

Meister Eckhart and Fred Craddock: Preaching as Mystical Practice

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Abstract: *This article asks how preaching might be understood as something akin to a mystical practice. To consider this, I do a close reading of a sermon by the medieval preacher and mystic Meister Eckhart. I read Eckhart's sermon through the lens of Fred Craddock's homiletic theory. Particularly important for this is Craddock's suggestion that preaching does more than communicate ideas to its audience; rather, it can serve to lead its audience to an experiential awareness of its message. Interpreting Eckhart's sermon in this way provides a sense of how preaching can indeed function as a mystical practice, bringing its listeners to a consciousness of their oneness with God.*

This article originates in an experience I had leading an adult education group at an Episcopal parish during Lent 2014.¹ As part of a weekly series on Christian mysticism, our group spent an evening reading excerpts from and talking about a selection of the sermons of the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart. As the discussion progressed, it became clear that, while the persons gathered appreciated Eckhart's statements about the union of the human soul and God, they also struggled to comprehend the complexity of his ideas. Finally, someone voiced a concern that I assume many there shared. He stated that he considered himself a relatively well-educated person, and if he couldn't understand what Eckhart was saying, how could uneducated laypersons listening to these sermons in the Middle Ages have possibly gotten his meaning? In reply, I suggested that Eckhart was perhaps not so much interested in his audience intellectually comprehending ideas; rather, his concern was that those hearing his sermons come to an experiential awareness of divine-human union. While I believed my response was correct, the evening's discussion left me with questions. Could listening to Eckhart's sermons have functioned as something akin to a mystical practice for his medieval audience, a practice which brought them to consciousness of God? If so, then how might this process of preaching as mystical practice be analyzed and explained?

Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260–1328) was a Dominican preacher, professor of theology, and mystic.² The Dominican Order, which had been founded in the thirteenth century, claimed preaching as its primary charism. Eckhart's works include scholastic scriptural commentaries and sermons written in Latin as well as sermons preached in German. His vernacular sermons, of which there are over one hundred, were preached in communities of the Dominican Order. The audience for these sermons included his fellow Dominicans as well as laypersons from the towns surrounding these communities.³ As will be illustrated by the sermon to be considered in this

An early version of this article was presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality, which was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2015. I would like to thank my colleague Beringia Zen, who first suggested to me that Fred Craddock's homiletic theory could be used to interpret Meister Eckhart's preaching.

¹ In beginning with this personal anecdote, I am including the "self-implicating character" of Christian spirituality in this article's discussion of its topic. Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth A. Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 17.

² An overview of Meister Eckhart's life and works can be found in Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 1–19.

³ *Ibid.*, 29.

article, Eckhart was known for making provocative statements about the union of the human soul and God. This eventually resulted in twenty-eight articles from his writings being posthumously judged as being either heretical or suspicious of heresy.

My sense that Eckhart's sermons could be related to mystical practice comes in part from what others have noted about his preaching. For example, Bernard McGinn states that "Eckhart believed that mystical consciousness was fundamentally hermeneutical; that is, it is achieved in the act of hearing, interpreting, and preaching the Bible."⁴ As to the nature of this consciousness that Eckhart wants to evoke with his preaching, McGinn describes it this way: "Eckhart is pleading for us to open our eyes to see what has always been the case, that God and the soul are truly one in their deepest ground."⁵ Bruce Milem suggests that an important dimension of this mysticism is the liturgical context in which Eckhart's preaching would have taken place: "Eckhart uses his sermons to show his listeners the true meaning of the event, the mass, taking place then and there. Especially important is the sacrament of the Eucharist, which enacts the union of God and human beings."⁶ In this article, I will build on such claims made by Eckhart scholars to ask specifically how this eliciting of mystical consciousness might have occurred through Eckhart's preaching. In doing this, I will ask how Eckhart produced an awareness in his listeners that helped them recognize their oneness with God.

