

**A MISCELLANY  
ON NICHOLAS OF CUSA**

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## ON BEING A SON OF GOD (De Filiatione Dei)

The fervor of your desire has compelled me, now at last, to respond here to your frequent urgings.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, you are seen earnestly to request of me what it is that I surmise regarding being a son of God. Sonship is known to be given to us by the Eternal Ray-of-Light—known through the very exalted theologian John, when he writes: “But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name.”<sup>2</sup> O Fellow-brother, rightly revered, what is here presented receive in the following manner: that you not suppose me to be adding something new to the things you have read in my previous works.<sup>3</sup> For there has remained in my inmost thoughts nothing that I have not entrusted to those previous writings, which express my general surmises, such as they are. Perhaps you will recognize this fact in what is about to be said.

To put my view summarily: I judge that being a son of God is to be regarded as nothing other than deification,<sup>4</sup> which, in Greek, is called *theosis*.

But you know that *theosis* is ultimacy-of-perfection, which is called both *knowledge of God and His Word* and *intuitive vision*. For John the theologian's meaning is, I believe, that Logos, or Eternal Reason, which in the beginning was God-with-God,<sup>5</sup> gave to man rational light when He gave to him a spirit in His own likeness. Thereafter, [God] declared (by means of various admonitions from the seer-prophets and, in the end, by means of the Word, which appeared in the world) that the light of reason is the life of our spirit and that (in the case of us believers) if we have accepted the Divine Word Himself, then there arises in our rational spirit the power of sonship.

This [power of sonship] is a super-wonderful participation in divine power, so that our rational spirit has this power in its own intellectual strength. It is as if the intellect were a divine seed—the intellect whose power in the believer can reach such heights that it attains unto *theosis*. It attains, that is, unto the ultimate perfection of the intellect—in other words unto the apprehension of truth, not as truth is bedarkened in figurativeness and symbolisms and vari-

ous degrees of otherness in this sensible world but rather as truth is intellectually visible in itself. And this is that sufficiency which our intellectual power—which, in the case of believers, is actualized by the arousal of the Divine Word—has from God. For he who does not believe will not at all ascend; rather, he has condemned himself to be unable to ascend, by closing off for himself the pathway [of ascent]. For nothing is attained without faith,<sup>6</sup> which first sets the pilgrim on his journey. Insofar as our soul believes, therefore, our power of soul can mount upward unto perfection-of-intellect. Hence, if faith is present, ascent even unto being a son of God is not forbidden.

54 And since sonship is the ultimum of all power, our intellectual power is not exhaustible this side of *theosis*; nor does [the intellect] attain that which is its ultimate perfection at any stage this side of the quietude of sonship's perpetual light and its life of everlasting joy. However, I am of the opinion that this deification surpasses the limits of every mode of intuition. For<sup>7</sup> in this world nothing that does not retain the mode of contraction can enter into a man's heart, mind, or intellect—however high and elevated these may be. Hence, not even any concept—whether the concept of joy, delight, truth, essence, power, introspection, or any other concept—can be without a restricting mode. This mode, different in each thing, will have been drawn to sensory images in accordance with the [various] conditions of this world. Therefore, when we are free from this world, we will have been freed<sup>8</sup> also from these bedarkening modes. As a result, our intellect, having been freed from these restricting modes, will obtain (by means of its intellectual light) the divine life as its happiness. By means of that life the intellect will be elevated—though without the contracted bedarkened images of the sensible world—unto an intuition of truth.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, this intuition will not fail to have the mode of *that* world. For the theologian [John] says that the light of reason has (in the case of all who believe and who receive the Word)<sup>10</sup> the power of attaining unto being a son of God. Therefore, sonship will be present in many sons and will be participated in in various ways by them.<sup>11</sup> For multiplicity participates in various ways—and with various degrees of otherness—in oneness, since everything that exists in something other [than itself] exists, necessarily, in a way other [than the way it exists in itself].<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the sonship of many [sons] will not be without mode. This mode can perhaps be called “participation in adoption.”<sup>13</sup> But since the sonship of the Only Begotten [Son] is without mode, in an identity of nature with the Father,<sup>14</sup> it is Super-

absolute Sonship, in which and through which all sons by adoption obtain their sonship.

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## II

Now, you seem to want me to guide you, in some manner or other, to the place where you can see what that ineffable joy of sonship is. Although you do not expect that this joy (which surpasses every mind) can be adequately expressed (especially since by means of surmises we cannot go beyond the encumbering modes of symbolisms), I fear being tagged with bold presumptiveness if I, a sinful man, undertake a task reserved for the most purified of minds. Nevertheless, my great longing to please you does not permit me to remain silent. Take note, then, very briefly, of what I now surmise.

56

I do not think that we become sons of God in such way that we will be then something [essentially] other than we are now; instead, *then* we will be in another manner that which *now* we are in our present manner.<sup>15</sup> For the intellectual power—which receives the actual divine light, through which light the intellectual power is enlivened—draws, by faith upon that light's continual influence, so that it may grow, [as it were] into a perfect man (*vir*). But manliness does not belong to the world of boyhood, where the human being (*homo*) is still developing; rather, it belongs to the world of full development. The boy is the same individual as the grown man; but sonship does not appear in the boy, who is counted among the servants, but at the adult age, when [the son] co-reigns with the father.<sup>16</sup> The one who is now in school, in order to progress, is the same one who later obtains the mastery. In this present world we are learning; in the next world we will have mastery. But we study, as the theologian [John] says, in the following way: we receive reason's word from a teacher, whom we believe, for he is a truthful teacher and teaches us rightly, and we are confident of being able to progress; and because we receive his word and believe, we will be teachable by God.<sup>17</sup> Hereby there arises in us the power to be able to attain unto that mastery which is sonship.

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A painter teaches an apprentice to paint many particular forms with a brush. Then, at length, the apprentice passes from being an apprentice to being a master. This mastery is a passing beyond the knowledge of particular things unto a universal knowledge;<sup>18</sup> between the particular knowledge and the universal knowledge there is no comparative relation.<sup>19</sup> [From this illustration we see that] in this present

world we are learning by means of the senses, which attain only unto particular things. We pass from the sensible world of particulars unto a universal knowledge, which is present in the intellectual world. For what is universal is in the intellect and belongs to the intellectual domain. In this [sensible] world our learning deals with various particular objects as with various books. [However,] in the intellectual world there is only one object of the intellect, viz., truth itself; with respect to this object [the intellect] has a universal mastery. For in this [sensible] world the intellect has been seeking—in the various particular objects and by means of the senses—only its own life and the nourishment thereof, i.e., truth, which is the life of the intellect.

- 58** And the mastery that [the intellect] seeks in its study of this world is the following: viz., to understand truth—indeed, to have a mastery of truth, or to be a master of truth, or to be a universal knowledge of truth.<sup>20</sup> But the intellect does not find [in this world] the universal knowledge [of truth] but finds [only] those particulars, which are works of art.<sup>21</sup> But it passes from the school of this world unto the domain of mastery; and it is made into a master, a universal knowledge, of the works of this world. Therefore, when [the intellect] finds itself to be in that domain where the Master of all workable works dwells (viz., the Son of God, that Word through which both the heavens and all creatures were formed),<sup>22</sup> and when [the intellect] finds itself to be like Him,<sup>23</sup> then there is a cessation of the intellect's striving after life and perfection, and a cessation of its every movement. For the divine sonship is in the intellect when universal knowledge is in it, i.e., when the intellect is divine universal-knowledge in which and through which all things exist,<sup>24</sup> i.e., when the intellect is both God and all things in that manner whereby it has attained the mastery.<sup>25</sup>

In attentive meditation reflect upon all the foregoing.

- 59** Indeed, by its universal receptivity knowing encompasses all things knowable—viz., God and whatever exists.<sup>26</sup> Now, a scholar (*doctus scriba*) who has obtained a mastery of universal knowledge has a treasure from which he can bring forth both new and old items. Therefore, in accordance with the mode of mastery, his intellect encompasses God and all things in such way that nothing escapes it or is outside it; thus, in the intellect all things are the intellect. Likewise, in another scholar this same thing occurs in its own way, and likewise regarding all [scholars]. Accordingly, in the school of this sensible world: the more diligent someone is in the exercise of his intel-

lectual study in the light of the Divine Teacher's word, the more perfectly he will obtain the mastery.

