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CONTEMPLATIVE VISION:
VISUAL LANGUAGE IN THE SERMONS OF JOHANNES TAULER

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

By
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To Laura and our children

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ABSTRACT

Reifsteck, Joshua P. "Contemplative Vision: Visual Language in the Sermons of Johannes Tauler." STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 2022. 91 pp.

Johannes Tauler conceives of thought, contemplation, and mystical experience in visual ways, and this conception manifests in visual language and metaphor throughout Tauler's preaching corpus. This visual language is influenced heavily by Neoplatonic conceptions of contemplation and the One, and by an interior-exterior tension within Tauler's anthropology which is especially significant for his portrayal of the senses. This thesis focuses especially upon a group of Middle High German words related to the verb *schöwen*. These words are technical terms, describing a contemplative vision which is for Tauler an integral part of the life of faith. Through this contemplative vision, the individual turns within, gazes into the ground of the soul, and attempts to see God himself. In the practice of this inward gaze, the individual finds and clears away that which is not God, in the hopes of not only seeing God, but uniting with him in the abyss, where all sense and self is lost.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Johannes Tauler's sermons are filled with visual words, concepts, and imagery, all of which Tauler employs to communicate his understanding of contemplation (*schöwen*) and of the interior life. This visual language is not just figurative language used to aid in communication with his audience; it reflects the fact that Tauler conceives of contemplation in visual terms. For Tauler, contemplation is an act of the mind (*gemûte*) whereby the individual seeks to see God immediately. The *gemûte* turns the entire self away from the world and into what Tauler and his contemporaries called the ground (*grunt*) of the soul, an innermost location within the soul of each individual where the image of God resides. In this *grunt*, the contemplative begins a process of searching for that internal image of God and even for God himself. Gazing upon this image and upon God himself is one of the primary goals of Tauler's contemplation, though it is not the final goal of contemplation, for at the highest stages of contemplation, sense language no longer matters. Though it cannot be said that every sermon includes explicitly visual language, the prevalence of the visual in Tauler's descriptions of contemplation means that even where visual language is not used explicitly, its influence is often still present.

Occasionally, the initial impetus for Tauler's use of visual language comes from some aspect of the assigned sermon text, such as Jesus' words, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see" (Matt. 13:16 ESV) in sermon V64, or "we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen" (John 3:11) in sermons V60d and V61.¹ In such instances, it is only natural that

¹ Because the manuscript and critical tradition for Tauler's sermons is quite varied and each editor chooses to catalogue and compile Tauler's sermons according to differing rationales, citing sermons requires not just a knowledge of the listed sermon number, but the specific edition which is being cited as well. This study will primarily cite and quote the critical edition of Ferdinand Vetter, *Die Predigten Taulers aus der Engelberger und der Freiburger Handschrift sowie aus Schmidts Abschriften der ehemaligen Strassburger Handschriften* (Zürich:

Tauler explores visual themes. However, Tauler does not limit his visual language to clearly visual scripture texts; instead, because he conceives of contemplation in visual terms, he often uses visual language and imagery to describe contemplation even when the sermon text has no reference to the senses.

Such language and imagery does not emerge only from the influence of the Bible. When Tauler speaks of contemplation, images, forms, participation, the *grunt*, and the *gemüte* visually, he is drawing upon and building upon the work of many Christian theologians before him, especially those influenced by Neoplatonism, such as Augustine of Hippo, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Meister Eckhart. Each of these theologians developed the visual language and metaphors of Neoplatonic philosophy in their own way, and Tauler's visual language represents further development of these ideas. Tauler is by no means unaware of his indebtedness to these Neoplatonic sources, mentioning them as authorities often. However, Tauler occasionally bypasses such Christian authorities, going all the way back to the pagan Neoplatonist, Proclus, who Tauler will cite as an authority even over Christianity's greatest thinkers.

This study's exploration of Tauler's visual language will begin with an exploration of the senses (*sinnen*), especially the ways that Tauler develops the concept of exterior and interior senses. This first chapter will especially explore the ways that non-visual sense-language functions within Tauler's description of contemplative life. The first chapter will also explore the role of the mind (*gemüte*) in the direction of the senses and powers, as well as the role of the ground (*grunt*) in the reception of sensory information. Tauler's understanding of these

Weidmann, 1968). Each citation will start with the sermon number (according to Vetter's numbering), then page number(s), and finally line number(s). An example citation looks like this: (V65.356.11–16), where V represents the edition of Ferdinand Vetter, 65 is the sermon number in Vetter's edition, and the quotation can be found on page 356, lines 11–16. For more on differences in sermon number, Georg Hofmann's modern German edition has a helpful comparative chart in *Johannes Tauler: Predigten*, 2 vols. (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 2011), 632–34.

anthropological elements influences everything he says about the senses.

In chapter two, the study will explore exterior, physical vision and the eyes. Tauler discusses the exterior eyes and exterior vision far less frequently than he discusses interior vision, but these exterior senses still play an important role in shaping Tauler's understanding of interior vision, his anthropology, and his contemplative praxis.

Finally, the study will explore *schöwen*, an important word for contemplation in Tauler's preaching, along with a selection of related words such as *anschöwlich*, *schöwlich*, *schöwlichkeit*, and *beschöwen*. Each of these words carries both a mental meaning and a visual connotation in Tauler's preaching. Tauler uses these words as technical terms, words freighted with meaning which he expects his hearers to understand prior to the preaching task. Tauler also works to fill these words with meaning, according to his own understanding of contemplative praxis and union with God.

Tauler is greatly pre-occupied with contemplation, and while many scholars have recognized this fact, few have explored contemplation in terms of its visual character. For example, Richard Kieckhefer, in his analysis of Tauler's mystical praxis, is generally correct in saying that Tauler, "described, fostered, and presumably practiced the non-discursive or contemplative form of prayer, in which one dispenses with images and concepts and gives oneself over to the infused grace of spontaneous consciousness of God."² The *schöwen* kind of contemplation is explicitly described by Tauler as "beyond images," and moving "beyond images" is a common theme of Tauler's mystical praxis. But Kieckhefer never mentions the role of vision in this description, and he says immediately afterward, "To be sure, [Tauler] has

² Richard Kieckhefer, "John Tauler," in *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York, 1984), 267.

relatively little to say about the techniques of contemplation, or the ways that one opens oneself to this infused grace.”³ This is a gross misunderstanding of the visual language in Tauler’s preaching. Tauler is concerned with the techniques of contemplation and how one opens oneself to God’s grace. But because Tauler’s exploration of these ideas is typically couched in visual language—including but not limited to *schöwen* and its cognates—these ideas are often lost to translation and interpreted only in mental terms. When contemplation is understood purely mentally, it becomes nearly impossible to see that Tauler is using visual language to give step-by-step contemplative instruction across the entire spectrum of contemplative skill and experience.

Translators of Tauler’s visual language often acknowledge its visual character through their translations, adding visual words and phrases to help clarify the visual connotation of contemplation words.⁴ But because this visual language has seldom been explored and studied formally, occasionally translators miss the way that Tauler is exploring contemplative experience and praxis through extended visual analogies and metaphors, or they fail to convey the visual character of contemplation because they prioritize mental meanings.⁵

This thesis is only a first step in rectifying this problem, for although *schöwen* and its

³ Kieckhefer, “John Tauler,” 267.

⁴ When Georg Hofmann translates V2.14.11’s *showunge* into modern German, for example, he adds an explanatory adjective, rendering it “göttlichen Schauens” (Hofmann, *Predigten*, 23). Another example can be found in V61, in which Hofmann adds a number of words throughout the sermon, especially the word “Bildlosigkeit,” to communicate the distinction between Tauler’s conception and modern understandings of purity (Hofmann, *Predigten*, 337; citing Hermann Kunisch, ed. and trans., *Ein Textbuch aus der altdeutschen Mystik: Eckhart, Tauler, Seuse* [Hamburg: Rohwolt, 1958], 97n8).

⁵ Two excellent examples are explored in chapter three. The first is V60, in which Tauler explains the different actions appropriate for contemplating God at each level of piety, offering new warnings, goals, and benefits along the way. The second is in V6, where Tauler uses three verbs: *vinden*, *bekennen*, and *beschöwen*. Most translations use exclusively mental terms (perceive, recognize, and contemplate”) for these, but Tauler is exploring an extended visual metaphor of gazing into the *grunt* of the soul. While the mental terms are not incorrect, for communicating this metaphor, a translation like “find, recognize, and look upon” would be more helpful for communicating the contemplative’s search for God within the *grunt* of the soul.

cognates are important visual words for contemplation in Tauler's theology, Tauler uses a host of other visual words to describe contemplation, many of which are not technical terms with a clearly contemplative meaning. The contemplative sense of *sehen* (see), especially, is easily missed. But in Tauler's preaching, these words, too, frequently interact with elements of his theological anthropology and his conception of contemplative praxis in ways that explore extended visual metaphors for contemplation. Through an exploration of the way that *schö^vwen* is used in both visual and contemplative ways, this thesis argues for a second look at both the visual language and the contemplative language within Tauler's preaching.

CHAPTER TWO

SENSES

Before exploring contemplative vision, a brief exploration of Johannes Tauler’s use of *sinnen* (senses) will be helpful. This word, when translated from Middle High German into modern English, can have a number of intended meanings, but these meanings fall into two broad categories. The first category of meaning refers to the physical senses, where “senses” refers to things like smell, touch, taste, hearing, and sight. The second category of meaning refers to mental senses, including such ideas as thought, mind, consciousness, etc. While these two categories are quite distinct, this paradigm reflects to some degree the English use of the word “senses,” wherein an English speaker would be just as comfortable speaking of “the five senses” as they would asking someone, “Are you out of your senses?”¹ This reflects, for Middle High German as for English, a conceptual overlap. While context typically makes the intended meaning clear in English and in German, Tauler’s use of *sinnen* occasionally extends and even blurs that conceptual overlap. This blurring of the lines between the mind and the senses is a natural result of both his anthropological convictions and his experience of the senses.

At an anthropological level, this overlap reflects the interrelationship of quite a few convictions. Tauler, like many Christian thinkers before him, differentiated exterior and interior versions of the senses. Tauler recognized the typical five exterior senses which match the first category of meaning for *sinnen*, and yet he and generations of thinkers before him also enumerated a set of interior senses which fall under the second category. The number, names, and arrangement of these interior senses varied from thinker to thinker—often including senses

¹ This is not new to English or to Middle High German, for Augustine discusses this same paradigm in terms of interior and exterior senses—including the ability to speak of a person of ‘good sense’—in *City of God*, Book 11, Chapter 3.

such as proper sense, common sense, phantasy, estimative power, memorative power, etc.—but the general contours of these sense-paradigms were typically similar, for the goal was in each case to describe the experience of mental sensation.² Tauler is conversant in and occasionally uses these same mental sense terms in his sermons, but this thesis will focus upon instances in which Tauler describes a different set of interior senses, ones which correspond more directly to the exterior ones, such as interior sight, hearing, and taste.³ In describing these interior senses, Tauler often explores the relationship of the mind and the interior self to various interior organs of sense. Tauler explicitly describes inner ears,⁴ and he often describes inner eyes.⁵ Tauler's convictions regarding the operation of these interior senses influence his contemplative praxis, so his description of these interior organs will be explored as well. While these interior sense organs operate in much the same way as their exterior counterparts, there are distinct differences in purpose and in the perceived usefulness of these interior organs for the life of contemplation.

While the interior-exterior differentiation exists at the anthropological level, it also serves to delineate the experienced origin of sensory data. Such data can be gained either from the exterior world or from the interior world, with sensory data from the exterior world perceived by the exterior senses and sensory data from the interior world—the world of the mind, of images and forms—perceived by the interior senses. Tauler especially frequently uses verbs of tasting (*smacken*) and seeing (*sehen*, *schöwen*, *blicken*, etc.) to describe his own contemplative experience and to communicate effectively with the monastic individuals to whom he typically

² See Aquinas' STh I. q78 a.4 for further discussion.

³ Tauler was not alone in this either, for both Eckhart and Augustine describe interior eyes. See Eckhart German Sermon 10 or Augustine's *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus* 13.3.

⁴ V3.18.8, V44.191.8–35

⁵ For just a few examples, see V3.18.8, V45.196.10–14, V53.243.4, V60c.294.25, or V64.348.16.

preached.⁶ In his use of these verbs of tasting and seeing, the blurred line between interior and exterior sensation is significant. Tauler’s preaching frequently leans into the ambiguity of whether, for instance, *smacken* means “to taste” or “to perceive” or whether *schöwen* means “to look at” or “to contemplate.”

To complete the conceptual picture of the senses, however, requires further description of Tauler’s anthropology. Whether interior or exterior, sensory data only matters if it is noticed, and for sensory data to be noticed, attention must be directed both toward sensation and toward the source of sensation. The *gemüte*—for Tauler, that part of the person which directs the person at the highest levels—is a key piece of Tauler’s anthropological framework. *Gemüte* translates roughly to mind, especially in modern German. However, as Louise Gnädinger has argued, Tauler’s use of *gemüte* is quite distinctive, with little in common with its modern usage.⁷ Gnädinger describes Tauler’s concept of the *gemüte* as a “central organ which combines all sensory and spiritual abilities and powers.”⁸ While a full analysis of the *gemüte* will not be undertaken in this study, a brief exploration of the term’s relationship to the senses is important, as it heavily influences his contemplative praxis.

The direction of the senses by the *gemüte*—whether conscious or unconscious—is a major point of concern for Tauler’s preaching. Tauler explores this idea through a handful of related words, many of which come from the roots *keren* and *wenden*. The *keren* words focus upon the act of turning, and Tauler uses these words to describe quite a few different kinds of turning

⁶ Bernard McGinn notes the importance of the sacraments within Tauler’s theology in *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*, Presence of God, vol. 4 (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 278–79. It may be that this interior vision functions as a natural outflow of this sacramental experience, whereby interior vision and taste looks upon and savors the Christ which has been consumed in the Eucharist, or even looks upon the image of Christ gained in Baptism. Such an exploration, while perhaps profitable, is outside the scope of this thesis.

⁷ Louise Gnädinger, *Johannes Tauler: Lebenswelt und Mystische Lehre* (München: C.H. Beck, 1993), 125.

⁸ Gnädinger, *Johannes Tauler*, 125, translation my own.

actions, including *ker* (turn around), *keren* (to turn), *abker* (turn away), *inker* (turn within), and *weselich ker* (essential turn).⁹ The *wenden* words also describe turning, but these words connote directional facing more than the act of turning. They include *wenden* (to turn), *inwendig* (inward), *inwendikeit* (interiority), *uswendig* (outward), and *uswendikeit* (exterior). Together, this collection of turning words allows Tauler a breadth of nuance with which to describe not only the direction of the contemplative individual's sensing, but the active choice of object for that sensing as well. Whether using *wenden* or *keren*, the *gemûte* is that active, core part of the person which directs the senses and chooses their object.

Ultimately, the object of all Christian contemplation ought to be God, and much of Tauler's turn language exists in order to encourage his hearers to turn from alternative objects, such as the world, created things, and exterior things. Yet while the ultimate goal of a contemplative's sensing may be God himself, often Tauler encourages his hearers to focus upon intermediate objects, whether images and forms, words of Scripture, or upon God's attributes. Much of Tauler's devotional piety emerges from the conviction that God can be neither simply nor immediately accessed by any but the most proficient and blessed contemplatives. By allowing these intermediate objects of contemplation, Tauler offers a kind of stair-step approach, whereby the contemplative can grow in faith, skill, experience, and piety, hopefully growing closer and closer to the highest forms of contemplation along the way. At these highest levels of contemplation, contemplatives make the "essential turn" (*weselich ker*) where no intermediary is necessary and where God is experienced in his fullness and reality. These most successful individuals have been brought to both the inward (*inwendig*) turn and the turn within (*inker*),

⁹ Louise Gnädinger discusses the various ways that Tauler uses *ker* language in "Die Bewegung der Einkehr, Um- und Rückkehr" in *Johannes Tauler*, 136–47. Bernard McGinn describes the *ker* words in *Harvest* with a special focus upon *inker* as one of the essential attitudes of Tauler's mystical praxis, 266–67.

turning away from the world and created things, and turning within, toward God.

Key to all of this is a closely related Taulerian anthropological conviction, that God is located within the soul of each individual person, in the place which Tauler and his contemporaries called the *grunt* (ground, bottom) of the soul. This interior *grunt*-location means that the turn toward God always begins with an inward turn. However, it's important to clarify that the converse is not always true; the inward turn is not always a turn toward God. The interior world is vast, and many contemplatives find corruption and distraction therein, where they ought to find and contemplate God alone. If God is to be found and recognized in the *grunt*, that finding first requires a process of clearing the *grunt* of all corruption and distraction, so that God can be seen clearly. Once God is found, recognized, and contemplated, mystical union happens when the individual is drawn by God into the very deepest regions of the *grunt* of the soul, a place which Tauler and his contemporaries called the *abgrunt* (abyss).¹⁰

As with the *gemüte*, a full analysis of the role of the *grunt* and *abgrunt* in Tauler's theological anthropology will not be undertaken in this thesis, but some commentary on these words is necessary, for the *grunt* and *abgrunt* are integral to Tauler's theology and especially integral to his understanding of contemplation and of God himself. Much has been written on these two terms, both on them individually and on their relationship to the *gemüte*. This relationship is complicated, because as Bernard McGinn has noted, in a handful of sermons, Tauler speaks of the *grunt* and *gemüte* so interchangeably that a number of commentators have equated the two.¹¹ However, in most of his preaching, Tauler uses the two terms in different

¹⁰ V6.25.24–31 models this exact pattern perfectly. The three verbs used in this sermon—*vinden* (to find), *bekennen* (to recognize), and *schöwen* (to contemplate)—together form one of the core progressions of Tauler's contemplative praxis.

¹¹ McGinn, *Harvest*, 256. For one example where the *grunt* and *gemüte* are practically interchangeable, see V64.350.26: “Dis gemüt, diser grunt das ist als in pflanzet . . .”

ways and for different things; where the *grunt* can be used of God and humans, the *gemûte* is never used of God.¹² Steven Ozment differentiates the two not just in their typical objects, but in how Tauler describes them: the *grunt* is “a naturally given and firmly established dwelling place in the soul, where God is present and from which he neither can nor desires to separate himself,” and the *gemûte* is “an active power, grounded in and emerging from this ‘ground,’ which embraces and penetrates the powers of the soul (i.e. reason and will) and directs and excites the creature back to his origin in uncreatedness.”¹³ To simplify this paradigm even further for the sake of this thesis, it can be said that the *gemûte* directs the senses, both exterior and interior, while the *grunt* is the arena in which the interior senses are most appropriately utilized in order to contemplate God, for God dwells therein. The *abgrunt* is the location in which the senses are no longer useful, for the individual is passive therein, united with God. While much more could be said, this thesis will focus its discussion of these terms upon how the *grunt*, *abgrunt*, and *gemûte* intersect with Tauler’s understanding of the senses and of contemplative praxis.¹⁴

As the *gemûte* directs the action of all the faculties and powers, senses included, its functioning and the senses’ functioning are connected. When the *gemûte* is conscious, the senses are able to be consciously experienced and interpreted, and when the *gemûte* is not conscious, the senses are not able to be consciously experienced and interpreted. This connection between the *gemûte* and the senses is underscored at the highest levels of contemplative experience, for in

¹² McGinn, *Harvest*, 256–57.

¹³ Steven E. Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis: A Comparative Study of the Anthropology of Johannes Tauler, Jean Gerson, and Martin Luther (1509–16) in the Context of their Theological Thought*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, vol. 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 22.

¹⁴ Many have written on these subjects, and some of the best explorations of the *gemûte*, the *grunt*, their origins, and their relationship are: Gnädinger, *Johannes Tauler*, 241–51; Käte Grunewald, *Studien zu Johannes Taulers Frömmigkeit* (Hildesheim: Dr. H.A. Gerstenberg, 1972), 4–11; McGinn, *Harvest*, 254–64; Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis*, 15–26; and Paul Wyser, “Taulers Terminologie vom Seelengrund” in *Geschichte der altniederländischen Mystik*, ed. Kurt Ruh (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 324–52.

these moments the operation of the senses is interrupted and the control of the *gemüte* is lost. The following passage from V26 demonstrates the totality of this loss—and the role of the *abgrunt*—well:

In that abyss (*abgrunde*), the soul loses itself so deeply and in such a foundational way that it does not recognize itself. It recognizes neither word nor way, neither perception nor feeling, knowledge nor love. Then, everything is one pure, simple, singular God, one inexpressible abyss, one being, one spirit.¹⁵

At these highest levels of contemplation, Tauler describes the experience of losing the self in the abyss of God. As the self is lost, so is recognition, perception, feeling, knowledge, and love. The loss of sensory experience is tied to the loss of all else which constitutes human consciousness and control, the domain of the *gemüte*. The individual becomes “one being, one spirit,” with God and no longer needs such control.¹⁶

Herein lies one of the enduring challenges of Tauler’s contemplative model. The senses—especially the interior senses—are necessary for contemplation, yet they become unnecessary when contemplation achieves its goal. The lines are blurred between mind and senses, and yet the two are in practice and conception interconnected at almost every level. To better understand the distinction between interior and exterior senses, a brief exploration of the distinct ways that Tauler operates within the two sides of this paradigm is worthwhile. Though all senses are equally useless at the highest stages of contemplation, Tauler places very different values upon the exterior and interior senses.