Fred Craddock's Homiletic Theory as an Interpretive Lens

Meister Eckhart's preaching can be viewed through the lens of homiletic theory, particularly that of the New Homiletic, which rose to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s. As an important point of introduction, it can be noted that proponents of the New Homiletic suggest that the purpose of preaching is to bring the hearer of a sermon to an experiential awareness of its message. In the words of O. Wesley Allen, "Sermonic content is not propositional truth but a true, existential, transformative experience of the good news."⁷ Furthermore, in a sermon, "The language shapes not simply human beliefs (which is the orientation of propositional sermons), but human perception and experience—in a nutshell, human reality."⁸ What can be noted in such statements is a claim for the preached sermon as an invitation to a new consciousness, a new way of experiencing reality. In this regard, the perspective of the New Homiletic resonates with Eckhart's preaching, in that Eckhart was also attempting to engender a new consciousness among those who listened to his sermons.

The contrast of information reception and experiential awareness which is central to the New Homiletic has also been noted in scholarship on Eckhart's preaching. Milem states that Eckhart's sermons are "more than vehicles for ideas. They can also be seen as events, actions, or performances. From this point of view, what Eckhart says is only part of the story. We also have to ask, what is he doing in saying these things? What kinds of effects does he create?"⁹ Such a claim suggests that considering a sermon's form can be important in analyzing its function as a vehicle for a new consciousness. My method in this article will be to draw upon the description

⁴ Ibid., 24–25.

⁵ Bernard McGinn, introduction to *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, ed. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist, 1981), 61.

⁶ Bruce Milem, "Meister Eckhart's Vernacular Preaching," in *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, ed. Jeremiah M. Hackett (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 346.

⁷ O. Wesley Allen Jr., "The Pillars of the New Homiletic," in *The Renewed Homiletic*, ed. O. Wesley Allen Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Milem, "Meister Eckhart's Vernacular Preaching," 346.

of preaching found in one of the founding voices of the New Homiletic—Fred Craddock—to consider how Eckhart’s preaching might have functioned as a mystical practice for his audience. To do this, I will do a close reading of one of Eckhart’s vernacular sermons in light of Craddock’s homiletic theory.¹⁰ Through this reading, I will attempt to show that Craddock’s vision of what makes for effective preaching provides an interpretive lens with which to understand how Eckhart’s sermons might have led his audience to consciousness of their oneness with God.

Fred Craddock gives much attention to the movement that occurs in a sermon. He presents an alternative to the traditional deductive sermonic form, in which movement “is from the general truth to the particular application or experience.”¹¹ The alternative to this is an inductively structured sermon, in which “thought moves from the particulars of experience that have a familiar ring in the listener’s ear to a general truth or conclusion.”¹² This emphasis on beginning with the particulars of experience highlights an important dimension of the inductive sermon, the employment of concrete imagery as an inherent part of its message. According to Henry Mitchell, if a sermon is to bring about an experiential awareness in its audience, it must “be expressed in *concrete terms and images*—not in glittering abstractions, but in day-to-day details and dynamics—the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures.”¹³ Relating this use of imagery with the change of consciousness that is the goal of preaching, Allen explains that “sermons then take the listeners on a journey from where they exist to a vision and experience of something new. The vehicle that takes them on the journey is imagery.”¹⁴ An inductive sermon is thus directed toward an insight, which comes only at the end of the sermon. The entire movement of the sermon is intended to lead the sermon’s audience to an experience of that insight. And the way that movement occurs is through imagery that appeals to the particulars of human experience.

A Reading of Meister Eckhart’s Sermon 24

Before beginning this reading of Meister Eckhart’s sermon, a brief consideration of what McGinn calls the “mysticism of the ground” is important.¹⁵ The Middle High German word *grunt* (“ground”) can refer to “what is inmost, hidden, most proper to a being . . . that is, its essence.”¹⁶ As used by Eckhart, this term refers to the essence of both the human soul and God.¹⁷ Eckhart’s sermons are concerned with communicating to their audience that this ground is the shared unity of the human soul and God. In fact, the ground functions as a metaphor that is “meant to transform, or overturn, ordinary limited forms of consciousness through the process of making the inner meaning of the metaphor one’s own in everyday life.”¹⁸ Such a transformation of consciousness based on the mysticism of the ground is the goal of Eckhart’s preaching.

¹⁰ In analyzing one sermon to uncover Eckhart’s meaning, I am following a suggestion made by Milem regarding interpreting Eckhart’s preaching (Ibid.). This approach is also consistent with New Homiletic theory, in which emphasis is on the movement that occurs within a given sermon.

¹¹ Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 4th ed. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2001), 45.

¹² Ibid., 47.

