"Locating Meister Eckhart's Interpretation in Indonesia": A Dialogue between Modern Biblical Interpretation and Spiritual Interpretation of Ecclesiastes 10:5–7

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a compelling case for the transformative potential of Meister Eckhart's spiritual interpretation in the context of Indonesian biblical studies. It sets out to accomplish two primary objectives. First, the article conducts a thorough analysis of Eckhart's distinct spiritual interpretation, positioning it in dialogue with contemporary biblical methodologies. Second, it leverages Hans Georg Gadamer's concept of 'fusion of horizons' alongside Paul Ricoeur's 'phenomenological interpretation' framework to appropriate Eckhart's insights in the Indonesian context. Methodologically, the article examines Eccl 10:5–7 through the lens of modern biblical interpretative approaches including historical-critical and literary-critical perspectives. It then contrasts these with Eckhart's spiritual interpretation via a dialogical analysis. The culmination of this study is the application of Eckhart's interpretive strategies to Indonesian biblical interpretation, guided by the theoretical underpinnings of Gadamer and Ricoeur. The ultimate goal is to enrich Indonesian biblical studies, emphasising spiritual formation grounded in Eckhart's teachings.

KEYWORDS: Meister Eckhart, Biblical studies in Indonesia, Ecclesiastes, Spiritual interpretation

A RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The landscape of Indonesian biblical studies clearly lacks spiritual interpretation. Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, a notable theology professor at Duta Wacana Christian University, identifies four dominant interpretation models in Indonesia—pre/non-critical, historical-critical, literary-critical and reader response interpretations. These models, ranging from dogmatic to historically and literarily focused approaches, omit spiritual interpretation, aligning with broader scholarly observations in the field. [1]

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Further insights are provided in the book *Interpretation Method of the Bible*, authored by lecturers from the Faculty of Theology at the University of HKBP Nommensen, Medan.[2] The book follows the historical-critical method, emphasising the text's historical and socio-anthropological contexts but it also introduces literary-critical and reader response interpretations, while again bypassing spiritual interpretation, underscoring its absence in the academic sphere.[3] Echoing similar academic trends, Hasan Sutanto, a professor at Southeast Asia Biblical Seminary, advocates for historical and literary-critical models. Sutanto's methodologies, though historically grounded, do not incorporate spiritual interpretation, highlighting a consistent academic omission.[4]

Nonetheless, spiritual interpretation, exemplified by practices such as Lectio Divina, plays a significant role in developing Christian spirituality in certain church contexts.[5] Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, drawing on mystical traditions like that of Meister Eckhart, recognises the potential of spiritual hermeneutics. Singgih writes interpretation materials for GPIB (Protestant Christian Church in Western Indonesia) and views the "peace" in John 14:27 as achievable through association with God (mysticism) and love without condition or *sunder*

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[1] Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, "Masa Depan Membaca dan Menafsir Alkitab di Indonesia," Research paper in *Seminar dan Simposium Nasional dies Natalis 46 Fakultas Teologi Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana (UKSW)*, Salatiga, 15-Maret-2016, 3–8; Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, *Dua Konteks: Tafsir-tafsir Perjanjian Lama sebagai Respons atas Perjalanan Reformasi di Indonesia*, (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2009) x–xiii. It seems there are developments in Singgih's thoughts because his earlier writings recognise only three methods of biblical interpretation in Indonesia; see Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, *Doing Theology in Indonesia: Sketches for an Indonesian Contextual Theology* (Manila: ATESEA, 2003), 40–49.

[2] A.A. Sitompul and Ulrich Beyer, *Metode Penafsiran Alkitab* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2002).

[3] Sitompul and Beyer, *Metode Penafsiran Alkitab*, 106, 169 ff.

[4] Hasan Sutanto, *Hermeneutika: Prinsip-prinsip dan Metode Penafsiran Alkitab* (Malang: Penerbit SAAT, 2007), 280.

[5] Basil Pennington, "Lectio Divina: The Gate Way to the Spiritual Journey and Centering Prayer," in *Centering Prayer in Daily Life and Ministry* (ed. Gustave Reininger; New York: Continuum, 1998), 21.

warumbe, popularised by Meister Eckhart, a medieval mystic. He suggests that Eckhart's views could be valuable resources in the interpretive process in conjunction with spiritual hermeneutics.[6] However, this approach remains marginalised in Indonesian biblical studies.

Meister Eckhart, a medieval Christian mystic, is considered a significant figure in spiritual interpretation. His theological contributions, influencing figures like John Tauler and Martin Luther,[7] centre on a spiritual understanding of biblical texts. His interpretations, though historically distant, offer a contrasting viewpoint to modern interpretations of texts such as Eccl 10:5–7.[8]

Some modern scholars including James L. Crenshaw[9] and Robert Gordis[10] have offered critical insights into Eccl 10, focusing on the social and historical dynamics of the text. Their interpretations, grounded in historical and literary analyses, differ markedly from Eckhart's spiritual approach. Eckhart's interpretation of texts like Ecclesiastes diverges from modern perspectives, as it focuses on controlling desires and practising charity, a viewpoint stemming from his spiritual orientation. His interpretation, though not academically prevalent, offers a unique lens to biblical hermeneutics.

Scholars like Donald F. Duclow[11] and Robert J. Dobie[12] have explored Eckhart's works, indicating a continued interest in his spiritual hermeneutics. Besides, Eckhart's ideas have been studied especially in dialogue with Eastern philosophy.[13] These studies, while insightful, necessitate a contemporary contextualisation, particularly in the Indonesian academic landscape. This

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[6] Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, "Peace Is not Like the Peace that This World Gives: A Mystical Understanding of the Text of John 14:27," https://www.facebook.com/notes/156926874339639/

[7] George W. Forell, ed., *Christian Social Teachings: A Reader in Christian Social Ethics from the Bible to the Present* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 70.

[8] Matthew Fox, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation* (New York: Image Books, 1980), 424. I assume that spiritual interpretation is a part of biblical interpretation because basically, biblical interpretation is an effort to interpret the Bible and spiritual interpretation is one of many ways to interpret the Bible.

[9] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 171.

[10] Robert Gordis, Koheleth - The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) p. 320.

[11] Donald F. Duclow, "Hermeneutics and Meister Eckhart," *Philosophy Today* 28/1 (1984): 36. Another publication from the author is Donald F. Duclow, "Meister Eckhart on the Book of Wisdom: Commentary and Wisdom," *Traditio* 43 (1987): 215.

[12] Robert J. Dobie, "Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart on Exodus 3:14: Exegesis or Eisegesis," *Medieval Mystical Theology* 24/2 (2015): 124.

[13] Joseph Politella, "Meister Eckhart and Eastern Wisdom," *Philosophy East and West* 15/2 (1965): 117.

research aims to explore Meister Eckhart's influence on modern scholarly biblical interpretation in Indonesia. Utilising theories of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, the study examines the potential appropriation of Eckhart's spiritual interpretation in contemporary hermeneutic practices, thereby, bridging the gap between spiritual and academic readings of the Bible.

This research is pivotal in that it highlights how Eckhart's spiritual interpretation can enrich the discourse of biblical studies in Indonesia.[14] By forging a dialogue between his interpretation and modern methodologies using the text of Eccl 10:5–7, the study aims to demonstrate the potential fusion of spiritual and scientific readings in the Indonesian academic context.

B MODERN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION OF ECCL 5:5–7

1 Ecclesiastes 10:5–7 from historical-critical perspectives

1a Historical-critical analysis of verse 5

Ecclesiastes 10:5 begins with the word יֵשׁ (*yesh*) which is a unique characteristic of the Hebrew used in the Masoretic Text (MT) of the book of Ecclesiastes, particularly in Chapter 6. The term *yesh* is a substantive word whose meaning expresses a quality. One will encounter differences in comparing the Hebrew with other translations such as Greek and Aramaic. The analysis of the differences will probe how the suppression of the words reveals what the author sought to emphasise.

In the Greek translation, the initial word used is ἔστιν (*estin*) which is a verb derived from the word εἰμί (*eimi)*. *Yesh* has a different meaning in Hebrew while the word *eimi* in Greek means "is," depending on the context in which it occurs. The initial emphasis can be seen at this point. While in Hebrew it stresses quality with the use of the word *estin*, which is derives from the Greek word *eimi* and gives the same emphasis as in the MT. Unlike ego *eimi* in the Gospel of John, in which it emphasises a person or figure, in the context of Greek translation of Ecclesiastes 10:5, *eimi* is meant to provide further explanation of the word, that is, πονηρία (*phoneria*).

It is also interesting to compare the Aramaic translation of the Targum with the MT. The word איתּ is interpreted as in the Hebrew translation's "No," if only the איתּ word is a verb, whereas the word *yesh* is a substantive word. However, because they emphasise the existence of a thing described in a sentence, both translations share similarities, probably due to the proximity of the tradition of Hebrew and Aramaic. As John Bowker has noted, Aramaic and

[14] In another field, I have used Meister Eckhart's perpective to develop the discussion of Ecumenism in Indonesia. For more details, see Yan Okhtavianus Kalampung, "Ekumenisme berdasarkan Meister Eckhart dan Ibn Al'-Arabi yang dikembangkan dari When Mystic Masters Meet." Jurnal Orientasi Baru 24/2 (2015): 137–149.

