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Religious Vocabulary on Creation: Eriugena, Hildegard of Bingen, Eckhart

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Abstract: This paper departs from biblical images of creation (wisdom, word, mirror), and goes on to consider those images in three medieval thinkers from the Neoplatonist tradition. Firstly, Johannes Scotus Eriugena, who uses *sapientia* and *in principio* images. Secondly, St Hildegard of Bingen, in whose visions the images of wisdom and mirror-God appear. In third place, M. Eckhart, who refers in his Latin writings to God's creation *in se ipso*. The article will try to show that a common feature regarding *creatio* can be found in all the three authors: the explanation of the origin of the world as manifestation of the first principle and the final return–union–to it. This subject has recently been partly dealt with by authors such as W. Beierwaltes, W. Otten or M. Marder. The present research follows the thread of previous studies, claiming at the same time to be an original contribution to the history of Neoplatonic thought about creation.

Keywords: creation; wisdom; mirror; Eriugena; Hildegard of Bingen; Eckhart

1. Introduction: Medieval Images of Creation

The awareness of creation in medieval philosophy inescapably entails a human look on the transcendent. And that look hides a longing which couldn't be present in the Ancient world, where gods and men were part of the same family. The religious aspect of creation is displayed in that human desire for access to the divine.

Many medieval pictorial representations draw the creator of the universe as an architect, a 'world-maker', the divine artist is represented measuring the orb in order to confer a spatial and temporal disposition to it (Fingernagel and Gastgeber 2008); and also, more currently, Auguste Rodin designed *The Hand of God* or *The Creation* as a hand moulding clay. There also exists a picture which represents Saint John the Evangelist dictating the world to the amanuensis Prochorus, entitled *In the Beginning*, in allusion to creation by means of the pronunciation of a meaningful Word which contains all the letters of the universe (Fingernagel and Gastgeber 2008).

These illustrations show a special irruption of the finite. The theme of creation is thus introduced in the atmosphere of post-Aristotelian discussions in order to solve an aporia whose terms are, on one side, a self-consistent nature with a certain self-endurance; and, on the other side and at the same time, a contingent one, demanding foundation.

The pretention to solve the problem of the origin of the world is found at the speculative core of these questions. Answers have been multiple throughout history, from diverse religious myths to more explicit symbolisms, and they can even be considered questions of interest for our contemporaries (Oliva 2021).

In this investigation, I will deal with the question of creation in three authors from the Neoplatonist tradition, ranging from the IXth to the early XIVth centuries. Firstly, John Scotus Eriugena, who refers to creation using mainly the images of wisdom and word, both according to *Genesis* and to John's *Prologue*. Secondly, I will address the question of God-mirror in Hildegard of Bingen. Finally, we will try to figure out the meaning of Meister Eckhart's *creatio in se ipso*. Wisdom, word, mirror and the 'self' are expressions or images which aim to unravel the deep meaning of both the divine creative action and the structure

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of finitude. A common ground is revealed in this train of thought, which is the account of creation as manifestation.

Ferdinand Brunner wrote that the doctrine of manifestation is related to the emanative cause, which, in the Middle Ages, has a specific meaning: 'It is necessary to avoid representing emanatism as a derivation in the literal sense, or as a simple physical extension of the principle. Water or light, for instance, certainly escape from their source and get more or less away from it, but their source is inexhaustible and so it remains unaffected in its own nature by the derivation or irradiation that proceeds from it' (Brunner 1990). We can say that creation, emanation, theophany and manifestation signify better than other terms the direct ontological dependence with respect to God, as well the gnoseological role it plays for the human being who knows God, not in Himself, but in the beings in whom He appears. In this sense, alterity of the creature is understood to be assumed in God.

Regarding the relation between creation and thought, is relevant the well-known book by W. Otten (2020), who tries to recover the ontological status of creation and relates it to thought. Since Brunner and Otten, the relationship between creation as emanative cause and creation as thought and divine mirror is more clearly appreciated.

Let's see then hereunder the meaning–both religious and metaphysical–of the notion of manifestation in Eriugena, in Hildegard of Bingen's idea of mirror, and in the Eckhartian version of 'in the beginning'. These are three authors who have thoroughly thought the signification of the world as manifestation, as well as its theological-anthropological derivations regarding union to the divine. We will see how the vocabulary employed to describe creation connotes in itself a religious dimension.

A word about methodology: each author will treated separately with their respective conclusions. In the final conclusions of this paper the initial thesis will be further developed.

