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ERFURT CARTHUSIAN TREATISES  
OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY  
ON MYSTICAL THEOLOGY:  
ECHOES OF CONTROVERSIES WITHIN  
THE CARTHUSIAN ORDER, OR EVIDENCE  
OF A DIALOGUE WITH NICHOLAS OF CUSA?\*

Carthusian treatises on *theologia mystica* occupy a special place in a wide variety of fifteenth-century texts dedicated to mystical theology. The reason for this lies not only in their considerable number, but also in the diversity of positions presented in them, to which some prominent contemporaries, for example, Nicholas of Cusa, had to respond to critically. As a result of these opinion differences, historically remarkable controversies arose. They developed primarily in the context of the observant monastic reform of the fifteenth century and were predominantly structured around the themes and issues that emerged from the growth of a new late medieval spirituality. The present study aims to demonstrate main differences in these partly forgotten controversies on wisdom and mystical theology, which are reflected in texts, composed by some German Carthusians and their opponents during the fifteenth century. In particular, this study is an attempt to answer the following questions: how did the most representative discussion participants justify their positions, and on what did their justifications depend? On which theoretical principles they were based? Finally, what was the spiritual and intellectual ideal behind them?

In order to define the topic of this study precisely, it should be noted that the concepts of mystical theology of the Erfurt Carthusians lies at its heart. The

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reason for this choice is, first of all, that it is impossible to consider in detail in a small paper all positions and all fifteenth-century texts on mystical theology, even if only those attributed to the Carthusian authors. Secondly, there are still relatively few studies dedicated to the Erfurt Carthusians. Compared to such well-known Carthusians as Denis the Carthusian (Dionysius van Rijkel) and Nicholas Kempf (from the Charterhouse Gaming in Lower Austria), whose works have been repeatedly studied by researchers of the late Middle Ages, the texts of the Erfurt Carthusians have until recently received less attention. Paradoxically, it also happens when they are already critically edited, as it is the case, for example, with the treatise on mystical theology written by the Erfurt Carthusian Jacob de Paradiso.<sup>1</sup> Yet many texts from the Erfurt Charterhouse have been overlooked since they were not published. For example, it can be said about most of the writings of John de Indagine (alias Johannes Hagen).<sup>2</sup>

Despite this situation, they do not deserve such treatment. Their content argues in favour of a fresh consideration, as does the historical context of the development of mystical theology in the fifteenth century in which they were written. In general, it can be noted that after the condemnation of Meister Eckhart in 1329, the rationalistic-metaphysical foundations of his speculative mysticism were completely revised in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and reinterpreted in the direction of a more affective understanding of mysticism. This reinterpretation tendency proves to be particularly radically affective and irrationalistically oriented in the works on mystical theology of the Erfurt Carthusians of the fifteenth century, who, apparently following Jean Gerson, proposed an irrationalist-affective interpretation of the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. So, it is not surprising that their position

<sup>1</sup>JAKUB Z PARADYŻA, *Opuscula inedita*, edited by S.A. Porębski, (Textus et Studia Historiam Theologiae in Polonia Excultae Spectantia, 5), Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademii Teologii Katolickiej, 1978, p. 249–312.

<sup>2</sup>About John de Indagine, see: J. KLAPPER, *Der Erfurter Kartäuser Johannes Hagen. Ein Reformtheologe des 15. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1: *Leben und Werk*, (Erfurter Theologische Studien, 9), Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1960; vol. 2: *Verzeichnis seiner Schriften mit Auszügen*, (Erfurter Theologische Studien, 10), Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1961; H. RÜTHING, "Jean Hagen de Indagine," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, vol. 8, Paris: Beauchesne, 1973, cols. 543–552; D. MERTENS, "Hagen, Johannes," *Verfasserlexikon*, edited by K. Ruh, vol. 3, Berlin – New York: De Gruyter, 1981, p. 388–398; E. KLEINEIDAM, "Die Theologische Richtung der Erfurter Kartäuser am Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts. Versuch einer Einheit der Theologie," *Miscellanea Erfordiana*, edited by E. Kleineidam, H. Schürmann, (Erfurter Theologische Studien, 12), Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1962, p. 247–271; M. EIFLER, "Ut non solum mihi, sed aliis prodesset mea lectio. Autographe und Unika des Erfurter Kartäusers Johannes Hagen in einer Weimarer Handschrift," *Katalogisierung mittelalterlicher Handschriften. Methoden und Ergebnisse*, edited by B. Wagner, (Das Mittelalter, 14/2), Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009, p. 70–87; S. METZGER, "The Manuscripts of Writings by Ioannes Hagen de Indagine, O.Cart.," *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale*, vol. 50 (2008), p. 175–256.

eventually attracted critical attention of such a follower of rationalist mysticism as Nicholas of Cusa.

Nicholas of Cusa's active contacts with the Erfurt Carthusians and his discussions with them on monastic reform and mystical theology most likely began during his legation journey to Germany (1451–1452) when he visited Erfurt, where he stopped for almost two weeks, from May 29 to June 9, 1451.<sup>3</sup> It is known that he met there two leading Carthusians (Jacob de Paradiso and John de Indagine) and discussed with them a series of questions that seem to concern not only practical issues of the observant monastic reform, but also theoretical problems of nature of mystical experience, contemplation, meditation, and role of philosophy (especially ancient philosophy, first of all, Plato and Aristotle) for a contemplative religious life. At least the writings of the participants of this meeting, written around 1450–1451, suggest that such a dialogue could actually take place. These texts clearly emphasize the positions of the parties, which have surprisingly many similarities but at the same time show considerable differences.

In the case of Nicholas of Cusa, this is a series of texts written in the Marches, Central Italy, during the summer of 1450 and known as *De idiota* dialogues,<sup>4</sup> while in connection with Jacob de Paradiso and John de Indagine I mean their treatises on mystical theology. To the extent of our current knowledge, Jacob de Paradiso's only treatise on mystical theology seemed to have originally been two different texts; as mentioned above,<sup>5</sup> it has already been critically edited. John de Indagine wrote at least two versions of the text under the title *De mystica theologia*. In the first version of this treatise, which is preserved as part of the Weimar manuscript, Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek (HAAB), Q 50, ff. 1r–60v, John de Indagine himself reports that he wrote this text around 1451.<sup>6</sup> The second version has been preserved in a manuscript from the Archbishop's Academic Library in Paderborn.<sup>7</sup> It has recently been published thanks to the

<sup>3</sup>E. KLEINEIDAM, *Universitas Studii Erfordensis. Überblick über die Geschichte der Universität Erfurt*, vol. 1: *Spätmittelalter 1392–1460*, (Erfurter Theologische Studien, 14), Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, <sup>2</sup>1985, p. 192; *Acta Cusana. Quellen zur Lebensgeschichte des Nikolaus von Kues*, edited by E. Meuthen, H. Hallauer, vol. 1, Hamburg: Meiner, 1996, p. 921–926; J. KOCH, “Das Itinerar der Legationsreise 1451/52,” IDEM, *Nikolaus von Cues und seine Umwelt*, (Untersuchungen zu Cusanus-Texte, IV. Briefe, 1. Sammlung), Heidelberg: Winter, 1948, p. 123–124.

<sup>4</sup>K. FLASCH, *Nikolaus von Kues: Geschichte einer Entwicklung. Vorlesungen zur Einführung in seine Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, <sup>3</sup>2008, p. 251.

<sup>5</sup>JAKUB Z PARADYŽA, *Opuscula inedita* (see footnote 1).