Hebrew are closely related. The Targum itself, meaning "translation" or "interpretation," is a translation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament from Hebrew to Aramaic which at that time was the *lingua franca* in the ancient Middle East.[15]

The New Translation (1985) of the Indonesian Bible Society (*Terjemahan Baru, Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia* –TB-LAI) seems to follow the structure of the Hebrew that begins the statement in Eccl 5 with, "There is a crime." As the MT, the focus of TB-LAI is the 'crime'. Therefore, I translate the opening statement as "There is a crime," following the TB-LAI.

As noted earlier, the word רָעָה (*ra'ah*) forms a word pair with *yesh*. Thus, the focus of the sentence in paragraph 5 is *ra'ah* or crime. In other words, this sentence is talking about crime. *y*. The word "evil" here is singular in Hebrew and Greek as well as in Aramaic. So the crimes discussed here. There is some truth to TB-LAI by translating "a crime," perhaps to emphasise one of all of the crimes committed. The word *ra'ah* in the MT is a feminine noun, originally from the word *ra*, which also means crime. Further, πονηρία (*phoneria*) is also a feminine noun but only carries a more specific meaning, that is, a morally wrong act. It could also be interpreted as an act of sin. Therefore, the crime here can be understood explicitly as immoral and sinful acts.

Singgih translates the word *ra'ah* as a misfortune[16] without explaining the reason for his choice. However, in the Indonesian language, there is a difference between the word "evil" and "misfortune." A crime could be intentional or unintentional, but misfortune has to do with negligence. I prefer the word "evil" because the Hebrew is translated as such (evil) into English. It could be that Singgih chooses the word "adversity" in conjunction with the word "mistake," which is the translation of הַשַּׂלְיט (*hasysyallit*). It is logical conjunction—an oversight occurred due to negligence and misfortune occurred. In line with Singgih, George Aaron Barton also claims that the word *ra'ah* here refers to an error that occurs accidentally.[17] Indeed, in the second line, the word *ra'ah* is translated in the TB-LAI as "misfortune," thus preferring to emphasise it as an inadvertent error. Kleinert translates *ra'ah* as "misery," which is more neutral (and may or may not be intentional) but according to F. Delitzsch, that translation cannot be justified.[18] I prefer the word "crime," which is more neutral. In the

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[15] John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature: An Introduction to Jewish Interpretations of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 3.

[16] Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, *Hidup di Bawah Bayang-Bayang Maut: Sebuah Tafsir Kitab Pengkhotbah* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2011), 184.

[17] George Aaron Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Interpretation on The Book of Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1947), 170.

[18] F. Delitzsch, "Volume 6: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon," in *Interpretation on the Old Testament* (ed. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), 769.

English context, most translations use the word "evil" (e.g. KJV and RSV). It is clear however that a crime or evil was committed, whether intentionally or not.

The word *ra'itiy* is the subject of the sentence and is a verb *qal* perfect first person singular. The "I" who speaks in this text, had seen something which he relates in the passage. Later he saw a crime, but a crime that has not been described. Interestingly, in the LXX (Septuagint), *ra'itiy* is translated as ἣν εἶδον (*en eidon*) from the word *oral* which means seeing. Furthermore, *en eidon* is an aoris active verb, which means the act of "seeing" or what he saw of it, it was while he saw but also later would he look again. Thus, the understanding of the LXX, which Qohelet sees, is that he could still see now and then will he find it again.

The Targum uses the word that is a verb דחמית and could be interpreted as look (to see) or show (to show) but also, which may be interpreted as a combination of both. Thus, according to the version of the Targum, Qohelet could have said that he saw something and at the same time, he wanted to show (through words) what he saw. Here we see once again the development of the interpretation in the translations that follow the MT. The Targum, which was compiled by the rabbis, used דחמית, a word that could suggest that Qohelet wanted to say what he saw and at the same time wanted to show what he saw through his words. Maybe we can understand this as a form of speech-act.

Ra'itiy in this verse is structurally similar to the one in 9:13, as shown by Timothy Lee.[19] Only in 9:13, which Qohelet saw is *hokmah* or wisdom, while in 10:5 it is seen is ra'ah or crime. In addition, *ra'itiy* in this paragraph corresponds to the same word that appears in 5:12 and 6:1, as Barton has noted.[20] In contrast to Lee's interpretation, *ra'itiy* displays greater correspondence with the second verse because both refer to the word *ra'ah* with negative connotations, as already mentioned in the previous section. The difference lies in the fact that though both verses speak of wealth, Eccl 10:5 speaks about government positions.

The phrase, תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ (*takhad hasyamesy*) is commonly used by Qohelet. Singgih notes that "under the sun" is common expression in the Semitic world and occurs in the book of Ecclesiates 30 times. It is also a common expression in the context of ancient Greece. Therefore, if Qohelet indeed lived in the Hellenistic period, he would have been influenced by ancient Greek and and picked up this kind of expression. The Greek phrase, *upho ton plion*, has the same meaning in Hebrew. The Targum adds a caption to render it as הדין בעלמא שימשא תחות ("in the world under this sun").

[19] Timothy Lee Watson, *Experimenting with Qohelet: A Text-Linguistic Approach to Reading Qohelet as Discourse* (Amsterdam: VU University Amsterdam, 2006), 69.
[20] Delitzsch, "Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon," 769.

The expression is used to point to where the *ra'itiy* happens. Qohelet has seen the crime. Where? Under the sun. Where is under the sun? It can be seen that what is meant by Qohelet is the world as far as can be reached by by the sun. As Derek Kidner notes, the phrase "under the sun" provides information on "everything" that Qohelet could reach through the senses. Citing G. S. Hendry, Kidner then concludes that the phrase "under the sun" is the same as the phrase "the world" in the New Testament.[21] Based on these views, it appears that Qohelet deliberately attacked the growing secularism of his day. If this is true, then Qohelet does not resist secularism, he also rejects Israel's wisdom tradition from which it originated. So all were attacked by Qohelet. He could be viewed as a conceptual revolutionary leader in his day.

In this verse, the word "crime/mistake/error" appears again wand is translated from the כִּשְׁגָּגָה (*kisygagah*) whose meaning is similar to that previously suggested for *ra'ah*. It just seems to emphasise further that the word *kisygagah* points to an unintentional act, in which a crime/fault occurred by accident. The LXX translation, ἀκούσιον (*akousion*), also connotes chance. The Targum gives a more neutral meaning which is different from my translation. Whereas the Aramaic word used is נזקא which means damage, I opt for the word "mistake," in line with Singgih[22] because it is closer to the meaning of the Hebrew words. To distinguish *ra'ah*, which I render as evil, I prefer the word that emphasises unintentional blunder—understanding what, how and who performs an oversight can only be traced from the word afterward.

The word שֶׁיִּצָּא (*syeyyotsa*) is an active participle verb that explains the *mishap* that occurred and means "that while there." Thus, the mistake temporarily occurred in a place that Qohelet saw. Who made the mistake? The answer is the rulers, שַׁלִּיט (*syalit*), which is the result of observation *takhad hasyamesy* (under the sun). This means Qohelet wants to make some generalisations about the attitude of the rulers whom he probably never met. The result of this observation, according to F. Delitzsch, can also be interpreted as a reasonable and natural sign. In other words, the oversight was expected, only for Qohelet, the oversight on the part of the authorities as the reason for wrongdoing has been the case too often. It can also be connected with God governing the world. A natural and reasonable oversight often can be linked to the place of God in this world, even though it cannot also be assumed that the oversight was God's fault.[23] If this view is correct, then the oversight would be unnecessary. However, according to Qohelet, this case occurs too often and illustrates how the world has been corrupted.

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[21] Derek Kidner, *Pengkhotbah* (trans. R. Soedarmo; Jakarta: Yayasan Bina Kasih Communications, 1997), 24–25.

[22] Singgih, *Hidup di Bawah Bayang-Bayang Maut*, 184.

[23] Delitzsch, "Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon," 769.

The Septuagint adds the word προσώπου (*phrosophou*), which means "before" so that the sentence is changed to "before the rulers," that is, προσώπου τοῦ ἐξουσιάζοντος (*phrosophou tou esousizontos*). With this addition, the meaning shifts slightly because adding the phrase "in the presence," which refers to the oversight, means it could not come from the ruler. This meaning differs from the MT, which uses *syeyyotsa,* meaning "that is from" and is followed by *syalim*. Therefore, if it is an oversight, the Masoretic version says it is derived from the ruler; whereas the LXX assumes that the oversight only appeared before the ruler and did not come from him. The mistake occurred, according to the Targum, because someone took out the wrong words (דשלותא בפתגמא). Here we can consider how the thinking about who made the mistake developed. The MT says it was the ruler but the LXX said it may or may not be the ruler, while the Targum explicitly says that the mistake occurred because someonespoke wrongly in the presence of the ruler.

