

**Zeitschrift:** Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie = Revue philosophique et théologique de Fribourg = Rivista filosofica e teologica di Friburgo = Review of philosophy and theology of Fribourg

**Band:** 66 (2019)

**Heft:** 2

**Artikel:** Nicholas of Cusa's Idiota against the backdrop of his Sermons

**Autor:** Licata, Giovanni

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-869334>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 22.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

GIOVANNI LICATA

## Nicholas of Cusa's *Idiota* against the Backdrop of His *Sermons*

In his seminal work on Cusanus's Christology, Rudolf Haubst already acknowledged the significance of his *Sermons* for the *Cusanus-Forschung*:

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 [*Entwicklung*] 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<sup>1</sup>.

Following Haubst's observation, in this paper I will argue for the importance of Cusanus's *Sermons* for a more precise understanding of his intellectual evolution, since the latter can be observed both in the sermons and in his theoretical works<sup>2</sup>. On this occasion, I prefer to narrow my analysis to a number of crucial themes contained in the *Idiota* (1450), showing that they found their germinal expression in the *Sermons* written some years before, specifically between 1443 and 1450<sup>3</sup>. It goes without saying that this exercise of historiographical research can be extended to all philosophical and theological works by Cusanus, since his *Sermons* follow his entire speculative career. Even a cursory reading of Cusanus's *Sermons* reveals, indeed, that he often makes use of his principal philosophical ideas. Therefore, now that there is a complete critical edition of the *Sermons*, it is worth comparing them with his philosophical and theological works, in

<sup>1</sup> HAUBST, Rudolf: *Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues*. Freiburg: Herder 1956, 6 (trans. Jasper Hopkins in: *Nicholas of Cusa's Early Sermons: 1430–1441*. Loveland: The Arthur J. Banning Press 2003, VII).

<sup>2</sup> This view was recently restated by Kurt Flasch in his fundamental book *Nikolaus von Kues – Geschichte einer Entwicklung. Vorlesungen zur Einführung in seine Philosophie*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann 1998. See in particular p. 13: „Andere Umstände sind hinzugekommen, die heute eine genetische Darstellung der Philosophie des Cusanus erleichtern. Vier seien hier schon genannt: Da ist erstens die neue Edition der *Sermones*. Die seit 1970 kritisch edierten Texte zusammen mit verfeinerten Angaben zur Chronologie und zu ihren Quellen erlauben es, den Denkweg des Cusanus genauer darzustellen. Natürlich konnte ich sie nicht alle im einzelnen analysieren; für das philosophische Interesse behalten ohnehin die *Schriften* einen gewissen Vorrang; aber die Ausgabe der *Sermones* hat zusätzlich dazu angeregt, eine Entwicklungsgeschichte des Cusanischen Denkens zu versuchen“.

<sup>3</sup> The occasion for this paper was provided by the 7<sup>th</sup> International Congress for young Cusanus scholars (held at the University of Chieti-Pescara on 21–23 September 2016), which focused on the *Idiota* dialogues.

order to find out (1) when his ideas found their first expression and (2) how they evolved over time.

At present, 293 of Cusanus's sermons have come down to us, mostly written in Latin and ranging from 1430 to 1463 (the year before Cusanus's death); they constitute almost one-third of his writings. The critical edition of the *Sermones* was completed in 2007 after 47 years of scholarly work, with the first fascicle being published in 1970. There are 22 fascicles in all, and they constitute vols. XVI–XIX of the Heidelberg *Opera omnia* (published in Hamburg by Meiner Verlag). A research project led by Prof. Enrico Peroli, and in which I am currently involved, aims to provide the first translation of the totality of the *Sermons*: this will be a translation into Italian with Latin facing-pages<sup>4</sup>. Translating the *Sermons* that date from 1443 to 1454 and from 1457 to 1463 has given me the opportunity to enter the linguistic and conceptual world of Cusanus, and to appreciate its richness of philosophical insights.