¹⁵ In dem abgrunde verlüret sich der geist so tief und in so grundeloser wisen das er von ime selber nüt enweis, er enweis do noch wort noch wise, noch smacken noch fülen, bekennen noch minnen, danne es ist alles ein luter blos einvaltig Got, ein unsprechenliches abgrunde, ein wesen, ein geist; . . . (V26.109.20–23).

¹⁶ For other instances in which the individual loses self, control, or *gemüte* in God, see V24.101.12–29, V64.351.5–13, or V65.358.4–16.

Exterior Senses

Tauler's preaching frequently explores the relationship of the "exterior senses" to contemplative praxis. He develops this concept using two separate terms: *uswendigen sinnen* and *usseren sinnen*. In almost every case, the exterior senses are described as a threat or potential hindrance to the activity of contemplation. Tauler readily acknowledges that the life of contemplation is fraught with distractions and even dangers, and such problems are to some degree unavoidable.¹⁷ However, success in contemplation requires eliminating exterior distractions wherever possible and training oneself to ignore what remains. This helps not only to maximize the time in contemplation and free up the individual for focusing on the distractions which are unavoidable, but it helps to clear the way for finding God in the *grunt* as well.

Though Tauler uses two separate terms for the exterior senses, the difference in meaning is relatively insignificant. Literally, the *uswendigen sinnen* are the "outward senses," and the *usseren sinnen* are the "outer senses." While *uswendigen* has a directional connotation which likely relates it more closely to the *gemüte*, these two terms perform essentially the same function in Tauler's preaching. Whether the senses are "outer" or "outward," the same physical senses are the sensing agents, and the same exterior sensations are the objects of sensing. Tauler uses them similarly, in ways which are practically interchangeable. The following two sermons demonstrate both the functional similarity between Tauler's use of *usseren* and *uswendigen*, along with Tauler's consistent caution regarding the exterior senses.

The first sermon is for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and in it, Tauler is preaching on Jesus' words, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to

¹⁷ Tauler argues that exterior distractions can actually be a beneficial steppingstone to true contemplation when such distractions are accepted and surrendered to God, in V65.357.30–358.20. He warns not to skip past exterior sensation in V54.248.19–24.

myself” (John 12:32). Though this is the stated sermon text for the day, at many points throughout this sermon it might be said that Tauler is functionally preaching upon another passage of scripture: Jesus’ encouragement, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). This verse is not quoted explicitly, yet Tauler assumes familiarity with this text, as the sermon is full of references to carrying the cross and self-denial. One such encouragement to “carry the cross” is coupled with a warning regarding the exterior senses, for an individual’s ability to carry the cross effectively can be hindered by the operation of the exterior senses. While Tauler’s logic in this passage is oblique, understanding it is key to understanding the role which the exterior senses play in Tauler’s mystical praxis:

When you, oh human, thus find yourself in brokenness, then you should not make the cross too heavy according to your exterior senses (*uswendigen sinnen*), but rather let the truth itself make [its measurement], and in repentance be true. For ruin is not for those who are in Christ Jesus, but rather ruin is for those who with free will turn themselves to creatures; this is more like an exercise for those who love God and have him in mind.¹⁸

In the broader context of the sermon, Tauler is not saying that the danger of these exterior senses is that they can mislead the Christian regarding the perceived weight of a metaphorical cross. Rather, the danger which Tauler is describing relates to the way that exterior senses can sense exterior things and import them into the interior world of the mind. Any such exterior, created thing which thus finds its way into the mind becomes a distraction from the contemplation of God and thereby it becomes a burden. This is what Tauler means when he says that the cross can be made heavier by the exterior senses. Even if some degree of distraction is unavoidable in

¹⁸ Als du, mensche, alsus dich vindest in gebresten, so ensolt du das cruce nüt ze gros machen nach dinen uswendigen sinnen, sunder la es die worheit selber machen, sunder in rüwen bis getrüwe. Wan nüt enist vertümnisse den die do sint in Christo Jhesu, sunder den ist vertümenisse die do mit mütwillen sich zu den creaturen kerent; mer es ist disen ein übunge die Got gerne minneten und in meinden (V65.356.11–16).

contemplation, there is ruin for “those who with free will turn themselves to creatures,” those who freely choose to be distracted by exterior sensation. This conception of danger from the exterior senses is not unique to this sermon, but rather representative of much of Tauler’s preaching. The exterior senses consistently threaten to bring exterior, created things into the more spiritual life of contemplation, into the person’s interior *grunt*, where God alone is to reside. Tauler encourages his hearers to repent and turn away from all such created things which are perceived by the senses. Tauler’s solution in this sermon—loving God and having him alone in mind—orients the attention of the individual away from created things and exterior sensation, directing their attention instead to God.

The danger of the exterior senses is also explored in a sermon for the 11th Sunday after Trinity. Here, Tauler compares the exterior senses to a window through which “the foe” can climb:

The words say, ‘You should be awake and watch, for you do not know the time when the Lord will come from the wedding.’ For the foe directs all his cunning and skill without cease toward this [goal]: that he might seduce and eternally spoil us, and he watches fiercely for anywhere he can find an hour or a moment where we do not have diligence toward contemplation and where we forget a window open to our exterior senses (*usseren sinnen*) and where we are not on our guard; immediately he slinks in and robs us of all good. Therefore, guard your windows and watch, so that he is not able to undermine your house, like the thief.¹⁹

Note that in this sermon, Tauler refers to the *usseren sinnen* rather than the *uswendigen sinnen*, but the warning is functionally the same as in V65: these exterior senses are dangerous. They are not just potential hindrances to the life of contemplation or mere speed bumps which slow down

¹⁹ Die wort sprechent: ‘ir súllent sin wacker und wachent, wan ir nüt enwissent die zit wenne der herre kumet von dem brunlöf; wan der vigen der tüt alle sine liste und behentkeit dar zú ane underlos, das er uns verleite und eweklich verderbe, und nimet sterklichen war wo er eine stunde oder einen ögenblick vint das wir nüt flis der andacht enhan und einer vensteren offen vergessen unserre usserer sinne und uf unserre hūte nüt enston; alzehant so slichet er in und stilt uns alles unser güt. Dar umbe hūtent úwer vensteren und wachent das er úch nüt under grabe úwer hus als der tiep (V48.214.22–29).

progress in contemplative life; they can bring a person to ruin. Once again, the contemplative is encouraged to guard against the potential influence of the exterior senses, though this time because of the potential interference of the devil. The devil uses the exterior senses to distract from contemplation.

The exterior senses are not solely presented as destructive and dangerous, however. In a sermon for the Birth of John the Baptist, Tauler parallels the birth of John the Baptist with the birth of grace in the life of the Christian. As part of that process, he mentions the exterior senses in a manner which is, if not positive, at least not negative:

Thus, when the person secures [even] a glimpse—a taste—of eternity, then an inner searching is born in them, one which goes through the exterior senses, and this is truly the exterior altar which stands outside before the holy of holies, on which the rams and the oxen are offered up to God. In the same way, the person offers here their fleshly blood as a repayment for the very costly blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁰

What Tauler means by this is not clear until the following paragraph, where he says:

Through this lowly gaze into their infirmity, the person should greatly humble themselves and lay themselves before the feet of God, so that [God] might have mercy on them. In this way, they should fully hope that God will let all the guilt go. And then immediately John (which means “grace”) is born out of this *grunt* of humility; For the lower [the person humbles themselves], the higher [God’s mercy]: This is one thing.²¹

Tauler’s point is this: through the exterior senses, the Christian is able to recognize their infirmity, and this leads the Christian to humble themselves. This is necessary, for only then can

²⁰ So wenne dem menschen wirt für gehalten ein inblicken, ein smak der ewikeit, so wirt in im geborn ein innerlich sūchen, und das gat durch die uswendigen sinne, und dis ist recht der uswendige alter der do stat vor dem sancta sanctorum uswendig, do man die böcke und die ochsen Gotte uf opherte. Also ophert der mensche alhie sin fleischlich blūt zu einem widergelte dem hoch gūlten blūte unsers herren Jhesu Christi (V40.164.8–13). This translation reflects Ferdinand Vetter’s suggested emendation from *seufftzen* (to sigh) to *sūchen* (to search). While this translation does shift the meaning of the verb toward the visual, it is not significant for the point made at this point in this thesis, for it does not alter what Tauler is saying in the latter half of the passage regarding the role that exterior senses play in receiving the “glimpse of eternity.”

²¹ In disem nidersehende in sine gebresten sol sich der mensche sere demütigen und legen sich für die fūsse Gotz, das er sich erbarme über in. So sol er gantz hoffen das Got alle die schult lat varn. Und do wirt alzehant Johannes (das ist die gnade) geborn usser disem grunde der demütigkeit; wan so ie niderre, so ie höhere: das ist ein ding (V40.164.14–18).

they lay themselves before God in full humility and repentance, confident in God's forgiveness. The humbler those senses make the person, the more grace the person receives. While the exterior senses perform a valuable role, Tauler does not go so far as to say that the exterior senses are valuable in and of themselves. For Tauler, they are valuable insofar as they lead to a recognition of one's brokenness and one's need for the grace of God.

Interior Senses

The existence of exterior senses implies the existence of corresponding interior senses, and yet Tauler does not use *inwendigen sinnen* (interior senses) nearly as often as he uses *uswendigen sinnen* and *usserer sinnen*.²² Instead of talking about the interior senses as a group, it is much more common for him to focus attention upon one interior sense at a time, particularly the interior senses of sight, taste, and hearing. This section will primarily explore interior taste and hearing, but as will be shown, interior sight has an important role to play in Tauler's description of both interior taste and interior hearing.

Consider the following passage from a sermon preached on the 12th Sunday after Trinity, where the exterior senses are contrasted with interior hearing. In this sermon, Tauler is discussing a "great deafness" which has descended upon humanity since the fall, namely an inability to hear the eternal word, even despite the closeness of God:

And note, toward whatever the man is inclined, internal or external, whether it be pleasure or suffering, immediately thus he [i.e., the devil] mixes himself into it and entices the man with it and speaks these things to him internally. And the images which [the man] has from that [speaking], these flow into the ears of his interior, such that the eternal word is not able to be heard by him. Were it the case that suddenly and quickly the man now would completely turn his ears, his mind away from there, then the temptation would all too lightly be overcome. However, if all the while the man practically offers his ears to it, such that he looks on it and negotiates with it and they look at one another and he stands in this way as if wavering [whether] to turn

²² Tauler only refers to *inwendigen sinnen* once, in V14.65.14.

away or toward [it], then he is nearly overcome [already] and the temptation is at its worst. Immediately, therefore, with resolute heart turn your ears completely away from there, for then you have nearly overcome. This enables you to hear this internal word, and it removes this deafness from you. This deafness is not only had by worldly people, rather also by spiritual people, who with love and with affection are turned toward created things and with them are obsessed. The devil has recognized this, and he spoke the images to them for this reason and whenever he finds them inclined toward them. Several are made deaf by their individual arrangements and their habits in sensual activity, and by the individuality and external ways which they have taken from creatures by means of the exterior senses. All this flows to the man, in front of his ears, such that the eternal word in the man is not able to be heard nor understood in any way. Indeed it is true, the man must certainly have good inner habits apart from [any] individuality, whether it be prayer or holy contemplation or anything else of that sort, habits through which the nature might be awakened and the spirit might be uplifted and the man might be wrapped up with them. But this should be apart from any individuality, in such a way that he can have more of an internal listening to the internal word and to the internal *grunt*. And the man should not do as some stubborn men, who all the way to their death thus persist in their external ways, who do not search further inwards, and if God wants to speak to them internally, then it happens that something else immediately goes into their ears, such that his word is not able to be heard.²³

In this passage, interior hearing is in tension with and in opposition to the exterior senses and all sensual activity. Though Tauler sets up this tension, he does not do so in order to present the

²³ Und merkent, war zû der mensche geneiget si inwendig oder uswendig, das si nu liep nu leit, zehant so menget er sich dar under und bekort den menschen da mit und spricht im das in. Und die bilde die er dannan von hat, die fließent für die oren siner inwendikeit, das das ewig wort von im nüt enmag gehört werden. Wer das der mensche nu al zehant snelleklichen sine oren, sin gemüte dannan ab ze mole kerte, so wer die bekorunge al ze licht ze über windent. Aber alle die wile der mensche sin oren dar zû als vil erbüt das er es ansicht und mit dem koset und si underseht sich und stat also als in eime wanke ab oder zû ze kerende, so ist er nach überwunden und ist die bekorunge in dem swersten. Al zehant so kere mit herzen verwegenlich din ore ze male dar ab: so hast du nach überwunden. Dis git dir das du dis inwendig wort macht gehören, und benimet dir dise töbheit. Dise töbheit enhant nüt alleine weltliche lüte, sunder och geistlich lüte, die mit minnen und mit meinunge sint gekert zû den creaturen und mit den sint besessen, und das hat der tûfel gebrüfet und sprach in die bilde dannan ab und wan er si dar zû geneiget vint. Etliche werdent verdobt mit iren eigenen ufsetzen und iren annemheiten in sinlich wûrklichkeit, und das mit eigenschaft und mit usserlichen wisen, die si mit den sinnen uswendig genomen hant von den creaturen. Dis alles flüsset den menschen für die oren, das das ewige wort in dem menschen nüt gehört enmag werden noch verstanden enkeine wis. Wol ist das wor, der mensche muß wol haben gûte innige angenomenheit sunder eigenschaft, es si gebet oder heilige betrachtunge und vil des gelich, do mit das die nature erwackert werde und der geist uf gezogen werde und der mensche do mit in gelocket werde. Sunder dis sol sin sunder alle eigenschaft, also das er me ein inwendig losen habe nach dem inwendigen worte und dem inwendigen grunde. Und ensol nut der mensche tûn als etliche verblibende menschen, die untz an iren tot also uf iren uswendigen wisen stont, die nüt fürbas in sùchent, und als in Got wil insprechen, so ist iemer út das inen in die oren zehant vert, das sin wort do nüt enmag gehört werden (V44.191.29–192.22). Translation note: *mensche* may mean man or person, but “man” has been chosen as the most expedient translation for clarifying the point Tauler is making by using both singular and plural verbs in the middle of the selection. The use of “person” and “they/them/their” pronouns would obscure Tauler’s meaning.

interior senses as entirely superior to or safer than their external counterparts, for while the exterior senses are often the most obvious source of temptation, interior hearing can be just as dangerous; the devil speaks within man whenever he finds an opportunity. He tempts man with whatever the man is inclined toward, internal or external, and he tries to use any opening in the interior hearing just as readily as he would use an opening in the exterior senses, as was seen in V48, above.

Tauler's description in this sermon blurs the line between the exterior and interior senses. Not only are the exterior senses able to interact with the interior senses, but the exterior senses can block the functioning of interior hearing. Ultimately, anything which can be perceived through sensual activity can be slipped into the *grunt* by the devil through the senses—exterior or interior. Once there, it can distract the interior senses from their proper object or even completely block their ability to hear God's spoken word internally. Whatever the origin of sensory activity, it is the responsibility of the hearer to guard against distractions and obstructions.

In this sermon, Tauler not only blurs the distinction between interior and exterior sensing, he also blurs the distinction between the senses themselves. This can be seen in his description of the operation of the interior senses, where twice in this section, the devil is said to “speak images” to the man, in his interior. Though one cannot hear images through exterior hearing, interior hearing functions differently. In Tauler's typical description of this process, the sensations which are received into the interior world by the senses—interior or exterior—manifest as images within the interior world. This happens with each sense, not just sight. Such sense images are internal, objects of the mind, and Tauler conceives of these objects taking up a sort of mental space, cluttering the contemplative world with things, whether worldly, rational,

or spiritual. As the clutter builds, the work of contemplation becomes more and more difficult, perhaps even impossible, because this clutter obstructs the smooth operation of the senses and can even block it entirely, effectively plugging the interior ears, veiling the interior eyes, etc. This is what Tauler means when he says of these images, “All this flows to the man, in front of his ears, such that the eternal word in the man is not able to be heard nor understood in any way.”²⁴

This image-language in V44 is one of many examples of Neoplatonic influence in Tauler’s preaching and contemplative practice, and such image-language is widespread across many of Tauler’s sermons.²⁵ While the exact path by which these ideas made their way into Tauler’s theology may be impossible to retrace, Question 12 from Augustine of Hippo’s *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, demonstrates well that many of these ideas are congruent with older exemplars, and even with non-Christian ones:

“Come now, O wretched mortals,” he says, “take heed that the wicked spirit may never foul this habitation, and that, intermingled with the senses, it may not pollute the sanctity of the soul and becloud the light of the mind. This evil thing creeps stealthily through all the entrances of sense: it gives itself over to forms, it adapts itself to colors, it sticks to sounds, it lurks hidden in anger and in the deception of speech, it appends itself to odors, it infuses tastes, by the turbulent overflow of passion it darkens the senses with darksome affections, it fills with certain obscuring mists the paths of the understanding, through all of which the mind’s ray normally diffuses the light of reason.”

²⁴ Dis alles flüset den menschen für die oren, das das ewige wort in dem menschen nüt gehört enmag werden noch verstanden enkeine wis (V44.192.11–13).

²⁵ While this thesis will not explore the question of whether Tauler is more Neoplatonic or Thomist, nor will it explore the question of the precise avenues through which this Neoplatonic influence was mediated, it does operate in agreement with the assessment that Tauler’s sermons demonstrate strong Neoplatonic influence, as argued by Gnädinger, *Johannes Tauler*, 389–400; Grunewald, *Studien*, 4–11; Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik: Die Mystik des deutschen Predigerordens und ihre Grundlegung durch die Hochscholastik* (München: C.H. Beck, 1996), 503–07; and Dietrich Schlüter, “Philosophische Grundlagen der Lehren Johannes Taulers” in *Johannes Tauler: ein deutscher Mystiker. Gedenkschrift zum 600. Todestag*, ed. Ephrem Filthaut (Essen: Hans Driewer, 1961) 148–57. The exploration of Neoplatonic influence in this thesis will primarily aim to explain some of the more obscure concepts underlying Tauler’s understanding of contemplation and the mind and to demonstrate the congruity between Neoplatonic language in Tauler and that found in various likely sources of Neoplatonic influence, especially Proclus, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Meister Eckhart.

“In fact, since it consists of heavenly light, [that] ray mirrors the divine presence, for in it God, in it the blameless will, in it the merit of virtuous action all shine forth. God is everywhere present, and he is simultaneously present to each of us in the very moment when the undiminished purity of our mind has recognized itself to be in his presence. For just as defective vision does not recognize the presence of whatever it cannot see (for in vain does the image of things present impinge on the eyes if their powers are impaired), so also God, who is nowhere absent, is present in vain to defiled souls, since the mind in its blindness cannot see him.”²⁶

Augustine’s brief, “he says,” at the beginning of the section and his accompanying comment on this quotation reveal that these ideas are not original to him, but from Fonteius of Carthage. Of this quotation, Augustine says,

It is not mine, but because I was responsible for making it known to certain brothers who were at that time questioning me very closely on these topics and were pleased with it, they wanted me to write it among our Questions. Its author is a certain Fonteius of Carthage, and it is entitled *On the Need for Purifying the Mind in Order to See God*. He wrote it while yet a pagan, but he died a baptized Christian.²⁷

It is significant that these ideas emerge from a time when Fonteius was not yet Christian, and yet Augustine identifies these as acceptable, helpful Christian sentiments, for Tauler does the same with the ideas of the Neoplatonist Proclus on several occasions. Tauler is in such agreement with Proclus, that he even argues that Proclus understands what many of the greatest Christian theologians do not.²⁸

Many of the themes taken up in Fonteius’ answer will be seen in other sermons further below, but before moving on, calling attention to a couple of the parallels between Fonteius’ description and V44 will help demonstrate the way that some of these Neoplatonic ideas are utilized and developed through Tauler’s preaching. Though Fonteius’ description does not

²⁶ David L. Mosher, trans. *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Fathers of the Church, ed. Hermigild Dressler, vol. 70 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 43.

²⁷ Mosher, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, 43n1.

²⁸ Proclus is quoted as an authority in quite a few sermons, often in direct and favorable comparison to Christian ones. For instances in which Tauler compares Proclus favorably to other Christian authorities, see V60d.300.27, V61.332.21, V64.347.21, or V64.350.20. For an instance where Tauler quotes Proclus as an authority without comparing him to Christian authorities, see V65.358.15.

contain a literal devil, he does describe “the wicked spirit,” calling it also an “evil thing.” This entity is said to creep in “through all the entrances of sense” in much the same way as was seen in V48 and is here seen in V44, where the devil seeks to find openings through which to tempt the person and tamper with the operation of their senses. Whereas Fonteius’ contemplative aims to *see* God, in V44 Tauler’s contemplative is aimed at *hearing* God’s inner word. In either case, the contemplative’s goal is functionally the same: to sense God within. To do so, the contemplative individual must purify the mind, clearing it of worldly obstructions and hindrances to the pure sight of the divine or the pure hearing of the eternal word. While only one metaphor is shared between these two passages, namely the metaphor of flowing, nearly all of Fonteius’ major metaphors in this short passage—mirrors, colors and light, blindness, rays of light, and the concept of flowing—find significant and repeated development across Tauler’s preaching corpus. Tauler’s use of each of these metaphors will be explored at least briefly over the course of this thesis.

