earth and in Heaven. He spoke of the emperor and the pope as vulgar gladiators in a highly grotesque tactical sparring. He took a malicious pleasure in stripping His Holiness as much as His Highness of every veil.

"The emperor, Guglielmo said, wants to accomplish Barbarossa's dream at any price, but in him pride replaces magnanimity, so that by wanting the Empire, he is on the point of losing Germany." First of all he recalled to me Barbarossa's dream which he described in the following terms: "Frederick Barbarossa had been elected. Profoundly intelligent and energetic, he was convinced of the rights of the secular power and intended to make them respected by the pope. He turned his eyes toward Italy and dreamed of reconstructing the Germanic Holy Roman empire, which led him like his predecessors to an open conflict with the Holy See. In the beginning, though, it was a honeymoon (it is his expression) with the pope who, battling against the rebellious people of Rome, was helped by the king. In exchange for this the Pope Adrian IV crowned him emperor at Rome in 1155.

"Frederick, Guglielmo continued just as peremptorily, "profited from the situation to strengthen his power over all the German bishops, who had to revert to his obedience. He was supported by a new judicial concept introduced by the faculty of law of Bologna after serious research on the fundamental principles of Roman law; in Roman law, the emperor outranks the priests, and Barbarossa found in this a support to ensure his primacy. But in 1157, an Imperial Diet was held at Besançon in the course of which Cardinal Bandinelli presented a message to the pope reminding him, as if that were necessary, that it was from the pope that the emperor held the imperial crown and not the reverse. To this the Chancellor Rainald of Dassel responded sharply, with the result that the conflict surfaced once again. However, in 1158, in a collective letter, the bishops upheld the emperor and not the pope, so that the papacy retracted the claim. The bishops preferred the division of powers, Guglielmo plainly affirmed, since it was easier to maneuver between two chiefs rather than under the control of just one. The

emperor then went down to Italy with his armies, thus directly threatening the Holy See. Pope and emperor negotiated, but the pope died and in his place was elected the famous Cardinal Bandinelli who took the name of Alexander III. He excommunicated the emperor and cast the ban over all of Germany so that the mass could no longer be celebrated nor the sacraments administered. The emperor forced the German bishops to solemnly support him. To heighten his personal prestige, the emperor himself canonised Charlemagne at Aix-la-Chapelle. Thus Barbarossa appeared as the heir of the old Frankish emperor. After this he went back down to Italy and marched on Rome, which he entered on July 30, 1166. He proposed to resolve the pontifical conflict through the abdication of the two popes, after which a new pontiff would be elected. Alexander III refused, as expected. There was an epidemic, and the emperor was forced to beat a retreat in the face of the Lombards. At the same time, a series of revolts ravaged Germany and he was defeated at Legnano. There was nothing left for him to do but negotiate with the pope, and the peace treaty was signed at Venice. The emperor acknowledged Alexander III. In exchange, the latter confirmed the episcopal nominations made by the anti-popes in Germania. Thus the emperor was defeated in Italy, but his adversaries were greatly weakened and ready, consequently, to collaborate with the emperor."

Guglielmo described history as if it slipped out of the hand of God. He leveled it, removed from it all verticality, so that the surface of events no longer had meaning other than to echo the lowest passions of man. This introduced into my soul, without my immediately becoming aware of it, an increasingly mordant anguish. With this anguish as a backdrop, doubts, like famished dogs, came lunging and risked swallowing all the sacredness I attributed to human existence.

However, Guglielmo continued tirelessly: "Barbarossa considerably reinforced his powers in Germany. At the same time, another lord appeared, Otto of Wittelsbach, who received Bavaria. To strengthen his powers even more, Barbarossa announced the marriage of his son Henry, king of the Romans, with Constance, princess of Sicily. This was a brilliant maneuver which removed from the pope the Sicilians' support. So as to add to his prestige, he went on Crusade but, en route to the Orient, he bathed in a river in the Taurus and succumbed to a stroke. Legend continued what history had denied: Barbarossa is not dead and he will return for an everlasting reign when Germany is built. In spite of everything, after Barbarossa's death, his work fell to pieces in Henry VI's hands. Married to Constance of Sicily, he wished to reconstitute the Italian part of the empire. Alas for him, the Italian population had already attained a high level of culture, was aware of his personality and rejected this. Nonetheless, Henry VI succeeded in having his son Frederick, three years old, proclaimed king of the Romans. Three years later, Henry VI died, leaving to succeed him an heir who was still a child, and for whom Pope Innocent III became the tutor. Now this pope, the same one who had recognized Saint Francis of Assisi's work, dreamed of establishing the *Dominium mundi*, the domination of the world by the Holy See." At that point, Guglielmo indicated his strongest disapproval with broad gestures and a narrowing of the eyelids. He went so far as to insinuate that the pope took himself for theocracy personified and he said that there was developing around him a

grotesque theological reflection that pretended to be supported by Scripture and feudal law, and from which it emerged that the emperor had nothing to say.

"Germany," Guglielmo continued, "not wanting to be left behind, appointed a new sovereign: Otto, Henry VI's young brother. The pope didn't know whom to support. He chose Otto in order to diminish the power of the Swabians. Otto betrayed him and went down into Italy. The pope used against him Frederick, who had grown up and found an ally of substance in the person of Philip Augustus, the king of France. Otto was conquered, Frederick became king of the Romans and waited to gain the title of emperor. This former pupil of the pope had become an atheist (Guglielmo shrugged his shoulders and grimaced in an especially cynical manner) with the result that he allowed himself to be attracted by the Islamic world. He was excommunicated in 1227. He went on Crusade to rehabilitate himself and restore his influence. He attracted attention since he spoke fluent Arabic and sympathized with Islam. He returned with honor but only after having lost many of his powers in Germany. His absence ruined the efforts of his predecessors and Germany fell halfway into anarchy. He respected the truce with the pope. In spite of everything, the conflict worsened and he was deposed at the Council of Lyons. He died without anything being settled. In fact, Guglielmo insisted, it was division and feudalism which came out the winners in the conflict between the papacy and the Empire. The title of emperor was so weak that no one wanted it any more. It was only in 1273, that the electors, reduced henceforth to the number of seven and including, of course, the archbishop of Cologne, elected Rudolph of Habsburg, the count of Upper Alsace. The anarchy, however, reached its height. While numerous petty lords abandoned themselves to brigandage, the cities sought to re-establish for themselves security on the highways. Germany was no longer anything more than a federation of princes, the most powerful of whom was of course the archbishop of Cologne.

"Henry VII tried once again to increase his power in Italy. But this time, the whole country called out for him. Some hoped, once more, that a powerful emperor might put an end to so many feudal and barbaric wars. As for the bishops, they hoped for an emperor who was not too strong and not too weak, just what was necessary to neutralize the superior forces and allow them to conserve thus their territorial sovereignty. In fact, two theses clashed, either one solid head on a unified body - that is to say, the Empire as the Romans conceived of it - or two heads which neutralize each other in such a way as to favor the lord bishops. Dante saw in the arrival of Henry VII the promise of a new Golden Age, a return to a Christian Rome. At Milan, Henry VII was crowned king of the Lombards. In 1312, the cardinals, commissioned by the pope of Avignon, crowned him emperor at St. John Lateran, because St. Peter's basilica and half of Rome were occupied by the troops of Robert of Anjou, king of Sicily. It was the first imperial coronation since that of Frederick II. The following year, Henry VII was preparing a campaign against Robert of Anjou when he died, in an abbey in Tuscany. The air of Italy remained baleful for German emperors.

"The death of Henry VII was a hard blow for the Empire," Guglielmo

interminably continued. "If in the face of a common enemy unity is the best weapon," the merchant maintained, "for the internal feudal powers, that is to say the bishops for the most part, the best policy consisted in dividing the powers which were over them. In the end, they decided, - because they did the electing. A double election split the power into two great families: to Frederick the Fair, duke of Austria, was opposed Louis IV of Bavaria. One was consecrated king by none other than the archbishop of Cologne; the other, by that of Aix-la-Chapelle. About five years ago, Louis of Bavaria defeated Frederick at Mühldorf, imprisoned him in the castle of Trausnitz and left him there three years during which, Guglielmo was telling me, his hair turned white and his wife lost her sight from too much weeping. From this moment on, the old rivalry of pope and emperor was awakened once more. The supreme pontiff ordered the electors to choose a new emperor and excommunicated Louis of Bavaria. The latter responded, like his predecessors, by accusing the pope of heresy and calling for an ecumenical council. A full-scale propaganda war began. The pope's partisans maintained that his power was limitless, since he represents God on earth; those of Louis, that the emperor has inherited absolute power from Caesar, and that to defy the emperor was to bring disorder into the Church itself..."

Guglielmo had a lot to say, but the subject irritated me: at least that's the way I experienced my anguish at that time. On the other hand, obedience required that I listen to him and learn. Now I didn't understand where he was leading up to, so I directly asked him his opinion:

— The emperor or the pope, which one should lead the people?

— Honestly, he told me, I remain ambivalent. To tell the truth, of the two I would prefer a third: ambivalence itself. It is not good for all the power to be in one man's hands.

— But we aren't speaking of men here, I replied immediately, we are speaking of popes and emperors.

— That's just the problem, what you are speaking of doesn't exist. What does exist are men, and when a man is in power, only seldom does he raise himself above other men. In general, he slides instead beneath the least of his subjects, more stupid than he, more vile above all and more greedy and grasping. If one man kills another, the executioner will see to it, but if the emperor or the pope orders a whole city massacred, who will punish him? The worst of bandits kill ten men, or a hundred, maybe? The best of princes has impaled, burned, drowned, quartered, slit the throats of a hundred times as many. So I believe it is better that power be divided. I prefer two brigands busy fighting each other than only one without a leash.

— One might think you had leafed through one of William of Ockham's works.

— I have heard that he teaches the separation of the civil and religious powers. But, for my part, I prefer that these two powers remain in conflict. The nature of

ambivalence is as much to refuse separation as to fear unity. If one were to apply that Franciscan's idea, the pope would dispose of total religious power and the emperor of total civil power. That wouldn't bring any benefits. Where would it go, a world divided like that? On the intellectual plane, it would be an irremediable loss, and on the political plane, a double despotism. Today, they harm each other, limit each other, constrain each other, massacre each other on occasion, and isn't that a great advantage!

— You surprise me greatly! The Church can only raise itself to the state of City of God by bringing together all power under the tutelage of St. Peter's successor.

— So, Conrad my friend, I believe you don't understand a thing about your Master's work, and I wonder if you really can be of any help to him in the legal proceedings they are taking against him.

I was hurt, most assuredly. How could he, a merchant and a layman, understand anything about the teaching of the Master, a Dominican, a master in theology? And what was even worse, how could he maintain that I, his student, monk of the choir, secretary of the order, understood nothing! Nevertheless, following the advice of the General, who told me that the wise man learns from the humblest of people, I continued thus, not without first getting hold of myself:

— Teach me, then, so that I can help him.

— Why do you think the Master has devoted so much effort to the development and instruction of the Beguines?

— Only to their instruction, not to their development, and he did it in obedience to the Superior General.

— Enough of the nicety and camouflage. You know very well that this mission would never have been entrusted to him if he had not with all his strength wanted it, and you know very well too that the beguignages would never have developed without his teaching. So open your eyes. The Master teaches that authority is neither in the pope nor in the emperor, it is in every man and in every woman, in their stronghold, at the summit of their souls, in what is deepest in themselves, engraved in their hearts. He teaches that humility, detachment, and purity are the conditions necessary for attaining that authority. He teaches that man should conquer himself through sincerity. The beguignages are the places of assembly for women and men freed from themselves through the grace of God. They are the first of the new Church, not the Church directed by the pope, but the Church of men and women who have authority over themselves. This new Church resembles in all points the first Church, that of the first Christians. Certainly, they had leaders, but these leaders have at their disposal only the authority of their saintliness and not, like lords and the kings, the authority of law, of laws and forces. Master Eckhart invites us to go into ourselves to gain that authority. It is for this reason that the archbishop, the pope and the emperor are all his enemies. William of Ockham has the pope for an enemy and the emperor for a friend. The

archbishop profits from the pope as well as from the emperor, but your Master has all of them for enemies, because he is proposing a way of liberation. A people of sons of God cannot be a people of servants, a people of followers. The monks themselves have always sought to keep their independence vis-à-vis the powers of this world, and there will come a time when the true Church will be reborn. In fact, she already has been born and she is growing and expanding. It is for this reason that the archbishop, the pope and the emperor wish to destroy it. They wish to destroy it because their mediocrity could not in any case allow them to direct women and men freed by grace. They only have authority over the dead: as soon as a person enters the kingdom, they can no longer direct him, and that is what kills them. Either they destroy Master Eckhart, or they are destroyed by him; it's a war to the death, Conrad, a war to the death, never forget it. Therefore they will utilize every weapon, and while you are combatting certain points of theology, they will beat you to a pulp politically.

— Politically! But that makes no sense, I replied. It's a matter all the same for the holy Inquisition.

— Haven't you been a witness to their political machinations! The women they drowned under the bridge ... bloody machinations if there ever were any. The most important thing for them has nothing to do with philosophy or theology. They want in the first place to discredit the Master. If they reach the conclusion that they can get rid of him without there being any major uprisings, it's all over for him. So leave the political struggle to us. The beguignages will support the Master with all their strength and will call on the peasants and even the merchants and artisans. On the other hand, all during this trial, I implore you, I beg of you, spare the Master from being publicly humiliated, being separated from his daughters, or making a declaration of orthodoxy. That would destroy our efforts to embolden the population to defend him.

I was disconcerted. Guglielmo Berberi was, without any doubt, a member of the Free Spirit sect and probably, with Walter of Bruges and Jutta, one of the mainstays of the heretics. He confirmed implicitly that the sect recognized Father Eckhart as their Master, their shepherd, their guide, their saint. Their actions risked driving the Master deeper and deeper into the accusation he had henceforth to face.

My conversations with the merchant and his faulty reasoning caused my most terrible doubts to spurt up once again. Had this merchant come to negotiate the liberation of Katrei, the one they wished to see become Mistress of the sect? And why such a price? Was the young woman worth all that money? In which case she could only be a great witch, a fiend of Satan, a princess of the darkness! Perhaps the Master was informed of Guglielmo's intentions. Worse, might he not have organized this escape even from the Strasbourg convent? Was this the reason for the meeting with Katrei's father and the negotiations with Walter of Bruges? That could explain Jutta's presence. Was Father Eckhart leading a double life, a Dominican among us, a leader of the Free Spirit sect outside our walls? Unable to bear it any longer, I went to meet the General and, after revealing my concerns to

him, I asked him to tell me the whole truth.

— Conrad, he answered, I forbid you to entertain such thoughts. Father Eckhart, be sure of this, transcends all the plots you imagine. God's Church is something that surpasses human conception. Guglielmo is not entirely in error, nor is William of Ockham, and the pope is not right from start to finish, and neither is the emperor. God's Church is going to astonish all of us because she comes from everywhere, she makes use of all the accidents of history, she climbs up on the saints and even on the monsters, the heretics contribute to it, and orthodoxy, too. The Church, my friend, is like life, she shoots up spontaneously even out of the garbage so that whoever says: Look, she is here, doesn't say much of anything. The important thing is not to circle her round, to make her a safe house, an architecture of stone or of laws or of rights or of rules; the important thing is to watch for her everywhere, to catch her by surprise even in the crimes of men, be fed by her and, within her, raise ourselves up to God. The thread of events escapes us: the Church began with the crucifixion of a Jewish heretic, and the history of men up until now is the history of human monstrosity on which, like beads of sweat, the saints of God, now here, now there, stand out. But do not forget that the madness of men is the food of the saints. The saint is the one who makes use of the sins of others to reveal the virtues of God. So never confuse the horizontal weft of the human comedy with the vertical breakthrough of the saints. The saints are not the whole Church, but they proclaim it more than all the others. If I could say one thing about the Church, I would say that it is the emergence, here and now, of Heaven, and if I could say one thing about Heaven, I would say that it is the running start God takes in the monstrosities of this world in order to leap higher than Himself. For what is better than goodness if it isn't mercy? Return to your cell, meditate on the church, overcome your doubts, and don't come out until your doubts, once conquered, raise you higher.

Never had words driven me so deeply into my soul's most secret recesses. I was unable to get out, my thoughts went from doubt to obedience, from exaltation to despair, from firm belief in the Master's holiness to the certitude of his fall. Unable to get free of this despite all my psalms and prayers, I left my cell without thinking much about it and went to the baptistery at the very moment when the Master and the two women met to pray. I meditated next to them.

The Master murmured a psalm:

— "I am little and despised. Do not forget your ordinances. Your justice is an eternal justice, and your law is truth. Distress and anguish lay hold on me: your commandments are my delight. Your precepts are eternally just. Grant me wisdom, that I might live!"

A little later I recognized another psalm:

- "The friendship of the Eternal is for those who fear Him, and his covenant gives them instruction. Constantly I turn my eyes to the Eternal, for he will bring my feet out of the net. Look upon me and have pity on me, for I am abandoned and

unhappy. The anguish of my heart increases: draw me out of my distress. Behold my misery and pain, and forgive all my sins. Behold how numerous are my enemies, and with what violent hate they pursue me. May I not be confounded."

All these words seemed addressed to me and, as if the women and the Master knew it, they let the silence repeat them in my soul, hoping that they might take root there and bring peace. But peace still did not come. So, as if in despair, I went in front of him and shamelessly hurled at him this stupid question:

— How can I know that Katrei is converted, and that it is right for her to escape the judgement of the holy Inquisition by ransoming her crime?

It was she who responded.

— I don't know what to say, Father Conrad, except that I was shut up in a cistern and that now I run in the greenwood. When my mother died, I took refuge in a tiny little cave, and then, when I was scorned at the monastery, I also took refuge in a very small lair at the bottom of my heart. There I manufactured God much more than I met him, I constructed the world much more than I knew it. In reality, I was denying myself and, denying myself, I denied God and the world. I refused to be born into the world and I refused to be born to God. I found refuge with the Beguines, I didn't have any other place to go. I was so fragile, so fearful, so in pain, so lost, so confused: I could not understand. All I had known of the Church was violence and contradictions, hypocrisy above all: chastity transformed into perversion, charity changed into abuse of power, virtues become pure appearance, everywhere a facade totally contrary to what was happening in reality in the kitchens, the dormitories, the stables, the lofts, the fields, the orchards. With the Beguines of the Free Spirit sect, everything corresponded with my aspirations. I aspired to disappear; they taught me that we must fade into God. I wanted to destroy my body which to me was no more than a piece of trash soiled a thousand times; they told me that I had every chance of being burned like several of the sisters. Above all, I wanted to deny human love, no longer continue to perpetuate the horror of the world by adding children to it; they reminded me of the Cathars' dream of bringing all people to pure chastity so as to stop the continuity of a species which more deserved to disappear than to maintain itself. They introduced me to the thought of Master Eckhart, but in a version that was totally distorted. Ever since I met him, he has treated me as his daughter, with gentleness but without indulgence. He opened my heart to God. I had the impression of coming little by little out of a cistern and entering into life. I saw flowers, trees, children, men, women; I saw the river, the mountains, the city and I realized how beautiful and good everything was. How pleasant it is to live! Just to breathe the air suddenly appeared to me a great pleasure and a great grace. It seemed to me that the sufferings of life resemble a little oven in which one makes good bread; moments of victory and joy come out of it. Jesus did not die other than in our deaths, he did not suffer other than in our sufferings, he did not weep other than in our tears, he did not laugh other than in our laughter, he did not love other than in our loves. I felt that God was that, - everything that is and much more still, and that human life allows God to surpass himself. It was as if I were dead, and today

I have the taste for living, for loving, for giving myself completely and without reserve.

She had said these words with such candor and simplicity that they continued to dance in the silence, to return as a very pure canticle. One might have said a brook beginning to fertilize a vast desert. There was so much dryness in me, so much hardness. As if I had held myself back from living for fear of sinning. I had left everything to dry up in mediocrity, false security, for fear that a sentiment might rear its head, that an emotion might come to light a desire. And now her sweet words, more pleasant to hear than the song of birds, began to flow in my heart. The sand began to flower, trees took root on the rocks, animals ran on the plains, in the middle of a meadow I saw form a little pool of water, very pure. I had been completely wrong in my ideas about women: it is not the man who makes the woman pregnant, it is she who makes fertile the man. I had asked her to speak to me of her conversion, she went much farther - she brought her conversion into my heart. I remembered the Master's lessons on conversion. Conversion is not blind adherence to dogmas and adjurations, conversion is a transformation, the passage from death to life.

Then I dared to look her in the eyes. I thought I would drown there. I allowed my gaze to contemplate her face and life took hold of me. I realized that it was not her I wanted, no, I wanted ... I wanted to live, I wanted to love, I wanted to run outside, I wanted to weep, I wanted to laugh, I wanted to sing. I had never been more chaste. How can a dead man be chaste? But now I knew what chastity is. Chastity is when love spills over to such a point that, if you do not die of love for your neighbor, you cannot live. Not only had Katrie not perverted me, she had made my chastity a fertile field.

The brook she had brought into me had transformed the desert into a forest and now was flowing over. So many tears flowed from my eyes: sorrow for having been a mummy of myself, joy at touching life. To thank her, I was only able to say these words:

— Truly God is Life.

She took my hand between her two hands and I burst out in tears on her shoulder. It seemed as if were for a moment transformed into an ocean. So much sweetness, so much tenderness, something I had never known, not even as a child. Something I missed to such a degree that I had had to deny it. I begged her pardon, then, for never intervening and never banishing Herman and William. I wasn't able to see anything, since I didn't know myself what a child was, since I had never known the tenderness due a child. I had been raised among so many stones: how could I have understood the cry of a flower, the lament of a ribbon of water in a mossy fissure?

Those who don't know silence know nothing of all its variations. Silence is like the wind which passes through a cave. The music it makes depends on the width, the height, the depth and the breaks in the stone. The silence had attained a

polyphonic dimension so sweet that one would have said that it was the music of Hildegard sung by a choir of angels. The Master was in prayer and shone with a joy similar to the light of the rising sun which awakens the grass of the fields with a suave caress. Guglielmo was right, I had never understood the Master because iron armor has never understood the nuances of the movement of air when touched by the winds' musician. A heart like that one has gathered in itself so many inner tears, of joy and of pain, of light and of darkness, of hope and of anguish, that now it is no longer simply a man who prays, it is an entire people, it is an entire moment of history, it is an entire part of the universe. In fact, in the mirroring soul of a saint, it is the whole universe which reflects itself and returns to its source, and this produces a rain of nuances which lead the soul to bliss. Didn't the Philosopher declare in his *Meteorologica* that "the initial cause of the phenomena which affect the world, the point of departure for their movement, is to be sought in the impulse given by the bodies which move themselves eternally, that is to say, the stars?" And why? "Because," he said, "of the continuity which connects all things. This world is necessarily in continuity in one way or another with the one who turns on high, so that all the impulses here reflect the movement on high. This is the very principle of life." "For Aristotle," Thomas Aquinas recalled, "the void does not exist." So, by necessity, all is connected in All, each murmur of the ethereal substances of Heaven brings with it hummings on earth. Thus the prayer of a saint is the prayer of the universe, the return of the art to the Artist, and that is what bliss is.

The soul contains a substance that reacts to all that happens in the universe. The possible intellect is certainly, as Aristotle says, the "Form of a body having the potential for life." When the possible intellect takes fire from the creative act, it takes on life. In the book on the Soul, it is said that bliss is the end toward which every philosopher tends. This bliss is called pure and holy intellect by Avicenna, but Aristotle names it divine intellect: it is this intellect which receives the illumination necessary for prophecies and the true interpretation of dreams. It is this that knows the enjoyment of bliss.

"The nature of man is happiness," the face of the Master in prayer said. Katrei had let out a breath of God and I had taken life. Now I saw the Master's face and read the song of happiness in the soul of the saint. I asked him if he could say some words that might come near to the murmur of God in his heart. He began to smile, then to laugh heartily, doubtless because of my naïvete.

— To a child's question, a child's answer: God murmurs: "It is late, come sleep in my arms."

— No, don't evade the question, Master. Tell me something to meditate on.

— If you take it that way, here's something that comes to my mind. In the little hiding place of the soul, just the other side of the woods, I went in. It is there that I rested eternally and slept in the hidden knowledge of the eternal Father, dwelling in him, unexpressed. In God's state of being where God is above all being and all distinction, I was myself, I willed myself, I knew myself, willing to

create the man that I am. And that is why I am the cause of myself according to my being which is eternal, but not according to my becoming which is temporal. Bliss is the natural state of the soul which assists and participates at the birth of the cosmos ... But there, I have a little too much bliss and not enough sleep, so permit me to retire.

We returned to our cells. This time I was at peace. When the General saw me at matins, I smiled at him and he smiled at me. We were ready for the accidents of this world, our feet well anchored in the immutable essence of eternal bliss.

When Nicholas of Strasbourg reported to the General on the latest audience with Virneburg and the General realized that the trial was now inevitable, he entered into a long silence that, it seemed, he did not wish to ever leave. What an outrage! What a setback, he must have thought; the archbishopric which had been given by Charlemagne himself was turning against the Dominican order. A Dominican accused of heresy! It was unspeakable, the reverse of the Dominican mission, the overturning of Jacob's ladder; it was putting a foot into the stirrup of chaos. When Innocent III accepted Saint Francis of Assisi's proposition, everyone knew that this pretender to the supreme imperial authority wanted in fact to profit from the naïvete of a saint to develop a horde of good common monks who, being poor, would be close to the people; being chaste, would be credible; being obedient, would be soldiers of the Church. Much more effectively than iron armor, their coarse wool habits and their sincere words would succeed in binding the people to the pope despite the scandalous greed of the bishops and archbishops. These monks could pass beneath the authority of the archbishops to connect the people directly to him, the pope, which would permit him to gain authority over the local hierarchies. But no one could have suspected that the archbishops would know how to win back this horde of combatants for their own profit; would know how to parry the pope's maneuver by inducing these slightly fanatical monks to serve them, them also, as mercenaries; would know how to use, to their advantage, the holy Inquisition to impose their will. Today, the people call them "God's dogs." And now they are making use of these dogs against the one order which still defends the appeal to intelligence to maintain the cohesion and continuity of Jesus's work! How then will Christianity be able to escape from such a trap? Here is what ought, at the same time, to sadden and preoccupy the General.

Even while working for the trial's success, the General seemed to reflect in the greatest silence on the way to serve the Studium of Cologne in the event of a failure in the court. The profound mission and the grand design of Albert the Great: to develop for spiritual Christianity an intelligence and an integrity that would guarantee its viability - this must at any price live on. For the seed of Christ, this was an imperative, to bring humanity out of the wandering, the confusion, the chaos which, at every moment, calls it back to the night, to the absurd, to the most total madness. This great Dominican wished to unite the thirst for truth and the coherence of philosophy with the thirst for authenticity and the consecration of

the search for God. It is absolutely necessary to progress in that direction. Doubtless the General was imagining the roads by which that so essential research might survive and progress for a time, well hidden in the shadows, so as to resurface later when the Church would be ready. But how could the Church become ready for an intelligent spirituality if all the intelligence departed from theology to concentrate, reduced to reason, on the natural sciences alone? How can we succeed in acting in such a way that the Studium of Cologne prepares the Church to return to a spirituality of the divine Intelligence which appeals to human intelligence, if we must hide like the first Christians in the catacombs of some monastery? Isn't it terrible that the Church even today turns against the best in Christianity with the fury and cruelty of Nero and the Caesars? Has the hierarchy of the Church become the enemy of the holy Church of Jesus?