The Heidelberg critical edition is an important tool for a thorough study of Cusanus, and as is well known, the critical text itself is followed by three apparatuses. The first of these records the textual differences in manuscripts and prints, while the second records the quotations and sources. It is the third apparatus, however, which is the most valuable for our present purpose, since it accurately shows the *loci paralleli* in other works by Cusanus. In particular, Renata Steiger, the editor of the second edition of the *Idiota* dialogues, published in 1983, very usefully identified many textual parallels in the *Sermons*, although at that time the latter were for the most part still unpublished<sup>5</sup>. Her work was updated and in part completed in the recent editions of the *Sermons*, which, in their turn, record textual parallels in the *Idiota*, as well as in many other works by Cusanus.

In this paper, I concentrate on five important themes in the *Idiota*, focusing my analysis on some of the *Sermons* written between 1443 and 1450, a period that divides Cusanus's first two masterpieces, *De docta ignorantia* (1440) and *De coniecturis* (1442–1443), from the *Idiota* dialogues themselves (1450). The themes in question are not present, or not to any great extent, in the early development of his philosophical system, as set forth in

<sup>4</sup> There is a recent German translation, edited by the Institut für Cusanus-Forschung, of which so far two volumes have appeared (NIKOLAUS VON KUES: *Predigten in deutscher Übersetzung*. Band III: *Sermones CXXII–CCIII*. Hg. von W.A. Euler et al. Münster: Aschendorff 2007; Band II: *Sermones XXVII–CXXI*. Münster: Aschendorff 2013). A few sermons have also been translated into English by Hopkins, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa's Early Sermons: 1430–1441*; *Nicholas of Cusa's Didactic Sermons: A Selection*. Loveland: The Arthur J. Banning Press 2008; *Nicholas of Cusa's Last Sermons: 1457–1463*. Self-publication. Online at: <http://jasper-hopkins.info/> (18.04.2018).

<sup>5</sup> Steiger followed the outdated numbering of the *Sermons* provided by Josef Koch in his seminal essay: *Untersuchungen über Datierung, Form, Sprache und Quellen. Kritisches Verzeichnis sämtlicher Predigten* (= Cusanus-Texte I, Predigten 7). Heidelberg: Winter 1942.

*De docta ignorantia* and *De coniecturis*. Yet they are found in some of the *Sermons* written in the period preceding the *Idiota* dialogues, as Steiger also suggested in her critical edition. I am referring in particular to the following sermons, which are more philosophically rounded than others:

- *Sermo* 37, *Paraclitus autem*, preached in Koblenz on 31 May 1444 (h XVII/1, 72–100);
- *Sermo* 41, *Confide, filia!*, preached in Mainz on 22 November 1444 (h XVII/2, 139–165);
- *Sermo* 71, *Maria optimam partem elegit*, preached in Mainz on 15 August 1446 (h XVII/5, 422–441).

For the sake of clarity, I summarise as follows the five themes shared between the *Idiota* dialogues and the earlier sermons: 1. Tasting and foretasting (*gustare, praegustare*); 2. Assimilation (*assimilatio*); 3. Wonder, stimulation and sensible species (*Admiratio, excitatio, species sensibiles*); 4. Rest or resting (*quies, quiescere*); 5. Trinity in all beings (*Trinitas in omnibus*).