1b Historical-critical analysis of verse 6

Ecclesiates 10:6 speaks directly about the first figure and may be a key figure in the discussion of Qohelet. Gook (*shekels*) had some previous appearances in the book of Qohelet. The LXX uses the word ἄφρων (*aphron*), which means "fool," while the Targum renders it as רשיעא ושטיא, which means "cunning fool." Apparently, in the Targum version, the fool can also be seen as cunning or because of his cunning, he becomes dumb. However, whatever be the nature of the foolishness, it is discussed and later differentiated from "the rich" in Qohelet's narration.

In *apparatus criticus* (AC) there is another suggestion, רַבִּים בַּמְּרוֹמִים (*bameromiym rabiym*) which is possible by substituting בַּ מָרוֹם (*bamarom*). Both are actually derived from the same root, מָרוֹם (*marom*), which means "high position." What distinguishes the two is that the first rendering is in the plural, while the second is in singular. By paying attention to the next word, namely בַּשֻּׁפָּל (*besyepel*), which is a singular noun, it makes more sense to accept the suggestion by AC. This is because if we want to consider the balance in the rhythm between stupid and rich in this chapter, the number of times they occur should be proportionate. If the noun fool is singular, then rich should also be singular, so that the comparison is balanced. Thus, my translation employs the singular form of being "in high positions." However, the LXX seems to follow the Leningrad Codex version by using the word ὕψεσι (*upsesi*), which is rendered as plural.

The second character mentioned in this passaege are עָשִׁיר ('*asyir*) or the rich who are distinguished from fools. This contradiction may imply the existence of a system that is implied by Qoheleth, that is, plutocracy (rule by the rich). Perhaps Qoheleth assumed that rich people were the most suited to rule. For Qoheleth, the question of who occupies a position, in this case, is a matter of having the wrong people in the wrong place (the wrong man in the wrong

place).[24] Unlike in an earlier chapter (5:11) where the rich are compared to workers, here the rich are compared to fools. It seems there was a problem during the reign of Ptolemy Philopator (222–205 BC) when Agathoclea and the brother were placed in high positions. There was also the appointment of Haupt, an employee Antiochus IV Epiphanes gave a high position and considered ignorant because he betrayed the interests of the Jews. The rich in question here literally refers to people who came from wealthy families.[25]

Verses 5–6, according to William H.U. Anderson,[26] show a high degree of intertextuality with the "Instruction of Amenemhet," an ancient Egyptian text dated circa 2000 BC. The name "Amenemhet" refers to the Egyptian king, Amenemhet I, who reigned circa 1991–1962 BC but the text itself may have been written during the reign of his son, Senusret, who reigned circa 1971–1926 BC with a high political agenda, namely to secure the throne. Generally, the *Sitz im Leben* of Amenemhet and Qohelet are considered the same, that is, the context of the royal court. Thematically, these two texts also share close parallel, especially in their description human loneliness and political conditions that are contrary to the system's ideals. This view is based on a pessimistic perspective of politics and mainly a question of how the system should operate. This also is apparent in verses 5–6, which closely correlate with the text of Amenemhet. The two texts show a parallel in the sense that people should be careful when trusting others.[27]

The text of *Amenemhet* and Qohelet represent what Robert Davidson refers to as "Think before you act!"[28] Both texts warn the readers to be careful when choosing a leader or those who would assist the leader because as noted earlier, errors will occur when the wrong person or people who cannot be trusted are given the power to misuse authority.

1c Historical-critical analysis of verse 7

The word *ra'itiy* which has been discussed at length in the previous section reappears here in verse 7. This time, the object of *ra'itiy* is עֲבָדִים (*avadiym*) or slaves who ride on סוּסִים (*susiym*) or horses. *Avadiym* here has a clear context, which is slave labour, meaning the manual labourers in the lower class. The LXX uses the Greek word, δούλους (*doulous*) but this word is understood in the

[24] Singgih, *Hidup di Bawah Bayang-Bayang Maut*, 184.
[25] Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 171.
[26] William H.U. Anderson, "Ecclesiastes in the Intertextual Matrix of Ancient Near Eastern Literature," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually* (ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes; London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 163, 165.
[27] See Michael D. Coogan, *A Reader of Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Sources for the Study of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 190.
[28] Robert Davidson, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1986), vii–viii.

context of slavery and not in the spiritual sense, as in the New Testament that attributes it to the followers of Christ. In the Targum version, the meaning then grows even more because it appears as the figure of the prophet (נבייא), who prophesied that his people would later be in bondage. Slaves on horseback were seen by the rabbis who compiled the Targum as a prophecy that in the future, the nation would go into captivity. In fact, verse 6 indicates that later the nation would be in a low position (גלו). In the Targum version, the words of Qohelet is given a spiritual meaning to make it look like a prophecy.

In *apparatus criticus* (AC), the Codex Ms suggests that the word *avadiym* be replaced with *roqebiym*. However, I think this suggestion should be rejected because *avadiym* can be considered the antonym of the word *syariym* (princes). Thus, juxtaposing slaves with princes, in my opinion, is enough to describe two very different class groups. As James L. Crenshaw has shown, the text is talking about social classes.[29]

The reality was different when the *syariym* or the princes did something very rarely done by them.[30] Historically, as shown by Barton, the use of the horse as a vehicle by princes is nothing new. In the earlier days of Israel, royal princes only used horses as their mounts. Barton also says that the use of horses began in the era of the empires in the Middle East region.[31] As already mentioned previously, events such as in verse 7, according to Robert Gordis, could indicate any change in the structure of society.[32] Nevertheless, for Crenshaw, it goes deeper than that. At that time, the rich deprived the poor of their rights. Thus, slaves riding on horses meant a state in which the lower classes' wealth was in the upper classes' pockets.

1d Conclusion of the historical critical analysis

Based on the results of the text analysis of Eccl 10:5–7 from the historical-interpretation perspective, I can conclude that Qohelet speaks of a particular crime which was commonplace in the the Middle East. For Qohelet, this crime has occurred too often. The crime in question here is a mistake committed by the rulers when placing people in government positions, *the wrong person in the wrong place*. Therefore, expressing his opposition to this practice, Qohelet warns the rulers to think before acting, to be careful in choosing the persons who will be in power because they will determine later the fate of the people in many ways.

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[29] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: An Interpretation*, 171–172.
[30] Kathleen A. Farmer, *Who Knows What Is Good: An Interpretation on the Book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 187–188.
[31] Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 171.
[32] Robert Gordis, Koheleth - The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes, 320

2 Ecclesiastes 10:5–7 from a literary-critical perspective

2a Literary-critical analysis of verses 5–7

יֵשׁ רָעָה רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּשְׁגָגָה שֶׁיֹּצֵא מִלִּפְנֵי הַשַּׁלִּיט׃
נִתַּן הַסָּכָל בַּמְּרוֹמִים רַבִּים וַעֲשִׁירִים בַּשֵּׁפָל יֵשֵׁבוּ׃
רָאִיתִי עֲבָדִים עַל-סוּסִים וְשָׂרִים הֹלְכִים כַּעֲבָדִים עַל-הָאָרֶץ׃

(10:5) There is a crime that I have seen under the sun, an oversight that is from the rulers.
(10:6) Those fools are put in a high position and the rich sit in a low position.
(10:7) I have seen slaves on top and princes walking on their feet like slaves.

The literary interpretation mainly deals with the visible text and tries to understand it based on the literary components. Taking into account the elements of Hebrew literature, I try to explore the meaning of this text. Yongki Karman states that in Hebrew literature, it is difficult to distinguish clearly poetry from prose as "things that had been considered the characteristic of Hebrew poetry, was also found in parts of the Old Testament prose. Only poetic traits usually appear in a more intense, dense and neat Hebrew poetry."[33] More specifically, the difference between poetry and prose lies in the use of Hebrew parallelism and chiasmus. Poetry uses parallelism more than prose does. Based on that observation, I will try to analyse Eccl 10:5–7 in relation to how parallelism and chiasmus are used in the text. James L. Crenshaw has already shown that it is difficult to categorise this text as either poetry or prose. Thus, rather than try to analyse the genre of the text, I choose to analyse directly how parallelism is used in this text.

As noted by Jan Fokkelman, analysing the variations created by the author (Qohelet) and whether they appear in the verses are the main strategies used to determine the semantics.[34] This means that in forms that try to be assembled by the authors, there is a certain sense that we as readers can get by observing variations that the author tried to make. My attempt to show the shape of the text is captured fin the translation below:

> ***There is a crime that I have seen under the sun, an oversight that is from the rulers*** *(emphasis mine)**.***
> *(1) Fools are placed in a high position and the rich sit in a low position.*
> *(2) I have seen slaves on horseback and princes walking on their feet like slaves.*

[33] Yongky Karman, "Puisi dan Retorika Ibrani," *Jurnal Forum Biblika* 9 (1999), 18.
[34] Jan Fokkelman, *Menemukan Makna Puisi Alkitab: Penuntun Dalam Memahami Syair-syair Alkitab Sebagai Karya Sastra* (trans. A. S. Hadiwiyata; Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2009), 93.