**60** Hence, since the mastery which we seek and in which the happiness of our intellectual life consists is the mastery of true and eternal things: if our intellectual spirit is to become a perfect master, so that within itself it will possess eternally the very delightful intellectual life, then its study must not cling to temporal shadows of the sensible world but must use them, *en passant*, for intellectual study—as school-boys use material and perceptible writings. For their study is not of the material shapes of the letters but rather of the rational signification of those letters. Likewise, they use in an intellectual way, not in a sensory way, the vocal words by means of which they are taught, so that by means of these vocal signs they attain unto the mind of their teacher. But if there are those who delight rather in signs, then they will not attain unto a mastery of philosophy but, remaining ignorant thereof, will degenerate into writers, painters, orators, singers, or cithara players.

**61** In some such like way we who aspire unto being God's sons are admonished not to cling to sensible objects, which are symbolic signs of the true, but rather, because of our infirmity, to use these objects—without any polluting adherence thereto—in the following manner: as if through them the Teacher-of-truth were speaking to us and as if they were books containing the expression of His mind.<sup>27</sup> And, in that case, we will contemplate intellectual things in and through sensible things; and we will ascend [contemplatively], by means of a certain disproportional parallelism, from transitory and insubstantial temporal things, whose being is in constant flux, unto eternal things, where all succession is caught up into the abiding permanency of rest. And we will have leisure for the contemplation of that true, just, and joyous life. We will be free from all pollution (which draws us downward), so that with ardent desire for learning more of God, and being free from this world, we can enter into that life by attaining the mastery. This is the joy of the Lord that no one will be able to remove [from us; this is] when we comprehend, by an intellectual tasting, that we have attained incorruptible life. And, indeed, this is the supreme delight—as when we taste, by a fully healthy power-of-sense, life-giving food that we hungrily desire. For a sick man who has an infected palate eats very flavorful foods. But because the natural vigor of his power-of-sense does not sense the pleasantness of the flavor, he lives

in unpleasantness (with fatigue, sadness, and strain); and it is painful for him to chew food. But one who is hungry and whose palate is healthy and free of infection eats with pleasure and joy. In some such similar way (though a very remote one) the sons of God have incessant joy when their intellectual life, because of its incorruptible nature, not only is not annihilated but even lives by means of an intellectual tasting. By means of this tasting [the intellect] is aware that it is alive with true intellectual life; and pure truth forever renews [the desire for] this tasting.<sup>28</sup>

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## III

Perhaps that which is often heard disturbs you: viz., that God is incomprehensible and that sonship—which is an apprehension of Truth, which is God—cannot be attained.<sup>29</sup> You have adequately understood, I think, that truth as it exists in something other [than itself] can be comprehended as existing only in some way other [than the way it exists in itself].<sup>30</sup> But since these God-revealing modes are intellectual, then although God is not attained as He is, nevertheless He will be seen, in the pureness of our intellectual spirit, without any be-darkening sensory image. And this vision is clear to the intellect and is “Face-to-face.”<sup>31</sup> Since this mode of the manifestation of Absolute Truth is the ultimate, vital happiness of an intellect that is thus<sup>32</sup> enjoying Truth, it is God, without whom the intellect cannot be happy.

63

I want you to take note of how it is that objective truth is that which quiets all intellectual motion; outside this realm of truth no trace of the intellect is found; moreover, from the point of view of the intellect’s judgment there cannot be anything outside the heaven-of-truth. But as I explained in other works of mine:<sup>33</sup> if you notice very carefully, then [you will see that] Truth is not God as He triumphs in Himself but is a mode of God by which God is impartible to the intellect in terms of eternal life. For as He triumphs in Himself God is neither intelligible nor knowable, nor is He Truth or Life, nor does He exist;<sup>34</sup> rather, He precedes everything intelligible, as its one, most simple Beginning.

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Hence, since in the foregoing way<sup>35</sup> [God] transcends every intellect, then in the foregoing way He is not found in the realm, or heaven, of the intellect; nor can the intellect attain unto Him beyond this heaven-of-being. Consequently, since God can be attained beyond the intellectual realm only negatively,<sup>36</sup> then within the empyrean



heaven<sup>37</sup> the pathway of enjoying true being and life—viz., [the pathway] of the very lofty rapture of our [intellectual] spirit—is attained with peace and quietude when our spirit is filled with this manifestation of God’s glory. And therein is that supreme intellectual joy, when [the intellect] beholds its Beginning, Middle, and End—beholds them in the object of the intellect, viz., in pure truth, while knowing that these excel all the loftiness of [that] apprehension. And this is [the intellect’s] apprehending of itself in truth,<sup>38</sup> in such excellence of glory that the intellect understands that nothing can remain outside itself but that in it all things are it.<sup>39</sup>

- 65** But in order that you may be led by an illustration, [I will propose the following]: You are not at all ignorant, I know, of the fact that [visible] forms that are equal<sup>40</sup> in straight mirrors appear to be less than equal in curved mirrors. Therefore, suppose that there is a most lofty Reflection of our Beginning, viz., the glorious God—a Reflection in which God Himself appears. Let this Reflection be a Mirror-of-truth that is without blemish, completely straight, most perfect, and without bounds. And let all creatures be mirrors with different degrees of contraction and differently curved. Among these creatures let the intellectual natures be living mirrors that are straighter and more clearly reflecting [than the others].<sup>41</sup> And since [these intellectual mirrors] are alive and intellectual and free, conceive them to be of such kind that they can curve themselves, straighten themselves, and clean themselves.
- 66** I say, then: One [and the same] reflected-brightness appears variously in all mirror-reflections. But in the first, most straight Reflected-brightness all the other mirrors appear as they are. (This occurrence can be observed in the case of material mirrors turned toward one another in a facing circle.) But in each of the other mirrors, which are contracted and curved, all the other mirrors appear not as they themselves are but in accordance with the condition of the receiving mirror, i.e., with some diminishment because of the receiving mirror’s deviation from straightness.
- 67** Therefore, when any intellectual, living mirror is brought unto that first and straight Mirror-of-truth, in which all other mirrors appear truly and accurately as they are, then the Mirror-of-truth reflects itself, along with all that it has received from all the mirrors, into the intellectual, living mirror. And the intellectual mirror receives unto itself that mirror-ray from the Mirror-of-truth, which Mirror has with-

in itself the truth of all the mirrors. However, it receives [this ray] in its own manner.<sup>42</sup> But that [intellectual,] living mirror (as it were, a living eye)—upon receiving the first Mirror’s reflected light—in [one and] the same moment of eternity beholds (in that same Mirror-of-truth) itself as it is and beholds (within itself) all the mirrors in its own [conditioning] manner. For the more simple and less contracted and more bright, clean, straight, just, and true [the intellectual mirror] is, the more clearly, joyously, and truly it will behold within itself God’s glory and all mirrors. Therefore, in that first Mirror, [viz.,] the Mirror-of-truth (which can be said to be God’s Word, Logos, or Son), the intellectual mirror obtains sonship, so that (1) it is all things in all things, and (2) all things are in it, and (3) its kingdom is the possession, in glorious life, of God and all things.