<sup>6</sup>Erfurt, Bistumsarchiv, Ms. Hist. 1, ff. 257v; 336v–338r; J. KLAPPER, *Der Erfurter Kartäuser Johannes Hagen*, vol. 2, p. 132, 145.

<sup>7</sup>IOANNES DE INDAGINE, *Tractatus de mystica theologia*, Ms. Paderborn, Erzbischöfliche Akademische Bibliothek, Cod. 118, ff. 162vb–173va.

remarkable efforts of Stephen Metzger.<sup>8</sup> The more or less precise chronological framework for writing this version of the treatise is not very clear but, taking into account John de Indagine's usual way of writing texts that was associated with the compilation of lengthy extracts for each topic, there is no reason to treat it as one earlier than the Weimar version. At least the concepts formulated in it can hardly be considered as having been derived from earlier ideas than those found in the Weimar version. The work on both versions probably lasted for many years almost in parallel, and most likely with some interruptions. In addition to the long treatises on mystical theology attributed to John de Indagine, a number of smaller fragments, devoted to the same topic and preserved among his manuscripts, should also be considered. For example, in the Russian State Library in Moscow, a four-page fragment on mystical theology (*De mystica theologia*) has been preserved as a part of the extensive manuscript Fonds 201, No. 35 (old shelf mark H 135 of the Erfurt Carthusian Library), ff. 157r–158v. This text is written in the hand of John de Indagine; it is not easy to read because of his extremely illegible handwriting.<sup>9</sup> The anticipated connections between this fragment and other versions of his treatises on mystical theology are as yet unclear and require further investigation.<sup>10</sup>

It may seem astonishing that no researcher to date has envisaged a connection between the works of Nicholas of Cusa and the Erfurt Carthusians written around 1450. For some inexplicable reason, Cusanus' legation journey of 1451–1452 to Germany and his work on the text of the *De idiota* dialogues shortly

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<sup>8</sup> IOANNES DE INDAGINE, "Tractatus de mystica theologia," edited by S. METZGER, *Contemplation and Philosophy: Scholastic and Mystical Modes of Medieval Philosophical Thought. A Tribute to K. Emery, Jr.*, edited by R. Hofmeister Pich, A. Speer, (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, 125), Leiden: Brill, 2018, p. 636–674.

<sup>9</sup> About John de Indagine's handwriting, Paul Lehmann noticed the following in his catalogue, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz*, vol. 2: *Bistum Mainz: Erfurt*, edited by P. Lehmann, München: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1928 (reprint 1969), p. 264: "Hic libellus manu Joannis Indaginis illegibiliter omnino scriptus e loco amotus est, quia nullius utilitatis."

<sup>10</sup> Erfurt, Bistumsarchiv, Ms. Hist. 6, ff. 116v–117r; *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge*, vol. 2, p. 426; *Abendländische Handschriften des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit in den Beständen der Russischen Staatsbibliothek (Moskau)*, edited by D. Barow-Vassilevitch, M.-L. Heckmann, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016, p. 206–213; M. KHORKOV, "Mystische Theologie zwischen Universität und Kartäuserkloster (Fonds 201, Nr. 35 der Russischen Staatsbibliothek, Moskau)," *Deutsch-russische Kulturbeziehungen in Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Aus abendländischen Beständen in Russland*, edited by N. Ganina, K. Klein, C. Squires, J. Wolf, (Akademie gemeinnütziger Wissenschaften zu Erfurt, Sonderschriften, 49 / Deutsch-russische Forschungen zur Buchgeschichte, 4), Erfurt: Verlag der Akademie gemeinnütziger Wissenschaften zu Erfurt in Kommission bei Franz Steiner Verlag, 2017, p. 193–199; S. METZGER, "A Few More Manuscripts of Ioannes de Indagine, O.Cart.," *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale*, vol. 58 (2016), p. 447–452.

before it were supposed to belong to different narratives, not to the same story, although in reality they undoubtedly form the same story. As a result, in the vast majority of studies on his biography, the separation between work on the text of the *De idiota* dialogues and the legation journey to Germany is a common stereotype. The researchers also never paid enough attention to the visit of Nicholas of Cusa to Erfurt, although the stay in this city was obviously one of the longest and most important throughout the whole journey. As an exception, one could only mention publications devoted to the local history of Erfurt in the fifteenth century.<sup>11</sup> However, they do not change the prevailing historiographic situation. That is why for general interpretations of Cusanus' life and work, the later debates between Nicholas of Cusa and the Benedictine monks of Tegernsee have been studied in more detail and were always of far greater importance than his controversies with the Erfurt Carthusians, although, based on the date of Cusanus' stay in Erfurt, they took place much later than his contact with the Erfurt Carthusian monks.

First and foremost, it should be noted that in all above-mentioned writings, the attention of their authors is focused on the figure of the wise Layman. There are many publications on what this figure might mean in the *De idiota* dialogues of Nicholas of Cusa from theoretical and historical points of view.<sup>12</sup> I will not go into their detailed analysis here because, in my opinion, they often not only give very abstract answers, but also formulate their research questions in an extremely abstract way. Apparently, this is the case because they do not take into account the specific historical context of Cardinal Cusanus' life around 1450. Of course, one can find many common elements between understanding the new role of the laity in the *devotio moderna* or in the literature of Italian humanism, and these elements are not completely meaningless for systematic or comparative research studies.<sup>13</sup> However, they are still of little help to us in finding a clear answer to the question of why Nicholas of Cusa wrote his

<sup>11</sup> W. MÄGDEFRAU, *Kaiser und Kurfürsten im späten Mittelalter. Thüringen und das Reich von Friedrich dem Streitbaren bis Maximilian I.*, (Thüringen gestern und heute, 13), Erfurt: Frisch, 2001, p. 69–70; E. KLEINEIDAM, *Universitas Studii Erffordensis*, vol. 1, p. 192.

<sup>12</sup> H.G. SENGER, *Nikolaus von Kues: Leben — Lehre — Wirkungsgeschichte*, Heidelberg: Winter, 2017, p. 50; R. STEIGER, "Einleitung," NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Der Laie über die Weisheit*, Lateinisch-deutsche Parallelausgabe, edited and translated into German by R. Steiger, (Philosophische Bibliothek, 411 / Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues, 1), Hamburg: Meiner, 1988, p. X–XVIII.

<sup>13</sup> For some such studies see: NICHOLAS OF CUSA, *The Layman on Wisdom and the Mind*, translated, with an introduction and notes, by M.L. Führer, (Renaissance and Reformation Texts in Translation, 4), Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1989, p. 12–16; MIKOŁAJ Z KUZY, *Laik o umyśle*, translated, with an introduction and commentary, by A. Kijewska, (Ad Fontes, 7), Kęty: Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki, 2008, p. 15–33; H.G. SENGER, *Nikolaus von Kues*, p. 49–53, 123–126.

*De idiota* dialogues in the summer of 1450, when he was preparing to travel to Germany, not earlier and not later. But when we read the texts of the Erfurt Carthusians, which were written around 1450, the answer becomes immediately clear. And, of course, one must not forget that when dealing with the Erfurt Carthusian monks, Nicholas of Cusa pursued not only theoretical but also (and mainly) ecclesiastical and political goals: he wanted to gain their support for his plans of an observant monastic reform, which should be implemented in the country where a large part of the clergy adhered to anti-Papal or conciliarist positions at that time. Therefore, the legation journey of Nicholas of Cusa to Germany must have been extremely difficult and even dangerous, so that during the summer of 1450 he had to prepare for it very carefully. In other words, in the summer of 1450 Nicholas of Cusa simply did not have the opportunity for a peaceful and relaxing “philosophical” vacation in the sunny summer Italian province, despite many of our contemporary authors<sup>14</sup> believing that this was the case.

