

**NICHOLAS OF CUSA'S
EARLY SERMONS:
1430 - 1441**

*Translated and introduced
by*

JASPER HOPKINS

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PREFACE

Now that critical editions of the texts of Nicholas of Cusa's sermons are available through the combined accomplishments of the Institut für Cusanus-Forschung in Trier, the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Heidelberg, and the publishing house of Felix Meiner in Hamburg, the time has become opportune to translate these texts into English. The translation of the present twenty-six sermons represents a beginning; and it is meant to supplement my previous two volumes entitled *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*. In undertaking this project, I have striven for accurate as well as for readable English renderings. The former aim required that I avoid paraphrase—that I resist the temptation, at many turns, to restate more elegantly Nicholas's expressed ideas. Since these ideas are often articulated by Nicholas in abbreviated form, I have resorted to the use of brackets in order to show how I have construed his meanings. Although the English renderings would read more smoothly without these interrupting devices, I nonetheless insert them so as to make clear that all translation involves interpretation and that this fact is especially true of works that are hastily written, as were many of Nicholas's sermons.

I here express my appreciation of the scholarly achievement on the part of the members of the Cusanus-Institut, who have so reliably collated, transcribed, edited, documented, and dated. The few *corrigenda* that I add at the end of this present book in no way detract from the masterly accomplishment of the several editors. All scholarly works are continually being perfected; and only those individuals who are not engaged in historical and textual scholarship can regard such asymptotic perfecting as signaling negligence on the part of the scholars who give us the initial products. The misprints, etc., listed in the present appendix were observed *en passant* and are cited in addition to those already recorded by Rudolf Haubst at the end of Volume XVI, Fascicle zero, of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*.

Finally, I express gratitude to the University of Minnesota's Alice A. Welch, of the Department of Interlibrary Loans, and Richard J. Kelly, Professor and Librarian. Both have been of invaluable help to me in my gathering of source-materials.

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INTRODUCTION TO CUSA'S SERMONS

1. The *importance* of Nicholas of Cusa's sermons, considered as a whole (years 1430-1463), dare not be underestimated. For these 293 sermons are replete with philosophical and theological motifs that both shed light on themes in Nicholas's major works and also introduce metaphors, similitudes, and symbolisms that insightfully convey spiritual truths. To quote from Rudolf Haubst:

In the long string of Cusa's sermons—above all since the time of his *De Docta Ignorantia*—Cusa displays his intellectual individuality so keenly that these sermons afford a unique perspective on the liveliness and the development of his theological quest for knowledge. For again and again we are able not only to hear in them the echo of what he has already said in his major works but also to trace the germinating and maturing of ideas that he later expressed.¹

Haubst is right to call attention to the sermons written and preached *after* the completion of *De Docta Ignorantia* (1440). For the early sermons—even some of those as late as 1444—do not have the same weightiness, the same philosophical and theological depth, as do many of the subsequent ones, in which Nicholas's thoughts have also become more creative and captivating. Nonetheless, a sermon such as Sermon IV is certainly weighty, and all of Nicholas's sermons are highly didactic and intended to educate as well as to edify; indeed, they aim to edify by means of educating. This fact means that the sermons are not such as nowadays would be called *inspirational*. And yet, the not-infrequent allusions to the Cantic of Canticles, to the Book of Psalms, and to the writings of Augustine and of Anselm serve to insert poignant passages, such as the following passage from Anselm: 'Jesus' is "a sweet name, a delightful name, a name that consoles the sinner, and a name of blessed hope. Therefore, O Jesus, be Jesus to me."²

2. We must also take cognizance of the *general characteristics* of Nicholas's sermons, in addition to their being highly didactic.

a. To begin with, we should note the fact that most of the sermons are sermon-sketches and first-drafts. That is, they are not fully worked out; they are in rough-form literarily, if not always organizationally; they are unrevised; they show signs of having been written down hastily; they are, at times, repetitive with respect to both their topic and the execution of their topic; some of them are even incomplete qua sketches; they not-infrequently give the wrong reference for

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a Scriptural verse. Edmond Vansteenberghé appraises Nicholas's sermons, rough though some of them may be, as follows:

Especially of the sermons we can say that if they are the products of a *thinker*, they are not the products of a *writer*. Nonetheless, they remain a treasure-house of lofty ideas and of sentiments that are, by turns, warm and sensitive. Once sewn throughout Germany, Austria, and Italy, they assuredly caused to well up in many souls illumination and zeal. In any event, they reveal, still nowadays, the soul of their author.³ (my italics)