Returning specifically to the image language used in V44, Tauler’s development of the image language in this sermon further blurs the lines between interior hearing and interior sight, in a way typical of much of Tauler’s preaching on the senses. As the man “offers his ears” to the devil’s spoken temptation, Tauler’s focus shifts without explanation from hearing to sight, for the man not only “looks on it [the image of the devil’s spoken temptation] and negotiates with it,” but in his wavering and negotiating, the man and his temptation are said to *undersehent sich*; they “look at one another.” As they do so, the man must choose whether to turn toward (*zu^o ze kerende*) or away from (*ab . . . kerende*) this temptation, but at this stage he is said to be “nearly overcome [already].” Tauler warns that turning away from such interior images and away from the interior sound of the devil’s tempting voice from the outset is the only way to solve the

problem. After this, in the same way as Tauler's description shifted from hearing to sight in his discussion of temptation, his description shifts back in his discussion of repentance, which uses the same turn verb, *ab keren*. Afterward, without explanation, Tauler resumes his hearing language, encouraging his hearers, "immediately, . . . turn your ears completely away from there, for then you have nearly overcome." Such shifts do not require explanation, because Tauler and his hearers share a common conception of the role senses play in receiving sensory information and translating that sensory information into images within the mind. Because of this shared understanding, even though the topic at hand deals primarily with the sense of hearing, interior hearing even, Tauler's hearers know that the sense of interior vision always has at least some role to play in processing these images.

Tauler's goal of contact with God, whether through sight or hearing, means that he does not only warn his hearers. Instead, he counsels his hearers to cultivate their ability to hear the inner word of God through good inner habits, such as prayer and contemplation (*betrachtung*).²⁹ Tauler's accompanying comment that such habits ought to be free from "individuality" is rooted in another Neoplatonic emphasis regarding the essence of God, one which is only vaguely hinted at in the quotation from Fonteius of Carthage. According to this Neoplatonic conception of God's essence, God (or "the One") is wholly distinct from humanity and from all creation. God is uniquely simple, uniquely pure, uniquely radiant, uniquely singular, and uniquely perfect. If anything other than God possesses these qualities, it possesses them through some degree of participation in the essence of God. Because God's essence is wholly different, the individual who draws near to God through contemplation and prayer must learn to distinguish their own

²⁹ Contemplation, too, has a long history of interpretation with strong roots in Neoplatonic thought. For more on Platonic and Neoplatonic contemplation, see Bernard McGinn's discussion in Bernard McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, Presence of God, vol. 4 (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 23–61.

conception of simplicity, purity, radiance, etc. from the reality of these ideas which are found in God and are themselves God. Through contemplation, the contemplative must also withdraw from the opposites of these realities, both in the world and in themselves: including their createdness, multiplicity, complexity, darkness, imperfection, etc. These opposite things—and the individuality which Tauler warns of in V44 certainly falls within the category of opposites—are a hindrance, things which are other than God, separated from God, and which prevent one from seeing or hearing God.³⁰

While the previous example of Tauler blurring the lines between interior sight and other interior senses involved hearing, V54 focuses upon the interior sense of taste. Taste (*smak*)—along with the related verb *smacken* (to taste, to perceive)—is a common and versatile element of Tauler’s preaching vocabulary. Like with Tauler’s use of visual language, *smacken* often connotes both mental experience (to perceive) and sense experience (to taste) simultaneously. Tauler occasionally uses *smacken* in contexts which clearly delimit its meaning to “tasting” alone, but the majority of Tauler’s usages elicit the sense of “to perceive,” a concept for which Tauler has other words, namely *warnemen* and *bevinden*. While *smacken* is not as common as Tauler’s visual language, its prevalence demonstrates the value which both Tauler and his hearers placed upon interior sensing within contemplative praxis.

In this sermon for the 13th Sunday after Trinity, Tauler is overtly using *smak* for its sensory

³⁰ While Neoplatonists would likely say that it is impossible to give a complete picture of God and God’s essence within one text, Proclus does attempt to systematically develop a picture of “the One” in *The Elements of Theology*. While there is no concrete evidence that Tauler read this work, his conception lines up well with many of Proclus’ ideas. There are two main avenues through which Tauler likely encountered Proclus’ philosophy. First, these ideas may have been mediated over the years through generations of Christian writings. Second, Tauler may have encountered Proclus’ writings and ideas more directly through his contemporary, Berthold von Moosburg, with whom he may have lived in Cologne, as has been argued by Loris Sturlese, in “Tauler im Kontext: Die philosophischen Voraussetzungen des ‘Seelengrundes’ in der Lehre des deutschen Neuplatonikers Berthold von Moosburg,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 109 (1987): 390–426, <https://doi.org/10.1515/bgsl.1987.1987.109.390>.

meaning. Tauler draws upon the three loves of Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermon 20 on the Song of Songs: the sweet love, the wise love, and the strong love. Yet Tauler develops these three loves in ways distinctive to his own theology and Neoplatonic influence:

Thus it is with this sweet, image-focused love: this [type of love] is gilt over with good intentions. If someone scraped away only this, then what remained would be hardly worthy of a small price; however, it is very delightful to the senses in the nature. But God pulls and lures the person forward with a comparable sweetness in a process such that the true love is found to lie in this [person] and is formed and born in them, and thus with that taste (*smacken*) in them, the taste (*smak*) for and joy in the creaturely and all other things is extinguished. However, the person should not throw all this [sense-experience] away, and should receive this with honorable fear and humility, and should ascribe it to their own smallness and worthlessness that they needed to be lured in this way and driven to do it, and from there, [the person] should go through the images within them beyond images, through the exterior, sensual practices, inward into themselves, into the *grunt*, where the kingdom of God in truth is. For one finds many people who can [do] very well in the image-focused way and have great delight in it and for whom their interior is closed off, just like an iron mountain which has no way in. This comes from a lack of practice and also from the fact that they too much remain on these sensual images and there they stand and do not come further in and do not break through into the *grunt* where the living truth shines; For one cannot serve two masters, that is, the senses and the spirit.³¹

Like in the previous sermon, images are a major focus, but here the mechanism by which the senses take in information and translate that information into images is not explored. Here, as for much of Tauler's preaching, those considerations are in the background and Tauler instead has a separate, twofold focus. First, Tauler focuses upon the human love of images, specifically those images created in the mind through sense perception. This he calls the sweet love, and a

³¹ Also ist mit diser süßser biltlicher minne: die ist über gült mit einer güter meinunge. Als man die alleine ab geschübe, so were, was do blibe, harte kleines schatzes wert; aber es ist gar lustlich den sinnen in der naturen. Aber Got zühet und reist mit alsolicher süßsikeit den menschen fürbas in einen fürgang das die wore minne mit disem bevinden zü lege und in ime gebilt und geboren werde und also mit dem smacken in ime verlesche smak und lust der creaturen und aller ander dinge. Aber der mensche ensol dis nüt verwerffen, und solt dis mit erwirdiger vorchte und demütikeit nemen, und solt es siner kleinheit und snödeikeit an schriben, das man in dar umbe alsus locken und reissen müsse, und sol her durch gon durch die bilde in in über bilde, durch die uswendige sinliche übung inwendig in sich selber in den grunt, do das rich Gotz in der worheit ist. Wan man vint manigen menschen der vil wol mit der biltlicher wise kan und do grosse wollust inne hat und den ir inwendikeit vor beslossen ist: recht als ein isenin berg, der enkeinen weg inne hat. Das kumet in von unübungen und och dannan ab das si ze vil verblibent uf disen sinlichen bilden und do bestant und nüt für in koment und enkeinen durbruch tunt in den grunt do die lebende worheit lüchtet; wan man enmag nüt zwein herren gedienen, das ist den sinnen und dem geiste (V54.248.13–31).

description given earlier in the sermon clarifies what this looks like in the life of the Christian. Tauler bemoans the way that some religious individuals think upon Jesus only in the image-focused (*biltlicher*) way with sensual love (*sinliche minne*).³² Such individuals focus on intermediate images and never move beyond these images to the essential reality of God. Because of this possibility, Tauler holds very little esteem for this kind of love, comparing sweet love to wood that has been gilded over.³³ Without this gilding—which Tauler identifies with good intentions—this sweet, image-focused love is “hardly worthy of even a small price,” for though images are “very delightful to the senses in the nature,” they are distractions from the best objects of contemplation.³⁴

Tauler’s second focus is upon God’s response to this problem. This is the point at which the senses begin to blur in this sermon. While images elicit the sense of sight, God lures the person out with a “sweetness,” a taste-description. This mixing of senses is heightened as the sweetness is said to be comparable to the delight found in images. The sense of taste itself is then mentioned explicitly in the following sentence, where Tauler says that this taste (*smak*) extinguishes the “joy in the creaturely and all other things,” a statement which implies that this sweet taste from God extinguishes the love of images, too. This interior taste is a taste of true love, but Tauler warns not to throw all sense experience away at this point, instead instructing his hearers that the contemplative individual ought to move “through the images within them beyond images, through the exterior, sensual practices, inward into themselves, into the *grunt*, where the kingdom of God in truth is.”

Very little of Tauler’s development of this sweet, image-focused love is present in

³² V54.247.18–19.

³³ V54.248.3.

³⁴ V54.248.13–15.

Bernard's original sermon, and Tauler's later development of the other two loves is similarly idiosyncratic.³⁵ In Bernard's original sermon, each of the three loves is connected to a different action of Christ, and each are therefore interpreted as having individual value for the Christian. In Tauler's sermon, however, the three loves represent three distinct stages of piety. Sweet love, as Tauler describes it here, is of very little worth apart from its role as a steppingstone to the higher levels. Wise love on the other hand, is described as rational and noble, yet it can lead people to danger if they reason their way into a false sense of security.³⁶ Strong, essential love is the true goal. It is called essential love because the contemplative individual has been permeated by God's own loving essence.³⁷ In many ways, this trajectory is Neoplatonic in character, drawing upon Neoplatonic themes such as the role of images in sense perception, the encouragement to move beyond images, the theme of moving through intermediary stages to reach the highest good, the role of the inward turn, and the goal of the soul's union with God.³⁸

The concluding statement of this passage, "One cannot serve two masters, that is, the senses and the spirit,"³⁹ is a good demonstration of the overall position which Tauler takes toward the senses, which has already been seen above. The senses are beneficial and necessary insofar as they lead one toward contemplation of God, but they are detrimental and dangerous otherwise. Even when an external or internal stimulus is gone, its interior image can still remain and distract from contemplation of God within the *grunt* of the soul.

When Tauler concludes this passage with "one cannot serve two masters, that is, the senses

³⁵ Notably, Louise Gnädinger says that Tauler reinterprets Bernard's three loves "in the sense of Dionysian ecstatic mysticism," in *Johannes Tauler*, 403, translation my own.

³⁶ V54.249.1–2, V54.250.9–28.

³⁷ V54.253.1–4.

³⁸ For more on this sermon's Neoplatonic themes, see Gnädinger, *Johannes Tauler*, 401–03.

³⁹ cf. Matthew 6:24 (ESV), "No one can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve God and money."

and the spirit,” the meaning of *sinnen* is initially ambiguous. While *sinnen* could mean “mind” here, context makes clear that this *sinnen* refers to the exterior senses, for Tauler’s argument is that the contemplative must move “through the exterior, sensual practices” which bring competing images into the *grunt*. Note however that later in this same sermon, when Tauler refers to the *sinnen* again, immediate context is less helpful:

The first [characteristic of the strong, free love] is that the spirit of the person thus exuberantly elevates them to that which they love, and it pulls them far out of the individuality and capability and effectiveness of the faculties of remembering and wanting. This is beyond all understanding (*wise*) and senses (*sinnen*).⁴⁰

From the immediate context, either meaning of senses could be understood. The emphasis on understanding and remembering, especially, lends itself to ideas of mental processes, but Georg Hofmann interprets Tauler’s use of *wise* and *sinnen* together as a reference back to the two other kinds of love, wise and sweet love, respectively.⁴¹ If this is the case, then this *sinnen* is likely a reference back to the exterior senses. However, to force *sinnen* into one box or the other may be too artificial. In this culminating moment in the sermon, Tauler urges his hearers to move beyond the senses in their contemplation, beyond the individuality and capability and effectiveness of their faculties, beyond sweet and wise love—a move far beyond Bernard of Clairvaux’s original sermon. As was seen in V26 above, in the strong, free, essential love, all sense of control and self is lost, interior senses and faculties included. To slot *sinnen* in as one or the other would be to miss the point.

Such encouragement to move beyond the senses does not only emerge in this Neoplatonic turn toward the essential and real. In Tauler’s preaching, the move beyond the senses also

⁴⁰ Zü dem ersten das si den geist des menschen also überswenklichen erhebt in jenem den er mint, und zúhet in verre us der eigenschaft und vermúgen und wúrklichkeit der krefté gehúgnisse und wille. Dis ist úber alle wise und sinne (V54.252.21–24).

⁴¹ Hofmann, *Predigten*, 404n4.

emerges from a Dionysian conviction that God is hidden, especially from the operation of the senses.⁴² This is stated quite clearly in a passage from V60:

And he [God] is hidden in all things far more than anything in the *grunt* of the soul [is hidden] to the person himself, hidden from all senses and completely unrecognized within the *grunt*.⁴³

God is hidden from the senses, interior or exterior, and is completely unrecognized within the *grunt*. Thus, the contemplative must seek to move beyond, toward a knowing which does not require the senses. This theme of hiddenness will be explored further below, in the chapter on Contemplative Vision.

One more passage will help fill in the picture of the interior senses, as this sermon ties together many of the themes which have been explored so far, especially the theme of clearing the *grunt* and renouncing the worldly or sensual. Tauler typically calls this process *gelassenheit* (releasement, renunciation), though he occasionally uses a more Eckhartian term, *abgescheidenheit* (detachment), for the same idea.⁴⁴ This latter word, detachment, is the focus of a sermon for the Sunday after Ascension, where Tauler says:

Now, what is true detachment (*abgescheidenheit*), that first of these four [requirements to receive the Holy Spirit]? This is when the person turns away and detaches from all that is not God simply and purely, and with the light of their discernment (*bescheidenheit*) looks through (*durchsehe*) all their works, words and thoughts with an understanding mind (*gemüte*), lest there be anything in the *grunt* which is not purely God or lest God is not simply in mind (*enmeine*) in all things which are done and which are not done, and if the person finds (*vindet*) anything

⁴² For more on Tauler's relationship to Pseudo-Dionysius, see Gnädinger, *Johannes Tauler*, 394–96.

⁴³ Und er ist verborgenlichen in allen dingen verre me wan dehein ding im selber si in dem grunde der selen, verborgen allen sinnen und unbekant ze mole inne in dem grunde (V60.277.22–24).

⁴⁴ “Releasement” and “detachment” are Bernard McGinn's translations for these terms which are difficult to translate smoothly into English. Because these are technical terms in Tauler's vocabulary, each one is freighted with meaning. However, in his exploration of them McGinn notes, “there appears to be little difference in the way [Tauler] employs these words” (McGinn, *Harvest*, 268). What is said above regarding *abgescheidenheit* therefore applies to Tauler's use of *gelassenheit* as well. For more on Tauler's use of these terms, see Gnädinger, *Johannes Tauler*, 272–86, 300–301.

there that is minded (*gemeinet*) other than God, then that person ought separate from it and put it out [of mind].⁴⁵

As has already been seen, the role of the contemplative is to keep the *grunt* free of created things and their images. The contemplative employs every tool at his or her disposal to ensure that God alone is in the *grunt* and that God alone is the focus of contemplation. The *grunt* is interiorly located within each human individual, and it is in some sense said to be within God as well.

True detachment (*abgescheidenheit*), as Tauler calls it in this sermon, is not a one-time act in which the *grunt* is cleared, detached from creatures and thereafter permanently free. Instead, it is a process which is engaged in continually throughout the contemplative's life, for even if the *grunt* is fully cleared once, the devil can and will sneak created things and worldly concerns into contemplation any time he finds an opening in the senses. While the contemplative must guard against the intrusion of such created things via the exterior and interior senses, much of Tauler's preaching is marked by a kind of resignation to the inevitability of this intrusion. Engaging in a process of discernment, searching for those created things which have crept into the *grunt*, is therefore necessary. The contemplative uses the *gemüte*, the "mind" which directs the light of [the person's] discernment (*bescheidenheit*), to sift through all works, words, and thoughts. When Tauler describes this process of discernment under the direction of the *gemüte*, he is essentially describing the proper work of the interior senses within the person. This is why *bescheidenheit* is so surrounded with implicitly and explicitly visual sense-language, words like

⁴⁵ Was ist nu wore abgescheidenheit, das dis erste ist von disen vieren? Das ist daz sich der mensche abekere und abescheide von allem dem das nüt Got luter und blos enist, und mit dem lichte siner bescheidenheit alle sine werg, wort und gedenke durchsehe mit eime verstanden gemüte, obe út do si in dem grunde das Got nüt luterlich ensi oder Got nüt blösliehen enmeine in allen dingen, in tunde und in lossende, und vindet er út do das do gemeinet wurt anders denne Got, das man daz abescheide und uzliesse (V23.92.4–11). The word *meinen* is an extremely common word in Tauler's vocabulary, and its meaning is inseparable from Tauler's visual conception of contemplation. To *meinen* something means to actively focus the mind upon it. The translation above, "if the person finds anything there that is minded other than God," is unnatural sounding in English, but it more accurately communicates Tauler's active, contemplative meaning than alternatives.

durchsehe (look through), *enmeine* (have in mind), and *vindet* (find).

This theme of releasement or detachment—like many other main themes in Tauler’s preaching—is significantly influenced by the teachings of Meister Eckhart, with much of Tauler’s detachment vocabulary mirroring Eckhart’s own, especially *abgescheidenheit* (detachment), *gelassenheit* (releasement, renunciation), *lidig* (passive), *fri* (free), *luter* (simple), and *blos* (pure).⁴⁶ However, this similarity in vocabulary does not mean that the theme is adopted without modification. As Käte Grunewald has argued, Eckhart’s basic mystical convictions tend more toward a tone of triumphant certainty than Tauler’s own, which are better characterized by ideas like helplessness, entrapment, and even pain.⁴⁷ In the midst of such pain, Tauler “can only point to the grace of God—not as a sanctifying principle, but as the personal mercy and help that God will bestow, if it is his will that this particular person should live, despite the fact that sin wants to cover him.”⁴⁸ This contrast in tone is especially apparent in the sixth of Eckhart’s *Talks of Instruction*, “On Detachment and on Possessing God.” Although Eckhart’s topic in this talk shares a name and significant vocabulary with Tauler’s *abgescheidenheit* in V23, Eckhart’s posture is very different. The talk opens with a hypothetical situation: “Some people shun all company and always want to be alone; their peace depends on it, and on being in church.”⁴⁹ When asked, “Was that the best thing?” Eckhart replies emphatically,

“No!” Now see why. He who is in a right state, is always in a right state wherever he is, and with everybody. But if a man is in a wrong state, he is so everywhere and with anybody. But if a man is in a right state, in truth he has God with him. Now if a man truly has God with him, God is with him everywhere, in the street or among people

⁴⁶ Bernard McGinn developed this list to describe Eckhart’s use of and development of the detachment theme in *Harvest*, 165–66. Though McGinn does not comment here on Tauler, each of these words sees significant development across Tauler’s preaching corpus, and not only in the context of detachment or releasement.

⁴⁷ Grunewald, *Studien*, 10–11.

⁴⁸ Grunewald, *Studien*, 11, translation my own.

⁴⁹ Maurice O.C. Walshe, ed. and trans., *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart* (New York: Crossroad, 2009), 490.

just as much as in church or in the desert or in a cell. If he possesses God truly and solely, such a man cannot be disturbed by anybody. Why? He has only God, thinks only of God, and all things are for him nothing but God.⁵⁰

The triumphant character of Eckhart's *abgescheidenheit* allows him to encourage the individual to mingle with the created freely, as it cannot affect the truly detached person. Tauler's concept of detachment, however, is more cautious, never reaching this same level of certainty, indeed never quite allowing the individual to "arrive" in the same way as Eckhart's man "in a right state." Tauler's hearer never drops their guard against the intermingling of created things because—as will be seen further below—the work of detachment is never done.

Contemplation and discernment are therefore lifelong endeavors for the contemplative individual, with rest and true *unio mystica* a rare and fleeting occurrence. Such experiences cannot be forced and are not guaranteed, even to the one who is greatly devout and skilled. In fact, Tauler at least once seems to claim that he himself has not experienced this kind of union.⁵¹ Where Eckhart's teaching can often be lofty and philosophical, Tauler consistently aims at the practical and pastoral. His preaching exhibits genuine concern for his hearers who have not achieved this rest—and who may never achieve it. A select few may experience these moments of union in which the soul "loses itself" in the abyss of God, losing all control and sensation, both exterior and interior.⁵² However, even these blessed few will soon be brought back down to earth, where they will again wrestle with the worldly createdness, multiplicity, and imperfections of interior and exterior sensation.

At that point, the process of renunciation, along with the entire process of discernment described above, begins anew. Even the most skilled contemplatives must once again turn away

⁵⁰ Walshe, *Meister Eckhart*, 490.

⁵¹ See V41.175.4–7.