`For Qohelet, a crime had occurred and it came from the authorities. Therefore, the emphasis is clear; it is on the crime emanating from the rulers. The crime is visible from points (1) and (2) above. It seems Qohelet engaged in a word play as well as a meaning play, as outlined below:

(1a) Fools are placed in a high position
(1b) The rich sit in a low position
(2a) The slaves are on horseback
(2b) Princes are walking

A close reading shows that Qohelet used negative and positive comparisons to highlight the dynamics of the text. Points 1a and 2a are parallels because in both, negative people are found in a positive place while points 1b and 2b state the opposite. Here, we can see that for Qohelet, negative people are fools and slaves, while positive people are a rich man and a prince. The point that Qohelet wanted to make was that things were not going well. Ideally, there should be a right person in the right place and vice versa but it was not the case at the time of Qoheleth. According to the author, rich people should occupy high positions and the fool should be in a low position—plutocracy as the ideal government.

It is important to note the repetition in the text, which reveals a certain rhythm. This is a common feature in literary texts, especially poetry.[35] There is a specific meaning that can be found in the repetition of a word or phrase in a given text. In the case of Eccl 10, there is a repetition of רָאִיתִי (*ra'itiy*), which means "I have seen." The word *ra'itiy* in verse 5 appears again in verse 7. With this repetition, the pattern is then changed into a different one:

(1) There are crimes that I have seen under the sun, an oversight that was from the rulers.
(1a) Fools are placed in a high position and the rich sit in a low position.
(2) I have seen slaves on top of horses and princes walking on their feet like slaves.

In this pattern, point 1a appears as a kind of insert between points 1 and 2. The question that now arises is: is 1a unimportant or has it become a real focal point which deliberately added to help understand these two points (1 and 2). I am more inclined to argue that points 1 and 2 indicate some unity. It may be understood that the "authorities" in point 1 is the prince in point 2. Thus, the mishap referred to in point 1 is when princes let slaves ride horses. This way, the princes looked stupid instead. Further, it could be that the "fools" referred to the

[35] X.J. Kennedy, *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry and Drama* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 598.

prince! In other words, the reason Qohelet thought the princes were unfit to rule was because they were stupid. Ideally, power is for the rich people.

If we link the discussion with the previous, then the actual error was committed by the ruling prince. Those who should be in power are the rich and this was true until the princes rendered themselves unfit to rule because they chose to walk while slaves rode on horses happily! Here is the antithesis—the rich may not be doing the doing the right thing. The rich man would never degrade himself in the presence of slaves. Moreover, the attitude of the rich, according to Qohelet, is the ideal position. For Qohelet therefore, wealthy people who know how to maintain their position and not let other people take it are the ideal leaders.

2b Conclusion of the literary-critical analysis

Based on the literary analysis of Eccl 5–7, I conclude that Qohelet understood that those who were worthy of holding the reins of power were the rich. Since rich people could afford to maintain their position, they would not even let other people, especially those of other classes, seize power. In this case, the person who was considered in error by Qohelet was the prince. However, the prince had the right to hold the reins of power, which they would later inherit from their parents. However, for Qohelet, they were unfit to rule because they could not maintain their position. Instead, they allowed themselves to live and behave like slaves while the slaves enjoy the comfort that the prince should own.

C SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF ECCL 10:5–7

1 Ecclesiastes 10:5–7 according to Meister Eckhart

Eckhart began his sermon, "Be Compassionate as your Creator in Heaven is compassionate," by identifying the three requirements for a person to receive divine grace. The person must possess three virtues—humility, perseverance and willingness to give all that has been received. All of these three qualities are fundamental or substantive. Nevertheless, the third is the focus of the sermon as well as of this article, as Eckhart himself acknowledged: "And the third characteristic, communicability, was a resource indicated by words. For the words alone manifests the one speaking and communicates and pours out all things. Be compassionate. "[36]As the title indicates, *compassion* is the central theme of Eckhart's sermon, "Be compassionate as your creator in heaven is compassionate." Genuine compassion is the most apparent of the three requirements for receiving divine grace. As compassion is a virtue that can be communicated to all other creatures, it could also be said that the three virtues

[36] Matthew Fox, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, 424.

needed to receive divine grace, as stated by Eckhart, could be summed up as compassionate action. "Be compassionate," says Eckhart.

Before examining the central theme of the sermon, about it is helpful to consider first the three virtues mentioned by Eckhart. Eckhart directly linked humility, the first virtue, with the figure of the Virgin Mary. In this regard, we can understand Mary's statement in Luke 1:38, "Be it unto me according to your word." Eckhart explained this statement in his article titled *The Talks of Instruction.*[37] The first point in a series of instructions from the Eckhart sermon begins with obedience (indeed, faithful obedience). Obedience is based on releasing one's desires, "For I have surrendered my will into the hands of my prelate and want nothing for myself, therefore God must will for me and if He neglects in this matter then He neglects himself. "Such obedience, as defined by Eckhart, is based on the release of one's will, which echoes the theme of "letting go," which is a central theme in Eckhart's thoughts. Most of his argument is based on the concept of letting go, which refers to the detachment later described by Eckhart as a central aspect of love:

> First, because the best about love is that it compels me to love God, yet detachment compels God to love me. Now it is far greater for me to compel God to come to me than to compel myself to come to God ... Second, I praise detachment above love because love compels me to suffer all thing for God's love, yet detachment leads me to where I am receptive to nothing except God. [38]

It is clear why Eckhart regards detachment as essential. The last remark on detachment helps us to understand the second virtue, which is determination. The second condition for receiving divine grace is one's determination to stay in God. To be like that, one has to love the reality of eternity.

In his explanation of detachment, Eckhart preferred detachment to the love that leads people to focus on God. The timeless reality here is God, who is the most important and above all else. We are willing to not cling to everything, therefore, we provide a special place for God. That God came and live d in a particular place is only possible through the new birth, as God then is born in us. This is a typical theme in Eckhart's thinking—the birth of the divine in the human soul. As Eckhart said, "This work [birth], when it is perfect, will be due solely to God's action while you have been passive,"[39]. Humans in this case are more passive than God; the Divine then actively interprets humans. The trick is "If you really forsake your knowledge and will, then God will surely and gladly

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[37] Meister Eckhart, *Selected Treatises and Sermons* (trans. James M. Clark and John Skinner; London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1958), 47–48.
[38] Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defenses* (trans. Edmund's College and Bernard McGinn; New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 286.
[39] Meister Eckhart*, A Modern Translation* (trans. Raymond Bernard Blakney; New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 119.

enter clearly and shining with His knowledge."[40] All that needs to be done by humans is to release their knowledge and desires. That is the way our hearts can be steadfast in God.

The third virtue is the willingness to give all that has been received. If examined closely, it would be seen that the third virtue is actually an action that follows the two previous virtues. If the first two virtues stress the primacy of the attitude of the inner self, then the third one tends to emphasise the outward attitude. Since the third virtue tends towards the exterior, the three virtues can be said to have a direct relationship with one another. Again, this virtue cannot be understood without considering the concept of letting go. The willingness to give all you have received is a form of detachment. We may have everything but that is all we can willingly give. The relationship between these three virtues shows that they are intertwined. If we have humility and courage, then we would easily give all that we have received. Eckhart explained that these three virtues can be obtained if we follow God's example and the most obvious attitude already demonstrated in Luke 6:36–42. "Be compassionate as your Father in Heaven."

On compassion or mercy, Eckhart presents three points. The first point is about how to love. This point is described in four ways. First, compassion must be practised towards the enemy. For Eckhart, victory in war is an encouraging thing but the real win is when we are able to show compassion for the enemy, as the Bible says, "Forgive and you will be forgiven, give and you shall be given." Second, compassion wraps the soul in clothes that please God. Here Eckhart uses symbolic language to explain that a person who has compassion makes his or her soul to look beautiful before God. Third, compassion drives the person into a relationship with fellow human beings. Fourth, compassion makes us to receive heavenly blessings, the ultimate salvation or what Eckhart understood as happiness.

Eckhart's second point on compassion or mercy is the practice of compassion to imitate the Father or God. It is a manifestation of the desire to follow Him as a matter of urgency. As Eckhart wrote in his sermon entitled *Sequere me*, "... we should note that those who wish to follow God and apprehend Him, one must follow and apprehend Him straightway and without delay, must follow Him closely and, thirdly, must follow Him forsaking all things."[41]

To follow and imitate God's compassion, according to Eckhart, can be done in two ways. The first is that compassion must be done without passion. God's exercise of compassion is not from desire, "We are compassionate not from passion, not from impulse, but [as a] deliberate choice and reasonable decision," Eckhart wrote. Thus, the desire to appear without good judgment and

[40] Eckhart*, A Modern Translation*, 119.
[41] Eckhart, *Selected Treatises and Sermons*, 153.

be reasonable, for Eckhart, it is not compassion that arises from God. In this case, the desire cannot be denied for it is a human trait. Although it cannot be denied, desire must be controlled. It will be a problem if humans were controlled by desire. As happened in Eccl 10:5, fools are placed in high positions and the rich in lower positions. In Eckhart, the fool is the epitome of sensuality and passion. Here Eckhart raised the issue of educational passion that Eckhart had explicitly linked with sensuality. This subject will be discussed at length below because this is the research focus of this thesis.