Josef Koch sees the roughness of style as offering a benefit: "Perhaps the very unliterary sermons now hold for us the greatest appeal, inasmuch as they make possible deep glances into the spirit and the heart of this great German [figure]." ⁴ Elisabeth Bohnenstädt points out that sometimes a sermon-sketch is really a collection of notes drawn from different times.⁵ And, on occasion, a single sermon-sketch contains, in reality, several different sketches, as is the case with Sermons XIII, XIV, and XV—which were conflated.⁶ Almost all of the sketches are such as to leave one impressed by Nicholas's extensive familiarity with Scriptural texts and by his rich knowledge of Latin vocabulary.

Thus, we must not hold against Nicholas his roughness of style, given its beneficial consequence and given that Nicholas wrote down his sermons primarily for his own immediate use, not for immediate dissemination to the wider religious community. Many times, the written sermons are intended as notes and memoranda to be used as help-sheets for the sermons as actually preached more or less extemporaneously. And this fact calls to our attention two further points, viz., *b* and *c* below.

b. The sermon-sketches, written in Latin, were usually not the sermons that Nicholas actually preached. For most of the time his preaching was done in a variant of Middle High German or in his moselfränkisch (German) dialect. Koch has marshalled evidence of the fact that this preaching was done extensively in one form of German or another,⁷ rather than in Latin. And, as he emphasizes, "one cannot stress enough that [Nicholas's] *Latin drafts give us no picture* of how Nicholas preached to the people."⁸ For in preaching, he omitted ideas (found in his Latin text) that he regarded as too difficult for the congregation to grasp; and likewise he improvisingly inserted other points that also were not present in the written notes. This oral refashioning of a given sermon was sometimes quite successful, sometimes less so. Thus, the testimony of his contemporaries is conflicting. There is evidence that his preaching was very engaging. Hermann Schnarr cites

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this testimony and comments: “Obviously he, [Nicholas], possessed the rare gift of presenting highly speculative contents in a form such that all his listeners not only understood him but were even gripped by the manner of his presentation.”⁹ And Walter Euler¹⁰ refers to a chronicler (from Nuremberg) who called one of Nicholas’s sermons “daz schonst ding, daz ich je gehort habe”: “the loveliest thing I’ve ever heard.” On the other hand, any number of Nicholas’s sermons were still perceived as too abstruse and too high-flown for the congregation.¹¹

c. But if Nicholas preached so many of his sermons in German or a German dialect, and if his written sermons were intended primarily for his own immediate use, why, then, did he write them out in Latin? Here we must remember that although Nicholas preached to the lay congregations in German, he usually spoke Latin when preaching to clergy. Moreover, those sermons of his that were intended for the clergy—e.g., Sermon III and Sermons CCLXXXIX - CCXCII¹²—are often better worked-out, more polished, even lengthier, than are the sermons meant exclusively for the laity. So it would be a mistake to think of all of his sermons as being mere first-drafts. Be that as it may, all of Nicholas’s sermons that we possess¹³ were composed in Latin—except, that is, for Sermon XXIV, which Nicholas wrote by his own hand in German. (We must keep in mind that Sermon LXXVI was also written down in German—but by a listener, not by Nicholas. We have no Latin text of it.)

Thus, the question arises: Why did Nicholas compose the sermons in Latin if the majority of them were preached in German? Koch suggests two reasons:¹⁴ (1) Nicholas’s sources were Latin sources. The Scriptures that he used were in Latin, as were the commentaries by Jerome, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, John Chrysostom, and others. It was easier to incorporate these sources into a Latin text than into a German text. (2) By writing in Latin, Nicholas could keep the sermons from being read before they were preached—read by those who had no need of seeing them in advance.¹⁵ However, this latter reason advanced by Koch seems implausible. For even had Nicholas written in German, he could still have kept his written drafts from others’ eyes. In fact, it seems that Nicholas composed the sermons in Latin because he intended to revise them at a later time and to disseminate them along with his other works. Indeed, some of the so-called sermons are really minor treatises. Of this sort are *De Aequalitate* and *De Principio*. In order that the sermons be widely read by scholars, they needed to be in Latin—not in moselfränkisch! Koch