⁵² See V26.109.20–23, V24.101.12–29, V64.351.5–13, or V65.358.4–16.

from the world of exterior senses and turn within toward the *grunt* of the soul. There, the *gemûte* directs the operation of the interior senses, sifting through the images from exterior and interior sensation, clearing the *grunt* of all that is not God. Tauler's preaching is greatly preoccupied with describing this process at the level of interior sense—employing especially the language of taste, hearing, and sight. However, Tauler's preaching is also filled with warnings regarding the dangers which accompany this contemplative work and the human limitedness which hinders this work of the senses. In the next chapter, as the conversation shifts toward Tauler's description of exterior sight, this limitedness is a major theme. For Tauler, all sense is limited, both physical and mental, exterior and interior. At the highest stages of contemplation, all sense falls away as the individual surrenders themself and all sensation to the goal of rest in the presence of God.

CHAPTER THREE

SEEING

This section will move away from discussion of the other senses and the idea of senses generally, toward Tauler's more specifically visual language. Tauler has a rich visual vocabulary, using *sehen* (to see), *schöwen* (to look at, look around), *blicken* (to glance, have a look), *sicht* (sight, view), several variations on these words, and more. These visual words, alongside several significant visual themes, are present throughout Tauler's preaching. Though he does not explicitly express the opinion of Augustine that sight is better than all the other senses for it is closer to spiritual vision,¹ the frequency with which he draws upon visual language demonstrates a strong preference for vision.

Rather than analyzing any one visual word, this section will explore the typical ways that Tauler characterizes exterior vision and bodily eyes. For all the frequency with which he discusses vision and visual themes, Tauler uses visual language almost exclusively to describe interior vision. Exceptions are few and far between, and even these exceptions are often in service to a larger interior argument. Broadly speaking, Tauler's use of exterior vision can be characterized in terms of two main categories: descriptions of ability and descriptions of inability or weakness. While the latter is more common in Tauler's preaching, there are a small handful of moments in which the positive abilities of sight and vision are described. Both categories will be explored below.

As with all the other senses, Tauler differentiates exterior and interior versions of sight. In V45, a sermon for the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, he explores this idea explicitly, stating that each person has two kinds of eyes, interior (*inwendig*) and exterior (*uswendig*):

¹ *de Trinitate* 11.1.1.

Now we take up the first word: “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see.” The person has two kinds of eyes: exterior (*uswendig*) eyes and interior (*inwendige*) eyes. And if the interior eyes did not exist, then it would be a difficult, inferior, weak thing with the exterior eyes and for the person entirely, and then would the person be no different from an animal or beast.²

Note the use of *wenden* (turn) words, *uswendig* and *inwendige* (interior and exterior), which is typical of Tauler’s description of the senses. As has been argued above, this turn-language is a natural outflow of his *gemûte*-centered anthropology and his understanding of contemplative practice. Tauler could have described this sight using the Middle High German words *inner* and *usser* (inner and outer), but the *-wendig* words fit better as they connote directionality or focus.³

Note also that Tauler’s description of these two kinds of eyes puts the exterior eyes into a relationship of dependence upon the interior eyes within each person. The interior eyes are of great benefit to the exterior eyes, for without the interior eyes, “it would be a difficult, inferior, weak thing with the exterior eyes and for the person entirely.” While Tauler does not explain this statement within this sermon, descriptions of exterior eyes in other sermons are helpful in explaining what he means. In other sermons which reference the exterior eyes, Tauler regularly describes these eyes as “weak” (*krank*).⁴ All the exterior senses are “weak” and limited because they themselves are not able to process the images which they receive. They translate exterior sensation into images in the mind, but by themselves they cannot do anything with those interior images. Once inside, these images can only be explored and understood through the operation of

² Nu nemen wir das erste wort: ‘selig sint die \ddot{v} ogen die do sehent das ir sehent’. Der mensche hat zweiger leige \ddot{v} ogen: uswendig \ddot{v} ogen und inwendige \ddot{v} ogen. Und enwere das innerlich \ddot{v} oge nût, so wer es ein hert snôd krank ding mit dem uswendigen \ddot{v} oge und umbe den menschen al ze mole, und so were der mensche als ein ander vihe oder tier (V45.195.14–18).

³ For contexts in which Tauler chooses to use *inner* and *usser* see V9.40.14 or V57.273.12.

⁴ For other uses of weak eyes (*kranken \ddot{v} ogen*) in Tauler’s preaching, see V45.195.17, V50.228.15–17, V60.278.10, or V69.378.31–32.

interior vision.⁵ Because of this inability, the exterior senses depend upon the interior senses for their fullest functioning and usefulness, so much so that Tauler says without interior eyes the person would be “no different from an animal or beast.” This statement is stark, but it makes clear that Tauler prioritizes interior vision over exterior vision, not just for the functioning of the exterior vision, but “for the person entirely.”

Another example of Tauler describing the limitations of exterior vision can be found in a sermon preached on the 19th Sunday after Trinity. In this sermon, Tauler briefly describes the inability of the eye to separate air and light, another Neoplatonic theme:⁶

When the spirit suddenly sinks and melts with its innermost into God's innermost, then it is rebuilt and renewed, and in this way the spirit is much more overflowed and over-formed by God's spirit, as much more as it has been able to more orderly and purely attain this way and has had God simply in mind (*gemeint*): God pours [his spirit] in here in the same way as the natural sun pours its light into the air, and in this way, all the air is permeated with light, and this distinction between air and light no eye can comprehend or separate. And who then could separate this divine, far beyond natural union, where the spirit is born and pulled into the abyss of its beginning? Know this: were it possible that one could see (*sehe*) the spirit in the spirit, then one would look without any doubt upon God himself.⁷

In drawing attention to the inability of the exterior eyes to separate light from air, Tauler's main interest is not the physical realities that underly this inability. His primary interest is not really in

⁵ Meister Eckhart describes this paradigm in German Sermon 10: “The soul has two eyes, one inward and one outward. The inward eye of the soul is the one that sees into being and takes its being from God without anything else mediating. This is its proper function. The outward eye of the soul is the one that is turned toward all creatures, taking note of them by means of images in the manner of a [spiritual] faculty” (Bernard McGinn, Frank Tobin, and Elvira Borgstadt, eds. *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, Classics of Western Spirituality [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986], 263).

⁶ Gnädinger, *Johannes Tauler*, 403.

⁷ Als der geist al zemole in sinket und in smilzet mit sinem innigosten in Gotz innigosten, so wirt er do wider bilt und ernüwet, und also vil me wirt der geist über gossen und über formet von Gotz geiste, als vil als er disen weg ordenlicher und luterlicher gegangen hat und Got bloslicher gemeint hat: als ingüsset sich hie Got, als die natürliche sunne güsset iren schin in die lúft, und wirt aller der luft durch formet mit dem liechte. Und dis underscheit von luft und von liechte das enmag enkein öge begriffen noch gescheiden. Und wer möchte denne gescheiden dise götliche verre über natürliche einunge, do der geist ist in genomen und in gezogen in das abgründe sines beginnes? Wissent: wer es möglich das man den geist in dem geiste gesehen möchte, man sehe in ane allen zwivel an für Got (V56.263.7–18).

the ability or inability of the exterior eyes at all, but rather his interest is in communicating a deeper, spiritual meaning about interior eyes and interior vision. Most descriptions of exterior sight in Tauler's preaching match this pattern. Exterior sight is mentioned instrumentally, in this case, to help the listener understand the difficulty of distinguishing the border between the human who has been pulled into the innermost (*innigosten*) of God and God himself.⁸

A brief comment is warranted on the importance of recognizing the visual connotations of Tauler's language. While spiritual vision is not brought up explicitly until the end of this passage, it is implied much earlier by his use of *gemeint*, a form of the verb *meinen* (to mind, to have in mind), which frequently demonstrates visual connotations in Tauler's preaching. Having "God simply in mind" only happens when the innermost is "orderly," a reference to the well-prepared *grunt* which is free of obstructions. Recognizing the visual character of contemplation and the visual connotation of thinking verbs like *meinen* is important for recognizing the thematic connectedness of this passage. Tauler's later use of *sehe* is not a random conceptual shift into a new direction, but a natural outflow of both the ongoing visual activity, *meinen*, and the earlier comparison to exterior vision. Visual language even continues into the following paragraph, where Tauler mentions such implicitly visual themes as recognition, turning, darkness, and hiddenness. All this visual language is in service to the assumed interior aim of seeing God and the goal of the spirit being submersed into him. In a very real sense, this passage marks the point in the sermon at which Tauler encourages his hearers to cease contemplation, cease trying to see God. When an individual is submersed in the innermost, into the abyss, seeing is no longer possible. But "were it possible that one could see the spirit in the spirit, then one

⁸ By my rough count, Tauler only refers to an *innigosten* six (6) times, so defining it is somewhat difficult. However, Tauler appears to use it as an alternative name for the *grunt* which emphasizes the relationship of the *grunt* to either the interior of God or the interior of human individuals.

would look without any doubt upon God himself.”

The next example of limitation comes from V69. In this selection, two kinds of exterior eyes are described. First, Tauler refers to the “weak” eyes of his own hearers. Second, Tauler describes a swallow’s eyes. In both cases, the focus is upon the limitations of exterior eyes:

This in-turned person flies back into his origin, into his uncreatedness, and there [the person] is a light in the light. In this light they extinguish any moderation; (they are like a darkness) to all the natural light and to any inpoured light which ever shone within this [uncreatedness]. In the same way as when the brilliant sun shines, thus blinding all the luminance of the stars—they stand now as beautiful in the sky as they did last night, but the great light of the sun has blinded them—in that same way, the light that here shines in this *grunt* darkens and blinds all created light that has ever shone, and it is so brilliant in the *grunt*, so superabundant to the spirit, that it in comparison seems like a darkness due to the superabundance of the light, for it is incomprehensible to [the person] and to all creatures. For all creaturely understanding is to this light as the swallow’s eye is to the clear sun. Indeed, if you with your weak eyes wanted to stare into the orb of the sun, that would seem like a darkness to this sight due to the surpassing light and the weakness of your eyes. About this a heathen king writes: “God is a darkness in the soul compared to all light, and one recognizes him with the unrecognition of the mind.” This is a great disgrace to us, that a heathen, and at that a king, understood this. What are we poor people occupying ourselves with?⁹

This first comparison, whereby the sun darkens the eyes through its brilliance, is relatively common in Tauler’s preaching, and it is typically used as an analogy for the way that interior vision tends to fail in the presence of God’s radiance or glory.¹⁰ The second comparison, to a

⁹ Diser inwendiger mensche der wider flúget in sinen ursprung, in sin ungeschaffenheit und wirt do ein liecht in dem liechte. In disem liechte verlöschent etlicher mosse (si werdent als ein dúnsternisse) alle die natúrlichen liechter und die in gegossen liechter die under disem ie geluchtent. Ze gelicher wis als die klare sunne schinet, so verblendet si alle die lúchtunge der sternen; die stant nu als schön an dem himel als si hinacht taten; aber das grosse liecht der sunnen das hat si geblendet. Also dis liecht das hie schinet in disen grunt, das verdúnstert und verblendet alle geschaffene liechter die ie geschinent, und wirt als klar in dem grunde das es dem geiste wirt als überswenkig das es engegen in schinet als ein dúnsternisse von überswenklicheit des liechtes, wan es ime und allen creaturen unbegrifflich ist. Wan aller creaturen verstentnisse haltent sich engegen dem liechte als der swalwen öge sich haltet engegen der claren sunnen. Und ob du mit dinen kranken ögen woltest staren in das rat der sunnen, das schine dime gesichte als ein dúnsternisse von úber treffendem liechte und von krankheit des ögen. Dannan ab schribet ein heidenschere kúnig: ‘Got ist ein dúnsternisse in der selen nach allem liechte, und man bekennet in mit unbekentnisse des gemútes’. Dis ist uns ein gros laster, das dis ein heiden und dar zú ein kúnig verstúnt. Wo mit gon wir arm volk umbe (V69.378.18–36)?

¹⁰ For more examples of eyes being darkened by the sun, see V50.228.15, V54.249.30, or V61.332.19.

swallow's eyes, is less common, but fortunately not wholly unique among Tauler's sermons. The one other use of this image, found in V60, is helpful in determining its intended meaning:

For all created understanding conducts itself toward the divine radiance according to its nature, like the eye of the swallow toward the clear sun, and it must in its ignorance and its blindness be thrown back, insofar as it is created and creature.¹¹

In V60, the radiance of the sun in the swallow's eye is the reason that the swallow does not ascend higher but rather is "thrown back" to the earth. Though Tauler does not dwell long on either swallow analogy, the force of both analogies is the same: any created eye which attempts to look upon God is thrown back; it has flown too high and by its nature cannot bear the sight of God's glory.¹² The force of the sun-darkened eye analogy is much the same. Any human eye which attempts to look upon God is darkened, blinded even, by God's glory. Though human eyes can look upon other lights, they are limited by their nature and unable to break through and see God's radiance and all his glory, for all other lights pale in comparison to God. The goal of this comparison is once again interior—to explain the inability of interior vision to see God and to encourage the contemplative individual to instead "recognize him with the unrecognition of the mind," a theme which will be explored further in the next chapter.

In a sermon for the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, Tauler explores the text, "Blessed are the eyes which see what you see, for many kings and prophets longed to see what you see and yet saw it not" (Luke 10:23). This theme of inability to see leads Tauler to use one of his most common analogies, that of a covering over the eyes which blocks sight:¹³

¹¹ Wan alle geschaffen verstentnisse haltent sich engegen der klarheit von naturen als der swalwen öge sich haltet engegen der kloren sunnen, und müssen da wider slagen werden in ir unbekentnisse und blintheit, als verre als si geschaffen und creaturen sint (V60.278.11–14).

¹² Loris Sturlese notes that Tauler is drawing upon Book 2 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* for this theme, but he is making a significant mistake. Where Aristotle has a bat, Tauler has translated swallow ("Tauler im Kontext," 414).

¹³ For other instances of this theme, see V39.162.1, V45.195.22, V50.226.24, V53.245.1, V54.251.18, or V55.257.25.

Children, the problem lies in the will; for the will is truly the cause of the obstruction. It is the will which covers the eyes interiorly, in the same way as when the exterior eyes have a veil or a covering, which prevents from seeing. Therefore, the eye must be free from all color, that it might see all color. In the same way, the interior must be simple and pure of all willing and unwilling, if it is to see purely and blessedly.¹⁴

In the same way that an exterior veil covers the eyes and prevents sight, the will can function as an interior veil for the contemplative. In other uses of this analogy, the will is not always the covering which obstructs interior vision; anything in the mind can function as a veil, images especially.

Another important visual theme in this sermon is color, a theme explored in a handful of other sermons.¹⁵ Though the logic behind Tauler's statement that the eye must "be free from color, that it might see all color" is unexplained in this sermon, Tauler is drawing upon an idea in Meister Eckhart's teaching which traces back to Aristotle.¹⁶ In the *Book of Divine Consolation*, Eckhart says,

In a few words, everything that is to receive and be capable of receiving should and must be empty. The authorities say that if the eye had some color in it when it was observing, it would recognize neither the color it had nor the color it had not; but because it is free of all colors, it therefore recognizes all colors. . . . The eye has no color and yet truly possesses color, because it recognizes it with pleasure and delight and joy. And as the powers of the soul become more perfect and unmixed, so they apprehend more perfectly and comprehensively whatever they apprehend.¹⁷

These ideas are the background of Tauler's claim. Eyes cannot have color, for if they are to be able to receive color, then they must be empty. In the same way, Tauler is arguing that the mind

¹⁴ Kinder, in dem willen do inne lit der schade; wan der wille der ist recht das subjectum, der under stant des hindernisses. Der wille der bedeckt die ögen innewendig, ze gelicher wise als das uswendig öge das ein vel oder ein decken hat, das enmag nut gesehen. Dar umbe muß das öge sin sunder alle varwe, das es alle varwe gesehen müge. Also muß das innewendig blos und luter sin alles wellendes und unwellendes, sol es luterlichen und seliklichen sehen (V64.348.14–20).

¹⁵ For other instances of this theme, see V3.18.26, V37.146.25, or V55.257.20.

¹⁶ *On the Soul* 2.7, as cited in Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, trans., *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1981), 220. For another instance of Eckhart's teaching on the color theme, see German Sermon 12.

¹⁷ Colledge and McGinn, *Meister Eckhart*, 220.

must be clear of everything for it to see “purely and blessedly.” Though the eye is obstructable in V64 and therefore limited, this sermon is one of the few times in which Tauler describes the capabilities of exterior eyes. The eye is able to see color, and it is empty of all color. In this respect, the exterior eyes are not only described as detriments; they are also models for their interior counterparts.

One of the most remarkable depictions of exterior vision is in V60f, a sermon which focuses upon the Lord’s Supper:

We should look on this work with a reasonable consideration, with great love and praise, that our Lord is so bottomlessly humble that he has thus given himself in a coarse external way, in likeness of bread and wine, and that we should take him into our mouth as bodily food (*lipliche spise*); this means that he wants to sink into us very near and inwardly and to press himself upon us and to entirely unify with us, as much as one with the senses can examine and comprehend it; he very well might have liked it to be given in a much higher, more artful way, one with greater shine and radiance—yet Saint Hildegard writes that that happens every day, invisibly—and one of our sisters in the High Country saw this very thing, that an incomprehensible radiance enveloped the priest and the altar and wonder from angels and much lovely things—this she saw with her bodily eyes (*liplichen ögen*)! [But] this our Lord has not done [here].¹⁸

Tauler’s focus is upon the scandalous fact that Jesus gives himself to humanity in gross, physical, bodily form in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. For Tauler and his hearers, this may be difficult to reconcile with their Christian-Neoplatonist convictions. In so many other sermons, the flesh is the enemy, something to be overcome and even transcended, and God is

¹⁸ Wir süllent dis werg mit einer vernünftiger angesichte, mit grosser minne und lobe anesehen, das unser herre also grundelos demütig ist das er sich also geben hat in einer grober ussewendiger wise, also in glichnisse brotes und wines, und das wir in zü dem munde innemen süllent also lipliche spise; dis meinert das er gar nohe und indewendeclich sich in uns wil sencken und trucken und uns zümole vereinen, als man mit den sinnen vernemen mag und begriffen; er möchte wol ein vil hoher behender wise han geben von grossem schine und von klorheit. Aber S. Hiltgart schribet das das alle tage geschicht ungesichteklich. Und das selbe sach ein unser swester oben im lande das ein unbegriflich klorheit umbe vieng den priester und den alter, und wunder von engelen und vil minneklicher dinge. Dis sach si mit iren liplichen ögen; dis enhat unser herre nüt geton (V60f.310.24–311.9).

that opposite, essential, good reality toward which such transcendence aims. But here, the flesh is assumed by Jesus, God himself.

Later, an additional scandal is offered. Tauler says that “one of our sisters” saw radiance enveloping the priest and the altar and wonder from the angels and much lovely things, “with her bodily eyes.” This is a significant moment, as it is a complete inversion of Tauler’s typical contemplative paradigm. Contemplation of God is to be achieved in an essential way, not in a rational or mental way, and certainly not in a sensual or bodily way. The adjective here used for eyes, *liplichen* (bodily, physical, fleshly), is not typical of Tauler’s descriptions of the exterior eyes, but the unusual usage is clearly deliberate.¹⁹ It is a reference to the scandal mentioned just sentences before, that the Lord humiliates himself to such a degree that he is received “into our mouth as bodily food” (*lipliche spise*).

The concluding clause of this passage is especially difficult at an interpretive level. Immediately after saying “This she saw with her bodily eyes,” Tauler says, “this our Lord has not done.” There are two possible referents for the final “this,” and they dramatically change the force of Tauler’s statement. Either Tauler is saying “our Lord has not shown himself to her in a way visible to her bodily eyes,” or Tauler is saying, “our Lord has not revealed himself to us in this way.” While the fact that the syntax matches perfectly between the final two clauses lends itself to the former interpretation, the latter is more likely for a couple of reasons. First, Tauler’s description of the nun’s seeing offers no clue that it is to be received with doubt. In both cases, he flatly asserts without qualification that she saw—“one of our sisters saw,” and, “She saw.” Second, though this bodily seeing is an inversion of Tauler’s typical contemplative paradigm, it is not without possible precedent for Tauler, even within the Scriptures. Tauler references Paul’s

¹⁹ He uses this adjective for *ögen* in only one other sermon, V61.332.19.

rapture to the third heaven in 2 Cor. 12 a number of times in his sermons.²⁰ There, Paul says, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows” (2 Cor. 12:2–3). Though Paul does not state whether he was in the body or not, he does not rule out the possibility of himself being in the body during his rapture to the third heaven, so there is good reason to believe that Tauler would not strictly rule it out either. Third, this inversion parallels the inversion that starts this passage. In brief paraphrase, “The Lord could have given himself to us in majesty and glory, but this our Lord has not done,” and, “the Lord could have revealed his glory to us as he did for this nun, but this our Lord has not done.” This bodily seeing is one of the most unusual depictions of the eyes in all of Tauler’s preaching. It is even more remarkable in that the point of this bodily seeing is not made in service to interior, contemplative vision. For Tauler, seeing God is the goal, not just contemplative vision.

One final significant example of exterior vision in Tauler’s preaching is found in a sermon for the Monday after Pentecost, V24. At this point in the sermon, Tauler is wrapping up a discussion of prayer:

[J]ust as I with one look am able to see all of you sitting here before me, in the same way [those who have attained the heights] draw all in with [their prayer], into that same abyss, into that same smoldering love and this in a contemplative (*anschöw^velichen*) way.²¹

Here, though he does not label it as such, Tauler is undoubtedly talking about exterior vision. He sees all his hearers physically, and this physical sight is able to take them all in with one look. Again, the point he is making is not related to physical vision, but about “contemplative”

²⁰ V39.159.11, V43.184.11–12, and V60f.316.10–12.