The second sense, compassion copied from God, is sincere and done with a simple objective. Simplicity of heart is the simplicity of intent, according to Eckhart. The motive behind our compassion should be simple—because we do it all for God, there is no need for any other motive. “If you love, love freely, if you truly love, let your reward be from the one you love.” Eckhart said. The Master seems to emphasise the sincerity and focus on love—not for ourselves, not for others, but especially for those whom we love.

Eckhart explained why it is necessary to love without passion and sensuality. Both of these need to be controlled, instead of humans being controlled by them. Eckhart later attributed sensuality to the issue of immortality. The Master often talks about immortality, because for him, we can encounter God in eternity. In this sermon, Eckhart understood that the human soul is eternal. Desire and sensuality are far apart from reason and intellect. Therefore, according to Eckhart, people ruled by passion and sensuality at the same time move away from the will and intellect. People driven by desire are just like a blind person being led by a dog.

Eckhart’s third point on compassion in the sermon was good standard. Compassion needs a good standard, according to Eckhart. The third point is, to whom then we make a benchmark in practising compassion. For Eckhart, first and foremost, its standard was God, “For the most simple measure of all things is God, both in his existece and in general in every perfection. But the good is the last thing, the goal and the best: 'No one is good but God alone'. (Lk. 18:19; Mk. 10:18),'” wrote Eckhart. Thus, following the two points are instructions on how to practise compassion and about whose compassion should be emulated. Then the third considers God the standard of compassion. God is its goal and from God Himself then radiates abundant joy. All of this can only be experienced when a person is in God. That is why God has to be the standard. God as the standard in our lives marked by true compassion will only produce joy if we act solely for the sake of God.

For Eckhart, maintaining happiness and joy in God is not the standard. God remains the standard. God remains the focus. The joy of the saints is for those who practise compassion. Joy can be attained if God's standard has also been achieved. Only if God's goal has been reached will the joy flow. Joy flows in several ways according to Eckhart because God's joy is endless and beyond

all bounds. The first path is the joy of the righteous, which accompanies eternal life. Second, all suffering will not be able to match the joy that will flow. Third, unexpected safety will be present. Fourth, joy will be boundless and beyond imagination. Fifth, the joy prepared by God for the hearts of those who love Him is unspeakable. Sixth and last, joy will continue to flow from the places of power to a lower place and will continue to flow violently from the body to penetrate the soul. It has fusion such as water and light without any resistance; and at that point, life will be full.

2 Analysis of Eckhart's Interpretation of Eccl 10:5–7

The discussion of Eccl 10:5–7 focuses on the theme of compassion. I mentioned earlier that Eckhart speaks of Eccl 10:5–7 within the discussion on ones compassion is supposed to imitate God. The nature of God that should be followed when practising compassion is unaffected by desire. Eckhart talks about passion and sensuality. Compassion must be free from desire and compassion must be pure. Passion and sensuality have to be subdued. This is where there is a need for some sort of pedagogy of desire, for both desire and sensuality are present in humans.

The text of Eccl 10:5–7 examined by Eckhart says:

> [5]There is an evil I saw under the sun as an oversight that comes from a ruler [6]in many high places is seated the fool, whereas the low place is occupied by the rich. [7]I saw slaves on horseback and princes walking like slaves (*my translation from the Indonesian version*).

Eckhart understands the text as follows

> Ecclesiastes 10 says: "It is an evil thing roomates I see under the sun - that a fool is placed in a high position and the rich sit beneath him." The fool here is sensuality or passion. It is called foolish, according to Boethius both because it is not susceptible to discipline and because It clouds over the lighit of wisdom. "In a high position" means being subject to passion. A following text says: "I saw Servants on horses and princes walking on the ground like Servants." Servants on horses shows how passion dominates reviews those whom are very much like horses. It is against this that it is said in Psalm 32: 9: "Do not be like the horse and mule ..."[42]

Based on the quote above, we can understand that, for Eckhart, Eccl 10:5–7 is the picture of a person / group driven by desire, passion and sensuality. Eckhart describes his understanding of the text as follows:

People who are ignorant = sensuality or passion

[42] Fox, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality*, 424.

To elaborate on why sensuality and passion are associated with foolishness, Eckhart quotes influential philosophers in the late Middle Ages such as Severius Anicius Manlius Boethius (480–524 AD). Boethius was a Roman statesman and philosopher from an aristocratic family who was much influenced by Neoplatonism and stoicism.[43] It is unclear which of the works of Boethius Eckhart quotes in this sermon, but Eckhart mentions the name of the author. Both figures are linked, as both are influenced by Neoplatonism.[44] Desire and sensuality are then associated with ignorance because they are both difficult to control, according to Boethius, and shut the door of wisdom. In other words, uncontrolled passion and sensuality will make one unwise. In Neoplatonism, wisdom is very important because wisdom is of the heart and one can connect with God with the heart. Neoplatonism believes that human wisdom is the radiance of God's wisdom. We need to purify our minds to connect to the mind of God.

"Place/high position," for Eckhart points to where some crimes were committed. Due to the high position, the person is ruled by ignorance then is a symbol of one subject to desire. In that case, the person is like a horse, controlled by desire. "Slaves were riding" is another proof of a person bound by desire. The desire that should be conquered and controlled by humans instead turned to control humans. Thus, here Eckhart describes a reverse situation but in terms of spirituality. Someone who should control their passion and sensualityis now subdued and controlled by them.

Eckhart focused on the verses (Eccl 10:5–7) to reinforce the point in this sermon, which is compassion. It is practised without being influenced by passion. God's compassion is not tainted by passion and sensuality. Therefore, we need to imitate God's pure compassion. To practise compassion like God, we need to experience detachment (*Gellassenheit*) from passion and sensuality. Eckhart firmly said, "Passion does not take the lead but follows, does not rule but freshly prepared."

D DIALOGUE BETWEEN MEISTER ECKHART'S SPIRITUAL HERMENEUTICS AND MODERN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

1 Points of encounter between Eckhart and modern biblical hermeneutics

The findings above show two trends from the different interpretations. The historical critical–literary interpretation shows that the text refers to government.

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[43] David Knowles, "Anicius Manlius Severinus," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy Volume One and Two* (ed. Paul Edwards; London: Macmillian, 1967), 328–329.

[44] See, Bernard McGinn, "Meister Eckhart on God as Absolute Unity," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* (ed. Dominic J. O'Meara; Albany: SUNY Press, 1982), 128.

Whereas the historical interpretation of the text focuses on the abuse of one's position within the government, the literary interpretation shows that one should exercise power without being overtaken by desire. Eckhart speaks of spiritual interpretation from a different perspective, as a matter of lust/desire. However, whether or not lust and politics are connected is a different matter. What is clear is that the Eckhart's interpretation of the text is that a person who cannot control his or her desire is regarded as a fool. Thus, if Eckhart's spiritual interpretation describes the situation in which people cannot control their desire, then historical and literary interpretation illustrates a situation in which people cannot govern wisely.

In the table below, I show some differences between some of the interpretations that have been discussed above:

Symbols	Meaning from the Historical Critical Interpretation	Meaning from the Literary Interpretation	Meaning from Eckhart's Spiritual Interpretation
Crime	Errors in placing people in governmental positions—wrong man in the wrong place.	Inability to retain positions	Inability to control desire and lust
The fool	Incompetent people in the office to which they aspire	Princes who were incompetent maintained their power	Desire and lust

The table shows three different interpretations of the symbol of the "crimes" from the sentence, "There is an evil I saw under the sun" in verse 5. Here I adopt the view of Paul Ricoeur, who interprets words as symbols.[45] Thus, the "evil" in Eccl 10:5–7 can be interpreted from various perspectives to produce multiple meanings. I will therefore compare various perspectives at this point. Historical critical interpretation sees the crime as the wrong placement of people in government positions. From the historical analysis, we see that this was a common thing, but it has become repulsive to Qohelet. Literary interpretation then points us to a situation in which people are incapable of maintaining their power. It shows that the so-called fool is the prince. The reason is simple—he let himself go, while the slaves ride a horse. Thus, there was a reversal of status.