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may well be right when he comments further: “Even when the Cardinal [viz., Cusanus] let his first-drafts be bound together in the two handsome manuscripts V_1 and V_2 , he was not thinking of letting them be published. Rather, his concern was that these fruits of his meditation not be lost.”¹⁶ Nonetheless, Nicholas would still have expected to revise and polish these preserved sermons so that they might later be made available to a wide circle of priests, students, and scholars, all of whom were required to know Latin. His duties as bishop and cardinal, together with his continued composing of new sermons, left him no time for such re-workings. And this fact signals a third reason for Nicholas’s having penned his sermons in Latin: viz., that such was the established practice in his day. Even Meister Eckhart, a century earlier, had drafted his sermons in Latin.¹⁷ His German sermons are *repor-tationes* from *auditores* or are later translations from the Latin.

Some of the early Cusan sermons, especially, are organized around dramatic dialogues, a fact singled out by Hundersmarck and Izbicki.¹⁸ Of special interest in this regard are Sermons VII and XII, where Mary Magdalene speaks. Sermon XVII hypostatizes and personifies Mercy, Justice, Truth, and Peace and presents them as pleading a legal case before God in Heaven, with Justice and Truth arguing for man’s punishment, while Mercy and Peace are cast in the role of his defenders. Yet, amid the dramatization we find highly theological speculations. In Sermon XVII, for example, Nicholas instructs his congregation that Jesus, from the very moment of His conception in the Virgin’s womb, was a complete human being. In this same sermon he explicitly rejects the Christological claims of Mani, Arius, Apollinaris, Nestorius, and Eutyches. And in Sermon VII (2-4) he alludes to Ambrose’s and Augustine’s definitions of “sin”; and he vividly illustrates the vileness of sin:

Sin is like a bodily wound which, when it is fresh, permits itself to be touched and pressed against—but scarcely does so after three days. Likewise, in the case of sinners ..., etc. And there are three days—viz., the committal, the habituation, the obstinate persisting—after which the sin does not admit of being touched.

When we recognize that Nicholas’s sermons constitute almost one-third of his corpus of writings,¹⁹ it should be no surprise to us that his prodigiously speculative mind infused into his sermons philosophical and theological tenets. Yet, the simultaneous inclusion of many comparisons, metaphors, and symbolisms serves to counter-balance the interjection of speculative doctrines, with the result that most of the

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sermons appeal also to ordinary people and not exclusively to the learned. In a few of the sermons Nicholas introduces divisions in such a way that one part of the sermon is meant for the more learned and another part for the less learned. Thus, Part One of Sermon XII is for the common people; Part Two is for those who are more capable; Part Three is for those who are more contemplative.

Moreover, the question arises: “Just how long did Nicholas’s sermons last when they were being preached?” And the quick answer is that we do not really know, since there is no correlation between the length of a Cusan written sermon and the shortened or the expanded version of it that was actually preached. We may not presume, for example, that the whole of sermon V or VI, as written, was actually delivered orally. On the other hand, it would be tempting to presume that a sermon preached to the clergy would have lasted longer than would have a sermon preached to a lay congregation of the populace. However, we have no evidential basis for entertaining such a presumption—a presumption that is not even fully supported by comparing with one another (insofar as we can identify these two groupings) the respective written-lengths of the sermons meant to be preached to the clergy and of the sermons meant to be preached to the laity. Some scholars have supposed that an inference to the typical length of Nicholas’s preaching could be made from considering the common practice in Nicholas’s day. Accordingly, Peter Niederkofler judges that all of Cusa’s sermons probably lasted for an hour, with some of them lasting for two or three hours.²⁰ Bohnenstädt observes that in Nicholas’s day sermons were sometimes three- to six-hours long among the Brothers of the Common Life.²¹ Nonetheless, although Nicholas’s sermons conform to the pattern of a priest-scholar’s writing them in Latin—he was, after all, a doctor of canon law—we have no firm evidence for concluding that his sermons fit the foregoing pre-established patterns of length. For they also do not correspond to the pattern of his period whereby few bishops undertook at all to preach;²² for Nicholas, during his residence (1452-1458) in Brixen as bishop, preached 167 sermons (viz., Sermons CXXII - CCLXXXVIII).²³ Indeed, during 1454-1457 he composed no philosophical or theological works but concentrated on his sermons.²⁴