So, what distinguishes the position of the Erfurt Carthusians which so attracted the attention of Nicholas of Cusa? In their view, the Layman is much better equipped to understand wisdom than learned theologians and philosophers since he is humbler than learned people. For example, this idea is frequently repeated in the treatise on mystical theology by Jacob de Paradiso, who was one of the leaders of the Erfurt Carthusian monastery during the visit of Nicholas of Cusa to Erfurt. Here are some of his typical formulations of this idea:

Et sic quilibet etiam laicus vel mulier potest mentem suam liquefacere in amore Dei;<sup>15</sup> [...] ut omnes mundi sapientes confutet, cum vetula vel rusticus pascuarius ad istius sapientiae consurrectionem perfecte possit attingere, dum tamen praedicto modo se praeparet, quod nulla philosophica scientia nec moralis industria apprehendit;<sup>16</sup> [...] per idiotas a me repletos divina sapientia docui.<sup>17</sup>

It should also be noted that, in connection with the discussion of what kind of people are more likely to attain wisdom, a clear emphasis on the great importance of female mysticism is quite characteristic for the mystical theology of Jacob de Paradiso in general. He greatly appreciates it and devotes many enthusiastic pages of his treatise to it. Here are just a few examples that clearly illustrate this trend:

<sup>14</sup>K. FLASCH, *Nikolaus von Kues*, p. 251.

<sup>15</sup>JAKUB Z PARADYŽA, *Opuscula inedita*, p. 270, l. 12–14.

<sup>16</sup>Ibidem, p. 275, l. 5–9.

<sup>17</sup>Ibidem, p. 284, l. 29–30.

De quibusdam mulieribus hac theologia mystica inebriatis;<sup>18</sup> Ideo dicitur devotus femineus sexus a beato Gregorio seu Augustino;<sup>19</sup> [...] Deus in confusionem sublimium, qui sibi videntur alicuius momenti esse, gratiam suam cumulatus infundit in sexu contemptibilem, scilicet in femineum, scilicet in praedictas sanctas: Dorotheam, Catharinam, Brigittam de Suecia, contemporaneam praedictis, Gertrudam de Lipczk, coevam Hedvigis, Elisabeth, Hedvigem eius cognatam et alias in Almania;<sup>20</sup> Sic per feminas fragiles et ignorantes mea sapientia dotatas, in confusionem temeritatis docebo;<sup>21</sup> Ideo dicitur devotus femineus sexus, cuius perspicua ratio est, quia actus actionum sunt in patiente praedisposito.<sup>22</sup>

Obviously, this influential Carthusian monk was the cause of the tremendous wealth of writings by medieval female mystics in the library of the Erfurt Charterhouse, both in German and Latin, which has recently attracted great attention of researchers.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to me to agree with the position of Jarosław Stoś, who sees the mystical theology of Jacob de Paradiso as an expression of an integrative medieval Carthusian monastic spirituality that combines extremely affective and moderate positions.<sup>24</sup> He argues that other Carthusians, including inexplicably Nicholas Kempf, are considered to be defenders of a different, extremely affective position. According to this approach, the Parisian chancellor Jean Gerson is credited with holding a moderate position, without giving an explanation what is actually meant in this case under a “moderate” position. At the same time, the very atypical “mystical feminism” of Jacob de Paradiso is completely ignored. Of particular significance is that this “feminist” tendency is already peripheral in the writings of John de Indagine,<sup>25</sup> while it is

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 277, l. 4–5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 277, l. 12–13.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 284, l. 11–18.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 284, l. 30–32.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 288, l. 4–6.

<sup>23</sup> B. NEMES, “Ein wieder Aufgefundenes Exzerpt aus Mechthilds von Magdeburg *Lux Divinitatis*,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, vol. 137 (2008), p. 354–369; IDEM, “Mechthild im Mitteldeutschen Raum. Die Moskauer Fragmente und andere Handschriftenfunde zur Rezeption des ‘Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit’ und seiner lateinischen Übersetzung,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, vol. 142 (2013), p. 162–189; A. MÄRKER, *Das “Prohemium longum” des Erfurter Kartäuserkatalogs aus der Zeit um 1475. Edition und Untersuchung*, vol. 2, (Lateinische Sprache und Literatur des Mittelalters, 35), Bern: Lang, 2008, p. 322.

<sup>24</sup> J. STOŚ, “Die Mystische Theologie des Jakob von Paradies,” *Intellect et imagination dans la Philosophie Médiévale: Actes du XIe Congrès International de Philosophie Médiévale de la S.I.E.P.M., Porto, du 26 au 31 août 2002*, edited by M.C. Pacheco, J.F. Meirinhos, vol. 4, (Mediaevalia. Textos e Estudos, 23), Porto: Universidade do Porto edições, 2004, p. 367–380; IDEM, *Mistrz Jakub z Paradyża i devotio moderna*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademii Teologii Katolickiej, 1997.

<sup>25</sup> The manuscript Erfurt, Bistumsarchiv, Ms. Hist. 1, ff. 240v–241v, contains e.g. an interesting text written by John de Indagine with his own hand, in which he describes and evaluates

completely absent in the works of Nicholas of Cusa, even though the motif of the spiritual importance of the laity continues to play a central role in the texts of both thinkers.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that in John de Indagine's writings on mystical theology, he generally holds the same positions as his older Carthusian brother Jacob de Paradiso. In the Paderborn version of his treatise *On Mystical Theology*, he distinguishes three main forms for the attainment of direct knowledge of God, which he also calls "wisdom" — just as Nicholas of Cusa does in his dialogue *Idiota de sapientia* (*The Layman on Wisdom*). It is important to note that not three different modes of wisdom are concerned in all these main forms, but one and indivisible wisdom which John de Indagine has in mind when, at the beginning of a special chapter devoted to wisdom,<sup>26</sup> he makes a clear reference to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*<sup>27</sup> and *Nicomachean Ethics*:<sup>28</sup>

Insitum est naturaliter mentibus racionabilibus desiderium sciendi et "omnis homo naturaliter desiderat scire", quia desiderat suam perfectionem, suam propriam actionem et suam beatitudinem que est in visione seu cognicione summi boni. Est igitur triplex adquisicio sapiencie [...].<sup>29</sup>

Wisdom is unified because it is principle of unification. And this is the only point in which views of Nicholas of Cusa and the Erfurt Carthusian John de Indagine are completely in harmony with each other.

John de Indagine associates the first main form of the reception of wisdom or, so to say, the first way to it, with rational cognition of God through His creation. In his opinion, such a realization is always confined to the weakness of human nature. The best knowledge to which it could lead is the recognition of person's own sinfulness and understanding of the necessity of constant penitential exercise for the forgiveness of sins. The pagan philosophers are thus of the least help since even the best of them, the Platonists, cannot attain the wisdom that Aristotle describes, because their sinful reason can hardly allow them to know truly their own souls and God.<sup>30</sup>

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various representatives of medieval female mysticism. This text is characterized by more restrained evaluations of female mysticism than in the treatise of Jacob de Paradiso; J. KLAPPER, *Der Erfurter Kartäuser Johannes Hagen*, vol. 2, p. 126.