**68** And so, Brother, [mentally] remove the quantitative contractions of the sensible mirrors,<sup>43</sup> and free your conception from place and time and all things sensible, elevating yourself unto the rational reflected-brightnesses, where in clear reason our mind beholds truth. (For we seek out the hidden recesses of uncertain matters with the clear light of rational reflection; and we know to be true that which reason teaches us.) Hereupon, transfer the foregoing paradigm unto the intellectual realm so that by means of such guidance<sup>44</sup> you can elevate yourself more closely unto mentally viewing divine sonship. For by means of a certain bedarkened intuition you will be able to relish, in advance, the fact that sonship is nothing other than our being conducted from the shadowy traces of mere representations unto union with Infinite Reason, in which and through which our [intellectual] spirit lives and understands that it lives. [This living and understanding] occurs in such way that (1) [our intellectual spirit] sees nothing as living outside itself, and (2) only all those things are alive which in the intellectual spirit are the intellectual spirit, and (3) the intellectual spirit knows that it has life of such great abundance that in it itself all other things live eternally in such way that they do not maintain *its* life but, rather, it is the life of [all other] living things.<sup>45</sup>

**69** For to this [intellectual spirit] God will not be *other*<sup>46</sup> than it or different or distinct; nor will Divine Reason be *other* or the Word of God *other* or the Spirit of God *other*. For all otherness and all difference are far beneath sonship. For the most pure intellect makes to be intellect whatever is intelligible, since in the most pure intellect everything intelligible is the intellect itself. Therefore, everything that is true

is both true and intelligible through truth itself.<sup>47</sup> Hence, truth alone is the intelligibility of everything intelligible. Accordingly, an abstract and most pure intellect makes to be intellect the truth of everything intelligible, so that [this intellect] lives by an intellectual life that consists of actual understanding. Therefore, when in a [most pure] intellect truth *is* the intellect, the intellect will always be in the act of understanding and living; but when it understands truth (which in the intellect is the intellect), it does not understand something that is *other* than itself. For nothing is understood except for what is intelligible. However, in a most pure intellect everything intelligible is the intellect. Therefore, nothing will remain except an intellect that is pure in itself. This intellect can understand as able to exist only what is intelligible. Therefore, since the fact of the matter is thus, that intellect does not understand the intelligible to be *other*, nor will its actual understanding be anything *other*. Instead, in a oneness of being there is the intellect that understands, that which is understood, and the act of understanding.<sup>48</sup> Truth will not be something *other* than the intellect. And the life by which [the intellect] lives will not be *other* than the intellect, which lives in accordance with the entire strength and nature of its intellectual vigor. This nature encompasses all things in a conformity with itself, and it makes itself to be all things when in it all things are it.<sup>49</sup>

**70** Therefore, sonship is the removal of all otherness and all difference and is the resolution of all things into one thing—a resolution that is also the imparting of one thing unto all other things. And this imparting is *theosis*. Now, God is one thing in which all things are present as one; He is also the imparting of oneness unto all things, so that all things are that which they are; and in the [aforementioned] intellectual intuition *being something one in which are all things* and *being all things in which there is something one* coincide. Accordingly, we are rightly deified when we are exalted to the point that in a oneness [of being]<sup>50</sup> we are (1) a oneness in which are all things and (2) a oneness [which is] in all things.

**71** Do not regard the foregoing expressions as precise, for ineffable matters are not attained by expressions. Hence, you must be elevated, by means of profound meditation, above all contrarities, figures, places, times, images, and contradictions, above [all] alterities, disjunctions, conjunctions, affirmations, and negations. Thereupon, you, a son of Life, will be transformed into Life by means of being elevated beyond all comparative relations, all parallelisms, and all rational in-

ferences—elevated unto pure intellectual life.

And, for the time being, this is a surmise of sorts (although a very remote one) about *theosis*—a surmise whereby (whatever be the description of that most lofty profundity) you may surmise, as best you can, about our having to ascend, in simple pureness [of intellect], beyond all reasoning unto something higher than that which is explicable by means of any signs whatsoever.

May these statements, made in the foregoing way, suffice on this topic.

72

IV

But I do not doubt that you very strongly desire for me to disclose to you the conception of the pathway by which I surmise that in the present course of time we are to proceed with our pursuit of sonship.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, I will endeavor to explicate this matter still more, according as it comes to mind. Now, I say that an analytic approach will get us out of various convolutions if we will look unto the *one* and the modes of the one. [I do] not [mean] that the One—which is free from all qualifications and which is the Beginning, the Middle, and the End of all things (indeed, which in all things is all things and in nothing is nothing)—is somehow comparatively related to intelligible, rational, and sensible beings. (I dealt with this point elsewhere, viz., in *On Learned Ignorance*).<sup>52</sup> For to this unqualifiedly Maximum we cannot come by means of an ascending or a descending order of things. Rather, [this Maximum] remains super-exalted above all order and all gradation. Nevertheless, this One, although it remains unattainable, is the One which in all things is attained. Therefore, the One will be that which is also all things: at [one and] the same time, [it will be true that] the unattainable One is attained in all things.

[The situation] is as if someone were to speak of the innumerable unit, which, nevertheless, is every number; and in every number the innumerable unit is counted. For no number can be anything other than the unit. For example, the number ten has from the unit all that which it itself is; and without the unit, ten would not be a number nor would it be the number ten. For that which the number ten is, it has completely from the unit. Nor is the number ten anything *other* than the unit. Moreover, whatever [the number ten receives] from the unit is not received by it as if some being besides the unit could befit it; rather, all that which it is is unit. Nevertheless, the number ten does not give number to the unit; but, rather, the innumerable unit remains

uncountable in terms of the number ten, just as it is also uncountable in terms of any other number, for it is exalted above all numbers. And because the number six is not the number seven, these two numbers will be different, although the unit in six is not different from the unit in seven. For in these [two different numbers] only a single unit is found with a difference [of modes]. Therefore, the unit, which is the beginning of number, is not locatable in number; instead, oneness is present in number countably and is present in the unit uncountably. There is no coordination or proportion of the countable to the non-countable, of the absolute to the modally contracted.

- 73 Likewise, it is fitting that you surmise [as follows]: The *one* that is the beginning of all things is ineffable, since it is the beginning of all effable things. Therefore, whatever can be uttered does not express the ineffable; nonetheless, every expression indicates the ineffable. For [the ineffable] is the one, is the father or begetter of the word, and is all that which is verbalized in any word, all that which is signified by any sign—and similarly regarding other things.
- 74 And to guide you by means of another example: the intellect of a teacher is altogether unattainable within the realm of the rational and the sensible. This intellect is moved because of the fullness of its mastery and of its power or goodness—moved to unite other intellects to a likeness of itself. It begets from itself a mental word, which is the teacher's simple and perfect word-of-mastery, or perfect knowledge (*ars ipsa perfecta*). [The teacher] wants this knowledge to inspire the minds of his students. But since it cannot enter their minds except through sensible signs, he draws in air and from it forms a sound which he variously in-forms and expresses, so that in this way he elevates the minds of the students unto an equal mastery [with himself]. But none of the teacher's words are able to manifest the author of the words, viz., the intellect, except by means of a mental conception, or an intellectual word, which is the image of the intellect.
- 75 In such an expression of the teacher's teaching there shines forth the teacher's affection: it shines forth in his pronunciation and in various ways according to the various modes of his expressing himself. In order that the word may bear fruit, a conception of the teacher's affection shines forth in the words' signification,<sup>53</sup> as does also the mastery, from which flows the very fruitful and masterly conception. Now, none of the modes of pronunciation attain unto the affection, since the latter is so great that it cannot be sufficiently expressed in

pronunciation. Nor do any of the modes-of-formulation of the utterances attain unto the conception, which is of inexpressible fruitfulness, since it is the masterly knowledge. Nor can the utterance and its pronunciation, in all their possible modes, express the intellectual mastery, even though, in every utterance, nothing other than a manifestation of that mastery is present or is signified—with the goal of transforming [the minds of the students] into a similar<sup>54</sup> mastery.

76 In some such similar way our triune Beginning created, because of His goodness, this sensible world for the sake of intellectual spirits. He created matter to be the “voice” whereby He made His mental word to shine forth in various ways. Thus, all sensible objects are utterances of various expressions—utterances unfolded from God the Father through [God] the Son (who is the Word) in [God] the Spirit-of-all-things. [These were unfolded] to the end that through sensible signs the teaching of the supreme mastery would be imparted unto human minds and would effectively transform [them] into a similar mastery, so that for the sake of the intellectual [spirit] this entire sensible world would be as it is and man would be the highest of the sensible creatures and the glorious God would be the Beginning, the Middle, and the End of His every activity.

77 Therefore, the pursuit on the part of those who aim at being sons of God is the following: it recognizes (1) that everything effable is from the incomparable and super-exalted Ineffable; (2) that the Ineffable is situated above everything intellectual and is the Beginning, the Middle, and the End of everything intelligible; (3) that the One is, in a way that cannot be participated in, the Fount of intelligible beings and is all that which they are.<sup>55</sup> (By comparison, the mental word is the fount of the vocal [word] and is all that which [the vocal word] is; and the mental word is signified by the vocal word without there being any intermixing or dividing of the mental word, since the mind cannot be either participated in, or in any way attained unto, by the vocal word.) But the intellectual [i.e., mental] word is itself the intellectual reception of the ineffable Word.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, every intellectual word remains free from all contraction to the sensible.<sup>57</sup> Now, that which the intellectual is it has intellectually from the Ineffable. If the Ineffable is given a name by the intellect, then this [name-giving] is done in an unrestricted manner, since the intellectual mode, in turn, is not restricted to sensibly contracted things.