3. The *style and organization* of Nicholas’s sermons fall into various classes: some of the early sermons, such as Sermon III and Sermon V, proceed in accordance with the then-prevailing standards of

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sermonizing: viz., to enunciate a Biblical text that constitutes the theme of the sermon; next, to plead one's own inabilities; then, to invoke God's help, either invoking it directly or by way of the intercession of the Virgin Mary or other of the saints; thereafter, to indicate the parts (usually three in number) into which the theme is divided; finally, to proceed to expounding each of these thematic parts. Oftentimes, Nicholas's sermons in this class do not have all of these five features. For example, Sermon III *does* have them all; and, yet, it does not perfectly expound the three divisions that it articulates. Likewise, Sermon V also has all five features; however, it skirts swiftly and indirectly over the allusion to inability: "Inasmuch as I must speak of him [viz., John the Baptist] who is greater than, and more than, a prophet . . . , let us invoke God's grace." By comparison, Sermon I has all the features except for the anticipatory division into parts.

A second, and larger, class of sermons consists of those that are homilies—i.e., those that expound a passage of Scripture in a fuller way than do sermons of the first type. Sermon X expounds the Beatitudes; Sermon XXIV, the Lord's Prayer. Sermon XI expounds John 1:14; Sermon XII, Mark 16:6. A third class of sermons consists of those that are more highly speculative, as is Sermon XXII, which addresses the doctrine of the Trinity. In last analysis, these three classes overlap, with the result that a number of sermons can be viewed as falling into more than one class. And, to be sure, Nicholas himself nowhere explicitly *classifies* his sermons, nowhere assigns them to different *rhetorical types*. Hence, the attempt on a reader's part to impose such classifications must be understood as purely heuristic.

4. In the sermons, Nicholas makes use of all the *methods of interpretation* that were available to him. These include literalism, antonomasia, allegory, anagogy, and hypostatization.²⁵ We have already noted the example of the hypostatization of Justice, Truth, Mercy, and Peace; and it is obvious what literalism, or literal interpretation, is. Antonomasia (1) has to do with the use of a metaphor to substitute for a personal name or for a proper noun; or (2) it has to do with the use of a personal name to substitute for something non-personal. Thus, the city-name "Bethany" (meaning, according to Nicholas, "House of obedience") is used as a name for the Virgin Mary; and "Martha" is used as a name for the power that motivates the active (vs. the contemplative) life. Antonomasia occurs throughout Sermon VIII but especially in VIII, section 5. In Sermon IX (4) Mary, because of her

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virginity, is called *heaven* and, because of her fertile motherhood, is called *earth*. The use of allegory is found in Sermon VI, where the Genesis story of the Garden of Eden is construed in the following ways: The reference to Paradise is a reference to the Virgin Mary. The “Tree of life” signifies Christ. The “Tree of the knowledge of good and evil” stands for the Virgin Mary’s rational and intellectual faculties! Or again: in Sermon XII the Apostle Peter is said to symbolize the assembly of the Gentiles; and the Apostle John is said to symbolize the Jewish synagogue.

In Sermon XVIII the Magi are allegorizations for sinners; the Star of Bethlehem is the allegorization that represents a preacher. Other symbolisms also abound in this same sermon: The Old Testament account of the slaying of Adonias is said to befigure a putting an end to the lust of the eyes. The condemning of Abiathar to death represents our condemning the lust of the flesh. And the killing of Joab symbolizes our ridding ourselves of the pride of life.²⁶ Anagogy, or anagogical interpretation, understands the words and teachings of Scripture in a proleptic way, a way that discloses truths about the redeemed soul’s status in Heaven.²⁷ For example, Jesus’s Last Supper discloses the truth about the future Heavenly reunion with Christ, about future spiritual feasting upon Christ, who is the Bread of life. Nicholas also accepts typology: Joseph—son of Isaac, sold into bondage—is a type of Christ, as is also Jonas (Jonah), who spent three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish.²⁸

5. Nicholas of Cusa is an eclectic writer whose *sources* are especially numerous. There are, of course, the usual and expected sources: Proclus, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, John Damascene, Anselm, Bonaventure, Peter Lombard, Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, Eckhart, Gerson, Lull, Bernard of Clairvaux, Petrus Comestor, Hugh of Strassburg, Nicholas of Lyra. Yet, there are many others, as well—such lesser figures as Henry of Ghent, Matthew of Cracow, Aldobrandinus of Tuscanella, Jordan of Quedlinburg, and others. The Heidelberg Academy edition of Cusa’s sermons is magnificent in its identification and tracing of these sources, which need not all either be mentioned here or repeated in the notes of the present English translations.