"Crime," according to Meister Eckhart's spiritual interpretation, is defined as the inability to control one's desire and sensuality. In addition to

[45] E. Sumaryono, *Hermeneutik: Sebuah Metode Filsafat* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1999), 105. Ricoeur actually goes much further than just explaining the symbol but shows also how to interpret it.

differences in the meaning of “crime,” the most striking difference from this perspective is how the “fool” is defined. If the two other interpretations understood the “fool” as a human being, Eckhart’s spiritual interpretation understood it as passion and sensuality. The spiritual interpretation appears to attribute an allegorical meaning to the word “fool.” The word “fools” here, according Eckhart’s interpretation, is a symbol of passion and sensuality. A symbol here is a word that has more than one meaning. Compared with other interpretations that interpret the fool as a person, whether it is someone who is not competent to carry out the duties of office or a prince who cannot maintain his position, Eckhart’s interpretation then presents a very different meaning of “fool.” A fool is no longer a person but relates to a passion and sensuality. Now it is clear from the comparison made earlier that Eckhart and his interpretation show the reflective part of the hermeneutic or interpretation. The two interpretations (critical historical and literary) explain only the meaning of the text without directly talking about the depths of human beings. Eckhart’s later reading of the Bible entails a process of reflection on how humans should behave, how a person should control his/her desire.

2 Analysis of Eckhart’s Biblical Interpretation from Ricouer’s Perspective

In Meister Eckhart's spiritual interpretation, “crime” is defined as the inability to control one’s desire and sensuality. This interpretation notably diverges from other definitions of the “fool.” While traditional interpretations view the “fool” as a human being, Eckhart recognises it as emblematic of passion and sensuality. This allegorical reading transforms the “fool” into a symbol of internal human struggles, contrasting it sharply with interpretations that see the “fool” as a person lacking competence or leadership ability. Eckhart's interpretation represents a reflective hermeneutical approach, focusing on the inner dimensions of human existence. Unlike critical historical and literary interpretations, which primarily aim to elucidate the textual meaning, Eckhart’s reading encourages a reflection on human behaviour, particularly the control of desire. This approach signifies a deeper engagement with the text, urging readers to contemplate their conduct and morality.

Viewed from the perspective of Paul Ricoeur, Eckhart’s interpretation falls within the realm of 'first naivete,' where interpretation significantly impacts the interpreter's life.[46] Ricoeur identifies a hermeneutic circle between trust and understanding, emphasising the need for modern interpreters to engage with divine communication beyond mere textual analysis. This perspective challenges interpretations that solely focus on the scientific analysis of texts without

[46] For a comprehensive discussion of how Ricouer’s hermeneutical theory can contribute to biblical studies, see Gregory J. Laughery, *Paul Ricoeur & Living Hermeneutics: Exploring Ricoeur’s Contribution to Biblical Interpretation* (Fribourg: Destinee Media, 2016)

integrating faith. Ricoeur's hermeneutic circle, encapsulating the interplay between understanding and belief, challenges the notion of separating faith from interpretation. He argues that true interpretation involves a dynamic relationship between these elements, making it a living, evolving process.[47] This perspective criticises approaches like the critical historical and literary methods, which may neglect the role of faith in understanding religious texts. [48]

For Ricoeur, the interpretative process is integral to achieving what he terms the 'second naivete.' This stage is characterised by a balanced fusion of understanding and belief, where interpretation becomes a tool for accessing deeper meanings and insights. Ricoeur's approach underscores the necessity of interpretation in bridging the gap between ancient texts and contemporary understanding. Ricoeur then advances Heidegger’s argument that the interpreter approaches the text with certain presuppositions. Ricoeur agrees that the interpreter brings some preconceived ideas to the interpretive task, which cannot be denied. In the context of religious people trying to understand the symbols of faith, this concept is faith. A Christian who interprets the Bible then brings his faith into the act of interpreting. The question is, “Do we have to return to the primitive naivete? Not at all,” says Ricoeur. We cannot deny that we are living in the present and we already have a conceptual modern background but at the same time we then lose something which is the immediacy of belief.[49] We make less room for our belief in the effort to understand the symbols of faith. This is visible for example in academic interpretation as I have noted under the critical historical and literary analyses. Both interpretations dig deep to understand the meaning of the text without any direct influence of the faith of the interpreter. Hence, it could be understood as a scientific symbol that is not interfered by faith, “..., never, does the interpreter get near to what his text says UNLESS he lives in the aura of the meaning he is inquiring after.”[50] That is why Ricoeur framed the hermeneutic circle between understanding and trust.

According to Ricoeur, “This circle is not a vicious circle, it is not also a circle of death; [Circle] it is a circle of life and excitement.”[51] Ricoeur explainsthe nature of the hermeneutic circle and how we supposedly see what the circle offers. The circle is remarkable because it involves an element of self which is that all human beings must believe. This circle, according to Ricoeur,

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[47] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (trans. Emerson Buchanan; Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 351.

[48] In his other book, Ricoeur simply does not stop at the discussion of symbolism but further considers how metaphor is crucial for understanding the knowledge. See Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (trans. Robert Czerny et al.; London: Routledge, 2004).

[49] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 351.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

starts with the second phase, “we must believe in order to understand.”[52] Ricoeur's hermeneutic circle is not a circle that can be broken into two parts. The first phase requires a person to understand the need to believe first. It holds that a person attempting to understand texts and other religious symbols cannot be separated from their faith. Then Ricoeur moves to the second part, “we have to understand to believe,” which is a major part of the hermeneutical process. For Ricoeur, the interpretation process plays an important role in the second naivete part: “For both our immediacy way and a second naivete that we waited, no longer can we access anywhere without the interpretation; we can only trust to interpret.”[53] The first phase in the hermeneutic circle is the process of interpreting. The second is a prerequisite for completing the hermeneutic process. That is why the hermeneutic circle is a unity.

Eckhart's interpretations, though emerging from a period of 'first naivete,' demonstrate a profound respect for hermeneutical diversity. However, the fact that Eckhart predates modern critical methods must be acknowledged. His interpretations, focused more on belief than scientific analysis, must be held in dialogue with contemporary critical interpretations. Ricoeur's emphasis on integrating faith in interpretation highlights the enduring relevance of Eckhart's approach in contemporary hermeneutical discussions.

3 Eckhart’s Contribution Using Gadamer’s Fusion of Horizons

The dialogue with Paul Ricoeur highlights the significance of Meister Eckhart’s interpretation for the development of modern faith. This interpretation suggests that understanding biblical texts requires consideration of the reader's faith. Furthermore, a unique aspect of Eckhart's spiritual interpretation is its emphasis on using the Bible as a source of inspiration for spiritual development. By providing examples of individuals struggling with desire, Eckhart's interpretation positions the Bible as a pedagogical tool for spiritual enlightenment. Ricoeur's insights also shed light on the challenges faced by modern interpreters with academic backgrounds who cannot entirely detach from their contemporary contexts. This leads to the proposition that Eckhart's contributions could complement existing scholarly interpretations. Epistemologically, as Ricoeur suggests, modern readers of the Bible require more than just reflective knowledge processes. In the Indonesian context, scholarly interpretations, predominantly critical, historical and literary, often

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., 352. Ricouer’s concept of symbolism of evil has been widely used in theology and religious studies; see, for instance, Petruschka Schaafsma, “Evil and Religion: Ricoeurian Impulses for Theology in a Postsecular Climate,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 76/2 (2015): 129; Christina M. Gschwandtner, “Philosophical Reflections on the Shaping of Identity in Fundamentalist Religious Communities,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 24/5 (2016): 704.

overlook the faith aspect of readers, indicating a disconnect between academic biblical studies and faith.

The appropriation of Meister Eckhart's spiritual interpretation in Indonesian biblical studies can enrich the theological discourse. Incorporating spiritual perspectives alongside scholarly interpretations can provide a more holistic understanding of biblical texts on both intellectual and spiritual levels. To appropriate the contribution of Eckhart's spiritual interpretation in Indonesian biblical studies, adopting Hans Georg Gadamer's concept of the 'fusion of horizons' is proposed.[54] This concept involves merging the contemporary interpreter's horizon with that of the text's author. The aim of using Gadamer's framework is to integrate Eckhart's spiritual hermeneutics with existing scholarly interpretations, which are indispensable.[55]

Based on Gadamer's approach,[56] this article attempts to combine scholarly and spiritual interpretations. For instance, Eckhart's interpretation of Eccl 10:5–7, focusing on spiritual formation without considering literary and historical

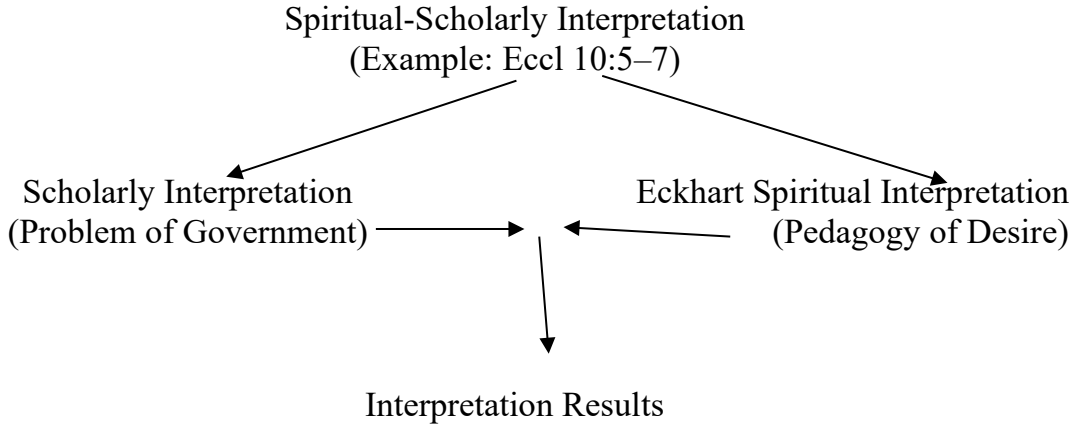
[54] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Kebenaran dan Metode: Pengantar Filsafat Hemerneutika* (trans. Ahmad Sahidah; Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010), 369. As a follow up to the discussion of the problem of religion and ethics in *Truth and Method,* in the years following the publication of that book, Gadamer returns frequently to the subject matter, as observed in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