2. Scotus Eriugena: *Sapientia* and *In Principio*

The Eriugenian tradition features the Neoplatonist (let us call it) 'dogma' about the conception of the first cause. According to this thesis, the One-cause is *in* everything, and, at the same time, *outside* everything: the first cause is operant in what proceeds from it, but remains in itself as it is. Only in this way can the finite being's difference from its origin be thought (Beierwaltes 1980). Such is the model of the emanative cause proposed in n. 35 of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*; a text Eriugena certainly could not have known himself, but whose doctrine was present in the work of Dionysius the Areopagite (Erismann 2011), which the Irish translates in the court of King Charles the Bald, and which strongly influences the elaboration of his own doctrine on creation.

Eriugena's global vision of both human and divine reality is thus based on the dual movement of procession and return: each effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it and returns to it (Proclus 1963). Although we talk of Eriugena's ideas within the framework of division (or procession) and resolution or return (Eriugena 1987, 1997), both forms ought to be understood as intrinsically intertwined; that is, they are not, strictly speaking, separate movements or processes. Procession of creatures and their return is intimately associated to reason, to whose consideration they appear as inseparable from one another (Eriugena 1997, II.529a and 532a). Dialectics, as the 'mother of arts', can descend from genera to species or ascend from species to genera (Eriugena 1997, V.870b). According to Paul Rorem (1988), Eriugena applied this method to the 'macrocosm of metaphysics', for which he adapted the Neoplatonist theme of *exitus* and *reditus* to the total history of God and the world.

In order to understand well Eriugena's thought on creation, departing from the central problem of the derivation of the multiple from the one in extratemporal moments of a dialectic ontology is especially significant, to my consideration. We must particularly avoid mixing authentic creation–related to empiric multiplicity–and the origin of forms, whereby (or from which) there can be no creation in a strict sense, as we read in the fifth book of *De divisione naturae*, in the following dialogue between *nvtritor* and *alvmnvs*: 'And it is from these, which are incorporeal and intelligible, that the corporeal and sensible derives its origin (. . .) Causes we name the 'reasons' of the first order of generality which were

established instantaneously and together in the Mind of God: while *substances* are the individual and most special properties and 'reasons' of individual and most special objects, properties 'reasons' which are distributed among the Causes and established in them' (Eriugena 1997, V.887a). That is, primordial causes, the second mode of Nature–both from formal and objective reason–conform the eternal status of the finite, at a moment when the concept of creation is already explained through the emanative cause and means, mainly, both permanence in itself, and manifestation or theophany[1]. Nevertheless, regarding causal relations existing in the created world, the fact needs to be considered that they are not but a remote analogy of the supreme causality of the first cause. This is cause both in the primary and secondary senses, being the immediate cause of each thing, as well as the cause of the complex totality of the universe.

Actually, Eriugena assumes the Proclian scheme of permanence, procession and return; yet, within this assumption of the Neoplatonist causal scheme, the Irish assigns to the created world, if not the ontological status as such, at least its consistence in that it tends, as an end, to its origin. In fact, according to Ch. Erismann (2007), the application of this scheme in 'Eriugena leads to the following result: the moment in which the created world remains in God corresponds to the intelligible creation of the world in the form of primordial causes or divine ideas; it is the *natura creata et creans*. Then comes the procession into the sensible world, the moment of the realisation of the division into genera and species: this is the domain to which the categories apply. At this moment, each entity is determined by space and time. The last stage is that of the return to the creator, the synthesis'.

Eriugena and the Subsistence of Effects in Primordial Cause

Eriugena affirms the subsistence of effects in primordial causes. From there, it could be argued that *ex nihilo* would mean *ex Deo*, in the sense of divine creation as apparition or manifestation of the superessential nothing, which is the first cause concerning human intelligence, due to its ineffable excellence and incomprehensible infinitude[2]. In this way, primordial causes are understood to provide the pattern according to which things contained in the sphere of the third nature are modelled; thus, the ineffable becomes cognoscible in its theophanies. The book of the world is then one of the means to know the being which is beyond all being and all knowledge. All the predicates stated by cataphatic theology apply to God only *per metaphoram a creatura ad creatorem*.