6. Some interpreters have thought it desirable and helpful to distinguish Nicholas’s sermons into *periods* that correspond to his various ecclesiastical roles and to his various stages of life. Thus, Koch prefers

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to group the sermons into four time-periods:²⁹ (1) the time before the composing of *De Docta Ignorantia* (1439),³⁰ (2) the decade from 1439 to 1449, (3) the period of Nicholas's mission as papal legate to Germany (March, 1451 - March, 1452), and the time of his bishopric in Brixen (April, 1452-1458). The four additional sermons in 1459 and the last sermon in 1463 do not constitute a further grouping. The foregoing groupings by Koch are indeed helpful in calling our attention to some of the differences that characterize Nicholas's sermons over time. For example, the early sermons (i.e., before 1439) allude—more extensively than do the subsequent ones—to such works as the *Decretum Magistri Gratiani*, the *Glossa Ordinaria*, and the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*. Or again, the sermons of the Brixen period (when Nicholas's bishop's responsibilities left him with less time) are more concentratedly homiletical, expounding at length a given Scriptural pericope. Yet, should an interpreter care to, he might well sub-divide the Brixen period (as does Koch implicitly) into (4a) April, 1452 - November, 1455 and (4b) December, 1455 - September, 1458, thereby distinguishing sermons that were more hastily drafted from sermons less hastily prepared.

Now, of course, other ways of grouping the 293 sermons are both possible and plausible. Rather than grouping them chronologically, one might group them into the shorter written-ones and the longer written-ones or into the more speculative ones and the less speculative ones or into those that deal with Biblical figures other than Jesus (e.g., with Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, the sisters Mary and Martha, the Apostle John, etc.), those that deal principally with Jesus, those that deal with non-Biblical figures, and those that do not focus on individual figures at all. Or again, if we knew the exact year in which Nicholas was ordained a priest—his ordination occurred some time between 1436 and 1440—we might group the sermons, chronologically, into the period of his being a cleric, the period of his being a priest (but not yet a bishop), the period of his bishopric, further sub-divided into the time before and the time after his elevation to the cardinalate (December, 1448).³¹

7. Even Nicholas's early sermons include, as concerns their *content*, many philosophical and theological considerations. We have already noted that the whole of Sermon XXII expounds the doctrine of the Trinity, introducing at the same time teachings about the Incarnation. However, in that same sermon there are other speculative themes, as well. For therein Nicholas tells us that “the theology of

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negation is the truer theology—that God, who is all things, is not any one of these things but is the altogether simple Beginning, who enfolds all things by means of His infinity.”³² Moreover, we are told that God is all perfections, is Perfection itself. Furthermore, Nicholas instructs us as regards the rationality of belief in God, when he draws the following conclusion: “Whether God is understood to exist or understood not to exist: since either alternative is affirmed as *true*, God [who is Truth] is affirmed to exist.”³³ Here we must recall the Augustinian background of Nicholas’s line of thought. For in *De Libero Arbitrio* (*On Free Choice*) Augustine argues: ‘If there are immutable truths, then there is immutable truth. Either Immutable Truth is God or, if there is anything higher than Truth, then that thing is God. In either case, God exists, since, clearly, there are immutable truths, such as arithmetical truths.’³⁴ In Sermon XXII Nicholas also speaks of God as beyond all opposition, as so everywhere that He is nowhere, as so nowhere that He is everywhere, as so One that He is Trine, and as so Trine that He is One.³⁵ Similarly, Nicholas introduces the metaphysical claim that in God not-being is in some sense existent.³⁶ And, theologically, under the influence of Eckhart, he sets forth the doctrine of the three births of the Son of God: (a) the eternal begottenness of God the Son from God the Father; (b) the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, from the Virgin Mary; (c) the birth of Christ in a religious believer at the time of the believer’s conversion, which is also the time that the believer is born in Christ.³⁷