#### 1. TASTING AND FORETASTING (*GUSTARE, PRAEGUSTARE*)

The image of tasting Wisdom, which on the ultimate level is God, is pervasive in the first part of *De sapientia*<sup>6</sup>. Recalling an ancient etymology, according to which “Wisdom is that which is relishable” (*Sapientia est quae sapit*)<sup>7</sup>, Cusanus aims to explain that a striving to reach God cannot only be intellectualistic, but must also convey a sensorial and emotional experience; it should be connected with a “wondrous desire” (*mirabile desiderium*). Moreover, since “Wisdom dwells in the highest places and is not tasteable by means of any savouring”, we feel and we are attracted towards Wisdom, our source of life (*fons vitae*), only because we have within us a sort of foretasting (*praegustatio*)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *De sap.*, I 10–12; 18–19; 26–27. All quotations from the *Idiota* dialogues are from Steiger’s second edition: NICOLAI DE CUSA: *Idiota de sapientia – de mente*. Editionem post Ludovicum Baur alteram curavit Renata Steiger (= h V). Hamburgi: in aedibus Felicis Meiner 1983. I have used the English translation of the *Idiota* by Jasper Hopkins, which can be found in: *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*. Minneapolis: A.J. Banning Press 2001.

<sup>7</sup> *De sap.*, I 10, 7. On this theme, see especially STABILE, Giorgio: *Sapor-sapientia: tatto e gusto tra cultura agraria, medicina e mistica*, in: LEONARDI, Claudio/SANTI, Francesco (eds): *Natura, scienze e società medievali*. Firenze: Edizioni del Galluzzo 2008, 287–344.

<sup>8</sup> “Ipsa [sc. sapientia] autem, quia in altissimis habitat, non est omni sapore gustabilis. Ingustabiliter ergo gustatur, cum sit altior omni gustabili, sensibili, rationali et intellectuali. Hoc est autem ingustabiliter et a remotis gustare, quasi sicut odor quidam dici potest *praegustatio* ingustabilis. [...] aeterna et infinita sapientia cum in omnibus reluceat, nos allicit ex quadam praegustatione effectuum, ut *mirabili desiderio* ad ipsam feramur. Cum enim ipsa sit vita spiritualis intellectus, qui in se habet quandam connaturatam praegustationem, per quam tanto studio inquirat *fontem vitae* suae, quem sine praegustatione non quaereret nec se

The same idea, with many variations, can be found in many earlier sermons. This is not surprising, since the image is rooted in the Bible, in a well-known verse of the Psalms: "Gustate et videte, quoniam suavis est Dominus!"<sup>9</sup> ("Taste and see that the Lord is sweet"). Four passages from *Sermo* 40 and 71 are notable in this respect, because the resemblances are apparent not only on a conceptual level but also lexically.

*Sermo* 40, n. 7, 19–25 (*Martinus hic pauper*, preached in Mainz on 11 November 1444): "[Martinus] repperit, quod Deus *non potuit non velle* videri, *gustari*" → "Quomodo tunc [aeterna sapientia] *potest non gustari*?" (*De sap.*, I 14, 6);

*Sermo* 71, n. 19, 8–10: "O quam alte super omnes intellectuales visiones ipsa [sc. Maria] unum illud invisibile vidit, et quam sano palato unum *fontem vitae gustavit*!" → "[intellectus] inquit *fontem vitae* suae, quem sine *praegustatione* non quaereret" (*De sap.*, I 11, 3);

*Sermo* 71, n. 19, 11–15: "Si David ad hoc elevatus est, ut diceret: '*Gustate et videte, quoniam suavis est Dominus*!', merito ipsa [sc. Maria] quanto altior omnibus prophetis, tanto perfectius *vidit et gustavit ipsum*, apud quem est *fons boni*" → "Quousque *gustare* eam queas et *videre*, quam *suavis* sit illa" (*De sap.*, I 27, 5–6);

*Sermo* 71, n. 20, 8–10: "Tunc autem intellectualiter eligit, quando ipsum *intellectualiter praegustavit* esse unum necessarium" → "Pergere autem illud cum sit intelligere, tunc est et *gustare intellectualiter*" (*De sap.*, I 26, 7–8).

