

**NICHOLAS OF CUSA'S
DIDACTIC SERMONS:
A SELECTION**

Translated and introduced

by

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PREFACE

The title of this present volume tends to be misleading. For it suggests that Nicholas's *didactic* sermons are to be distinguished from his *non-didactic* ones—ones that are, say, more inspirational and less philosophical, or more devotional and less theological, or more situationally oriented and less Scripturally focused. Yet, in truth, all 293 of Nicholas's sermons are highly didactic, highly pedagogical, highly exegetical.¹ To be sure, there are inspirational and devotional elements; but they are subordinate to the primary purpose of teaching. Likewise, only occasionally² do the sermons show signs of addressing local circumstances that are idiosyncratic to the respective churches in Koblenz, Trier, Mainz, Augsburg, Frankfurt, Brixen, and Rome. Rather, their Scriptural focus more often than not yields up interpretations that are allegorical—or otherwise figurative—in a general way that allows Nicholas to draw inferences about the relationship between the intellect and the senses, about the unity of the virtues, the two natures in Christ, human freedom of will, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the inter-relationship of faith and reason, the triune nature of God, the role of conscience, the precepts of the natural law, time as the image of eternity, the four stages of a knowledge of God, Christ as Wisdom Incarnate, God as Beauty, the Holy Spirit as Love, ... and so on. Each of the sermons contains more than one major theme, so that no sermon dwells at length upon a single topic so as to sound pedantic and inappropriately academic. On the contrary: in a limited measure Nicholas's sermons tend to entice through their extensive display of original metaphor, of striking imagery, of fresh vocabulary, and of erudite knowledge of earlier writers such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Anselm, Albertus Magnus, and Meister Eckhart.

Given the wealth of the overlapping themes that one encounters in the sermons,³ I found the attempt to group them by topic to be unmanageable. And it seemed of little value to arrange them merely in chronological sequence. Accordingly, both my principle of selection and my principle of arrangement turned out to be purely subjective: I selected the sermons that most appealed to me, and I arranged them according to my own degree of interest in them.

The translations were made from the Latin texts contained in Volumes XVI – XIX of the series *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag). The printed editions of these texts are

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exemplary when it comes to their identifying Nicholas's sources; and the collations themselves bear the marks of the masterly meticulousness with which their editors worked. My appending, to this present volume, a short list of additions and corrections does not belie the outstanding work of the respective editors. Rather, the list attests to how exceedingly painstaking it is to work with Medieval manuscripts; furthermore, it attests to the fact that even when the most competent scholars do their very best, their accomplishment inevitably falls short of utter perfection—though not of our utter admiration for the very high degree of perfection that has been attained.

I am especially appreciative of the fact that these scholarly editors, who are associated either directly or indirectly with the Institut für Cusanus-Forschung, agreed to let me see pre-publication copies of the most recently published fascicles of the sermons. I cite, in the Bibliography, the names of all the editors of the fascicles that comprise Volumes XVI – XIX, which constitute the complete sermons.

Since I have now reached the age in life where this present set of translations will have to conclude my major scholarly activity, I would like to pay tribute to those German colleagues from whose writings on Cusanus, and from personal contact with whom, I have over the years continually profited. I am thinking of the early director of the Cusanus Institute, Prof. Rudolf Haubst[†]; of the two subsequent co-directors, Profs. Klaus Kremer[†] and Klaus Reinhardt; of the historian Prof. Erich Meuthen; and of Prof. Werner Beierwaltes, Head of the Cusanus-Commission of the Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. There are, of course, others in whose scholarly debt I stand. Mention of them all by name would, though deserved, be here too lengthy.⁴

The present volume was completed during my sabbatical leave from the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota. Before the leave even began, I was aided by the University's Alice A. Welch, of the Department of Inter-Library Loans in Wilson Library. She expeditiously obtained for me articles and books that were relevant to the present project. Ingrid Fuhrmann in the Secretariat of the Cusanus Institute was also helpful in expeditious ways, as was also the Institute's Dr. Alfred Kaiser.

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NOTES TO THE PREFACE

1. In Sermon CCXXXVI Nicholas states that his preaching on this feast-day will be briefer than usual so that those who have come (to Brixen) from a distance may return home to the fields at this time of Harvest. Elsewhere (Sermon CXLVII (8)) he admonishes against priests' taking money for hearing confessions. And still elsewhere (Sermon CCLX (3)) he upbraids local parishioners who partake of the Eucharist without paying attention to the sermon.

2. Hervé Martin, *Le métier de prédicateur en France septentrionale à la fin du Moyen Âge (1350 – 1520)* [Paris: Cerf, 1988], distinguishes didactic sermons from sermons that teach about a religious subject (pp. 573 f.). However, I am using the term “didactic” in a broader sense—one that includes a reference to teaching, whether teaching about a religious subject or not.

3. See, for example, the many different themes in Sermon CLXXXVII or in Sermon CLXXXIX.

4. I will, however, mention especially also Italy's Prof. Giovanni Santinello,[†] along with Germany's Dr. Hermann Schnarr and Dr. Gerhard G. Senger—all of whom have made invaluable contributions to Cusanus scholarship, as has also Prof. Walter A. Euler, the current director of the Cusanus Institute.

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INTRODUCTION TO CUSA'S SERMONS

1. *Preliminary Remarks.* Nicholas of Cusa's sermons display a richness of terminology and metaphor, a detailed conversance with Scripture, and a fecund interlacing of themes. The sermons dare not be ignored by anyone who seeks to fathom the mind of this fifteenth-century philosopher and theologian. For in terms of importance they are comparable to Nicholas's other writings. Not only do they embody many of the motifs that are dealt with in the systematic treatises and in the dialogues, but they even enhance these motifs in appreciable ways. One example of an enhancement is seen in Sermon XXIII (15), where each of us is asked to imagine that he is Adam and has been placed in the world as was Adam. We are then shown by Nicholas how from the world we could be led, through an observation of the world's natural objects and processes, to a knowledge of God's existence—and even of His triunity. This discussion, through its pithiness and through its very starting point, enhances and redirects and refocuses the approach taken in *De Docta Ignorantia* I and II.

Nicholas wrote down some of his sermons *after* they were preached, others of them *before* they were preached; and several of them were preached without ever being written down. Almost all of the ones written down are sermon-sketches, rather than full-fledged literary accomplishments, although a few of them—e.g., Sermons XXII, XXIV, and XLI—are “small theological masterpieces,” to borrow Walter Euler's description.¹ Moreover, all the sermons are written in Latin, except for Sermon XXIV, which was composed by Nicholas in German. In addition, Sermon LXXVI was written down in German by a hearer in Vienna, where Nicholas preached it. In fact, Nicholas preached mainly in German, although we have no actual record of his German wordings other than the words found in the two sermons just indicated. And even those words may not all have been the actual words, or actual sequences of words, as preached. That Nicholas sometimes also preached in Latin—especially to the clergy and especially in Rome—cannot seriously be doubted. Yet, the exact number of occasions on which he so preached remains a matter of surmise. We must avoid assuming that the sermons preached in Latin were the ones that we find written down in better, more stylized, Latin. For it could easily be the case that other sermons—ones not preached in Rome but preached nonetheless before clergy—were preached in Latin, *as the*

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more simplified Latin could be said to attest!