<sup>26</sup> IOANNES DE INDAGINE, *Tractatus de mystica theologia*, cap. 6, Ms. Paderborn, Erzbischöfliche Akademische Bibliothek, Cod. 118, ff. 166rb–167va, ed. Metzger, p. 648–652. An abbreviated parallel to this passage can also be found in the treatise on mystical theology of Jacob de Paradiso: JAKUB Z PARADYŻA, *Opuscula inedita*, p. 271, l. 1–5.

<sup>27</sup> ARISTOTELES, *Metaphysica*, I, 1 (980a21).

<sup>28</sup> ARISTOTELES, *Ethica ad Nichomachum*, X, 7 (1177a12–13, 16–17).

<sup>29</sup> IOANNES DE INDAGINE, *Tractatus de mystica theologia*, cap. 6, Ms. Paderborn, Erzbischöfliche Akademische Bibliothek, Cod. 118, f. 166rb, ed. Metzger, p. 648, l. 14–17.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 166rb–166vb, ed. Metzger, p. 648, l. 18 – p. 650, l. 6.



The second way to wisdom is principally reserved for monks, who lead an ascetic life away from all worldly temptations, vanities and worries. At least, it can be concluded on the basis of the description of this form of wisdom which John de Indagine gives in his treatise. The point here seems to be that the ascetic way to wisdom does not teach to learn wisdom through sensual knowledge of natural things, or from controversial and ambiguous writings of secular philosophers, but rather it brings monks to wisdom by the instructions of the holy teachers (*sancti doctores*) in Christian life (“non naturali modo, ut philosophi, sed ut docetur in fide catholica”).<sup>31</sup>

According to John de Indagine, the third way to wisdom (*tercia acquisicio sapientie*) is “the most sublime and excellence” (*sublimior et excellencior*). It targets a relatively small number of people because it is mystical path in the true sense of the word. In this case, the Carthusian understands mysticism as an affective process of the over-rational ecstatic ascent to the summit of the soul:

[...] actualiter sine omni medio disponente animi ad superiora rapit et in dilectionem suam immediate sursum transfert et consurgere actibus extensionibus facit, quae in mistica theologia tradita in apice affective quae est synderisis.<sup>32</sup>

Human reason does not help those who follow this path: within the first two main forms, it has already become completely discredited, and within the framework of the third main form, the soul is elevated above the rational faculties of a human being. Therefore, the Carthusian monk describes the third way to wisdom as an “irrational” and “foolish” way:

Et vocat ipsam “irrationabilem”, quia nec ratio ipsam apprehendit neque ratione acquiritur neque inuestigacione studiosa nec eiam utitur ratione in suo usu sed tantum amore amentem vocat, id est, sine mente et intellectu quia nec ipsa in suo exercicio utitur intellectum nec ad ipsam perueniri potest per intellectum sed solum per affectum et amorem ferventissimam; “stultam” vocat, quia sine usu omnimode intellegencie in solo affectu consurgit quam nullus apprehendere potest intellectus.<sup>33</sup>

The whole line of argumentation seems here to be clear and unambiguous. Mystical experience is characteristically concerned with the rational faculties of the human soul only at its first primitive stage, where at best it works as bad conscience. Mystical ecstasy as such is affective and irrational, and has nothing in common with intellectual activity. Thus, the subjective-affective psychologized

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, f. 166vb, ed. Metzger, p. 650, l. 11–12.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, ed. Metzger, p. 650, l. 23–26.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, f. 167ra, ed. Metzger, p. 651, l. 12–19.

mysticism and universal rational knowledge permanently diverge in completely different directions.

I believe it would be unnecessary to say that such a conceptualization of the nature of wisdom and the manner of reaching it were totally unacceptable to Nicholas of Cusa (as well as it was earlier also completely alien to the Dominican friar Meister Eckhart). But he did not have to argue personally with the stubborn Erfurt Carthusian monk, because the defender of the general position of Nicholas of Cusa in favour of a rational nature of mysticism was found in the same Carthusian order, namely Nicholas Kempf.<sup>34</sup> He did not come from Erfurt, but from Strasbourg, and at the beginning of the controversy he had already lived in Austria as a monk at the Charterhouse Gaming, where he was also prior from 1451 to 1458. In his treatise *On Mystical Theology* (*Tractatus de mystica theologia*), he writes that the illuminating light of reason (*illuminacio*) is a necessary condition for gaining the wisdom which human beings acquire through the habitual practice of virtues. When the human mind is enlightened by the light of natural reason and associated with the perfection of virtues, then its intellectual part also becomes receptive to the divine light:

Secunda via, scilicet illuminationis, sequitur immediate purgacionem, ut, aere purgato a vaporibus et nubibus, lumen sequitur et, remoto obstaculo, intrat lumen solis cenaculum. Ita lumen gratie, ablato peccato, intrat mentis triclinium. Quamvis autem illuminacio solum videtur sonare de intellectualibus virtutibus et cognitionibus, in proposito tamen capienda est illuminacio prout extendit se ad omnes virtutes, sive naturales, sive morales, sive theologicas, tam intellectuales quam morales, quia valde imperfecta est illuminacio que fit solum in intellectu et non sequitur actus vel habitus perficiens affectum, tum quia communiter actus intelligibilis et voluntatis coniunguntur, tum quia magis valet ad propositum sic loqui de illuminatione, prout extendit se ad utramque anime potenciam, scilicet intellectum et affectum. Philosophi enim secuti solum intellectualem illuminationem, et in ea tanquam summa perfectione quiescentes erraverunt.<sup>35</sup>

Nicholas Kempf reaffirms his position with numerous references to the Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophers. Of course, he is familiar with Augustine's criticism of Platonism. But he still believes that Christians must study philosophy, especially Neo-Platonic philosophy. And he mentions Plotinus and Macrobius as the most influential key authors who wrote on this subject:

<sup>34</sup>D. MARTIN, *Fifteenth-Century Carthusian Reform. The World of Nicholas Kempf*, (Studies in the History of Christian Thought, 49), Leiden: Brill, 1992.

<sup>35</sup>NICOLAUS KEMPF, *Tractatus de mystica theologia*, II, 5, edited by K. Jellowschek, J. Barbet, F. Ruello, vol. 1, (Analecta Cartusiana, 9), Salzburg: James Hogg, 1973, p. 106–109.