78 Therefore, the Ineffable can in no way either be named or attained

unto. Hence, a non-relational name—whether “being”<sup>58</sup> or “deity” or “goodness” or “truth” or even “power” or any other name whatsoever—does not at all name God, who is unnameable. Rather, a non-relational name speaks of the unnameable God by means of various intellectual modes.<sup>59</sup> In this way the Ineffable is effable, the Incapable of being participated in<sup>60</sup> is capable of being participated in, and the Transcender of every mode is modifiable. Consequently, God is the Beginning, which is above the one and above mode; [yet,] in the one and in its modes He exhibits Himself as [therein] able to be participated in. Therefore, I surmise that the pursuit by which we attempt, while in this world, to ascend unto the attainment of sonship, is perhaps possible with the aid of something else, so that my speculation deals with the one and its modes.

79

V

And so that by my speaking more pithily you may sense, in terms of an example, what I mean: Apply [the notions of] *one* and *mode* to something that you experience to be both present and active in all things. Now, we experience that some power is present in all things. Therefore, let power be abstracted by the intellect, so that you consider it in an unrestricted manner.<sup>61</sup> This absolutized power will be, then, (1) a certain maximum that is capable of comparison and that has within itself all gradations and modes of power in a universal elevation and in a oneness of intellectual simplicity, and (2) a very lofty mode by means of which the super-excellent, ineffable and altogether unattainable Cause of all power is attained unto in an intellectual way.<sup>62</sup> For God is not power but is the Lord of powers.

80

Next, we must notice that God, who exists above everything absolute<sup>63</sup> and everything contracted, is not attained, as He is in Himself, by any very lofty absoluteness but [is attained only] in conjunction with the [given] absolutized mode.<sup>64</sup> In this absolutized way intellectual natures participate intellectually in Him who cannot be participated in, so that they are powers elevated above all contraction of power insofar as power is obscured, [i.e., contracted], in the sensible world. Now, the absoluteness of power has modes.<sup>65</sup> For absoluteness cannot be participated in apart from a mode. Therefore, the absoluteness of power manifests various powers that participate [therein] with a variety of modes. Hence, there are various intellectual spirits participating in power with various modes of absoluteness, so that all ab-

solute spirits participate in one power variously and are nothing other than participants in absolute power in various ways.<sup>66</sup>

- 81** You now see how powerful the possibility of the [intellectual] spirit is,<sup>67</sup> since it is a power exalted above all power that belongs to the sensible world. Therefore, in the possibility of an intellectual spirit's power there is enfolded all the power of the heavens and of the things subordinate to the intellectual spirit, so that all the power in them is a certain unfolding of the intellectual spirit's power. Now, this present sensible world participates—in various sensible ways—in the one power in which the intellectual [world] participates in various intellectual ways. Therefore, the absolute power of the intellectual world is contracted by the sensible [world] by various modes of participation: in the heavens [the power of the intellectual world is contracted] celestially, in sensing beings sensorily, in living beings livingly, in vegetating beings vegetatingly, in minerals in a mineral way, and so on regarding other things.<sup>68</sup>
- 82** Therefore, if you look carefully you will find, in all things, power and its modes. So power is one thing which in all things is all things; and all things participate in it in their own manner. You may surmise about being, goodness, and truth in like manner as about power. For being is the one thing in which all existing things participate. And a similar point holds regarding both goodness and truth. Hence, the very wise law-giver Moses says that God *created* all things and *formed* man—as if<sup>69</sup> God were creative and formative power, although He is above all these things. But Moses tries to make known that all things come into existence by participation in God's power,<sup>70</sup> in the way in which it can be variously participated in. Likewise, he says that God saw that all things were *good*—[thereby] indicating that God is the Fount-of-goodness, from whom, in the way in which He can be variously participated in, various goods arise. Therefore, there is only one thing, which cannot be participated in apart from a mode.<sup>71</sup>
- 83** And to disclose to you more adequately that which I surmise: That which all theologians or philosophers attempt to express in a variety of modes is a single thing. There is one kingdom of heaven, of which there is one likeness,<sup>72</sup> which can be unfolded only in a variety of modes, as the Teacher of truth indicates.<sup>73</sup> Zeno, Parmenides, Plato, or any others [among the philosophers or theologians] have not handed down different truths; rather, all of them viewed one [and the same] thing, but they spoke of it in various ways. For although their ways



of speaking are at odds and seem incompatible, nevertheless [these teachers] attempted to explicate only the One, situated inattainably above all contrariety. [Each attempted to do so] in his own manner—one by affirming, another by denying, still another by doubting. For there is one theology: qua affirmative theology it affirms all things of the One; qua negative theology it denies all things of the One—while qua dubitative theology it neither affirms nor denies, qua disjunctive theology it affirms one alternative and denies the other, and qua conjunctive theology it conjoins opposites affirmingly or else denyingly rejects the opposites conjointly. Likewise, within theology all possible ways of speaking endeavor somehow to express what is ineffable.

84

VI

This, then, is the way-of-pursuit on the part of those who aim at *theosis*: viz., in the difference of whatever modes to discern the One. For when any seeker, considering carefully, takes note of how it is that the One, the Cause of all things, cannot fail to be expressed in every expression Oust as a word cannot fail to be expressed in the case of everyone who speaks, whether he says that he is speaking or says that he is not speaking), then it is evident to him both that the power of the Ineffable encompasses everything sayable and that nothing can be said wherein, in that statement's manner, the Cause of all saying and being-said does not shine forth. Therefore, a scholar-who-is-theologizing-truly will find nothing that would disturb him in regard to all the variety of surmises. In his eyes, someone who says that there exists nothing at all says no less than someone who says that all the things which seem to exist do exist. And he who says that God is all things speaks no more truly than he who says that God is nothing or not-being.<sup>74</sup> For he knows (1) that no matter what anyone might say [of God], He is ineffable, above all affirmation and negation, and (2) that what anyone does say of God is nothing other than a certain mode by which the speaker speaks of the Ineffable. By comparison, the two species *man* and *ass* express, in different manners, the genus *animal*—the human species [expressing it] rationally and the species *ass* [expressing it] irrationally. With respect to the human species' expression, rationality is seen to befit *animality*; with respect to the expression of [the species] *ass*, irrationality [is seen to befit *animality*]. But if someone looks unto genus, [seeing] that it is so exalted above these differentiae and that therefore none of the differentiae befit it, then he will notice that the expression of the species is a certain differential

mode of the genus, which is exalted above the differentiae. (A similar point holds regarding [the species] *ass.*) Hence, these contrary expressions of the contrary differential modes do not hinder the one who looks unto the one super-exalted genus.

**85** The pursuer [of *theosis*] must not, then, neglect the fact that in this school of the sensible world the One, which is all things, is sought amid a variety of modes, whereas when the mastery has been attained, in the heaven of the pure intellect, all things are known in the One. Now, you may surmise from the aforesaid how this [mastery] comes about. For in that future state the mind is not moved to its apprehension [of all things] by any rational inference from sensibly received [data].<sup>75</sup> Instead, [even in this world] the mind participates intellectually in absolute power in such way that in accordance with the abundant power of the mind's nature a certain notion of all intelligible things arises. [While the mind was] in this world, it strove to elevate this powerful [notional-]possibility into actuality by means of sensory stimuli. Accordingly, when subsequently the power is actualized by reasoning and is freed from enlivening the body (to which it lent itself as capable of being participated in)<sup>76</sup> and attains unto unity with itself, a living intellect, then it finds itself to be a power that is the *actual* notion of [all] things.