## 2. ASSIMILATION (*ASSIMILATIO*)

The concept of *assimilatio* is present in the first part of *De sapientia* and becomes crucial in *De mente*. Cusanus conceives of assimilation in a two-fold sense: *assimilatio* either describes the never-ending process of becoming similar to Wisdom or God (*De sap.*, I 18)<sup>10</sup>; or it describes the never-ending process of human knowledge (*De mente*, III and VII). The latter is summarised in the famous statement that "conception in the human mind is the assimilation of beings"<sup>11</sup>. As Clyde Lee Miller has rightly pointed out, this means that we, as knowers, "are *assimilated* or *likened* in some way to

repperisse sciret, si reperiret, hinc ad eam ut ad propriam vitam suam movetur" (*De sap.*, I 10, 11–11, 5).

<sup>9</sup> Psalms, iuxta Vulgatam, 33 [34], 9. See also in the New Testament 1 Pt 2, 3: "Si gustastis quoniam dulcis Dominus".

<sup>10</sup> "This assimilation (*assimilatio*) [of our intellectual spirit] to Wisdom—an assimilation which is naturally present in our spirit and through which our spirit is not at rest unless it is present in Wisdom—is as a living image of Wisdom" (trans. Hopkins). On the platonic and neoplatonic concept of *homoiosis Theo*, see BELLETTI, Bruno: *La dottrina dell'assimilazione a Dio in Filone di Alessandria*, in: *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica* 74 (1982), 419–440.

<sup>11</sup> *De mente*, III 72, 9: "mentis conceptio est entium *assimilatio*".



the objects of knowledge". Yet, the two aspects of the assimilation—assimilation to God and assimilation to beings—are two sides of the same coin, because according to Cusanus "along with the 'horizontal' notion of our concepts being images of things [...], *assimilatio* also has a 'vertical' dimension, because in knowing we liken ourselves to our divine Original"<sup>12</sup>.

Actually, the idea of knowing as *assimilatio*, so powerfully displayed in *De mente*, can be traced back to *De coniecturis*<sup>13</sup>, and it is re-employed in *Sermo* 37, dedicated to the Holy Ghost and composed in 1444, six years before *De mente*. Here, Cusanus states that "our spirit is an image of God (*imago Dei*) and it has a motion by means of which it makes itself to be all things, for it is a likeness of things (*rerum similitudo*)"<sup>14</sup>. But the sermon in which the *assimilatio* plays a key role is *Sermo* 71, composed in 1446. Cusanus here employs the term nearly thirty times, anticipating the theme he will later develop in the *Idiota* dialogues<sup>15</sup>. For instance, we learn that "all things endeavor to express the One through assimilation, but they cannot do so, because the assimilation always does not reach the One"<sup>16</sup>. We also find a textual parallel on preciseness: "Veritas enim unius est summa praecisio similitudinis. Unde haec precisio, quae veritas dici potest, est illa, in qua noster intellectus unum absolutum attingere cupit" (*Sermo* 71, n. 15, 15–16) → "Qui praecisionem unam attingeret, deum attingeret, qui est veritas omnium scibilium" (*De mente*, III 69, 14–15).

The concept of *praecisio* is directly linked with that of *assimilatio*, as Cusanus himself states. Indeed, there is a proportion between them: *praecisio* is to *assimilatio* (or *similitudo*) as *veritas* is to *imago*<sup>17</sup>.

In *Sermo* 71 there is another textual parallel with *De mente* on the ratio of human mind to God. According to the latter, indeed, "the Divine simplicity enfolds all things, while our mind is the image of this enfolding simplicity": "Sicut unus intellectus in sua unitate complicat omnia suo modo uniter, hoc est intellectualiter, sic unum absolutum omnia uniter *absolute*"

<sup>12</sup> MILLER, Clyde Lee: *Cusanus, Nicolaus*, in: ZALTA, Edward N. (ed.): *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/cusanus/>> (18.04.2018).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. in particular *De coni.*, I 1, 5.