One manuscript of the sermons, viz., Codex Cusanus 220, contains copies of sermons written in Nicholas's own hand. Two other manuscripts, *Codices Vaticani* 1244 and 1245, though not autographs, were commissioned by Nicholas and were examined and corrected by him. At this juncture, we must avoid making a second dubious assumption—viz., the assumption that just because Nicholas looked over these two manuscripts they contain the more reliable readings whenever they conflict with the readings of the other manuscripts; for such need not be the case. For example, in Sermon CCLX, at 24:10, the editors of the printed edition of that Latin text opt for the word “contracta” because *Codex Vaticanus* 1245 has this word. However, the correct reading is “incontracta”, which both *Codex Magdeburg* 38 (Berlin) and *Codex Ashburnham* 1374 (Florence) have.

2. *Important Minor Themes.* From the sermons we glean many points, some of which are more significant than are others but all of which are of interest. Among the interesting but relatively minor points are such poignant observations as the following ten: (a) The Virgin Mary was indeed very beautiful; yet, her beauty was not a seductive beauty.² (b) The Layman (Latin: *Idiota*) whom Nicholas fictionalizes as a discussant in his works *Idiota de Sapientia*, *Idiota de Mente*, and *Idiota de Staticis Experimentis* is taken by Nicholas to be illiterate³ but to be capable, nonetheless, of reading the world-book, i.e., the book of nature. (c) Every sin that is contrary to love is a mortal sin.⁴ (d) He who seeks God only when it benefits him loves himself more than he loves God.⁵ (e) He who loves himself more than he loves God ends up in eternal self-hatred.⁶ (f) Christ is *minimus homo* (the smallest human being) because, unlike others, He was a complete human being from the moment of His conception.⁷ (g) In this present world there is no such thing as a perfect circle (as even Plato taught).⁸ (h) In Deuteronomy 6:5 and Luke 10:27 man is commanded to love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind. Although one cannot do so without the assistance of Divine grace, and cannot in this lifetime do so perfectly even with the assistance of grace, one can nevertheless come to love God in such a way that he loves nothing as much as he loves God, i.e., loves nothing more than he loves God.⁹ (i) Solomon was first a man and then was wise; Christ was first Wisdom and then was a man.¹⁰ (j) God cannot hate anything that He has created; but He can love one thing more than another.¹¹

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3. *Important Major Themes.* It soon becomes evident that the foregoing sample of themes is not really a sample of *minor* themes—at least, not if the themes are considered in and of themselves. They may be called “relatively minor” only inasmuch as, and insofar as, Nicholas chooses not to develop them either in the written sermons or elsewhere. Yet, certainly, he could easily have expanded upon them had he chosen to; and, for all we know, he did so in his oral delivery from the pulpit. Other of his themes may be called “relatively major” themes in the corresponding sense that they are developed more extensively either within the total corpus of sermons or within his other works. Let us explore but four of these focal areas.

3.1. *Faith and Reason.* The first thing that strikes one regarding Nicholas’s treatment—in the sermons—of the relationship between faith and reason is how different the emphasis is from the emphasis in his treatises and dialogues. In particular, the ostensible role of faith is *promoted*, and the ostensible role of reason is *demoted*.

3.1.1. In the sermons Nicholas speaks of faith as overcoming, or vanquishing, reason;¹² and he even speaks of faith as belief that goes against reason.¹³ Moreover, this perspective is found not only in the late sermons but even in the early ones. Sermon IV, for example, portrays faith as bridging the gap when reason founders while encountering improbability. In that same sermon God is said to be believed-in not only without proof but also without evidentness.¹⁴ And in Sermon XII (34) we are told to elevate ourselves unto God by pure faith rather than by means of signs, examples, empirical evidences. No amount of empirical evidence, for instance, will show that in the Eucharist the bread is transubstantiated into the Body of Christ. Similarly, no amount of empirical evidence that is available to natural reason will suffice to prove that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is God incarnate.¹⁵

Christ’s performing of miracles tends to support the belief that He is the Son of God.¹⁶ And yet, empirical reason can always maintain that these unusual events are not real miracles, for it cannot establish that they are worked *by the power of God*. Moreover, natural reason cannot understand how it is that while Jesus’s body lay dead in the tomb, His soul descended unto the lower parts of the earth, as Ephesians 4:9 teaches, or descended unto Hell, as certain of the creeds state. Although the super-wondrous mystery of the union of Christ’s divine nature with His human nature is altogether incomprehensible, says Nicholas, it is not unbelievable.¹⁷ Indeed, faith,

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based on revelation, impels one to believe in spite of one's not understanding.¹⁸

Moreover, continues Nicholas making use of a metaphor, faith is sterile, is barren: it has no reasons; it begets, produces, educes, adduces no reasons.¹⁹ Indeed, the more reasons it would evince, the less it would be entitled to be called faith.²⁰ So, whereas the intellect is fertile—ever adducing, formulating, furnishing rational grounds—faith does not rely upon rational grounds. Abraham is regarded by Nicholas as epitomizing the man of faith. Abraham believed that God would help Sarah to conceive, even though she was past the age of child-bearing²¹ and even though experience taught that such conceiving would be counter to past experience. Yet, Abraham believed that with God all things are possible. Even *that* is possible which, for us, is highly *improbable* and, hence, unreasonable to expect. Yet, Abraham's trust in God and his belief in God's word went still further: for, later still, he believed—against all human experience—that if he obeyed God by sacrificing Isaac, God would resurrect Isaac from the dead.²² He *believed*—even though natural reason tells us that resurrection from the dead is empirically *impossible*.²³ Abraham's reason must die, says Nicholas, in order that his faith should live.²⁴

3.1.2. Surely, the foregoing declarations are extreme; and they have no parallel in Nicholas's systematic works. Yet, in the sermons they are not altogether untempered and unqualified, although their emphasis does prevail. In order to apprehend Nicholas's true perspective, we must approach his topic as he develops it: viz., dialectically.²⁵ That is, when we ask on his behalf whether faith vanquishes reason, we must recognize that he answers both *Yes* and *No*. And we must discern that in order to apprehend the truth about his position, we are required to bring both of these answers into a unity of consciousness. We have just seen how it is that reason *is* suspended,²⁶ how reason is said to have to die, to have to be vanquished. And yet, reason *is not* vanquished. For it is needed by faith, since the basis of faith is the fact of God's existence²⁷ and since the belief that God exists is reasonable. We have already alluded to the early Sermon XXIII, where in section **15** Nicholas sketches a line of reasoning to the effect that if we were to enter the world as did Adam, and if we were alone as was Adam originally, we could be led, reflectively, by our observations of the empirical world, unto a knowledge of God. Nicholas advances a corresponding line of reasoning in his later Sermon CLXXXVII (2):

Since whatever things the perceptible world contains are finite,

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they cannot exist of themselves. For the finite can exist in a way different from the way it does exist; and so, its *being* is not eternity, which cannot exist in a way other than it does. Nor is [the world's *being*] infinity or absolute necessity. And so, if that which is not eternity itself were to exist from itself, it would exist before it existed—[something impossible]. Thus, then, we come, necessarily, to a Beginning of all finite things—[a Beginning] which is infinite . . . , etc.