¹³ Henry Mitchell, “The Hearer’s Experience of the Word,” in *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, ed. Gail R. O’Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 228.

¹⁴ Allen, “Pillars of the New Homiletic,” 13.

¹⁵ McGinn, *Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 37.

¹⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹⁷ Ibid., 41.

¹⁸ Ibid., 38.

The sermon of Eckhart that I am considering here—Sermon 24—begins, as do most all Eckhart’s vernacular sermons, with a quotation from scripture.¹⁹ Here, that quotation is from Rom 13:14, which in the Vulgate reads “*induimini Dominum Jesum Christum*,” (“put on the Lord Jesus Christ”). Eckhart uses the similar sound of the Latin *induimini*, “put on,” and the German *intuot*, “put into,” to translate this verse as “put Christ into yourself, interiorize him to yourself.”²⁰ He then starts his exegesis by saying, “By putting self aside, a person puts inside himself Christ, God, happiness, and holiness.”²¹ Eckhart then identifies what he believes to be his audience’s perspective as they begin to listen to the sermon: “If a young boy were to tell marvelous tales, one would believe him; but Paul promises great things and you hardly believe him.”²² Thus, at the outset of his sermon, Eckhart states that it is hard for those who hear him to believe in the possibility of divine-human oneness. This is important, as the entire movement of Eckhart’s sermon will be to have his audience end at a place very different from where they began.

Next in the sermon, Eckhart employs two images to illustrate what it might mean to say that God is put into one’s self. In the first, an allusion to Ps 8, he refers to “what God does with the stars, the moon, and the sun,” and he relates this to “the soul, that God has done and does such great things with it and for its sake.”²³ He continues with a second image to explain what it is that God does: “I form a letter of the alphabet according to a likeness which the letter has in me, in my soul, but not according to my soul.” Eckhart contrasts this with the creation of humanity in the image of God:

But the soul [God] made not just according to an image in himself. . . . Rather, he made it according to himself, in short, according to all that he is in his nature, his being, his activity which flows forth yet remains within, and according to the ground where he remains within himself, where he constantly gives birth to his only-begotten Son, from where the Holy Spirit blossoms forth. God created the soul in accordance with this out-flowing, inward-remaining work.²⁴

Eckhart thus uses concrete, tangible images to evoke the dynamic of the interiorizing of God with which he began the sermon. An image of the heavenly bodies leads to a consideration of God’s relationship with the soul. A description of writing the alphabet likewise leads to a consideration of the soul’s likeness to God’s ground. In this employment of imagery at the outset of the sermon, one can see an appeal to the particulars of experience that characterizes inductive movement in preaching.

Furthermore, through the use of imagery such as this, Eckhart is calling upon his audience to envision what he describes and to come to a conclusion regarding its significance for understanding divine-human oneness. In this, Eckhart is asking his audience to become actively

¹⁹ The title “Sermon 24” is taken from the numbering of the German sermons in the critical edition of Eckhart’s works. This is the standard way of referring to Eckhart’s vernacular sermons.

²⁰ Meister Eckhart, Sermon 24, in *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist, 1986), 284. Citations to this sermon are by page number from this edition. For discussion of Eckhart’s translation of Rom 13:14, see Frank Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 174.

²¹ Eckhart, Sermon 24, 284.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 284–285.

engaged in the sermon. This corresponds well with Craddock's belief that "listeners are active participants in preaching," and that "sermons should proceed or move in such a way as to give the listener something to think, feel, decide, and do during the preaching."²⁵ Eckhart's use of imagery in this sermon asks his audience to become actively engaged in his preaching.