**86** For just as God is the actual Essence of all things,<sup>77</sup> so also the intellect, as separated [from enlivening a corruptible body] and as vitally and transformedly unified in itself, is a living likeness of God. Hence, as God is the Essence of all things, so too the intellect, which is a likeness of God, is a likeness of all things. Now, knowing occurs by means of a likeness. But since the intellect is a living intellectual likeness of God, then when it knows itself it knows, in its one self, all things. Now, it knows itself when it sees itself in God as it is.<sup>78</sup> And this [seeing] occurs when in the intellect God is the intellect. Therefore, the intellect's knowing all things is nothing other than its seeing itself as a likeness-of-God—something<sup>79</sup> that is sonship. Hence, by means of a single, cognitive intuition it sees all things. But here and now the intellect seeks the One amid a variety of modes. Therefore, the intellectual power, which extends itself rationally and sensibly for its pursuits in this world, gathers itself again when it is transferred from out of this world. For the intellectual powers that are participated in by the organs of the senses and by the organs of the reasoning processes will return to their intellectual center, so that they

will be alive with intellectual life in a oneness of their [returning] emanations.

- 87** Now you are able to see sufficiently clearly that in accordance with my surmise, such as it is, the intellectual nature is a universality-of-things in an intellectual mode. And while [the intellect] is occupied in the schools of this world, it seeks to actualize its potency, and it assimilates itself to particular forms. For when it actually assimilates itself to the thing understood, it exercises an understanding of this and that thing—[doing so] of its own power, whereby it intellectually contains in its potency the universality of things. This assimilative power, which in the foregoing way is actualized in connection with particular [forms], is transferred to complete actuality and to the perfect universal] knowledge that belongs to mastery—transferred when in the intellectual heaven [the intellectual nature] knows itself to be a likeness of all things. As a result, the intellect is *actually* an intellectual universality of all things when it is a discriminating notion of all things.
- 88** Nevertheless, the intellect does not then see anything except the intelligible heaven of its own quiescence and life. For it does not behold temporal things temporally, in constant succession, but beholds them in an indivisible present. For the present, or the now, that enfolds all time is not of this sensible world, since it cannot be attained by the senses, but is of the intellectual [world]. Likewise, [the intellect] does not at all behold quantities in their extended, divisible materiality but beholds them in an indivisible point in which there is the intellectual enfolding of all continuous quantity. Moreover, [the intellect] does not [then] behold differences-of-things in a variety of numbers but beholds [these things] intellectually in the simple unit, which enfolds every number.
- 89** Therefore, [in that state] the intellect perceives all things intellectually and beyond every sensible, distracting, and obscuring mode. Indeed, it beholds the entire sensible world not in a sensory manner but in a truer, viz., intellectual, manner. For this perfect knowledge is called intuition because between the knowledge of that world and the knowledge of this sensible [world] there is something like the difference which there is between knowledge received by sight and knowledge received by hearing.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, the more certain and clear is the knowledge produced by sight than is the knowledge (of the same thing) effected by hearing, the much more does intuitive knowledge

of the other world excel the knowledge which there is of this [present world]—just as *knowing why something is* can be called intuitive knowledge, since the knower looks into the reason for the thing, and *knowing that something is* [can be said to come] from hearing.

**90** Receive agreeably, I ask, these statements regarding our topic—statements made in the foregoing way and made imperfectly and cursorily, as time has permitted. At another time, if God ministers [to me] something more excellent, [I] will not keep it hidden from you.

Farewell for now, most beloved Fellow-brother. Make me a participant in your prayers, so that when we are translated from here below, we may attain—in the Only Begotten Son,<sup>81</sup> Jesus Christ, forever blessed—unto being sons of God.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- Ap.* *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* [Vol. II (edited by Raymond Klibansky) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1932)].
- CA* *Cribratio Alkorani* [Vol. VIII (edited by Ludwig Hagemann) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1986)].
- DI* *De Docta Ignorantia* [Latin-German edition: *Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues in deutscher Übersetzung*, published by Meiner Verlag. **Book I** (Vol. 264a), edited and translated by Paul Wilpert; 3rd edition with minor improvements by Hans G. Senger, 1979. **Book II** (Vol. 264b), edited and translated by Paul Wilpert; 2nd edition with minor improvements by Hans G. Senger, 1977. **Book III** (Vol. 264c), Latin text edited by Raymond Klibansky; introduction and translation by Hans G. Senger, 1977].
- DP* *De Possess* [Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 3rd ed., 1986)].
- DVD* *De Visione Dei* [Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 2nd ed., 1988)].
- MFCG* *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft*, edited by Rudolf Haubst *et al.* A continuing series published in Mainz, Germany by Matthias-Grünewald Verlag.
- NA* *De Li Non Aliud* [Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-other: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Li Non Aliud* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 3rd ed., 1987)].
- PF* *De Pace Fidei* [Vol. VII (edited by Raymond Klibansky and Hildebrand Bascour) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1970)].
- PL* *Patrologia Latina*, edited by J.-P. Migne. Series published in Paris.
- TB* Theodor Bibliander, editor, *Machumetis Sarracenorum Principis Vita ac Doctrina*. Zurich, 1550 (2nd ed.).
- VS* *De Venatione Sapientiae* [Vol. XII (edited by Raymond Klibansky and Hans G. Senger) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1982)].

## PRAENOTANDA

1. All references to Nicholas of Cusa's works are to the Latin texts—specifically to the following texts in the following editions (unless explicitly indicated otherwise):

- A. Heidelberg Academy edition of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia: De Concordantia Catholica; Sermones; De Coniecturis; De Deo Abscondito; De Quaerendo Deum; De Filiatione Dei; De Dato Patris Luminum; Coniectura de Ultimis Diebus; De Genesi; Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae; Idiota* (1983 edition) *de Sapientia, de Mente, de Staticis Experimentis; De Pace Fidei; De Beryllo* (1988); *Cribratio Alkorani; De Principio; De Venatione Sapientiae; Compendium; De Apice Theoriae*.
- B. Texts authorized by the Heidelberg Academy and published in the Latin-German editions of Felix Meiner Verlag's Philosophische Bibliothek: *De Docta Ignorantia*.
- C. Editions by J. Hopkins: *De Visione Dei* (1988); *De Possess* (1986); *De Li Non Aliud* (1987).

The references given for some of these treatises indicate book and chapter, for others margin number and line, and for still others page and line. Readers should have no difficulty determining which is which when they consult the particular Latin text. E.g., 'DI II, 6 (125:19-20)' indicates *De Docta Ignorantia*, Book II, Chap. 6, margin number 125, lines 19-20.

2. All references to the Koran are in terms of the English translation by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1980 printing). A reference such as 'Surah 7:29' indicates Surah 7, verse 29.

3. References to the Bible are given in terms of the Douay version. (References to chapters and verses of the Psalms include, in parentheses, the King James' locations.) English translations of the Vulgate are sometimes taken from the Douay version, whether *in locis* this borrowing is explicitly indicated or not.

4. Where, for purposes of clarification, words from the Latin text are inserted into the translations, the following rule is employed: when the Latin term is noted exactly as it appears in the Latin text, parentheses are used; when the case endings of nouns are transformed to the nominative, brackets are used.

5. American-style punctuation is used, except where clarity occasionally requires placing a comma or a period outside of quotation marks.

