

[1968. In *Encyclopedia of Christianity*. Edwin A. Palmer, ed. Wilmington, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education.]

ERIUGENA, John Scotus (c. 810 – c. 877), medieval philosopher. Barbarian invasions with resulting anarchy destroyed Roman civilization and virtually eradicated learning from 450 to 800. Charlemagne founded schools in Paris, Fulda, and Tours; but they collapsed at his death, and Charles the Bald asked John the Scot, born in Erin, to reorganize at least the one in Paris.

Eriugena translated Dionysius the Areopagite (q.v.) into Latin and completely absorbed in his neo-Platonic philosophy. His first original work, written at the request of Hincmar, Bishop of Reims, was a refutation of the Augustinian (indeed the Pauline) doctrine of predestination as held by the monk Gottschalk. Gottschalk was imprisoned and tortured until he died. But Eriugena's refutation did not find favor either, for it is a mixture of Pelagian, neo-Platonic, and pantheistic ideas.

Eriugena's most significant work is entitled *De divisione naturae*, published about 867. It suffered ecclesiastical condemnation at least three times, but the author was not tortured, though he was a pantheist. According to *De divisione naturae* nature has four divisions. First there is that which creates but is not created. This is God, the cause of all being and non-being. God is a Trinity, of one essence and three substances. The coeternal Word contains the Ideas, themselves created. These Ideas or primordial causes are the second division of nature: that which is created and creates. Third are things in space: that which does not create but is created. The fourth division is that which neither creates nor is created; that is, God again, not as Creator but as End, the completion of salvation.

Man and all things, the multiplicity of the world, are finally united with God by the redeeming Logos. Man becomes penetrated with God as air is penetrated with light; and then God shall be all in all, when there is nothing but God alone. This reabsorption of all things into God seems pantheistic, but it need not be conscious pantheism. Eriugena qualifies the union with God by the phrase *adunatio sine confusione, vel mixtura, vel compositione*. Scholars find difficulty in agreeing on an interpretation.

Eriugena adopts the negative theology of Dionysius. All language about God must be understood metaphorically and symbolically. God has no name, no predicate; one can only say that God is super-essential, super-good, etc. What such expressions symbolize, no one knows.

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