Eckhart continues the sermon with a third image. With this, he goes beyond characterizing the soul based on its creation; rather, he suggests an ongoing state of divine-human unity. He begins with this statement: "It is part of the nature of all things that those above constantly flow into those beneath to the extent that the lower things have the capacity for those above."²⁶ Eckhart then makes an analogy to explain his vision of human nature: "Because God is above the soul, he is constantly flowing into the soul and can never slip out of the soul. . . . As long as a person holds himself under God, he is receiving direct divine inflowing, straight from God."²⁷ Having used, as before, a concrete image to illustrate divine-human oneness, Eckhart goes on to explain how this oneness is to be understood. He says that "the soul receives God not as something foreign to it, nor as though it were beneath God. Whatever is under something is different from it and distant. The masters say that the soul receives [from God] as light receives from light, where nothing is foreign or distant."²⁸ It should be noted that with this statement Eckhart presents his hearers with something of a paradox. He began with an image of God above and the soul beneath; he concludes by saying that the soul cannot be beneath God, as they share an inherent oneness. That is, as the sermon progresses, he says something different than what he had said earlier. As Frank Tobin suggests, a paradox such as this functions as Eckhart's invitation to awareness of divine-human union: "Paradox thus takes us to the limits of our knowledge and helps us to define these limits in our search to know ourselves and God. What is beyond these limits is darkness and, paradoxically, a splendor beyond all our capacity to imagine."²⁹

If this paradox is an invitation to further reflection on the soul's relationship to God, it is developed by Eckhart in the next two movements of his sermon. In these, he suggests how the soul that receives from God also shares an identity with that God from whom it receives. He begins this part of the sermon by making reference to "something in the soul," wherein the soul exists in a shared identity with God. Of this, he says, "It is what it is in another and that [other] is in it; for it is what it is in that other and that other is in it. This other flows into it and it into this other, and here, he [Paul] urges: 'Join yourselves to God, to happiness.'"³⁰ Here, Eckhart is using the literary device of chiasmus, the reversing of order in a sequence of terms, to embody his understanding of the soul and God. Of this literary device, Tobin writes that "it is a means of taking differing concepts and, by intertwining them, making them one."³¹ This can be seen in Eckhart's words. Whereas earlier in the sermon he said God flows into the soul, here he says they flow into each other. Thus the words themselves, and the intertwining form they take, serve to embody Eckhart's claim of mystical union. The listener of the sermon is made progressively more aware of this union through the movement of the sermon.

The oneness of God and the soul suggested by this chiasmus is articulated explicitly by Eckhart in the following lines of the sermon, when he says that "in the ground of divine being

²⁵ Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 25.

²⁶ Eckhart, Sermon 24, 285.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language*, 167.

³⁰ Eckhart, Sermon 24, 285.

³¹ Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language*, 168.

where the three Persons are one being, the soul is one according to the ground. And so, if you wish it, all things are yours and God as well. Therefore, abandon yourself, all things, and everything you are in yourself, and take yourself according to how you are in God.”³² This identification with the unity of the trinitarian persons is further claimed by Eckhart in his discussion of the Incarnation:

God assumed human nature and united it with his Person. At this point human nature became God because he took on human nature and not a human being. Therefore, if you want to be this same Christ and God, abandon all of that which the eternal Word did not assume. The eternal Word did not assume *a* man. Therefore, leave whatever is *a* man in you and whatever you are, and take yourself purely according to human nature. Then you are the same in the eternal Word as human nature is in him; for your human nature and his are without difference. It is one, and whatever it is in Christ, that it also is in you.³³

It should be noted that in these last two statements, Eckhart has associated an imperative with his discussion of divine-human unity. He instructs his hearers to abandon themselves and all things, by which he seems to mean abandoning anything that would serve to distinguish them from God who is the ground of their being.

At first glance, imperative statements such as these might suggest that Eckhart’s sermon is different from Craddock’s vision of an inductive sermon. In fact, one of the hallmarks of inductive preaching is that it is not imperative in tone. Because the sermon begins with the particulars of experience and moves toward general truth, the hearer is led to that truth and does not need to be told what to do. Application is intrinsic to the sermon’s structure in and of itself. As Craddock explains, “The inductively moving sermon is more descriptive than hortatory and more marked by the affirmative than the imperative.”³⁴

Nonetheless, I would suggest that the exhortations made by Eckhart in this sermon are consistent with what Craddock describes. They are less a specific application of the sermon than a conclusion based upon the particular experiences and truths that Eckhart has articulated through the movement of the sermon. They are not commanding his audience to do anything; rather, they are describing what is, in the hope that this will be recognized by the sermon’s hearers. In considering this difference between making statements about what should be done and making statements about what is, Craddock claims that “the strongest of all imperatives is a clear affirmative that has been embraced.”³⁵ This is precisely Eckhart’s methodology in this sermon. His call for detachment from self and all things arises from his claim for divine-human oneness. Thus, the imperative statements are a conclusion that follows from the affirmative statements Eckhart has preached.