Tercia vero via, scilicet unitiva, erit de actuali amore procedente ex illuminatione intellectus et affectus per habitus virtutum et donorum, ut patebit suo in loco. Pone autem Plotinus philosophus, Platonis discipulus, et post eum Macrobius, quatuor gradus virtutum: tres in hominibus perfectis et quartum in Deo. Et quociens legi, miratus fui de tanta perfectione virtutum et earum cognitione in predicto philosopho et aliis philosophis.<sup>36</sup> [...] Et exponit idem Philosophus, et extensius Macrobius, de quatuor virtutibus cardinalibus sic inquires: Illic prudentia est divina, non quasi in electione preferre, sed sola divina noscere et tanquam nichil aliud intueri. Temperantia est terrenas cupiditates non iam reprimere, sed penitus oblivisci. Fortitudinis est passiones ignorare, non vincere, ut irasci nesciat nichilque cupiat. Iusticie est ita hominem cum superna et divina mente sociari, ut cum ea fedus perpetuum servet imitando. Quartum genus virtutum ponit in mente divina, sic dicens: Si omnium rerum aliarum, multo magis virtutum ydeas esse in mente divina credendum est. Illic prudentia est mens ipsa divina; temperantia, quod in se, perpetua intencione, conversa est; fortitudo, quod idem est nec aliquando mutatur; iusticia, quod, perhenni lege ac sempiterni operis sui continuatione, non flectetur. Et subiungit: Hec quatuor genera virtutum, in passionibus quibus homines metuunt, cupiunt, dolent quaedamque, maximam habent sui differentiam. Nam has passiones prime molliunt, secunde auferunt, tercie obliviscuntur, in quartis nequas est nominari. Et scribitur de eodem Philosopho quod, sicut illas virtutes docuit, ita non alieno sed proprio virtutis exemplo ostendit. Fuit enim ad omnium virtutum ornamenta compositus omniumque divinarum dispositionum studio formatus.<sup>37</sup>

In fact, he reproduces here as an argument Macrobius' paraphrasing of Plotinus's treatise *On Virtue* (*Enneades*, I, 2), which is a part of his *Commentarius in Somnium Scipionis* (first book, chapter eight),<sup>38</sup> one of the few texts with information on Plotinus' philosophy, which was well known in Western Europe long before the complete translation of the works of Plotinus into Latin by Marsilio Ficino:

[...] solae faciunt virtutes beatum, nullaque alia quisquam via hoc nomen adipiscitur. Unde qui aestimant nullis nisi philosophantibus inesse virtutes, nullos praeter philosophos beatos esse pronuntiant. Agnitionem enim rerum divinarum sapientiam proprie vocantes eos tantum modo dicunt esse sapientes, qui superna et acie mentis requirunt et quaerendi sagaci diligentia comprehendunt et, quantum vivendi perspicuitas praestat, imitantur: et in hoc solo esse aiunt exercitia virtutum, quarum sic officia dispensant. Prudentiae esse mundum istum et omnia quae mundo insunt divinatorum contemplatione despicere, omnemque animae cogitationem in sola divina dirigere; temperantiae omnia relinquere, in quantum

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 106.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 108–109.

<sup>38</sup> MACROBIUS, *Commentarius in somnium Scipionis*, I, 8, ed. J.A. Willis, Leipzig: Teubner, 1970, p. 36–37.

natura patitur, quae corporis usus requirit; fortitudinis non terreri animam a corpore quodam modo ductu philosophiae recedentem, nec altitudinem perfectae ad superna ascensionis horrere; iustitiae ad unam sibi huius propositi consentire viam unius cuiusque virtutis obsequium.<sup>39</sup>

[...] sed Plotinus inter philosophiae professores cum Platone princeps libro *De virtutibus* gradus earum vera et naturali divisionis ratione compositos per ordinem digerit. Quattuor sunt inquit quaternarum genera virtutum. Ex his primae politicae vocantur, secundae purgatoriae, tertiae animi iam purgati, quartae exemplares. [...] Quartae sunt quae in ipsa divina mente consistunt, quam diximus *noun* vocari, a quarum exemplo reliquae omnes per ordinem defluunt. Nam si rerum aliarum, multo magis virtutum ideas esse in mente credendum est. Illic prudentia est mens ipsa divina, temperantia quod in se perpetua intentione conversa est, fortitudo quod semper idem est nec aliquando mutatur, iustitia quod perenni lege a sempiterna operis sui continuatione non flectitur.<sup>40</sup>

The position of Nicholas Kempf is particularly interesting in the sense that he finds his arguments in favour of intellectual nature of wisdom not in the Aristotelian metaphysics, but in the Platonic or Neo-Platonic tradition. His discourse obviously follows Plotinus and Macrobius, who describe the path to wisdom as an increase of virtues. Thereby the intellectual nature of wisdom becomes dependent on ethical premises as well as on the inevitably ascetic form of cultivation of virtues. I think that this is precisely the reason why Cusanus does not follow the interpretation of the Plotinian ethics by Macrobius in his own concept of wisdom, but comes closer to the Platonic understanding of wisdom that Plato proposed in his dialogue *Phaedrus*.

For reasons of content and chronology, and because of the unique nature of the institutions involved, it seems to me to be less probable that Nicholas of Cusa's theory of wisdom presented in his *De idiota* dialogues could interfere directly with the discussion on virtues developed in the closed Carthusian network (i.e., practically, in a strictly cloistered space of their *clausurae*), or could in any way have depended on it. On the other hand, he touches upon the important problems of the Carthusian discussion on wisdom in these dialogues and solves the problem of the relationship between intellect and wisdom in a unique way: the intellect (*mens*) is not simply a possible way to obtain wisdom (among many others) and not only a means to an exercise of wisdom, but it perceives wisdom, because it sees it intellectually without any intermediation. Compared to the conception of Aristotle, who describes wisdom in the sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a dianoetic virtue, wisdom — according to Cusanus — is not a virtue, but rather foundation of all virtues, that is, *mens* itself. It is difficult

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 37–39.

not to notice that the whole figure of thought sounds here very Platonic and apparently refers to the famous text passage on the nature of wisdom in Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, it is not yet known with full accuracy when Nicholas of Cusa read this dialogue of Plato's. But we know that it is preserved in the Latin translation by Leonardo Bruni as part of Codex Cusanus 177 in the Cusanus Library in Bernkastel-Kues. Numerous marginalia, written by Nicholas of Cusa himself, clearly show that he had to read this Platonic text profoundly. And when one finds in the *De idiota* dialogues ideas and figures of thought that should be taken from the Platonic *Phaedrus*,<sup>42</sup> it means nothing else but a very probable fact that Nicholas of Cusa must have read Plato while working on his *De idiota* dialogues (first of all, the dialogues *De sapientia* and *De mente*), that is, around the year 1450.

What makes me think that Nicholas of Cusa had read Plato's *Phaedrus* shortly before the composition of his dialogues *De sapientia* and *De mente*? Firstly, the form of these texts and their literary genre, namely of dialogue, clearly refer to Plato, a fact that is hard to miss, and therefore it is not surprising that it has long attracted attention from researchers.<sup>43</sup> Secondly, as in Plato's *Phaedrus*, the formalism of the sophists and rhetoricians is consistently and rigorously criticized in the *De idiota* dialogues. Thirdly, great metaphysical significance is attributed to beauty in the texts of both Plato and Nicholas of Cusa. Fourthly, Nicholas of Cusa observes in a passage in his *De mente* dialogue (c. 14, nn. 154–155) that souls retain their knowledge even after death, which sounds like an allusion to Plato's *Phaedrus* (249b–250a).

However, these general remarks not only are important for further observations on our subject matter, but also the forms and manner of Cusanus' reception of *Phaedrus*, especially the passages directly dedicated to the subject of wisdom. In his still unpublished marginal notes to the Latin translation of the Platonic dialogue *Phaedrus* in Codex Cusanus 177, Nicholas of Cusa focused his attention on Plato's idea that "the sense of sight does not see the wisdom, although it is the sharpest of all senses": "Visus enim in nobis acutissimus est sensuum omnium qui per corpus fiunt, quo sapientia non cernitur."<sup>44</sup> Nicholas of Cusa wrote in the margin of this text in his own hand: "Visus acutissimus tamen cum eo sapientia non cernitur."<sup>45</sup> Developing this idea further, Plato

<sup>41</sup> PLATO, *Phaedrus*, 250d–251a.