Only a modicum of intelligence is needed, thinks Nicholas, in order to grasp a line of reasoning such as the foregoing one.²⁸ And such a line of reasoning furnishes a foundation for faith, so that now Nicholas may speak plausibly of “the certitude of faith” (*certitudo fidei*)²⁹ and of “doubtless faith” (*indubia fides*).³⁰ Given this foundation and given the belief-in-God that is supported by it, the believer can go on to sense the sustaining presence of God in his life. As the Psalmist counsels: “O taste and see that the Lord is sweet.”³¹ This experiential knowledge is of more worth, thinks Nicholas, than are the attempts to understand with the intellect just *what* God is.

3.1.3. And now we are back at the *Yes*: faith does vanquish reason when we seek to know what God is. For God is beyond knowability by finite minds. Such minds can only symbolize God, can only select appropriate metaphors by means of which to envision Him. For just as the body's eye cannot look directly at the sun, which is so bright as to be blinding, so too the mind's eye, i.e., the intellect, cannot gaze upon the Infinite Brightness that God is.³² But in recognizing that God is Something than which nothing better can be thought, the intellect can recognize that God is Goodness itself,³³ is Beauty itself,³⁴ is Love itself.³⁵ Thus, at this juncture, the answer again becomes *No*: the intellect is not overwhelmed; rather, it is needed for discerning what the description of God is and for discerning that the Being that answers to this description is Infinite and, thus, beyond all positive human conception.³⁶ We can conceive of what this Being is not;³⁷ we can conceive, for instance, that it is not not-Love. But we can have no positive, non-metaphorical conception of what Infinite Divine Love either is or is like, since between the finite and the Infinite there is no proportional relation.³⁸ But of this very fact—the fact of infinite disproportionality—reason is the one to inform us. Furthermore, through our knowledge of the historical Christ we learn something of what God's Love is like *ad nos* (i.e., in relation to us), though never what it is *in se* (i.e., in and of itself).

3.1.4. So, in the end, Nicholas in and through his sermons never

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loses sight of the essential role of reason, even though he accentuates the role of faith. Reason sees *that God is* but cannot see, non-symbolically, *what God is* in and of Himself. Reason sees, as Nicholas puts it, that faith's sterility is really a kind of fertility.³⁹ For faith leads to truth. For not only does believing sometimes lead to understanding,⁴⁰ but also one's acting upon the teaching of Christ will oftentimes have the result that one will come to discern that Christ's teachings are true.⁴¹ The intellect discerns, too, even its own weakness⁴² and even the fact of its own darkeness:⁴³ "The object of the will is the good. But sin so darkens and depresses the intellect that it makes the good to seem to be the bad." Thus, Nicholas is alert to the phenomenon that theologians refer to as the noetic effect of sin.⁴⁴

As one would expect, Nicholas agrees with Augustine and with Scripture that faith is a gift of God, is a grace.⁴⁵ For unaided by God, one does not come to have faith, does not come to say with Job "I know that my Redeemer liveth."⁴⁶ For the knowledge referred to by Job is the kind of *certitude* that comes by faith, not the kind of *certainty* that comes from "seeing is believing." Faith's certitude is grounded in religious experience; empirical certainty is grounded in perceptual experience. Faith, says Nicholas, is a *visio invisibilis*, a seeing of the invisible⁴⁷ — *toto caelo* different from ordinary perceptual vision. The ability-to-believe is, teaches Nicholas, the highest power of the soul;⁴⁸ it excels the intellectual power, even as the intellectual power excels the perceptual power. Nicholas is also willing to agree with Augustine that, in a more ordinary sense, believing differs from thinking, insofar as to believe is to think *with assent*.⁴⁹ Yet, although one's believing that Jesus is the Son of God is his thinking this proposition and assenting to it, nonetheless this kind of believing first becomes religious faith when one obeys Christ; for belief without obedience is not faith of the sort that makes one pleasing to God. And only the latter kind of faith is saving faith. In the sermons Nicholas seems to go beyond Augustine's emphasis on *cum assensione cogitare* when he speaks of our assenting as being our freely bringing our intellect into submission (*servitus*).⁵⁰ But this discrepancy is only apparent, for Nicholas is viewing the intellect as at times wayward, because of pride, so that it is in need of the guidance of revelation. And Augustine held this same view.

3.1.5. Let there be no doubt about the fact that Nicholas is not really asking the man of faith to discard reason altogether, not really asking him to let reason die, in an unqualified sense. Rather, he is ask-

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ing only that reason realize its own limitations and accept the legitimacy of faith. He is clear about his claim that reason can assure us of the existence of God but that reason cannot think God's nature and God's attributes except metaphorically. Thus, when he speaks of knowing that God *exists*, he emphasizes the power of reason and of intellect, whereas when he speaks of knowing God's *nature*, he emphasizes faith and revelation and symbolism. Regarding the *former emphasis*, we must not lose sight of such passages as Sermon XX (5:6-11), where we read:

[We ascend unto God] by way of *perceptible things* qua things caused. According to Augustine, this fact [holds true] for several reasons: either (a) because nothing has brought itself into existence or (b) because from what is changeable we must come [inferentially] to what is Unchangeable, from the imperfect we must come to the Perfect, from what is good we must come to what is Best, etc.

Regarding the *latter emphasis*, we must not lose sight of passages such as Sermon CXXXV (17:15-20):

Note that God is visible not to the outer eyes (which are capable of attaining [only] material and temporal objects) but to the eye of the heart (and this is the intellect). And He is visible to the eye of the intellect only in accordance with the condition of the world, viz., only by means of symbolism.

Sometimes the point about the Divine Nature's being knowable by us only symbolically, and never as it is in and of itself, is expressed by Nicholas paradoxically: God, because of His *infinite knowability*, is *unknowable*.⁵¹ But Nicholas adds: He is unknowable, analogously to the way in which light, visible of itself, may, because of its resplendence, be unseeable by our eyes, which become temporarily blinded.

3.1.6. In the sermons, then, we find that Nicholas, like Augustine, does not lose sight of the importance of reason in rendering belief in God's existence not just plausible but also assured. Yet, reason, unaided by grace, by revelation, by religious experience, cannot arrive at the Christian God—the Incarnate God.⁵² Nonetheless, it can arrive at the true belief that God is triune,⁵³ even if it can never conceive properly of God's *non-numerical* triunity.⁵⁴ Accordingly, a balanced interpretation of Nicholas's position requires us to recognize that some of his remarks are rhetorical flourish, are dramatizations, are super-emphases that make their point hyperbolically—as one might expect in a sermon but not in a treatise.