²¹ . . . also ich uch all hie vor mir sehe sitzen mit eime angesicht, also zuhent su als mit in in, in daz selbe abgrunde, in den selben minnenglut und in ein anschöw^velichen wisen . . . (V24.102.15–17).

(*anschöweli*ch) vision. What he means by contemplative vision will be explored in the next chapter, but the positive abilities of physical sight are meant to inform his hearers' understanding of contemplative vision. Their contemplative vision, too, can take in many things at once.

In the next chapter, as interior, contemplative vision is explored, Tauler's perception of exterior vision is important to remember. The limitations and capabilities of the exterior eyes shape Tauler's understanding of interior sight: interior eyes, like exterior eyes, are obstructable; just as exterior eyes must be empty of all color if they are to see color, interior eyes need to be empty of all else if they are to see God; and the inability of bodily eyes to look directly upon the sun, finds new expression in Tauler's description of the interior sight of God. For all their limitations, however, the interior eyes remain fundamental to Tauler's contemplative praxis. Limited as they are, they remain one of the best and only ways to comprehend the interior world, just as the limited, exterior eyes are one of the best and only ways to comprehend the exterior world. Thus, the contemplative engages in a lifelong struggle against their own human limitedness. They push past the limitations of exterior vision, past the limitations of interior vision, through to the essential experience of God within the abyss of divine darkness and hiddenness.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTEMPLATIVE VISION

While Tauler does not use a single, uniform term or expression for interior seeing, the importance of this sight is hard to understate. As will be seen, Tauler frequently portrayed contemplation in terms of interior vision. This chapter will explore one set of visual words which Tauler uses for contemplation, but it must be noted that there are a number of others used throughout Tauler's preaching.¹ In addition to visual words, Tauler also has a selection of visual metaphors which he employs to communicate what contemplation of God should look like.² While Tauler has and occasionally uses non-visual words for contemplation, like *contemplieren* (to contemplate), *andacht* (contemplation), *contemplacio* (contemplation), and *andaechtic* (contemplative), Tauler's use of these non-visual terms is far less frequent than his use of visual ones.

This thesis will explore the set of words related to *schöwen* (to contemplate), namely *anschöwlich* (contemplative), *schöwlich* (contemplative), *schöwelicheit* (contemplativeness), *showunge* (contemplating), and *beschöwen* (to contemplate).³ As is likely already clear, many of these words are close to one another in meaning, so this chapter will explore the various shades of meaning between these words. But this chapter will also explore the visual connotations of each of these words as well, for Tauler develops each of them in visual ways.

Tauler uses these words as technical terms which describe a kind of interior, contemplative

¹ Some additional visual word groups include *vinden*, *bevinden*, *meinen*, *blicken*, *bilden*, and *sehen*. Much more could be said about the ways that Tauler uses each of these words visually and mentally, along with the ways that these ideas intersect and interrelate with one another. For a helpful, though non-exhaustive glossary index of many key terms in Tauler's preaching, see Vetter, *Predigten*, 442–518.

² Additional visual themes include turning, hiddenness, darkness, blindness, and seeking.

³ An additional word, *beschowunge*, might be included in this list, but the semantic range of *beschowunge* in Tauler's preaching is limited to meanings of testing, temptation, and trial, so it will not be explored here.

vision, through which the individual seeks to turn within and see God. This is no simple task, but it is—for Tauler and his hearers—a core component of their life of devotion.

There is significant—and likely deliberate—ambiguity between “seeing words” and “contemplation words” throughout Tauler’s preaching. In the act of interpreting or translating Tauler’s sermons, it is not always possible to say, “This instance of this word is used in a strictly visual sense,” or “This instance of this word is used in a strictly mental sense.” Tauler often intends words to evoke both senses, and his exposition will often bounce back and forth between describing what is going on in the mind in an abstract sense and what is going on at the conceptual level of interior vision. This is consistently true for *anschöw^velich* and *beschöw^ven*, and it is often true for *schöw^ven* and *schöw^velich*. It is also true for almost every other visual word in Tauler’s vocabulary, and this chapter will touch on a few others, some of which Tauler uses far more frequently than *schöw^ven*. However, the primary focus of this thesis will remain upon Tauler’s use of *schöw^ven* and its cognates, for no other word in Tauler’s vocabulary demonstrates the visual character of Tauler’s contemplative model so clearly. This section will not be exhaustive, but it will explore both visual and non-visual uses of *schöw^ven* in order to demonstrate the meaning and usage of this technical term.

Anschöw^velich

Some of the most visual of Tauler’s sermons utilize the adjective *anschöw^velich*. Though it comes from *anschöw^ven*, meaning “to look at” or “to look upon,” most dictionaries suggest a more technical meaning for *anschöw^velich*, such as “contemplative.”⁴

⁴ See Kurt Gärtner, Klaus Grubmüller, and Karl Stackmann, eds., *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch: a–evrouwe* (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 2013), 268, or Beate Hennig, *Kleines Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, 6 ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 12.

This word was seen at the end of the previous chapter, in the passage from V24, where it modified the noun *wisen* (way). Though dictionaries assign this word a more technical meaning, Tauler's exposition in this sermon clearly leans into and develops the visual connotations of this word:

[J]ust as I with one look am able to see all of you sitting here before me, in the same way [those who have attained the heights] draw all in with [their prayer], into that same abyss, into that same smoldering love, and this in a contemplative (*anschöw^velichen*) way. And yet they look back as well, back into that loving abyss, into that loving smolder, and they rest there; and then, however, they are consumed in the lovely heat, and they go below to all those who are in need in holy Christendom, and yet then back into the loving, dark, still rest in the abyss. They are always going out and in, and yet they remain always within, in that lovely, still abyss, in which is their being and their life, in which is also all their activity and their movement.⁵

In this section of his sermon, Tauler is discussing prayer and acknowledging the tension between contemplative life and worldly life. The individual in this passage is no novice, but a highly skilled contemplative, one who has attained the heights of contemplation. Tauler's illustration, "just as I with one look am able to see all of you sitting here before me," is the beginning of his development of visual themes in this passage. As was seen above, the description of physical vision is used to demonstrate the way that a contemplative can pray for diverse needs without being bogged down in the particulars of those needs. Though worldly things are prayed for, the contemplative is to draw all things into "that same abyss (*abgrunde*)." "Same" references an earlier part of the sermon, wherein Tauler quotes Augustine. Each soul "has in it a hidden abyss"⁶ where "God himself is present."⁷ So here, Tauler is saying that the contemplative,

⁵ . . . also ich üch all hie vor mir sehe sitzen mit eime angesicht, also zühent sú als mit in in, in daz selbe abgrunde, in den selben minnenglüt und in ein anschöw^velichen wisen und widersehent aber wider in der minnen abgrunde, in der minnen glüt und rastent do; und denne aber so döwent sú in daz minnenkliche heisse für, und aber hernider uf alle die in nöten sint in der heiligen cristenheit, und aber wider in das minnenkliche dunster stille rasten in dem abgrunde. Alsus gont sú uz und in, und blibent doch allewegent inne in dem minneclichen stillen abgrunde, do ist ir wesen und ir leben, in dem ist öch alles ir wúrcken und ir bewegen; . . . (V24.102.15–23).

⁶ . . . die sele habe in ir ein verborgen appetgrunde . . . (V24.101.30).

⁷ . . . Got ist selber gegenwertig . . . (V24.102.4–5).

through *anschöw^velich* prayer, draws the objects of prayer into the abyss of God.

Note that Tauler's "drawing" language might seem to create a contrast with the more visual contemplation language, one which is maintained and expanded throughout the rest of the paragraph. Drawing is a kind of physical motion which is not clearly related to current understandings of vision, yet Tauler explicitly links the two. "They draw all in . . . in a contemplative (*anschöw^velichen*) way." While Tauler never explicitly articulates a theory of vision, this is some of the strongest evidence that he possesses an emission theory of vision, in which rays emitted from the eyes toward objects return to the eyes to deliver information.

Following this drawing language, Tauler introduces a visual verb: "they look back (*widersehent*)." Tauler will elicit this verb two more times with repetitions of *wider* (back). Shortly after, Tauler introduces a second motion verb, with the phrase "they are always going out and in." Note, however, that the "they" of "they are always going out and in" cannot be emissive rays of the eye; "they" references the skilled contemplatives who have attained the heights of contemplation. Such "going" is not a shift back and forth between interior vision and exterior vision, nor is it a physical movement of the contemplative from one place to another. Rather, the back and forth and the going describe the contemplative individuals reorienting their attention, changing the focus of their interior sight. Sometimes, the change is from prayer for one worldly need back to the abyss of God; other times, the change is from contemplation of the abyss of God back to the worldly needs of all Christendom. Tauler's description means that both the contemplatives and the objects of their contemplation are in motion interiorly.

This "going" description is of a piece with—not contradictory to—an emission theory of vision. The contemplative draws the objects of contemplation in through interior vision. Once those objects are images "in" the interior world, then they are submersed into "that same abyss"

which is simultaneously the object of and location of prayer, for in some sense the abyss is both God and God's dwelling-place. The frequent reorientation of attention moves the contemplative interiorly from one object to the next, representing an interior movement within their interior world. One gets the impression of the contemplative praying their way around town and perhaps even around the world, envisioning different locales and individuals and needs as the object of prayer changes, and occasionally shifting the focus of prayer to God himself, a move which withdraws the individual from the rest of the world, at least insofar as the world is represented interiorly.

Tauler also clarifies that this shift in focus is not one which moves the individual in and out of contemplation. Throughout, the contemplative's focus remains interior, and the contemplative's prayer is continuous. The change which Tauler describes is chiefly in the object of the prayer, for the truly skilled contemplative is "always going out and in, and yet they remain always within, in that lovely, still abyss, in which is their being and their life, in which is also all their activity and their movement."⁸ All the movement which Tauler here describes properly takes place within the *abgrunt*, the abyss of God. This motion either draws the object of prayer into the abyss or it involves a change in interior focus, but it always remains internal. Put simply, sometimes the contemplative prays for interior, spiritual things; other times the contemplative prays for exterior, worldly things. But the goal of the contemplative is always to pray through interior, contemplative vision, always to remain submersed in the "lovely, still abyss" of God.

Another use of *anschöw^velich* is found in V60, and this use is again modifying *wise* (way). Though Vetter's edition separates it into two words, *an schöw^velicher*, in context it is certainly

⁸ Alsus gont sú uz und in, und blibent doch allewegent inne in dem minneclichen stillen abgrunde, do ist ir wesen und ir leben, in dem ist öch alles ir wúrcken und ir bewegen; . . . (V24.102.15–23).

the same Middle High German word. This sermon is somewhat unique in form compared to the rest of Tauler's preaching, but it is helpful, for in it, Tauler lays out a hierarchy of progressive, visual stages of contemplation, each leading closer to God:

But God alone is the essence of good, of love, and of everything which one may call essence. The person should push himself toward there and sink therein with all their powers, in an effectual, feeling, contemplative (*an schöwelicher*) way, in order that their nothingness would be entirely received and renewed and essentialized in the divine essence, which alone is essence and life and activity in all things. Only then might the person look on (*sehe . . . an*) the character of the singular oneness of essence, for God is the ultimate embodiment of singularity and in him is all multiplicity unified and united in the singular One essence.⁹

Tauler would probably balk at attempts to put too much systematic definition upon what he is saying here, but the underlying visual and Neoplatonic themes are consistent, and therefore an exploration of this and the following paragraphs is warranted for the purposes of this thesis. As the argument develops, it becomes clear that Tauler is not just describing a series of abstract, shapeless mental processes, but visual processes, which at least initially involve Platonic concepts of images and forms. As the sermon progresses, it leans into Christian Neoplatonist themes, and these images fall away in favor of the essential, singular reality that is God himself.

Even at this early stage of the sermon in the quote above, Tauler appears to be speaking to experienced contemplatives. He encourages his hearers to push themselves toward God in an “effectual, feeling, contemplative (*an schöwelicher*) way,” language which would be saved for the end of most other sermons. Even apart from the visual connotation of *an schöwelicher*,

⁹ Aber Got allein ist wesen der g^oten, der minne und alles des das man wesen nemmen mag. Dar engegen sol der mensche sich tragen und dar in versenken mit allen sinen kreften in w^urklicher gef^olliger an schöwelicher wise, das sine vern^utkeit ze mole werde enphangen und vern^uwet und gewesen in dem g^otlichen wesende, das allein wesen und leben und w^urken ist in allen dⁱngen. Denne sehe der mensche an die eigenschaft der einiger einikeit des wesens, wan Got ist an dem lesten ende der einvaltikeit und in ime wirt alle manigvaltikeit geeiniget und einvaltig in dem einigen ein wesende (V60.277.9–17). Bernard McGinn notes that Tauler frequently use the Eckhartian theological term *das* or *ein einig ein*. For Tauler as for Eckhart, this term marks the absolute simplicity of the divine nature (McGinn, *Harvest*, 249).

Tauler makes clear that this push will involve contemplative vision, for he says that the person should look upon (*sehe . . . an*) “the character of [God’s] singular oneness of essence,” an action which is not possible for weak human eyes.¹⁰

Tauler’s subsequent description of God as “the ultimate embodiment of singularity” may make it sound like the contemplative has reached the end of the journey, but this is one of the most preliminary stages of contemplation within this sermon. For after contemplating God’s singular oneness, Tauler’s description progresses through several additional stages of looking, each described with the same Middle High German verb, *an sehen*. After looking on God’s singular oneness, the next step is that “the person looks on (*an sehe*) the inexpressible hiddenness of God.”¹¹ In the next stage, Tauler says, “Then the person should look on (*an sehe*) the character of divine emptiness in the still oneness.”¹² And finally this contemplative looking culminates in, “Then on (*an*) the divine darkness.”¹³ Each stage represents a progression in contemplation, and, as will be seen, Tauler’s surrounding language remains visual throughout.

In the second stage of contemplative vision, the person “looks upon the inexpressible hiddenness of God.” Hiddenness, especially the hiddenness of God, is a common visual theme throughout Tauler’s preaching.¹⁴ Often, as is the case here, discussion of God’s hiddenness

¹⁰ Tauler’s choice to change root words from *anschöwēlich* to *ansehen* is puzzling, but not without potential explanation. It must be noted that *schöwen* would not be appropriate, for *schöwen* cannot take an object. For this use, Tauler would need *anschöwen*, to denote that this contemplation has an object, yet Tauler never uses this word in any of his sermons. It may be that Tauler chooses not to use *anschöwen* in V60 because he is suggesting that the individual contemplate something other than God; even if that something is a quality of God, like hiddenness or singularity or emptiness, the only truly appropriate object of contemplation is God himself.

¹¹ Denne an sehe der mensche die unsprechliche verborgenheit Gotz, . . . (V60.277.20–21).

¹² Denne mag der mensche an sehen die eigenschaft der götlichen wüstenunge in der stillen einsamkeit, . . . (V60.277.31–32).

¹³ Denne sich an das götliche vinsternisse, . . . (V60.278.8).

¹⁴ While it is related to vision and an important, recurring theme of Tauler’s preaching, this thesis will only explore hiddenness briefly.

centers on distractions and mental obstructions to contemplation because the true “ultimate goal” of contemplation is finding and looking upon God himself. At this stage of contemplation, however, the goal is not to see God himself, but merely to recognize God’s hiddenness and the hindrances to seeing God, so that these hindrances might be stripped away and so that God himself might eventually be seen once these hindrances are gone. If it is easier to look upon God’s hiddenness than to see God himself, then Tauler advises his hearers to take advantage of that fact! Contemplate the hiddenness of God, knowing that he in some way resides therein.

The stripping away of obstructions is no instantaneous, easy task; it is a process—and all the more necessary because God is “more hidden than any other thing is hidden from the individual within the *grunt* of the soul, hidden from all senses and utterly unrecognizable in the *grunt*.”¹⁵ Because God is so well hidden, this process advances in various stages until, ideally, the contemplative is able to find and look upon God himself.

At this second stage of contemplation, in which the individual is not yet looking on God but attempting to look “upon the inexpressible hiddenness of God,” Tauler repeats an earlier encouragement toward two movements which are core to this sermon. First, the individual is to push themselves toward God. Second, the contemplative is to sink into and hide in God’s hiddenness:

Therein push forward with all your powers, far beyond the thoughts of your outer externality—which is so distant, so foreign to itself and to all inner interiority, like an animal which lives according to its senses and possesses no knowledge, no consciousness, no experience [of interior things]—and sink in, hide yourself in the hiddenness from all creatures and from all that which is foreign to and unlike the essence.¹⁶

¹⁵ Und er ist verborgenlichen in allen dingen verre me wan dehein ding im selber si in dem grunde der selen, verborgen allen sinnen und unbekant ze mole inne in dem grunde (V60.277.22–24).

¹⁶ Dar in tring mit allen kreften verre über den gedank dine usserliche uswendikeit, die so verre, so frömde ir selber ist und aller innerlicher inwendikeit als ein vich, das den sinnen lebt und nüt enweis noch ensmakt noch

This push toward God is an inward motion, as is typical of Tauler’s preaching. In this inward push, he encourages his hearers to go deeper, to go “beyond,” for all creatures and creaturely concerns must give way, all thoughts of “outer externality.” Such worldly, created things are not the divine essence, and they are “unlike” the divine essence. They are unworthy of contemplation, and they become obstacles to finding God. To avoid such obstacles, Tauler encourages the individual to take the counter-intuitive step of not only hiding the self from creatures and all things which are not God’s essence but also the step of hiding within God’s hiddenness. In Tauler’s Neoplatonism-influenced conception, the only way to truly escape that which is worldly, flawed, and created is within the perfect, pure, singular oneness of divinity.

The next stage of contemplation explores a crucial point: worldly, physical things are not the only things which must be stripped away. Even mental and spiritual things can be obstructions and obstacles to the perfect contemplation of God.¹⁷ In this section, Tauler begins a multi-stage deconstruction of some non-essential ways in which the individual might contemplate God. Tauler begins this deconstruction by setting aside images:

This [looking] should not be all in the image-focused (*biltlicher*) way or only in the way of thoughts, rather [it should be done] in an essential, effectual way, with all faculties and desires, beyond the senses (*uber die sinne*), in an experiential (*bevintlicher*) way.¹⁸

This section utilizes two important visual words. The first, *biltlich*, is a common word in Tauler’s vocabulary. It is an adjectival form of its root word, *bilde* (image), which in this translation has

enbevindet, und in senke, verbirg dich in der verborgenheit vor allen creaturen und vor allem dem das dem wesende frömde und ungelich ist (V60.277.24–29).

¹⁷ For more on this theme of stripping away, see Bernard McGinn’s discussion of releasement in *Harvest*, 266–71, or Richard Kieckhefer’s discussion of detachment in “John Tauler,” 260–62.

¹⁸ Dis alles ensol nüt sin in biltlicher oder allein in gedenklicher wise, sunder in weselicher, wúrklicher wise mit allen kreften und begerungen über die sinne in bevintlicher wise (V60.277.29–31).

been rendered, “in the image-focused way.”¹⁹ Such looking “in the image-focused way” refers to the creation of mental images during thought or prayer, along with the practice of using these images as a focus for contemplation, such as meditation upon the wounds of Christ. Though this first word is visual, it is not the kind of contemplation which Tauler encourages. Images may be thought of as the typical objects of contemplation, but contemplative vision aspires to move beyond images, toward a more direct relationship between the contemplative and the object of contemplation. If the object is God, then merely envisioning an image of God is good, but it is not enough, and it is ultimately a distraction. The image of God is not truly God himself.

The other word, *bevintlich* (experiential, perceptible), is likewise closely related in etymology and meaning to its root, *bevinden* (to experience, to find, to perceive). Because *bevinden* is “a key word in Tauler’s vocabulary,”²⁰ the importance to Tauler of seeing *in bevintlicher wise* should not be underestimated. If the contemplative is to truly contemplate God himself, then they must move beyond the contemplation of images and—as in that earlier stage of contemplation which aims to look upon the singularity of God—progress toward a kind of contemplative vision which is “essential” and “effectual” in character.²¹ But if that contemplation is to be *bevintlicher*, then as Bernard McGinn says of *bevinden*, the goal is “to taste, to become aware of, rather than to feel by sensation, or know by rational reflection.”²² If this looking is to be done “with all faculties and desires,” then in short, the entire self should be directed toward experiencing God in this way.

¹⁹ Though a literal translation of *biltlich* is quite awkward here (“image-ly”), more natural translations such as “pictorial” or “visual” are insufficient for conveying the key fact that Tauler is referring to the ‘image’ of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy, explored above. The above translation, “in the image-focused way,” though imprecise, is chosen to reflect this relationship.

²⁰ McGinn, *Harvest*, 265.

²¹ cf. V60.277.9–16.

²² McGinn, *Harvest*, 265.

Note that prior to introducing *bevintlich*, Tauler advises that such contemplation should be *uber die sinne* (beyond the senses). It is worth exploring the question of what Tauler means here. Certainly, Tauler means that the contemplative should move beyond the exterior senses. However, is he arguing here that contemplation of God must move beyond the interior senses, too? This question is particularly relevant because up to now, Tauler's description of contemplation in this sermon has exclusively been a function of interior sight. While it may be impossible to answer definitively, the context provided in the next paragraph would seem to indicate that, at least for now, the interior senses will not be cast aside. In this and the next stage of contemplation, the individual is explicitly still "looking," for Tauler retains his seeing verb, *ansehen*.