<sup>42</sup> K. FLASCH, *Nikolaus von Kues*, p. 270.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> PLATO, *Phaedrus* 250d, translated into Latin by Leonardo Bruni; Bernkastel-Kues, St. Nikolaus Hospital, Ms. 177, f. 111r.

<sup>45</sup> Bernkastel-Kues, St. Nikolaus Hospital, Ms. 177, f. 111r.

argues in his dialogue that only beauty can connect our world with the Divine. It is to be understood as a visible image of the Divine, which is perceived by the sense of sight in contrast to wisdom.<sup>46</sup> There is only one problem in this theory: the immediacy of perception is not guaranteed by physical senses. Only spirit (intelligence) can guarantee it. It means that the perception of beauty is not only a sense process, but also a mental and spiritual one according to its essence.

As it is well known, Nicholas of Cusa goes even further in his text: in his view, all other senses are essentially spiritual, not only the sense of sight, but also those senses which are strongly related to the flesh, e.g. the sense of taste (*De sapientia* n. 10 and n. 14, 4–10). As a result, Cusanus notes that what the physical senses perceive is essentially eternal wisdom. To describe this, he uses the term *sapientia*, obviously following the terminological choice of Leonardo Bruni, who translated the Greek word *phronesis* (“reasonableness”) into Latin as *sapientia* (“wisdom”). In the original text of *Phaedrus* (250d) Plato actually describes a cognitive necessary connection of beauty and reason (*phronesis*). Consequently, the path to wisdom for Plato is only through beauty that represents the perfection of the invisible divine wisdom in this world, although it is at the same time sensible. Plato then describes in his dialogue progressive stages of an ascent from the world of senses to the world of eternal ideas, that is, to wisdom itself. However, Leonardo Bruni removed a large part of the text from his translation, on the human soul’s gradual ascension towards beauty under the guidance of the Olympic gods, presumably because of their pagan content. Thus, Nicholas of Cusa could not have been familiar with Plato’s entire theory of the soul’s ascension to heaven. As a result, he reduces it to the theory of a direct view of wisdom, in that a human being not only perceives intellectually but also sensually. Compared to Plato, he concludes on the basis of Bruni’s translation that it is not “reason”, but “eternal wisdom [...] is beauty in all what is beautiful” (*De sapientia*, n. 14, 5–6: “Ipsa est pulchritudo in omni delectabili”). However, at the same time, Nicholas of Cusa still understands wisdom as reason, which according to him becomes a meta-reason, as far as he interprets it as a principle of reason and spirit.

It is also important to the whole structure of the dialogue *De sapientia* that Nicholas of Cusa formulates here his concept of the principle in a manner which is very close to Plato’s *Phaedrus* (245d) and also uses it as key argument for the necessity of a direct connection between principle and consequence. Plato says that the principle has no external cause, because it is the cause of everything that comes after it: it is caused by nothing, but everything comes out of the principle. Therefore, the principle is eternal. It is to be understood as absolute

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<sup>46</sup> PLATO, *Phaedrus* 250d–e, Bernkastel-Kues, St. Nikolaus Hospital, Ms. 177, f. 111r.

beginning that never ends: “Ex principio enim necesse est omne quod gignitur oriri; ipsum autem ex nullo. Nam si principium ex alio oriretur, non esset principium [...] ex principio omnia oriantur oportet.” For his part, Nicholas of Cusa comments on a margin to this passage: “Principium aeternum esse ostendit.”<sup>47</sup> In his dialogue *De sapientia* (n. 8), the following passage appears to be a manifestation of this Platonic concept of the principle, if it is not to be interpreted as an allusion to the quoted Platonic text passage: “Nam omnium principium est, per quod, in quo et ex quo omne principiabile principiatur, et tamen per nullam principiatum attingibile” (“For the principle is, first of all, that by which, and by virtue of which all is grounded, that can be grounded by a principle, and yet it is touchable by nothing which is grounded by a principle”). Corresponding formulations about principle as an absolute and eternal beginning can also be found in the second chapter of the dialogue *De mente* (n. 61), the second dialogue of the *De idiota* group of texts.<sup>48</sup> It is obvious that the great significance of this Platonic figure of thought that is massively present in the dialogues *De sapientia* and *De mente* is that it determines the whole structure and logic of these texts.

In light of the above-mentioned factors, it is also remarkable that Cusanus obviously remains faithful to his idea of wisdom as it is represented in his *De idiota* dialogues, when he describes the process of the intellectual knowledge of God in one of his two extant Erfurt sermons, with the support of analogies drawn from the practice of teaching the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato:

Nam homo visibilis <est> dulcedo seu sapientia Patris, et in illa Pater praestat vitam. Pater noster est Pater omnis esse, vitae et intellectus. Ipse praestat omnia, quae intellectum pascere possunt, ut aeternaliter vivat in Filio seu arte seu sapientia sua, sicut pater doctrinae praestat per medium magisterii seu artis in sensibili voce discipulo pabulum doctrinae. O quantum erat gaudium apostolis, quando petiverunt in nomine Jesu et acceperunt videntes se assecutos omne desideratum! Certe “plenum erat gaudium”, sicut quando daemonia eis oboediverunt, ac si scholares, qui summo desiderio appeterent omnia scire, invenirent verbum abbreviatum breve et cito apprehensibile Aristotelis, et quod in illo, quidquid scire appeterent de omni scientia Aristotelis, assequerentur. Certe magnum gaudium habent; sed adhuc maius, si etiam scientiam Platonis adhuc, etiam si

<sup>47</sup> Bernkastel-Kues, St. Nikolaus Hospital, Ms. 177, f. 108r.

<sup>48</sup> NICOLAUS DE CUSA, *De mente*, n. 61, IDEM, *Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate Academiae litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita*, vol. 5: *Idiota de sapientia — de mente*, edited by L. Baur, K. Bormann, R. Klibansky, H.G. Senger, R. Steiger, Hamburg: Meiner, 1983, p. 95 [h 5]: “Si igitur hoc sic est, nonne solum absolutum principium est infinitum, quia ante principium non est principium, ut de se patet, ne principium sit principiatum? Hinc aeternitas est ipsa sola infinitas seu principium absolutum.”

Hippocratis etc.; sed maximum, si absolute omnium scibilium artem ibi esse experirentur.<sup>49</sup>

Although we cannot know whether these words of Nicholas of Cusa were directed explicitly against the position of the Erfurt Carthusians with certainty, it could be unquestionably assumed that John de Indagine, if he attended Cusanus' preaching, could hardly agree with them.

And yet, regardless of the details of the events described, most of which can only be reconstructed hypothetically due to a lack of historical documents, there is still something in the story that seems quite certain. Namely, there is no reason to exclude the possibility that the *De idiota* dialogues were written in the context of the preparation of Cusanus' legation trip to Germany, or, in other words, shortly before or, perhaps, partly already during the discussion with the German and especially Erfurt Carthusians about the nature of wisdom and mystical theology. In contrast to the Carthusians, Cusanus used Plato's dialogues as his main source, which his opponents could not yet have read at that time. His position is not argued more strongly, but it is better reasoned, and therefore it is not surprising that the Erfurt Carthusians had to acknowledge it in the course of time. It happened, however, many years later,<sup>50</sup> after Nicolas of Cusa's death, and already in the context of new Erfurt theological controversies,<sup>51</sup> the details of which go far beyond the thematic scope of this paper.