## NOTES TO *DE FILIATIONE DEI*

1. This treatise was written in July 1445 for Conrad of Wartberg, a canon at the monastery in Meinfelt (today Münstermaifeld), near Koblenz, Germany.
2. John 1: 12. The translation is adapted from the Douay Version.
3. Nicholas must have in mind principally *De Docta Ignorantia* (1440) and *De Coniecturis* (1442-43). *De Deo Abscondito* (before 1445) and *De Quaerendo Deum* (1445) had also already been written.
4. Nicholas's use of the words "*deificatio*" and "*theosis*" could easily give rise to misunderstanding, as did his words in *DI* II, 2 (104:5-6) (" . . . ut omnis creatura, sit quasi infinitas finita aut deus creatus . . .") and his use of the verb "*absorbere*" in *DI* III, 11 (252:14). Note *De Dato Patris Luminum* 5 (113:5-6), where "*deificatio*" also appears.
5. John 1: 1.
6. John 15:5. Hebrews 11:6.
7. The long sentence in the printed Latin text, viz., 54:5-16, needs to be repunctuated by putting a colon (in place of the comma) after "erit" at 54:11. The word "*cum*" at 54:5 is coordinated with the word "*dum*" at 54:11. Cf. the structure of the sentence at 85:6-13—a sentence that also needs repunctuation. See n. 75 below. At times, Nicholas's Latin style is decidedly crude.
8. Here I am reading "*revelati*" in place of "*revelatus*". Nicholas was writing hurriedly, as he acknowledges at the end of the treatise (90:1).
9. Earlier in this paragraph Nicholas stated that deification (i.e., sonship) surpasses the limits of every mode of *intuition*. Now he indicates that the intellect of one who becomes a son of God has an *intuition* of the truth. These statements are not inconsistent. For by his initial claim he means that sonship cannot be rendered fully intelligible by means of sensible, rational, or intellectual intuition. Moreover, as the section corresponding to margin number 64 makes clear, he is anticipating his claim that though, in the case of sonship, the intellectual spirit sees itself in God *as it is*, it nonetheless does not see itself as God sees it, viz., precisely and beyond the limitations of the intellectual mode. That is, it sees itself as free from all contraction to the sensible mode but not as free from all contraction *simpliciter* (viz., as it is uncontractedly enfolded in God as God). See *DI* I, 24 (77). See also n. 38 and n. 39 below.
10. Sonship is attained only by believers.
11. Like Aquinas and Christian theologians generally, Nicholas affirms the distinctness of each man's intellect after its release from the body when the body dies.
12. " . . . since everything that exists in something other [than itself] exists, necessarily, in a way other [than the way it exists in itself]": this theme occurs frequently in Nicholas's writings. See, e.g., *De Coniecturis*, Prologue, Book I (3:1-2) and I, 11 (54:6-25). *DP* 40:16 and 62:13. See especially *De Filiatione Dei* 3 (62:4-5), together with the subsequent illustration in terms of mirrors.
13. *DI* III, 8 (228:20-26): "Therefore, all of us, whether good or evil shall arise; but not all of us shall be changed through a glory which transforms us—through Christ, the Son of God—into adopted sons. Therefore, all shall arise through Christ, but not all shall arise as Christ and in Christ through union; rather, only those who

are Christ's through faith, hope, and love [shall so arise]."

14. The sonship of believers, unlike the Sonship of Christ, occurs without an identity of nature with God the Father. Thus, the "deification" of believers, as Nicholas portrays it, is not the believers' becoming God but rather their becoming more perfectly Godlike by participating (not in God as He is in Himself but) in God's likeness.

15. This same point holds also for *DI* III, 11 (253:1-3), where Nicholas speaks of the believer's being transformed (not into Christ but) into the image of Christ. This transformation is not a transformation of the human essence—is not a transubstantiation.

16. Similarly, sonship does not occur during this lifetime but during the next life, when believers reign with Christ (II Timothy 2:12).

17. John 5:46-47.

18. "Est autem magisterium transumptio scientiae particularium in universalem artem ...." Nicholas is not here insisting upon some technical distinction between *scientia* and *ars* but is drawing a distinction between two kinds of knowledge—viz., particular knowledge and universal knowledge. At 59:3 he uses the expression "*universalis scientia*" (though in the genitive case). In the context of the discussion in the sections corresponding to margin numbers 57 and 58 the expressions "*ars ipsa*" and "*ars illa*" indicate *universal knowledge*. Cf. the terminology here with the expression "*scientia seu ars*" in *CA* II, 2 (91:3-4 and 91:18). See the whole of *CA* II, 2-3. Nicholas's use of terminology often tends to be casual. In *De Filiatione Dei* he employs "*virtus*," "*vis*," and "*potentia*" at times interchangeably; yet, at other times he distinguishes *potentia* from *virtus*. (See 81:1-5.) Sometimes he speaks of our *vis intellectualis*, sometimes of our *virtus intellectualis*—doing so interchangeably. (Cf. 53:2 with 53:8-9.) Instead of "*potentia*" or "*virtus*" he occasionally writes "*potestas*" (52:12 and 53:2), just as in *DP* he puts "*possibilitas*" for "*potestas*" and likewise interchanges "*possibilitas*" and "*potentia*". Moreover, in *De Filiatione Dei* he makes no systematic distinction between *scientia*, *cognitio*, and *notitia*, even as he also uses "*verbum mentale*" in place of "*verbum intellectuale*" (cf. 77:6 with 77:9). Likewise, "*abstractus intellectus*" (69:7-8), "*purissimus intellectus*" (69:4), "*intelligentia pura*" (85:3), "*absolutus spiritus*" (80:10), "*intellectualis spiritus*" (81:4-5), and "*intellectualis natura*" (87:2) all refer to the same thing in the context of the present treatise.

See n. 34 and n. 46 of Notes to *De Quaerendo Deum*.

19. Cf. the last sentence of *De Filiatione Dei* 4 (72): "There is no coordination or proportion of the countable to the non-countable, of the absolute to the modally contracted." Elsewhere Nicholas often states that there is no comparative relation of the finite to the infinite. See n. 10 of Notes to *De Quaerendo Deum*.

20. *CA* II, 2-3.

21. I.e., they are works that result from a universal knowledge.

22. Colossians 1:16. John 1:1-3.

23. I John 3:2.

24. Colossians 1:17. 1 Corinthians 8:6.

25. The attainment of a "perfect" knowledge occurs in the next life, as does also sonship, in its fuller dimension—the dimension that Nicholas calls deification. Since no finite mind can have absolutely perfect knowledge, Nicholas means that each intellect acquires up to its respective capacity to receive knowledge and that this knowl-



edge includes, in some measure, a knowledge of God and all things. See 87:8-9 and 89:4, where Nicholas uses “*ars perfecta*” and “*cognitio perfecta*” respectively. Also note the expression “*perfectus magister*” at 60:3.

26. Usually, “all things” (“*omnia*”), as used by Nicholas, means “all created things,” so that the expression “God and all things” is not redundant, since God is not a thing—i.e., is not a *res* or an *ens*—but is even beyond being itself (*entitas; esse ipsum*) as we conceive of being itself

27. In what follows in this section Nicholas is explaining how we may better be able to conceive of sonship: viz., by making use of sensible objects, parallelisms, and illustrations. His explanation continues on into Section III. Although sonship itself will be fully attainable (by believers) in the next life, believers may in this life prepare themselves for it and seek to conceive of it better. That is, although sonship begins with conversion (I John 3:2), Nicholas is discussing sonship insofar as it is to be perfected in the life after death—insofar as it is something yet to be attained unto. Mystical vision, which Nicholas does not discuss in this treatise, is a foretaste of future sonship, which is an abiding state.

That the perfecting of sonship belongs to the future life and not to *visio mystica* is obvious from a number of considerations: that it is a state of (1) incessant joy, (2) permanent incorruptibility, (3) universal knowledge, (4) freedom from all pollution—a state (5) occurring not beyond all intellect but as an intellectual vision of God.

28. *DI* III, 12 (259).

29. Nicholas here continues his attempt to explain how we may successfully conceive of being sons of God even though God as He is in Himself is inconceivable (except to Himself).

30. See n. 12 above.

31. I Corinthians 13:12.

32. By “an intellect that is thus enjoying Truth” Nicholas means “an intellect that is enjoying Truth in accordance with the mode of Truth’s manifestation.”

33. *DI* I, 24 (78) and I, 26 (88:15-20). *De Quaerendo Deum*, notes 10 & 14 & 26. *De Deo Abscondito* 12.

34. According to Nicholas, God, since He is Infinite, neither exists nor is in any sense in which we can conceive of existence or being. This point is brought out again at 78:2. See also *De Deo Abscondito* 9.

35. “Hence, since in the foregoing way [God] transcends every intellect . . .”: i.e., “... since as He is in Himself [God] transcends every intellect ....”

36. See n. 29 above. When Nicholas states that God is inconceivable, he means that what God, in Himself, is or is like is inconceivable to every finite mind. We may, of course, still conceive of God either metaphorically or as the one who, in Himself, is inconceivable by us because of the infinite disproportion between finitude and Infinity itself. See n. 26 of Notes to *De Quaerendo Deum* and n. 10 of Notes to *De Deo Abscondito*.

37. For Nicholas the empyrean heaven is the intellectual heaven—i.e., the immaterial heaven that is accessible only to intellectual spirits and that constitutes the abode of the angelic intelligences. Resurrected spirits will there encounter God in and through a union with Christ.

38. The intellect beholds itself always in accordance with the intellectual mode and never as God beholds it in its precise quiddity—teaches Nicholas. See n. 9 above.