<sup>14</sup> *Sermo* 37, n. 7, 12–13 and n. 7, 19–23: "Cum sit motus eius [sc. spiritus] ad verum, non attingit motu animali verum, sed vitam corruptibilem; nec motu rationali, quo motu *se facit rerum similitudines*, cum similitudo non sit ipsa veritas, sed per infinitum ab ipsa cadens". See *De mente*, III 72, 1–2: "Omnia in deo sunt, sed ibi rerum exemplaria; omnia in nostra mente, sed ibi *rerum similitudines*"; V 85, 15–16: "Illa [sc. mens] se intuendo omnium *rerum similitudines* reperiret, per quas de omnibus notiones facere posset".

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Sermo* 71, nn. 11–18. The term *assimilatio* is also employed many times in the *Dialogus de genesi* (1447).

<sup>16</sup> *Sermo* 71, n. 15, 5–8: "Omnia nitantur ipsum unum exprimere per assimilationem, et tamen hoc facere nequeant, cum *assimilatio* semper deficiat ab uno".

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *De sap.*, I 25, 4–5: "Est enim [Dei sapientia] in omnibus formis ut veritas in imagine et exemplar in exemplato et forma in figura et *praecisio* in assimilatione".

(*Sermo* 71, n. 18, 16–18) → “Simplicitas divina omnium rerum est complicativa. Mens est huius complicantis simplicitatis imago. [...] Sicut deus est entitas absoluta, quae est omnium entium complicatio, sic mens nostra est illius entitatis infinitae imago, quae est omnium imaginum complicatio” (*De mente*, III 72, 1–2; 73, 2–4).

### 3. WONDER, STIMULATION AND SENSIBLE SPECIES (*ADMIRATIO, EXCITATIO, SPECIES SENSIBILES*)

According to *De mente* (IV, 77–78), the human mind has no innate ideas and it has to be awakened or stimulated by the objects perceived by the senses. *Admiratio* and *excitatio* play a decisive role in the process of knowledge, in which the human body recovers its essential function as medium between the objects and their representation, in line with the Aristotelian tradition: “In our minds, at the beginning, life resembles someone asleep, until it is stimulated to activity by wonder, which arises from perceptible objects”<sup>18</sup>.

In building a theory of cognition, Cusanus argues for the necessity of the sensible species (*species sensibiles*), which in scholastic terminology signify the modifications of the sense organs by external objects:

Doubtlessly, our mind was put into this body by God for its own development. [...] Therefore, we ought not to believe that concreated with the soul there were concepts, which the soul forgot in the bodily state; rather, we ought to believe that the soul has need of the body in order that its concreated power may proceed toward being actualized. The visual power of the soul (*vis visiva animae*) cannot succeed in its operation (so that it actually sees) unless it is stimulated by an object; and it cannot be stimulated except by encountering species conveyed in a replicated way by the intermediacy of the [sense] organ (*non potest excitari nisi per obstaculum specierum multiplicatarum per medium organi*); and so, the soul needs the eye. Similarly, the power of the mind (*vis mentis*)—a power that grasps things and is conceptual—cannot succeed in its operations unless it is stimulated by perceptible objects; and it cannot be stimulated except by the intermediacy of perceptual images (*phantasmatibus sensibilis*). Therefore, the mind needs an organic body, i.e., one of such kind that without it stimulation (*excitatio*) could not occur<sup>19</sup>.

The theory of sensible species (and intelligible species), though only sketched by Cusanus, has a long history that dates back to the medieval interpreters of Aristotle's *De anima*, and reaches influential formulation in

<sup>18</sup> *De mente*, V 85, 8–10: “In nostris mentibus ab initio vita illa similis est dormienti, quousque *admirazione*, quae ex sensibilibus oritur, *excitetur*, ut moveatur”. Concerning the concept of *excitatio*, see also the explanation in NICCOLÒ CUSANO: *Opere filosofiche, teologiche e matematiche*. A cura di Enrico Peroli. Milano: Bompiani 2017, 2630–2634.

<sup>19</sup> *De mente*, IV 77, 5–16 (trans. Hopkins, modified). See also *De mente*, VII and *De quarendo Deum* (1445), I 20; II 33.

the work of Thomas Aquinas. This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion, since Leen Spruit has already explained Cusanus's use of these concepts against the backdrop of the Aristotelian tradition<sup>20</sup>.