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In order better to appreciate the rhetorical force of Nicholas's sermons, and so that we may better make allowances for it, we may focus upon a striking instance of it:

[The following] is a lovely contemplation: [viz.,] how it is that our soul—by *renouncing freedom of choice* (which is the life of the rational spirit) [and] by subjecting itself to the authority of God's word ([an authority] made evident to us through Christ)—dies unto itself and by thus dying enters into life. [The soul dies unto itself] because within it there reigns only the enlivening and nourishing word-of-God—[a state] that comes about through the faith that the word of God has been revealed to us through the Son.⁵⁵

Now, obviously, the soul cannot, in an unqualified sense, renounce its use of free choice. It can do so only in the qualified sense of freely placing itself under the rule and guidance of the word of God as taught by Christ—that is, by choosing to obey God's commands and by continually reaffirming this decision. But such a reaffirmation does not constitute either a suspension of (the use of) free choice or a relegating of free choice from oneself. Indeed, we must not interpret Nicholas's statement radically. Similarly, when Nicholas states that a believer ought to exercise a faith that *overcomes* reason, that *vanquishes* reason, he must be interpreted not radically but in the light of other things that he says in favor of the emergence of confirming grounds—things such as that in the soul the Christian faith is as sight,⁵⁶ that Christ is *ratio absoluta*,⁵⁷ that *visio intellectualis* results from *fides*, i.e., “that through the certitude of faith one arrives at love for God and that together with love that is rooted in faith there comes an intellectual vision, i.e., knowledge; for by means of love a living faith proceeds continually onwards unto seeing and unto knowledge.”⁵⁸

3.2. *Four Levels of a Knowledge of God's Nature.* In further developing his conception of the knowledge of God, Nicholas in Sermon CCLVIII distinguishes four levels of access to God, four levels of God's accessibility. The first level differs considerably from the approach of natural theology, even though Nicholas refers to it as natural knowledge. For it is natural not in the sense that one makes inferences from observations of material objects within the cosmos, or world, but in the sense that one's own natural desires afford some understanding of what God is—insofar as we can form a conception of His perfection.⁵⁹

3.2.1. Man, says Nicholas, is by virtue of his rational nature

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inclined toward truth, justice, goodness, life, knowledge. And through these things man is naturally inclined toward God, in whom these things are one.⁶⁰ For, as Augustine reasoned in *De Libero Arbitrio* II, God is either Truth itself or Something higher than Truth, if there is something higher. A similar point, thinks Nicholas, holds for Justice, Goodness, etc. And so, like Augustine, Nicholas finds it natural to conceive of God—who is envisioned as the object of rational human nature’s desires—in terms of the moral and ontological perfections that the mind and the rational will are directed toward. Accordingly, he deems the names of these perfections to be appropriate names for God—appropriate, that is, for purposes of prayer and of worship.

3.2.2. But there is a second, and higher, way of conceiving of God, viz., the negative way, which Nicholas refers to as “*via mystica negationis*.”⁶¹ He calls the way of negation *mystical* in the sense that it is a hidden mode of knowledge, for it does not disclose just what God is but signifies only what He is not. And yet, notes Nicholas, negative propositions about God implicitly entail affirmative propositions about Him. Hence, the negation “God is not nameable” implies the affirmation “God exceeds everything nameable.” However, this affirmation does not yield a positive notion of the Divine Nature. Accordingly, negations are “truer” statements about God than are affirmations.⁶² For it is truer to say, for example, “God is not life” than to say “God is Life.” For the former implies that God is more than life, or than Life, whereas the latter does not. Indeed, the *via mystica negationis* likewise implies that God is not not-life, since He is beyond the distinction between life and not-life. So at this second level, the rational human spirit conceives of God as transcending everything that would constitute the unitive perfectibility of the objects of its inclinations.

3.2.3. But the rational human spirit that truly loves God may hope to obtain a third kind of access to God: viz., a face-to-Face seeing of God. This vision is reserved for the next life, although the Apostle Paul⁶³ obtained a foretaste of it in this lifetime; and others, too, may be graced with such a mystical foretasting. Paul’s *praegustatio mystica* differs from the *via mystica negationis* inasmuch as it is an *encountering* and not simply a *conceptualizing*. It is mystical because it takes place not only beyond the five senses and the imagination but also beyond the reason and the intellect, so that it is a non-cognitive encounter in which the soul is aware non-conceptually and non-per-

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ceptually—though not non-intuitively—of its unitive encounter with Divine Goodness and Divine Love. In Sermon CCLVIII Nicholas describes this encounter as a face-to-Face vision in which the Face of God is still somewhat bedarkened, in the sense that no knowledge of His Essence is acquired.

Elsewhere in speaking of mystical encounter, Nicholas uses more radical language—language reminiscent of Meister Eckhart. For, like Eckhart, he speaks of our being transubstantiated into the life of Christ.⁶⁴ But when he thus speaks, he is no longer thinking of mystical encounter in the way that, say, Hugh of Balma⁶⁵ thinks of it. Rather, he is expressing the fact of each believer's union with Christ—expressing it in a theologically hyper-vivid, hyper-rhetorical way. That is, Nicholas uses the expression “face-to-Face vision of God” in two different senses: (a) face-to-Face₁ experience of God—call it mystical experience—occurs in this lifetime and is an experience reserved for but relatively few. By contrast, (b) face-to-Face₂ experience of God—call it sonship (*filialio*)—will be attained, by all believers, in the next lifetime. Unlike mystical experience, sonship does not involve the suspension of the activity of the intellect. Sonship is perfected in the next life, although it begins in this life—begins upon conversion, as Nicholas indicates in Sermon CLXXXVI (13:5-7).

So we need to distinguish between (1) Nicholas's claims about mystical experience, (2) his claims about sonship, and (3) his claims about a believer's being incorporated into Christ,⁶⁶ his being transformed into Christ,⁶⁷ Christ's “digesting” the believer into Himself.⁶⁸ The radical-sounding phrases “transformation into,” “incorporation into,” and “digestion into” belong to the rhetoric of preaching and are meant both to grab attention and to articulate the theological doctrine of the believer's union with God through Christ. Every believer, upon conversion, is translated unto and into eternal life. As Nicholas writes: “By means of Your death we have been translated unto life, even as the priest transubstantiates bread into Your Body on the altar.”⁶⁹ But when Nicholas speaks more carefully, and less rhetorically, he expresses the same point by implying that the believer becomes transformed into a more and more perfect *image* of Christ, whom he loves.⁷⁰ The believer is supposed to seek to become ever more *Christlike*, ever more *Godlike*.⁷¹ And although Nicholas states that believers become deified, he never means that they become God or have their human nature transformed into becoming the Divine Nature. Nor does Nicholas teach, à la Averroës, that after the soul leaves the body, it loses its per-

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sonal identity and becomes one with the world-soul.