Sermon XXII dates from 1440, and it discloses Nicholas’s interest in the very themes that he addressed in *De Docta Ignorantia*. Nonetheless, even his earlier sermons betray glimpses of his speculative tendencies. In his very first sermon, from 1430, he stresses God’s infinity, God’s unknowability by any finite mind, God’s ineffability qua Triune Deity.³⁸ In Sermon II he makes the theological point—following in the steps of Anselm of Canterbury and others—that Adam and Eve are among the elect and did not sin irredeemably.³⁹ He there also makes the theological points (1) that God alone knows future events, (2) that the Devil cannot enter the rational soul, cannot alter either reason or intellect, although he can insinuate thoughts into the mind.⁴⁰ In Sermon IV Nicholas inserts the theme of the disproportionality between the finite and the infinite,⁴¹ the theme of God’s nature as

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in itself unknowable by creatures' natural reason.⁴² Nevertheless, he clings to the claim that God's *existence* can be known by making rational inferences from a consideration of finite creatures.⁴³ In Sermon IV we see, theologically, that Nicholas employs the term "emanation" when speaking both of the Son's begottenness from the Father and of the Holy Spirit's procession from the Father and the Son;⁴⁴ and he there explores at length the notion of faith. Likewise, Sermon VI is sprinkled with theoretical and doctrinal considerations. For in it Nicholas discusses original sin, mentioning Anselm's view.⁴⁵ He introduces the themes of self-knowledge⁴⁶ and of moral virtue,⁴⁷ citing Augustine's definition of "theological virtue." The cardinal virtues are adduced in Sermon VIII, as is also the distinction between political virtue, purifying virtue, and the virtues of a purified mind.⁴⁸

As we see, then, Nicholas's theological thrustings are as penetrating and as bold as are his philosophical propoundings. Speaking of the Virgin Mary, he states radically (in Sermon IX (19)): "According to Dionysius this mother was so great and was of such marvelous beauty that anyone who would have no knowledge of her Son would readily believe *her* to be God." And he goes on to maintain that God loves Mary more than all others (except Jesus).⁴⁹ Moreover, he asserts that Mary was free not only of original sin but also of all venial and personal sins.⁵⁰ In fact, as he declares radically, Mary never sinned and was *never able to sin*.⁵¹ Moreover, after her death she was resurrected and raptured.⁵² She was of exceptional beauty and had, in the highest degree, all of the perfections that were ever had, or ever to be had, by any other saint. Using sources that contain unscientific physiological observations and surmises, Nicholas infers that Mary had dark hair and dark eyes, as did also Jesus.⁵³ As for Jesus Himself, Nicholas refers to Him both as *maximus homo* and as *minimus homo*.⁵⁴ He is maximal man in that He is the most perfect of all human beings; He was the smallest human being in that He was fully a human being, and fully wise, at the time of His conception.⁵⁵

8. In *manuscript form* Nicholas's sermons (except for Sermon XXIV, in German) are found, most importantly, in Codices Vaticani Latini 1244 and 1245, which Nicholas commissioned to be copied for himself and which he himself corrected. Although we do not possess all of the originals from which these Vatican manuscripts were copied,

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we do possess an autograph (viz., Codex Cusanus 220) of the sermons from 1430 through 1445 (viz., Sermons I - LVI, exclusive of XL and XLI, which are not in Cusanus 220). Other manuscripts are listed and described by Rudolf Haubst in Vol. XVI, Fascicle zero of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1991).⁵⁶

9. In *last analysis* we may be glad that Nicholas put his sermons into writing—rough drafts though many of them be. For these drafts afford us a keener understanding of the devotional matrix from which there issued forth his metaphysical musings. Thus, they bring us into closer *rapport* both with him himself and with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And they summon us to order our lives in such a way that we not become alienated either from God or from ourselves. And thus it is that Nicholas beckons us unto the spiritual awareness that

there is no better or healthier art than [the art of] knowing oneself. For when a man sets himself before himself and looks at his own baseness, he recognizes his miseries and the torments of his sin, and, consequently, he grieves. He observes the emptiness of present things, with the result that he despises them. He recognizes the benefits of God, with the result that he is grateful. He recognizes God's mercy, so that he has hope; he recognizes God's justice, so that he fears; he recognizes the uncertainty of his end, so that he worries and shows himself to be always prepared. And, hence, he who at first was alienated from God and from himself and said "My heart has forsaken me," now [says], having returned by way of entering into himself: "Your servant has found his heart."