With so much stripped away, this next stage focuses upon emptiness, specifically the divine emptiness:

Then the person should look (*an sehen*) on the character of the divine emptiness in the still oneness, wherein never a word is spoken nor is a work ever worked within the essence in an essential way, for there it is so still, so secret, and so barren. Therein is nothing except pure divinity. Nothing foreign ever comes therein, nothing creaturely, neither in image nor in manner.²³

Anything which seeks to comprehend God mediately, whether physical or mental, must ultimately be excluded. As contemplation progresses to "the character of the divine emptiness," even an "essential" and "effectual" way of looking—previously valued in multiple stages of contemplation—loses some of its value, for in the divine emptiness, "never a word is spoken nor is a work ever worked within the essence in an essential way."²⁴ All of those steppingstones and

²³ Denne mag der mensche an sehen die eigenschaft der götlichen wüstenunge in der stillen einsamkeit, do nie wort in dem wesende nach weselicher wise inne gesprochen enwart noch werk gewürkt enwart; denne do ist es so stille, so heimelich und so wüst. Do enist nüt denne luter Got. Dar in kam nie nüt frömdes, nie creature, bilde noch wise (V60.277.31–278.1).

²⁴ The root for "effectual" and "work" is the same Middle High German word, *wirken*. While this relationship is difficult to capture in English, this comment is therefore a reference back to the previous stages of contemplation.

all those obstacles have been removed or excluded. All that is left in the divine emptiness is “pure divinity.”

Though the contemplative has presumably already stripped away all distractions in order to achieve this stage of looking “on the character of the divine emptiness,” Tauler’s next words reveal the difficulty or perhaps impossibility of stripping away those things entirely, for the flawed “senses and powers” rear their ugly heads. They still produce problems, and the individual is once again encouraged to part with them. However, what Tauler encourages the contemplative to do with those problems—along with what Tauler next deems unnecessary and useless—is quite unusual, especially in the context of his *grunt*-centric theology:

And into this empty, still, detached divinity, push your useless, empty *grunt*—[push it] into the emptiness of God—[yes, your] *grunt*, which is fully overgrown with weeds, free of anything good, full of wild animals, namely your bestial, animal senses and powers.²⁵

Tauler is not clear whether the “bestial, animal senses and powers,” are the original problems, new problems, or simply what was left over after all the stripping away. But whatever the case, all these and the *grunt* are renounced and pushed into the emptiness of God.

Here, many of the themes of this sermon begin to resolve, as the individual completes the long process of renunciation and detachment. The pure simplicity, detachedness, and essentialness of God is contrasted with the multiplicity of impure createdness within humanity. While God is empty, the human *grunt* is overgrown, full of weeds and wild animals. Paradoxically, the human *grunt*—which in other sermons is united with and indistinguishable from God’s *grunt*—is also described as “empty.” It is not empty in the positive sense in which God’s divinity is said to

²⁵ Und in die wüsten stillen lidigen gotheit trag dinen italen wüsten grunt, in die wüste Gotz den grunt der da ist vol verwachsens unkrutz und lidig alles gütz und vol wilder tier diner vichlicher tierlicher sinne und krefte (V60.278.5–8).

be empty. Rather, though it is full of things, namely the “bestial, animal senses and powers,” it is empty of anything of value.

If Tauler is held to the standard of systematic consistency, then these bestial senses and powers represent only the exterior—not the interior—senses, for as was seen in V45, interior vision is what separates humanity from beasts. But that is probably putting Tauler’s preaching into too rigid a structure, for if the *grunt* is born into the emptiness of God, then the interior senses should logically go as well, and that appears to be what happens, for in the final stage, the contemplative “looks” on the divine darkness.²⁶ But no verb is present in this sentence. Based on the preceding context, the bare *an* prefix is almost certainly a clue that this is an ellipsis in which *sehen* is to be understood implicitly, but it is suggestive that here and only here does Tauler leave the verb *sehen* out:

Then [look] on (*an*) the divine darkness, which due to its inexpressible clarity, is darkness to all understanding, angelic and human, just as the rays of the sun and the sun in its orb are a darkness to the weak human eye. For all created understanding conducts itself toward the divine radiance according to its nature, like the eye of the swallow toward the clear sun, and it must in its ignorance and its blindness be thrown back, insofar as it is created and creature.²⁷

Tauler is—as was explored in chapter three—systematically removing the various ways that one might understand contemplation of God visually, yet even here he retains visual imagery. Once again, we see both the analogy of the swallow and the analogy of looking into the sun. The swallow analogy focuses upon the inability of the swallow to look into the radiance of the sun.

²⁶ Darkness, like hiddenness, is an important, recurring, visual theme, but will be only briefly explored in this thesis.

²⁷ Denne sich an das götliche vinsternisse, das von unsprechelicher klorheit vinstert ist allen verstentnissen, engelen und menschen, als der glantz und die sunne in irem rade ist dem kranken vgen ein vinsternisse. Wan alle geschaffen verstentnisse haltent sich engegen der klarheit von naturen als der swalwen vge sich haltet engegen der kloren sunnen, und müssen da wider slagen werden in ir unbekentnisse und blintheit, als verre als si geschaffen und creaturen sint (V60.278.8–14).

As the swallow looks, it falls back down to the earth.²⁸ The sun analogy is about the way that looking into the sun darkens all other vision. Both analogies are used to illustrate that the contemplative cannot look on God, not because God is truly dark in the usual sense of darkness, but because God—like the sun—is so bright that seeing him is blinding. The human eye, exterior as well as interior, cannot see God according to its weak, created nature. So whether the interior sight functions or it has been cast aside at this stage of contemplation, it is rendered doubly useless. The *grunt* is empty, so there is nothing to see, and the *grunt* is too “dark” to see, in the sense that the human interior eye cannot look upon God in all his magnificent radiance and splendor.

As this message ends, Tauler provides a resolution of sorts. All typical means of contemplation excluded, all normal means of contemplation rendered useless, the individual makes one final push, and the goal of all contemplation is achieved:

Toward there, push your unfathomable darkness, deprived of all true light and lacking all that is light, and let the abyss of divine darkness be known only to itself and to all things be unknown. This abyss, which is unknown and unnamed, the blessed one, is more beloved and lures more souls to the divine essence than all which they could recognize in the eternal blessedness.²⁹

At this stage, the description is still visual in character—darkness and light—but the visual words have little sense as they have become vestigial. The visual has been rendered useless and has been renounced by the contemplative. They have pushed all that they have and all that they are into the abyss of God. The individual does not expect to see or be able to see anything of

²⁸ See note 12 in the previous chapter on swallows in Tauler’s sermons.

²⁹ Dar engegen trag din abgründig vinsternisse beröbet von allem worem liechte und darbende alles liechtes und la das abgründe des götlichen vinsternisses im selber allein bekant und allen dingen unbekant. Das abgründe, das unbekant und ungenant, das selig, ist me gemint und reisset me die selen denne alles das si bekennen mügen in der ewigen selikeit, an dem götlichem wesende (V60.278.14–19).

value—to know or be able to know anything of value—yet is confident that the abyss of divine darkness can be rested in securely and blessedly.

While it could be said that this is the highest level of contemplation, and the individual has moved past the visual, it would be more accurate to say that the individual has moved beyond active contemplation entirely. For Tauler, the visual is not one aspect of contemplation, but the essence of contemplation itself. Better to look on nothing and rest in the presence of God than to look upon that which is not God and be outside his presence.

Schöw^velich

Because this chapter began with *anschöw^velich*, the next word to be explored will be a closely related one, *schöw^velich* (contemplative). There is significant overlap in meaning between these words. Most lexica will gloss both *schöw^velich* and *anschöw^velich* with the same technical definition, “contemplative.” Both are adjectives, coming from the clearly visual root verb, *schöw^ven*, and both retain visual connotations. However, there is also a difference in meaning and usage between the two words. The main differentiator in meaning is the *an*-prefix, which modifies the root to direct it toward a specific object. While *anschöw^velich* looking must have an object, *schöw^velich* looking denotes “contemplative” more generically, without any object, at least not one specified within the same clause. In most cases, *schöw^velich* contemplation has an object, it is just unspoken: God. But for *schöw^velich*, the object is *not* the point of the term; the kind of looking is. Differences in the usage of this word emerge from this difference in meaning.

Perhaps the most visual use of *schöw^velich* is in V53. In a discussion of the various degrees of piety to which God calls each Christian, Tauler says,

The highest and utmost way of this call is to closely follow the lovely image (*bilden*) of his most beloved Son, exteriorly and interiorly, [to follow] in an active way and in

a passive way, and in the image-focused way (*biltlicher*) or in the contemplative way (*schöwelic^vher wise*) beyond all images (*über alle bilde*).³⁰

This is a helpful starting point for the comparison between *schöwelic^v* and *anschöwelic^v*, for much like the previously explored instances of *anschöwelic^v*, this use of *schöwelic^v* is adjectivally paired with the word *wise* (way). Another similarity can be seen in that, once again, Tauler uses a *schöwen^v* word to encourage a kind of contemplation which is explicitly “beyond all images” (*über alle bilde*). Note however, that in this context, this is starkly paradoxical, because the object of this contemplation “beyond all images” is an image—the “image of his most beloved Son (*bilden sines aller gemintesten suns*).” This paradox is heightened in the following paragraphs, as Tauler returns to this image language frequently as the sermon continues.

But how can this apparent paradox be resolved? Georg Hofmann’s modern German translation resolves this paradox by masking it, translating the Middle High German word *bilden* in the phrase “the lovely image of his most beloved Son” with the NHG word, *Vorbild* (example).³¹ Because the second use of *bilde* is unproblematic, Hofmann translates it with *Bilder* (images).³² *Vorbild* is a standard translation option for *bilde* within most lexica, but it obscures Tauler’s wordplay and his point in this passage. Tauler intends the uncomfortable tension evoked by his use of *bilden*, *biltlicher* and *bilde*.³³ But what is lost by translating *bilden* with *Vorbild* is not just wordplay; such a translation also obscures Tauler’s more fundamental convictions

³⁰ Der hochste und der oberste weg dis rüffes das ist nach ze volgende den minneklichen bilden sines aller gemintesten suns uswendig und inwendig, in würclicher wise und in lidelicher wise und in biltlicher oder in schöwelic^vher wise über alle bilde (V53.243.23–26). Literally, *lidelicher* means suffering, but “passive” communicates Tauler’s meaning better, as he is contrasting *lidelicher* with *würclicher* (active) in a manner which emphasizes the experience of enduring suffering.

³¹ Hofmann, *Predigten*, 507.

³² Hofmann, *Predigten*, 507.

³³ On the translation, “in the image-focused way,” see the discussion of *biltlich* in V60, note 19 of the previous chapter.

regarding the reality of this image of the Son within the *grunt* of the soul.

This deserves a brief excursus. The image of the Son in Tauler's theology is not a still frame. For the contemplative, it is their conception of who Jesus is, how Jesus has acted in the past, and how Jesus would act in the present. This image is followable precisely because it is not just imagined, but referenceable within the mental world, or to use more precise, Taulerian terminology, the *grunt*. Yet Tauler's typical description of the highest levels of contemplation and his typical description of God's existence within the *grunt* goes even further. The image of God which exists within the mind is not a normal, Platonic image. In one sense, the image of God offers access to the real God, yet in a deeper sense, this image is God himself. In many sermons about the *grunt* of God, Tauler blurs the lines between the image of the Son—or in some sermons, the Trinity—which is accessible through contemplation and the reality of God himself. In an extended discussion of the *grunt* and *gemüte*, Bernard McGinn argues, “Like Eckhart, Tauler is especially interested in linking the soul's ground and God's ground, though he prefers to express this in his own language of the abyss (*abgrunt*).”³⁴ Even more explicitly, McGinn later says, “at the deepest level the ground of the soul and God's ground were one and the same.”³⁵ Practically speaking, this means that for Tauler, the *grunt* is not only where the image of the Trinity resides, but the place where the well-prepared contemplative individual can encounter the Trinity itself in an unmediated fashion. As Engratis Kihm says about this moment of encounter, “the image of Christ comes alive within the consciousness of the person.”³⁶

This conviction is the underlying rationale behind the seemingly paradoxical statements in

³⁴ McGinn, *Harvest*, 258.

³⁵ McGinn, *Harvest*, 262.

³⁶ Engratis Kihm, “Die Drei-Wege-Lehre bei Tauler,” in *Johannes Tauler: ein deutscher Mystiker. Gedenkschrift zum 600. Todestag*, ed. Ephrem Filthaut (Essen: Hans Driewer, 1961), 284, translation my own.

V53. Tauler's encouragement to follow the image of the Son "in the contemplative way beyond all images" is not only conceptually separate from following other images; it precludes following other images. The image of the Son is not a normal mental image, and it does not function like one. An interior encounter with the image of the Son requires first that all other obstructions to contemplation be removed. Only then can the individual hope for an encounter with the Son himself, and even that is mere preparation for this encounter. The contemplative cannot force an encounter with God, but rather stands passive before God, dependent upon God to initiate the encounter and complete it. But when God initiates that encounter, it is an immediate encounter with God, beyond all images.

So what does Tauler mean by following "in the contemplative way beyond all images?" The most pressing question is whether *schöwelicher wise* is explained by or modified by *über alle bilde*. This is a difficult question to answer, but especially important for understanding what Tauler means by this word and the other *schöwen* words. For if *über alle bilde* explains *schöwelicher wise*, then this kind of contemplative vision is—for both Tauler and his hearers—inherently beyond images, which would be quite significant for this thesis.³⁷ While the immediate context is not helpful in answering this question, a few observations from Tauler's preaching corpus are merited.

First, throughout Tauler's preaching, *schöwelich*—along with the other *schöwen* words—is a technical term, one weighted with meaning. For its user and its hearers that meaning is typically understood and unspoken. The translation "contemplative," while accurate, does not encompass the full semantic range of the word, a fact which will be demonstrated further through

³⁷ This matches the description of contemplation given by Richard Kieckhefer, mentioned in the introduction, "in which one dispenses with images and concepts and gives oneself over to the infused grace of spontaneous consciousness of God" (Kieckhefer, "John Tauler," 267).

additional examples below. In this passage, note that *schöw^velicher* is the preferred option in this opposite pair, the final in a series of opposite pairs. First, “exteriorly and interiorly,” then “in active ways and in passive ways,” and then finally “in the image-focused way or in the contemplative way beyond all images.”³⁸ If each of these is read as opposites, then Tauler’s addition of *über alle bilde* to *schöw^velicher wise* should be read like an explanation for a potentially unfamiliar technical term. Tauler expects his hearers to understand the contrast between *schöw^velicher* and *biltlicher*, and in case they do not, he includes a brief explanation of what he means by *schöw^velicher*: beyond images.

Second, the absence of images in *schöw^velicher* activity is a remarkably consistent theme in Tauler’s sermons. Tauler never uses *schöw^velich* or any *schöw^ven* word to describe an individual using images in contemplation. While arguments from silence are often tenuous, a position must be taken for the sake of this thesis. Considering the visual overtones of these words and Tauler’s willingness to incorporate visual language into discussions of prayer, this consistent omission is unusual and noteworthy. The most likely explanation is that “beyond images” is part of this technical term’s meaning.

Third, the move “beyond images” is a consistent theme in the higher levels of Tauler’s contemplative praxis.³⁹ This means that whatever Tauler’s intentions, the effect is the same: contemplation should ultimately move beyond images. Whether *schöw^velich* inherently means beyond images or not, for Tauler, true contemplation moves beyond images ultimately. If an individual is not yet ready or not yet able to follow the image of the Son in the *schöw^velicher* way

³⁸ On this translation, see the discussion of *biltlich* in V60, note 19 of the previous chapter.

³⁹ For more examples of beyond images (*über bilde*), see V15.68.37–69.1 or V54.249.16–19. Though Tauler does not use the exact phrase in V60.277.29–31, this same theme was seen above in one of the *anschöw^velich* sermons.

beyond images, then they are encouraged to follow the Son's image in the lesser manner, via images. For Tauler, *schöw^velicher* following is not the most important thing; closely following the image of the Son is. For that reason, though *biltlicher* following is inferior, it is not unacceptable.

This contrast between *schöw^velich* and *biltlich* following does not imply that *schöw^velich* is not a visual term. As has already been seen in the case of *anschöw^velich*, Tauler has no qualms with using visual terminology alongside descriptors for contemplation "beyond images." Instead, Tauler is establishing a contrast between following imperfect, unreal images of the Son and following the perfect, real image of the Son himself. This contrast encourages his hearers to move beyond looking at intermediary images, toward a kind of looking which is essential, immediate, and real within the *grunt* of the soul. The word *schöw^velich* is used here not because it describes a kind of non-visual contemplation, but because Tauler is encouraging his hearers to look at the image of the Son in contemplation, and he knows that *schöw^velich* contemplation is inherently visual, yet beyond images.

Other uses of *schöw^velich* are brief, typically too brief to demonstrate significant visual character. However, the following sermon is useful to demonstrate one of the major features of Tauler's use of *schöw^velich*, one shared with his use of *schöw^ven*. Tauler's most typical use of *schöw^velich* and *schöw^ven* is as part of a contrast. In V74, Tauler uses *schöw^velich* as one part of a three-way contrast between the activities surrounding a wedding feast: two of the activities prepare for the wedding feast and one of those activities is the wedding feast itself. In Tauler's analogy, these three activities mark a clear progression in faith, of which *schöw^velich* work is only a middling part. The contemplative may wish to ascribe their progress to their own effort, but Tauler gives the credit to the Lord:

Now we see how the Lord has prepared his wedding feast: “his oxen are slaughtered”—by this, one can understand the outer works—“and his birds are killed”—by this one can take the inner, contemplative work. And by the wedding feast [one can understand] the inner rest where one behaves worthily and joyously, just as God himself delights in an active manner.⁴⁰

Note that in this passage, *schöw^velich* is again used as a technical term. The contrast is between outer works, contemplative work, and inner rest. For the meaning of the passage, it matters little whether *schöw^velich* has any visual connotations; what matters is its “contemplative” denotation.

The contrast seen above is typical of Tauler’s use of *schöw^ven* in many other sermons. The *schöw^ven* word is one option set alongside two or three others in a comparative fashion. As has been seen in this example and above in V53, it is not always the only acceptable option, and it is not even always the best option. In this passage, like elsewhere, the best option is “inner rest.”

This contrastive role that *schöw^velicher* plays can be seen in V40, a sermon for the birth of John the Baptist. A much earlier part of this sermon was explored above, but here the sermon is drawing to a close:

But the angel said that this true birth should not drink wine nor anything that might make [one] drunk. This is [to say that] the person in whom this birth is to be born should be in the highest way, to the utmost degree, led on a far higher path, for there is good and better and the very best. Such people should not drink from that which might make them drunk, as became of those about whom we have already spoken, who had delight given to them by the objects [of their contemplation], whether it be [delight] in perceiving or in experiencing, whether it be contemplative or joyful; rather they are set upon and pulled along a narrow path, which is entirely dark and comfortless, in which they stand in an insufferable pressure that they are not able to escape; thus wherever they turn they find a bottomless foreignness that is barren and comfortless and dark. Therein must they direct themselves and, in this way, surrender

⁴⁰ Nu sehent wie der herre sine brunloft bereit hat, sin ohssen sint geslagen: bi den mag man nemen die ussere werke, und sine vogle sint getötet: bi den mag man nemen die innewendigen schowelichen werg, und bi der brunloft die innerliche raste do man sich haltet würcelichen und bruchlichen, also Got sin selbes gebruchet in würclicher wisen, . . . (V74.402.22–27). Vetter notes that one manuscript has *würkliche un gebruchliche* instead of *würdeclichen und bruchlichen*. While the former seems more likely, the difference has little bearing on the point currently made regarding *schowelich*. This translation reflects the latter tradition.

themselves to the Lord as long as it pleases him. And in the end the Lord makes as if he does not know about their torment.⁴¹

As in the previous sermon, the highest way is not *schöw^velich*. The highest way is “entirely dark and comfortless,” and on it the person experiencing the true birth undergoes “insufferable pressure.”⁴² This stratification in the degrees of success in contemplation is typical of much of Tauler’s preaching. As he describes it here, “there is good and better and the very best.” Even though such contemplation is “good,” perhaps “better” even, it is not the highest way. Again, the visual character of *schöw^velich* matters little; Tauler is drawing upon *schöw^velich* simply because it is a technical term.

Schöw^ven

The next word to consider is *schöw^ven* (to look around, look for, look on, contemplate). Tauler’s use of *schöw^ven* is similar to his use of *schöw^velich* in a number of ways. First, both are typically used as technical terms. While *schöw^ven* has several potential meanings in Middle High German, in the vast majority of cases, Tauler uses *schöw^ven* as a technical term for “to contemplate.” The second similarity with *schöw^velich* emerges from its character as a technical term: Tauler often pairs *schöw^ven* with one or more contrasting ideas. This is especially prevalent with *schöw^ven*, as Tauler develops a pair of stock word pairs with *schöw^ven* which will be

⁴¹ Aber der engel der sprach das dise wore geburt ensolt nüt wins trinken noch dekein ding das trunken machen mag. Das ist der mensche in dem dise geburt geborn sol werden in der obersten wise in dem höchsten grate; die werdent verre einen höhern weg gefürt, wan er ist güt und besser und aller best. Dise ensüllen nüt trinken dannan ab si trunken werden mügen, als dise sint worden von den wir vor geseit han die lustlicheit die disen geschenket wirt in den fürwürffen, es si in smackender oder in bevindender wise, es si schöw^velich oder gebruchlich; sunder si werdent gesaste und gezogen in einen engen weg, der zemole vinsten und trostlos ist, in dem stont si in einem unlidelichen trucke, das si nüt us enmügen; so wa si sich hin kerent, so vindent si ein grundelos ellende, das wüst und trostlos ist und vinsten. Dar in müssent si sich wogen und lossen sich dem herren in disem wege als lange als es im behagt. Und in dem lesten tüt der herre als ob er von siner quale nüt enwisse; . . . (V40.168.24–169.2).