So whereas in the treatises and the dialogues Nicholas sticks with the terms “*deiformis*” and “*Christiformis*,” he prefers in the sermons the expressions “*in Christum transformari*” and “*in Deum transformari*.” But the transformation that is being spoken of is a spiritual transformation, not an ontological transformation. For the Divine Nature and the human nature remain forever distinct, even though through participation in Christ’s human nature a believer’s human nature obtains its perfection.⁷² A striking instance of Nicholas’s use of dramatic language is seen in Sermon CCLXXXIV (7), where we read: “He who believes in Jesus becomes ‘Jesus,’ i.e., ‘saved’. For Jesus is the Savior.” Here Nicholas appeals, dramatically, to the fact that the name “Jesus” means “Savior,”⁷³ so that, figuratively speaking, in becoming saved from sins one may be said to become ‘Jesus’. But just as here Nicholas is making a spiritual point and not a point about ontological identity, so in his stating that a believer becomes transformed into Christ, he is also making only a spiritual point. This fact becomes perfectly patent in Sermon CCLXXII (13):

The inner man ... can be like Christ. I mean “like” not with respect to an exact likeness, which cannot be attained, but with respect to a certain outcome, which in each [inner man] is distinct. By way of illustration: all men partake of the incorruptible specific form of humanity, although one man does so differently from another man. Therefore, that transformation [i.e., transforming likeness] by means of which a man is transformed in spirit (i.e., in the inner man) can occur, other things being equal, all the while that the man remains a man.

For just as the Lord who is the Son of God put on the form of a servant,⁷⁴ so the servants who are sons of Adam put on the form of the Lord in baptism, (where they are anointed with lotus oil), so that they may be Christlike.⁷⁵

3.2.4. The fourth level of a knowledge of God is the knowledge that God has of Himself and of His own Quiddity. No finite mind has this knowledge.⁷⁶ And since God is the only Infinite Mind, then only Infinity itself, viz., God, knows Infinity itself. Even in the next lifetime human minds will have no knowledge of God as He is in and of Himself. Rather, they will have a fuller knowledge of God as He is knowable in and through Christ, with whom each believer’s soul will be more perfectly united. In Sermon CCLVIII (14-15), which dates from 1456, Nicholas is espousing the same position that he put forth in *De Docta Ignorantia* I, 26 (88), completed in 1440. But even earli-

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er—viz., in Sermon XVI (8), preached on Christmas Day, 1432, perhaps in Koblenz—Nicholas stated that “the primary object of the Divine Intellect is God Himself.” This is a point that harks back not only to Thomas Aquinas but also to Albertus Magnus and to Aristotle, by both of whom Aquinas was influenced.

But unlike Aristotle, and more in line with St. Albert and St. Thomas, Nicholas maintains that God knows not only Himself but also individuals and everything that He has created:

As Artisan of all things, God knows the species and forms of these things, even as a writer [knows] the letters formed by himself, of which he is the cause.... God knows, in a more perfect way, all that angels or men know or can know. He works all in all. And so, He not only knows generally but also knows each thing individually; for otherwise His knowledge would not be perfect.⁷⁷

But just as God is an Artisan who has intimate knowledge of all that He has made, so too He wills to be known through all that He has made. Thus, the heavens declare the glory of God,⁷⁸ and, thus, God created rational beings in order that they might see His glory and display His glory in themselves.⁷⁹ But man, in sinning, robbed God of His glory, as it were. For thereby he marred human nature and in that way detracted from God’s artisanship, as it were. Here Nicholas follows Anselm’s account in the *Cur Deus Homo* and emphasizes with Anselm both God’s glory and His honor.⁸⁰

Now, although the magnificence of God’s power, wisdom, and craftsmanship are displayed in the universe, Nicholas teaches lucidly that the universe is not ‘God in His visible state of Being’. That is, Nicholas distances himself clearly from pantheism. It is therefore ironic that he should at times have been accused of pantheism. This charge was brought, initially, by his contemporary John Wenck, who in *De Ignota Litteratura* ascribed to Nicholas the doctrine that “all things coincide with God,” so that “God is the Totality of things.”⁸¹ More recently, others, too, have taught that Nicholas’s writings display his pantheistic tendencies. Like Wenck, they have viewed Nicholas as teaching that the universe is God in His contracted (i.e., restricted) state of Being. And they go beyond Wenck in wrongly interpreting a passage in Nicholas’s *De Possess*: “Quid igitur est mundus nisi invisibilis dei apparitio? Quid deus nisi visibilium invisibilitas ...?”⁸² By construing “*apparitio*” as *appearance*, these interpreters take Nicholas to be teaching that the world is God in His visible state, whereas

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Nicholas means only that the world is the *manifestation* of God, means only that the heavens declare the glory of God: “What, then, is the world except the manifestation of the invisible God? What is God except the invisibility of visible things ...?”

In *De Docta Ignorantia* Nicholas indicates that the universe is not God because God alone is absolute, whereas the universe, along with its parts, is diminished through being contracted.⁸³ Now, in the later sermons Nicholas reaffirms his opposition to pantheism. In particular, Sermon CCXVI (23-24) conveys Nicholas’s belief that the world’s magnitude is finite; and it indicates that God is prior to and superior to the universe. Unfortunately, in *De Docta Ignorantia* Nicholas did not take pains to dissociate himself from pantheism; indeed, he even used the term “emanation,”⁸⁴ which misleadingly suggests that the world, in emanating from God, is of the Divine substance. Yet, “*emanatio*” and “*emanare*” are Nicholas’s substitute words for “*creatio*” and “*creare*” when the doctrine of the universe’s origin is being discussed endorsingly. Nowhere in the sermons does Nicholas refer to the universe as “the body of God.” Rather, echoing the thought of St. Paul in Colossians 2:9, he chooses to say that Christ is the Body of God (CLXXVIII (7)).

3.3. *Maria, mater Dei*. Nicholas accepts the orthodox theological doctrine that the Virgin Mary was impregnated by the power of the Holy Spirit and without a male seed. As such, she is θεοτόκος (*theotocos*), the God-bearer, the mother of God. In the sermons she is exalted above all other human beings, having prerogatives that, taken together, no other human being has. In Sermon VIII, which eulogizes Mary, Nicholas identifies some of these prerogatives and privileges. “She was privileged, foremostly, with a prerogative against evil, because *not only did she never sin but she was not even able to sin.*”⁸⁵ Moreover, she is the most God-loved of all creatures.⁸⁶ She was beautiful with a beauty that excels that of all other mortals.⁸⁷ She was ignorant of nothing.⁸⁸ Indeed, she has very great achievements of intellect, memory, and will.⁸⁹ (Nicholas does not tell us what these achievements were but rather intimates that they were what enabled her to overcome the world, the flesh, and the Devil). She is exalted above all the choirs of angels.⁹⁰ She possessed natural virtue, so that she lived in a state of innocence.⁹¹ Because she had love for God and for neighbor, she had all the moral virtues. For “he who has love has all the moral virtues, and he who does not have love has no moral virtue,” since love

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is the bond of perfection, as says the Apostle Paul.⁹² Furthermore, in addition to the theological virtue of love, she possessed in a most excellent way the other two theological virtues: viz., faith and hope. Mary was full of all grace⁹³—so full that “as purely a creature she was not capable of greater grace.”⁹⁴ She is so merciful that she is deserving of the name “Queen of Mercy.”⁹⁵ She will intercede for believers who supplicate her—intercede with her son, who is also the Son of God. By believers she is to be adored with an adoration of hyperdulia,⁹⁶ i.e., with the highest kind of adoration that creatures can licitly exhibit toward saints.