39. According to Nicholas: when an exalted and most purified intellect (i.e., an intellect cleansed of sinfulness and freed of sensory images) attains unto sonship, the intelligible forms of all things will be in that intellect as that intellect (since whatever is in the intellect *is* intellect). The intellect's cognitive intuiting (or intuitive cognizing) of all forms is said by Nicholas to be perfect knowledge (*perfecta cognitio*). It is "perfect" not because, like God's "knowing," it is exact knowledge that is without the conditioning of a modality-of-apprehending but because it is knowledge as complete as that intellect is capable of and because it is knowledge of all things (by way of their intelligible forms).

Just as Nicholas's cosmological views in *DI* II do not anticipate the Copernican Revolution even though they do in certain respects remotely foreshadow it, so his views regarding cognition (as these views are expressed in *De Filiatione Dei* or in *Idiota de Mente*) remotely foreshadow certain aspects of the Kantian Copernican Revolution and of Leibniz's monadology—without anticipating or directly influencing either of these later theories. In particular, the theme of the conditioning features of intellectuality (*De Filiatione Dei*) would in another context be suggestive of Kant; and the emphasis upon the mind's innate power of judgment (*Idiota de Mente*) and of each mind as mirror-like in its reflecting of all reality (*De Filiatione Dei*) has a Leibnizian ring. See n. 6 and n. 13 of Notes to *De Deo Abscondito*. See also n. 41 below.

40. The word "equal" ("*aequales*") means "very closely similar"; it does not mean "exactly similar." In *DI* Nicholas teaches that no two things are ever exactly similar in any respect (*DI* 11, 1). See also Nicholas's later treatise *De Aequalitate*. Cf. *De Coniecturis* I, 9 (37:12-13): ". . . cum praecisio aequalitatis impossibilis sit in omni finito." Note also *De Coniecturis* I, 10 (52:8): ". . . praecisio, quae est deus benedictus."

In the passage signaled by the present note (i.e., n. 40) Nicholas means that in straight mirrors the mirror image of a thing (or the respective image of several things) appears equal in size to that thing (or equal in size to those things considered respectively). Cf. *De Dato Patris Luminum* 2 (99).

41. We must beware of extending Nicholas's mirror-illustration further than does Nicholas himself. According to him the one perfectly straight and altogether boundless "material-Mirror" symbolizes Christ, who is the Reflection of the glorious God—God being the Originator, Sustainer, and Goal of all creation. The differently curved material-mirrors symbolize the various created natures, whether living or non-living. However, living creatures that have intellects are symbolized by living mirrors. (So some mirrors are alive; others are not; but all mirrors are material, or sensible, mirrors.) Each curved mirror receives reflected light from the straight Mirror. In this ray of reflected light is contained a mirror-image of God and the mirror images of all the other mirrors, which are undistortedly reflected by the straight Mirror. However, though the image of God and the images of the other mirrors are undistorted as they appear in the straight Mirror, they are received from the straight Mirror only with some degree of diminishment and contraction, in accordance with the degree of curvature of the receiving curved mirror. In the case of the living curved mirrors (viz., the "intellectual mirrors"), which have the capability of understanding, these phenomena are understood by them. That is, they *understand* that their own reflection appears undistortedly in the straight Mirror and that the reflection that a given intellectual mirror receives from the straight Mirror is such that the other mirrors, as they

appear in the given intellectual mirror, appear with some degree of alteration, as does also the image of God. Nicholas in his illustration seems to indicate that all the curved mirrors receive reflections from one another directly—as well as by way of a mirror-ray from the straight Mirror. But he does not deal with this phenomenon. Nor does he use his illustration to mention the occurrence of reflections within reflections within reflections, *ad infinitum*, and to seek some illustrative truth therefrom. Finally, he concentrates upon the reflecting by the intellectual natures, leaving aside discussion of the non-living material mirrors. If his mirror-illustration is pushed too far, certain problems arise. For example, he asks us to imagine a case in which a living, intellectual mirror “is brought unto that first and straight mirror-of-truth . . . .” Yet, since the Mirror-of-truth is without bounds, it itself is already present to each intellectual mirror, which need not and cannot be brought to it. Similarly, how are we to envision something without bounds as a (material) *Mirror*? Or, again, what is the relationship between the image of itself that the intellectual mirror beholds in the Mirror-of-truth and the image of itself that, presumably, it beholds within itself when it beholds the ray that has been infused into it by the Mirror-of-truth?

42. At 67:7 of the printed Latin text the editor’s punctuation should be changed by putting a period after “*modo*”, thus beginning a new sentence with “*In*”. Furthermore, “*momenot*” is, of course, a misprint of “*momento*”.

43. Though Nicholas’s mirror-illustration commenced with reference to material mirrors, it now continues by asking the reader to envision all the mirrors as non-material—in the way that minds and the intellectual forms within them are non-material. Hereby Nicholas hopes to illustrate how the human intellect, when once freed from the body at death, can, in the case of a believer-in-God, be elevated unto being a son of God. As things are reflectedly present in a mirror, so all things will be present in the elevated human intellect that is united to Christ, who is Infinite Reason. The intellect’s intuition of all things Nicholas calls both perfect knowledge and sonship. Cf. *PF* 12 (37). See n. 39 above.

44. The notion of *manuductio* (guidance) looms larger in *CA*—e.g., in *CA* II, 5-7, as the chapter titles indicate.

45. The intellectual spirit is the life of all other living things insofar as it is united to Christ, in whom and through whom it lives (cf. 68:10-11).

46. To say that God will not be *other* or *an other* with respect to the intellectual spirit is not to say that God and the intellectual spirit will be identical. The pure intellect will understand God and all things to the extent that these exhaust the intellect’s capability for understanding. But the intellect will not be in contact with anything that is foreign to it—and therefore other—by virtue of being unintelligible. See Nicholas’s *De Li Non Aliud*, where the theme of God as Not-other is elaborated. See also *De Deo Abscondito* 12 and *DVD* 14 (60-61).

47. *De Deo Abscondito* 3.

48. This oneness of being, this union of knower and known, is not an identity. Nicholas has already stated (margin number 56) that being a son of God does not involve an essential transformation. Consistently throughout the present work (as also elsewhere) he refuses to regard “deification” as a being merged into Divine Being in such way that believers lose their respective individual personal identity.

A few lines later than the passage marked by the present note, Nicholas writes that the intellectual nature “encompasses all things in a conformity with itself, and it

makes itself to be all things when in it all things are it" (69:21-22). This cognitive union occurs in sonship. The intellect intuitively—in and through Christ, the Divine Word or Divine Concept—the forms of all created things. Cf. *DP* 38. According to Nicholas the number of actual things in the created universe is finite [*DI* I, 6 (15)].

49. Even when Nicholas is not discussing sonship he holds that in order to understand, the intellect must assimilate itself to all things. *DP* 17:9-11: "For unless the intellect becomes like the [putatively] intelligible object, it does not understand [it]; for to understand is to become like the intelligible things and to measure them by means of the intellect (i.e., conceptually)." *CA* II, 3 (94:4-6): ". . . the image of the Creator, viz., the intellect, produces by its operations likenesses of real things; for to create is to make to be, and to understand is to make to be like." See also *Idiota de Mente* 7 (e.g., 99:5-7).

Regarding sonship see especially *De Filiatione Dei* 6 (86).

50. See n. 48 above. The full expression "in a oneness of being" ("*in unitate essentiae*") occurs at 69:17.

51. Although sonship as "union with Infinite Reason" (68: 10-11) belongs to the resurrected state, spiritual preparation for it begins in the earthly state. Nicholas is intent upon sketching for his readers a suitable conception of sonship, in order that the reality, thus conceived, may better be pursued.

52. *DI* I, 5.

53. The teacher's affection belongs to a concept's signification insofar as the concept has connotation. Therefore, the teacher's affection is shown not only by his tone of voice but also by his choice of words. Just as he will not use a harsh tone of voice when correcting students, so too he will not use harsh or humiliating words.

54. The transformation is into a *similar* mastery—not into an *identity* of mastery. By comparison, in the believer's future, more perfect union with Christ, the believer will share in Christ's knowledge. His knowledge will be, as it were, similar to Christ's; but it will not be Christ's. It will be similar, *as it were*, because there is no proportionality between finite knowledge and infinite knowledge, inasmuch as the former is perspectival, the latter not. Even in the next life finite minds will not be freed from conceptual perspective. See n. 59 below.