I realized that Guglielmo had strongly influenced me, so that now his were the only explanations that entered my mind in the face of the General's silence. However, this silence wasn't total. The General said no more than a few words of consolation to Father Eckhart, though he spent a lot of time in Berthold of Moosburg's laboratory. This confirmed for me that he was preparing more for the Master's failure than for his success. During a meal, and in front of a large number of monks, the General went so far as to recall that he had formally forbidden, outside of the monastery, any sermons on difficult subjects. Everyone understood that he disapproved of a part of the Master's works: the fact of having displayed in broad daylight to badly prepared minds a thought which should first have been advanced in the secrecy of our monastic communities. At that, Guglielmo suddenly left as a sign of disapproval. From his point of view, the Master had been completely correct. He had gained his inspiration at the deepest spring of Christianity by preaching the Good News to the simplest of folk, with all that it has to engage the intelligence, that intelligence in which the heart is the most delicate part.

In the fall, I had to consecrate a good part of my time to checking the harvests, their quality, and the places where they were stored. I had gotten in my stock of herbs, and John - who came from time to time to exchange medical knowledge with me - had become a friend. I passed on to him exact information from books, and he communicated to me a logic of observation which allowed me to adjust dosages and specify mixtures. However, his superior was increasingly pressuring him to stop these meetings. Everyone knew that Father Eckhart would have to justify himself before the Inquisition in January, and that it wasn't good to associate with the Dominicans. It wasn't as if John were afraid of being contaminated by these plagues of the soul, any more than he believed that the Dominicans were overrun with demons: no, he laughed when anyone spoke to him about Hell. However, he owed obedience to his superiors and had to stop coming

The bells rang the hours, the prayers gave life rhythm, work held our bodies in check, the regularity smoothed time to the point where our spirits were unloosed from the movement of things to anchor themselves in the quiet depth of eternity. Every day there was a particular high water mark of delight: in the evening, after

compline, we went, - Suso, Tauler and I - to pray with the women and the Master. It was a most heavenly moment, and the harmony of our chants in the resonance of the baptistery rose very high. It happened to me also to follow one of these thrusts and rise with the incense above these sublunary worlds up to the driving spheres of the universe. I became vaguely aware then of the perfection of the divine timepiece. Not that between these instants there were not moments of risk, vistas into the unknown, slides into evil; the divine timepiece permitted all this and even from up there, in the bosom of Providence, the Unpredictable projected instants of life and toppled them down into darkness. Out of this there resurfaced at times strange and worrisome possible realities. But the archangel Chronos who had slipped between time and eternity brought all these lost shreds back in his wheels and tied them up to the flesh of eternity. In this way, evil itself served good as affliction serves courage and obscurity, light. It even happened that I made breakthroughs beyond the fire which surrounds the cosmos and, after the burns of love, to stretch out to infinity in God's bed of sweetness, quietude and eternal amiability. I remained there for a moment which had no border, a concave moment which retained us in Him. I lost myself there to find myself again, to taste above all the perfection, the certitude and the serenity of the Truth of God. When I came out of it, I always left behind there an ever greater part of my awareness: thus, at the moment when, on my return to this world, I was drowning in Katrei's eyes, there was nothing in it for the flesh and everything was celebrating the beauty and perfection of God. There are in women reflections of perfection which move a part of men's souls, which throw them unceasingly back into life, giving them courage, ardor and generosity. Truly she was beautiful like the angels and produced in our hearts what angels produce in our spirits.

But, one day, the two women and Guglielmo disappeared from the monastery. No one had seen them leave. In some ways, it had the look of an escape, but it was obvious to an intent observer that the locks had been forced only on the surface. Now it was obvious to me that Guglielmo had purchased a pass from the archbishop, happy no doubt to get rid of a woman who passed for a saint among the Beguines. It wouldn't have been easy to have brought the Master and the saint to the stake at the same time without rousing to revolt a mob too numerous for the archbishop's armies.

Katrei's departure was a very heavy burden to bear. It might have been said that a part of the monastery's soul had flown away. Doves now nested in the empty room where they had stayed, and each day I went to bring them food. It pleased me to think that these women had simply been transformed into domestic fowl so that they could return in the evening to eat out of my hand. I even began to caress them on the head and between the wings, but there was always a moment when I realized they would never, ever, return. I missed them a lot. The Master comforted me, telling me that I would see them one day in Heaven, and that even now I could pray with them in the communion of saints. Tears came to caress our cheeks then, to cover with sobs for a moment what they had abandoned forever.

Winter spread out on all the land. Christmas had not been able to crack the frost which had accumulated on my heart. I felt a cold which sank right into my bones.

The Master's consumption made him suffer more and more. At times, he stopped breathing almost entirely, and a tear of pain ran from his left eye; then with great efforts, as when a very heavy door is opened, rusted on its hinges, he managed to clear his lungs for a few more wheezing breaths. Every evening we went to the baptistery, generally for just a time of silence. Sometimes, however, we - Suso, Tauler, or myself - harassed him with questions with the eagerness of pirates who empty a sinking ship of its treasures. I clearly remember an especially cold evening when we were huddled one against the other so close to the candle that at every moment we were in danger of catching on fire. I took the chance of asking the Master a question so common and banal that Tauler thought for a moment that the cold had frozen my brain. I had asked him:

— Why is there suffering?

After having a good laugh at this return to the children's catechism, he answered me, with the slowness dictated by his respiration, something we had never read nor heard:

— God could have been satisfied with being God, but that is not what he did, he chose to become God. That is the purpose of the world, to make God become truly God. Because a god who is God is much less God than a god who becomes God. To be perfect is much less perfect than to become perfect, to be good is much less good than to become good; to be happy is impossible, one must become so; to be compassionate is impossible without fragility; to be courageous is impossible without risk and without suffering. Who can know joy without ever having known pain?

— But if God experiences the impulses of suffering and joy, how, then, can He be eternal?

— God cannot simply be and cannot simply rest eternally. If He were simply a being, His goodness, His beauty, His truth, His mercy, His love would be imposed upon Him by His being; He would have, in regard to these, neither freedom, nor joy, nor awareness. God cannot be that, He must become that, He must make that of Himself. That is why God first of all withdrew into a great mystery so as to leave space to become what He is. That demonstrates that Albert the Great and Dionysius the Areopagite were certainly correct in thinking that God is much more than being. God is a more-than-being that spills over into being. To do that, He had to withdraw into His mystery, which produced the Word, and thus free Himself from the obligation to be immediately and absolutely Himself. If God had not first of all transformed His identity into the Word, he could only have fulfilled Himself immediately and absolutely, and there would have been no place for anything but Himself. That would have limited God, would have prevented Him from knowing Himself and surpassing Himself. God cannot be simply eternal either, He must be more than eternal and to be more than eternal, He must first be less than eternal. God had to take the time necessary to surpass Himself, so He invented an eternal time for an eternal surpassing. Thus God made Himself more than eternal by making Himself just as much temporal.

— And Man, who is he? I asked.

Eckhart experienced difficulty in getting a breath, but finally gave us to understand this:

— I am the time that God takes to make Himself truly God, says Man.

— But the universe, space, movement are more than just time! Tauler exclaimed.

— Of course space is one of the results of time. Imagine a bud which becomes a leaf, then the leaf reddens, falls and dies. You can well imagine that. Now imagine that this happens faster and faster. There comes a time when the bud dies at exactly the same time that it opens; in other words, it doesn't exist because it doesn't have the time to exist. Each thing is only the time that it takes to grow and disappear. Without time, it does not exist, it doesn't have the time to exist. Now, imagine distances, imagine, for example, the monastery of Erfurt, that of Strasbourg and that of Cologne. They form a triangle and space is what separates them. One day you decide to visit them, but through a miracle of God, you walk faster and faster. Through this miracle of God, there comes a time when to pass from one monastery to another happens so quickly that you arrive at the second and third exactly at the same time you leave the first. That would mean that all the space would have entirely disappeared. The three monasteries would be the same, and the space separating them would be no more. Space is only time, the time it takes to pass from one spot to another. If it took no time to go from the earth to the sun, there would be no space between the sun and the earth. Space is only time. That is why I say that Man is the time that God takes to know Himself, love Himself, defy Himself, surpass Himself, make Himself truly God, God of goodness, of compassion, of courage, of mercy, of knowledge ... To make Man, God withdrew from the knowledge He had of Himself, He withdrew into mystery, leaving time and night. Afterwards, He began to make the night dance so that it shone forth light, and he began to make the light dance so that it shone forth life. And me and you, we are the delay that God has decided to take on Himself in order to make His insides explode.

— I no longer understand, I admitted.

— I mean, Eckhart answered, that time allows God to develop a sentiment of courage, a sentiment of joy, a sentiment of happiness. Happiness cannot exist without effort. And effort requires time. So me, I say that I am the delay that God has decided to allow Himself in order to make His insides explode. And here is what there is in the belly of God: the snow, the fields covered with whiteness, the forests, the animals, the moon, the sun, the stars. He puts them all fully in our sight. And we, we are the eyes by which God is pleased to contemplate Himself, to see Himself pour out in cataracts of light and splendor. We exist as long as God remains withdrawn into Himself in order to give us the time to reach Him. In this time, He surpasses Himself; an eternal time for a perpetual surpassing. Within time God passes under being in order to surpass being. "Oh! my God, what sweet time, time to love, time to know You, time to

take courage, time to explore the reflections that You make in each one of us and in all things. How I love this time! Oh! my God, keep me a while yet, the time for me to savor You yet another moment. And if You close time back upon itself, I know that it will be only for a time. For You have decided to give Yourself time and that without this time, You would cease being a true God, You would no longer be anything but a static and infinitely tiny mass lost in ignorance of itself. No, You are a God of life, I have my life in you and forever. Today I am crossing great pockets of suffering and solitude but at the bottom of myself, in the very depths of my being, there is always, always an undulation of joy which collects the fruits of this suffering. I cannot give myself to You because I am Yours, but I delight in the awareness of that love which unites us, me and You, to time and to eternity."

He began to cough and a drop of saliva filled with blood escaped from his lips. We helped him get back to his cell, but when we offered to go in and watch over him, he refused. **CHAPTER VI: The Inquisition**

..."The future Dominican makes a long noviciate during which he remains cloistered and devotes himself to serious philosophical and theological studies. After his very holy vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, he enters a convent where he continues his studies and receives the major orders of the diaconate and the priesthood. After that, he divides his life between study, meditation, teaching, administration and action, the care of souls, and preaching along the roads and in the city squares. All this while practicing absolute poverty and numerous fasts and mortifications. Draped in the white robe of the Premonstratensians, covered by the black cape of the Spanish canons, these incomparable and impeccable preachers, because of their intellectual formation, were the driving force in the universities and furnished great scholars and great saints to the Church."

It was the General himself who was speaking. He had demanded to be heard by the tribunal of the holy Inquisition. The room was dark, it was winter, and the clouds were heavy. The tribunal stood out as well as it could from the darkness thanks to numerous candelabras. Behind a massive parapet formed by dark and heavy balusters carved with flames and demons, elevated, on a platform more than two cubits high, against a background of hatched woodwork with columns especially darkened, the white and icy figure of Virneburg stood out. At his right, Master Reinher Friso, just as pale, glanced around the room with eyes as piercing as cats' in the night. At his left, Albert of Milan, younger and broad-shouldered, appeared worried. Next to him sat Pierre Estate, friar minor with the Franciscans, with hands joined to give the appearance of praying, and finally, beside Master Reiner, Virneburg's secretary, an old man enveloped in a hood which almost entirely concealed his face. Beneath where the court sat, a little table had been set up for the two notaries appointed for the trial.

Among the not very numerous onlookers, made up of a few Dominicans, three or four notables and a few Franciscans, one could see Gerald of Podahns, the Dominicans' vice-procurer general, who stood beside Nicholas of Strasbourg, both of them ready to intervene if necessary. A little to one side, the two accusers: Herman of Summo and William of Nidecke. No one, not even the Franciscans, approached them. They had exchanged their monks' soutanes for the sumptuous and brightly-colored clothes of the nobility. On their cloaks, their family coats-of-arms were visible. Some people, certainly, had noticed the resemblance of their escutcheon to that of the house of Virneburg.

The General had moved forward a little toward the court, but had not entered the circle of the accused, or even that of the witnesses. He kept on:

— The Dominican order makes certain of the perfect cohesion of its members.

Each one is recognized for his orthodoxy. If it happens that a monk, whether he be a simple servant, choir-monk, Master, prior or even provincial, is lacking in some way - in his thought or in his action - in a single element of the faith or of the Church, he would be immediately rebuked for his error and if he persisted, he would be expelled from the order at once. The accused is not an independent or isolated person, but a recognized Dominican and he cannot be accused without placing the integrity of the order itself in doubt. Now no one here, in any way, is making any objection to the order. If the order is within the bounds of orthodoxy, all its members are.

He cast a look in Herman and William's direction.

— Father Barnabas of Cagnoli, Master Reinher continued, I have heard it said that certain of your scholars have contested the nominalist theses of William of Ockham, is that correct?

— Yes, it is.

— So then this Franciscan could, according to some of you, be in error. Do you think that is possible?

The general didn't know what to say anymore. If he said yes, he would undo his own argument; if he said no, he would have to admit that in his ranks the monks who had attacked William of Ockham were in error and that he, the superior general, had not intervened. Finding himself trapped, he said nothing. Master Reinher savored this first victory and, in order to taste it a little longer, added in a sarcastic tone:

— I find it very imprudent of you to come to defend one of your monks in this way at the risk of dragging in all the Dominican order with him. But I am well enough acquainted with you to know that in case of danger to your order you would be wise enough to let him go.

— I am not alone in this affair, Barnabas protested, his voice shivering slightly. Michael of Cesena, Master general of the Franciscan order, is presently supporting William of Ockham in his trial at Avignon. The order should, out of duty, support its masters and its scholars ...

Everyone had clearly understood the expression: "out of duty." It was done. The superior general had elegantly abandoned the Master. From now on, Eckhart would have to defend himself alone. I felt a shudder in all the Dominicans present.

— Right there is an example I would not advise, Master Barnabas, Reinher continued, to further reinforce the General's decision. At the moment that we are hearing you, Michael of Cesena and William of Ockham have left God's church and have fled under the protection of Louis of Bavaria. Today they explicitly reject the Church just as they did implicitly before.

This time, it was the Franciscans' turn to tremble, but we were all of us astounded. Pierre Estate became very nervous and had difficulty suppressing his rage. Several Franciscans left the room, probably to try to verify the information. Yet, how could one doubt Reinher Friso the Inquisitor, the theologian, the scholar, the Master? Father Barnabas regained his spirits and attempted to return the situation to his advantage:

— You see that we were right on one point: William of Ockham confirms tacitly, as it were, his error. Now, here at the Studium of Cologne, our theses reject Ockham's new and strange vision and hold to Saint Augustine's orthodoxy.

— That reasoning is weak, Master Barnabas, Reinher interjected, the truth is usually found in the middle and the contrary of an error often constitutes a second error. Moreover, what was involved at Avignon was not so much Ockham's nominalism as his proposition of the separation of the religious powers from the civil powers.

At that the superior general shot back without, however, raising his voice:

— It seems to me that this proposition of division of powers ensues directly from a nominalism which separates all that is united in God.

— That is a simplification that doesn't do justice to your intellect, Reinher counter-attacked. Nominalism doesn't separate anything, it simply and humbly acknowledges that our mortal thought can only attain to singular things in the realm of multiplicity and that the Ideas, if they exist, are beyond human reach. That is why man must keep to the Gospels, to obedience, and to the empirical approximations of the natural sciences. But let us not go too far, this is not the trial of Ockham here, but Eckhart's, and we have been waiting a long time to hear him.

Everyone knew that Reinher tolerated Ockham's nominalism and that that was the reason Virneburg had chosen him, but no one suspected that he could support him even after the trial at Avignon and in spite of Ockham's defeat. Pierre Estate was no longer looking in Reinher's direction. Doubtless he was in very much of a hurry for them to charge the subject. At least Father Eckhart knew from now on who he was dealing with.

The old man walked around the circles of the accused and slowly advanced to the tribunal. It was January 24, 1327. Since November, it had been so cold! Each day winter had driven its frost a little more deeply into his flesh until it reached the marrow of each of his bones. Because of arthritis, his toes were afflicted with corns, his fingers could hardly hold a quill, his swollen knees stayed rigid, and his twisted spine made him look like a hunchback. His lungs had so dried up and hardened that, when he coughed, he discharged blood and shreds of flesh. By Virneburg's order, the General had had to resign himself to confining the Master in his cell; he left it only for prayers and meals. It was pathetic to see him press his hot bowl between his two hands in hopes of bringing a little warmth into his

chest. All of his body had become pain and ice. After Berthold's nomination, and especially since the women's departure, I had the impression that his heart was no longer as much in the struggle. It seemed to him that Katrei and Berthold formed the two wings of his mission, that they would prolong the work and that, because of this, he no longer needed to struggle as much. Katrei was advancing on the spiritual side, and Berthold on the intellectual side. I told him that it was highly dangerous for these two wings to be so polarized; he reassured me by saying that Suso and - above all - Tauler were going to pursue the way in its unity. I wasn't able to explain to him that his presence was indispensable to me also who, unsteady as I still was, loved him above all. Perhaps he sensed it since he still had not given up. There were in that physically broken, extremely isolated and almost abandoned man, reserves of energy which belong only to heroes and saints. He began to speak, and I was astonished by the vigor, the solidity, and the wit of his first speech.

— Lord archbishop, dear doctors of theology, dear Franciscans and you, my friends, it is not good for the lamp to be put under the bushel; it should, through humility, rise above the world so that the world may profit from its light. That is why I am here, not to defend myself, but to participate in the work of the Word, by demonstrating one more time to what degree It is our light. Of the propositions called into question by my accusers, several are simply mistakes - involuntary, no doubt - of transcription or translation. Yet those who are here to accuse me did not see fit to rectify them in spite of the proofs brought forward by my defenders. That is not the essential thing, however. To understand and adequately interpret the thought of the masters whose work I and others are continuing by order of my superiors, it is essential to return to the very foundations of Christianity. It is said in John's gospel: "Jesus was the true light who, in coming into the world, enlightens every man. It was in the world, and the world was made by it." The world was made by the light, says the evangelist. Now we know that material light proceeds from intellectual light which itself derives from spiritual light. In sum, the universe is an intelligence which marvels at the spirit of God. All that we see - rivers, mountains, trees, birds, moon and sun, even the stars - reveals the irrepressible intellectual jubilation of the universe when its intelligence rolls in the depths of the divine spirit. That intelligence dwells in us: "Whoever acts according to the truth comes to the light," says John, "so that his works might be made manifest, because they are done in God." And further on: "While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may be children of the light." Now if the light dwells in you and if the universe is made by the light, that means that we should use our intelligence to know God and to know the universe.

— If I understand correctly, Albert of Milan resumed, you maintain that human intelligence has the power to accede to God. You are not far from thinking, then, that philosophy can by its own lights arrive at theology. You return to your *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, where you said: "From the same source proceeds the truth of the teachings of theology, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, practical and theoretical knowledge, and even law. That unique source is the divine Intelligence, the light of the Word."

— Master Albert, I perceive that you truly are searching for the truth, so consider this argument. Imagine just for a moment that the apostle John was wrong and it is not as he says. Imagine that, through the inconsistency of God, human intelligence were of a different nature from that which illumines the universe and moves it. That would mean that every one of us, without exception, would neither be able to know anything about God nor anything about the world.

— But we would have the Gospels! Pierre Estate retorted.

— By what light could we know that they are the Gospels? By what light could we understand them? By what light could we live from them? Only those who have ears can hear ...

— It is through Jesus that we hear, he answered without thinking.

— What could Jesus of Nazareth do if his light, the light of the Word, were not in us forever, and at every moment? By what light could we know that Jesus told the truth?

Pierre Estate attacked, his eyes in flames and his finger pointing toward Heaven: You are implying that Jesus could have lied!

At that, Albert of Milan threw a look at Pierre Estate which spoke volumes about his dislike for minds as narrow as they were ill-tempered. The man kept his fiery eyes on the accused, however, but could not say a word. The majority of the Franciscans seemed uncomfortable with their colleague's anger. Only Herman and William dared to smile. The Master averted his eyes from the Franciscan and approached Albert of Milan.

— There will be great misfortunes for the City of God if we say to man that his natural lights, his philosophy and his science are incapable of touching the divine, of distinguishing truth from error, justice from injustice, goodness from wickedness. If such were the case, man in his entirety would give up in the face of his own ideals, he would turn in upon himself, would no longer live for anything but the satisfaction of his sensual pleasures, would not even be able any longer to distinguish a legitimate authority from an unreasonable authority. There would follow from this not only a desiccation of the soul, an ineptitude of the spirit, but chaos and despair as well.

— But ought we to say that this is true simply because it would be a great misfortune if it were false? Albert of Milan asked.

— The truth should be beautiful and good; if something is not beautiful and good, it is not true either.

— Can you demonstrate this? he asked.

Pierre Estate seemed to be losing patience; he knew that Albert had opened the door to a long harangue he was completely uninterested in. Reinher appeared to

accept this game, but remained frozen in his eternal Pyrrhonian face, going so far as to doubt the value of each word in representing anything real. As to Virneburg, one might have thought he had been replaced by a marble statue so that he could tend to his business deals and affairs while all these fine people got lost in a labyrinth that was, from his point of view, useless and insipid. Father Eckhart, for his part, appeared to take pleasure in his conversation with Albert of Milan. There was something personal and intimate being woven between the two men and some, I believe, forgot the judicial ritual for a moment and listened to them with satisfaction. The Master addressed him in these terms:

— If it is essential to his happiness, his hope and even his survival that man preserve a faith in his capacities to attain to God and nature by the lights he has at his disposal, then man can only be calmed and reassured if he finds himself convinced that his intelligence, God's intelligence, and the intelligence of the cosmos are basically one and the same intelligence, one and the same light, the logos, the *no*°, the Word. In sum, he ought to be convinced that beneath diversity lies unity. That then is what ought to be demonstrated. I must, of course, make this demonstration based essentially on philosophical sources founded upon natural reason.

The pagans of Greece, not knowing the Gospel, were led to ask themselves this question beginning from different very simple observations. For example, if all the bodies of different natures - wood, stone, and flesh - all have the same behavior when you raise them, that is, falling, it follows that they should contain something in common. Or better yet, if the food that we eat is transformed into bone, into muscle and flesh, it is necessary to believe that food and body are made of the same substance. For Thales (625-545 BCE), if movement calls forth a stability, discontinuity calls forth continuity and multiplicity calls forth unity. In reality, movement, in its progression from movement to movement ad infinitum, does not move at all. Only something that is stable in itself can be in movement. Water, for instance, remains water even while forming waves and swells. In the same way, an infinite progression from discontinuity to discontinuity to discontinuity is impossible. Zeno of Elea demonstrated this with the example of an arrow which would have to cross half of the distance before reaching its mark, then half of the half of the distance, and so on. He demonstrates in this way that in a discontinuity which goes on to infinity, no movement would be possible. Beneath discontinuity, there is necessarily continuity. In the same way, the multiple of the multiple of the multiple ad infinitum would dissolve totally into nothingness. Being presupposes, then, a ground of unity. For Thales, everything in this world results from the internal transformations of a first unique substance. There it is, one first obvious fact, and that fact raises a question: what is the one first substance which permits movement, the dynamic of reality?

Several answers were explored at first. For Anaximenes (586-526 BCE), it was air; while for Anaximander (610-545 BCE) it was the "undetermined," since only the Undetermined could be determined. Anaxagoras (500-428 BCE) continued in the same direction and supposed that in the heart of the primordial "not limited" substrate, everything exists in a mixed-up state, emulsified in the form of

particles, infinitely small and infinitely numerous. In fact, each distinct being would contain in itself the particles of all things, the atoms. Yet this phenomenon of transformation, Anaxagoras observes, must certainly have an explanation. Different answers were explored, and then a second question was asked: What dynamism impels this primordial substrate to transform itself? What is a thing that transforms itself, in itself and by itself? It is an intellect (the *noûs*), Anaxagoras thinks. For Pythagoras (580 - 500 BCE), that intellect is first of all a creator of numbers and the numbers in relationship with each other activate the world. In the same period, Parmenides (around 500 BCE) opened the question of being. Being is; there is plenty of being, whereas non-being, there is none of that. For this reason, being is necessarily without past or futures; it is uncreated, identical to itself, of a single continuity, immobile and spherical. It was necessary to surpass this. If a being were filled with being, it would be so glued to itself that it could not know itself. Now, knowledge, there is some of that. The question ought then to be asked: how is being accessible to thought? That is the question Plato (428-348 BCE) tried to resolve. If being is condemned to be what it is, if it is so full of itself that it has no place to reflect on itself, it is capable neither of freedom nor of knowledge. In order for there to be knowledge, it is necessary for the First Cause to surpass its own being and reflect it. What is more, in order for man to know things, there must be a common reality between man and these things, because two realities entirely separated one from the other cannot know each other. Plato asserts, then, that there is a natural kinship between being and knowledge. If things are able to be known, it is because they too originate and move about, like the ideas in a thought. The Ideas form at the same time the thing and the knowledge of that thing. On this plane, Aristotle (385-322 BCE) is the extension of Plato. Matter is met with alongside potentiality, and the Idea has become "form" and is met with alongside actuality. For Aristotle form is the actualization of matter.

— Master Eckhart, Albert of Milan asked, you say that the First Cause must surpass being. Nevertheless, in the Holy Scriptures God says: "I am who I am." Isn't there a contradiction there?

— Not at all, Eckhart continued. To say that the First Cause surpasses being is not the same thing as saying that He does not exist. On the contrary, it affirms that His creativity takes precedence over everything so that He can be this or that, without this or that sealing up His being. This was the observation of Plato, who wished to go beyond Parmenides and escape the fatalism of his religion. Plato reasoned that if what unites all things were only a given intelligence, a "being-intelligence" defined in advance, it would be condemned to itself, incapable of surpassing itself. Everything such a being might create would be so perfectly its own being that it would have no freedom. Plato wanted to escape from this terrible limitation. He wanted to pass from static being to dynamic becoming. Moderatus of Gades (around 50 CE), following Plato on this path, saw a First One beyond Being, pure actuality, a Super-Intelligence which produced a Second One, intelligible Being, and finally a Third One, the Soul of the world. That is rather close to our conception of the Trinity. Today we say that the Deity is Father in the mystery which transcends everything including His own intelligence,

which is projected into the word, the Logos, the intelligence that the Father has of Himself so as to create and animate a universe which marvels in its Holy Spirit.