Let us, however, briefly consider the following connection of thoughts, which we have already seen in *De mente*: the body is necessary for mind in order to achieve knowledge of the external world; the mind, surprised by sensible objects, is stimulated to know their essence; sensible species are the first step for the process through which mind (or intellect) creates concepts. Now, the same connection of ideas can be seen in *Sermo 41, Confide, filia!*, written in 1444:

[31] Quando ista consideras, quo modo omnia ad hoc, ut vita conservetur, ministerium praebent, incipit spiritus tuus videre, quam bonus Dominus, et admirari<sup>21</sup> incipit.

Et utitur spiritus tuus corpore et sensibus, imaginatione, ratione et omnibus viribus suis, ut de omnibus Dei operibus admiretur et per admirationem excitetur ad amorem admirando bonitatem conditoris [sc. Dei] [...].

Arbitror enim ordine mundi nostrum intellectualem spiritum infimum gradum intellectualis naturae habere, ut de sua natura sit in potentia ad intelligendum, non tamen actu intellegat. Sed de potentia ad actum *excitatione admirationis* deducitur. Quae excitatio motu *specierum*, quae de mundo sensibili recipiuntur, exoritur, ut fiat vigilans intellectus, quando *admiratur*. *Admiratio* enim quaerere facit admirantem, quid sit, quod *admirationem* inducit.

Et sic fit vigil, sicut vox fortis sensum auditus percutiens dormientem *excitat*, ut vigilet. Tunc enim noster intellectus *quasi dormiens*<sup>22</sup> et in potentia existens vitae intellectualis, quae est intellegere seu vigilare, in actum ponitur, ut vigilet. Et incenditur hic, ut ardeat amore apprehensionis illius, qui est dator omnium.

Nam quando *species* coloris se oculo ingerit, spiritus in oculo sentit obviationem<sup>23</sup>. Et ita anima sensibilis se convertit supra illam *speciem* et *admirando* inquit, cuius sit *species*. Intellectus vero excitatur, ut quidditatem inquirat per visum mediante *specie sensus*. Dicit hoc, cuius est figura, esse hominem. Admiratur intellectus, quid sit homo, et ita ponitur in motu, ut intellegat actu veritatem, entitatem seu unitatem hominis; et ita de aliis.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. SPRUIT, Leen: *Species intelligibilis: From Perception to Knowledge*. Leiden: Brill 1995, vol. II, 20–28. See p. 25: “In *De mente*, where Cusanus’ theory of ‘intellectual perception’ is set forth, sensible species are accepted—even in the interpretation of the doctrine of multiplication—but *intelligible* species are not referred to. Where intellectual knowledge of the external world is concerned, Cusanus used terms like ‘notio’ and ‘conceptio’ to refer to the intellect’s assimilation of the conceptualisable aspects of the sensible realm”.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. ARIST.: *Metaph.*, I 2, 982b 12, *versio* Moerbeke: “propter *admirari* homines coeperunt philosophari”.

<sup>22</sup> Note the same wording in *De mente*: “In nostris mentibus ab initio vita illa *similis est dormienti*, quousque admiratione excitetur” (*De mente*, V 85, 8–10).

<sup>23</sup> As in the passage of *De mente* quoted before, here begins the same comparison between the *vis visiva* and the *vis intellectiva*.



[32] Hanc arbitror causam, cur spiritus intellectualis ad tempus corpori unitus est, qui de sui natura infima intellectuali *dormiens* et in potentia tantum est. Per figuram huius mundi ad cognitionem, quae est vita aut vigilia, actu *excitetur*! Servit igitur spiritui nostro totum corpus et totus hic mundus, ut in amorem vitae suae *excitetur*.