[55] In the field of biblical studies, Thieselton uses Gadamer's hermeneutical theory in biblical studies; Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981); Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice in Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997); Anthony Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). Ferry Y. Mamahit argues that Thiselton's approach cannot solve the problem of cross-cultural encounter between complex various cultural backgrounds. Mamahit argues that Thiselton's fusion of hermeneutics needs to be complemented by the interpreter's sensitivity to various cultural complexity; see Ferry Y. Mamahit, "Hermeneutika Peleburan dua Horizon Anthony Thiselton dan Tantangan dari Antropologi Lintas Budaya," *Veritas: Jurnal Teologi dan Pelayanan* 18/1 (2019): 31. Overall, I wish to argue that Gadamer's hermeneutical theory has been used in biblical studies despite the controversy that follows his views.

[56] I am not the first to use Gadamer's perspective in the field of religious and cultural studies. See, for instance, Jear N. D. K. Nenohai, "Penerjemahan sebagai media pekabaran Injil Middelkoop ditinjau dari perspektif hermeneutika Hans Georg Gadamer," *Gema Teologika: Jurnal Teologi Kontekstual dan Filsafat Keilahian* 3/2 (2018); Matthew W. Knotts, "Readers, Texts, and the Fusion of Horizons: Theology and Gadamer's Hermeneutics," *Theologica* 4/2 (2014); Kakali Bhattacharya and Jeong-Hee Kim, "Reworking Prejudice in Qualitative Inquiry with Gadamer and De/colonizing Onto-epistemologies," *Qualitative Inquiry* 26/10 (2020); Adi Barak, "Fusing Horizons in Qualitative Research: Gadamer and Cultural Resonances," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 19/3 (2022): 768.

elements, can be integrated into the modern biblical interpretative process. This integration necessitates a dialogue between literary and historical understanding and spiritual considerations, fostering mutual acceptance and enrichment.

With this, I suggest a scheme of spiritual scholarly interpretation based on Eccl 10:5–7.



(Those in government are able to control their desires and practise compassion)

The core of this analytical scheme is fostering a dialogue between two distinct interpretative approaches. This integrated approach is exemplified by the analysis conducted in this article, particularly with regard to Eccl 10:5–7. The necessity of such a dialogue is grounded in the belief that different interpretations can enrich our understanding of biblical texts, allowing for a more nuanced and comprehensive grasp of their meanings. The article compares the scholarly interpretation of Eccl 10:5–7, which views the text as political commentary, with Eckhart’s interpretation that sees it as a discourse on pedagogy, desire and the practice of compassion. This comparative analysis aims to demonstrate how a dialogue between these interpretations can yield a more integrated understanding of the text, specifically in this case, portraying governance as an exercise of compassion uninfluenced by desire.

This analysis showcases Eckhart's contribution to the methodological approach, emphasising the importance of spirituality in interpreting texts. The integration of Eckhart's spiritual insights with scholarly interpretations enriches the understanding of the text, highlighting the role of spirituality in deriving meaning from biblical passages.

A methodological sequence is proposed for readers wishing to analyse biblical texts thus:

1. Selection of the text for analysis.
2. Analysis of the text from an academic perspective.
3. Identification of a relevant spiritual theme (e.g. Eckhart's pedagogy of desire).

4. Dialogue between the scholarly interpretation and the chosen spiritual theme.

This sequence is designed to guide readers in combining academic and spiritual perspectives in order to enhance their interpretation of the texts. The methodology offers readers the flexibility to choose texts and spiritual themes according to their interests, encouraging them to explore and derive personal meanings from the texts. The approach not only facilitates a deeper understanding of specific passages like Eccl 10:5–7 but also empowers readers to engage with biblical texts in a way that resonates with their own life experiences and spiritual journey.

4 Case Study: An Eckhartian Spiritual Interpretation of Eccl 10:5–7 as a Response to Corruption in Indonesian

As a case study in Indonesian context, I will continue the analysis of Eccl 10:5–7 with special consideration of the problem of corruption in Indonesian government. Due to the limitation of space and based on the previous analysis in this article, I will delve right into the dialogue between modern scholarly biblical interpretation and Eckhartian interpretation of the texts in light of the corruption problem. Therefore, as a background, I will briefly explicate the problem of governance in Indonesia based on the methodological steps of Eckhartian spiritual interpretation.

4a Problem of corruption in Indonesia

The detrimental impact of corruption on governance and societal life is a multifaceted issue that demands comprehensive exploration and understanding. At its core, corruption represents a significant deviation from ethical and legal standards, undermining the fundamental principles of fairness, justice and trust that are essential for the functioning of a state and its institutions. This essay examines the various dimensions of corruption's harmful effects, addressing its profound implications on economic prosperity, societal welfare, political integrity and the broader ambition of achieving sustainable development.

The persistent battle against corruption in Indonesia, marked by intensified sanctions against perpetrators and frequent high-profile arrests, underscores the deep-rooted nature of this challenge. Despite these efforts, corruption remains a stark reality, as illustrated by the shocking arrest of 41 out of 45 members of the Malang City Regional Representative Council (DPRD) by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). Similarly, the arrest of DPRD members in Mataram City for extortion related to disaster rehabilitation funds further highlights the pervasiveness of corruption. This essay examines the causes, obstacles, solutions and regulatory frameworks surrounding corruption in Indonesia, shedding light on its detrimental impact on society and individuals, the dangers it poses to the younger generation, its undermining effect on politics,

its destructive influence on the economy and its efficiency-draining effect on bureaucracy.[57]

The persistence of corruption can be attributed to multiple factors, including weak legal and institutional frameworks, lack of transparency, cultural tolerance of corruption and inadequate enforcement of mechanisms. Obstacles to combatting corruption include deeply ingrained practices, lack of political will, resistance from powerful elites benefitting from corrupt practices and the public's cynicism towards anti-corruption efforts.

Corruption erodes the fabric of society, leading to chaos and the breakdown of social systems. It fosters an environment where self-interest and selfishness prevail over co-operation and communal welfare. This atmosphere undermines social justice and equality, creating stark disparities in income, prestige and power among different social groups and individuals. The moral and intellectual standards of society deteriorate in the face of rampant corruption, which promotes greed, selfishness and cynicism.

Corruption in politics results in illegitimate governance, eroding public trust and obedience towards authorities. It damages democracy through unfair elections, violence and money politics, potentially leading to political instability and social disintegration. The struggle between corrupt powers and the citizenry often culminates in shameful breakdown of government.

Economic development is severely hindered by corruption. Projects laden with corrupt elements fail to achieve their economic growth potential, deterring both domestic and foreign investment. Since 1997, investors from developed countries have preferred to direct their direct foreign investments tocountries with lower corruption levels. Corruption leads to an inefficient bureaucracy, increasing administrative costs and degrading the quality of public services. The principle of a rational, efficient and quality bureaucracy is compromised, favouring only those who can afford to pay bribes for better services. This condition breeds social unrest, inequality and potentially, social upheaval.

Effective anti-corruption efforts require a comprehensive approach that includes strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, enhancing transparency and accountability, fostering public participation and cultivating a culture of integrity. Education and awareness programs are essential to changing societal attitudes towards corruption. Moreover, the enactment and enforcement of stringent anti-corruption laws, such as those outlined in Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) statutes, are crucial. The engagement of civil society and the media in monitoring and exposing corrupt practices also plays a pivotal role in these efforts.

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[57] Nandha Risky Putra and Rosa Linda, "Korupsi di Indonesia: Tantangan perubahan sosial," *Integritas: Jurnal Antikorupsi* 8/1 (2022): 15.

Corruption severely undermines the integrity of political institutions and erodes public trust in government. When elected officials and public servants engage in corrupt practices, they betray the trust placed in them by the citizens. This not only diminishes the legitimacy of the government but also hampers the effectiveness of governance. A corrupt judiciary compromises the rule of law, making it difficult to combat corruption as well as other forms of crime. A corrupt political environment discourages citizen participation and engagement in democratic processes, as the public becomes cynical about the potential for genuine reform and the efficacy of their participation.