55. ". . . and is all that which they are": i.e., the One (or God) is the Ground-of-being of all intelligible beings.

56. Nicholas explains this point at 85:6-13.

57. An intellectual, or mental, word is free from all contraction *to the sensible*; but it is not unqualifiedly *free from all contraction*. See n. 9 above.

58. Nicholas teaches that God is beyond being (*entitas*) insofar as being is conceivable by us. See n. 34 above.

59. God is not apprehensible by finite minds apart from some intellectual mode, Nicholas keeps repeating. See n. 54 above.

60. As He is in Himself, God cannot be participated in. Cf. Eckhart's distinction between Godhead and God.

61. The concept of power, when this concept is abstracted from all reference to perceptible objects, Nicholas calls unrestricted, or absolute (*absolutus*)—because it is free from sensible (i.e., perceptual) constraints. This terminology may confuse some readers since Nicholas also refers to God as *absolutus*. However, God is never (except in a symbolical sense) absolute *power* or absolute *goodness* or absolute *love*,

etc. In the last sentence of the section corresponding to margin number 79 Nicholas writes: “For God is not power but is the Lord of powers.” In his later work *De Visione Dei* Nicholas asserts: “An infinite line is not a line; rather, in Infinity a line is Infinity. And just as nothing can be added to the Infinite, so the Infinite cannot be contracted to anything, so that it becomes other than Infinite. Infinite goodness is not goodness but is Infinity. Infinite quantity is not quantity but is Infinity. And so on.” [DVD 13 (58:8-12)]. As a *modus loquendi*, however, Nicholas continues to speak of God as Infinite Goodness and Absolute Goodness [DVD 15 (69:15-18)]. Note *De Quaerendo Deum* 3 (42:19; cf. 46:5-6)]. This discourse, Nicholas makes clear in *De Filiatione Dei* 5 (82:5-7), is discourse *as if*—i.e., is a *modus loquendi*.

God is Absolute Maximality (*maximitas absoluta*). But in *De Filiatione Dei* 5 (79) Nicholas speaks only of *quaedam maximitas* (79:6): a certain maximality, or maximum. This *quaedam maximitas*, he says, is capable of comparison (*coordinata*), whereas God is incomparable (*incoordinatus*). Indeed, God is the super-excellent, ineffable Cause of the *quaedam maximitas* that Nicholas calls *virtus maxima*.

62. See n. 59 above.

63. In existing above everything absolute, God exists above absolute power, absolute goodness, etc., as these are conceivable by finite minds. Indeed, according to Nicholas, He exists beyond the distinction between the uncontracted (i.e., the absolute) and the contracted, insofar as this distinction is graspable by us. Nonetheless, God is Absolute in that He is altogether free of the restrictions of finitude and in that He is altogether undifferentiated (i.e., is not *a* being).

In the present context: just as Nicholas refers to God as *super-excellent*, so he also calls Him *super-absolute*: *supra omne absolutum* (80:1). But cf. 54:25 (“*ipsa superabsoluta filiatio*”), where “*superabsoluta*” is used only hyperbolically of sonship.

64. See n. 59 above.

65. We need again to be reminded that when Nicholas here uses the expression “*absolutio virtutis*,” he is *not* referring to God.

66. This translation correctly renders Nicholas’s meaning when he writes: “. . . ut omnes, absoluti spiritus virtutem unam varie participantem non aliud sint quam virtus absoluta variis modis participata.” This passage could also be translated as: “. . . so that all absolute spirits participate in one power variously and are nothing other than absolute power as it is participated in in a variety of ways.” However, this alternative rendering will obscure Nicholas’s meaning unless we remember that “absolute power,” as used here, does not refer to God but only to a disproportional likeness to God, who is not power but is infinitely beyond the distinction between power and not-power. So bodiless intellectual spirits are not modifications of God but are modified likenesses of God because of participation in absolute power, which, though disproportionately, is a likeness of God.

67. Cf. *De Quaerendo Deum* 3 (46). Regarding the translation of “*potentia*” [at *De Filiatione Dei* 5 (81:1)] as “possibility,” see *De Filiatione Dei* 6 (85:9).

68. These hierarchies were discussed previously by Nicholas in *De Coniecturis*, Book I.

69. See n. 61 above.

70. See the last sentence of the section corresponding to margin number 80.

71. See n. 59 above.

72. Likewise, not God Himself but only His *likeness* is unfolded and is partici-

pated in by creatures. The “deified” state is a state in which believers’ likeness to Christ is—through union with Christ’s finite human nature (itself hypostatically united to His infinite divine nature)—much closer than it is now. Christ, in turn, is the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). See *DI*, Book III for Nicholas’s Christology.

73. See Jesus’s parables regarding the kingdom of heaven (e.g., in Matthew 13).

74. *De Deo Abscondito* 8-9.

75. The printed Latin text is wrongly punctuated at 85:4-13. At 85:6 there should be a period after “*movetur*”. In the new sentence, “*cum*” (85:6) is to be coordinated with “*Dum*” at 85:10. Accordingly, “*Dum*” should be changed to “*dum*”; and a colon (rather than a period) should follow “*elevare*” (85:10). *Mutatis mutandis*, the passage from 85:6 (“*Sed cum . . .*”) to 85:13 (“*. . . notio existit*”) could be translated literally as follows: “Instead, since the mind participates intellectually in absolute power in such way that in accordance with the abundant power of its nature a certain notion of all intelligible things arises, which powerful [notional-]possibility the mind has striven to elevate into actuality by means of sensory stimuli: when subsequently the power is actualized by reasoning and is freed from enlivening the body (to which it lent itself as capable of being participated in) and attains unto unity with itself, a living intellect, then it finds itself to be a power that is the actual notion of [all] things.”

76. According to *De Coniecturis* I, 7 (27:16-17) the rational soul is the form of the body. The present passage [*De Filiatione Dei* 6 (85:10-13)] attests that the perfection of sonship occurs in the next life (and not in some mystical experience in the present life). For sonship occurs when the intellect attains unto a unity with itself and becomes the actual notion of all things. But this attainment and this actuality occur only after the intellect has been freed from *enlivening* the body—i.e., only after the death of the corruptible body and the initiation of the resurrected state with its incorruptible, glorified, and elevated body. See *De Filiatione Dei* 1 (54:5-17) and 3 (69). But, above all, note *DI* III, 7 (226).

77. *DI* I, 16 (45). I, 17 (48:1-4). I, 17 (51:6-8). *Ap.* 26 and 17. *De Dato Patris Luminum* 2 (98). J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*, pp. 10-13 and 23-24.

78. Self-knowledge is thus related to the self’s knowledge of God. Cf. *DP* 38:13-14: “Non enim potest se causatum cognoscere causa ignorata.” Also cf. the present passage [*De Filiatione Dei* 6 (86:6-7)] with *De Filiatione Dei* 3 (64:7-12).

Regarding Nicholas’s statement (in the sentence following the sentence designated by the present footnote) “in the intellect God is the intellect,” cf. *De Filiatione Dei* 3 (69:11-12), 3 (69:22) and 3 (69:4-5). See also n. 48 and n. 49 above. In the believer’s intellect God is the intellect, so to speak, when the believer’s intellect becomes fully actualized, having received from God a knowledge that transcends sensory limitations. [What is said in this context of sonship should be distinguished from what is said by Nicholas in the context of creation in general. In the latter context, it is correct to say only that in the intellect God is *intellect* (not that He is *the* intellect); He is intellect in that He is the Ground-of-being and the Ground-of-essence of all intellect. See, below, in Review I, the third paragraph of my critique of Dermot Moran.]

In knowing, the intellect “becomes,” so to speak, what is known. But it becomes it through attaining unto a cognitive *likeness*.

Regarding Jesus's intellect, see *DI* III, 4 (206) and *DVD* 22 (99).

79. Nicholas writes (86:8-9): "Nihil igitur aliud est omnia cognoscere quam se similitudinem dei videre, quae est filiatio." I regard "*quae*" as shorthand for "*quae res*" ("*which thing*") rather than as referring to *similitudo* alone or as a substitution for "*quod*" because of assimilation to the gender of "*filiatio*". Cf. the use of "*quae*" in *De Genesi* 1 (152:19).

80. *Ap.* 14:14-23.

81. *De Filiatione Dei* 1 (54:last sentence).