⁴² On suffering in Tauler’s preaching, see Christine Pleuser, *Die Benennungen und der Begriff des Leidens bei J. Tauler* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1967).

explored below. Third, in this contrastive role, it is frequently used as a higher—though not necessarily highest—form of contemplation.

The first example is demonstrative of the first two points. In V42, a sermon on the different ways that God blesses different individuals, Tauler pairs *schöwen* with the technical term, *würken* (to act, do, perform, carry out, make) in order to dissuade his hearers from overvaluing contemplation:

A good man stands and threshes his seed, and in this [activity] he becomes enraptured, and the angel must hold the flail, or he would hit himself. Now, you seriously desire to be free [from work]? This comes grievously from laziness: each wants to be an eye (*öge*), and all want to contemplate (*schöwen*) and not work (*würken*).⁴³

In this example of the “good man” who is enraptured while threshing his seed, Tauler subverts the expectations of the monk or nun who thinks that the surest path to the presence of God is contemplation. The statement “all want to contemplate (*schöwen*) and not work (*würken*)” elicits the enduring monastic tension between activity (*würken*) and contemplation (*schöwen*). This word pairing with *würken* is Tauler’s most common word pair for *schöwen*, and *schöwen* takes on its most clearly technical character alongside *würken*. Everyone, Tauler is saying, wants to spend all day in contemplation, but some need to work for the sake of the rest of the body. Furthermore, he offers that some are able to attain the heights while working, even while working a task as menial as threshing seed. In light of this, Tauler urges his hearers to reconsider their expectations with regard to the best route to union with God.

This warning against neglecting activity in favor of contemplation is not an uncommon theme in Tauler’s sermons, and it will be seen in a number of the following examples. The

⁴³ Ein güt man stünt und trasch sin korn, und in dem wart er verzuket, und der engel müste den phlegel haben oder er hette sich selber geslagen. Nu wellent ir echt ledig sin. Es kumet sere von tragheit: ieklichs wil ein öge sin und wellent alle schöwen und nüt würken (V42.179.16–19).

degree to which contemplation is valued or devalued varies from sermon to sermon, but the rough trajectory of Tauler's piety remains consistent: the individual seeks to turn and push inward with all their powers, into the *grunt*, renouncing all that is not God, sinking into the passive, still, singular darkness of divine hiddenness and emptiness found in the abyss of God. In many ways, Tauler is a pragmatist when it comes to piety; whatever brings one closer to God is worth pursuing, whatever does not provide benefit is worth casting aside.⁴⁴ In developing this tension between work and contemplation, Tauler quietly aligns himself with Meister Eckhart, who describes a very similar tension between grace and works. As Bernard McGinn argues, Eckhart "was fixated on the end, God in Godself, not on means. For him, total inner detachment was the only proper attitude for all prayer and practice."⁴⁵

Several of the following sermons will explore the *schöwen-würken* word pair. While Tauler typically prioritizes contemplation over activity, in a number of sermons—like V42—Tauler demonstrates an openness to the value of activity and a willingness to set aside contemplation if it is no longer serving the aim of finding God. In this word pair, *schöwen* occasionally demonstrates its visual connotation, a fact demonstrated in V42 by one main element: the *öge* (eye). The eye in this sermon is not a literal, physical eye, nor is it even primarily the eye of interior sight. Rather, it is a reference to the eyes of the Pauline body of Christ, which Tauler interprets to be contemplative individuals.⁴⁶ However, this eye emerging together with *schöwen* is strong evidence that *schöwen* has a visual connotation even when it is used primarily as a

⁴⁴ While Tauler is willing to downplay the value of contemplation, he explicitly warns against throwing it out entirely. For more on this, see V13, specifically V13.61.22–27, where Tauler describes contemplation as perfecting good works.

⁴⁵ McGinn, *Harvest*, 164. For more, see the entire section, "Grace and the Means of Salvation," 160–64.

⁴⁶ For the eye in the Body of Christ, see 1 Cor. 12. Paul discusses the Body of Christ metaphor in Rom. 12 and Eph. 4, as well. For more discussion of this biblical theme in Tauler's sermons, see V39.

technical term.

Another example of this word pair is found in V45. In this sermon, Tauler uses the *schöwen-würken* word pair in a slightly modified form: *schöwelicheit* (contemplativeness) and *wirklicheit* (activeness). This sermon is particularly noteworthy, in that he includes a third word alongside the typical pair: *contemplacie* (contemplation):

The one thing [necessary] is that you recognize your nothingness, that is your own, what you are and who you are from yourself. [The goal of] you having this “one thing” caused our Lord such angst that it made him sweat blood. Because you did not want to recognize this “one thing,” he cried at the cross, “God, my God, why have you forsaken me!” Apart from this “one thing” that is necessary, how much ought to be forsaken by all people! Beloved child, let go of everything which I and all teachers have ever taught, and all activeness (*wirklicheit*) and contemplativeness (*schöwelicheit*) and high contemplation (*contemplacie*), and learn alone this one thing, that you might become this [way]: then you have done well. Therefore, our Lord said, “Mary has chosen the best part.” Indeed, the best of all.⁴⁷

Why Tauler chooses one contemplation word over another cannot be determined conclusively, but these three terms—*wirklicheit*, *schöwelicheit*, and *contemplacie*—represent the totality of pious activity, a perceived ascending scale of value for the contemplative. Tauler is arguing that even if a person has achieved the highest degree of pious activity, *contemplacie*, that achievement is worth relatively little in comparison to recognizing their nothingness. This means that all contemplation, *schöwelicheit* describing contemplation of a mere middling level, is once again downplayed in its importance. As important as it is, beneficial as it is, it is not the pinnacle of devotion; recognizing one’s nothingness is.

In V13, a sermon for the Wednesday before Palm Sunday, Tauler discusses this tension

⁴⁷ Das eine das ist das du bekennest din nicht, das din eigen ist, was du bist und wer du bist von dir selber. Umbe dis ein hast du unserm herren als angst gemacht das er blüt switzte. Umbe das du dis ein nüt enwoltest wellen bekennen, so rüft er an dem crúze: ‘Got, Got min, wie hast du mich gelossen!’, wan dis ein des not ist, als gar von allen menschen solte verlossen sin. Liebes kint, los varn alles das ich und alle lerer ie gelerten, und alle wirklicheit und schöwelicheit und hoch contemplacie, und lerent allein dis ein, das úch das werde: so hant ir wol gearbeit. Dar umbe sprach unser herre: ‘Maria hat das beste teil erwelt’. Ja, das beste alles (V45.197.1–10).

between works and contemplation at length. While the vast majority of the sermon strongly preferences contemplation over works, a brief paragraph acknowledges that works can be redeemed:

If the powers about which we have spoken in truth turn inward with nature and above the nature and turn in toward the interior *grunt*, inward toward the root, then they confess God in experiential ways. And when they find God there, then they confess him in truth in enjoying ways, and all of this is done in true living faith, and everything that is born interiorly out of the reason and in the will, or exteriorly in the outer powers, whether it be with activity or with passivity, whether in words, in actions, in behavior, in habits, one perceives everything—not only in acting [ways] nor only in contemplating ways but rather everything—is a confession of God in truth.⁴⁸

While Tauler’s endorsement of activity is not completely unqualified—works must be born out of the inward turn toward the interior *grunt* in order to be “a confession of God in truth”—the *schöwen-würken* word pair is used for the sermon’s strongest endorsement of works. In this sermon, Tauler uses this word pair not in order to expound upon the contrast between *schöwen* and *würken*, but to encompass in one phrase the totality of what a person does from the inward *grunt*, a usage which has already been seen in V53 and V45.

Another example of this use of the word pair to encompass the totality of devotion is found in V39. In this sermon, Tauler uses the present participle of both: *schöwende* and *würkende*. Note that the visual character of *schöwende* is almost irrelevant to Tauler’s meaning:

Should not then the noble, after-God-imaged, worthy person, be active, since God made them God-imaged (*Gotte gebilt*) in their powers and like him according to their essence? Such a noble creature ought to be much more nobly active than the irrational creatures, such as the heavens. And these [irrational creatures] should, in a likeness

⁴⁸ Wenn die krefte do wir von gesprochen hant, sich in der worheit inkerent mit naturen und inboven der naturen und kerent in den innewendigen grunt, in die wurtzele, also verjehent sú Gottes in bevintlicher wisen, und also sú Got do vindent, so verjehent sú sin in der worheit in gebruchenlicher wisen, und dis ist doch alles in dem woren lebenden glouben, und alles daz hinuz wurt geborn innewendig in der vernunft und in dem willen, ussewendig in die ussern krefte, es si mit würkende oder mit lidende, in Worten, in werken, in gelosse, in wandelungen alles enpfindet man nüt noch in würcender noch in schowender wisen denne alles ein verjehen Gottes in der worheit (V13.62.19–28). In Tauler’s vocabulary, *liden* and its cognates perform a dual role. These words describe both suffering and passivity. It would be equally correct to read “whether it be with acting or with suffering.”

[to the noble person], follow after (*volgen nach*) [that person] in acting and contemplating, toward whatever way the person with all their powers, [both] the highest and the lowest, is turned (*gekert*).⁴⁹

This section contains many ideas which in other contexts Tauler would develop in explicitly or implicitly visual ways, including “God-imagined” (*Gotte gebilt*), “like” (*gelich*), “follow after” (*volgen nach*), and “turned” (*gekert*). However, in the immediate context, Tauler does not develop the visual character of any of them, as he is focused upon the way that the human individual has been made “God-imagined in their powers” and made like him in essence, along with the results of this development. In this passage, *schöwende* is first and foremost a technical term, paired with *würkende*, which together describe the totality of human devotion.

Another significant use of *schöwen* takes place in V68, a sermon for the Feast of the Guardian Angels, which explores Jesus’ warning, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10). In this sermon, Tauler develops the relationship between angels and the work of God in the individual:

And that is why we speak of their [the angels’] activity toward us and not their essence; for their activity is that they are always contemplating (*schöwent*) us and looking upon (*ansehent*) us in the mirror of divinity, according to form and essence and activity, with differentiation. And they have a particularly differentiated activity in us.⁵⁰

Several elements of this description are noteworthy. As Tauler describes the guardian angels’ contemplative and visual activity, he says that “they are always contemplating us and looking

⁴⁹ Solte denne der edel nach Gotte gebildet werde mensche nüt würlich sin nach Gotte in Gotte gebilt an sinen kreften und ime gelich nach sinem wesende? Die edele creature die muß vil adellicher wirklich sin wan die unvernünftigen creaturen, als der himel. Und dise süllent ime in einer gelicheit nach volgen an wükende und schöwende, in weler wise der mensche mit allen sinen kreften, den obersten und den nidersten, gekert ist (V39.157.3–8).

⁵⁰ Und dar umbe sagen wir von irre würllichkeit engegen uns und nüt von irme wesende; wande ir würllichkeit ist das si alwegent uns schöwent und ansehent in dem spiegel der gotheit, förmlich und weslichen und würllichen mit underscheide. Und si hant ein sunderlich underscheidenlich würlen in uns (V68.372.22–27).

upon us in the mirror of divinity.” While the angels looking upon this mirror is almost certainly a reference to the angels looking upon the face of God in the sermon text, Matthew 18:10, neither this verse nor its context offers any reason to interpret the face of God as a mirror. To further complicate matters, Tauler gives very little indication of how to interpret this image. Though the ultimate source of this image may be impossible to pin down, a number of Tauler’s other sermons might be helpful in interpreting it.

Although mirrors are a recurring metaphor in Neoplatonic thought and although Tauler references mirrors in Neoplatonic ways a handful of times in other sermons, this particular use of mirrors, specifically the “mirror of divinity,” likely has another origin. Tauler only comes close to describing a “mirror of divinity” in one other sermon, but that passage is helpful for understanding what he means here. In V60f, Tauler says,

Ah, children, what a joyful end! They [who are under divinely given pressure and suffering] are overformed and united in God. He assures us of this—that noble prince who learned it in the true school of the third heaven, in the mirror of divine truth. Saint Paul said, “We are transformed by radiance into radiance, into the same image of the spirit of God.”⁵¹

Tauler’s biblical quotation comes from the second half of 2 Cor. 3:18. While nothing in the quoted passage references mirrors, a look at the full verse reveals a possible source for this mirror image. The full verse says, “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18 NRSV).⁵² But whether

⁵¹ Ach kinder, wel ein wunneclich ende! Sú werdent überformet und geeiniget in Got. Das bewert uns der edel fürste der es in der woren schulen des dirten himels, in dem spiegel der göttelichen worheit het geleret. Sant Paulus sprach: ‘wir werdent transformieret von klorheit in klorheit in das selbe bilde von dem geiste Gottes’ (V60f.316.9–13).

⁵² This quotation comes from the NRSV, for the ESV—quoted throughout the rest of the paper—does not include mention of a mirror except in its footnotes. The mirror in this verse is a reflection of the Greek κατοπτρίζω, about which BDAG says “prob. w. the mng. **look at someth. as in a mirror.**” (William Arndt et al., *A Greek-*

or not Tauler gets this image from 2 Cor. 3:18, he uses this mirror image in V60f as a description of the vision of the radiance of God.⁵³ In 2 Cor. 3:18, the radiance of God is unveiled, a reference to the intermediary veil of Moses which protected Israel from seeing the full glory of God shining in Moses' face after Moses' encounter with God.⁵⁴ In V60f, Paul parallels Moses' function, bringing divine truth down to his hearers after an encounter with God in the third heaven, but this time with no veil, no intermediary. Paul has been "overformed and united in God" by this encounter, and Tauler promises this same unveiled encounter with the mirror of divine truth to all who undergo the pressure and suffering given by God. The mirror of divine truth is then the experience of the divine radiance and presence of God, available to all believers who have been prepared by God for that experience.⁵⁵ In V68, then, though the "mirror of divinity" is accessible to angels and all believers who enter God's presence and see the face of

English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 535) The Latin of the Vulgate, which Tauler was using for this message, has *speculantes*. This is less directly tied to the Latin for mirror, *speculum*, albeit close enough that this rendering is possible.

⁵³ Tauler's rendering, *von klorheit in klorheit* reflects the Vulgate rendering of the same verse "a claritate in claritatem." While *klorheit* in Middle High German may typically be translated glory, more visual renderings—such as clarity, shining, brilliance, radiance, and brightness—better fit Tauler's emphasis upon light in the later portions of the sermon.

⁵⁴ See Exod. 34:29–34.

⁵⁵ Though Tauler does not hint at his source for this image, some possible influences for Tauler's use of this mirror image are worthy of note. The first possible influence is the already-quoted passage from Augustine, in which Augustine quotes Fonteius of Carthage. Though two recent English translations differ on this, Fonteius describes a "mirror of the divine presence" which is either separate from the ray of reason or is a component part of the ray of reason. If the former translation is correct, the concepts in this passage align well with what Tauler is describing here. For the former translation, see Boniface Ramsey, trans., *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions* (New York: New City Press, 2008), 35. For the latter translation, see Mosher, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, 43. The second possible influence is John Ruusbroec, whom Tauler may have visited in Groenendaal (McGinn, *Harvest*, 243). Ruusbroec uses mirrors as images extensively in his writings, for several different purposes, and whether or not Tauler read Ruusbroec's treatise, *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness*, he may very well have been influenced by Ruusbroec's understanding of the term. Further, while Ruusbroec does not use the term "mirror of divinity" as seen in V68, he does use the term "mirror of divine truth" in *The Spiritual Espousals*, Book 3, Part 4. The closest Ruusbroec comes to Tauler's description is in book two, where God is described as "order and form and a mirror of all creatures" (James A. Wiseman, trans., *John Ruusbroec: The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*, Classics of Western Spirituality [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985], 230).

God without intermediary, the focus of the passage is primarily upon the way that guardian angels use this mirror in order to supervise humanity.

Also significant in V68 is that the angels are said to both *schöwent*^v and *ansehent*. Tauler is not saying that the angels are “looking” and “looking upon us,” but rather describing two distinct kinds of activity, “contemplating” and “looking upon us.” He draws upon the verb *schöwen*^v because of its technical connotation, and this instance of *schöwen*^v is clearly visual alongside *ansehent*.⁵⁶ Note however, that the typical object and agent have changed. In every other instance of contemplation explored so far, the object of contemplation has been God, but here, the object of contemplation is human. And while humans are the typical contemplating agents, here the angels are the ones contemplating. This passage demonstrates that contemplative vision is not an activity unique to humanity, but one which Tauler believes is shared by the angels as well.⁵⁷ Note also that—at least as *schöwen*^v has been understood so far—it likely would not be appropriate in Tauler’s understanding of contemplative praxis for humanity to *schöwen*^v in the mirror of divinity in the same way as the angels, for looking upon God is the pinnacle of mystical praxis for Tauler, and *schöwen*^v is seldom used of the highest levels of piety.

Further significance in the distinction between *schöwen*^v and *ansehent* can be found in the manner of looking which Tauler describes. The angels are said to contemplate and look upon humanity according to three spheres of interest: “according to form and essence and activity.” Though this is not laid out explicitly or developed in detail, Tauler’s selection of these two actions and three spheres of interest is not incidental, but a natural outflow of his understanding

⁵⁶ Unlike *ansehent*, *schöwen*^v has no *an-* prefix. It is likely that this is significant, that Tauler is focusing on the character of their looking as contemplation rather than the object of their contemplation, but nothing can be said on this conclusively. Tauler simply does not use the verb *anschöwen*^v in his preaching in the same way as he uses *anschöwelich*.

⁵⁷ The role of angels and other creatures in contemplation is explored significantly in V39.

of vision and contemplation: the angels *schöwen* according to form and essence, and they *ansehent* (look upon) according to activity. This is because the technical terms *schöwen* and *würken* are opposites, mutually exclusive within Tauler's conception. It would not be appropriate to use *schöwen* to describe looking upon *würken* (activity).⁵⁸ In consideration of this, Tauler describes the angels as both "contemplating us" and "looking upon us," a means of reassuringly expressing to his hearers that the guardian angels' supervision encompasses all of human existence: form, essence, and activity.

This is not the only sermon where Tauler presents working and contemplating as mutually exclusive activities. This fundamental difference is critical to understanding V64, a sermon for the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity. As Tauler discusses the teaching of various masters upon the subject of the *gemüte*, he says,

The masters say that this mind (*gemüte*) of the soul is so noble, it is always working (*würkent*) whether the person sleeps or wakes, whether they know it or do not know it; it has a god-formed, indescribable, eternal, backward look (*wider kaffen*) into God. But these [also] say, it contemplates (*schöwen*) always and loves and delights in God without cease. How that can be, this we now let lie; but this [mind] recognizes itself as God in God, and nevertheless it is created.⁵⁹

In the teaching of the masters, Tauler teases a logical inconsistency through the phrase, "How that can be, this we now let lie." While the inconsistency is not explained and less obvious than Tauler seems to assume, Tauler's argument appears to be that the *gemüte* (mind) cannot possibly always be working (*alwegent würkent*) and looking back into God (*es hat ein . . . wider kaffen in*

⁵⁸ It does not necessarily follow that *ansehent* cannot describe looking upon form or essence. Tauler adds *ansehent* to describe the angels' supervision of human activity, but it is not a technical term for Tauler, and so it does not have the same limitations; in fact, in V60's exploration of *anschöwelich*, above, *anschen* is used for looking upon many of the most important things in Tauler's mystical praxis, even beyond form and essence.

⁵⁹ Die meister sprechent das dis gemüte der selen das si als edel, es si alwegent würkent, der mensche slaffe oder wache, er wisse es oder enwisse es nüt; es hat ein gotformig unzellich ewig wider kaffen in Got. Aber dise sprechent, es schöwe alwegen und minne und gebruche Gottes ane underlos. Wie das si, das lassen wir nu ligen; mer dis bekent sich Got in Gotte, und noch denne ist es geschaffen (V64.350.13–19).