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And after a man has thus entered into himself, he finds the child, together with Mary, in the temple (i.e., in the Church), in the desert (i.e., in the place of penance), in the house of a rightly ordered conscience, in the manger (i.e., in humility).⁵⁷

No doubt, Nicholas's sermons, uninspiring though they oftentimes are, will be best appreciated by those for whom the Biblical stories and images are familiar and in whom religious devotion wells up at the recital of the Scriptural verses that these Biblical stories embed. For such individuals are likely, after the fashion of the Prodigal Son and after that of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, to "come to themselves" and to re-utter the sigh, "Did not our heart burn within us when He ...opened to us the Scriptures?"⁵⁸ For it is really Christ and the Holy Spirit who, through Nicholas of Cusa, open the Scriptures to us.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. Rudolf Haubst, *Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues* (Freiburg: Herder, 1956), p. 6.
2. Quoted from Cusa's Sermon XX (14).
3. Edmond Vansteenbergh, *Le Cardinal Nicolas de Cues (1401-1464): L'action - La Pensée* (Paris, 1920) [reprinted by Minerva Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 1963], p. 164.
4. Josef Koch, *Cusanus-Texte. I. Predigten. 7. Untersuchungen über Datierung, Form, Sprache und Quellen. Kritisches Verzeichnis sämtlicher Predigten* [Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse (1941/42, 1. Abhandlung). Heidelberg, 1942], p. 15.
5. [Nicholas of Cusa], *Predigten. 1430-1441*, translated by Elisabeth Bohnenstädt and Josef Sikora; introduced by Bohnenstädt (Heidelberg: Kerle, 1952), p. 14.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
7. Koch, *Untersuchungen über Datierung, op. cit.*, pp. 22-29. See especially p. 27: "Steht es nun einwandfrei fest, daß Cusanus auf der Legationsreise deutsch gepredigt hat, so hat er es auch sonst getan." Cf. Vansteenbergh, *Le Cardinal, op. cit.*, p. 157.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 22. My italics.
9. Hermann Schnarr, "Nikolaus von Kues als Prediger in Trier," pp. 120-132 in Helmut Gestrich, editor, *Zugänge zu Nikolaus von Kues* (Bernkastel-Kues: Cusanus-Gesellschaft, 1986), p. 120^b.
10. Walter A. Euler, "Die Predigten des Nikolaus von Kues," *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift*, 110 (2001), p. 291.
11. *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, Vol. XVI, Fascicle zero, edited by Rudolf Haubst. Haubst calls attention (on p. xxix) to Nicholas's preaching in Latin Sermons CCLXXXIX - CCXCIII.
12. Euler, "Die Predigten," *op. cit.*, pp. 290-291. Wilhelm Egger, "Die Kirche von Brixen zur Heiligen Schrift hinführen. Die Brixner Predigten des Nikolaus Cusanus," *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift*, 110 (2001), p. 298.
13. Karl Zani attests to his having discovered a document in which Hieronymus Baldung (1485-1533) speaks of Cusa's *several* German sermons ("Neues zu Predigten des Kardinals Cusanus 'ettlich zu teutsch'," *Der Schlern*, 59 (1985), 111-115). See especially p. 112. But even granting that Nicholas wrote various other sermons in German, we possess only one sermon that has come down to us in German from his own hand. A second German sermon, written down by a listener, is found in but a single manuscript and has been published by Josef Koch and Hans Teske, editors, on pp. 96-121 of *Cusanus-Texte. I. Predigten. 6. Die Auslegung des Vaterunsers in vier Predigten* [Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse (Jahrgang 1938/39, 4. Abhandlung). Heidelberg, 1940].
14. Koch, *Untersuchungen über Datierung, op. cit.*, p. 23.
15. Koch, *ibid.*, p. 23: "Die lateinische Sprache hütet den Predigttext vor unberufenen Augen. Was hat eine Predigt für einen Sinn, welche die Zuhörer schon vorher kennen?"