— You are reminding us of the pagans, Albert of Milan continued. The subject is interesting, but Jesus came and he surpassed Plato.

— You are entirely right, Master Albert. Jesus was not only a saint, but also a sage. That is why his Church opens its doors to saints and sages. When Christianity was taking its first steps, Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE - 50 CE) ventured a first attempt at unifying the Jewish sources and the Greek sources of Christianity. He confronted the unavoidable question of the union between the divinity and the world, the question of the union between the One and the Multiple. It is through the Logos that he attempts to comprehend that union. The Logos is the divine Word, effective action and wisdom at the same time as It is the regulation of numbers and equations and the expression of laws. It is the "begotten" First Cause, the reservoir of archetypes, and it is in Its image that everything was created. The Logos constitutes, then, the intermediary between God and men, the link between the All and the parts. Later, with Plotinus (205-270 CE), the World Soul appeared to proceed from the Intellect (the *νοῦς*). The Intellect constitutes the summit of Being. The Intellect is the Subject which gives Itself away as an object having within it the totality of Archetypes. But, Plotinus believes, that exalted Unity is, however, dual, since it thinks itself, divides itself into subject and object and thus extracts itself from the absolute Unity. Its existence makes reference, then, to a "One" that is higher still. The source of Being can only be beyond Being. For Plotinus, the "Make-Being" (First One) is not (it is beyond being); it does not possess the limiting properties of being, that is to say, to be equivalent to itself. The first and highest emanation of the One is the Intellect-Being, the Subject-Object. Within It there arises a self-created world. Oh! How I wish that people would understand this! To this eternal descending procession is added a universal return: intelligence reflects itself in the jubilation of the universe. The entire cosmos is moved by a desire for unity, by an imperious desire to coincide with its first source. That is the essence of the spirit ...

Master Reinher was growing impatient, especially since Pierre Estate was on the point of falling asleep or at least looked like it. Some of the Franciscans were gossiping among themselves. The accusers kept their eyes glued on Virneburg's face, hoping that he would bring the two philosophers back to order. But he did nothing of the kind. It was Reinher who intervened"

— Conclude, Father Eckhart, please conclude.

— From that we can bear in mind two essential things. The first is that philosophy is capable of approaching Christianity in its deep foundations: a proof of that is the example of these philosophers. The second is that the goal of man is knowledge. This knowledge goes from the communion of intelligence between God and man, ecstasy, to the pleasure of discovering the multiple nuances of this intelligence in the natural sciences and in the arts.

Pierre Estate, who had awoken or pretended to, objected:

— That does not at all explain your frightful affirmation and I quote you, Father Eckhart: "In the soul, there exists something uncreated and uncreatable, thanks to which, if all the soul were made of it, every bit of us would be eternal."

— Quite to the contrary, all of that sheds light on the question marvelously well. If Saint John was right and the light is the Word and this light made the world and dwells in us, it is necessary to conclude that each man and each woman carries in the bosom of his or her soul, in its stronghold, a seed of the Word. He or she can make it grow or, alas, snuff it out. If Christ is the Word, if the Word is uncreated and if the Word dwells in us, it follows that each one of us has something uncreated in the depths of his soul.

Pierre Estate retorted in a voice as sharp as it was strong:

— You are reasoning as if sin did not exist. Man has sinned and, through his sin, he has permanently confused his thinking, so much so that he must wait for death to arrive at knowledge, if God so wills. It is in our bodies, turned toward concupiscence, that this fault wrote its mark.

— I think that Salvation is infinitely stronger than the inclination of the flesh. If Intelligence, the Word, does not save us every moment from common sense, from our prejudices, from our hatreds, from our resentments, from our narrow-mindedness, Its Kingdom would escape us. But, Brother Estate, the Word saves us at every movement from our egotism, from our hate and our smallness of mind, so that each one of us, man and woman, are capable of knowing God and loving Him.

— You speak of women, forgetting that they only have intelligence when they are subjected and guided by men in conformity with the laws of God.

— From where does it come, Father Estate, the confidence that you have in that idea?

Master Reinher, anticipating the trap, immediately intervened:

— It is not a question of women here; let us return to the important points of the discussion. The Platonists, it is well known and not necessary to recall, considered that the Ideas - for example those of dog, tree, etc. - exist in a heaven of Ideas. To know the things of this world, it is sufficient to group these Ideas in their essence. If Plato was right, we all should isolate ourselves in a quiet place, plunge into ourselves and bring the dogs, the cats and the trees out of our minds, with the result that the world would be useless. However, no dog is Plato's dog, and that is fortunate, for otherwise life would be dull and useless. You have quoted the Platonist, but why not the Nominalists! For Roscelin, for example (1050-1154), the idea of man is nothing more than the physical reality of a vocal emission ... As for Gilbert de la PorrÈe (1076-1154), he places in doubt the reality of relationships; only singulars exist, their relationships are pure abstractions.

Abelard (1079-1142), didn't go that far. He proposed instead a moderator. "What allows us," he says, "to impose on a genus, for example, man, and on an individual, for example, Abelard, the same predicate is that it designates a certain state of reality, for example, the being "man." But the decisive reflection comes from Jesus Himself. Christ grants attention to each person, to each being, by giving him or her his or her own reality. If Plato were more right than Christ, we would not need to love our neighbor and his differences, but Man in general in the abstract. You must understand, Father Eckhart, and all of you here, just how pernicious, vicious, and dangerous the pagans' ideas are! They cause us to neglect the real misery of our fellow humans and the careful knowledge of each created thing and lose ourselves in abstractions. The world has been given to us in all its materiality, each thing is a singular being with all its own value and now these Platonists make them into abstractions. Did you know that Plato believed in reincarnation just as the Cathars did after him? But, worse than that, a Platonist society would be composed only of individuals directed toward their own purification. The world would only be an illusion; it would be useless then to try to improve it. The City of God would exist only in Heaven and we wouldn't have to build it on earth. It would be useless to convert the barbarians, we would only have to wait until they discovered the Gospel by themselves ...

— May I speak again, Master Reinher? Eckhart asked.

— I grant you that, Father Eckhart, but I would ask you to show yourself less pagan and more Christian.

— Albert the Great has very well pointed out the road that permits us to go beyond Plato and restore to the universe a role superior to that of a copier of Ideas. It is the nature of perfection to be forever trying to surpass its own forms. Thus God adjusts His creativity downward into the universal intelligence and into the intelligence of each one of us. I am happy today to be in the presence of a man who grants importance to singular things and so would know how to show respect and compassion to me as a particular person present here, and who will not judge me according to a fixed idea completely made up in advance. It would be interesting to do a critique of the Nominalists, I grant you that. To the degree that they turn our attention on the sufferings of this world and on our duty to pay attention to it, I admire them. However, I would remind you that, when Roscelin applied his Nominalism to the very Holy Trinity, he was immediately condemned by the Church for the simple reason that he was compelled, out of a need for consistency, to affirm that in God - as everywhere else - only individuals are real. For him, then, the Trinity could only be an abstraction. But the trial of the Nominalists is not in question here; that took place in Avignon, there where it should occur since it concerned the trial of a Master of theology, the Father William of Ockham and, as you have told us, he was lost. It is not of this trial that we must speak, but of that of a Dominican Master, accused by two monks here present who are attempting to seek vengeance for the reprimands that I as their superior made to them in regard to certain acts so immoral and so repugnant that I will spare you the mention of them here. For reasons that are very unclear, this trial is taking place here, in Cologne, in the presence of commissioners whose

pontifical authorizations I have never seen, while I can read the authorizations of Nicholas of Strasbourg who should deal harshly with my accusers; this he could not do because of the protection of the archbishop here present. I won't mention this again. What is in question here is my trial, Master Reinher, but I observe that you only understand me through the Nominalist theses. You push Plato's ideas to extremes; without any discernment you ascribe to me his exaggerations, and consequently it is easy for you to hold me up to ridicule. In this trial, it is not your Nominalist vision of Platonism that must be judged. If I had to judge your crude vision of Platonism, I would say that it is erroneous on a great number of points. The Dominican you have to judge is not the Platonist in the heaven of your mind, Master Reinher, but the singular being who is in front of you, and the thought of that man is not the caricature that you make of it, but a perfectly Christian synthesis of the highest philosophy and the noblest theology in the civilized world. This synthesis is not something invented, it is not "my" synthesis, it was undertaken by Saint Dionysius and by the Fathers of the Church. Saint Augustine played a major role in it, and Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas continued it. It is this synthesis that I defended, with many other masters, at the University of Paris; and it is this synthesis which continues to be refined and clarified at the Dominican Studium at Cologne. Would you allow me to be more precise, Master Reinher?

The man, still taken aback, could say nothing, so the Master continued:

— Plato never imagined the Idea as "something existing elsewhere;" for him, it was instead an active principle immanent in things and immanent in the knowledge of things. The Idea consists of an actuality which causes that starting from which every being is what it is and can be known as it is. Besides, it is Aristotle and not Plato who insisted on genus and species, particularly for animals. Plato thought more about the Idea of beauty, goodness, truth, etc. Despite this, Plato's propositions presented some serious difficulties, for example, that of time. Do the ideas exist before the world and then come into matter after a certain time? That is what you have said lead us to believe. In your Platonism, the idea of the dog precedes the dogs and the idea of the cat precedes the cats. You think, then, that eternity is anterior to time. You establish a temporal link between eternity and time. That obviously is meaningless and creates a ridiculous vision of Platonism. The relationship between time and eternity is not a temporal relationship, as if the Ideas existed before their manifestation, it is an ecstatic relationship. That was well demonstrated by Saint Dionysius.

— We aren't at the University of Paris, Pierre Estate interrupted ...

— Right there is the drama! Eckhart severely retorted. It would be very interesting to debate these things before a student audience, freely but with vigor. Our ideas would progress and grow more refined through the very fact of their contradictions. In order for the Christian faith to attain a great purity, places are necessary where conflicting ideas can confront each other. Far be it from me the idea that the philosophy and the theology I am proposing are perfect. Many points remain to discuss, many questions remain obscure. Discussing with the

Nominalists and the Franciscans would certainly allow us to progress. But the unfortunate thing is, that we aren't here to discuss, but to come to a verdict in a trial of the Inquisition. That amounts to saying that not only am I in error, but that that error must not be discussed, neither at Cologne, nor in Paris, nor anywhere else. My condemnation would also signify above all that I was persisting in that error with the intent to harm the Church. Now, my being in error without my knowing it, that could be. Tell me what my error is, if this is so. But to persist is a matter of the will; I cannot do it without knowing it. The Franciscans who are here and we the Dominicans have diverging views, I admit it and even think that it is beneficial, but ought we to mutually accuse each other of heresy and condemn each other for intentions that it is obvious we do not have?

— It is not we who are accusing you of heresy, Father Eckhart, Pierre Estate replied, but two of your Dominicans. And I have understood your speeches well. Your propositions, Father Eckhart, do not deviate from orthodoxy on secondary and debatable points, quite the contrary. You are attacking the faith in its very foundations. You think that philosophy can attain to faith, you believe that man's intelligence can understand faith, you affirm that when an article of faith cannot be accepted by reason it ought to be rejected. Now then, you are going to tell me by what reasoning you arrived at the conclusion that the world is not eternal, that Mary is a virgin, that Jesus is God and man, that the resurrection will take place in the flesh, that adultery is a mortal sin, that the Host really contains the body of Christ, that the Pope and the bishops are God's authority on earth, that Jesus rose into the heavens on the third day, etc. All this is part of the faith and cannot be demonstrated by reason or by philosophy. So then, if you only accept that part of the faith which philosophy can understand, you reject almost all of the faith and not only are you rejecting the faith, you are also destroying the very foundations of the faith. Faith is not based on reason, it is based on scripture and the Church's teaching. So, then, inasmuch as you uphold reason, you place the Church in peril.

The Master remained for a long time in a silence which seemed terrible and deadly. Everything appeared to depend upon this question. Everyone knew that no philosophy had ever approached, even from a distance, these articles of faith and morals. If the Master admitted that philosophy could never go that far, he would contradict himself, but if he did not admit it, he would be obligated to demonstrate, by philosophical reasoning, each of these points of orthodoxy. In both cases, he was lost. The Master sat down for a moment on a chair, breathing with difficulty, his pains seeming to gain ground against him. Finally he stood up, approached Pierre Estate and answered him:

— Never reduce intelligence to reason alone; intelligence penetrates mysteries which evade all reasoning. Next, ask yourself the following question: how long a time can a religion survive if it supports unconditionally dogmas and teachings that are unintelligible? If the sword and the stake are needed to convince the faithful, I fear for the future of the Church. It is true that philosophy ought to accomplish great works to join itself to theology and vice versa (he emphasized these words "vice versa"), it is true that these works are far from being completed, and it is possible that intelligence, even beyond reason and even beyond itself, may

fill in this synthesis, but I believe that it is truly worth the trouble to try. Can we come to terms about this: it is too soon to cut off this debate, let us simply accept that it takes place. The future will tell if it is better for the Church to be dynamic and advancing than static and dogmatic. For the moment, should I recall to the court that I conform in every detail to all the articles of faith and to all the points of morality?

— Are you prepared to fully confess the orthodoxy of your faith, Albert of Milan put in, and to rectify the errors noted in the forty-nine propositions brought before the court? He really wanted to go no further than this.

Oh, living God! If only someone would tell me where I am wrong, as soon as I understood my errors, I would rectify them at once. But how can I correct propositions whose faults I don't understand? Explain to me where I am wrong and what is my error.

On everything, Pierre Estate cried, you are wrong on everything and even on what you just said. You wish to understand where you are wrong and that is precisely your greatest fault. Understand, understand, understand! Those are the only words you say! You must obey without understanding, that's all there is to it.

— But Brother Estate, Eckhart replied, visibly exhausted, you are asking me to lie, since to pronounce the sound "yes" when the intelligence does not understand is to fail in the most basic of sincerities. You cannot reasonably ask me to simply repeat words whose meaning I do not understand.

— Then you have just admitted your heresy, Pierre Estate retorted almost immediately, you have just admitted in front of us all that the devil has gotten you under his control. You have fallen into heresy to such a point, your twisted thinking has been so corrupted, that you can no longer even gain access to the faith. Philosophy has damned you.

It was in vain that Master Reinher looked severely at Brother Estate, for the latter continued without restraint:

— Philosophy is the weapon of Satan, it destroys faith even more than the sin of the flesh. The condemnation of the bishop of Paris, ...tienne Tempier, in 1277, was not sufficient; a sucker from that stump has just arisen even in Cologne. "A transgression which does not even dare proclaim itself as one, Tempier said, coupled with the technique of a shameful forger, that is the whole art of the philosophers who, exceeding the limits of their speciality and - while spreading their execrable errors or, better yet, their proud and vain insanities - seek to give the impression that they don't really accept what they say. They say in effect that certain things are true in philosophy, which are not so according to the Catholic faith, as if there were two contrary truths, as if the truth of the Holy Scriptures could be contradicted by the truth of the texts of these pagans God has damned." Are you going to say, Father Eckhart, like the ungodly Averroes: "I believe that the faith is true but I think that it is not true?" You say that you believe, but this is

not true, you do not believe. Your faith is eaten away from the inside by philosophy, which destroys everything the reason finds false. You do not believe, you speculate!

Brother Estate, Albert of Milan finally intervened, you have spoken well, and we would like to hear Father Eckhart on this subject.

Father Eckhart, who was seated, tried to get up, but could not. He was forbidden to speak from his seat. So he turned toward me so that I would go and support him. His eyes were filled with water. I approached him, took him by the shoulders and got him up. He managed to free up his respiration and after a short while replied:

— Don't you know that philosophy is the surpassing of reason with the aim of finding satisfaction in the Wisdom and the Intelligence of God? Don't judge too hastily. Carefully take note of what Aristotle says about detached spirits in the book which follows his *Physics*. The greatest of all masters whoever dealt with the natural sciences, speaking of these pure detached spirits, says that they are not forms of any thing, that they receive their being in a direct flow from God; and they contemplate the pure being of God without diversity. Aristotle calls that limpid and pure being a "something." He demonstrated that human intelligence can touch the sublime. Dionysius the Areopagite, in his treatise on mystical theology, describes the ordered series of links which lead to God: the crossing-over of language, and of thought as well, which, through successive surpassings of affirmation and of negation, by the stripping away of all images leads to a certain exhaustion of what can be thought and understood, where a union is achieved with Him who is beyond all essence and all knowledge. Faith is thinking at its maximum and not a suspension of reason and a refuge for stupidity and intellectual laziness.

Pierre Estate, who felt this as a personal attack, protested immediately: You are speaking of intellectual bliss. Beatitude is not a matter of intelligence, but of will and morality. It is renunciation of the flesh and impeccable conduct that make the saint. Now you have maintained that women are equal to men, and that it is good to pay attention to their pretty talk; this is to place in great peril the whole moral edifice of the Church. You quoted Aristotle to me a little while ago, but you omitted to say that, for Aristotle - and Thomas Aquinas himself confirms it - women are undetermined. They don't have any choice, they must have men determine them, or at least make them capable of being determined. Aristotle has compared the female to matter aspiring to the male as to a form, that is to say, to a determination. In moral and judicial terms, this signifies that a woman is determined when she belongs to a man: her father, her brother; if she is married, she belongs to her spouse and, if she is a nun, she is subordinate to a masculine community. She is potentially determined when nothing prevents her from belonging to someone, as in the case of spinsters subjected to their father and their brothers. Now, you have listened to women, you have encouraged the beguinages, you have placed the Church in peril. In this way, you are opening the door to the worst of sins, those of the flesh. Don't you know that the wrong use

of coitus leads men to Hell and imperils the very origins of civilization? But there is something even worse! By encouraging women to think, by teaching them the subtleties of philosophy and theology, you are leading reason in its entirety toward licentiousness, excess, formlessness, chaos. Your heresy is much greater than that of the Beguines you are protecting and who carry on your thought; it is a heresy of heresies since, through philosophy and women philosophers, you are opening the gates of the Church to every heresy and every kind of madness.

I was trembling with anger even as I held the Master, because I knew how much he detested the idea of the inferiority of women. But, after a moment, I realized that I too had lived almost all my life, like Pierre Estate, terrified of thinking and of women. My anger changed into pity. The Master put his hand on my arm, and opened his mouth but could not utter a sound. He closed his eyes for a moment, cleared up his breathing and managed to pronounce:

— You don't know what you are saying.

— Your pride, Father Eckhart, is what appears to me to be the most detestable thing about you, Pierre Estate retorted

Then the Master approached the man and said:

— An unknown Franciscan, a disciple of Bonaventure, maintained that there are two kinds of humility: the humility of truth which is born of reflection upon our fragility, and the humility of severity which is born of the awareness of our faults. The humility of truth is the root of magnanimity, the humility of severity is the root of compassion. I believe that you don't know either one of them.

Reinher Friso seized the opportunity to speak and tried to raise the level of the debate:

— In your treatise on *The Noble Man*, you went so far as to destroy the very meaning of this word, putting in danger the entire structure of society. Macrobius says it well: "The earth is the lees of the elements." Peasants are the workers of manure. The earth in its entirety is twisted with shame before the nobility of the stars; that is why it is curved like the backs of peasants. The earth then is the place of radical humiliation. But it is fortunate that the light of the spheres finds its way into the nobles so as to spread out from level to level into everyone. Without that function, civilization would no longer exist and we would return to savagery and barbarism. Dante Aligheri has eminently demonstrated the importance of the *Influentia* of the nobility. Now you, Father Eckhart, you link nobility to its opposite, poverty. Your propositions will go so far, then, as to turn the whole social order upside-down. How can you justify such a thing?

— The things I say are spiritual, Master Reinher. Jesus said: "Blessed are the poor;" this was not primarily a treatise on the social order! I wanted to attract attention to the humility of truth. What is low serves us in surpassing being. To go beneath being, into darkness, into the possibilities and potentialities so as to

make beauty emerge from it, the beauty in what gives the appearance of ugliness, the goodness in what seems contemptible, the nobility in what appears vile, this is truly the work of the light of the Word which rebounds in the darkness to return to the Father laden with nobility and the sentiment of having gone beyond. It is the same for God as for the sun at the height of its bottomless depth, in the ground of His humility. Yes! That is why man has no need to ask God for anything, on the contrary: he can command Him, since the height of the deity can only look down to the bottom of humility; the humble man and God are one and not two. What is highest in His bottomless depth answers what is lowest in His bottomless depth. What creates the grandeur and the nobility of God is the humility of the human heart. The more I recognize my humility, the more God, and my nobility, will be exalted. You were speaking of Dante. Didn't he say in one of the cantos in *Purgatory*: "Open your heart to the truths which come and know that, as soon as the brain of the fetus is formed, the Prime Mover, He who gladdens nature's art, will turn toward it: He blows on it a new spirit, of abundant virtues which draws to Him what He finds to be active there, transforms it in Himself, and makes a single soul which lives and feels and turns upon itself."

— You certainly know the art of evasion, Johannes Eckhart, Pierre Estate continued. You cover with honey and subtlety the evil and sin that tax your mind and your soul. But make no mistake. The Holy Inquisition smells the odor of Satan that suppurates from your beautiful words. In identifying man with God, in subjecting faith to philosophy, in reversing the social order to the point of putting poor folk over nobles, in casting the Church into uncertainty through the emancipation of women, not only are you a heretic, but you are breaking the partitions that divided Christians from Satan. Through your fault, Germany risks the greatest dangers. What am I saying, the civilization of the whole of Christendom is in peril.

— If the Church you are speaking of, Eckhart retorted, can be destroyed every time a man or a woman reflects, then it is not God's Church. God's Church is large enough to contain all of Man and solid enough to accept his criticism.

There was a long moment of silence. The Master collapsed into his chair. He was so exhausted that I feared for his life. Then Virneburg stood up straight and dramatically:

— You have been heard, Father Eckhart, the court will render its verdict in due course.

At that Nicholas of Strasbourg energetically retorted:

— We will appeal to the Pope. This trial is only a parody like the Sanhedrin's ...

Virneburg pounded on the table with all his strength and concluded with authority:

— Do it, do it, sir, appeal to the Pope and you will certainly see that the Church is

stronger, more consistent and more powerful than the Sanhedrin.

Nicholas and I had helped the Master, who walked with difficulty, to leave this dark and sinister place. We had brought him into the convent kitchens so that he might warm himself a little. Suso and Tauler came to join us as soon as they knew of our return. I served the Master herb bouillon and had him breathe some vapors of camphor. In spite of the noise of preparations for supper, a little halo of tranquillity had formed around us. The Master fell asleep at the table, his forehead between his arms. He regained some strength and, after an hour, woke up. He smiled like a child, looked at the food and especially savored the warmth of the kitchen. He was served some vegetables and a chicken bouillon.

— This reminds me of my childhood years, when I was with my mother, he recalled. I never left her for a moment, I loved the smells of the kitchen.

— But, I continued, wasn't your mother a noblewoman and your father a knight? How could it have been that she was busy in the kitchen like a servant and how could it have been that your father allowed you to be there?

— We received a lot of guests and my mother wanted everything to be perfect, so she did her part. My father did not appreciate my being with her all the time, but my mother wouldn't allow herself to be imposed upon, and my father gave in. She was always, or almost always, singing, and she overflowed with joy regardless of the family's worries or my father's moods. But life is not a quiet river! I was about ten when my brother achieved knighthood. It was a sunny, festive day. To the sound of their own singing, dancers capered near the garden. Others played backgammon, bowls, or chess. My father's friends possessed a card game imported from the Indies. They played a lot. The ladies and the maidens had gathered on the terraces to sew, embroider, and spin, all the while conversing and singing weaving songs. In the garden, with the children, serving women told fairy tales. The men were just returning from the hunt. But two of them, and my brother also, had still not come back. Most of the men had embellished their clothes with lively colors, and it was always my father who wore the handsomest ones. My mother knew extremely well the dyer's art, which produces greens livelier than those of springtime after a rainy day. He wore a collar of gray squirrel trimmed with ermine, one he was especially proud of. Everyone was dressed in their finest. Aside from some peasant uprisings, we had up till then been spared. But misery makes chaos that soon must be suffered. "Because of their laziness, the yokels and the country folk are finding the ban very heavy," it was said. I accepted this judgment. I didn't understand. I knew neither their toil nor their misery. Some of them were former slaves settled on tenures and able to enjoy, in exchange for rents, a little servant's manse. I believed that they were well treated, and, with my father, made fun of their laziness. It was about ten days later, after I had fled from the house, that I understood, when I saw their one-room cottage, with its dirt floor where scrawny geese and chickens left their droppings. No chairs, no tables, no furniture save for a single plank chest containing all their

possessions. They wore on their backs almost all of their clothes: coarse linen hose, sandals, shirt and long tunic, robe, coat and cape. They rose before dawn and, after prayers, went to work. They had scarcely anything for breakfast, a slice of bad bread seasoned with herbs sufficed for lunch, and they had a barley soup for supper. An egg sometimes and a little meat on Sundays. From time to time, some small game that the nobles disdained to hunt. They went to bed exhausted as soon as twilight passed. There it is, their whole life, like a wrinkle open to sweat, chapped by illness, mourning, the fear of devils and evil fairies. They knew nothing about God, nothing about the world and were afraid of everything: the invisible even more than the visible. But that long and crushing poverty which kept them so far from the relief and consolation that a little education might have given them, I still did not understand when my brother arrived on his charger, laughing and yelling. With two of his friends, he had captured a peasant and his two daughters. They dragged them into the courtyard and, in front of my father, dressed for the ball, my brother shouted. "These are the ones. - Very well, my father curtly replied, do with them what you will provided that I don't ever see them again on my land." He knocked them out immediately and threw them unceremoniously into the fire where several boars were already roasting. One of the girls did not lose consciousness and jumped out of the blaze screaming, but they caught her and kicked her back into the fire again. She came out horribly bruised only to be thrown once more. It was atrocious. The scene has always remained in my memory and even today I have nightmares about it. I was ten years old. I threw myself in my mother's arms. I knew I would never be a knight. As soon as I was able, thanks to my mother's intervention, I entered the convent at Erfurt when I was not even quite fifteen. You see, Suso, like you, my family bought me a dispensation, but today I am terribly afraid of fire, not of hellfire, but the fire of the cruelty of men.

Tears ran softly on his cheeks, but he remained silent and had difficulty breathing. I had him inhale some vapors of camphor and eucalyptus. Nicholas stepped in to reassure him:

— Gerard of Podahns supports us. Tomorrow, a courier will leave for Avignon. Whether Virneburg refuses or accepts the appeal, we will obtain an audience with the cardinal Jacques Fournier. In the worst case, they will ask us to make some adjustments in the vocabulary, but it can never be a question of ...

He didn't dare say it.

— ... the stake, Father Eckhart himself continued. Nicholas, don't delude yourself too much, we haven't seen anything yet. No one is safe any longer. The Church is following a disturbing course. She is breaking off with Constantinople and the East, she is cutting herself off from the peasantry; she no longer teaches, she condemns; she no longer feeds the poor, she adds to their burden; she no longer restrains the nobles' yoke, she participates in it. Perhaps they won't burn me, but they will burn others, - monks, theologians, scholars; by the hundreds they will reduce them to ashes. One day, I fear, the population will protest, will withdraw its fidelity to the Church and there will be much blood, many revolts and repressions.