Creative causality is understood from the paradigm of emanativity as *opus intelligentiae*. Therefore, expressions like 'All things are contained in the divine mind' (Eriugena 1997, V.925a) or 'He comprehends Himself as the cause of all the existing' are frequent, thinking being an immanent action inseparable from the emanative cause, which thereby cannot be conceived as accidental or *per accidens*: 'For Him–he tells us–creating the universe is not accidental' (Eriugena 1997, III.639a-b). Eriugena offers a summary of his view on creation in III, 678 A-B, from where we extract the following theses: 1. What God has done, exactly that and no other, He always wanted and saw. 2. What God always wants and sees is always with Him and not out of Him. As Piamonte has commented, 'this specification is of utmost importance, for it shows the sense Eriugena attributes to the biblical texts which talk of creation 'in the beginning' (in the Verb), 'in wisdom''. (...) And, finally, it is convenient to acknowledge that it is within God Himself that the descent from superessentiality to the multitude of essences occurs. The only true 'nothing' is divine goodness which transcends everything, the only true creation is the '*aeterna conditio rerum in Verbo Dei*' (Piamonte 1968; Eriugena 1989). After these considerations, *in se ipso* can also be attributed to Eriugena as a condition for the union of the human person with divinity person (Gersch 1977). A thesis with which I consider necessary to agree, or as Eriugena writes: *Divino animo omnia contineri nullus recte naturas rerum intelligens dubitat* (Eriugena 1997, V.925Va; see also: Kijewska 2014).

All that without forgetting, at last, that for the Irish philosopher 'man was created as the image of God, so that in human all creatures (*omnes creaturae*)' (Kurdzialek 2014). Here, according to the model of the theory of emanation, the moment of *proodos* from a

unique principle of all reality implies a step from essence to existence, which will also enable the comprehension of intelligibility of nature as work or cause by God. Finally, 'purified human intellect unites proper divine intellection in the highest knowledge of the unknown' (Moran 1990). That union with divinity, which opens a door to human's religious dimension, is possible thanks to the described conception of creation as manifestation.

3. Hildegard von Bingen: God-Mirror

Within the conceptual framework of the Middle Ages, initially marked by Platonism until well into the XIIth century, vision is a privileged way of knowledge; by means of vision we come in contact with what is beautiful. And, due to its power to radiate light–the source of all beauty–the mirror was charged with an exceptional symbolic load.

This is how the mirror enters the religious vocabulary of the Middle Ages, as well as their spirituality and thought. There are three main texts contextualizing medieval thought on the mirror. In first place, the book of *Wisdom* (7, 26) describes Wisdom as: 'the brightness that shines forth from eternal light. She's a mirror that flawlessly reflects God's activity. She's the perfect image of God's goodness'. Secondly, in *Corinthians* 1, 13, 12, 'For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror'. And in third place, the passage in *James* (1, 23–24): 'Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like'.

The mirror has different meanings and a certain ambivalence in the cited texts. Paul's mirror only gives a veiled image or representation of the truth of things. It is a sieved, indirect knowledge, and it refers to the advance from imperfect sight to face to face vision of the model of knowledge. In fact, for Paul there is not a mirror in this world to get to know oneself. Only going beyond the self and reckoning oneself in the original look, can one know oneself: 'then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known' (*Corinthians* 1, 13, 12). In Paul, the fact that, after the world of the mirror, we will see 'face to face', means we will know as we are known. That is, our knowledge of ourselves is essentially linked to a rupture or departure from the mirror, and to a look over ourselves. In Paul there exists, moreover, an almost impossible conciliation between the vision of the face of God and continuity of life, according to Yahweh's words to Moses in Mount Sinai. He thus differentiates between 'face to face' and 'through the mirror'. That look traverses the mirror to take one to see something else. James' mirror, in contrast, reminds human beings their inconstance, their fragility and their folly when they forget themselves and lose sight of themselves. It has a moral sense.

Hildegard of Bingen—a relevant, early scholastics theologician–represents a notable woman, one whose theological discourse does not only develop from solid dogmatic concepts, but integrates as well complex visions and symbols, both igneous and mirroring (Meis 2002; Gösebrink 1998). The mirror is presented in her work both as metaphysical knowledge and religious instrument, leading to an idea of creation *from* and *in* God.

In front of the above uses of mirror, wisdom is—in Hildegard—really, the clear mirror of divinity. In this way it is appreciated in Hildegard of Bingen. For her, divine energy, which is ultimate life, when creating, 'life looked at herself in herself at the mirror, at the mirror God' (Dumolin 2016). God Himself appears here as a mirror where He entirely sees Himself in creating the world; we know that then He enunciates a word whereby He creates the Heavens and the Earth. And, in turn, the human being, at the summit of creation, is defined as 'mirror of God' (Dumolin 2016). 'Hildegard's visions', Victoria Cirlot has written, 'are inscribed within a theoretical framework where the eye image occupies a central place within the relationship between the visible and the invisible, as it is installed on the certainty that the invisible is reached through the visible' (Cirlot 2005)[3]. For this reason, we can talk of a living mirror which configures the world, and also of the living mirror the human being becomes when one becomes conscious of who one is (Konnermann 1991). We can see here the anagogic path employed by Dionysius in *The*

Heavenly Hierarchy, which the abott Suger of Saint Denis recovered in the XIIth century, when he developed the theory which was to found Gothic Art.