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16. Koch, *Untersuchungen über Datierung*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
17. Koch, *ibid.*, p. 23.
18. Lawrence Hundersmarck and Thomas M. Izbicki, "Nicholas of Cusa's Early Sermons on the Incarnation: An Early Renaissance Philosopher-Theologian as Preacher," pp. 79-88 in Thomas M. Izbicki and Christopher M. Bellitto, editors, *Nicholas of Cusa and His Age: Intellect and Spirituality* (Boston: Brill, 2002), p. 81. Note also Peter Niederkofler, "Über die Predigtweise des Kardinals Nikolaus von Cues," *Priester-Konferenzblatt*, 75 (1964), p. 123.
19. Klaus Reinhardt, "Raimundus Lullus und Nicolaus Cusanus: ihr Umgang mit der Bibel in der Predigt," pp. 133-145 in Fernando Domínguez y Jaime de Salas, editors, *Constantes y fragmentos del pensamiento luliano* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996), p. 139.
20. Niederkofler, "Über die Predigtweise," *op. cit.* (n. 18 above), p. 120.
21. Bohnenstädt, *op. cit.* (n. 5 above), p. 22.
22. Egger, "Die Kirche von Brixen," *op. cit.* (n. 12 above), p. 296. See also Alois Trenkwalder, "Zur Geschichte der Predigt in der Diözese Brixen," *Konferenzblatt für Theologie und Seelsorge*, 95 (1984), p. 148.
23. Euler, "Die Predigten," *op. cit.* (n. 10 above), p. 284.
24. Walter A. Euler, "Die Christusverkündigung in den Brixener Predigten des Nikolaus von Cues," *MFCG*, 27 (2001), p. 66.
25. Vansteenbergh signals the fact that Nicholas distinguishes four senses of Scripture: the literal, or historical, sense; the tropological, or moral, sense; the allegorical sense; and the anagogical sense. *Le Cardinal*, *op. cit.* (n. 3 above), p. 158.
26. Sermon XVIII (15).
27. Restated verbatim from p. 5 of *Hugh of Balma on Mystical Theology: A Translation and an Overview of His De Theologia Mystica*, translated by Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: Banning, 2002).
28. Matthew 12:40.
29. Koch, *Untersuchungen über Datierung*, *op. cit.* (n. 4 above), pp. 29-37.
30. *De Docta Ignorantia* was completed in February, 1440. It was composed chiefly in 1439.
31. I myself plan to draw together into a future book those of Nicholas's sermons (in English translation) that I deem to be his best ones if only because they are of the most interest to me, a theologically oriented historian of philosophy. And, of course, I have drawn together into this present volume not simply the sermons composed before the composition (1439) of *De Docta Ignorantia* but the sermons up until and including the year 1441.
32. Sermon XXII (10).
33. Sermon XXII (9).
34. Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, Book II. The excerpt above is not a quotation but is a summarizing paraphrase.
35. Sermon XXII (15-16).
36. Sermon XXII (13).
37. Sermon XXII (5 & 42-44).
38. Sermon I (3 & 7).
39. Sermon II (6). Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* II, 16.
40. Sermon II (16-17).

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41. Sermon IV (34).
42. Sermon IV (32-34).
43. Similarly, a rational glimpse of God's triunity can be gained from an examination of creatures, although the mind needs the stimulating assistance of revelation: "However, for those who nowadays hold, by faith, that [God is] a Trinity, it would not be difficult to find, subsequent to their faith, rational grounds for [this belief in] a Trinity—as states Richard of St. Victor at the outset of his *On the Trinity*.... However, from merely naturalistic considerations and without their having had faith, they would not have arrived at these reasons." [Sermon XIX (6)]
44. Sermon IV (35).
45. Sermon VI (6 & 13).
46. Sermon VI (27). See also Sermon VIII (16) and Sermon XXI (15).
47. Sermon VI (16-18 & 34).
48. Sermon VIII (38). See also my article "Die Tugenden in der Sicht des Nikolaus von Kues. Ihre Vielfalt, ihr Verhältnis untereinander und ihr Sein. Erbe und Neuansatz," *MFCG*, 26 (2000), 9-37.
49. Sermon IX (35).
50. Sermon VI (13).
51. Sermon VIII (13 & 27).
52. See n. 86 of Notes to Sermon VIII.
53. Sermon IX (13).
54. Cf. Sermon XXII (35) with Sermon XVII (11).
55. Like Anselm (*De Conceptu Virginali* 7 & 14), Nicholas did not believe that ordinary human beings have a rational soul from the moment of their conception.
56. On p. xxiii of Vol. XVI, Fascicle zero, Haubst notes that the Vatican Latin mss. 1244 and 1245 contain all but eighteen of Nicholas's 293 sermons.
57. Sermon XXI (15-16).
58. Luke 15:17 & 24:32.