It is to be feared that the Church, such as we know it, will collapse and abandon man to himself. It is on that day that it will be necessary to exhume the manuscripts that will not have been burned; it is perhaps for that day that they will have been written. Because it is in this emptiness that the Word unceasingly braces itself and hurls itself back again farther and higher. We must continue, Suso, we must continue, Tauler; Berthold must continue, Katrei must continue and you too, Conrad, even if all this is buried for centuries. Our manuscripts will emerge even from inside the debris of the dying Church, and it is through them that true Christianity will be reborn.

He ran out of breath, coughed, spit a little blood and continued:

— They won't burn me because I'm already burning inside and this fire will carry me off before theirs will. They only have pity for themselves, they prefer that I die quite simply in misery rather than take on my condemnation.

He rested a little, took a few good breaths over the bowl of camphor and eucalyptus that I had just heated, cleared his lungs and continued:

— You will remember that in December 1310, I was elected provincial of Teutonia, but the election was not confirmed by the chapter general of Naples. On the contrary, I was sent for the third time to Paris where I had to combat the Franciscan theses. I recall having crossed the French countryside, then the valley of the Marne, to reach step by step, convent by convent, the capital of all the sciences. While crossing the Petit-Pont which led me onto the Left Bank, the domain of the university, I thought of the light of the Word which comes all the way to us. I no longer had any doubt, I was convinced that the Church must pass the test of philosophy, the test for human intelligence and that, if she did not do it, sooner or later she would be abandoned. Every civilization is an emancipator of the mind. There will necessarily arrive a time, then, when a religion, whichever one it may be, must respond to awakened and perceptive minds. For that, it is essential to prepare oneself, discuss, and reflect in a climate of rectitude, rigor and openness. The Greeks finally abandoned their religion because it wasn't up to the level of their philosophy: we should draw a lesson from that, and quickly. Today the Muslims are sending Aristotle back to us through the incisive commentaries of Averr[^]es. A certain rationality is springing up out of the crowd. New minds are thirsty, we should give them water that is clear in a new way. I wanted to dedicate myself entirely to this with humility and abnegation, like Thomas Aquinas did, but by going further, beyond Aristotle, by taking into account the last disciples of the school of Athens, whom the Church, in its narrowmindedness, massacred. You may kill men, but ideas last. When I went to Paris, the wave stirred up by Etienne Tempier's ban had largely subsided, and the atmosphere appeared somewhat serene. I stayed at the Dominican convent on the Rue Saint-Jacques. The effervescence of a group of intellectual knights preparing for battle prevailed there, a free jousting which allowed each one to pass beyond his own philosophy. But we were far from imagining the terrible trap that would soon be set for us. On the 3rd of April of that same year there would take place, in our walls, yes, in a Dominican convent - Saint Dominic forgive us - the

inquisition trial of Marguerite de Porete, the Beguine from Hainaut who had written in French the very beautiful book: *The Mirror of Simple Annihilated Souls*. The case of the *Mirror* was at the heart of the Council of Vienne. Guillaume de Paris was the Grand Inquisitor at this trial. I talked for hours with him. He seemed to listen to me, but when I attended the terrible trial which unfolded right before my eyes, you couldn't believe how ashamed I was of the Church! It was no longer a contest of reasonable men, it was the machination of frightened fanatics who feared human intelligence to the point of closing themselves off from everything beyond them. Marguerite de Porete was burned on the square, the Place de Gînes, the 1st of June, 1310, and on the same pyre all the copies of the *Mirror*. The spectacle was particularly horrible, but the scandal of that flagrant injustice was even worse. No reasonable man, no reasonable woman could agree with that way of convincing, - driving reason out of the Church, was what it amounted to. And to drive reason out of the Church, was to throw it down into its own void. When the Church's authority will no longer be anything but that of fire and sword, she will already be dead even if all the Muslims and all the heretics submit to her out of fear or ambition. Submission is not faith. A little later, the Council of Vienne condemned the eight errors of the Beghards and the Beguines concerning the state of perfection. It is true that they went a little too far with the ideas of abnegation and annihilation of themselves, but they were sincere women and much less intellectually and spiritually second-rate than most of us are. It would have been enough to hold discussions with them and, why not, invite them into the university. It was this last point that especially scandalized Guillaume de Paris; like everyone else, he refused to accept that women could enter the university as students. But why did men have the right to discuss the Nominalism of Abelard and even the moderate Averroism of Boethius of Cadia and Siger of Brabant, while what they offered women were counterfeit trials and horrible executions?

He inhaled the medicine again and continued:

— I miss Katrei and Jutta a great deal. Do you have any news of them? Did they arrive safe and sound at Bruges?

— We haven't received any message confirming their arrival, Tauler responded, but there's no reason to be afraid; Virneburg's safe-conduct was certainly valid and Walter had provided for a dependable escort.

The Master entered into himself for a moment and began to smile. He suddenly seemed so happy that they thought he was confused. Consequently, Suso asked him directly:

— What are you thinking about, Master?

— If a rich king with a very lovely daughter gave her in marriage to a poor man's son, every member of that peasant family would be made noble, wouldn't they?

— You are thinking of the Son of God, Suso said.

— Of course, Father Eckhart continued. A master says: "From God becoming man, all the human race is elevated." This master spoke well, but I don't make much of this. What good would it do me to have a brother who was rich if I remained poor? What good would it do to have a wise brother if I remained insane?

— And you, what do you say? Suso asked.

— As for me, I say something else that goes further: God took on all of human nature. The blessedness that the Son, the light, brought us was ours. There where the Father begets His light in the most intimate depths of our souls, there is where our nature unfolds. That nature is one and simple. In order to be able to survive without any mediator in the destitution of that nature, we must go outside of our selfishness to the point of wishing as much good to one who is across the seas as to our friends. For the whole universe is our business. In the second place, we must have a pure heart. In the third place we must be destitute of nothingness.

— What do you mean by "be destitute of nothingness?" Suso inquired.

— Let us suppose that I put a burning coal in my hand. If I accuse the coal of burning my hand, I am wrong. It is the nothingness that burns me. The coal has in it something that my hand does not have. If my hand had in it everything that the coal is, it too would have the nature of fire and would not feel any burning. Likewise, if I had the nature of God, who has no nothingness in Him, it would never be possible for me to suffer. I would suffer without suffering. Just as truly as the Father begets the light in Himself, just as truly does He beget it in the bosom of our souls. Here the depth of God is my depth and my depth is the depth of God. As long as you do your works for the kingdom of Heaven, for God or for your own bliss, from the outside, then, properly speaking, you are not truly upright. You can be tolerated, but the best is not that. For truly, if you imagine that through interiority, recollection, and sweetness you will receive more from God than by the hearth or in the stable, it is exactly as if you took God, wrapped His head in a coat, and hid Him under a bench. For whoever seeks God in one way grasps that way but forgets God who is hidden beneath the way.

— But why then, Father Eckhart, do you seek truth and saintliness?

— If for a thousand years you were to ask life: "Why do you live?," it would never say anything else but: "I live because I live." The reason for this is that life draws its life from its own depth and gushes forth what is its own: that is why it lives without asking why, because it lives only from itself. Now, if you were to ask a true man, someone who acts from his own depth: "Why do you live? Why do you do your works?," if he wished to respond uprightly, he would say nothing other than: "I do because I do."

The Master fell asleep almost instantly, leaning against the table, his head between his arms. The meal had been served and the kitchen slowly became quiet amid the warmth of the last odors. At compline, I stayed alone next to him and quietly fell

asleep, my back against the stone hearth.

Under the dome of the immense cathedral, Virneburg glittered in his splendor; his red and silver mitre refracted in all directions the lights flashed down on him by the immense stained-glass window hanging above him, a window depicting the Judgement of God. Pierre Estate, in a soutane of hoary wool, radiated a light so pure one might have said it was the sun at its zenith. His left hand was raised toward Heaven while his right hand pointed in the direction of the darkest corner of the chancel. This was what I approached, for I wanted to uncover what was thus condemned with such vigor and assurance. Under the stairs, covered with dirty and dismal rags, wearing heavy chains on his hands and feet, was Eckhart. He looked at me for a moment his eyes without color or life; he resembled an alabaster statue. He held in his right hand, however, a little white flower trembling from an unknown breeze. Pierre Estate, from up in the pulpit, pronounced these words with the greatest of authority:

— This man wanted, in his turn, to offer the apple of knowledge to the world and make us forget that we are not God. He kindled in men and even in women the vain hope of a unique knowledge of the world and of God. In all his pride, he has forgotten that we are nothing more than a shadowy dust even to the deepest depths of ourselves. Vanity of vanities, we are nothing more than the wind in our brains. When will man understand, then, that he can say nothing about the world, unless it be words, allegories and numbers? Even less can he covet God. Without the Scriptures and the authority of the Church, thought can do no more than collapse into its own void. Certainly, reason can improve our lot on earth, manufacture tools, enlarge our zones of comfort, yet it will always remain in ignorance. It will never be able to arrive at any conclusions about the existence of God, or even about the existence of the world. Man, you are nothing more than the dust of stars, the repercussion of gyres and the somersaults of the celestial spheres. Accept your lot, be silent and work.

The common people present listened with dumb admiration to the sayings of Pierre Estate. They were the stupidest people imaginable, capable of believing that the atoms of Democritus are able to produce intellectual vapors and awareness as thin and vain as onionskins. Their religion no longer served anything more than meager ritual consolations even now ready to disappear. Their lives were no longer anything more than a parlor game which swallowed their cerebral substance and digested their aggravated and futile emotions. They were slaves of themselves. The world had become a machine transforming human effort into sleep-inducing pleasures.

Two guards drove the Master outside, beating him with sticks. He was tied to the stake and flaming faggots were thrown on him. The poor man moaned pitifully. One of the guards recognized me and asked if I were his disciple. "No," I answered him. "I'm only obeying the General of my community." - No, he is lying," cried a woman nearby. "I saw him sympathizing with him, right in the

middle of some young and good-looking heretics." At that, the guards took hold of me and threw me into the fire.

When I woke up, the Master was no longer there at my side. I was alone, terribly alone. A trap door opened under my feet, I fell into the abyss, and all the doors closed above me with a great noise. The blackness was immediate and total. I was abandoned and fell into infinity. I became aware that I was going to fall thus indefinitely into the abyss, that never, never would I encounter a face, nor a hand, nor a thing, nor dust, nor any limit. Only the abyss. My thinking itself disintegrated: I was no longer able to form an idea about anything. I was no longer able to focus on a memory; not even a single image formed, nor even the idea that there would never be, without a doubt, any more images. Then my heart emptied itself of all of its substance. I no longer felt anything, not even the anguish of no longer feeling anything. I tried to grasp my head between my hands, but there was nothing to grasp - my legs, impossible; my torso, it too was annihilated; and then I no longer had a hand at all; only emptiness, only blackness. Not a sound other than the final reverberation of the doors that were closing definitively on me and even that disappeared. I no longer knew anything, no longer had hold on anything, not even on this terrible nothingness which was making me disappear thus in its eternal digestion. I would have wanted to feel the death that lies in wait for every man on earth so that it might push a little clump of life back on itself, make of it a ball in a chest, a beating mass, a rhythm of some kind, just that, a pulsing body. That would have seemed the sweetest of presents, but nothing happened, not even the fear of nothing. The thread of time became more and more linear, without the least trembling, without the least swelling, thin, so thin that it broke. When there was no longer anything, not even time, and all distances collapsed into the same infinitely minuscule black hole, into the same futility, I heard the whistling silence of absolute equality. I would not know how to say it, but the nothingness succeeded in making itself felt as a primordial equanimity, the infinitely subtle undulation of eternity before the arrival of the Man who is the Way. The strange impression remained with me that nothingness is not nothing, but is All; welcoming of the possible, inmost depth of life, first substratum.

It was then that I really awoke, at the same time as the Master, to the sound of a utensil that the cooks had dropped in their haste to prepare breakfast. While leading Father Eckhart back to his cell, I told him my nightmare. He answered me with this enigma:

— It is so good to suspend for a moment, even in sleep, the judgements we make about each and every thing. This allows us some amazing encounters it is impossible to dress up in words. It is enough to keep them in our hearts, to brood on their sentiment.

This didn't clear up anything at all for me, I didn't understand what had happened. This dream had renewed in me anguish and terrible doubts, greater than those raised by Guglielmo. So I ran, then, to Barnabas, the General. He was very preoccupied and had little time to devote to me. But I was so anxious that I

hastily related to him my dream, my extreme confusion, and my limitless distress.

— I believe, the General crisply answered, that you need to keep your distance. Men like you don't have a feeling for nuances and subtleties. Eckhart went too far, not so much by what he said, as by whom he addresses. He doesn't discriminate between children and men. Last night I called Berthold, Suso and Tauler to a meeting; we must adjust the target: preach Thomas Aquinas to the beginners and reserve Eckhart for the elite. This was the decision of the chapter general, but Eckhart did not conform to it. He continued to exaggerate, in his images and in the breadth of his audience. He has put the Studium in danger, as well as the beguignages and the hearts of the simplest monks like you, Conrad. You risk finding yourself stuck between the rational thought of Aristotle and the mystical heart of St. Francis of Assisi. You see, we, the Dominicans, we are trying to unify heart and reason. This is very good, but the great risk is of ending up with a heart that is too rational and a thought that is too intuitive, the risk is to find oneself lost between these two. The advantage of William of Ockham is that, in separating the two, reason can be truly rational and the heart can truly be the source of love and art. Ockham separated too much, Eckhart not enough. Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas arrived at a better balance. That is why I have asked Eckhart's students to return to Saint Thomas while assimilating the best of Eckhart. But you, Conrad, you are too fragile and you should not venture out on such paths. Keep yourself fixed on what is simplest: the commandments of God, the commandments of the church, and the Premonstratensian rule as our founder wished it. Keep far away from women and discipline yourself every day.

I was crushed. I asked him what I should do.

— You will accompany Father Eckhart to the end, but keep on your guard. Obedience will help you as it always has. Make sure that Father Eckhart is led back to his cell and that he remains there as planned. Tomorrow he will go to the Preacher's church and present his excuses to the people.

After these words, I never again regained serenity. For the first time, the General's authority did not succeed in completely closing the door that Eckhart had part way opened. On the other hand, this door remained stuck open at a particularly cruel angle: wide enough to hear the invitation of the darkness and not enough to truly penetrate it. The General's words had dismissed the peace that Katrei's last words imparted to me, and they had also swept away the security that obedience provided me. Something in me was dead. Like a knight stuck in his armor, I was going into combat like a machine set in motion by the General's word. I had scarcely enough thinking substance left to ask myself if this was obedience or abdication!

The Church was full to overflowing. It had snowed all night but, in the morning, the light had about it something diaphanous and supernatural. The rays

penetrating the monochrome stained-glass windows gave to the moist stone a particular brilliance. It was cold, very cold. The vapor coming out of our mouths bonded itself with the purifying incense to form a sort of pink fog out of which emerged the altar, the platform prepared for the Master's confession and the pulpit the General would preach from. Virneburg and the commissioners of the Inquisition, with the exception of Reinher Friso, were there on the red thrones that had been brought from the archbishop's palace.

After asking the people to have pity on our faults, Barnabas of Cagnoli climbed into the pulpit and harangued the crowd in this way:

— Paul, the father of us all, the first and the most perfect preacher, wrote one day, and this is the word of God: "Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and the apostolate, to bring in his name all unbelievers to the obedience of faith ..." The foundation of faith is obedience. It is the disobedience of Adam that lost us, it is the obedience of Christ that saved us. Inasmuch as he was a man, Christ could not understand why his Father sent him into the world to die on the cross to save us. That love always escapes human reason. It is madness from the point of view of the philosophers. But Christ was wise enough to abandon his human wisdom and stick to his obedience to God. This is why Saint Paul affirms loud and clear: "So then, as by one offence, Adam's, condemnation affected all men, so, by one act of justice, the justification which gives life extends to all men. For, as by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners, so, by the obedience of one, many will be made just." He declares a little further on: "Don't you know that in giving yourselves over to someone as slaves to obey him, you are slaves of the one you obey, whether of sin which leads to death, or of obedience which leads to justice. But thanks be to God that, after having been slaves to sin, you have obeyed with your whole heart the rule of the doctrine in which you have been instructed." Man has no choice but to obey, whether he obey sin, or whether he obey the doctrine of the Church. There is not a path for each one, there is only one highway, and it is narrow; one alone, and it is obedience. It is narrow because there are an infinite number of ways of doing evil, but only one of doing good. Don't do evil and you are of necessity good, obey and you will have Heaven in return. Don't venture out on subtle ways through complicated reasonings. Stick to the essential. "For," Saint Paul says again, "the weapons we fight with are not fleshly; but are, through the virtue of God, so mighty as to overturn fortresses. We overturn the arguments and pretensions which raise themselves against the knowledge of God, and bring all thought captive to the obedience of Christ. We are prepared also to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is complete." Father Eckhart didn't want to mislead you, but these are troubled times. The Moors were not content with driving us out of Jerusalem, they have infiltrated among us through their manuscripts, subtle and difficult to combat. Father Eckhart was taken in despite his good faith and comes here to publicly correct himself so that everyone will know that he is not a heretic, even though he made mistakes in several places. We must now have mercy on him. Paul told us: "Just as you have formerly disobeyed God and through your disobedience you have now obtained mercy, so they have now disobeyed in order that, through the mercy which was shown to you, they also might obtain mercy. For God

encompassed all men in disobedience, so as to have mercy on all." That is why Father Eckhart has come to ask for pity and mercy from the archbishop.

The Master went forward with difficulty to the podium. He was broken in body and spirit. I read for him in Latin at first and then in German the text of the retraction and adherence to orthodoxy that the General had prepared for him and that two priors had signed in his place.

— Before the archbishop and the Commissioners here present, I, Johannes Eckhart, Dominican and Master of theology, I have erred on many points and taught errors that I bitterly regret. It is not true that we can know God in this world, it is not true that my little finger has created everything, it is not true that we on earth are all equal, it is not true that there is in Man something uncreated and uncreatable, it is not true that the world exists from all eternity, it is not good for women to be in Beguignages. I have said many other things just as false and I repent of them. I ask mercy for my faults and I submit myself to all that the Church will dictate that I do, think or believe.

The Master wanted to speak, but he simply looked at the crowd. He opened his mouth, then closed it immediately. He shed a tear that everyone saw as a sign of repentance. After the mass, accompanied by several monks, we went, Eckhart and I, to the residence of Master Reinher Friso. He appeared at his window and I read him the same text and the Master remained silent in the same way.

During the week which followed, I didn't say a word to the Master and the Master didn't say a word to me. He was totally enclosed in himself. Several times I thought he was dead, but if I shook him and opened an eyelid, he awoke from a kind of lethargy into which he sank again as soon as I went away. I did not let myself be touched by his sufferings. I only hoped that they would spare him some of the numerous years in Purgatory that he had prepared for himself. As for me, I accepted the cold that I shared with him, tightening my hairshirt and giving myself hard blows with the discipline so that God might pardon me for having believed for a time in the mad hopes of this lost man. I struggled with all my strength against the memories of Katrei whom I saw, in spite of all my efforts, naked and sensual. By dint of fasting and vigils, whip and escarole, I succeeded in freeing myself from the bursts of concupiscence which sought to carry me off into their hells.

A courier arrived from the archdiocese with two official orders from the holy Inquisition. The first called into question Nicholas of Strasbourg, accusing him of complicity. Not only had the archbishop not agreed to take disciplining measures against Herman of Summo and William of Nidecke as the mandate signed by Avignon demanded, but here he was, turning against the papal visitor himself. The other order concerned Father Eckhart. His appeal was rejected as frivolous and non-existent, and his confession was declined as superficial and insincere. They had removed certain sentences challenged in the first court appearance and added others completely new and with worse consequences.

For a moment, I thought again of Guglielmo's warnings: "If they see that the people no longer support the Master, they will finish him off pure and simple. I beg of you, prevent him from being humiliated in public." But I decided otherwise. The Church could not descend that low!

CHAPTER VII: The Final Step

Gerald of Podahns, vice-procurator general of the Dominicans, accompanied by Nicholas of Strasbourg, papal visitor, left for Avignon with General Barnabas of Cagnoli's order to obtain a hearing for Master Eckhart or his procurator on the subject of the accusation that the archbishop Henry II of Virneburg was maintaining in spite of all good sense and without taking into account the Dominican master's retractions and public submissions to the authorities of the church. Cardinal Fournier, principal censor in the case of William of Ockham and the one seen as John XXII's successor, would hear the Master and render judgement, But it was easy to discern that the General no longer had confidence in the Master's ability to defend himself, not that he doubted his faith, but he feared his overheated words and the enthusiasm of his mind. It could be said that he hoped that a natural death would carry Eckhart off before the hearing, so that Gerald of Podahns could represent him with all the submission and sangfroid essential to the enterprise. Death truly was hovering over the old man, who suffered greatly from cold and hunger since the beginning of winter.

In close conjunction with the General, I accomplished my duty as well as I could: I noted down the Master's words and actions even as I kept him at a distance. As regards myself, I kept busy revising each of the Master's lessons so as to retain only the safest and surest ideas, rejecting what could result from a too-great enthusiasm, from an excessive engagement of the heart. I remember among other things this reflection of mine: the Master allots too much importance to consistency : it is not because the Trinity is based on equality that we must deduce from this that all men are equal spiritually, including women; it is not because the universe is "one" that we must conclude that evil is only absence; sin, only a temporary deviation and , Hell, only non-existence; the universe is not a perpetual overflowing of joy because God is goodness; everything in this world is not good because He is intelligent; all purity does not lead to knowledge because He is truth, The Master only looked at one side of things. He refused to see that sin had bent all things out of shape, that it had drained all consistency out of this world, and that it was because of this that philosophy could understand only the ideal world and not the world after the Fall, only the divine and not the human, only what should be and not what is and becomes. He had worked for the development of a new social order that he wished to be more egalitarian and more serene, founded solely on the power of conviction and not on the authority of force, on the sanctity that he said was "natural" to men and without taking into account the tendencies that had to be checked or broken. It was not so much what he said that had to be filtered, but what he didn't say or refused to say, about the sacraments, authority, the redemption of sins, the original sin, the virginity of Mary, etc. What is more, he had worked to open a breach in the social order by encouraging the Beguignages, places where inner authority could supplant the authority of men. In all things he

went too far. He threw pearls to the swine, he opened the mysteries of spiritual communion to the populace and to women.

He was, however, also a man of obedience and submission, and as such he had surprised and even edified me. It was during the worst of the cold and the hunger, one of those days when winter bites into the marrow of your bones, when you would sell your soul for a bowl of hot milk, when sullenness and weariness, added to physical suffering, weaken not only will, but mind and memory. Death kept an eye on the Master as he sat or huddled on the straw of his mattress. He defied death nonetheless for he had not given up; he wanted to speak at Avignon, convince the Pope, correct the Church, save the Beguignages, save the intellectual work of the Studium, save the Dominicans' reputation. So day after day he fought a death that it would have been easy for him to absorb, as easy as it is to take a cup of wine and then two, three... to the point of drunkenness, evanescence, uncertainty, the quietude of a shadow which has lost its fangs, which ceases making us afraid and puts us to sleep in the end on its soft and tepid chest. John had asked to meet the Master, alone. The General had acquiesced, but in secret he had whispered in my ear that I should stay close to the door and take notes. Which is what I did. After briefly questioning the Master about his health, John laid his cards on the table:

— I have a message from Michael of Cesena and William of Ockham, who are presently in Pisa under the protection of Louis of Bavaria. They are aware of your difficulties with the Church. In spite of the differences of opinion, they have a great regard for your work and are asking you to consider their proposition.

— And what is their proposition? the Master asked.

— It is obvious that the Church has taken the wrong road by wanting to monopolise Caesar's throne and subject the civil power to the religious. Under the future Emperor's protection, William of Ockham and Michael of Cesena have committed themselves to the struggle against the papacy with a limitless determination. Like Dante and Marsilius of Padua, they reject all mutual dependence between the temporal order and the spiritual order. Their critique of theocracy even implies a declericalization not only of politics, but of the world and the Church as well. They are opening up a new dynamic, renouncing purely speculative preoccupations and launching a vibrant appeal to intellectuals, exhorting them to combat the power of the popes, for if not, they are nothing more than timid and silent dogs that refuse to bark and warn of the wolf that is prowling in the sheepfold. I am going to join them and would like to bring you with me. I am convinced that your thinking favors Ockham's intentions. You restore authority to the stronghold of the soul, and obedience to the inmost depths of the conscience; the Christians you have in mind do not need, then, a Church of authority but simply a Church of inspiration; they do not need a predefined order, but a spiritual and intellectual atmosphere ... All Germany loves you and will follow you, the women especially and through them the future generations ...

—I believe that you have said enough about this, John, Master Eckhart interrupted. The only argument capable of influencing me is that in Pisa it's hotter than in Cologne and the spring comes earlier. As for the rest, you are forgetting the most fundamental point : The Church is the story of sainthood and not the story of politics. It is not a question of building something, John, but of making the trees have flowers. We must fertilise the soil and give it water, we must add the leaven to the dough, we must - like the wind - blow over the fields and even the oceans, so don't talk to me about stone and mortar, about organisation and structure, these things get lost in time. If, to diminish the madness of emperors, it is useful to divide the empires, they will be divided in any case. But if in order to divide the madness, you disconnect science from knowledge, and knowledge from wisdom, then you open the door to an even greater madness. It is possible that Ockham may have more success than me in centuries to come, but if he does have this success, there will come a day when everything will be so divided that the hearts of men will no longer have either faith, or confidence, or hope. They will exalt the most despairing of arts, the most absurd philosophies, the most destructive sciences. Each ego will become a little castle with its greedy, unpardoning lord; there will no longer be cities, only fairs; there will no longer be the Church, only sects; there will no longer be philosophy, only theories; there will no longer be science, only equations; there will no longer be love, only interests. When this madness will have made them suffer to the point of suicide, it is probable that there will be a return to unity and they will ask themselves where the Studium of Cologne was when it was abandoned by the Church and by the State. John, we must bring light and not try to move things toward the light. It might well serve the purposes of the Church and the State to divide the power and thus extend their dictatorship over men, but then how can we stop the fall and prevent each man from becoming his own despot, and a despot over others? What's the use of dividing the evil? This may reduce its extent for a while, but it multiplies its seeds, and there will come a time when the entire field is contaminated. No, two emperors will bring about a thousand, and a thousand, ten thousand and so on up to the worst of despotism: that of the citizen who is perfectly egotistical and justifies his being so. John, believe me, it is better to liberate what is good than to try to break up what is bad... But I grant you that in Pisa it's already springtime and that the sun's rays would be very nice.