The one theological problem that Nicholas unself-consciously encounters in conjunction with his adoration and exaltation of Mary has to do with the prerogative of purity that he ascribes to her in association with her fullness of grace. For it can seem theologically aberrant to assert that Mary never sinned and was never able to sin. Traditional orthodox theologians wanted to say that Jesus alone was without sin,⁹⁷ so that He alone did not deserve to die, death being the penalty for sin.⁹⁸ So if Mary did not sin, why did she die?—unless, that is, she was martyred. Accordingly, Nicholas would be committed both to belief in her martyrdom and to belief that Jesus was not the only sinless mortal—both of which beliefs appear problematical. As if realizing this fact, Nicholas in a later sermon states explicitly that Christ alone is sinless.⁹⁹ Now, there are three possible interpretations of Nicholas’s statement here in conjunction with his previous statements in Sermons VI and VIII: (a) Nicholas changed his mind during the interval between writing down Sermon VIII and writing down Sermon CCLXXVI; (b) Nicholas unwittingly contradicts himself; (c) Nicholas means that Mary had no *actual sin* and no capability of *actually sinning*; but she had *original sin* and, thus, was not totally free of sin, as was Christ.

If we suppose that the last interpretation is the correct one, we save Nicholas from contradiction—but without saving him from theological aberration. For if Mary was born with original sin, she could not rightly be said to be unable to sin unless not only the guilt of original sin were removed but also the consequences of original sin were removed. And, indeed, if Mary were given every grace and were full of grace, she would, it seems, have been free of the stain of original sin. But, in that case, there would remain a theological difficulty in maintaining that she died a natural death. So Nicholas could preserve the consistency of his ideas by subscribing to the following proposi-

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tions: (a) Mary was born with a human nature that inherited the guilt of Adam's sin; (b) this guilt was forgiven her because of her belief, at the time of the Annunciation, that her son, Jesus, would through an act of atonement save her and others from their sins;¹⁰⁰ (c) Mary died as a martyr. Alternatively, he could deny that Jesus was the sole human being to live a sinless life and to be born free of the guilt of original sin. He could maintain that Mary, too, was born free of the stain of original sin, as well as maintaining that she remained free of all actual sin, so that she is not included—any more than was Jesus—in the Apostle Paul's verdict that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Nicholas appears to have chosen this alternative; indeed, his ideas clearly aim in the direction of this alternative. Still, it was not until 1854 that the Church officially endorsed the doctrine of Mary's immaculate conception—a doctrine promulgated by Pope Pius IX in his encyclical *Ineffabilis Deus*.

So if Nicholas teaches the doctrine of Mary's immaculate conception, he must explain why Mary was subject to death. Instead of addressing this issue directly, he tells us that her natural death was governed by five special privileges, or prerogatives¹⁰¹—a view adopted from Albertus Magnus.¹⁰² First, Mary foreknew the time of her death. Secondly, Christ escorted Mary into Heaven. Thirdly, Mary was free of a painful death. Fourthly, she arose immediately after dying. And, fifthly, she was assumed bodily and alive into Heaven, once having arisen.

3.4. *Love, Will, and Self*. One of Nicholas's most quotable passages is found in Sermon CCLXXVII (23): “Because the soul conforms itself to that which it loves: when it loves itself, it conforms itself to itself. And because it does not have from itself the fact of its existing and living, it does not love itself when it loves itself. But if it loves God (from whom it has its existing and being alive [and] in whose image it is) and does not love itself, in order to love God more: then it loves itself...”¹⁰³ Nicholas adapts this passage from Augustine's *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 123.5. And he delights in the paradoxical thought that the soul does not love itself when it loves itself. For beneath the surface-paradoxicality lies hidden, as he believes, a profound spiritual truth: the soul that seeks its own good must seek it in Goodness itself; for whoever is alienated from the Good is alienated also from himself qua participant in the Good, qua one who is made in the image of the Good. Thus, just as the soul is *not supposed to love itself* in place of loving God or more than it loves God, so also it *is sup-*

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posed to love itself as a participant in God's glory.¹⁰⁴ A sinner is to return to his heart, as the Latin Bible says,¹⁰⁵ so that he may become conscious of the sins that alienate him from God¹⁰⁶ and so that he may repent. For when he repents and enters further into himself, he sees God's light within himself¹⁰⁷ and is enabled to conquer himself¹⁰⁸ by acquiring, with God's help,¹⁰⁹ the moral virtues.

Nicholas never loses sight of the measure of the inalienable free will that human beings have. Indeed, the power of free assent is inherent in human nature.

Consider carefully the fact that the human soul is constituted from four elements of its own. For the soul is immaterial, [and] its elements are immaterial. For we experience that the human soul is a certain immaterial power that sends forth from itself a fourfold movement: viz., an appetitive movement, a movement of anger, a movement of reason, and a voluntary, or free, movement. Now, because the soul is of an intellectual nature, it endeavors to steer these four movements intellectually by modulating intellectually the impulse of each movement. The modulation of the appetitive movement is called temperance; and the modulation of the movement of anger is called courage; and the modulation of the movement of reason is called prudence; and the modulation of the movement of free will is called justice.¹¹⁰

At times, Nicholas says not just that the *will* is free but that the *mind* is free and that free choice is present in the mind:

The following ought not to be ignored: that freedom of choice is present in the mind, so that the mind has within itself the source of its own acts and so that it controls its own works.... And it has this freedom because it is created in the image of God. And to one who considers carefully, it is evident that the First Cause qua Cause placed His likeness in the mind, so that the mind is a living image, or a caused cause. And it is not possible that the mind's dignity be wrested [from it].¹¹¹

Nicholas's view regarding the human soul's inherent freedom is neither radical nor naive. For Nicholas recognizes that the will is often conflicted, since, as Paul says, there is in the believer "another law ..., fighting against the law of my mind ...,"¹¹² so that "the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do."¹¹³ Nonetheless, notes Nicholas, "the will cannot be compelled to give its assent."¹¹⁴ But it can be tempted and seduced by the Devil, the Serpent, who seduced Eve and Adam. Now, although *sin* mars the soul and detracts from its moral and ontological excellence, nonetheless the *ability to sin* con-

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tributes to the soul's nobility¹¹⁵ by displaying the soul's freedom of choice, i.e., by constituting an aspect—though not an essential aspect—of the soul's freedom of choice. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” say the Scriptures.¹¹⁶ But the Scriptures also say that “love covers all sins”¹¹⁷ and “blessed are they ... whose sins are covered.”¹¹⁸ True love—God's love—covers defilement and deformity so that these blemishes become invisible to all. True love is like a stone that renders a man invisible.¹¹⁹ God's love not only covers but also transforms: it makes a son of man to be a son of God.¹²⁰ Whereas God's forgiving love purifies the soul and blots out the sin,¹²¹ the world's love can do neither. Carnal love that is enthralling blinds the lover, so that in his beloved he does not see the blemishes seen by everyone else.¹²² But Divine love covers and transforms, so that the soul's stains will disappear from the sight of every mind's eye.