Currently, Michael Marder has written about the Hildegardian vision of reality and creation through her visions of the world and nature. This reveals a mysticism typical of the monastic schools of the twelfth century.

Saint Hildegard presents in the *Liber divinorum operum* a work of God entangled between cosmos and man (Calabrese and Junco 2018). It was from the year 1163 on–at the age of 65–that Hildegard started writing this third visionary book, which she completed around 1173–74. Chapter CV of the Fourth Vision in Part One is, exactly, an exposition and comment of the *Prologue* to the Gospel according to Saint John, from 'In the beginning was the word' to 'full of grace and truth' (1, 1–14). The main theme here is the eternity of God's Word, together with an approach on how the creatures were within the Creator's thought. Besides, Part Two is dedicated almost entirely (from chapter XVII to XLVIII) to a comment on the six days of creation, chapter XLIII especially standing out there, dealing with the sixth day and the plan to make the human being in God's image, and addressing how the strength of God's power and the light of the Creator's wisdom glitter in the tailoring of the human body (St. Hildegard of Bingen 1996, 2018).

The work and the narrated visions are not written following the author's thoughts, it is God Himself who orders her to write 'With truth as my witness, I have not offered anything of human sentiment, but only what I perceived in the heavenly mysteries. (. . .) I heard a voice from heaven, teaching me thus. And it said: 'Write, therefore, according to me and in this way." (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2018). Thus, the voice told her: 'O poor little form, you are the daughter of very many labours, tempered by many grave infirmities of the body, yet also flooded by the depth of God's mysteries. Commit to fixed writing these things that you see with the inner eyes and perceive with the inner ears of the soul, to be useful for humankind; so that through them, humans might understand their Creator and not flee from worshiping him with worthy honour. Write them indeed not according to your own heart, but according to my testimony, I who am life without beginning and end. You did not invent them, nor did any other human consider them in advance; rather, they were foreordained by me before the beginning of the world.' (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 30). This imperative mode reveals both the evident command of the above considered, and the expression of the inwardly heard and understood word (Rapp 1998). Hildegard insists on the fact that what she writes has been perfectly consciously revealed to her, 'and not in dreams or ecstasies' (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 31).

The key text to our purpose is the following: "In the beginning was the Word.' This is open to understanding thus: (. . .) I am also Reason, which took its sound from no one else, but from which all rationality breathes. To behold my face, therefore, I created mirrors in which I consider all the never-failing wonders of my antiquity. These mirrors I made to sing together in praise, for mine is the voice as of thunder with which I move the whole circle of the earth with the living sounds of all creatures.' (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 244). As it can be noticed, the mirror simile has an essential role in the creation of the world. That said, one should note that the divine mirror is–as Nicholas of Cusa will say later–a 'living mirror', where God really looks, so to speak, at the orb of the created and the uncreated. It is not a metaphor referred to the material mirror. For, indeed, the eyes reflected on a material polished mirror are 'blind eyes', as they don't see. God would then be authentic mirror, that is, without metaphor.

The idea of the mirror related to the God-world dynamic has antecedents in classical Greek philosophy, as Marder mentions: "The microcosm and the macrocosm were seen as mirror images, reflecting the same underlying reality, contracted in the one case and amplified in the other. Perhaps the most influential of these accounts is the psycho-politics Plato sketches out in Book IV of his *Republic*" (Marder 2018, pp. 1, 9; see also Orthmann 1985). In this sense, referring to Hildegarda, he maintains that: "Hildegard detects in the human being a condensed image of the entire creation, a small facsimile of the world".

Likewise, God makes mirrors out of His face, where He contemplates the origin of all things. Due to their praising function, these second mirrors are represented in the vision of *the choirs of angels*, which is the sixth vision of Part One of the *Scivias*. There, Hildegard describes nine concentric circles of heavenly armies. This number matches Dionysius the Areopagite's nine choirs; whereby coincidences and differences between the Hildegardian vision of this angelic choir and Dionysius' angelic classification could be analysed (Cirlot 2001).

The sixth circle of the vision represents angels 'full of eyes and wings. In each eye, a mirror appeared; and in the mirror, the face of a person appeared. Their wings were raised on high to the heavens'. In the next circle, the mirrors in angels' eyes brought up 'like mirrors, (. . .) all the distinguished orders of the institution of the Church' (St. Hildegard of Bingen 1999, 2002). As we will immediately see, human being is the privileged mirror for divine manifestation.