One cannot help but notice that if our assumption about the connection between Cusanus' *De idiota* dialogues and the writings of the Erfurt Carthusians on mystical theology is correct, it can significantly change the current understanding of the beginning, course, content, and scope of the multifaceted discussion on mystical theology between Nicholas of Cusa and the German and Austrian monks, which took place in the 1450s. Thus, according to its generally accepted chronology,<sup>52</sup> it began in 1452–1453. However, the Erfurt meeting took place much earlier, and therefore the writings associated with it could be considered as the beginning of the whole discussion on mystical theology, or at least as a prelude to it. It is also obvious that this discussion was not only abstractly theoretical, but it was closely related to the practical tasks of monastic

<sup>49</sup>NICOLAUS DE CUSA, *Sermo LXXXIV*, n. 6, l. 1–22, IDEM, *Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate Academiae litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita*, vol. 17/6: *Sermones II* (1443–1452), edited by H. Hein, H. Schnarr, Hamburg: Meiner, 2007, p. 493–494 [h 17/6].

<sup>50</sup>P. WILPERT, "Die Entstehung einer Miscellanhandschrift des 15. Jahrhundert," *Mittel-lateinisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 1 (1964), p. 34–47.

<sup>51</sup>M. KHORKOV, "Ratio und Affekt in der mystischen Theologie des Spätmittelalters," *Meister-Eckhart-Jahrbuch*, vol. 13 (2019): *Von Meister Eckhart bis Martin Luther*, p. 69–87.

<sup>52</sup>H.G. SENGER, *Nikolaus von Kues*, p. 224; *Nicholas of Cusa: A Companion to his Life and his Times*, edited by M. Watanabe, G. Christianson, T.M. Izbicki, Burlington: Ashgate, 2011, p. 210–213, 222–224.



reform, and above all, touched upon the very meaning of this reform as affecting the spiritual life of monks.

In this connection, John de Indagine's second treatise on mystical theology, which is preserved as part of the manuscript Weimar, Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek (HAAB), Q 50, and has not yet been sufficiently studied in international Carthusian studies, seems to be no less interesting. First of all, this text says that the humble ones (*humiles*) understand the truths of mystical theology much easier, faster and deeper than men who are taught the secular sciences ("in omni sapientia mundi eruditi").<sup>53</sup> It always happens this way and not otherwise because humble people are simple in their intellectual ambitions and do not claim to know more than what they receive directly from God, to whom they are unrestrictedly connected in an act of fiery affective love. It makes them cling to the divine wisdom to which learned people have no access. Mystical theology differs from all other sciences and from other forms of theology, first of all, from speculative theology, because it is based on the affective faculty which fulfils the same function for mystical theology as the rational capacity does for speculative theology.<sup>54</sup> This difference makes it possible to understand why mystical theology grasps its objects of knowledge directly, whereas speculative theology can only do it indirectly with its knowable objects: the affect does not know mediation, while the rational thinking always works intermediately and can grasp something directly only if it is inseparably and indistinguishably connected with affects. But in order to achieve it, thinking must humble itself; in other words, it must be transformed into unlearned thinking.<sup>55</sup> Only then, through affective love of God, does thinking impart divine wisdom. Therefore, it is not accidental that the encounter with divine wisdom happens in the "valley of humility" (*in valle humilitatis*), where strong human affects become more subtle and spiritual<sup>56</sup>, because the affect, on which mystical theology is based, is a noble affect that has freed itself from all worldly passions: "Mistica autem theologia [...] in affectu nobilius consistit."<sup>57</sup>

Those who are well acquainted with the text of Cusanus' *De idiota* dialogues can easily notice that Nicholas of Cusa consistently analyses in his work the same philosophical topics about which Jacob de Paradiso and John de Indagine write in their treatises on mystical theology. And although we do not yet have any obvious evidence that Nicholas of Cusa was familiar with these texts of the Erfurt Carthusians (or at least with their short summaries) in the summer of

<sup>53</sup>Weimar, HAAB, Q 50, ff. 41v–42r.

<sup>54</sup>Ibidem, f. 41r.

<sup>55</sup>Ibidem.

<sup>56</sup>Ibidem, f. 50r.

<sup>57</sup>Ibidem, f. 41v.

1450, we cannot completely exclude this possibility, even if this is still a matter for further study at the moment.

Certainly, it would be very interesting to know whether Nicholas of Cusa had read the Erfurt Carthusian texts or at least knew about their general content before he wrote his *De idiota* dialogues and met his opponents in Erfurt personally. It is therefore regrettable that the current state of Cusanus research does not provide a definitive answer to this question, first of all, because the correspondence of Nicholas of Cusa with John de Indagine, which was known to their contemporaries,<sup>58</sup> has not yet been found. The unfortunate possibility that it might be lost forever cannot be completely excluded. On the other hand, it would be naïve to believe that Cardinal Cusanus, who was one of the most important European politicians of his time, was not informed in advance of the position of the Erfurt Carthusians. For him, it was a question of monastic reform in Central and Eastern Germany, and both Papal Rome and Cusanus' personal destiny depended on its success. Therefore, in Erfurt, a key city of the entire region, he sought to find allies who at least shared his views in some aspects and might support his reform plans. In this sense, *De idiota* dialogues sent a clear message to the Erfurt Carthusian monks: look, they said, we think the same way in answers to our main questions, and therefore we can and should work together. As a result, the Erfurt Carthusians decided to cooperate with Cusanus and were charged with overseeing the reform of the Benedictine monasteries in Thuringia and Saxony, a task to which they dedicated themselves even years after the death of Nicholas of Cusa. For example, this is evidenced by the long stay of John de Indagine in the Benedictine monastery Monnikienigeborch near Leipzig in the middle and second half of the 1460s, where he wrote texts on monastic reform specifically for Benedictine monks.<sup>59</sup> Thus Erfurt, in contrast to the later catastrophe in Tyrol, was associated with the great diplomatic and political success of Nicholas of Cusa. Unfortunately, this success was undeservedly forgotten in Cusanus' historiography.

Therefore, as it seems to us, it is quite possible to say with good reason that Nicholas of Cusa used the same figure of thought as the Carthusians did in his dialogues, when he writes about a humble Layman who understands the depths of divine wisdom and criticizes the scholars for that they cannot really understand wisdom, because they are self-conceited and do not know true humility:

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<sup>58</sup> *Acta Cusana*, vol. 1, p. 925: "Varie epistole recepte a fratre Indagine et ab eo misse ad legatum."

<sup>59</sup> St. Petersburg, Russian National Library, Ms. Lat. O. I. 30, ff. 219r–264v, 266r–270v; *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum latinorum, qui in Bibliotheca Publica Petropolitana asservantur: Theologia*, edited by O.N. Bleskina, S.A. Davydova, M.G. Logutova, St. Petersburg: Russian National Library, 2015, p. 253–254.

Orator: Ut audio, cum sis idiota, sapere te putas. Idiota: Haec est fortassis inter te et me differentia: Tu te scientem putas, cum non sis, hinc superbis. Ego vero idiotam me esse cognosco, hinc humilior. In hoc forte doctior existo. Orator: Quomodo ductus esse potes ad scientiam ignorantiae tuae, cum sis idiota? Idiota: Non ex tuis, sed ex dei libris.<sup>60</sup>

On the basis of what has been said, it seems reasonable to ask whether the figure of the Layman in the *De idiota* dialogues was originally nothing other than a message addressed to the Erfurt Carthusians, that Cardinal Cusanus has similar views, and therefore he counts on their support for his plans to reform the German monasteries? And, only some time later, was the figure of the Layman and the theory connected with it turned into a kind of topos that characterizes the “original” and “innovative” thinking of Nicholas of Cusa “as a whole”. Given that this thinking also has many similarities with other texts of the fifteenth century that are not directly related to either Nicholas of Cusa or the Erfurt Carthusians, the reading of this topos eventually acquired a more universal character.