#### 4. REST OR RESTING (*QUIES*, *QUIESCERE*)

The theme of resting in God as the ultimate aim of man is present in the first part of *De sapientia*. According to Cusanus, man can find peace or rest only in heavenly things, or in Wisdom, not in our present life. Only by resting in God can we receive a stability unattainable in this world.

This assimilation [of our intellectual spirit] to Wisdom—an assimilation which is naturally present in our spirit and through which our spirit is not at rest (*quietatur*) unless it is present in Wisdom—is as a living image of Wisdom. For an image is not at rest (*quietatur*) except in that of which it is the image [...]. But a living image, through its being alive, produces from itself a movement (*motum*) toward its exemplar; only in its exemplar does the image find rest (*quiescit*). For the life of the image cannot find rest in itself (*non potest in se quiescere*) [...]. Hence, [the image's life] is moved (*movetur*) toward the exemplar as toward the truth of its own being<sup>24</sup>.

This topic can already be seen in *De docta ignorantia*<sup>25</sup>, though ontologically conceived. In the *Sermons*, however, it becomes a leitmotif, and is developed in its existential aspect, namely, man's salvation. Here I give only a few examples:

*Sermo* 27 (*Jesus autem emissa voce magna expiravit*, 19 April 1443), n. 2, 16–17: “Non igitur quiescere potest homo sine apprehensione immortalis veritatis”;

*Sermo* 32 (*In nomine Jesu*, 5 April 1444), n. 4, 1–2: “Cognitio veri est visio seu *quies* intellectus, et est adeptio filiationis Dei, quia Deus est veritas”;

*Sermo* 37 (*Paraclitus autem*, 31 May 1444), n. 7, 5–7: “*Quies* intellectualium est in apprehensione vitae et esse intellectualis, scilicet in apprehensione veri”;

*Sermo* 41 (*Confide, filia!*, 22 November 1444), n. 9, 12–21: “Cum nihil maius aut melius dici aut excogitari possit quam id, quod me *quietare* debet, scilicet vita sine corruptione, veritas sine fallacia, bonum sine omni malo, tunc dico

<sup>24</sup> *De sap.*, I 18, 1–8 (trans. Hopkins). Cf. also *De sap.*, I 12. For other occurrences of *quies* and *quiescere* see the *Index verborum* in the *Idiota*, edited by R. Steiger.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *De docta ign.*, I 23, 72–73: “Omnis enim vivificatio, motus et intelligentia ex ipso, in ipso et per ipsum; apud quem una revolutio octavae sphaerae non est minor quam infinite, quia finis est omnium motuum, in quo omnis motus ut in fine quiescit. Est enim quies maxima, in qua omnis motus quies est; et ita maxima quies est omnium motuum mensura, sicut maxima rectitudo omnium circumferentiarum et maxima praesentia sive aeternitas omnium temporum. In ipso igitur omnes motus naturales ut in fine quiescunt, et omnis potentia in ipso perficitur ut in actu infinito. Et quia ipse est entitas omnis esse et omnis motus est ad esse: igitur quies motus est ipse, qui est finis motus, scilicet forma et actus essendi”.

hoc esse Deum. Deus enim est id maximum atque optimum, quo maius et melius concipi nequit. Sed id, quo maius et melius concipi nequit, *quies* est atque terminus *motus* spiritus intellectualis”.

## 5. TRINITY IN ALL BEINGS (*TRINITAS IN OMNIBUS*)

From *De docta ignorantia* (II 7) we learn that the universe can exist only by reflecting the triunity of God. This idea is repeated in *De mente*: all created things, being similar to God, must own a trinitarian structure.

Omnia principiata in se similitudinem principii habere atque ideo in omnibus trinitatem in unitate substantiae in similitudine verae trinitatis et unitatis substantiae principii aeternii reperiri certum teneo (*De mente*, XI 132, 9–11).