Also, word is a key element regarding creation: 'for mine is the voice as of thunder with which I move the whole circle of the earth with the living sounds of all creatures. I, the Ancient of Days, make them, for through my Word, which without beginning ever was and is in me, I bade a great brightness to come forth, and with it, countless sparks—the angels." (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 244). Divine manifestation in creation is here shown as a powerful call into being. In this case, the stress put on word is related to creative strength, which we have already seen in the divine mirroring self-consciousness.

In the same sense, Hildegard writes: 'For before the beginning and within the beginning of creation, the Word was without beginning, and before and within that beginning of creation, the Word was with God and in no way separated from God. (. . .) For what God composed in the Word, the Word bade in its sounding; and what the Word bade, God composed in the Word. And so, 'the Word was God." (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 247) Thus, God composed everything in the word; here, *in himself* refers to the classical *verbum cordis*, and in it, God intellectually knows and inwardly pronounces all which has to be brought to light.

In Hildegard, mirror and word unite in decisive moments, like when she describes both creation and the action of wisdom. In *Scivias* III we read[4], when she deals with the meaning of wisdom and her clothes: 'this image represents God's wisdom: God created and ordered all things thorugh her' (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2002, pp. 428–29). 'In the *Book of the Merits of Life* (*Liber vite meritorum*)–María Eugenia Góngora (2006) points out–Hildegard conceives *Sapientia* as the eye of God'.

Mirror and Word

In *Liber operum divinorum*, Hildegard goes on to comment the issue of the Word: "And the Word was with God,' as language exists in rationality, for rationality has language within itself and language exists in rationality, and they cannot be separated from each other. (. . .) For God willed in his Word that his Word should create all things, as he had foreordained before the ages. And why is it called, 'Word'? Because with a resounding voice it awakened all creatures and called them to itself.' (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 247). That call to itself means–as Meister Eckhart will collect–that creation signifies a call to the creature from not-being into being, a being which is God Himself; which opens a whole speculation on the ontological status of the created, as well as on the final union with God, the goal of all religious account.

For what God manifested in the Word, the Word ordered in resounding, and what the Word ordered, God manifested in the Word (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2018, pp. 277–89). The term 'manifestation' used by the Saint situates her fully within the medieval tradition that tries to explain to the human reason the reason of the finitude of the world, which constitutes, in medieval terms, the *universitas rerum*.

In Hildegard (*Scivias*, III, 8), moreover, the heart–core of the human person–is the mirror where the divine being is reflected, and it is from there she must write the narration of creation, according to the words received in visions. Then, at a certain moment, God

looks with love at His creature and loves her really as His mirror: 'my love lit by my mirror' (*in ardente amore speculi mei*) says the Voice, exhorting writing (Cirlot 2005, p. 179).

In the *Book of divine works*, when she comments on John's *Prologue*, she continues: 'And so I composed within myself a little work, which is Man, and I made it according to my image and likeness, so that he might work with another but in accordance with me–for my Son was to be at work in Man with a garment of flesh' (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2018, pp. 244–45)–in another place she says that man is the Son's garment, just as the body is the garment of the soul. Hildegard says here about God: 'I composed [human being] in myself', that is, in Himself (*in se ipso*). It can be claimed that God sees the human person in His mirror. As such, He sees her in a way which is different from the way he considers other things. He does not only see her in Himself but also creates her. This peculiarity of divine creative action regarding the human being implies that man is made 'in my image and likeness'. This idea arouses a full religiousness regarding human being and acting; for the human is the 'place' of divine manifestation. Therefore, the creature's return to its origin is possible insofar as it longs the face *it already was*.

The text on the creation of the human creature goes on as follows: 'I also made this work rational out of my own rationality, and in it I sealed my potential, just as human rationality comprehends with its skill all things by name and number–for the only way Man distinguishes anything is by name, and he understands the multiplicity of things only by number' (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 245). Rationality confers man the quasi divine power to name things and to act freely 'in his art'. Clearly, human being is an expression of divinity.

Man occupies a privileged place within the context of creation, and in Hildegard's work as well. She often refers to the *Genesis* passages on the creation of man, and to Saint Paul's words: 'Qui est imago Dei invisibilis, primogenitus omnis creaturae' (Cor 1:15). 'According to Hildegard, man occupies the central position in the universe because he is image of God and the most perfect of the creatures which inhabit in the world' (Kurdzialek 2014).

According to Hildegard, man is the means par excellence for God's manifestation. 'But through the human mouth God signifies his Word through which he created all things, as too all words are pronounced by the mouth with rationality's sound. For a person declares many things by utterance, just as the Word of God made many things by creating them in the embrace of his love'—she speaks of *sapientia* and *caritas* in creation (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 246). Human word expresses divine word, and by means of it, God expresses Himself in His creatures. Within philosophy of religion, here a path is open to speak of worship.