Returning to our immediate topic, we can generalize that in fact there is much in common between the works of Nicholas of Cusa and two most important authors among the Erfurt Carthusians whom Cusanus also contacted, and whom he even met with personally. Firstly, it is the figure of the Layman which is the leitmotif of the writings mentioned and analysed in this paper, both by Nicholas of Cusa and by the Erfurt Carthusian monks. Secondly, there is the key importance of wisdom for mystical theology, to the extent that wisdom unites it with philosophy, other forms of theology, and ascetic practice. In this regard, discussions on wisdom seem to be important if we wish to clearly understand the role and status of mystical theology. Thirdly, the aforementioned manner of reasoning, in combination with the terminology used, speaks in the clear language of a critical attitude towards the scholastic approach to mystical theology. Fourthly, according to the theories of all three authors, wisdom (regardless of what is meant by it) is attained directly, just as the mystical experience knows no mediation. These common elements in the writings of three important spiritual authors of the fifteenth century were hardly accidental. So, there is good reason to assume that there is a close connection between these texts, as well as between their authors. The common elements in this case will be especially noticeable when comparing them with the position of the above-mentioned Austrian Carthusian monk Nicholas Kempf. The views that all four authors represent in their works could be summarized synoptically as follows:

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<sup>60</sup>NICOLAUS DE CUSA, *Idiota de sapientia*, n. 4, IDEM, h 5, p. 6–7.

Nicholas of Cusa	Nicholas Kempf	Jacob de Paradiso, John de Indagine
1. <i>Theologia mystica</i> is a science.	1. <i>Theologia mystica</i> is a science.	1. <i>Theologia mystica</i> is a science.
2. Humility is the main condition for studying mystical theology.	2. Humility is the main condition for studying mystical theology.	2. Humility is the main condition for studying mystical theology.
3. It is about knowledge.	3. It is about knowledge of love of God.	3. It is about mystical experience which is the highest form of knowledge.
4. It is the highest form of knowledge.	4. It is the highest form of knowledge and love.	4. —
5. This knowledge is without any mediation.	5. This knowledge is mediated by ethical practice.	5. This experience is without any mediation.
6. Mystical experience is rational, universal, abstract, objective.	6. Mystical experience is rational, universal, abstract, objective.	6. Mystical experience is irrational, individual, subjective, psychological and individualized.
7. It acts like rational and the most abstract intellectual experience of God.	7. It acts like rational knowledge of the most abstract intellectual experience of God and as love of God.	7. It acts like love of God.
8. It is prepared through intellectual activity regarding the Christian faith and related knowledge, including the study of philosophy and natural sciences.	8. It is prepared (even though it is not being fully attained) through the study of (Platonic) philosophy, exercise of virtues and the ascetic way of life.	8. It involves three stages of preparation: <i>lectio</i> (common knowledge; what all people could know), <i>meditatio</i> (personalized and individualized knowledge; what “I know”), <i>contemplatio</i> (vision or knowledge of the <i>summum bonum</i> ).
9. It is against scholastic theology, laymen are preferable to professors of theology.	9. From the point of view of mystical theology, philosophy is better than theology.	9. It is against scholastic theology, laymen and women are preferable to professors of theology.

Summing up our study, we can say that it is not excluded that Cusanus' *De idio-  
ta* dialogues were written in connection with the preparation of his legation

journey to Germany in 1451–1452. It is very likely that they were primarily addressed to the monks of the Erfurt Charterhouse Mons Sancti Salvatoris (Salvatorberg). That is, they could have been written in the context of his controversies with the Erfurt Carthusians on wisdom and mystical theology. Nicholas of Cusa could not accept their theory of mystical theology as an irrational and affective experience and their understanding of wisdom. At the same time, in his *De idiota* dialogues he used the figure of the wise Layman, which was also typical for the writings of the Erfurt Carthusians, and their criticism of university theology and mundane sciences. Faced with a difficult political and ideological situation in Germany, one which required him to be better prepared for his legation journey, Cusanus tried to find arguments in his dialogue with the Erfurt Carthusians that would enable him to attract them to his side in the matter of monastic reform. For this purpose, he used the same figures of thought in his writings of the summer of 1450 which were also typical for the texts on mystical theology of the Erfurt Carthusians. At the same time, Nicholas of Cusa resorted to arguments that did not allow him to abandon his own rationalist position. So, he found the arguments in favour of direct knowledge of the Divine in Plato's dialogues, which his Erfurt discussion partners could not read at that time. Apparently, such a thoughtful strategy helped him to find new reliable allies among the Erfurt Carthusians for his plans to reform the monasteries in Thuringia and Saxony. But no less important is the fact that at the same time each of the participants in the discussion had no reason to abandon their main theories. Perhaps this is the reason why the Erfurt Carthusians were able to easily include Nicholas of Cusa's *De idiota* dialogues in their library when an Erfurt fellow of John de Indagine copied these dialogues of Cusanus and put them together into his anthology of mystical texts.<sup>61</sup> However, that is already another story, and it would be superfluous to discuss it here.

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<sup>61</sup>P. WILPERT, "Die Entstehung einer Miscellanhandschrift des 15. Jahrhundert," p. 34–47; A. MÄRKER, *Das "Prohemium longum" des Erfurter Kartäuserkatalogs*, vol. 2, p. 457–461, 492–495.

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ERFURT CARTHUSIAN TREATISES  
OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY ON MYSTICAL  
THEOLOGY: ECHOES OF CONTROVERSIES WITHIN  
THE CARTHUSIAN ORDER, OR EVIDENCE  
OF A DIALOGUE WITH NICHOLAS OF CUSA?

S U M M A R Y

This article is devoted to the study of controversies in the understanding of wisdom and mystical theology that developed in connection with Nicholas of Cusa's contacts with the monks of the Erfurt Charterhouse Salvatorberg in the middle of the fifteenth century. Nicholas of Cusa, who apparently relied mainly on Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* in his rationalistic theory of wisdom, presented his understanding of wisdom in his *De idiota* dialogues written in the summer of 1450 while preparing for the legation journey to Germany (1451–1452). In contrast, the leading representatives of the Erfurt Carthusians, Jacob de Paradiso and John de Indagine, expressed their affective and irrationalistic view of wisdom in their writings on mystical theology. The difference between the irrational and affective mystical theology of the Erfurt Carthusians and the rationalism of Nicholas of Cusa is particularly discernable in those cases where their positions are very close, for example, in the understanding of the importance of laymen in mystical theology and in the critical approach to university scholasticism. Apparently, the Erfurt Carthusians opposed both Nicholas of Cusa's rationalism and the humanism of the Austrian Carthusian monk Nicholas Kempf in their view of wisdom, who was largely guided in his ascetically oriented mystical theology by the Neo-Platonic theory of virtues of Plotinus and Macrobius.

KEYWORDS: wisdom, mystical theology, Nicholas of Cusa, the Erfurt Carthusians, Jacob de Paradiso, John de Indagine, laity, layman

SŁOWA KLUCZE: mądrość, teologia mistyczna, Mikołaj z Kuzy, Kartuzi z Erfurtu, Jakub z Paradyża, Jan Hagen de Indagine, świeccy, laik