At that he began to laugh, then to cough so hard that John had to use his skills as a doctor more than those of a sophist ... We never saw John again. He must have left Cologne secretly. The rest of the winter was just as terrible. Every morning, when I went to awaken the Master and bring him his oat porridge, I feared that I would find him dead. But each time, he turned over, smiled at me, greeted me, and then ate all that I gave him. Truly, he was a good, generous, patient and courageous man. I told myself that with a ' little more wisdom, a little more moderation in his ideas and in his words, he would have made a great saint. But nothing is more difficult to master than temperament and, when the fire of the heart enters the enclosure of reason it pushes us, inevitably, to immoderation and superfluous emotions.

He meant well, he wanted to introduce, to inject the conversion of light into every

man. He wanted to lead every man and woman, through his words and preaching, to the advent of thought by attentive listening to the inner Word that conveys it. It was a matter of letting the Word itself hatch or be born in the souls of those who pray in spirit and in truth. He aimed at instructing man in the inner auscultation of the Word. He wanted to establish a new relationship with the Word which, in the sonorous space of a compelling sermon, suggests the secret mystery of the birth of the Logos in the soul. He sought to give full meaning to the vocation of preacher: to preach is to speak about the Word, to let the Word spring up from the space that prayer opens, to let the Word gush forth between the sermon's words, to make the Word resound within that enclosure of love that is a chapel, a church, a parish. "We must make a good delivery of the Word, make it heard wherever we go," he said. "We must open up time to listen to God." But there was a risk. It is not easy to isolate the passions of the heart and hold to the balance of things. Certainly, the two accusers had taken advantage of simple ambiguities in the words or cut up sentences with impunity in such a way as to render them shocking or absurd, since the statements are normally examined *prout sonnant* for what they appear to mean, regardless of their context. This being said, several formulations are unnecessarily disconcerting, excessive or paradoxical. He strives to give preference to the rare and to the new, and refuses to repeat the sure and indubitable. He believes that creativity awakens the soul while repetition puts it to sleep. In this way he has betrayed himself and is probably his own worst enemy at court. Barnabas was certainly right, and I take great delight in obeying him; we must save Eckhart from himself, save his work from Eckhart's flames and passions. We must not hold it against him; every man has his own imbalances. Rarely does one arrive at evenness of heart; the saints alone manage to reach it. Eckhart has not arrived at this. This does not invalidate all his work, but this does require a rectifying critique, however. It will be up to his successors to do a better job at going where he wanted to go himself. It is this that Suso, Tauler and Berthold are preparing for. As for me, the General counsels me not to because: "I don't have the intelligence for it," he says.

Barnabas of Cagnoli is truly a thoughtful and moderate man, one you can trust in. He keeps the order well anchored in the customs of the times, anchored with certitude in orthodoxy without abandoning Saint Augustine's hope: to make reasonable all that is, and to consent to going beyond natural reason when necessary. Barnabas knows that this work will be long, very long, and that we must avoid troubling ordinary people, women and the uninstructed, with these debates that should be accomplished in closed circles by strong and erudite men. He had then no choice but to isolate the Master and to warn me daily of the excesses of his thinking, all the more so since his age was increasingly affecting his faculties. Of course, there was also the cold and the hunger imposed upon him, but: "Penitence," Barnabas said, "makes wise and smooths away whatever is excessive."

Luckily, spring arrived especially early, started warming the rocks, drying the seepage, making the vegetables green and the water alive. The sun revived the

Master along with the trees and the grass in the fields. The renewed verdure in the herbal teas I gave him, the first vegetables, and - above all - the sun, little by little brought back to life this old man who wanted to fight once more. Granted permission to go to the garden, he spent nearly all of his days there.

He had changed, he almost never spoke. He was so quiet that the squirrels climbed up on him and ate the little breadcrumbs that he allowed to fall on his soutane. He could look at a flower for hours at a time, follow a little bird with his eyes, smile while watching the clouds bump against each other over his head. The winter's ordeal, added to his age, had no doubt made him a little senile. The weakening of his memory probably also contributed to stimulating in him that form of perpetual drunkenness found sometimes in simple-minded persons. He had regressed extremely, it seemed to me, and behaved more and more like a peasant. He began to walk, to weed and hoe the garden, to laugh wholeheartedly with the laboring monks and the hired gardeners. I even surprised him singing spinning songs, the ones that women sing to their little children.

One morning, he clutched my sleeve and showed me a rosebush in a brushy corner:

— See how divine the light is! he said to me.

I didn't see how a plant could be without sin or show proof of virtue, so I didn't know how to answer him. He saw this clearly and wanted to explain :

— All this splendor from one single ray! All the colors are there, and the perfume, and the wasps that take its nectar; one might say that divinity streams out from everywhere, that it radiates and blazes, that it penetrates and impregnates, that it covers and delights, that it sings and weeps for joy; that it comes out to meet us, that it caresses us like a mama, touches us, strokes us, hugs us, carries us away, inhales us finally in an embrace which leaves nothing of the inert, nor of the body, nor of the heart, nor of the soul, nor of the spirit.

He pointed at the sky, making wider and wider circles with his finger until, turning round and round, he began to stagger, and continued:

— Don't you see that we are at home here in the palace of God, in His benevolence, in His love, in His joy, in His enthusiasm, in His rejoicing, in His simplicity, His purity, His transparency; don't you see that we belong to His play, to His pleasures, to His sentiments, to His loves! The universe is our house, it is run through and through by God. Through it, God comes to us, entertains us, restores us, satisfies us; He waters us with His sweetest flows; He emerges from us through all our desires, our inclinations, our thirsts, our hungers, our struggles, our victories, our despairing. Don't you see that God loves to come to you through me and to me through you, that He likes to hide and be found? You see the sky, you see the earth, it is our home here, Conrad, we are in our house; beneath the moon, beyond it, we will eternally be splashing up somewhere in that residence of God, always a little more filled with His ineffable and life giving presence. That is

enough for me, Conrad, that is enough. I don't want to know about anything else anymore because nothing else is really knowledge. The true wisdom is that this is enough for us. Do you understand it? All the rest confuses and destroys us. Our intelligence rejoices in the intelligence of God, --that is the truth; in fact, that is our dialogue with the truth.

— But sin, Master, suffering, the canons of the Church, the inclination toward evil, the human drama, the sorrows of this world ...

— Why are you talking to me about the nothingness that is passing away while I am speaking to you about the divine that is coming to pass? Don't detach a section of time from the web of eternity, a portion of space from the divine fabric, don't tear the garment that God has made in a single piece, to make of it rags and tatters. The vision of the blessed is the vision of Being in its entirety and in its movement, and not the vision of an ox at the plow who traces his furrow bent to the ground and doesn't perceive anything of the landscape which encompasses and feeds him.

I shrugged. What can you say to an old man who has lost it?

No horse, no mule, no cart were placed at our disposition. We would have to confront alone, the Master and I, all the perils of the journey. I left as if leaving on a pilgrimage, full of sins to be pardoned, of indulgences to obtain, saying farewell to all my brothers, for the pilgrim never knows which cathedral his steps will lead him to, the one on earth or the one in the beyond. He only knows that he is walking and that he will walk as long as he sins. Sin is what makes distance and thus produces the space the pilgrim tries to undo by returning to the center, to the great Cathedral, the Cathedral of cathedrals.

On the way, a merchant with a white beard and a bent back recognized Father Eckhart and greeted him as you would greet the best of friends. He took us on his barge which was returning to Strasbourg. As the Strasbourg convent was closed to us ever since the prior succumbed to his wounds subsequent to the revolt of the anti-Eckhart monks, the merchant, who was named Guibert, welcomed us to his home. He suggested that we continue our journey in the company of his eldest son, who was to escort his sister Ida, given in marriage to a vintner of Chalon. The Master accepted immediately without consulting me in any way.

The highway which led us to the Rhone was reputed to be dangerous, but Gislebert, Ida's brother, was a valiant fighter, had a good sword and knew how to use it. In Strasbourg, malicious rumors had it that he liked to fight. We were equipped with a sturdy cart drawn by two good horses. Except for Ida, we had no more baggage than what was necessary for the journey. As for Ida, she was betrothed to Bertolf the vintner, her dowry paid as a contract to purchase wines. The deal was advantageous for both families. Guiberts family secured a top-priority supply of superior quality, and Bertolf would no longer have to worry about the distribution of his wares in Germany, even in the Lowlands and further,

since Guibert traded all along the Rhine, and by the Rhine to England.

It was approaching noon, and we got down from the cart to eat and left the horses at a tuft of rich grass near a brook. The maiden would eat nothing and, through her veil, tried to hold back tears. The Master approached her in order to talk, but she all of a sudden arose and fled into the woods. Gislebert didn't budge, convinced that she would return of her own accord, but she didn't return. The Master went out to look for her, and Gislebert followed him. As for me, I watched the horses. The sun was moving along and they still had not come back. Growing worried, I called out to them in a loud voice. Then is when I must have attracted the robbers. However it may be I woke up in the arms of the Master, who was mopping my forehead with cold water. They had all three returned, but the cart and horses had disappeared. Gislebert roared at his sister. He took a green and knotted branch to whip her the way it ought to be done, but the Master intervened. Gislebert didn't have to do much to get around him, especially since I encouraged him to strike hard, and not pay any attention to the Master. She had cost us two horses, a carriage, our belongings and placed us in a serious predicament that could cost us our lives. A girl so stupid and badly raised should not be given to a man. But the Master would not give in. He went so far as to shove Gislebert, who was obviously unwilling to strike the old man. In the altercation, the girl's veil was pulled off and her dress torn down to the waist. I saw then how young the fiancée was. She was probably no older than twelve or thirteen. There was still time to set her straight. She was not compliant, however, and, like a rabid cat, took advantage of the Master's brief protection to scratch her brother in the face and pull his hair as hard as she could. Gislebert struck her with enough force to subdue her without, however, wounding her face; this would have annoyed the future husband. He should have been congratulated for this, but the Master didn't see it that way.

— My friend, he exclaimed, I think you are very hard on your sister and very weak on yourself. How can a variant man bring himself to strike such a young girl?

— But, Father Eckhart, I ... was all he had time to answer.

— It is not by whip lashes that you will understand your sister and know what is worrying her.

— But what are you talking about? There's nothing to understand, he replied, shrugging his shoulders.

— We don't know anything about that girl, so what can we do to help her.

— Help her! Gislebert continued, but we don't have a cart or horses anymore. We can't carry her on our backs to Chalon.

— I am not talking to you about helping her walk this highway which is leading her away from herself, I am talking to you about helping her move ahead on a road that will bring her closer to herself.

Gislebert remained speechless, and the girl straightened out her dress, put her veil back on and went up to the Master who enfolded her in his arms.

— Walk in front, you two, the Master enjoined. I will stay behind with her to hear her confession.

They walked at a distance the rest of the afternoon. If he did confess her, it was rapid and the penance was light, for at the end of scarcely one hour, they were chatting and laughing like two children. We arrived before nightfall at a very quiet little inn where we were able to dine and where we planned on spending the night. The evening was mild and the innkeepers welcoming. After the meal, the Master, who had drunk at one go the two cups of wine that were served him, threw out without further ado this question:

— Do you know what marriage is?

No one dared to answer.

—If you don't know, then, why are you taking this child to Chalon?

Gislebert clenched his fists but didn't dare reply.

— And you, my child, do you at least know what you're getting into?

She wanted to open her mouth, but her brother threw her a scathing look that paralyzed her outright.

— So you do not know, you either, what you are going to do at Chalon. It's high time then to instruct you, my daughter, seeing that you were just about to give us your opinion about your father's proposition.

— Gislebert ordered a beer and drank it in one swallow while looking away.

— If I understand your brother correctly, he is telling us in his way: "You can talk all you want to, but the deal is so to speak already done." So then, let us talk. And you, my secretary, part-time notary, man of law, man of religion, you doubtless know how to instruct this girl. Tell her, please, what marriage is.

Did I have any choice about answering? I did it as I would have done it with a group of ordinary young people in any parish.

— Marriage is at the same time civil and religious, I answered. On the civil side, the accent is on the *copulatio* for the purpose of procreation. Its role is to ensure without harm the transmission of a fund of wealth, of glory, and of honor, and to guarantee to the descendants blood of equal or superior rank to that of the ancestors. The men of the family hold the right and duty to marry off the young people and marry them well, that is to say, on the one hand, to give the daughters away, to negotiate for the best their power of procreation and the advantages they should bequeath to their offspring, on the other hand to help the boys to take

suitable wives.

—And what does it mean, to take a wife? the Master asked.

— It is, for the husband, to bring her to his home where she ceases depending on her father, her brothers, and her uncles, and is submitted to her husband. However, she remains a stranger as long as it is uncertain whether she is totally devoted to her new family. She should be watched to guard against the risk of betraying bed and blood. She should be kept apart. It is necessary also to make sure of her virginity, for what is lost cannot be given; if she is not a virgin, she can give birth by another man and cause the blood to lie. This is a terrible crime.

— And why so much distrust? the Master asked.

— Children are loyal to their families by nature and out of interest. Men have only one family and so do not experience any conflict of loyalty, while married women have two families and, because of this fact, often find themselves in a conflict of interest. In principle, they should prefer their husbands, but they remain attached by numerous ties to their father's family. Their hearts remain for a long time in a state of confusion and it would be unwise to trust them.

Gislebert had swallowed three or four beers and seemed more and more pleased with my repartee.

— That is what you say about the civil side. Now, about the religious, what do you say? the Master continued.

— Marriage puts the accent on consensus. Despite the perils of the carnal, marriage can become the metaphor of the alliance between Christ and his Church. The accords should proceed then from an individual choice.

Gislebert almost choked on his beer.

— So there's a contradiction then between the civil and the religious! the Master exclaimed.

I began to feel very hot. Gislebert ordered me a beer, hoping no doubt that I would clarify my ideas and return to the facts. I drank it in one gulp, after which - and I couldn't have been more surprised - the Master in turn ordered me a full pitcher which I drank in the same way.

The canon provides for this, I finally answered. The man takes a wife to be united to her in a unique and singular manner in shared love. But it is a love of *caritas* in which the man protects the woman because she is weak, and protects her from herself because of her weaknesses. The man is like the stronghold of the woman, yes, I did say the stronghold. Out of gratitude for that protection, the woman submits herself to him as she should. Her body belongs to her husband, her soul to God. Just as a lord holds in submission all of his lands so that they might produce, so the husband holds in tenure his wife's body so that it will reproduce

him, him and his blood. But the wife should not forget that she has two spouses and that she owes her soul to her divine spouse. That is why she shouldn't take pleasure in giving herself. Just as she cannot refuse her body to her husband, so she cannot abandon her soul to him in pleasure. The man should not under any conditions excite his wife, he takes her cold according to her nature for the discharge of the debitum. If he were ever to awaken her sensuality, how could he be sure of her fidelity?

Gislebert tapped me on the shoulder and served me another glass. I had answered well, and no one could do anything against my reasoning. The Master must have been happy about this, since he smiled at every swallow I took and at every word I got carried away with. At least that's what I believed.

— And the ritual? he continued.

— It follows from the canon. At the beginning of the night, when the husband and wife are together in the same bed, the husband calls the priest, the bride's father and her brothers. The married couple are incensed, blessed and entrusted to God. The father or the eldest brother invokes Him thus: "So that they may live in His divine love, persevere in concord and that their seed may multiply all their days and from age to age." After this, he warns the husband to guard against the triple insecurity of women which is rape, lust, and sorcery. After this the family and the priest withdraw and wait behind the door for the sound of the *containment*.- this is the pain of the penetration from which a little blood should appear on the sheet. Sin has condemned us to the two twins: *dolor* and *labor*. These are the couple's first children, which will protect them all their lives against pleasure and its sins. Marriage is a holy thing as much in the civil as in its religious aspect; to perpetuate the lineage and provide oneself with a sinless love requires removing all frivolity, all passion, all fantasy, all pleasure from marriage. That is why, even if in principle consent should be freely given, the girl who wishes to refuse the suitor chosen by the father must demonstrate that it is a bad marriage and not refuse it out of caprice or a sudden change of mood. We must unceasingly bring this to mind: it is impossible to enjoy the things of this earth without losing one's soul. The husband's love is a tender and spiritual love, and the wife's love, reverence. It is preferable that the married couple not feel much attraction, for otherwise, turmoil would enter their lives.

Gislebert was truly proud of me. He had probably understood only what suited him. As for me, I was perspiring through every pore in my skin, for I detested talking about things this despicable and was afraid of provoking a reaction in my flesh by speaking about them. I did all I could to keep my wits about me, but sleep overcame me, the more so since I had swallowed a goodly number of beers. Ida was all smiles while her brother almost slept on the table.

— You have spoken well, Conrad, you describe our present customs well. And now, what is the ideal of marriage?

— It should be the image of the love between Christ and his Church.

I was no longer able to collect my ideas and couldn't go any further. The Master continued in my place:

— You talk like a book, but the books themselves go further than you do. Natural love is the love of the creative emanation, God is a creative essence, and the woman who conceives makes that essence of God manifest. The ideal of natural love between a man and a woman is in God. God formulates all His creatures in His eternal Word, as in a woman. We should learn how His natural goodness constrains Him to sow His seed in the Word. The soul which opens itself to God's natural love is like a virgin. Because it has become a total emptiness, God pours Himself out into it as perfectly as into His seraphim. This is how a man and a woman should love each other in this world. Natural love glorifies creation. It is written in the book of Song of Songs: "Would that he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For his love is worth more than wine, your perfumes have a sweet odor; your name is a perfume that spreads its fragrance; that is why the maidens love you." And further on: "He made me enter the house of wine; and the banner he spreads over me is love. Sustain me with raisin cakes, strengthen me with apples: for I am sick with love. Would that his left hand were under my head, and his right embraced me! I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and the hinds of the field, do not awaken, do not awaken love before it wishes." God does not give Himself before man desires Him with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his strength; in the same way, the man should not touch a woman before she desires it with all her heart. Love is not first of all a commandment, rather it is a beginning of being, of the being of the woman and the being of the man, and the being of their children after that.

Gislebert was almost completely asleep, but as for me, I was still awake and I wanted to bring the Master back to common sense.

— But, Father Eckhart, I continued, you can't let marriage fall prey to female emotions.

— How would this be more serious than letting it fall prey to masculine passions? Christianity is there to attract, progressively, human customs toward the divine ideal and not to justify and harden the institutions of one time.

— What are you saying there, Master! You risk scandalizing these poor people.

The innkeepers, even as they were serving us, had lost nothing of the conversation. They even seemed truly interested. They had even got to the point of asking Ida if she wanted anything and served her a milk that was plenty hot enough. Decidedly, the Master wasn't able to discriminate between a scholarly discussion and a speech adapted for an ignorant public. I wanted him to be quiet and motioned to him that we were being heard by illiterate strangers and a girl without education.

— If I scandalize these people, I would not be the first, Eckhart retorted. As to this girl, if this offends her, then she is not old enough to marry. You will recall

that Hubert de Romans was General of our order from 1254 to 1263. I never knew him while he was alive. Nonetheless, it was he who, through his works, made me understand the relativity of time. Time should not be conceived of as a homogeneous block, where the past and the future are consistent with the present, maintaining purely anagogical relationships with the present. Hubert thought about the history of Christianity, and sought its explanation in a sequence of natural causes, a bit like Guglielmo. His personal experience of the failures of the Church, of the lowering of the imperial dignity to the detriment of the papacy, of the withdrawal of the Latin footholds in the East, prevented him from believing in the necessity for a Church that is Western and Catholic, prevented him from believing that the entire universe will inevitably become Catholic merely with the passage of time. If the Church ceases to enlighten human practices by the ideal that each person can perceive in the intimacy of his or her own conscience, and makes itself the censor of the morals of a people and an age, she will shatter into a thousand pieces before the end of the next three centuries. The Church is there to bring into time what is new and not to perpetuate institutions, to continue the creation and not to make fast the wrecks of time. Do you really understand that, my friend? If you understand that, you understand what I have done in my life and what I am about to do; if you don't understand that, you understand nothing of my life and what I will soon do. So this, then, is my conclusion : I will oppose this girl's marriage so long as I am not convinced that she agrees with all her heart to love and live with Bertolf, as her father expects of her. If the civil law has its reasons, Christianity is an inspiration which has its reasons also, and it is my duty to make this union Christian, or prevent it.

Gislebert had probably understood only the last two sentences Eckhart said and this was enough to wake him up with a start and this angry answer:

— What are you saying there, old monk? You're the one they're taking to Avignon to answer for heresy! If you weren't my father's friend, I wouldn't hesitate to leave you right here and now. I had better not see you stick your nose into my family's affairs, or you'll bitterly regret it!

— It's not me it's a question of here, but your sister. In the coming week, the happiness or unhappiness of her whole life will be decided, and if you love her, you will pay attention to it,

— I won't leave my father's business and what will soon be mine to the whims of a virgin thirteen years old.

It was then that the girl began to scream.

- I'm not a virgin!

She broke down in tears in Father Eckhart's arms. Gislebert's eyes flashed fire but he remained speechless.

— Don't be afraid of anything, girl, the Master said. Speak, I am listening.

Through her sobs and moans I managed to understand this:

— At Easter I was introduced to Bertolf and they left me alone with him. He had drunk a lot of wine and wanted to kiss me. I didn't want to. He made me so afraid that I wanted to throw up. He threw me on his bed and took me by force. It hurt so bad. I hate him.

— The deal is irreversible, you little idiot, Gislebert managed to say in his rage, you can no longer be given now to anybody else.

— You are wrong, the Master retorted. God never abandons His children to despair. Now let us go to sleep. We will see this matter more clearly in the dawn.

— Yes, and I will rest assured, Father Eckhart, because you can't do anything about it, Gislebert concluded.

We really did sleep soundly, carried by our libations farther off and later than we would have liked. In the morning, Ida and Father Eckhart were no longer there. I understood immediately why they had encouraged us to drink. They ought to be returning now in the direction of Strasbourg. Eckhart knew Guibert very well, and doubtless was trying to convince him to renounce this marriage in spite of all the advantages he could gain from it. It was not long before Gislebert reached the same conclusion, but he was determined not to let himself be imposed upon. After all, this marriage was certainly more his own affair, since he would soon take charge of his father's business, than that of Guibert who, though still head of the family, was already aged. Nevertheless, it is the father who should decide. Gislebert feared that the two old men would come to an understanding; at that advanced age, they get tenderhearted over nothing. Grabbing a bread loaf from the table, he left precipitously and I followed him. He didn't want to wait for me, but I succeeded in persuading him that I alone had authority over Father Eckhart and that I was mandated to bring him to Avignon and that, out of obedience, he would follow me there at once. I followed on his heels as best I could, but the young man was almost running and I had difficulty in catching my breath.

— Don't walk so fast, I kept repeating to him. An old man and a child can't go very far in such a short time.

In the distance we caught sight of our cart which came toward us driven by four men, more perhaps. We hid in a grove of small trees. The best thing would have been to let them pass but, when the vehicle was even with us, Gislebert leapt onto it like a panther. The battle was especially violent. The horses took the bit between their teeth. I saw a man fall and lie lifeless. I was afraid for Gislebert. I ran toward him. The man had a sword planted in the middle of his back. Luckily it wasn't Gislebert. I had lost sight of the cart. Concealing myself in the thickets along the road, I slowly advanced. At any moment I expected to be caught by surprise or to discover Gislebert's corpse on the side of the road. It was terribly hot. The sun showed it was noon. Suddenly I heard a moan and found Gislebert

stretched out in the ditch. His arm was bloody. I made a bandage with some mud and a piece of my soutane. He had been mightily stunned and only with great difficulty was he able to arise. His terrible anger did him no good; we went forward very slowly now. We arrived at Strasbourg worn out the next day, a little before noon.

The Master, the girl, and Guibert were talking quietly. The innkeepers, moved by the girl's declaration and reassured by the Master's words, had loaned them a horse and a tipcart. The moon was bright, and they reached Strasbourg in the wee hours. Ida had told her father everything and Eckhart was seeking to persuade him.

— Don't listen to him, Father, Gislebert promptly yelled on his arrival. That man is a heretic.

— Sit down, my son, and listen to me well. I love you more than anything in the world and want to leave you a good business. I am old and very tired. Because of this, I didn't go to Chalon myself to meet Bertolf and conclude the betrothal. I placed complete confidence in you. Did you take all the usual precautions? I'm afraid you didn't! As for Ida, I didn't even think of asking her opinion. I have total confidence in Father Eckhart; he made me see where I was wrong. The ecclesiastical authorities are right to place the consent of the spouses above business considerations. Marriage should above all unite two human beings and not two families, two inheritances, two networks of interests.

Gislebert looked at me, hoping that I would intervene. I was totally confused. I thought of the General's last words, when he warned me to take every precaution vis-à-vis Eckhart; on the other side I saw the Master, so calm and sure of himself. I did not, obviously, look at the girl because that was against the rule. I finally recalled my promise to obey the General whatever the circumstances, and to conform in all things to the most commonly held doctrine. Thus quieted, I was not long in answering:

— Father Eckhart, you have forgotten that the monk Henry of Lausanne was persecuted as a heretic because he claimed to liberate the institution of matrimony from all civil obligations. That is what he preached at Le Mans; he wanted marriage to be founded exclusively on mutual consent.

— Yes, Conrad my friend, and that was in 1116; since that time the Church has been obligated to pass beyond these customs in order to face up to the more enlightened minds of our time. You cannot build something as sacred as marriage on fear of women. It is natural for men to fear the uncertain, the possible and the creative powers of nature, women, and his own heart. We are afraid of the dark because darkness conceals the real and suggests the possible. Likewise, we fear the future and not the past.

The past is defined and we know what it contains, but the future brings us a possibility we don't yet know. Because we don't know her, in our minds Woman is

indeterminate like darkness and the future. So we fear her. That is why we act so brutally toward her. But the danger rests much more in ourselves, in our fear and in our cruelty. Haven't I already told you: in all things, but especially in the divine nature, equality is the birth of the One, and that birth of the One, in the One and with the One, that is the principle and origin of the love that burns and bursts into flower. Without equality there is no love and without love, marriage is only an outrage and a profanation. Conrad, my friend, I feel so sad that after making so much progress, you are stuck once again in your fears. Didn't Katrei give you confidence, breathe into you a second birth, a conversion of the spirit! This distrust of yours today, where does it come from? And me, have I ever deceived you? Do you, too, consider me a heretic?

— Enough of your monks' speculations, Gislebert unexpectedly retorted; Bertolf won't wait for my sister forever. Wheher she likes it or not I'll bring her to him.

— You will not bring her, my son, the father declared with authority.

— But Father, she's my only sister and she is no longer a virgin. Who would want her now? What will I do with her?

— Father Eckhart will take her to one of the many beguignages in town, and if someday you find a match for her that suits you and that she accepts, you will go and get her. The Beguines make simple annual promises that don't necessarily obligate them to celibacy for life.

— I positively oppose this, Gislebert answered back.

— It is for that reason, my son, that I must make sure that Ida is escorted to a beguignage that is well protected, with the order that she only leave with her consent.