The text continues to focus now on man's eyes: 'Furthermore, in the human eyes he declares his knowledge by which he foresees and foreknows all things. The eyes display many things within themselves because they are lucid and watery, just as the reflected shadow of various creatures appears in water. For with sight the human person recognizes and discerns all things—and if he lacked sight, he would be like a corpse among them' (St. Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 246; 1999, pp. 93–94). The description of human eyes as shiny and watery directly relates to an idea of a mirroring look, similar to the mirrors mentioned above which God created in first place. The human being is, as God's image, like Him: a mirror representing everything created by thought, just as God Himself sees Himself in His mirror and creates other mirrors.

Meis has written what follows in this regard: 'Such intellection, linked to the senses, is transcended by vision, a complex and dynamic event, inverse to Eriugena—as regards the implications on the subject—with whom the author shares the stages of ascent, purification and union in the Dionysian mode' (Meis 2002). We can, finally, affirm that vision activates, beyond intellection, a 'praxical' character which leads to the union with divinity.

4. M. Eckhart: *In Principio, Sive in se Ipso*

It has been said that 'There are a number of points at which the theology of Eckhart and Hildegard overlap. They are both interested, for instance, in the original point of creation from the Godhead, and in the genesis of creatures through the Word' (Davies 1991). And the mirror is also used by Eckhart when he speaks of the relation God-world in terms of *Urbild-Abbild*. When he investigates the relation between original image (*Urbild*) and originated image (*Abbild*), he puts forward the following question: Where is really the being of the image, in the mirror or in that from which the image proceeds? The answer is clear: 'The image is in that from which it proceeds. The image is in me, it proceeds from me, and it heads to myself. As long as the mirror presents my image, my image is there; if the mirror is absent, the image is lost' (Eckhart 1956; Soto-Bruna 2013). The dissolution of the image is given by the lost or absence of the mirror. This means that the image vanishes when the mirror of divinity is lacking.

Meanwhile, just like Eriugena, Eckhart comments on the scriptural phrase *In principio creavit deus caelum et terram*, and he claims that *in principio* does not mean but God's creation in Himself–*secundo quod 'creavit in principio', id est in se ipso* (Eckhart 1964, pp. 2–4). For, according to Eckhart, the *ex nihilo* implicit in *creatio* cannot mean that nothing can receive something; if that was to be admitted, or was it to be supposed that something has its end in nothing, that something would be, simply, nothing. When it is said that God created everything from nothing, one shouldn't understand that He did it in the way of natural agents, so that the effects may persist outside, in front of or beyond Him. God created things, that is, He called them from not-being into being so that they may stay in Him. But God is being itself, that's why it must be highlighted that He created everything not *a principio*, but *in principio*. How could then creatures be anywhere else than in the Being which is their foundation? (Kremer 1965). Hence, we can read statements in Eckart's work holding that, God being the Being which exists from the beginning, nothing can be before or outside Him[5]: *extra ipsum vero esse nihil esse potest*[6], so that those who consider that something can be outside God are mistaken[7], for nothing can be outside God, or besides God (*extra deum, vel praeter deum*)[8]. McGinn has developed the relationship between Eriúgena and Eckhart on this issue (McGinn 2014).

It has been commented, in the light of the preceding assertions, that Eckhart's is a metaphysics of the unity, where the opposition between God and creature is tackled from the opposition between One and no-One, an opposition existing only from the realm of the creature, since, from God, there is no otherness, for the 'other' requires its belonging to the realm of what really is (Lossky 1960; Mojsisch 1983). Then, if the creature is, and if only God is being, it necessarily follows that the creature is the Being of God in God[9].

Indeed, Eckhart argues, if creation is to give or to grant being (*creatio dat sive confert esse*), and being is the beginning and the first in all order—it is God Himself—there is and can be nothing outside of it (*ante quod nihil et extra quod nihil. Et hoc est deus*). Certainly, God calls things from nothing into being[10], but if He is being, things cannot exist outside being[11]. Thus, that God created all things in the beginning can only mean that he created them all in Himself. For he created everything in being, which is the very beginning and is God Himself. And since, according to Eckhart, it needs to be remembered that everything God does, He does in Himself. And thus, what was outside God or God did outside Himself, would be outside being, that is, would not be[12]. From this perspective, the creature, far from being 'nothing', becomes the maximum granted by its own possibility: it is a manifestation of the Absolute to itself.

Creatio est collatio esse, a concession–of being–which can only be granted by that who is *ipsum esse*, God[13], in whom every being or mode of being is contained. In the beginning, God invoked things from nothing into being: to Eckhart, this means that God called things towards Himself, because He is being itself. What is proper to the creature, thus, is not as Thomas Aquinas thought–her composition of essence and being, but a being intertwined with nothing[14].