Eckhart moves toward the conclusion of his sermon with a final transition. He has appealed to his listeners to recognize who they are in the ground of their being. He now asks a final question: “When are you as you should be?”³⁶ That is, when does this recognition take place? Eckhart’s answer draws upon Gal 4:4: “In the fullness of time the Son was sent.” In reflecting on the meaning of this verse, Eckhart leads his hearers to the conclusion he has been moving toward throughout his sermon, that of their eternal oneness with God: “There, there is

³² Eckhart, Sermon 24, 285.

³³ Ibid., 286.

³⁴ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 49. Cf. Allen, “Pillars of the New Homiletic,” 12–13.

³⁵ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 49.

³⁶ Eckhart, Sermon 24, 286.

neither before nor after; it is all present there. And in this ever present view I hold all things in my possession. This is ‘fullness of time,’ and thus I am as I should be. And thus I am truly the only Son and Christ.”³⁷ A comparison of the biblical texts that begin and end Eckhart’s sermon is worth noting. The sermon began with an instruction to “put Christ into yourself,” and it ends with a claim that those who hear the sermon “truly” are “the only Son and Christ.” The realization that comes at the end of the sermon represents the fulfillment of the instruction at the sermon’s beginning.³⁸

Having heard Eckhart’s conclusion, we might now ask how it corresponds with the structure of an inductive sermon. For Craddock, the importance of induction in preaching is that it leads the sermon’s hearers to a conclusion. This is not a propositional statement; rather, it is a personally appropriated truth realized as the hearer has participated in the sermon’s movement. As Craddock describes it, “If [the sermon] is done well, one often need not make the applications of the conclusion to the lives of the hearers. If *they* have made the trip, it is *their* conclusion, and the implication for their own situations is not only clear but personally inescapable.”³⁹ Even more directly, Craddock says, “The listener completes the sermon.”⁴⁰ What Craddock describes in these statements resembles quite closely what Eckhart does in this sermon. He begins with a biblical text, and uses a series of concrete images to explicate that text. These are directed toward an inescapable conclusion—consciousness of the soul’s union with God. The sermon begins with the statement that it is hard to believe in this. It ends in the hope that this union, Christ inside the self, has been recognized. It is an inductive movement toward an experience of this on the part of the hearers of the sermon.

Eckhart ends his sermon with a brief prayer. As we have seen, he has evoked awareness of the soul’s oneness with God with the phrase “in the fullness of time.” He now ends with this petition: “That we come to this ‘fullness of time,’ may God help us. Amen.”⁴¹ Here again is paradox. Eckhart has preached a sermon directing his hearers to an awareness of divine-human unity, the reality of the shared ground of God and the human soul. Thus, the “fullness of time” already exists, and yet at the end of the sermon Eckhart prays that it may arrive. Such a paradox suggests the entire point of Eckhart’s preaching—to make his hearers existentially aware of a truth of which they are unaware. Eckhart prays for his hearers to realize what is, their union with God. The sermon that has been considered here is an attempt to move them toward that realization.

A Shared Ground and the Shock of Recognition

According to Fred Craddock, an inductively structured sermon works because of shared understandings and experiences that exist between the preacher and the sermon’s audience. As he explains, “Because the particulars of life provide the place of beginning, there is the necessity of a ground of shared experience. . . . These common experiences, provided they are meaningful in nature and are reflected on with insight and judgment, are for the inductive method essential to

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ In considering Eckhart’s sermon, it can be noted that there is a similarity with one of Craddock’s suggestions as to how to end a sermon, this being to return to the biblical text with which the sermon started. While Eckhart does not literally use the same biblical text at the beginning and end of Sermon 24, there is a connection between the two texts which lends itself to the movement of the sermon. Fred B. Craddock, *Craddock on the Craft of Preaching*, ed. Lee Sparks and Kathryn Hayes Sparks (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2011), 159.