At that, we left Gislebert to his anger and left for the beguignage. On the way, Guibert grew deeply depressed. He was finding it harder and harder to walk, to the point that we were forced to stop beside a fountain. He began to shed great silent tears. Old men lose a good deal of heat, and this affects their faculties, lessens their resistance and heightens their sensibility. Little by little they are weakened into a state of femininity, and that is why their sons can find themselves obligated to take over their businesses even before their deaths. I hoped that Gislebert would do this. Ida went up to her old father and wrapped herself around his shoulders.

— I realize today more than ever to what degree I've lived alone, he confessed to her. Your mother was a good wife and a good mother, in every way in accordance with what a man expect of a woman. I practically never spoke with her, seeing as she foresaw my smallest desires and responded to them even before I made them known to her. Your birth was especially difficult and she lost a lot of her blood. Seeing that she was about to breathe her last, I asked her: "Tell me sincerely, did you love me?"

— Haven't I served you well? she answered. Isn't that enough for you?" Her eyes kept the coldness I had always known. It was at that moment that I understood that she had never known or loved me, and neither had I ever known or loved her. The monks in a community are closer to one another than a husband is to his wife. And yet, she was beautiful, your mother, and she possessed a beautiful soul, a tender and gentle heart. She died at the very moment when I would have wanted to know her. She died alone, terribly alone. I wouldn't want you to be abandoned like that, Ida.

The girl burst out sobbing in her father's arms. She wrapped herself around him quite openly and the old man let her do it. He placed his hand on her head and closed his eyes. The sun shone on their intermingled hair, half golden, half silver. Time made a little circle, and the image remained as if congealed in a suspended drop. The Master kept at a distance and savored that privileged moment when the past seems to whisper to the future secrets intended to make it a better one. For a moment I thought I was going to get carried away with emotion, but I succeeded in keeping on course. Now I was in a hurry for the incident to be over, for we needed to arrive at Avignon within two weeks.

It was in entering the beguignage that I understood why the walls were so thick, the windows divided in such small squares, the doors so heavy and the guard so watchful. Women and girls sought refuge there, those with marital difficulties and those who had quarreled with their families or run away from their husbands. It happened sometimes that these women would be transferred from one beguignage to another to avoid a family's justice or even an ecclesiastical court. A number of men would lend them a hand and it was not rare, it was said, for one of them to freely take a fancy to one of these girls. How could they let such things go on? Several recommended - like Marsilius of Padua, William of Ockham and Jean de Jandun, in *The Defender of Peace*, - a complete declericalization of the Church which, according to them should be content with its purely spiritual mission. The exercise of its authority would be limited to specifically pastoral functions, and every form of coercive power, even for the maintenance of matrimonial discipline, would pass into the hands of the princes, defenders of the civil and religious peace. This was a disgrace. They had forgotten the six powers of Gregory VII's *Dictatus Papae*: First, the Roman Church is founded by God alone and not by any princes. Secondly, only the pope can use the imperial ensigns of Rome. Thirdly, all the princes must kiss the pope alone. Fourthly, a decision rendered by the pope cannot be annulled by anyone save the pope himself. Fifthly, the pope can be judged by no one. Sixthly, the Roman Church is never in error and never will be in error, eternally; the Scriptures bear witness to this. And here these women, aided by lovers without a cent and monks who have lost their bearings, are digging out for themselves cozy nooks of rebellion in which they claim that Christianity, the true kind, they say, is little by little bursting its way in. There they develop profitable cottage industries - dressmaking, embroidery, and even weaving and dying. They cultivate a garden and have a few animals at their disposal. Into their den they receive the destitute and sick, whom they care for, though they know nothing. They give the appearance of righteousness yet are no more than thieves on society's fringes. They steal from their father and their brothers a blood and a

milk that no longer benefit anyone but themselves. The Church is right not to tolerate any of this.

The Master was known in all the beguignages. The Mistress who welcomed us treated him like a great friend and went so far as to kiss him on the cheek. She assured Guibert that his daughter would be well protected and that her brother would not be able to do her any harm. If there are robbers in the country, there are in the city robber-women. These steal nothing other than one of the greatest riches families have, their most beautiful daughters, and if they were vowed to a monastery, they steal them from the Church. They aren't wrong to burn them on the public square like they flay highway robbers or tear the fingers off pickpockets. And here a Dominican, and not the least of them, one of their greatest Masters, who was a prior and a provincial, who took the chair of Saint Thomas, who taught even in Paris, that such a man supports them, entrusts them with girls, instructs them, brings them books and who knows what else! I know very well that there is no bad intent on his part, the General confirmed this, but what dangerous naïveté. He is happy that this is coming to an end, that he is being taken to Avignon where, I hope, he will know how to defend himself where he is right, and bow the knee where he is wrong.

We returned the horse and tipcart to the innkeepers and continued our journey on foot the next day. The Master walked at a snail's pace, yet we had more than two hundred kilometers to cover through the Vosges and the Haute-Saône before reaching Chalon. We didn't have a cent either for a horse, or for lodging. We were ordered to avoid monasteries, because the affair incited tumult and provoked serious seditious movements among the monks. We were obliged to depend, like the Mendicants, on the country people's generosity. If that delighted the Master, worry crept over me. At any moment the Master could fall from exhaustion, or fail to get a breath, or simply decide to die, leaving me alone in this dense forest crawling with flesh-and-blood animals and strange immaterial things. What were we going to eat for dinner, for supper? Where were we going to sleep? Perhaps in a ditch watching the wolves, or in the abode of a witch who would take advantage of our sleep to sell our souls to the Devil.

— Don't panic, the Master said, we are in the Intellect of God. The worst that can happen to us is to find ourselves on the shores of Purgatory with Beatrice.

He began to laugh while citing some of the tortures Dante described, inflicted on souls who had recently crossed the Styx.

— It could be that Proserpina, the wife of Pluto, god of Hades, will intone for you some incantations and offer you potions that will make you drunk.

But I wasn't about to laugh. So he then proceeded to the heavenly side.

— There, you won't be afraid of women anymore, he told me, because in Heaven your love will exceed your desire. You will rejoice in their beauty and their chants and you will be surprised at the purity of their adoration. You will hold Katrei's

hand and weep a deluge of loving tears in gratitude for our all being invited to the pleasure of the Trinity: the communion of love.

I wasn't able to make him be silent. Luckily a carter approached and agreed to take us with his equipage, saying we would bring him good luck against the pillagers and brigands. Two hired men and three goliards en route to Basel accompanied him. The carter was going as far as the Haute-Saône with barrels of oil. It was a superb day and everyone was in a good mood. With shrill voices, they sang and chattered. But the Master was so tired that he went to sleep just like that on the casks, splashed with a filtered light that seemed to intoxicate him. But me, I had to endure the vulgar talk of these crude men. As for the goliards, who called themselves artist-philosophers, they made use of the little they had learned in Paris to parody the most sacred things.

I had barely left the monastery and did not know the country folk's dire poverty and the vulgarity of low-class city-dwellers. Certainly I had treated the wounds and diseases of our peasantry when they came to the convent, but I knew nothing of their customs and their lives. Not all the casks on the cart contained oil; wine abounded and they drank a lot of it, which consequently dissolved the little bit of restraint these people had. Their bawdy songs made all the birds fly away, except for the magpies and crows, perhaps:

— And the lady drank and the Master drank, the soldier drank and the clerk drank... The quick man and the lazy man, and the white man drank and the black man, and the steadfast and the fickle, the peasant and the sorcerer and the poor like the sick, the exile like the unknown man ... And the monks too, that's what unites us ...

They began to laugh coarsely, while imitating breeding bulls by gestures to which I didn't think a man could lower himself.

— Aren't you afraid of Hell? I challenged, hoping by this to cool them down.

— It's a beautiful place, one of the goliards responded, and always hot and there are plenty of women and lots of jubilation. You don't die of boredom there like in Heaven. I admit preferring Persephone to the Virgin Mary. How can you get there?

— I refused to answer their provocations.

— By doing this, he suggested to one of his pals. And he mounted the other, who had gotten down on all fours. I looked away.

— Don't hold your nose up in the air like that, my good man, you wouldn't exist if your father hadn't done that, and for lack of a woman it's better to practice it between ourselves than alone in a monk's cell.

I wanted to instruct them about the sin against nature, the worst and most serious one:

— It is better to sin with a woman than among yourselves. If you don't fear Hell, you might fear your bishop who can have your eyelids torn out for such a sin. It is written in the books on penance.

— What naïveté, good monk! You aren't living on this earth. If that law were applied to the letter, a great number of bishops would be blind and you, already you don't see anything at all any more! Do you believe that all men kneel at their bishops' feet? Dante didn't write just about Hell, he wrote *De monarchia*. The bishops wanted the authority of the Empire to be subjected to the Church, so they told us that "according to Genesis, God created two lights, one large and one smaller, one to govern the day, the other to govern the night." This, they allege, is an allegory of the two types of power: the spiritual and the temporal. Then they maintain that, just like the smaller luminary, the moon, the civil authority has no light of its own, but only what it receives from the sun. Thus the temporal power has no other authority than what proceeds from the spiritual power. They also say that the apostles said to Jesus, at the moment when they came to arrest him: "Behold, here are two swords." Jesus is supposed to have answered: "That is enough." On this text, they establish the doctrine of the two swords, one for the civil power and the other for the religious. But we, the goliards, we don't just have a university education, we know how to reflect on it besides. Do you think that men will be dupes forever? For a long time the nobility has held the two swords: as a civil lord, it is the architect of all that is visible, with its institutions, its taxes, its rights, and its laws that it arranges in accordance with its own interest. And, as Catholic bishop, it constructs the invisible and its laws according to the dividends they can bring it. However, to forge the earth and Heaven too is always and only to forge images and fears. Those are all their powers. Men are supposed to fear the visible city because of its laws and its sword, and the invisible city because of its rules and its Hells. Go and ask others, not us! As for us, what we're afraid of is the poison they've put in our minds! And as for them, what they fear in the depths of their hearts is that we might stop being afraid.

— The Church has the power to bind in Heaven and to bind on earth, I answered.

— Oh well! Bind and bind, the goliard replied, except that your bonds are nothing more than wind and their only support is fear and ignorance. But ignorance won't always be with you; ignorance is going away, ignorance is tired, it can't bear our using her anymore.

— Do you believe, another added, that married men never have sex on Sunday, nor on feast days, nor during Lent, nor on fast days? Do you believe that young people observe penance and confess it every time that they throw up ...

— But don't you fear death? I replied.

— It is less to be feared than a life without sin, he shot back. But you, my father, don't tell me that never ... No, I know the difference between a monk and a goliard: the former doesn't know what his left hand is doing while his right hand holds the Gospel, while the latter always knows what his two hands are doing.

The difference is the degree of hypocrisy. The monk sins twice, once against the flesh and once against the truth, while we, we only sin in your eyes. But under your soutane everyone knows what's going on.

And they began to laugh so hard that the Master woke up.

— What a beautiful day, he mumbled while opening his eyes, and so much gaiety!

— That you don't know the object of, I answered the Master to give him something on which to get a grip.

— What difference does the object make, Father Conrad, it's the subject that's important. With the sun so glorious, a little hazy, but so warm, so good for my bones, to hear laughter is a good thing.

— But these young people are sullyng decency and the Church, and all they talk about is that, I objected.

— Generally, indecency like violence is a thing that is passed on from one to another, and perhaps all they are doing is trying to return that indecency and that violence to whoever represents the ones who gave it to them.

I couldn't have been more shocked at the allusion, but he said that with a naïveté and a charm so disconcerting that the goliards kept silent for a moment and, taking advantage of this silence, the Master continued his thought:

— I am asking myself who is the one who scandalized you. Did he wear a soutane, perhaps? The first one to scandalize me was the bishop of Erfurt who did nothing, nothing at all except smile, when my brother and his two accomplices burned a poor peasant and his two daughters. It was he who, the same day, consecrated my brother as a knight, protector of the widow and the orphan! What cruelty, what lies, what hypocrisy! It is fortunate that a little later I was able to come across a holy monk, good in his heart, and who knew God. Without him, it is possible that I might have run away to Paris to the College of Arts and that today I might be taking a break with you, cursing the monks and the bishops. But tell me, good people, that indecency they gave you, what are you going to do with it? Give it to others? Why curse the clergy who scandalized you while you cast on others that same scandal?

— But we aren't casting that malice on anyone. While laughing, we open people's eyes, and we reckon on showing the blind that they are following other blind men worse than themselves.

— The project is praiseworthy, but I fear that your means will betray you.

— And how is that?

— To catch sight of injustice, it is not sufficient to decry it. As proof of this, most of the bishops who are lords inveigh even more than you do against injustices they

themselves are guilty of and, for the most part, they aren't even aware of their duplicity. To grasp injustice, we must understand justice, listen to it in the depths of ourselves and allow it to penetrate all of our life till it comes out the pores of our skin. We can never drive out injustice other than by introducing justice into our lives. That being said, tell me, one after the other, what happened to you. Who hurt you and who enlightened you, the worst and the best?

The rest of the afternoon passed in an atmosphere that was light, but rarely inappropriate. One by one, the young men recounted the most significant anecdotes of their lives. The Master listened to them and directed the discussion by small and carefully measured questions. He seemed to have forgotten the journey completely and only paid attention to these scatterbrained scholars who became a little more serious the closer we came to the roadside inn.

They didn't have any more money than we did, so all five of us lay down in the stable with the horses. We had hulled a little of the oats and barley left in the mangers in a vain attempt to sustain ourselves. The next day, we travelled in the rain and in the evening we had to dry our clothes outdoors next to a fire. It was hard, we were nearly naked with these shameless boys who danced, jumped around and yelled. The Master didn't seem to pay any attention to their foolishness, but he immediately emphasized any hint of goodness he could filter through the brutishness of their speech and actions.

The following night, some peasants took us in to their hut and agreed to share their meal, provided that we tell them stories and teach the children songs. We ate wild rabbit with some roots and mushrooms. The children had a great time with the young goliards while the Master related to the peasants the adventures of a valiant knight who succeeds in saving a whole village from a treacherous lord who was getting ready to destroy the harvests. The Master spoke in a familiar and very gentle tone, and consequently won the parents' trust. At the end of the evening, while the children slept outside near the fire, and silence hummed in the murmurs of the forest, they told us of the death of one of their children during the winter. The Master wanted to console them, but they confessed, though not in so many words, that they had chosen him by lot and sacrificed him for the salvation of the others. The peasants of that region had the custom, in times of great famine, of choosing one of their children whom they would allow to die so as to save the others. It was told to me later that occasionally some of them ate this child in order to survive until springtime. The Master did not impose any penance on them, on the pretext that they had already done penance a thousand times in their hearts, and consoled them as best he could. They were happy that the new year was a good one, and until quite late on weekday evenings, when they were free of the obligation to labor for the lord, they cultivated a small parcel at the edge of the woods, one that yielded well. More and more at ease, the father of the family dared to ask us what needed to be done to avoid Hell.

— It is not possible to avoid sin, he said anxiously, there are too many rules and we don't know all of them. A monk came to the village and told us about the torments of Hell: to burn forever, and never to lose consciousness. It was

terrifying. Please, tell us what we have to do.

They seemed truly desperate.

— Have no fear, the Master answered. God can only see the good; in his eyes, evil does not exist. Evil passes so quickly that He doesn't have the time to see it. You are like Him, you don't know all that is evil, but that isn't important because you know what is good. It is sufficient for you to love one another as I see that you do, and to love your children as best you can. When you look at the mountains, the fields, the magic of life, what do you feel?

— We think that God is great, the father replied.

— Then, tell yourself that a God that great and who makes such beautiful things cannot be cruel and send to Hell poor people who are doing the best they can. Whatever they may say, look around you at the beauty of the world and say to yourself that, in spite of the suffering that lasts only for a while, there is goodness in the universe and that that goodness will receive you into its arms with more love than you can imagine.

The Master took a little poplar leaf in his hands and had us observe all its details:

— The life that created that so well cannot reserve anything so horrible as Hell for us.

And he took a piece of wood, a stone, a grain of wheat, everything that was at hand and marveled at it. There were sparks in his eyes and in the end he transmitted a little of his confidence to the parents. We fell asleep in so gentle a quiet that it was no longer possible to imagine Hell.

The journey continued another two days where we had to beg for our food and lodging in exchange for a few good words or services. The Master put all his heart into it and lived every moment with all the intensity of his spirit. He slept on the cart for many hours, however, while I endured as best I could the goliards' dirty jokes and stories. At one point, the Master was awakened by a church bell ringing the Angelus. He began to recite word for word the story that an old peasant had repeated to him the evening before, one that he said had been handed down from his ancestors:

"My life on earth has just four seasons. I spring up in the winter, stretch my legs in February, and work with all my strength in the spring to make my field and my garden produce. In the summer I stay bent over and harden my hands and my back. In the fall, I wither bit by bit and measure the fruits of my season. Winter covers me and carries me away, I hope, to the garden of God. Every year of my life has only four seasons. 'When April with its showers sweet, has pierced the drought of March down to the root, when Zephyr has, with his sweet breath, revived the tender shoot,' and when the little birds make melody then is the time to plow and hoe the earth, to tear it up and put the seed in it. Do everything before Easter, and then it's the feast you have to get ready for the lord. In May,

when the green leaves are dark and the sky is white, repair the house and the barn, the gates, the hedges and the drainage ditches. Weed the lord's gardens and take care of his land. If there's any time left over, weed your own piece. In the summer, we pull thistles on the lord's lands so that the Lord of lords will give us swiftness to serve him. On Saint John's Day, we must run through the fields with torches to drive away the dragons; the day after that is haymaking. It's hot on your lands, lord, and when we harvest, we soak the fields with our sweat. In November, we beat the flax with heavy swingles to separate the fiber from the stalks. It is the bloody month, we kill the animals so that forage will not be lacking. In winter, when the starlings fly away, in the time of cold, I have only one story to tell: the deer bell, the snow falls, and we wait for spring. We long for its return, for the barn is empty and it is so cold. Each day of life has only four seasons. Morning is springtime; noon, summer, in the evening autumn comes and winter falls in the night. Our days pass like chaff in the wind; sometimes some seeds remain and fall into the ground, take root and make another season. I've had six children, four to fertilise the earth, two to make it yield. So it is that the sweat of the peasant rolls on the meadows of his lord. If you hear a child laugh, it's because he is in springtime and me, you don't hear me laugh, because I already see the winter coming.

- All the peasants around here tell that story like a prayer, the carter observed.

He hadn't seen Father Eckhart's tears of emotion.

— But why are you crying? the youngest goliard asked.

— I'm coming near to winter and I can't bear the Church anymore. I so much wanted to awaken her, I so much desired her conversion. But she did not convert, on the contrary, she is distancing herself from the peasants. How can a house stand if it no longer warms anyone?

— What would be the sign of that conversion? he asked.

— Conversion is the turning around of the light in the most humble thing on earth. We recognize conversion by the fact that what is low is found on high. When the peasant told his story yesterday, it is the deepest depths of Christianity that I heard. The simplicity of his days of labor teaches us the essential thing and we should all taste of his prayer. But it is not necessary to profit from him. We are living backwards; it is the noble who is pitiful when he feels no compassion.

— But what exactly is the essential thing? he wanted to know.

— Haven't you noticed that the rhythm of a poem, of a song, of a bell can dissolve time? The repetition of the same moment, its beating when it harmonizes with the beating of all nature; the beating of the heart and the seasons drowns the succession of time in a single moment. It is thus that the soul enters in to its little house. That little house of nothing at all is the most magnificent of strongholds. It is starting from this castle that the soul produces the world as the modulation of a chant on the rhythmic of eternity. Life is only a

pulsation of Eternity, but what a pulsation! There emanates out of it, through the layer of pain and hard labor that makes of it a humus, a feeling of humanity that is entirely the glory of God. For the glory of God is the noble man, and the noble man is the peasant, the ground and the breath of life. The peasant depends on the wind and the rains, and his life endures half as long as the lord's, but he is more true than the lord. The noble doesn't know that he depends on the earth, the peasant knows it. The noble doesn't know that he depends on the peasant, the peasant knows that he depends on himself. The noble only exists through the peasant but he doesn't know it, the peasant only exists through nature and he knows it, it is for that reason that the peasant knows a lot more things than the noble does. He knows the depth of his vulnerability, his fragility, and in the trembling that results from this, he becomes an opening and, in that opening, the penetration of the divine takes place, and in that penetration there is so much delight that the heart faints in its own depth. There it is, the essence of Christianity. When the Church converts itself, she will understand at last that the Word is equality. But I, yesterday, listening to the peasant's chant, I understood true Christianity, the one that is still sleeping, for winter is not yet done. I won't see the springtime, I won't see it with my eyes. I worked so much for this springtime, and I won't see it. The Church has buried itself alive in a tomb of stone, of doctrine and of power, and I fear for its life. Conrad, my friend, do you feel the fragile, delicate, frail and tenuous thread of Christianity and do you wish to maintain its integrity a while longer? Will you be able to protect it for one more step? A day will surely come when the earth will be warm enough to receive it. No, you don't understand! I plainly see, you don't understand! But your Christianity is sleeping under the layer of ice that covers your heart, it is not dead, I can feel it, it is not dead. This is my hope.

There was a huge silence, and in that silence I slept as though exhausted. No one was able to speak, and I, for my part, meditated on the words he had left me with. I no longer knew what to think. At times I said to myself, "He is a saint!", but at other times I told myself, "He's crazy!" At times I saw everything from the top down, but at other times, from the bottom up. When I believed the Master to be wise, I saw that the world was insane, when I believed that the world was wise, I saw that the Master was insane. I felt totally lost. To depend on the poor peasants for my sustenance was unbearable, and all these fields and all these forests made me terribly anxious. I was in a tremendous hurry to be back again inside the walls of a church, a monastery, or a city. I missed these walls dreadfully. The earth falls to pieces under the rain, but stone remains solid and passes the centuries. God cannot be what remains when all civilization disappears. But civilization cannot contain God either; what it contains of Him is only a shifting definition. So what is God, then? God, I am losing You, come back to me! And what if God leaps out of silence and the night, and what if God were only possible when we stop producing His image!

At Basel, the goliards gave us the pleasure of turning straight south to Milan. After that they hoped to reach Venice. They had heard of Marco Polo and his

fables, believed them, and wanted to attempt similar adventures. Monsters, chimeras and savages did not frighten them: they were even convinced that there could be a better civilization somewhere else, in unknown lands, far from Rome and Jerusalem. They said that, if Christ were the Son of God, He must have preached His Gospel everywhere men lived. For them, it was not obvious that Paul and Peter had interpreted Him best; others, they said, had no doubt understood Him better. Not only did the Master not oppose this: he even came close to encouraging them by saying that, in any case, the Word is within all men and all women and that this gives great hope that, everywhere in the universe, Christianity can emerge.

All during the journey these young people had drawn closer to Father Eckhart. Through their crude exterior a certain tenderness was more and more to be grasped, and in this the Master sowed a seed for days less occupied. Some of them were more attached to him than others. As he left us, the youngest said to Father Eckhart, with sparkling and laughing eyes:

— I will always remember you. More than one monk has shocked and hurt me; and you are the first that I believe has integrity and is worthy of respect. If you're ever cold in Heaven, come then and warm yourself a few hours in Hell. We'll arrange a little corner for you and we'll recall the finest memories of our one hell of a life on earth.

He burst out laughing so heartily that, forgetting all that was appropriate, I myself entered into their juvenile mirth for a moment. The Master took leave of them with such benevolence that one might have thought he was their father. On their side, I think that they were awkwardly seeking to hide the worry of their goodbyes in the piercing chants they began to intone in perfect harmony with the crows.

At Basel, we were able to join a convoy which was going to Chalon. The Master seemed to have taken on strength and assurance from his immersion in a vat of libertine young people, peasants, summer sun, and untamed forest; he seemed to have undergone a rejuvenation which brought him back to what he was long before all the worries of the trial, a trial he seemed moreover to have forgotten completely. At Chalon, the Master had not forgotten Bertolf, however, and insisted on meeting him. It was in vain that I opposed this and tried to lose him in the city; he found the place and, without any hesitation, knocked on Bertolf's door. After very brief introductions, the Master called the man to account in these terms:

— I must inform you that you broke your own engagement the day that you took a girl who hadn't yet been given to you; no dowry grants you the right to a human being, bear that well in mind. Guibert absolves you of the compensation that he has the right to impose for the dishonor done to his daughter and her family. However, he does want you to respect the contract already signed, which places him under obligation. If the contract were to become a dead letter, he would be

obliged to make an agreement with another vintner. News of the affair could spread and harm both families. As for the rest, Guibert leaves you the choice of suggesting as causes for the break, those that would blemish your honor the least. That is Guibert's message. Now, mine. Without a doubt you have neither the sensitivity nor the honor necessary to appreciate your action, but dread that day when you will encounter your life's reflection with an awareness that is freer. I hope that you will have enough of the experience of God and His mercy then to forgive yourself. For it can be painful, in the evening of life, when awareness releases, in spite of us, the thickness of lies which cover it, it can be painful then to encounter the truth. We will all arrive at a moment when the soul will be left naked with itself. May we then have forgiven enough to absolve ourselves. If you still intend to marry, I wish you a wife with character and - if you are a man - you will take her from among the strong and mature women, from those who can stand up to you. A man left without a critic runs to his own ruin. We never have eyes enough to do without those of others: a family needs the opinions of all those who compose it. May God help you, sir, and may I have the pleasure of seeing you, I hope, in a better world!

And he left without waiting any longer, which was not impertinent, in view of the lively colors our host took on during this address. It had been a long time since I had seen the Master speak with such authority. It is in this way and even more severely that I should have called Herman of Summo and William of Nidecke to account when they were under my discipline. Once again, I regretted my cowardice bitterly.

At Chalon we were able to find a barge departing for Avignon which agreed to take us on board in exchange for work. We had to do an inventory of the cargo below deck, prepare bills of sale, do the accounting for the bills of exchange and write business letters. This I did almost entirely by myself, as the Master was extremely occupied with conversing with the crew, who grumbled interminably about the captain.

We arrived finally at Avignon totally exhausted, but ever so happy at touching the heart of Christianity. At least, that is what I expressed spontaneously to the Master, who reproached me for it.

— The heart of Christianity, he said to me, is the Word, the dynamism of the intelligence at work in every man, in every woman and even in the stones, the mountains, the valleys, the stars and the most elevated spheres. The heart of Christianity is in the middle of each being in the same center for all.

This didn't stop me from feeling like a lost child who, at last, touches the wall around his home. At last I had gotten out of the country, of the mud in which every man risks sinking indefinitely, as in a lukewarm and lugubrious limbo. Yes, under the film of being there mumble and mutter powers and possibilities so strange and incompatible with this world that they are refused by being, but haunt

and brush against it nonetheless. It is there our terrestrial origin is found, our womb, our feminine roots, the primordial chaos whose return we must always dread. It is in this flesh that the vegetable and the animal gain a foothold, but cannot blossom except by escaping it, for if not it is corruption, decomposition in the indeterminate. The peasantry, the country districts, their profound ignorance, their superstitions, their tragic intimacy with the plants and animals form as it were the belly of the Church: at the top, certainly, they touch Her heart and lungs, but at the bottom they lose themselves in the openings and the muck which are no more than the humus of humanity. When you are in that mire, you have the impression that your mind is emptied of the fibers that hold it fast, the landmarks that guide it and the gods that orient it. Everything seems to be lost in animality, in the quest for fleshly satisfactions, trapped by it, carried off in its filthy entrails. The peasants are sunk up to their waists in the material glue of the earth and are blind to the celestial summits that the Church's tall steeples point out. When my foot found support on the stones of the landing and I saw all these clerics draped in blue, green, and red, I felt like Virgil reaching the first circle of Paradise.