4. *Conclusion.* Nicholas's sermons command our respect. Some of them are longer; some are shorter. Some are complete sketches; some are incomplete sketches. Some are in better Latin; others are in worse Latin. But all of them are insightful and instructive in important ways. To the extent that the sermonizing is also a philosophizing, the latter feature does not draw us away from Scripture but leads us into its richness. The sermons are, indeed, didactic—aiming to teach believers how to imitate Christ, how rightly to love themselves by loving God, how it is that they ought not to neglect the adoration of Mary, ought not to forget that the sacrament of baptism is regenerative, that in the Eucharist God transubstantiates the bread and the wine. The more philosophical moments either inform or remind that God is *Being (esse ipsum)*,¹²³ not a *being (ens)*, that the human intellect *abstracts* various universal forms from various kinds of sensory images,¹²⁴ that there is a *lex naturalis*,¹²⁵ that the maximum and the minimum coincide in the infinite,¹²⁶ that each thing exists insofar as it is one,¹²⁷ that each of the cardinal virtues is present in the other,¹²⁸ that there is nothing in the intellect that was not previously in the senses,¹²⁹ that nothing unknown is loved,¹³⁰ that art imitates nature,¹³¹ that there is no proportion of the finite to the infinite,¹³² that God's abode is the Coincidence of coincidences¹³³—and so on. In the end, then, the sermons aim to edify through teaching; and they teach through philosophizing and theologizing, though always in combination with interpreting Scripture.

Whether as parish priest or as bishop or as cardinal, Nicholas was

true to his clerical calling to preach the Gospel. And in preparation for his preaching he complied with the commandment of Christ: “Search the Scriptures, for you think in them to have life everlasting; and the same are they that give testimony of me.”¹³⁴

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1. Walter A. Euler, "Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Etappen und Schwerpunktmäßige Themenverschiebungen in den Sermones?" *MFCG*, 30 (2005), p. 85: "kleine theologische Meisterwerke". Other sermons may be added to this list of Meisterwerke: e.g. IV and CCXVI and CCXLIII.
2. Sermon VI (1 8).
3. See Sermon CXXV (4:7-8).
4. Sermon XXXVII (1 9).
5. Sermon XXXVII (1 8).
6. Sermon CCXLVI (2 1).
7. Sermon XVII (11). Nicholas does not believe that every *conceptus* is a human being, consisting already of a rational soul. This view came later in the history of the Church.
8. Sermon CCLXIII (2 4).
9. Sermon VII (2 8).
10. Sermon CCLXXVII (1 0).
11. Sermon CLXXII (1).
12. Sermon CCLXVIII (18-19).
13. Sermon CCLXXXVI (3).
14. Sermon IV (9).
15. "There are some things that are set forth by a teacher and [are such that] the students do not believe the teacher unless [those things] are demonstrated to the intellect. For example, when a certain claim is made—say, [the claim] that there is [but] one world—it is not believed unless it is demonstrated by evidential considerations. By means of the evidential considerations the intellect sees that the claim is true, and it believes. However, there are other things that cannot be demonstrated either to the sensory eye or to the intellectual eye—as is the claim that the true man Jesus is the true Son of God." Sermon CLXXXVI (3:1-9).
16. Sermon CCLXIII (5). See also CCLXV (9) and CXXXV (7).
17. Sermon XVII (9-10).
18. Sermon CXC (9).
19. Sermon CCLXXV (3).
20. Cf. Sermon CLXXXVI (3:18-19), where Nicholas indicates the possibility that faith is diminished where there is evidence that leads to certainty.
21. Sermon CCLXXV (4).
22. Hebrews 11:17-19.
23. Sermon CCLXVIII (18-19).
24. *Loc. cit.*
25. "... dialectically": i.e., in Kierkegaard's sense, not Hegel's.
26. Cf. Sermon CXC (9): "For faith does not guide by means of persuasion and reason; rather, it impels [one]—in spite of his not understanding—to undertake the journey."
27. Sermon IV (2 0).
28. Sermon CLXXXIX (1 9:20-24).
29. Sermon CLXXXVII (1 6). Cf. CLXXXVI (8:15-19).

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30. Sermon CCLXXVI (2 7).
31. Psalms 33:9 (34:8).
32. Sermon CLXXXVII (8-9).
33. Sermons CCLVIII (1 5) and CCLXIX (11).
34. Sermon CCXLIII (2 8).
35. *Loc. cit.*
36. Sermon CCLVIII (1 4 & 1 6). In other words, our positive conception of God is but a surmise. Sermon CLXXXVII (5).
37. Sermon IV (3 2).
38. Sermons III (11) and IV (3 4) and VII (3 2) and CLXXII (1).
39. Sermon CCLXXV (3).
40. Isaias (Isaiah) 7:9 (Old Latin version). See also Sermons XIX (6) and CXXXV (7).
41. Cf. John 7:17.
42. Sermon CCXXXV (3).
43. Sermon CXCI (1 5:1-3).
44. Sermons CCXXXV (3) and CXCI (1 5:1-3) and CLXXXIX (3:1-4).
45. Sermons IV (1 6) and VI (1 5) and CXX (5:8) & CXXXV (6). CCLXXXIV (1 4). Ephesians 2:8.
46. Job 19:25.
47. Sermon CCLXVIII (1 9). Cf. CLXXXIX (3:1): “Fides christiana in anima est sicut visus.” Yet, faith can lead to *visio intellectualis* (CLXXXVII (1 6)).
48. Sermon CCLXVIII (1 8-19).
49. Sermon CLXXXIX (1 9). Augustine, *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*, II, 5 (*PL* 44:963).
50. Sermon CLXXXIX (1 9:5-6). Cf. CXX (5:11-12): “Qui credit, redigit intellectum in servitutem et humiliationem. Quod nota!”
51. Sermon CCXLI (5).
52. See, *supra*, the section on faith and reason.
53. Concerning reason and God’s triunity, see Sermon XXXVIII (1 2).
54. See Jasper Hopkins, “Verständnis und Bedeutung des dreieinen Gottes bei Nikolaus von Kues,” *MFCG* 28 (2003), pp. 135-164.
55. Sermon CLXXXVI (1 3:20-27).
56. Sermon CLXXXIX (3).
57. CCLXIX (9).
58. CLXXXVII (1 6).
59. Regarding inferences to perfections, see Sermon XX (9).
60. Sermon CCLVIII (8).
61. Sermon CCLVIII (11).
62. With Sermon CCLVIII cf. Sermon XX (1 0), as concerns Nicholas’s preference for the *via negativa*.
63. II Corinthians 12:2-4.
64. See, *infra*, n. 68.
65. See Jasper Hopkins, *Hugh of Balma on Mystical Theology: A Translation and an Overview of His De Theologia Mystica* (Minneapolis: Banning, 2002).
66. Sermon VI (9).