Got) and always contemplating (*schö^vwe alwegen*) him. Always contemplating only precludes always working if these two actions are mutually exclusive. This is the same pattern seen in V68, one once again peculiarly accompanied by two kinds of vision, *schö^vwen* and *kaffen*. While these two sermons do not use the same verb for looking—*kaffen* in V64 and *ansehent* in V68—the key here is really the technical terms, *schö^vwen* and *würken*. Many things in life can be done simultaneously, but true contemplation of God requires a renunciation and exclusivity which makes the performance of other activities, especially worldly activities, impossible.⁶⁰

By contemplating and looking “according to form and essence and activity,” the guardian angels’ supervision not only encompasses all kinds of human piety, but also every level of human piety. This tiered approach to piety is remarkably consistent across Tauler’s preaching. Whether he expresses it in two levels as in V68, in three as in V45, or in the many levels of *anschö^vwelich* contemplation seen in V60, in each case the individual seeks to move progressively closer to essential contemplation of God. Tauler consistently positions *schö^vwen* as a higher form of contemplation, but in most cases, it is not the highest. Instead, Tauler consistently describes the culmination of this progress in terms of *rasten* (rest), *swigende* (silence), *vinsternisse* (darkness), *trucke* (pressure), the *abgrunt* (abyss), or some combination of

⁶⁰ A brief comment on translation and interpretation is necessary, for Tauler presents his comments as if they are obviously logically inconsistent, and yet he never points out the specific logical inconsistency which leads him to say, “How that can be, this we now let lie.” This ambiguity has led to difficulty in translation. In the above translation, Tauler describes the mind (*gemü^te*) through two seemingly opposing understandings taken from the same group of “masters,” and this apparent, internal inconsistency within the masters’ teaching leads him to say “How that can be, this we let now lie.” Georg Hofmann’s modern German translation translates and interprets this passage very differently. Where the above translation reads, “But these,” Hofmann’s translation reads “Others say” (Hofmann, *Predigten*, 411). The modern French translation of P. Hugueny, P.G. Théry, and A.L. Corin makes the same translation decision (*Sermons de Tauler: Traduction sur les plus anciens manuscrits allemands*, vol. 2, Editions de la Vie Spirituelle [Paris: Librairie Desclée, 1930], 360–61). In both cases, this translation changes Tauler’s meaning significantly, from one group of teachers with a shared teaching that has an internal logical inconsistency to two opposing groups of teachers, with two opposing teachings. Such a translation is not supported by the Middle High German, and it appears to be an attempt to massage the translation in order to create a logical inconsistency where one was not obvious.

these concepts. This full pattern is visible in V74, where he says,

We should turn ourselves with all [our] power from all superfluous busyness and multiplicity and from whatever is not bare necessity, and turn to ourselves and wait for our call—how, where, and in what way the Lord has called us. The one [he calls] into inner contemplation, the other into activity, the third far beyond either into lovely inner rest, in a quiet, silencing, clinging in unity of spirit to divine darkness.⁶¹

In this sermon, there is a now-familiar stratification into three levels: contemplation, activity, and inner rest. Again, *schöwen* is not the best option, and though the precise stages are not the same, the trajectory is consistent. The highest stage is inner rest.

One other word forms a potential word pair with *schöwen*, and this word has appeared several times in the passages which have already been explored above. This word is *gebruchen* (to delight, enjoy, rejoice). While *gebruchen* is a relatively common word in Tauler's vocabulary, there are only three authentic sermons in which the two words are directly linked to one another.⁶² Though the sample size is small, the usage is consistent enough that some comment is warranted. V5 uses *gebruchen* alongside *schöwen*, *wurcken*, and *liden* (to suffer) to describe the various ways that God can work in the life of an individual:⁶³

[A]lways they should ask: “where is he who was born?” in a humble fear and in a perception from within of what God wants from them, that they might win satisfaction. If God gives to them in a suffering (*lidender*) manner, then they suffer. If

⁶¹ Wir súllent uns mit aller kraft keren von aller úppiger unmússen und manigvaltekeit und wes nút bar notdurft enist, und keren zú uns selber und warten unsers rúffes, wie, war und in weler wise uns der herre gerúffet het: den einen in ein innerlich schöwen, den andern in ein wúrken, den dirten verre úber dise alle beide in ein minnenclich innerlich rasten, in eime stillen swigende anzúhangende in einikeit des geistes dem göttelichen vinsternisse (V74.400.7–13).

⁶² V79 uses this word pair but is believed to have been misattributed to Tauler and originally written by John Ruusbroec. See McGinn, *Harvest*, 586n16.

⁶³ One quick translation note is relevant to the interpretation of *gebruchen* in the following passage. In his glossary index, Vetter lists *in gebruche wise* as equivalent to *in wirkender wise* within Tauler's vocabulary (Vetter, *Predigten*, 458). This seems highly unlikely within V5 at least, where suffering, acting, contemplating and delighting are set alongside one another as four separate activities. Vetter likely comes to this conclusion based on a number of comments which Tauler makes during an extended discussion of activity (*wirklichkeit*) and enjoyment (*gebruchlichkeit*) in V39. See especially V39.156.13–22. While Tauler certainly says that *gebruche wise* and *wirkender wise* ought to be the same and can be the same for the Christian, his point in this sermon derives from the fact that they often are not, and his goal is to try to teach Christians to attain that level of devotion in which working is a delight to them.

he gives to them in an active (*würkender*) manner, then they act. If a contemplative (*schöwen*^v) or enjoying (*gebruche*) manner, then they rejoice.⁶⁴

In V5, *schöwen*^v retains its function as a technical term for contemplation, especially because *würken* is set alongside it in the sentence. However, unlike Tauler's typical portrayal of the relationship between *schöwen*^v and *würken*, *schöwen*^v and *gebruchen* are never in contrast. In this sentence, these two stand alongside one another in a complimentary fashion (*in schöwen oder in gebruche wise*). Suffering (*lidender*) and acting (*wurckender*) stand alone, in contrast with each other and in contrast with *schöwen*^v and *gebruchen*. Tauler is once again establishing a tiered list of devotional activities, with *schöwen*^v and *gebruchen* this time offered as the most preferable options on a spectrum from suffering to acting to contemplation and enjoyment. It is not clear where *schöwen*^v sits relative to *gebruche*. Either enjoyment takes the top position with contemplation taking a close second, or enjoyment shares the top position with contemplation, but it is difficult to determine with a limited sample size, especially when this is the only instance of this word pair which Tauler presents in an unqualifiedly positive light.

Other instances of this potential word pair are similarly ambiguous regarding the precise relationship and priority between *schöwen*^v and *gebruchen*. V40, which was explored in greater detail above, clearly sets the two words alongside each other in a manner which demonstrates their perceived value. But Tauler's usage is likely intended to surprise his listeners:

Such people should not drink from that which might make them drunk, as became of those about whom we have already spoken, who had delight (*lustlichkeit*) given to them by the objects [of their contemplation], whether it be [delight] in perceiving or in experiencing, whether it be contemplative (*schöwelich*^v) or joyful (*gebruchlich*); rather they are set upon and pulled along a narrow path, which is entirely dark and comfortless, in which they stand in an insufferable pressure that they are not able to

⁶⁴ . . . und súllent allewegent fragen: wo ist er der geborn ist? in einre demütigen vorhten und in einem warnemen von innan was Got von ime welle, daz sú dem gnüg sigent. Git in Got in lidender wisen, so lident sú, git er in in würckender wise, so würckent sú, in schöwen oder in gebruche wise, so gebruchent sú (V5.24.21–25). It may be that *lidender* ought to be translated “passive” here to draw out the contrast with *würkender* (active), but the translation “suffering” makes the connection between the *lidender wisen* and the *lident* (suffering) clearer.

escape; thus wherever they turn they find a bottomless foreignness that is barren and comfortless and dark.⁶⁵

In this sermon *schöw^velich* and *gebruchlich*—normally positive signs of mature faith—are presented as dangerous and enticing lures to ruin. In presenting these two as a danger, Tauler is returning to the common theme that anything which is not God can become a hindrance, and if it is not helping to grow closer to God, then it is a hindrance. He is therefore warning against getting stuck in the lower levels of piety represented by contemplative or enjoyable ways. He urges his hearers toward the next level—toward the kind of darkness, comfortlessness, and barrenness which is typical of his descriptions of the abyss of God and the highest levels of piety.

The third and final instance of this potential word pair is in V64, a sermon which was explored in greater detail above. In this sermon, Tauler uses this pair to describe the action of the *gemü^e*. However, Tauler attributes this description to others: the “masters.”

The masters say that this mind (*gemü^e*) of the soul is so noble, it is always working whether the person sleeps or wakes, whether they know it or do not know it; it has a god-formed, indescribable, eternal, backward look into God. But these [also] say, it contemplates (*schöw^ve*) always and loves (*minne*) and delights (*gebruche*) in God without cease. How that can be, this we now let lie.⁶⁶

In this description, the *gemü^e* “contemplates always and loves and delights in God without cease.” Though love (*minne*) is between *schöw^ve* and *gebruche*, the two are once again set alongside one another in complimentary fashion, with no clear priority between them. They are once again presented as a preferable, higher level of piety.

⁶⁵ Dise ensüllen nüt trinken dannan ab si trunken werden mügen, als dise sint worden von den wir vor geseit han die lustlicheit die disen geschenkt wirt in den fürwürffen, es si in smackender oder in bevindender wise, es si schöw^velich oder gebruchlich; sunder si werdent gesaste und gezogen in einen engen weg, der zemole vinster und trostlos ist, in dem stont si in einem unlidelichen trucke, das si nüt us enmügen; so wa si sich hin kerent, so vindent si ein grundelos ellende, das wüst und trostlos ist und vinster (V40.168.28–36).

⁶⁶ Die meister sprechent das dis gemü^e der selen das si als edel, es si alwegent wúrkent, der mensche slaffe oder wache, er wisse es oder enwisse es nüt; es hat ein gotformig unzellich ewig wider kaffen in Got. Aber dise sprechent, es schöw^ve alwegen und minne und gebruche Gottes ane underlos. Wie das si, das lossen wir nu ligen; . . . (V64.350.13–18).

However, the fact that Tauler attributes this statement to other “masters,” and the fact that he subtly criticizes this perspective, may indicate that his use of this word pair is more a reflection of his time and his contemporaries than his own piety. Considering Tauler’s own prioritization of passivity, renunciation, trial, hardship, and darkness—and his willingness to deprecate contemplation as the highest form of piety—it is perhaps unsurprising that Tauler would warn against the uncritical embrace of contemplation and enjoyment, or even the linking of the two in the minds of his hearers.

This kind of warning is exactly what is given in V42. Though this sermon does not use *gebruchen*, Tauler does use the Latin forms of these words together, *iubilacio* and *contemplacio*:

In the same way, there are many and wondrously many good practices, great high-seeming practices and wondrously lofty living, words, and works, where everything interior in the grunt is worm-eaten [or] can become that way, neither an active life, nor a contemplative life nor jubilation nor any contemplation nor that which would rapture one into the third heaven (that one finds in [the case of] noble Paul, . . .)⁶⁷

In this sermon, no pious activity is immune to the danger of becoming “worm-eaten.” Neither active life (*würkent leben*), nor contemplative live, (*schöwent leben*), nor delighting (*iubilacio*), nor contemplation (*contemplacio*), nor even rapture into the third heaven make one free from messing things up. Though this trajectory is an enticing additional demonstration of the progressive stages of Tauler’s mystical praxis, it is an even greater example of his mystical pragmatism. No action is worth pursuing that is not achieving its goal, not even the highest *contemplacio*.

The final passage to explore will be V6, the only instance of *beschöwen* in Tauler’s preaching corpus. This passage is one of the best demonstrations of the importance of a visual

⁶⁷ Also sint vil und wunderlichen vil g^oter ^uebungen, gros hoch schinent ^uebungen und wunderlichen hoch lebende wort und werk, das alles inwendig in dem grunde wurmstichig ist und werden mag, noch w^urkent leben noch sch^owent leben noch iubilacio noch enkein contemplacio noch das man w^urde entzukt in den dritten himel (das vint man an dem edelen Paulus, . . .) (V43.185.7–12).

connotation for the *schöwen* words, and therefore a fitting conclusion to this chapter. The main difference between *schöwen* and *beschöwen* is that the *be-* prefix shifts *schöwen* from an intransitive verb into a transitive verb, meaning *beschöwen* must take a direct object, unlike all the other instances of *schöwen* seen above. As has already been noted regarding *anschöwelich*, in most cases Tauler is more interested in the quality of contemplation or fact of contemplation than he is interested in specifying the object of contemplation, probably because the object, God, is assumed.

In this sermon for the Sunday before Septuagesima, Tauler preaches on Jesus' words, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light," for which Tauler offers the translation, "My yoke is sweet, and my burden is light."⁶⁸ Tauler compares the sweet yoke to the "inward person" and the burden to the "outward person." He describes this inward person in the following way:

The inward, noble person has come out of the noble *grunt* of divinity and is called into and drawn back there, that they may take part in everything good that the noble, wondrous *grunt* has by nature, which the soul can attain by grace. Because God has grounded [himself] in the interior *grunt* of the soul and lies hidden (*verborgen*) and covered [therein], whoever could find (*vinden*) and recognize (*bekennen*) this—and contemplate (*beschöwen*) [it]—that one would without doubt be blessed. And though that person may have their gaze (*gesiht*) out-turned (*uzgekert*) and go into error, even so they have an eternal lure and inclination back here, and they cannot have rest anywhere else unless they possess this, for all other things cannot be enough apart from this, for in all things this drives and pulls them into the very innermost, apart from their knowledge, for this is their goal, as all things rest in their place.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Min joch daz ist süsse und min bürde ist lihte' (V6.25.12–13). This translation is a result of the Vulgate's "suave," which means sweet or pleasant.

⁶⁹ Der inwendige edel mensche der ist uz dem edelen grunde der gotheit heruzkummen und ist gebildet noch dem edeln lutern Gotte, und ist do wider ingeladen und wider ingeruffet und wurt wider gezogen, das er alles des gütes teilhaftig mag werden das der edel wunnenliche grunt hat von naturen, daz mag sù erkriegen von genoden. Wie Got in dem indewendigen grunde der selen gegründet het und verborgen und bedeckt lit, der daz vinden und bekennen möhte und beschöwen, der wer on allen zwifel selig; und wie der mensche sine gesiht het uzgekert und irre get, doch so het er ein ewig locken und ein neigen herzü und enkan kein raste niergent han waz er dis umbegat, wan alle andere ding enmügent ime nüt genüg gesin ussewendig dis, wan dis treit und zühet in alles in daz aller innerste sunder sin wissen, wande dis ist sin ende, also alle ding rastent an irre stat (V6.25.19–31).

In this sermon, the blessed person is the one who can find (*vinden*), recognize (*bekennen*), and contemplate (*beschöwen*) the hidden God in the *grunt* of the soul. All three of these verbs carry at least some visual connotation within Tauler's vocabulary, and several of the words in the rest of this passage have visual connotations or meanings as well, namely hidden (*verborgen*), gaze (*gesiht*), and out-turned (*uzgekert*).

These visual ideas are key to understanding Tauler's meaning in this sermon, for if the visual character of these verbs is not recognized, the link which Tauler makes between the contemplation of the hidden God in the *grunt* of the soul and the gaze is also unrecognized, and this sermon loses its reassuring "sweetness." The contemplation (*beschöwen*) of God's *grunt* is itself a kind of gaze (*gesiht*). When Tauler says, "though that person may have their gaze out-turned (*uzgekert*)," he is not only describing the orientation of the person's looking, but the act of looking away from the *grunt* and ceasing contemplation, whether that action was a personal choice or forced upon the individual.⁷⁰ The reassuring sweetness comes from the promise that—even if the individual should stray—if that individual has even once before achieved the goal of contemplating the hidden God in the *grunt* of the soul, then they have "an eternal lure and inclination back here" meaning back into that *grunt* of their original contemplation. They may stray from the goal of contemplation, but they will always be lured back "into the very innermost." Though it is not mentioned by name here, the *gemûte* is almost certainly in the background of this discussion, for in Tauler's anthropology, it is that core part of the person which inclines the person and directs their senses and powers. Here, the *gemûte* participates in that eternal lure back to God, inclining the individual toward finding God's image and God himself within.

⁷⁰ See the distinction between *wenden* and *keren* in chapter 1.

Note that the yoke is described as sweet, but Tauler's definition of that sweetness departs from the sense of taste. What does Tauler say it means that the yoke is sweet, and the person is blessed? It means they find, recognize, and see the hidden God in the *grunt* of the soul. This strong visual language once again blurs the lines between the senses, this time between taste and sight. Why? Because Tauler, influenced deeply by the language and goals of Christian Neoplatonism, places a higher priority upon inner vision than all the other interior and exterior senses. However, more important than the precise language at play is the function that the language performs within Tauler's preaching. Tauler is in many ways too pragmatic to hold fast to any sense or even any one method for achieving the goal of his contemplative praxis. This is not to say, that there is no consistency, however, for his anthropological convictions and Neoplatonic impulses—along with the resultant trajectory of these two—consistently shape his preaching and contemplative praxis.

Tauler's use of *beschöwen*^v is very similar to his uses of *schöwen*^v. It may not take a word pair, but it is a technical term, and Tauler's use of it here demonstrates both its core contemplative meaning and an intentional visual sense, as well. Though Tauler does not describe *beschöwen*^v as "going beyond images" explicitly in this passage, he implies it. He warns of the danger of the "out-turned gaze," the covered-ness of God, and the hiddenness of God. All three of these ideas elicit the worlds of exterior sense and interior sense, along with the resultant images which can prevent an individual from seeing clearly within the *grunt*. There within the *grunt*, the contemplative individual must go beyond images in their search for God and desire to see him face to face.

Yet human beings are not able to see God, so in the tension of this goal and human limitation, the individual goes "beyond." Beyond the senses, beyond multiplicity, beyond

createdness, beyond reason, beyond images. Such things are obstructions and obstacles to true contemplation. Ultimately, the individual goes beyond even contemplation toward essential union with the singular, perfect, good God. They cannot pursue this in an active fashion, but must passively receive this ultimate gift, resting in God's *grunt*, where God grants it only according to his goodness and love. There, the individual finds rest, lost in the blessed abyss of divine darkness.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Though this thesis has focused upon only one set of visual words within Johannes Tauler's preaching, visual language is central to Tauler's presentation of contemplation, thought, and mystical experience. The visual character of this language has been seldom explored and is often completely ignored within scholarly literature and translations of Tauler's sermons. As a result, important aspects of Tauler's anthropology and contemplative praxis have been misunderstood or unexplored.

The *schöwen*^v words are technical terms for a kind of contemplation which is—for Tauler and his hearers—inherently visual. This contemplative vision is an integral part of the life of faith, and Tauler consistently sets it alongside other major practices of piety, especially action (*würken*), delight (*gebruchen*), and higher contemplation (*contemplacie*), to describe the whole of pious activity. While contemplative vision is clearly a favored tool in Tauler's mystical praxis, his preaching makes clear that it is neither the highest goal nor the only means to effective practice of piety. Instead, in pragmatic and pastoral fashion, all practices of piety are made subservient to the goal of rest in the abyss of God.

This visual language also interacts in significant ways with Tauler's anthropology, especially the ground (*grunt*), mind (*gemüte*), and other senses (*sinnen*). Central to this anthropology is an interior-exterior tension, through which sensation is interpreted in terms of exterior and interior senses, especially hearing taste, and sight. Though Tauler has little regard for the exterior senses, the interior senses, with interior sight chief among them, are integral to the practice of contemplation.

Tauler's portrayal of contemplative vision reflects the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy

upon both his contemporaries and upon Tauler himself. Platonic ideas regarding mental images dominate Tauler's discussion of sensation and the early stages of contemplative activity, but not contemplative vision. Such contemplative vision is beyond images. To communicate this complex concept, Tauler draws upon a number of Neoplatonic metaphors, including flow, mirrors, color, blindness, and rays of light. He also frequently draws upon apophatic, Dionysian language regarding the hiddenness of God, whereby God is ultimately inaccessible to humanity in its createdness.

Because of this hiddenness, the individual turns within, away from the world and creaturely sensation. They look for the image of God which is hidden in the *grunt* of the soul, engaging their *gemüte*, to direct their discernment and sift through the multiplicitous images of sensual createdness, seeking that which is uncreated, singular, essential, and real. Whenever such images are found, Tauler encourages his hearers toward releasement, a lifelong process of ridding the *grunt* of created images, clearing the way for the vision of the One which is God himself. This clear sight of God is elusive, difficult to achieve, and perhaps ultimately impossible, but as more and more impediments to contemplative vision are removed, the individual grows closer and closer to seeing God in the *grunt* of the soul, and closer and closer to *unio mystica* within the abyss of God. In that union, all sensation, all self is lost. Therefore, in the abyss, contemplative vision both achieves its goal and is lost simultaneously. Yet for Tauler and his hearers, it is worth it, for in this loss of self, the individual finds an all too rare peace and rest from the fears and trials of created life.

Significant work could yet be done in exploring the various visual metaphors in Tauler's preaching, along with the plethora of other visual terms which Tauler uses for contemplation, thought, and inner sight. Particularly fruitful could be a comparison between Tauler's use of

metaphor and that of his sources and contemporaries. Though much has already been written about the transmission of Neoplatonic concepts through the years to Tauler's day, significant research could yet be done through a focus upon the visual language and metaphors of Neoplatonism. Another fruitful set of metaphors for study include the apophatic metaphors commonly associated with Pseudo-Dionysius, namely hiddenness, darkness, and blindness. Another might be Tauler's visual interaction with the *grunt* and abyss metaphors in relationship to Eckhart's or that of their contemporaries. The mirror metaphor, whether within Neoplatonism or as it is developed in John Ruusbroec's preaching, could also be a valuable study. Comparisons between Tauler's own language for contemplative vision and that of his contemporaries could be especially fruitful, such as Eckhart, Ruusbroec, Suso, and Margaret Ebner. Perhaps the most profitable work of all, however, would be to translate Tauler's sermons freshly, in a manner which adequately reflects the visual character of his thought and contemplative praxis.

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