Thus, the Eckhartian interpretation of creation is understood as a calling to the things that are not to come into being. To call, he explains, is to convene those who are absent, those who are outside, to appear before that who calls. The calling does not resound in nothingness, but in the one who calls. Things aren't, thus, created *in nihilo*, but *in Principio*.

This creation as calling 'in the beginning' would imply, in Eckhart, a divine intellectual act in which God affirms Himself as a manifesting being, becoming known to the creature. This entails a conception of the Absolute as intellection, before being. In other words, he holds in *Parisian Questions* that the Absolute is because it thinks, and it does so by an act of complete return on itself; in the same way as, in his comments to Saint John, Eckhart considers that God is insofar as He intellectually knows, and that intellective knowing is the foundation of His Being. In His intellective act He affirms Himself as being, manifesting Himself, making Himself known, to the creature. He differs thus from Deity—*negatio negationis*—for He possesses being in its fullness, in all its richness, given that He is the thought of all that is.

Just as in Eriugena, this doctrine gives specific meaning to *assimilatio a Deo*. The creature is certainly distinct from God, which is undifferentiated. She must, therefore, approximate God until she is assimilated to Him. And it is like this that the ontological status of the creature as image is understood. The being of the image is in that of which it is image; whereas the Creator happens to be a mirror for the creatures, which are no longer 'effects', but 'reflections'.

Creatures are, then, teophanies or manifestations, which here means they are image of the Image, which is the *forma formarum*; they are therefore something degraded, a departure from the only original; but, if they identify with the Image they will truly be in that who is One. But the creature always preserves its ontological status. There is no pantheism here. Hence the importance of the third moment of the ontological triad: the return, as a return to the truth of the self in the Truth. The true meaning of creation is not solved, thus, from *ex nihilo*, but from *in principio*, and it is not temporary, but eternal.

Thus, Eckhart does not properly negate the creature—it possesses its formal being—yet he explicitly signals that which distinguishes her from the Creator: called from nothing, it is nothing in front of God, it is nothing but in God. In Eckhart, then, finite entities carry negation in themselves, which leads him to the extreme statement that they are 'pure nothing'[15]; and that, not so much because he negates the existence of creation, but for his eagerness to claim God's absolute being, from whom no mode of being remains excluded.

According to the above, all analogy between God and the creature–which must, in any case, be considered as an extrinsic attribution analogy (Albert 1976)–is properly solved in the unity that reunites them in the divine Logos, where things possess their causal or virtual being, which is always more excellent than the one they formally possess. From this conception, the being of the created is a divine 'mode' of being. This affirmation does not lead, in Eckhart, to a—rather Spinozist—claim of univocity with regard to the notion of being; but it solves the question of the God-creature relation in absolute unity; where differences are not cancelled in the Hegelian mode. And, in a parallel mode regarding this, Werner Beierwaltes has already commented, in his book about Proclus, the central thesis traversing medieval Platonism, when he holds that '*moné*, *próodos* and *epistrofé* are located, however, in the provenance and departure from the cause and in its movement of return; so that it can be affirmed that the ultimate reunion of things is the causality of the active and perfect cause' (Beierwaltes 1979; 1980), which, in its liberality, decides to manifest, so that the 'categorially distinct' being refers to the *negatio negationis* of the Absolute, revealing the eternity of its calling to the creature towards Himself.

5. Conclusions

In the period ranging from the centuries IXth to XIVth, John Scotus Eriugena, Hildegard of Bingen and Meister Eckhart stand out for their singular explanation of creation. The three thinkers have related the metaphysical account of creation to the religious aspect of the human being's union with divinity.

Indeed, the vocabulary these thinkers employ to describe the divine act of creation entails an inescapable calling to look for the very origin in an absolute consciousness that has eternally thought the person. The word eternally pronounced is a meaningful word, that is, a word that gives meaning to what is thought and pronounced. Hence, the human being can build and develop their rationality in two ways. First, answering the original call of the first word. Secondly, manifesting themselves the words that name and measure things. These two modes of rationality entail a specific religiousness which shows that the world is relinked (*re-ligere*) to divinity.

In Scotus Eriugena, divine intelligence acts as a mediating element between creation and human knowledge; man finds in himself the *se ipso* that unites him with divinity. In Hildegard of Bingen, the vision of the mirror has both a mystical and a metaphysical character: God's mirror creates man's mirror. Finally, Meister Eckhart joints the notions employed by Eriugena and Hildegard in the idea of 'calling' as a philosophical-religious idea. In all the three thinkers, religiousness responds to the conception of creation as manifestation.

