

Daily Meditation 06/14/2023

Meister Eckhart on How All People are Nobles and Aristocrats

Good morning.

Today we're dealing with the meditation on Meister Eckhart and his amazing talk, which certainly was a sermon as well, on how everyone is an aristocrat, everyone is a noble, a noble person.

One historian says that there was a "merchant aristocracy" at the time of Eckhart, and the use of aristocracy was on people's minds, because aristocracy itself was kind of slipping. And they were going through an identity process, and the merchants were becoming a very strong class.

So in a way, Eckhart was addressing both the noble class that inherited nobility, and that new merchant class that was challenging, if you will, the aristocracy. But here, he's taking on both.

And one historian, Jacques Heers, says that what characterized the popular uprisings of Eckhart's period, and place, was that even when the people overthrew one aristocracy, another immediately took its place.

Thus we see that Eckhart is doing a very courageous and profound thing when he's confronting both aristocracies, if you will, by wanting to bring in the poor and peasants and those who were speaking in the German dialect, which was the poor and the peasants. Eckhart deliberately preached in their language to assure them of their nobility. And thereby he was truly making an effort at democratizing the whole notion of aristocracy.

So it's in this context that he's speaking in his talk, and writing this long essay he wrote on aristocracy and the noble person.

Said Ernst Bloch, the Marxist philosopher:

One thing is certain. Eckhart's sermon does not intend to snuff man out for the sake of an Other-world beyond him....Revolutionary Anabaptists, those disciples of Eckhart and Tauler [Tauler was a Dominican student of Meister Eckhart], showed afterwards in practice exactly how highly and how uncomfortably for every tyrant. A subject who thought himself to be in personal union with the Lord of Lords, provided, when things got serious, a very poor example indeed, of serfhood.

So Eckhart was part of the liberation movement of Germany at that time. And of course, this got him into real trouble. because the Franciscan Archbishop of Cologne was an aristocrat, and also there was a struggle between the Dominicans and the Franciscans at the time. And much of it was fueled by the fact that Aquinas had been canonized a saint a few years earlier, and their Franciscan brother had not.

A key to Eckhart's preaching was to redefine the aristocrat, but also to try to erase the severe caste system that was part of Germany in the time. Cologne had become a European trade center par excellence. The Emperor Henry VII had convoked an international gathering of over 77 European towns and cities and Cologne was key to

Germany's trade with England. Its merchants forwarded English cloth by way of the Rhine Valley, earned fares in Frankfurt and cities of Southern Germany, as well as around the Danube to the east.

So all this was part of the energy of Eckhart daring to propose that nobility was bestowed on everybody. And it did not endear him to the noble class, but it certainly got him a lot of followers among the poorest of the poor. And this eventually resulted in two trials: one in Cologne, that he won, and the second one in Avignon, under the Pope who was living in Avignon, France, and he lost that trial. And in many ways he was lost to history until recently, when we've been bringing him back.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.