In a meander of the Rhône, the walls of the city rise very high. Since 1309, Avignon has sheltered the popes, the thinking substance of the Church, the blessed head of civilization. This was a radical transformation if one remembers that Avignon had taken the side of the Albigensians, the anticlerical Cathars of France. Louis VIII conquered it and demolished it. Today, they say that the pope is on the point of buying it from the Countess of Provence, Jeanne of Naples. They were soon going to erect a great palace, and already the workers were busy with the foundations. The most beautiful marbles were arriving by boat; rare woods, the purest gold and silver, the most learned architects, the most experienced master artisans, the most erudite doctors, the cream of Christianity came to raise the fortress of God here in the very center of Christian civilization. To the west: the counties of Portugal, Leon and Castile, Cordova, Navarre, Aragon and Barcelona; to the north: Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England and France. To the east: Lithuania, Poland, Pomerania, Hungary, Bohemia and the Germanies. To the southeast: Serbia, Croatia, Venice. To the south: Italy and Sicily. The pope was going to take root in the very heart of the world and shine forth over all the earth as he already does in Heaven. I found in this a security which the Master seemed to make light of, repeating to me constantly:

— Not that either, you won't take that with you to the grave, you won't even take it to the bottom of your anxiety, there where nothing remains but the silence of God. What would you do if the Mooors captured you and made you a slave in their country or else, even farther south, among the Blacks and the savage monsters?

My mind didn't dare encounter this eventuality even in my most terrible nightmares. and the Master, who enjoyed torturing me on this point, continued:

— It is there, however, that you would know what there is that is truly Christian in your heart. You don't know anything about the water when your voyage is in the hold of a ship, and the more stable the ship is, and the more reassuring the

captain, the less easy it is to know the water, its depth, its width and its dynamics. But don't fool yourself, the Word that is in us runs like a wave in every direction, and doesn't hesitate at all to cross straight through itself from one end to the other. One day you will overflow out of yourself and pour out into that water and you ought to do more to prepare yourself for this.

And his two eyes began to sparkle, eyes that knew how to penetrate everywhere. He moved forward one more step:

— Old age, believe me, undoes all the scaffoldings of the mind; we aren't even able to recall them anymore. The one thing that seems to survive is sentiment, the global state of human intelligence in the tranquil abyss of the shadow of God. If you don't really enjoy what is darkest in you, how do you think you can attain the vision of the blessed, the rejoicing of spirits at peace, of those who are not in flight. You see this city, but it is only an illusion of time; in a thousand years, in ten thousand years, nothing will remain of it, any more than ten seconds from now anything will remain of this wave which is moving away from the landing at the moment. Each thing in the visible world is only a breath that we hold back for a time before letting it go. The beautiful is not a thing, but the majesty of time that passes, its revelation, its theophany. Time plunges unceasingly into death to come back out of it again filled with life and nothing can put a stop to this; nothing, Conrad, not even the pope. Christ did not come to stop time but to exalt it; He did not come to stop death but, on the contrary, He came to pass through it. The peasants know about time, they follow its seasons, it is they who are the living Church. As for doctrines, if they don't follow the journey of men through their changing culture, they are no more than stones which sink straight down into depths from which they will never return. Woe to he who would build a boat of stone, for he is lost. He who loses his way finds himself, he who seeks to hold fast loses his way.

— But didn't Jesus say that it is on Peter that He will build His Church?

— There is only one stone, Conrad, but there will yet be a thousand other popes.

He refused to explain that dangerous proposition.

We were able to find Gerald of Podahns at the temporary residence of the Dominicans. Nicholas of Strasbourg had already met Cardinal Fournier who received him, Gerald told us, very cordially, and listened attentively to all that had been said at the trial in Cologne. He reassured Nicholas so much that the latter accepted another mission as papal visitor in Germany, to which he returned without further delay. But at Avignon the Master seemed each day to lose what he had gained in the country. He now appeared so worn out that he didn't seem to take much pleasure in this success. On the contrary, he appeared particularly worried about this turn of events. The Cardinal had requested that a suitable cell be prepared for the Master in the northern corner of the residence, because the view from there was especially pleasing. For a moment I wanted to oppose this, seeing that the Master needed sun and the cold and the damp had a great effect

upon him, but there was no question of refusing an offer that generous on the Cardinal's part.

We had to wait an entire month before being received by the Cardinal. Winter was approaching by leaps and bounds, and the cold was beginning to seriously affect the Master, who had more and more difficulty in walking and breathing. He arrived at the Cardinal's manor wet and chilled to the bone. We were introduced into a very high room, widely illuminated by azure stained-glass windows of great beauty. Everything was of stone except for an immense table of solid wood which separated us from the Cardinal, at peace and brimming with politeness and refinement. He wore red silk very finely embroidered with gold and speckled with diamonds. Immense silver candelabras added to the lighting. The back of his throne of scarlet leather rose almost three cubits above his head. The pink marble that covered the floor was so perfectly immaculate that you would have thought you had left this valley of tears. Nothing in this palace could remind us of the filth of the countryside. It was civilization in its pure form. The Cardinal himself was nothing like an ordinary man: his skin was perfect and seemed soft like that of the angels, his eyes sparkled like stars, his crimson mouth like a sunset. He was only half in this world, a whole side of his being took its flight toward Heaven. He smiled at us very elegantly and expressed concern for the Master's health.

— They tell me that your consumption is giving you a great deal of trouble.

— I've suffered a lot of other troubles, the Master shot back.

— I have been informed of your adversities in Cologne, the Cardinal answered. That must have been a cross.

— The adversity is far greater for the Church, Eckhart retorted.

— The times are difficult, but the Church possesses sufficient length and breadth to slide over these reefs without totally losing balance or hopelessly running aground. Nevertheless, I grant you that our difficulties with certain princes who take themselves for emperors absorbs a lot of our time. Not much is left over. I have been anxious, however, to hear you in person. I have been favorably impressed by your procurators, Nicholas of Strasbourg and Gerald of Podahns, and I was impatient to hear you.

The Master took time to stare at the man so as to measure well what he could tell him.

— I will not repeat what they said, nor my defense at Cologne; I know that you are intelligent, you know more than enough about it to understand and come to a conclusion. Moreover, it is not what they reproach me for that is so important. I did no more than insist on several fundamental points that have already been well clarified by Dionysius the Areopagite. The most fundamental point being that it is necessary that the Ground of the human soul, the Ground of the universe, and

the Ground of the Trinity be the same Ground, and that in this Ground, the intelligence of the Word is produced, acts, and makes itself understood. All my life has consisted in practicing and disclosing the way of poverty and detachment which leads to this Ground. But all this is so well known, so evident, so orthodox that, if there were not other things somewhere else, they would certainly not reproach me for these statements. The worrisome thing is not, then, the words they are reproaching me for, but fear of the consequences of those words.

Here is the conclusion I have reached: the essence of Christianity is in and of itself terrifying to any social order that aims at subjecting men to local interests. The Jewish Church feared Christ because He demonstrated in Himself that truth arose from the interior of the soul. The Roman emperors feared and still fear Christianity because it furnishes an antidote to fear and opens consciousness to a superior lucidity. Every organization, whatever it may be, will fear Christianity as soon as it depends on obscurantism and ignorance to render men subject. Certain men in the Church are strongly tempted by Caesarism and, consequently, Christianity terrifies them. Now I live and preach Christianity, and because of this they want to destroy me. But it is not me they want to destroy, it is Christianity, the Logos, the Intelligence which springs up in the human soul made alive as it springs up in the illuminated universe.

True Christianity, the one that is lived by the saints, is not something that you put in men, but something that you make arise from within men. Now for certain people, Christianity resembles a code of laws and principles that must be made as rigid as a sword in order to thrust it as deeply as possible into men's hearts. But such a Christianity kills, it does not make alive. There is no need to fear me, however, I have not struggled against this pseudo-Christianity and never will, - it knows well enough how to destroy itself. As soon as an institution stands by the power of the sword alone, another sword always arrives to destroy it. No! I do not need to struggle against this rigidity which the winds from the East are breaking up already; schism is knocking at our door, and the winds of Africa, the Moors, are swallowing us on the South. No, much more simply, and I hope more purely, I have professed, amplified, and exalted true Christianity, the one which arises naturally from human intelligence solely because it makes itself sincere, honest with itself, and detached from everything that distorts its own light. The Christianity I have spoken of will live on, even though it may take all sorts of forms. Even if all of civilization were to disappear from the surface of this earth, even if all men, through a universal and absolute plague, were to disappear, this Christianity would continue to make itself understood in the beauty of the trees, the mountains, the stars, of all that moves in eternity. This is the only Christianity wise enough to cross the Age of Reason and then the Age of Emotion, for it will surely be necessary to cross them some day. Beware of dogmatism!

I have listened to people who told me that faith surpasses reason and that Christ died in an act of loving madness. They should watch out! For if there exists a faith that surpasses reason and even goes beyond intelligence, those who spoke to me about it that way don't know it at all! All they know are beliefs that are beneath reason and not the faith that is above reason. All they practice is a very convenient

intellectual laziness. These people are opening the door to fanaticism, to a confused obedience to leaders who could easily abuse them. It is much better to keep one's faith within the simplicity and prudence of what is admissible to reason or results from an enlightened intelligence, than to abandon oneself to a madness that has very little chance of surpassing natural wisdom. Beware of fanaticism!

Others have told me that we must not teach these things to simple people. This is a strange reproach to Jesus, who did this. It is also an insult to the faith itself. For if the Ground of the soul is one with the Ground of the universe and the ground of God, all souls can understand the divinity in their hearts, not just some. So I have not taught subtle things to women and the poor. It is women and the poor who have instructed me from what they have grasped in the bottom of their hearts. No, Christianity is not introduced into men by men. Christianity emerges from men and women naturally, and it is infinitely true, and it is so true that no authority in this world can ever crush it completely. To crush it, it would be necessary to destroy the Intelligence hiding in this world, and this is not possible. There will always be light in this world and if it ever comes to pass that there isn't any, it will only be because there is no more world at all. Beware of ignorance!

Absolutely, my lord the Cardinal, the Church must not make itself the enemy of the Christianity it has as its mission to cultivate! It would be to be desired were the Church to put itself instead at the service of Christianity which has been growing since the beginning of the world and will go its way until its apogee. It does this in its saints, why can't it do it in its functionaries? If the Church persists in this rigidity, if she cuts the artery which is trying to unify philosophy and theology, if she destroys the link between the sciences of nature, the sciences of reason and the science of the All, if she becomes a doctrine rather than a breath, inevitably she will shatter into fragments. The East will detach itself from her definitively, history will make her shatter into a multitude of sects, reason will crush her underfoot, and an egoism wild once more will return for a time to the mystery religions and the atheism of Alexander of Aphrodisias. Certainly, true Christianity will be reborn even stronger from its ashes, but woe to those who will have been accomplices to such a deviation. The Word-Intelligence demonstrates every day its power of resurrection and resurgence. Was it necessary to crucify it? Beware of violence!

The Master found it difficult to continue and was forced to draw on his meager reserves to add what follows:

—I know that you have heard and understood perfectly all that I've said, but I also know that, if you are not detached, liberated from your superiors, you will condemn me, at least you will condemn what you believe to be dangerously liberating. Obviously, you have sufficient finesse to avoid my being burnt at the stake. At this moment, a martyr would do you no good. It would be tempting to allow us to die gently, my works and I, in a patient indifference. This is perhaps what you have already decided. But that doesn't wash the blood off your hands. In Pilate's position, no one can decide. Pilate could not detach himself from his fears, that is why he condemned the Word. In every man, fear and cowardice kill

the Word. Yet there are plants that grow in spite of the stones men throw over them, they get around all the pebbles and go their way: Christianity is like that. Woe, however, to him who throws the stone, for it is on his own soul that he throws it.

The Master was hardly able to speak any longer, nor even stand up. He nearly collapsed onto his chair, but succeeded in holding himself upright thanks to his solid grip on the table.

— Does that complete your defense, Father Eckhart? the Cardinal asked quietly.

— It is finished, my lord the Cardinal.

— Then allow me the time to decide. You compare me to Pilate, but Pilate made his decision under pressure. Don't blame me for showing prudence. You well represent the spirit of the Church, but the Church is not purely a spirit. She has at her disposal a body whose skeleton must be solid. Balance is not easy, Father Eckhart, and you are in a good position to know this. Rest assured of my sincerity and may God help you.

The Master was so weak, tired, and broken that it was difficult for me to lead him back. It was his last great effort.

Winter began to pass through the stone of the walls; little snow, but so much rain, cold and wind. No one, save for winter, entered our retreat. There were no other hearings. Gerald of Podahns was occupied elsewhere. We had no news from the German convents, no mail from Bruges, nothing but the silence and whistling of winter. This was the stake they had set up for the Master: the wind's condemnation, a crowd that was absent, a tumult of silence, a disgrace of indifference, a torch of nothingness, a pyre of ice, a frigid fire, a brazier of time and frosted stones, a snail's-pace crossing, a languishing exodus. The Master didn't sleep anymore, his body was like an icicle, yet he burned on the inside, his lungs bloody and inflamed. For long minutes, he almost suffocated, then suddenly caught a breath, borne along by a memory he could not manage to speak, for lack of air. He ate practically nothing anymore, his thin skin clinging tightly to his face, which little by little became a living skull. It was terrible to see, and yet a lantern kept vigil in his eyes and warmed his smile which sometimes took on almost the proportions of a laugh. He seemed to savor the arrival rather than mourn the departure. He seemed to want to describe for me the beauties he was seeing, but could not.

It was a stake of infinitely slow combustion, so slow that no one realized that they were burning a great Master here on a well-planned stake. Certainly, this was a strange man, incomprehensible and mysterious, whom one could not give to the people as a model, but this was a man who goes in advance, a sentinel, a scout, a man of courage who takes on himself the risk of the road, the risk of the

unknown. Though the curious habitually draw near to stakes that burn, horrified and fascinated at the same time, they kept their distance from this one more than if there had been a plague in its smoke. What solitude! I saw the Master slip slowly away, little by little let go. I sensed that he was emerging somewhere else on a shore that delighted him beyond measure. He was dying, yet he was being born into all this at the same time. It was as if he didn't want to abandon this world before grasping the fringe of the other. There was so much suffering on this pyre that every hour I prayed that he be borne away. But the man was strong, with an exceptional resistance, an indestructible heart, a tenacious spirit. During these moments of intense suffering he said:

— I'm no longer able to pray. It's my body that is praying, it's my suffering that is praying.

Yet, at the same time, sparks flew out of his eyes: it was an overflowing of life, intelligence and joy just like he said the universe was. Not that kind of intelligence which passes away with age because it is linear, temporal and relative, the intelligence that is called rational and is only rational for one people and one time; not that puny faculty of the mind, which goes away and so much for the better, for it leaves behind, pure and simple, the ground of the intellect that grasps the divine dynamics. It doesn't grasp it by bringing it back to itself, nor in bringing itself to it, no, it grasps it by dancing with it, by allowing itself to be carried away by its movement, by producing the Word with it, and by producing with the Word all of a universe moved, stirred, and aroused. It was this intelligence that sparkled in his still radiant look, an intelligence that is a true seeing and knowing, and a true power. He managed to say, in his moments of joy:

— If you knew the intelligence of God! It is a beauty, it is a goodness, it is a truth for which all the universe sings. Lend an ear to the praise of the world and if you don't cry for joy it is because you don't yet hear it. "God is love," the whole universe says. "God is love." Do you hear it?

I wiped the tears of joy and pain sliding down his hollow cheeks. It was a pain and a joy united in a single sentiment offered and received, a reflection of the divinity in the human soul. I gathered this reflection in my hands; I could do nothing else since I no longer knew how to pray, reflect, or remember. I could only gather this pearl that had so slowly formed in this life of total consecration, of love without reserve and above all without fear. This was a man who had sufficient faith and confidence in God to smile at fears; a man, consequently, on which no one could have any hold, neither emperor, nor archbishop, nor pope. No threat could shake him, no difficulty could make him turn back, because he had allowed himself to be enthralled by an infinitely superior love, the one that overflows from the divine intelligence.

He was afflicted, though, right down to the bitter end. The Church had not rejected him; far worse, she had disdained him. She had not killed him, but abandoned him. She had not burned him, but isolated him in his own fire. She did not wash her hands like Pilate but, more cowardly than he, was satisfied with

the appearance of not having dirtied them at all. How could she have crucified in this way for a second time the Word, the Logos, the Intelligence, the veritable Love? Was the Church going to perpetually crucify her own Source this way? And the Master answered:

— It is not the Church which crucifies the Intelligence, the Word, no, it is not the Church which kills her source and her own Life, it is individuals who have lost their way, simply individuals who have abandoned the true Church, the Church of the saints. It is not two monks who incriminated me, it is two criminals. It is not two bishops who are killing me, it is two robbers. The Church is Christianity and Christianity is the intellectual life and the love life of the universe which overflows with the pleasures of God. We are dust and, when the dust of the stars begins to think, it reflects the thought of the universe and we say that it has a soul, that it participates in the soul of the world. The soul is the flavor of love when it passes into a consciousness aware of itself so that this love can celebrate in its own self a celebration that surpasses it: the beatitude of God. Love and Intelligence are one and the same outflowing, one and the same goodness, one and the same truth.

And then winter resumed its work, drove the Master even more deeply into the prison of ice, disconnected words and things, led them back to their original chaos, to the primordial numbers, to the static hum of fundamental relations, there where unity plays within itself. The man was falling apart, dislocating himself, while an angel, a pure soul took its place. The metamorphosis was fascinating. In the cocoon of agony, the butterfly was going to take the caterpillar's place. The cocoon dried up, crumbled, and fell away in shreds; the butterfly took life and already sought to fly away. And one especially somber day, when the storm blew as if to tear up the world, he seemed to slip out of his pain, and entered in the perimeter of peace that allows souls to say their goodbyes. He began to pray with power like a soul finally liberated from the body's talons:

— O Source of all intelligence, who took me as soon as you conceived me, you are carrying me, I can feel it, still closer into you. The freer this heart is, the stronger, the more dignified, useful, praiseworthy and perfect are the prayer and the work. Today my heart is free of all and so can do all. Thus I am with you and in you; I am a creator. Together we are unfolding creation so that our love will be revealed. We are producing the trees and the flowers, we are making the mountains leap up, we are making low the valleys, the lakes and the seas, we are making the animals run and are giving to the human deserts of freedom and all this shines forth our love. We do not make men so that they perfectly reflect the Word right away, we give them time so that they reflect the Word more than perfectly in the perpetual magic of their unlimited creativity. For the perfected is much more perfect than the perfect, and perpetual creativity greater than all creation. If we move the human far from us, and from himself, it is so that he can freely savor the return, it is so that he can grasp the happiness of finding himself again. If we humble him and then raise him up, it is so that he might know all the height, the greatness, and the depth of the place of our love. For love cannot be created, it can only come from a movement, from an encounter free and infinitely desired. An easy universe would have deprived man of all sentiment, of all joy.

We have made the world more than perfect, that is to say, with an imperfect beginning, an unpredictable time and an intangible conclusion. Our name is freedom, men call us surpassing, we are Love's essence.

What is a free heart? A free heart is one that is troubled by nothing and attached to nothing, which has bound the best of itself to no fashion and never has its immediate good in mind. A free heart knows time and likes the end to always be a little further off. What I hadn't wanted to lose, my God, you are taking away from me today. You are freeing me from every burden and here I am lighter than air. I have walked so much, how much I savor today the joy of flying, a joy that I would not know if you had not given it to me from the point of departure. Blessed be time. How happy is the one who has discovered that joy does not impose itself, that it is the absolute non-imposition!

This death that is coming is taking nothing from me but the nothingness still in me. It does not destroy: it gives. Grace never destroys nature, it perfects it; for transfiguration is grace in its state of completion. Thus there is in God nothing that destroys anything at all; He is the one who perfects all things. How happy he is, he who has understood that all he can lose is a little bit of nothingness and that he can gain all the love of God! How happy I am to go farther into your Word! The highest elevation is found in the deepest abyss, for the deeper the abyss is hollowed out, the higher and greater the highland rises; the deeper the well is, the higher it is; height and depth are one thing. What height is mine, I who am nothing and so am everything? Is there anyone more noble than he who is born half for what is highest and best in creation, and half for the inmost depths of nature and its solitude. This is my nobility, this is the nobility of Man. If the soul enters, then, into the Light unadulterated, it is transported into its Nothingness, and in this Nothingness, it is so far from its created self that its own power is no longer sufficient to bring it back to its created self. It breaks away and floats freely in its water. But then, God, He who is not created, grasps the nothingness of the soul and welcomes that soul into Himself. The soul has dared to annihilate itself and can no longer return by itself into itself. It is necessary that this be so. It is in this movement that we make creation.

This is what is happening to me, Conrad. So don't cry, don't be sad. You are the only one who has accompanied me in my solitude. It wasn't necessary to be so afraid of me. You must tell all those who left me to myself like this how grateful I am to them. All my life I have wished to die gently, quietly, and in retreat. I have wished to have the time to pass from the slow mode to the rapid mode, from heavy love to light love, from unclear contemplation to clear contemplation, from dull intelligence to lively intelligence. God has granted me that grace. Blessed by He!

Remember this, Conrad, and repeat it to all those with love and a good heart, it is the essence of my life in this world: "In Itself, the intellectual Act is nothing other than the God-shape of the spiritual arch, the emanation of Love. In expressing the Word, the Father expresses Himself, He expresses all things in another person and gives to the Word the nature He has Himself; and He expresses in the Word,

all the intelligences like Him that are essentially the same since they contain this Word. And the Father has expressed it completely as it is in Himself. He has expressed the Word and all that is in the Word as equal to Himself. Do you understand that? Equality is the condition and the consequence of Love." This is the egg I have brooded all my life, I am giving it to you, take it, fly away on its wings.

A man cannot swim so long as he keeps one foot on the wharf. You, my friend, you have always wanted to jump into the sea, but you have never wanted to take your foot off the wharf. Don't stay pulled apart like that, you risk wearing yourself out and you are depriving yourself of happiness. To go you have to leave, to leave you have to forsake; you cannot race ahead while staying safely in a house. Look steadily at the ocean that I see now. Look at it in my eyes. It will finally charm you, charm you to the point where you forget your fears and cast yourself into it.

You are the last memory I carry with me, and in your eyes I carry Katrei and Jutta and Barnabas and Suso and Tauler and Berthold and Nicholas and all those who experience a true love that destroys fear. How I have loved you ...

He sank into that night he loved so much, since he compared it to a mother who lets life enter her, come in her, and make more than her.

Conclusion

In this year one thousand three hundred and forty-five, as I prepare to leave, I have removed the manuscript from its shrine of stone to scribble these final notes on it ...

No one was willing to dig the muddy ground of early March to bury a man suspected of heresy. I had to promise a good number of loaves of bread to two boys who, though they had no family, did have a cart at their disposal, so that they would agree to help me transport his body outside the city. We buried him unceremoniously at the edge of some woods behind the churchyard of a country parish. The man had no right either to a crypt, or to a cemetery, or to ablutions, or to unctions, only to indifference and scorn. I placed on the ground a little cross of lime-whitened wood, washed by my tears as well as the rain. I was unable to pull myself away from this place; I must have remained there for several hours. I was so troubled, frightened, and lost, as if struck senseless, and it may have been that deep down I hoped that someone would come with a message from the Curia announcing that the Master had been pardoned and that they were waiting to have him brought to the cathedral for a funeral mass. I remained there waiting. It seems to me that I even may have passed the whole night there in a sort of lethargic condition. But that isn't possible; the winter season was already so far advanced that the cold would have paralyzed me. Paralyzed, that was what I was regardless! I remained transfixed before the warm full belly of earth that held the Master. I would have wanted to take root like a tree and cover him with my prayers just as the forest still does today. I would have wanted to hold the hand of time and form a cupola over the Master, arches of beeches and oaks. Trees have a fortitude for the dead that has no limits. Alas, I am a man, and in the hearts of men there is not enough fortitude to suck all the light from the sky without budging from the earth; in Man there inevitably occur tiny fractures which tear the thread of time, gaps in memory, in intelligence and in will which slash his attention to shreds. He then finds himself outside his body, as it were, he observes that he has grown distant from himself without ever having decided to, exactly; he ends up far away. It is impossible for us, for us men, to stay where we are. While the trees know how to stand still in time, we flee away with it. However, a part of me has remained in the heartwood of the trees, leaning over the Master, so that after depositing several flowers, I found myself on the road to Cologne, while at the same time overhanging the soil that forever covers the Master.

The Master's body was never exhumed and moved to hallowed ground. When Gerald of Podahns and Nicholas of Strasbourg returned and realized they had been sent away by trickery, they were furious, and ran to the Cardinal to demand that his body be suitably buried. But the Cardinal gave them to understand that the Curia took Virneburg's side, so the body is still at the edge of the woods and me, I continually watch by him. I know it, I sense it. Even today I perceive, in this soil, the warm and nourishing life of the Master. My ear is glued to the ground

with the same attention as when I am auscultating a pregnant woman about to give birth. That same night, for example, lying on my straw mat, I was awakened by the movement of the Master as he stretched a leg in the earth; one might have said it was the old root of an oak contracting before hurling its loftiest branch even higher into the heavens. On that branch was a leaf that quivered with pleasure at the sun's caresses. It is a little of myself, for even if my heart still wanders in its useless fears and worries, something of me rests in peace forever with the Master. I believe that I buried Father Eckhart in the fleshiest part of my heart and that it did not rain that day; on the contrary, the springtime swarmed with life. That was why the earth was soft and it didn't take much effort at all to dig, to set him in the ground, and cover him myself. He was already resurrected as a life which raises its inner columns and pulls the soul up with it. He pulled me up a little with him. There was, because of this, a breach in the web of my doubts and fears through which, little by little, the best of my soul seeped in, enabling me to savor the dazzling tastes of the trust of children.