The article has shown to be in line with current research on the subject of creation in medieval Neoplatonism. From what is exposed in this study, a broader investigation can be continued on the terms established here as religious vocabulary about creation. This philosophy has been considered as mysticism many times. In this regard, W. Otten affirms: "While calling him a mystic may be the only workable label left, I consider it a stretch even in the nonexperiential sense that the term has acquired today. Bernard McGinn's nuanced judgment of "dialectical mysticism" helpfully invites comparison with other idiosyncratic—one might say self-reflexive—dialectical thinkers like Eckhart (Otten 2020), but Eriugena's methodical rational quest cannot but stand in tension to McGinn's rendering of mysticism as the "immediate consciousness of the divine".

However, in my view, the three thinkers treated in this article belong to what has been considered a vision of man and creation as microcosms (Kurdzialek 2014). Certainly, the medieval idea of microcosm is associated with philosophical mysticism, as McGinn has explained (McGinn 1994).

We can also conclude that in these authors the idea of the mutual modification of the affirmative, negative and metaphorical discourse is a kind of "dialectic". Dionysius, Eriugena, Eckhart and of Bingen were called to a *doctia ignorantia* in which nothing is anti-dialectical and anti-methodical, including a displacement of the subject out of the realms of the objective knowledge.

Or, using one of Eriugena's phrases, writers within this tradition are searching for an *infinitus intellectus*, or *multiplex teoria*, a multi-perspective vision of reality, which, through its ability to sustain different and even contradictory viewpoints, converges on a divine vision, giving a double meaning to the term *visio dei.* A purified human intellect joins up with a divine intellect in the highest knowledge of the unknown, as it discovers that the unity of things depends on its relationship "with" and "in" the Absolute (Soto-Bruna 2018).

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Notes

[1] See Eriugena (1997) III, 633A: "For It encircles all things and there is nothing within It but what, in so far as it is, is not Itself, for It alone truly is; for the other things that are said to be are Its theophanies, which likewise have their true subsistence in It.] Therefore God is everything that truly is because He Himself makes all things and is made in all things, as St. Dionysius the Areopagite says". III 633 A-B, the famous text: "For everything that is understood and sensed is nothing else but the apparition of what is not apparent, the manifestation of the hidden, the affirmation of the negated, the comprehension of the incomprehensible, [the utterance of the unutterable, the access to the inaccessible,] the understanding of the unintelligible, the body of the bodiless,

the essence of the superessential, the form of the formless, the measure of the measureless, the number of the unnumbered, the weight of the weightless, the materialization of the spiritual, the visibility of the invisible".

2 Eriugena (1997) III 634 BC: In the original: "Non facile concesserim diuinam superessentialitatem nihi esse, uel tali nomine priuationis posse uocari. (. . .) Si igitur propter ineffabilem excellentiam et incomprehensibilem infinitatem diuina natura dicitur non esse".

3 The employ of profecy in Hildegard (*The Book of Divine Works*) can be seen in: (Oliva 2022).

4 Translation by the author.

5 Eckhart (1964) I, 160, 14–16: "ante quod nihil et extra quod nihil".

6 Ibid., 162, 5–8.

7 Idem., II, *Expositio libri Sapientiae,* 372, 46, 5–7: "Et iterum quia non reputant esse, sed pro nihilo habent esse quod non in deo est".

8 Idem., 328, 7, 7: "Nihil enim potest esse extra deum".

9 Commenting on Eckhart's central text: *Opus Sermonun*, II, 13: "Dicamus esse, quos unum est deus. Constat quod ab ipso esse sunt Omnia. Similiter per esse et in esse sunt Omnia. Quod enim extra esse est, utique nihil est".

10 Eckhart (1964), I, 162, 17, 5: "Vocat ea quae non sunt" (referencia a *Rom*., 4).

11 Ibid., 162, 17, 3–4: "Quomodo enim essent nisi in esse, quod est principium?".

12 Ibid., 161, 17, 1–7: "(. . .) Quod enim extra deum est et quod extra deum fit, extra esse est et fit". Ibid., 13–20: Things cannot be conceived as being outside the Absolute: *ut starent extra se*. See (Soto-Bruna 2007).

13 M. Eckhart (1964), I, 160, 7: 160, 8: "Constat autem quod ab esse et ipso solo, nullo alio, confertur esse rebus".

14 Ibid., IV, 283, 8–10: "Ab omni nihilo, id est habente nihil sive privationem aut etiam negationem admixtam, qualis sit vel est omni creatura".

15 See Ibid., III, 184, 18–85, 9; IV, 380, 1–6.

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