³⁹ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 48–49.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁴¹ Eckhart, Sermon 24, 286.

the preaching experience.”⁴² This notion of shared experience as the foundation of preaching has been critiqued by some homiletic theorists because it assumes a certain homogeneity on the part of the preacher and members of the congregation. For example, John McClure claims that “appeals to common human experience . . . fail to pay true attention to the real experiences of the many people, with their own partial and contradictory stories/lives.”⁴³ As for the practical implications of this critique, McClure says that “preachers cannot help but realize that on Sunday mornings they are not simply preaching from, to, or within a framework of common human experience or common ecclesial vision. . . . Instead, they are in a situation of diverse worldly and ecclesial experiences.”⁴⁴

Meister Eckhart also assumes the existence of a shared ground, and this informs the construction of his sermons. However, Eckhart’s understanding of this is different from Craddock’s. As such, it provides for a possible constructive revisioning of Craddock’s homiletic theory. Craddock argues for the existence of a shared ground based upon common human experience. What Eckhart has in mind is the shared ground of divine-human unity. In the words of Eckhart’s Sermon 5b, “Here God’s ground is my ground, and my ground is God’s ground.”⁴⁵ Using a different metaphor, in the words of Sermon 12, “The eye in which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me.”⁴⁶ Of course, Eckhart is not only talking about his ground or his eye; he is describing a divine-human unity that is true for all persons. That is, Eckhart assumes there is a basic commonality to both himself and those who hear his preaching. He is speaking from his awareness of union with God, and asking his audience to join him in that awareness. In McGinn’s words, “Eckhart invites his audience to hear what he has heard and to become one with him in the one ground.”⁴⁷ While Craddock’s inductive preacher makes use of a common experience he shares with his hearers, Eckhart calls upon a common existential reality, the one ground, and he asks his congregants to become conscious of this.

A final element to consider in Craddock’s vision of preaching involves two interrelated moments, what he calls the “nod of recognition” and the “shock of recognition.” The nod of recognition refers to aspects in a sermon with which the audience can readily identify: “Effective preaching generates a nod of recognition, which is a feeling of familiarity, a sense of being at home. In the message I recognize the message as my message, what I have owned as a Christian from my Bible, in my church.”⁴⁸ The shock of recognition refers to the moment when a sermon causes the audience to move toward what is unfamiliar, what causes them to perceive reality in a new way. In Craddock’s words, “Effective preaching carries in it and generates in the listener a shock of recognition. We all wish to create the shock in preaching, for people to be startled and see something afresh and anew.”⁴⁹

⁴² Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 49.

⁴³ John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2001), 49. In response to this critique, Craddock maintains that shared experience is foundational to inductive preaching: “I will continue to trust that even in the multicultural context, beneath the surface people are more alike than they are different and will resonate to the truth that both of you share beneath the surface.” Fred B. Craddock, “Inductive Preaching Renewed,” in *The Renewed Homiletic*, 54.

⁴⁴ McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching*, 57.

⁴⁵ Meister Eckhart, Sermon 5b, in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, 183.

⁴⁶ Meister Eckhart, Sermon 12, in *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, 270.

⁴⁷ McGinn, *Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 30.

⁴⁸ Craddock, *Craddock on the Craft of Preaching*, 127.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

For Craddock, the key element of these contrasting dimensions of the sermon is that the shock must be generated out of the nod; that is, what is unfamiliar must arise from what is familiar. As he describes it, “The shock should come at the point of recognition. . . . In that very moment in which I nodded over the place in your sermon and said, ‘There I am. I recognize myself.’ There’s the point of the shock. ‘Is that really me?’”⁵⁰ This complementary dynamic between what is comfortable and what challenges the listener to new perception is precisely what Eckhart employs in his preaching. His sermon begins with a source familiar to his audience, the biblical text. What Eckhart does with this text, however, is reflect upon it inductively, leading his listeners to a conclusion of divine-human union as the ground of their being. With this conclusion comes an understanding of oneself anew through a reconsideration of that which is already known. It is, in Craddock’s words, a “shock of recognition.”

In discussing the importance of sermonic form, Fred Craddock claims that “*how* one preaches is to a large extent *what* one preaches.”⁵¹ This article has been an attempt to use this claim to consider how Meister Eckhart’s preaching functions. While this certainly involves the content of Eckhart’s sermons, I have emphasized the form of those sermons, and used Craddock’s homiletic theory to discuss how that form might have mediated mystical consciousness to those who heard Eckhart preach. This suggests that preaching can indeed function as a mystical practice, shocking its listeners into a recognition of who they really are, bringing them to consciousness of their oneness with God.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 131.

⁵¹ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 44.