Addressing the challenge of corruption requires the active involvement of all segments of society. Beyond legal and institutional reforms, a cultural shift towards transparency, integrity and accountability is essential. Civil society organisations, the media and the public at large play a crucial role in monitoring government actions, exposing corrupt practices and advocating for change. Thus, education and awareness raising are vital tools in building a societal consensus against corruption, empowering citizens to demand accountability from their leaders and institutions.[58]

The biblical reflection in this context will contribute to the cultural discussion of corruption in Indonesia. Based on Meister Eckhart's biblical hermeneutical approach, this reflection will contribute to how the government can counter this problem spiritually. I will continue this reflection using the Eckhartian spiritual interpretation I discussed earlier.

4b Methodological sequence

- Selection of the text for analysis: Eccl 10:5–7
- Analysis of the text from a scholarly perspective.

Drawing from the historical-interpretative analysis of Eccl 10:5–7, it is evident that Qohelet is not merely commenting on historical events but is in fact issuing a stern warning against a pervasive and detrimental practice in Middle Eastern kingdoms—the misplacement of individuals in governmental roles. This is not just an observation; it is a critique of a recurring injustice, in which the 'wrong man in the wrong place' leads to widespread consequences. Qohelet's words transcend mere advice; they are a clarion call for careful consideration and discernment in the selection of those who wield power, as their decisions shape the destiny of the populace. This passage is not just a historical commentary; it is a poignant and relevant critique of political mismanagement, echoing through the ages as a lesson yet to be fully heeded.

[58] Wicipto Setiadi, "Korupsi Di Indonesia: Penyebab, Bahaya, Hambatan dan Upaya Pemberantasan, Serta Regulasi," *Indonesian Journal of Legislation* 15/3 (2018): 250.

Having analysed Eccl 5–7 through a literary lens, it becomes clear that Qohelet sharply criticises the societal norm that only the wealthy are deemed fit for power. This exclusivity, rooted in the affluent's ability to sustain their positions, systematically bars individuals from other classes from rising to power. Qohelet specifically targets the prince, who, despite having a legitimate claim to authority through inheritance, is deemed unfit to rule. The failure of the rulers, as Qohelet sees it, lies in their inability to maintain their status, leading them to live a life akin to that of a slave. The scenario inversely comforts the enslaved, fostering a belief in the rightfulness of the prince's rule. The critique by Qohelet is a pointed commentary on the flawed power dynamics that privileges wealth over merit and skill in governance.

- *Identification of relevant spiritual theme*—Eckhart's pedagogy of desire

I draw on Eckhart’s pedagogy of desire for the previous analysis of Eccl 10:5–7. Eckhart interprets Eccl 10:5–7 as a metaphor for the dangers of uncontrolled desire and passion, equating them with ignorance. He cites the late Middle Ages philosopher Severius Anicius Manlius Boethius, who linked unbridled sensuality with lack of wisdom. For Eckhart, this uncontrolled desire is not only a personal failing but it also corrupts those in high positions, symbolising a subordination to these base instincts. This inversion of control in which passion dominates rather than being governed, represents a spiritual crisis. Eckhart emphasises that true compassion, like God’s compassion, is untainted by passion and sensuality. To achieve this divine compassion, one must shun these lower urges, allowing passion to follow, not lead. This interpretation serves as a call for spiritual discipline to achieve higher wisdom and purity.

- Dialogue between the scholarly interpretation and the chosen spiritual theme

In the context of addressing the pervasive issue of corruption in Indonesia, an innovative approach emerges from the integration of biblical reflection and the spiritual insights of Meister Eckhart. This study explores how the ancient wisdom of Eccl 10:5–7, based on Eckhart's hermeneutics, offers a profound spiritual framework for combatting corruption at its core.

Ecclesiastes 10:5–7 presents a poignant critique of political mismanagement and the misplacement of individuals in roles of power, a situation that resonates deeply with contemporary issues of governance in Indonesia. Qohelet's observations highlight the detrimental effects of placing the “wrong man in the wrong place,” resulting in widespread societal consequences. This ancient text serves as a historical commentary as well as a relevant admonition against the flawed selection processes in governance, where the wealthy are often favoured over the meritorious. Such practices not only undermine social justice but also perpetuate a cycle of inequality and inefficiency.

The analysis extends beyond a mere academic exercise, venturing into the realm of spiritual examination based on Meister Eckhart's interpretation. Eckhart, drawing on his profound understanding of spirituality and the teachings of Ecclesiastes, identifies an underlying theme of uncontrolled desire and passion as central to the discourse on corruption. He likens these unchecked impulses to ignorance, a spiritual ailment that blinds individuals to wisdom and virtue. For Eckhart, the solution lies not in the mere restructuring of external systems but in the cultivation of an inner detachment from base desires.

Eckhart's pedagogy of desire, informed by his interpretation of Eccl 10:5–7, suggests that the root of corruption lies in passion and sensuality. The spiritual crisis erupts because the leaders are controlled by desire, which in turn corrupts their ability to govern justly and wisely. The text implicitly criticises the societal norms that privilege wealth and status over true merit and competence, reflecting a profound disconnect between the spiritual and the material in the area of governance.

The idea of a pedagogy of desire that teaches individuals to control and direct their desire towards a positive end can be particularly effective in anti-corruption education. This would involve not just penalising corrupt behaviour but also promoting values and practices that fulfil individuals' needs and desires in constructive, ethical ways. For example, transparency, fair competition and recognition of merit can help curb the desire for success and recognition without resorting to corruption. Eckhart calls for detachment (*Gelassenheit*) from desire and passion, suggesting that true compassion and wisdom are free from the influence of lower instincts. This concept can be applied directly to the fight against corruption by promoting a culture in which public officials and citizens alike prioritise the common good over personal gain. By fostering an environment where detachment from selfish desires is valued, society can reduce the motivations that lead to corrupt behaviour.

The relevance of this spiritual theme to the contemporary struggle against corruption in Indonesia cannot be overstated. Eckhart's call for spiritual discipline, aimed at transcending lower urges, presents a radical yet foundational approach to reform. Corruption often stems from unchecked desires for power, wealth or status. A pedagogy of desire begins with an understanding of how these desires, though natural, can lead to destructive behaviours when not properly directed or controlled. It entails a comprehensive analysis of the desires that drive corrupt practices and the societal conditions that foster such desires, including inequality, lack of transparency and inadequate checks and balances.

By fostering a culture of detachment from material desires and emphasising the virtues of wisdom and purity, leaders can realign their governance with principles of justice and equity. This spiritual transformation, though deeply personal, has the potential to effect systemic change, guiding the

selection of leaders not by their wealth or status but by their integrity and capacity for compassionate governance.

In conclusion, the integration of biblical reflection and Eckhartian spirituality offers a unique perspective on the fight against corruption. It underscores the necessity of addressing not only the external manifestations of corruption but also its spiritual underpinnings. By revisiting the wisdom of Eccl 10:5–7 through Eckhart's interpretative lens, we are reminded that true reform begins with the transformation of the heart and mind, paving the way for a governance model that is both just and effective. This spiritual approach, deeply rooted in the wisdom of the ages, holds the promise of inspiring a new paradigm in the battle against corruption, one that harmonises the spiritual with the practical in the quest for a more equitable and virtuous society.

E CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERPRETING THE BIBLE IN INDONESIA

In the context of academic interpretation of the Bible in Indonesia, where emphasis is placed on the author and the text, figures like Eckhart are instrumental in bridging the gap between the biblical narrative world and the contemporary world of Indonesian readers. This approach extends beyond mere information and delves into the intricacies of spirituality. Eckhart's interpretation is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context, suggesting that biblical texts should not be viewed merely as historical documents but as living texts that continually resonate with and speak to readers. This perspective introduces the idea that there is no singular, absolute meaning of the text; meanings vary among different people and in Indonesia’s diverse cultural contexts. This viewpoint emphasises that spirituality is largely shaped by individual engagement with the biblical narrative, a concept that resonates deeply in Indonesia's diverse religious landscape.

Moreover, in the Indonesian theological academic context, Eckhart's approach emphasises the dynamic nature of biblical interpretation. It suggests that the Bible's meaning is not static but evolves through a dialogue between its academic interpretation and the principles of spirituality, a dialogue that is particularly pertinent in Indonesia’s multi-faceted religious society. Eckhart's teachings demonstrate that understanding the Bible requires a dialogue with spirituality, acknowledging the importance of disciplined spiritual practice, which is a concept that aligns with the Indonesian value of religious devotion.

Furthermore, Eckhart's interpretation offers a unique perspective on spiritual inspiration in the Indonesian context. Eckhart advocates for interpreters to act as humble guides, echoing Indonesia's cultural emphasis on humility and respect. This is evident in his teachings on the humility of the heart, which resonates with the Indonesian ethos of modesty in spiritual practice. Eckhart's stance against the monopolisation of biblical interpretation by a few aligns with

Indonesia's democratic and pluralistic approach to religious interpretation. Eckhart's contributions to academic interpretation in Indonesia is significant, as its hermeneutics encourages interpreters to approach the Bible with humility, recognising the limitations of one's understanding and the need to allow space for diverse Indonesian readers to find their own meanings in life. This approach is particularly relevant in Indonesia where religious and cultural diversity necessitates a flexible and inclusive approach to spiritual texts.

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