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67. Sermon III (11). Cf. CLI (1 0:13-20).
68. Sermon XII (3 3).
69. Sermon III (11).
70. Cf. Sermons CLXXII (3) and CCLI (1 2:12-17).
71. Sermon XII (3 4). But in XII (3 5) Nicholas again speaks after the fashion of Eckhart.
72. Sermon XXII (3 7-41).
73. Matthew 1:21.
74. Philippians 2:7.
75. Sermon CCLXXII (1 3:3-17).
76. Nicholas makes this point not only in Sermon CCLVIII but also in Sermon XXII (1 0) and elsewhere.
77. Sermon CCLXX (4).
78. Psalms 18:2 (19:1).
79. Sermon CCLI (2). See also, and especially, CCIV (6-7).
80. See Jasper Hopkins, "Nicholas of Cusa's Intellectual Relationship to Anselm of Canterbury," pp. 54-73 in Peter J. Casarella, editor, *Cusanus: The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*. Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006.
81. Cusanus, *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* 24 in my translation and edition entitled *Nicholas of Cusa's Debate with John Wenck*.
82. Cusanus, *De Possest* 7 2:6-7 (in my edition, contained in my *Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*).
83. Cusanus, *De Docta Ignorantia* II, 9 (1 5 0).
84. Cusanus, *De Docta Ignorantia*, II, 4 (1 1 6).
85. Sermon VIII (2 7). See also VIII (1 3) and VI (1 5).
86. Sermon VIII (2 8).
87. Sermons VIII (3 0) and VI (1 6).
88. Sermon VIII (2 7).
89. Sermon VIII (2 8).
90. Sermon VIII (3 1).
91. Sermon VI (1 7).
92. Colossians 3:14. Sermon VI (1 8).
93. Luke 1:28.
94. Sermon VIII (2 8).
95. Sermon VIII (2 7).
96. Sermon VIII (3 1).
97. Cf. II Corinthians 5:21. Hebrews 4:15. I Peter 2:22. Galatians 3:22. I John 1:8 & 10.
98. Romans 5:12.
99. Sermon CCLXXVI (3 0:14-16): "Unde omnis homo argui potest de peccato, quantum est de natura sua, eo solo excepto, qui sic est Filius hominis, quod et Filius Dei."
100. See Anselm, who in the *Cur Deus Homo* II, 16 holds this view.
101. Sermon VIII (2 5).
102. *Loc. cit.*
103. "Et nota: ex quo anima se conformat illi, quod amat, et dum se amat, se

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sibi conformat. Et quia a se non habet, ut sit et vivat, non se amat, quando se amat. Sed si Deum amat, a quo habet esse et vivere, cuius est imago, et se non amat, ut illum magis amet, tunc se amat ...” CCLXXVII (2 3:1-6). See also Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium*, CXXIII, 5 (PL 35:1968).

104. Sermon XXXVII (1 8:15-16).
105. Isaias (Isaiah) 46:8. Sermon XXXVII (1 9:37-38).
106. Isaias (Isaiah) 59:2.
107. Sermon V (3 9).
108. Sermon CCLIV (9:11).
109. “... God’s mercy can assist some men to return to their heart ...” Sermon XXXVII (1 9:36-38).
110. Sermon CCXLVIII (1 2:1-16). Temperance, courage, prudence, and justice are the four cardinal virtues of ancient Greece.
111. Sermon CCLI (1 5:2-10).
112. Romans 7:23. Sermon CCII (6:1-4).
113. Romans 7:19.
114. Sermon CCII (6:1-2).
115. Sermon CLXXXVII (1 0).
116. Ezechiel (Ezekiel) 1 8:4 & 20.
117. Proverbs 10:12.
118. Romans 4:7. I Peter 4:8. Psalms 31:1 (32:1).
119. Sermon CCXLI (1 2:1-2 and 1 2:15-16).
120. Sermon CCXLI (1 3:4-5). I John 3:2.
121. Isaias (Isaiah) 43:25.
122. Sermon CCXLI (1 2:17-21). This sermon is one of the few places in which Nicholas distinguishes his use of the noun “*caritas*” and his use of the noun “*amor*”; for here “*caritas*” is used to refer to God’s love, since *Caritas Deus est*, whereas “*amor*” is used to refer to profane love, to *mundi amor*. See section 1 4 of the sermon.
123. E.g., Sermon CCXVI (1 7-19).
124. Sermons CLXXII (3) and CLXXIV (2-3) and CCXLVI (1 5).
125. Sermon CCLXXII (2 2-2 4).
126. Sermon CCXLIV (2 1).
127. Sermon CCXLVI (3).
128. Sermon CLXXXVIII (6).
129. Sermon CLXXXVII (8).
130. Sermon CCXLI (5).
131. Sermon CCXVI (2 7).
132. Sermon CLXXII (1).
133. Sermon CCLXVIII (9-10).
134. John 5:39.

Nicholas of Cusa (Nikolaus Cryfftz or Krebs in German, then Nicolaus Cusanus in Latin) was born in 1401 in Kues (now Bernkastel-Kues) on the Moselle River between Koblenz and Trier. He was one of four children in a bourgeois family.Â sermons. Of particular note are two works he wrote during these years that reached out to other religions, especially Islam, *De Pace Fidei* (1453) and *Cribatio Alchorani* (1461). In 1450 he was named bishop of Brixen in the Tirol.Â Nicholas of Cusaâ€™s most complete set of proposals about what is real occurs in his best-known work of 1440, *De docta ignorantia: On Learned Ignorance*. Here Cusanus addresses the four categorical realities traditionally found in Christian thought: God, the natural universe, Christ and human beings. A selection of translated sermons of Nicholas of Cusa by Jasper Hopkins.Â Listen Playing Paused You're listening to a sample of the Audible audio edition. Learn more. *Nicholas of Cusa's Didactic Sermons: A Selection* Hardcover â€“ January 1, 2008. by Nicholas of Cusa (Author), Jasper Hopkins (Editor). See all formats and editions Hide other formats and editions. Price. The title of this present volume tends to be misleading. For it suggests that Nicholasâ€™s didactic sermons are to be distinguished from his non-didactic onesâ€”ones that are, say, more inspirational and less philosophical, or more devotional and less theological, or more situationally oriented and less Scripturally focused. Yet, in truth, all 293 of Nicholasâ€™s sermons are highly didactic, highly pedagogical, highly exegetical.¹ To be sure, there are inspirational and devotional elements; but they are subordinate to the primary purpose of teaching. Likewise, only occasionally² do the sermons show