What should be stressed here is that in the long *Sermo* 38 (*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus*) Cusanus adds important and original thoughts on this subject. In this sermon, preached on Trinity Sunday in 1444, he tirelessly develops the idea of the triunity of all beings. For instance:

Habemus in simplicissima essentia humanitatis: ex qua, per quam et in qua homines id sunt, quod sunt. Et ita humanitas, nisi unitrina foret, per ipsam homines esse non possent (n. 16, 20–24).

I could add to this another passage, which is found in *Sermo* 40, n. 6 (though this seems to be a later addition by Cusanus):

Potuit sanctus noster [sc. Martinus] in hac via non solum attingere unitatem absolutam, quae Deus est, sed et unitrinum Deum. Nam aut respexit ad plures creaturas aut ad unam aliquam. *Si ad plures*, illas vidit (1) plures, (2) inaequales et (3) distinctas. (1) Pluralitas ex unitate, (2) inaequalitas ex aequalitate, (3) distinctio ex conexione: Vidit principium trium. *Si ad aliquam unam*, vidit habere eam (1) unitatem, (2) aequalitatem et (3) conexionem. Unitas est ipsa entitas; aequalitas est ipsa formalitas, quae non est nec maius nec minus, ut res hoc sit, quod est; et est conexio, qua entitas ipsa formalitati conectitur. *Hanc trinitatem habet omnis res a Deo trino*, qui est unus: unitas Pater, aequalitas Filius, conexio Spiritus Sanctus.

\*\*\*

It should not surprise us that if we narrow our research focus to single expressions, we will find other strong similarities between the early *Sermones* and the *Idiota* dialogues, such as the following:

*Sermo* 37 C, n. 2, 5–8: “Dicitur ‘spiritus’ [...] propter eius invisibilitatem, sicut aer et ventus. Dicitur ‘spiritus’, ‘ruha’ sive ‘pneuma’ → “id, quod in vento motionem facit et in omnibus aliis, spiritum appellemus” (*De mente*, XIII 147, 9–10);

*Sermo* 71, n. 4, 6–7: “per fenestras corporis” → “oculi, nares et cetera quasi fenestrae sunt” (*De mente*, VIII 114, 1–2);

*Sermo* 71, n. 8, 6: "Exemplar est vera mensura exemplati" → "Est igitur absolutum exemplar aequalitas, praecisio, mensura seu iustitia, quod idem est et veritas et bonitas, quae est perfectio omnium exemplabilium" (*De sap.*, II 41, 8–10);

*Sermo* 71, n. 15, 1: "Haec est facilitas difficilium" → "O miranda facilitas difficilium!" (*De sap.*, II 45, 1).

To conclude, we should bear in mind that Cusanus's *Sermons* were intended as notes for sermons usually preached in the vernacular<sup>26</sup>. Sometimes they were written as sketches, and at other times as thoroughly developed homilies. In any case, the sermons clearly bear the influence of his philosophical and theological writings and to such an extent that we cannot understand them fully without also understanding his thought. Furthermore, as I have shown with the *Idiota* dialogues, Cusanus regarded his *Sermons* as a place in which he could pioneer new concepts and ideas; a reservoir of ideas and expressions that was available for reuse or development later, in his more theoretical writings<sup>27</sup>.

### Abstract

*Even a cursory reading of Cusanus's Sermons shows that he often makes use of his principal philosophical ideas. Now that a complete edition of the Sermons is available, it may be worth comparing them with his philosophical and theological works, in order to find out when his ideas first found their expression and how they evolved over time. As an example, in this paper I compare a number of themes contained in the Idiota dialogues, written in 1450, with the Sermons written in the years before that, specifically between 1443 and 1450.*

<sup>26</sup> Cf. HOPKINS, J.: *Nicholas of Cusa's Early Sermons*, VII–XX.

<sup>27</sup> On this point see DUPRÉ, Wilhelm: *Die Predigt als Ort der Reflexion*, in: REINHARDT, Klaus/SCHWAETZER, Harald (Hgg.): *Nikolaus von Kues als Prediger*. Regensburg: Roderer-Verlag 2004, 79–104.