After the hearing where the Master had presented his final defense, and even though Cardinal Jacques Fournier seemed to have lent an ear to the accused's theses, he submitted, for discussion by the Curia, twenty-six articles that Eckhart had acknowledged as his own plus two others they had accused him of. No one was in a hurry to come to a decision, but I learned later that Herman of Summo and Reinher of Friso had presented the conclusions of Cologne there, supported by an envelope sealed with the seal of the house of Virneburg. The palace they were building at Avignon was costing an awful lot and gifts were welcome! The bull of condemnation was finally rendered sometime after his death: March 27, 1329. I read it in Cologne affixed to the wall of the cathedral, for I hadn't had the strength to hear it pronounced the day before by the archbishop. I could not have endured his iron mask and his smile of blood. It was written there: "I, John XXII, bishop, servant of the servants of God, in eternal memory of the affair ... In the field of the Lord, of whom, by the disposition of Heaven and without having deserved it, we are the guardian and the laborer, we are obligated to bring as much care and prudence to the cultivation of the spirit that, if ever an enemy sows grass in addition to the seeds of truth, it should, before it multiplies in a noxious proliferation, be suppressed at its origin, so that the seed of vices is destroyed and the thorns of error uprooted. It is with great pain that we let it be known that, of late, a certain Eckhart, of the German lands, doctor in Holy Scripture, it is said, and professor of the order of preaching Friars, wanted to know more than was suitable. He did not want this moderately and following faith's measure, since, turning his ear away from the truth, he turned to fables. Seduced by the father of lies, who often takes the form of an angel of light to spread black and deep shadows in place of the clarity of truth, this man has caused thorns and vexations to spring up in the field of the Church in disregard for the dazzling truth of the faith. Striving to produce harmful thistles and poisonous brambles, he taught many dogmas which obscure the true faith in the hearts of numerous believers. He presented his doctrine chiefly in his preaching to the credulous common people. From the investigation made against him on this subject, first by order of our venerable brother Henry of Virneburg, archbishop of Cologne, and finally taken up on our orders by the Roman Curia,

we have learned, and it is established in an obvious manner by the confessions of this same Eckhart, that he has preached and taught twenty-eight contemptible propositions. The first fifteen and the last two are expressly reproved by the Church: they contain errors and are tainted by heresy, both by the sound of the words employed, and by the sequence of ideas. The eleven others are considered offensive, very rash and suspect of heresy, even though, with many explanations and much additional information, they could take on a Catholic meaning."

The Avignon Commission had then up to a point agreed with Eckhart by repeating what he himself had often put forward in his defense: such and such an article might appear erroneous taken literally, but if one goes to the trouble of understanding it in all good faith, it takes on a meaning that is higher and more correct. The bull added that Eckhart, "... confessing at the end of his life the Catholic faith, revoked and disavowed the twenty-six articles ... as well as all that he had written or taught in the schools or in his sermons which might cause the minds of the faithful to take them in an heretical or erroneous sense, contrary to the true faith." It should have been said that he had agreed to the confession drawn up by the General Barnabas of Cagnoli and signed by two priors of our convents ... This does not lessen in any way his adherence to the true Church.

On April 15, the pope wrote to Henry of Virneburg to invite him to solemnly promulgate the bull in the diocese of Cologne. This he did with pomp while concealing his satisfaction. But he was the only bishop to promulgate it, as the bull was never pronounced anywhere else. It must be understood that the Avignon Commission never condemned either Father Eckhart or his doctrine, but simply a few extreme and paradoxical formulations that he expressed in moments of enthusiasm so that, the commission says, "... these articles or their contents may not further contaminate the hearts of the simple people to whom they were preached." Virneburg had only partly won. It must be said that, despite the elimination of a large part of his debts, thanks to the bill of exchange brought by Guglielmo for Katrei's liberation, Virneburg could not give Avignon all that a more thoroughly fixed trial would have cost.

The bull did not diminish at all the Master's prestige among scholars and even less among women and the people. People knew very well the character of the persons who had fomented the affair. The story of Katrei circulated as a legend in which Herman of Summo and William of Nidecke appeared as two scoundrels beside an archbishop more feared than respected. Legends are stronger than bulls, and travel more quickly and surely, with the result that the old archbishop, covered with silk and velvet, died in a solitude a thousand times greater than the Master's. In reality, he passed his life in an ice that finally covered him completely. None of the stakes he set afire with Beguines and alleged witches succeeded in warming his already dead heart, smothered in its own appetites. Certainly, his court offered him low bows and funny faces, but these were only iron plates set in action by a mechanism of interest as predictable as they were perfidious. No man can survive the machines he puts in place to keep him outside of himself!

Virneburg had sought to cover up the light because it could have illuminated his

face and he would not have been able to stand this. The Master had consecrated his life to the advent of a lucidity of the heart by means of the Word. Together they formed the two sides of the human paradox. The sparkling of the moon and its dark side were both of them dead. These were dark days followed by days darker still. Since the Master's death, famines, plagues and wars hurled themselves onto Germany, and it was certainly these calamities, rather than the Master's condemnation, that brought some people back within the churches and their dogmas. It seems that fear engenders in men a need for security that is easy to exploit, that leads churches to transform themselves into rest-stops for lukewarm hearts rather than into catapults capable of propelling souls further in God's adventure. Prisoners of these ports of call, men begin to reel off formulas like creaking handles, to extol crowned heads like courtesans, to make themselves doormats for leaders whose sole nobility is their pedantry. We must never ever take advantage of human fear.

The struggle between the Pope and Louis of Bavaria continued. The latter, having displeased the Romans, was forced to recross the Alps and return to Germany. The cities, for the most part, proved loyal enough to the king, while the noble families remained hostile to him. The pope placed the ban on the cities which sided with the king. He prohibited public masses as well as the divine office and the other sacraments, except for the dying. The pope died in 1334 and was replaced, as predicted, by Cardinal Fournier. Under the name of Benedict XII, he continued the policies of his predecessor. He gave even more importance to the construction of the pontifical palace, as if the papacy had abandoned Rome definitively and sought to establish the empire in Gaul. The pope wished to exalt himself ... so the nobles and the bishops backed Louis of Bavaria. As Guglielmo used to say, it is better to have division in the powers over you and unity in those beneath. Strengthened by this support, Louis of Bavaria defied the pope and forbade obedience to the papal ban. It was a long period of trouble and division. Under the leadership of Magaretha Ebner, most of the Dominican nuns showed leniency toward the emperor, while Henry of Nördlingen, a priest involved in politics and very influential, left his native Swabia for Basel where the pope was still obeyed. At Constance, in spite of the pope's ban, the Franciscans administered the sacraments and buried the dead with the usual rites, but the canons remained attached to the pontifical cause. The Dominicans of Constance and Strasbourg emigrated to Basel to be with Henry of Nördlingen and remained there until 1343. There was disorder and, when we had to leave the convent for a moment, we ran the risk of finding ourselves in a skirmish, a riot, or obliged to help the dying, moaning in their blood, their hunger, or their illnesses. As a doctor, I had much to do. But terror preyed upon us even more than misery.

In 1337, a comet and solar eclipses terrorized the crowds. In 1338, an invasion of grasshoppers swooped down on all of Germany, followed by huge floods. To curb the wrath raining down, processions of flagellants multiplied, provoking undefinable and uncontrollable emotions, to such a degree that the pope finally forbade them. It was then that a large number embraced the Beghards' cause.

If the suffering and the anguish led many to seek refuge in the stone houses of

the Church, it pushed others to rush outside and take their flight. In periods of pain and suffering, all habitations of stone disappear into their own emptiness: those who leave them have a better chance of salvation. In such times, there is no longer any place for mediocrity. In Bavaria, in Alsace, in Switzerland, but above all in the low countries of the North, at Bruges principally, the pure souls felt the need to draw closer to each other. To avoid the persecutions that were raining down on the Beghards, they called themselves the Friends of God. They simply desired, and still desire with the same passion, to support and encourage each other in their way. They communicate through manuscripts and exchange pious books, anonymous texts by the Master and by a certain Katrei, Mistress at Bruges. Few associate that woman with the heretic of Cologne who, according to the legend, was taken away by angels in the middle of the night while she was praying with the Master. I would so much like to see her again. Now that my heart is settled, perhaps I would be capable of listening to her like the Master could. If I listened to her, perhaps I could leave my eternal ambivalence behind and burst forth at last into life with all my being united and willing.

The Friends of God practice the highest virtues, apply themselves to work, among other things, to the illumination of manuscripts; they practice mutual charity, assiduity of the heart and the love of interior prayer. Certainly, some theologians in Paris speak scornfully of this "feminine piety," but from what I have read myself, they ought to take back their words, for few of them have attained the intellectual and spiritual heights of the Friends of God! They tell of how John, who was on his way to Pisa, after having a dream in the Alps, reversed his course and made his way to Bruges where he teaches medicine to the Beguines. I believe he is still there because some scandal mongers told me recently that he supposedly has as a companion a Beguine whose conduct is not among the most chaste. I keep my distance from this gossip, but put more faith in Guglielmo's words. He comes to Cologne sometimes and reports that a large number of the Friends of God are devoting themselves, skillfully, to caring for the poor and the destitute. To the great shame of the Franciscans, Guglielmo carries from place to place, and in great detail, the news that John is teaching the Master's doctrine, and that he is demonstrating with a totally Aristotelian logic the errors of William of Ockham and those who hold to the separation of faith and science.

The word of Father Eckhart passes through every mouth and uses every parchment. There are so many of the Master's manuscripts circulating secretly that it is becoming difficult, even for the learned, to distinguish the authentic from the false. Especially since Eckhart the younger, another Dominican who is, I believe, from Constance, wrote some commentaries a while ago that are confused with those of the Master. Nevertheless, his true disciples inevitably manage to reestablish the truth.

When I returned to Cologne, Tauler had gone back to Strasbourg. He emigrated to Basel along with his brothers. He travelled a lot, however, sowing a little of the Master's spirit everywhere. I learned that he always went to the Friends of God, who gladly welcomed him. He assigned himself the mission of making the Master's thought understandable. He teaches that the soul should abandon the

point of view of the created to find God's point of view. He preaches that there are three true births: the eternal generation of the Son in the Father, that of Jesus in the Universe, and that of God in the human soul. In this last birth, God belongs to the soul so much and gives Himself so much to her that she possesses him more than anything anyone could possess. "For," he says, "the soul is created between time and eternity. Through her superior part, she belongs to eternity, through her inferior part she belongs to time." It is between the two that there develops, according to him, the very great mystery of the soul sublimated in its divine ground. For this you must apply yourself with all your being. "When an archer," he says, "wishes to strike a target, he closes one eye so that the other aims more accurately; he who wishes to know a thing in depth applies all his thoughts to it and compels his forces to come back into the soul. When two must become one, it is essential that one be passive and the other active: for my eye to perceive the images, it must be bare of every image. No one understands the Unity very well except for those who have reached it. People call it God, but it is an ineffable shadow, and yet it is also the essential light. It is a wild desert where no one finds either way or mode, for the way and the modes are what it makes with being. There is access to it by surpassing all intelligence, by working one's way to the Source of all intelligence."

One day someone asked him if he were not afraid of being contaminated by his Master's error. He answered:

— No one can answer for another person, each person answers for himself.

He was never bothered by the Inquisition and even today openly teaches the Master's thought. No, the most controversial reputation falls rather to Suso, that being so inward, so mysterious, yet so involved. I learned, long after the Master's death, that he had been raptured by the time he was eighteen, and introduced into the arcana of wisdom; he could, more than anyone else, grasp the Master's thought in its depth. And the General knew this. He was so showered with spiritual favors, he overflowed with so much unction that only through penitence and austerity could he relieve himself of this. No sooner was he informed of the bull of condemnation, than he courageously took the Master's defense and wrote *The Book of Truth*. He wanted to set the Master's authentic teachings against his betrayers' misrepresentations.

He payed very dearly for his position, and is still paying today. He was swiftly accused of having written suspicious books. He was forced to go to the Low Countries to clear himself before the chapter general. He suffered the internal censure of the order. Subsequently he travelled all through Switzerland, Alsace, and all the valley of the Rhine. He maintained very close relations with the Friends of God. When the Dominicans loyal to the pope took refuge in Basel, he was despite everything named prior of the community in exile. He made many enemies in the community because he had the courage to bring back into order a good number of monks unworthy of their calling. He didn't tolerate the Hermans and the Williams, and was slandered abundantly as a result. Most recently, he has been sent to Ulm so as to allow the rumors to subside. He had a spiritual daughter

named Elsbeth Stigel, a Dominican at Töss. He wrote to her one day: "I was the object of much scorn, not through my own fault, but through the fault of others. Seated in my cell, I saw a dog running in the middle of the cloister and playing with a footcloth; sometimes he threw it in the air, and sometimes he threw it down. I drew a deep sigh then and said: "In truth, Lord of Heaven, like this rag is in the dog's mouth, I am in the mouths of my brothers." I said to myself: Notice this, though, the rag lets the dog do whatever he wants with it, to throw it high or throw it low, or even trample on it. In the cloth, there is nothing for the dog to eat, and that's why when all is said and done it never will devour it."

Like Suso, Tauler continued the essence of Eckhart's ideas, moderating them and reducing the number of paradoxical explanations. His Book of the Eternal Wisdom took hold in all the monastic communities, among the Friends of God, and - through preaching - even among the simplest of the peasants. Almost every night I reread this prayer from it: "Lovable Lord, though I am not worthy of praising you, my soul desires even so that the sky praise you when, in its most ravishing beauty, it is illuminated in all of its clearness by the brilliance of the sun and the innumerable multitude of the luminous stars. May the beautiful landscapes of the country praise you when, amid the delights of summer, they shine by their noble nature in the manifold adornment of their flowers and their exquisite beauty Lord, when I look upon the graceful living beings, the lovable creatures, they say to my heart: "Ah! look how lovable He is, He from whom we have issued, from Whom all beauty comes!" I search the sky and the earth, the universe and the abyss, the forest and the fields, the mountains and the valleys: all together, they make my ears resound with the immense concert of your infinite praise... But when I think that it is You, the one so worthy of praise, that my soul has selected from all others, that my soul has chosen for itself to be its only beloved and love, my desire to praise is such that my heart would break into itself."

As for Berthold of Moosburg, he is still the director of the Studium at Cologne. He most recently completed a gigantic and brilliant commentary on Proclus's *Elementatio theologica*. The Studium's strategy was to continue the work of Eckhart without attracting the fury of narrow minds. Eckhart's name was, as one might expect, absent. His presence was felt everywhere, however. In fact, Berthold is demonstrating point by point the Eckhartian thesis of the divine man. It could even be said that, in places, his treatise takes on the appearance of a settling of scores between Aristotle's limited thought and the Platonists' opening to the superessential. By choosing Proclus, Berthold clearly announces the Studium's break with Parisian scholasticism. Proclus is the pagan who climbed to the summit of the contemplation of God by the assiduous practice of philosophy and, by this very fact, he testifies to the astonishing potentialities dormant in Man. This proves that the soul has access to God through its intellect to the degree that it transcends that intellect by penetrating it right down to its Ground. He has demonstrated that philosophy and theology can join together to meet God. The way of totally sincere and completely consecrated thought is sure; it is indeed the only way possible, as much for the science of God as for the other sciences.

Berthold is known in all the region's beguinages. He is the personal spiritual father

of one of their wisest mistresses: Bela Herdevust. Among our enemies, he is considered from here to Paris to be the true father of the Studium, the one who founded a school that existed before him. They say that because he has unified the entirety of the Studium's thought in an intellectual and spiritual entity so powerful that they are tempted to denigrate it rather than combat it. Yet other scholars believe that he will know how to pass through the time that is coming and even its chaos, a chaos in which the Church must renew itself. In truth, since the religious authority had opted for the maintenance of a system of dogma that eludes reflective thought, and the civil authority had adopted a mode of reflection which rejects the wider sphere of intellect, nothing could follow but a division of man and a loss of the general meaning of the universe. Having lost his own purpose, man is condemned to a vagueness of the soul which can do nothing else but carry him away in a madness that will engender suffering beyond our imagining. No longer having anything at his disposal but a religion without intelligence and an intelligence without religion, man is lost. But the work of the Studium, many feel, is done in such a way that it will be able to pass through this season. When the shadows will be so heavy as to carry off men's souls the work will shine the more the darker it becomes. Berthold has conceived of the bow and arrow in such a way that the truth can restore hope to the lost men of the future. His arrow brings the best of past centuries to the end of centuries to come, at least that's the hope of the General and all the Dominican order.

To the General, Berthold appears to be the human book he had wanted for the Studium. "He is an erudite man who has read everything and who, using the great thinkers as material, has managed to construct an edifice of remarkable solidity. Not an edifice, but a true living organism; capable of swallowing, digesting and integrating the thought that preceded it and that which will follow it, even as it turns away the futile and erroneous. This philosophical beast, which goes from Plato to Eckhart even as it feeds essentially on the Jesus within, having swallowed the libraries of the past, will form its substance out of those of the future. It is prepared to be a beast-Word, qualified to devour the beasts of the Apocalypse and reappear, at the first light of dawn, gigantic from all it has absorbed, magnificent and suited to transport man to his beatitude." That is what the General repeated, and I listened with hope.

One particularly cold winter day, when I was accompanying Berthold to Bela Herdevust's beguignage, after the community had assembled in the courtyard, Berthold began to speak to them in these words:

— The soul, he said, is a substance which perceives and savors the illuminations and the delights of God. The most inward part of the soul is contemporaneous with all it produces, since the soul is a single substance. Nothing in the soul escapes the soul: it is everything that is before it and everything that is after it.

He didn't say anything more about it, this was his way of preaching: he put out an enigma and waited for questions. The first was not long in coming:

— If we contain our past and our futures, a sister proposed, if the soul of the

world contains its past and its future, what is the use of acting out a play that, in any case, is written in advance?

— What do you think about it? Berthold asked Bela.

— I would suggest the following image, replied Bela, whose eyes shone constantly with joy. The First Cause created in himself a lake of light, bottomless and forever active, he engendered a basin of fire. This light rested in his Word which stirred it unceasingly, kept it from self-satisfaction. This strange sphere had no exterior and everything was interior to it; it was a water of light. There was in it a quivering, a simmering, an exultation, a life which pushed it to pour itself out, to dance, to transform itself, to transfigure itself. It was a glory, a joy, a force, an energy which can never completely catch up with itself, neither through its intelligence nor through its creations. That water of light exploded like a volcano with fiery lava hurled in every direction. It was like a sun and each ray shone with light, couldn't be anything but light. And that light which expanded in an exterior it kept in its interior began to move, to create forms, to create melodies, to create games because, in each part of itself, it boiled with love and with life. It was an intelligence, that is to say a creative transparency, an eternal self-transcendence, a refusal to stop even at its own infinity, an inexorable taste for knowing itself without ever comprehending itself, for expressing itself without ever restraining itself, more interior and more exterior. Stars appeared, spheres, elements, combinations; trees grew, animals ran, and men and women felt emotion. You can say what you like, add causes, draw out chains of cause and effect, the fact remains that a life is amusing itself with its own matter before your astonished eyes. As soon as you dare to look, you see that, with an inexplicable charm, the invisible is pleased to clothe itself with all the colors and all the forms, that the inaudible plays a melody that makes us dance, carries us away in its joy, draws us in to its interior. I don't know what the world is, but it can't be anything else but surges from a single source. That source is so active, so free and so creative that each one of the parcels it contains includes that same contagion, that same freedom and that same creativity. So, yes, I know already that everything that was, is and will be, can only be the Light, the Word, and the Life, but I know nothing of what that vitality will become because I am a participant in it. Its being will always surprise me, though I love it already in its essence. There is only one essence, but that essence has the property of multiplying and astounding itself by its modes of being. I think that the life and the creativity in that boiling light can only know itself by exploding, in exulting, in singing, in dancing, and that is what our cosmos is, and that is what being is. The water of light is like the woman who is loved in the Song of Songs. We already taste the charm of her essence without knowing anything about the dances she will perform. Who can predict what she will reveal to us? No one! And in spite of this we know and love her better than ourselves.

— Bela is absolutely correct, Berthold continued, and as long as we don't have the feeling of fully participating in this ebullience, we do not know the Word's beatitude. The intelligence that bubbles up in us is that which bubbles up in all the universe. If we liberate it just as it liberates itself in the universe, it passes through us like a river and transports us in its joy in creating. Our beatitude consists in

allowing ourselves to be carried away in this movement. In allowing ourselves to be carried away by it, we know it in essence in all its depths even as we discover it as being every day. Our security is in the perfect consistency of this essence and we are astounded at the multiplication of the beings which express it. I have faith in its essence and hope in its being. This adventure contains enough intrigues to captivate us and certitudes enough to reassure us. As you see it and experience it, God has thrown into us a certain vestige of himself which impels us to practice God's occupation: to boil with love.

The image of Bela has remained imprinted on my mind not as the key to a joy, but on the contrary as a stumbling block. This is because this image came to measure the enormous weight of doubts and resistances my heart still contained, which deprived me of the happiness of frolicking without inhibition in the waters of light, the flesh and the blood of God. I looked at her, radiant with life, with splendor, with beauty. Nothing in her resisted that flow, that outpouring, that torrent that carried her away. Nothing in her struggled in the opposite direction. She stretched in the light like a deer unafraid in a universe without wolves, she glided in the river like a sailing-ship with no anchor. She was a wave, she was a stone, an eye in a stone on the shore, overlooked and abandoned. I was no more than a spectator whose view remained diagonal, a spectator unwilling to throw himself into the spectacle, who rejected the spectacle with an incomprehensible and totally irrational sort of revolt. All the objections emanating from me were only logical for that revolt, primary and intrinsic to my reason. All of my scepticism's rationality rested entirely and uniquely on this refusal to belong to a Life which comes before me and goes with no need for me. In fact, I was refusing to believe that the world contains anything. Even worse, I didn't want it to contain anything.

I would have preferred to feel very small in a completely incomprehensible and insoluble world. I would have preferred to be lost on a useless and stupid cube of stone. I would have preferred being able to show an absolute magnanimity by crying out to that empty stone: "I am going to look all around you, I am going to prove to the whole world that you are nothing more than chance, ineptitude, a stupid and mean fact. And I, don't you see, I can survive in your absurdity." This is the magnanimity that I would have wanted to demonstrate. So, when I contemplated the beauty of that woman and was reminded of Katrei and the Master and their confounded beatitude, there was something in me that refused, that rejected, that threw the happiness card on the floor before even trying it. Because this happiness would have reduced me to being no more than a child, and I didn't want to be a child, I wanted to be a god capable of holding my own in a world entirely and irrevocably crazy and absurd.

One day when I dared to disclose these terrible feelings to Berthold, he simply answered:

— It is surely necessary for the light to hide itself if it wants to be found, it is surely necessary for being to be denied us if we wish to participate in it. The resistance that you carry is there in all the universe, it is part of it, it is even one of

its most necessary components. There is no space without that distance, there is no time without that resistance. You are essential for the emancipation of the light. The soul exists because God has made a hollow in Himself; without that hollow, there would not be any soul. Imagine for a moment that the soul abandoned itself totally and unreservedly to this good, it would be so drowned in it that it would no longer exist. We are travelling in the shadow of the light, but that shadow contains all of the possible light. It is the possible light that responds to the living light, it is what gives it its space, its flesh to eat, its blood to drink. We are sustained by that possible light, it is our raw material. Revolt is the first step of love: I am confident that you will take the next one.

Berthold's consoling words remained stuck, as if blocked by this revolt that had become a habit for me, and I refused to give up that habit. So who then am I, Conrad of Halberstadt, in this story I have recorded in obedience to a General who wanted to destroy it? Who, then, is this person who could only take notes but not dive in, describe but not live, transport but never open? Why did the General require me to accompany the man and record his actions, his words, and the events of his life, if he forbade me to penetrate him, unless it was because I was only a stump on the shore? Why had he assigned me the only place I could take and the only role I could play, if it were not because he knew my nature? I am doubtful, I am the suspension of the act of loving, the fear of losing myself in a loving act. I am especially and above all else, obedience to this fear. The General did not want the Master to be accompanied by a diver, but by a mute stump stuck on the shore by a kind of pride intrinsic to its existence. He really never did entrust me with any other missions than that of accompanying and recording the lives of others while at the same time forbidding me to enter into them. No, he didn't need to forbid me to take this plunge, all he had to do was maintain my nature as it is. It wasn't I who obeyed, it was the General who obeyed my nature, who condemned me to my nature, and if in the end he commanded me to destroy the only thing I ever made, a story, it was in order to place before me, for the first time, a true choice. He wanted me to give up this insipid obedience so as to achieve a superior obedience. He hoped that I would save a copy and keep it secret, a copy that would represent my first true disobedience to fear, my first true obedience to life. In fact, when he asked me to destroy my pages, he was inviting me to consecrate myself, by myself, to my true mission. He entrusted Tauler with the teaching, Suso with the mysticism, Berthold with the philosophy, and to me he entrusted the task of remaining sufficiently outside to bear witness. And he wanted that mission to be an act of liberation and of life, and that is why he asked me to destroy the manuscript. Tauler spreads all over the West, Suso crosses time, Berthold pierces history, but all three had to employ various disguises to go their own ways. My own note, this manuscript I am preparing to hide behind a stone, is rushing toward the unknown without any fancy costumes, in the rough. In the end, it is I who must launch the arrow through the centuries right into the future's inevitable chaos, in order that the Master's seed might fertilize its anxiety and anguish.

So my disobedience was an obedience, and the Master's breath contained no pestilence, so consequently I am not in the depths of Hell today, but on the

contrary receptive to happiness and blessedness. Am I going to remain here harnessed to this fear, to this limbo which is no longer anything more than a habit, than a miserable identity of stone? Me, chaste? No, I was simply afraid of women. Me, detached? I was simply afraid of life. I was afraid then, of one and the same thing, the vitality which unceasingly throws being back outside of itself, light's shadow: beatitude. I am now very old and what I have to lose has grown very small, so that, in spite of doubt I am preparing to take the plunge. I am leaving for Bruges, to meet Katrei. The journey will be long, I hope long enough so that there won't be any more resistance in me when I take her in my arms. I would love to die on her heart.

The Master died amid the ambivalence of the world; I have been in some way his executioner. Manipulated by people who didn't even want to get near him, it is I who did not feed him, it is I who did not warm him, it is I who did not care for him, it is I who lit his stake of ice, it is I who closed his eyes and buried him between the cemetery and the woods. Through obeying, I disobeyed, to the point of killing both the Master and myself. He died like me amid the world's indifference, but he is still not dead inside me because I have saved a little of his warmth. If a man or a woman discovers this text one day, I pray that he does not remain at this distance: never close enough, never far enough. Let him destroy this text or enter into it, but let him not leave it to die of cold on a library shelf. Could it be that the century that discovers this text may simply place it on display between some novels and abstain from ever plunging into it! Could it be that the Master will die a second time in the ice of indifference, and that in an age of fire, at the fiery dawn of the final slope of chaos! Don't wait to love until age has broken you. As for me, I am going to Bruges to die in a woman's arms. There, I will say this prayer:

O Thou, impetuous Source, hear me. Some are born more and better than others, me, I have stayed on the edge of life. Birth is an opportunity for affiliation that I held back from signing onto. All is possible, nothing is inevitable, existence remains forever optional. I feared the openedness of the contract. But I have always had a good ear and a sharp eye. I have heard everything and seen everything: in the universe of possibilities, where insane whirlwinds throw men against each other with din of death and cries of anguish, a small voice murmurs, inviting us to throw ourselves into it.

I have been a witness to some who have drunk of that water. I did not understand all that they said about it, but the spark in their eyes told me it was good. Now that I am dying, I choose to be born at last. I want the equality of LIfe. I plunge with all my heart into the Undetermined, entirely and without reserve. I know now that there, in the broth of the One, we sprout and multiply for universal bliss.