

SUMMARY

Title: Cusanus' World of Allegories: Analysis of Philosophical System in Nicholas of Cusa's "Sermons"

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Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) is one of the most prominent philosophers of the late Middle Ages. His paradoxes have inspired Giordano Bruno, Gottfried Leibniz, Hermann Hesse and others. Furthermore, Cusanus was engaged in political and social activity. An influential player on the political scene of Europe in the 15th century, he was an author of conciliaristic ideas, supporter of the pope, mediator between the papacy and the kings, and, finally, bishop and cardinal involved in the reform of the Church. At the intersection of these activities, *Sermones* developed – a collection of 293 sermons in which Cusanus discussed ambitious philosophical issues using the genre of utilitarian literature, addressed to various social groups and based on an exegesis of biblical passages.

The point of departure for the philosophical message are the symbols and images described by Cusanus with terms such as *exemplum*, *imago*, *symbolum*, *speculum et aenigma*, *similitudo*. Their perception is the first stage of *manuductio*, i.e. a project at the intersection of the theory of cognition and theory of teaching where the point of departure are symbols that can be grasped with the senses. By transcending them, looking beyond the image and above it, one can reach an understanding of the incomprehensible without the participation of reason, only with *intellectualitas simplex*. The meaning of symbols results from a specific concept of the world, according to which *visibilia* are signs leading to the extrasensory reality. This analogousness of the world is expressed in language as it materializes, so to speak, in the textual layer of *Sermones*. Images such as a spoon, ball game, map of the world, icon or hunting, are no ordinary examples. They are a trace left in the world of sensual experience by intelligible reality, and reading them makes it possible to explore this reality. Thus, the symbol becomes the language of philosophy. The symbol makes it possible to process data obtained through empirical cognition into conclusions concerning the spiritual world, and to move from a detailed view to a general view. From this arises a specific concept of the world according to which one should carefully watch the reality surrounding man on the one hand and, on the other, one should not content oneself with it because the literal meaning is just a medium for symbolic meanings that constitute the essence of the symbol. Ultimately, the whole world turns out to be a collection of symbols that are traces of God manifesting

Himself, the media of theophany. Thus, the symbol becomes the only possible relationship between the Creator and God's creation.

Because of the double (linguistic and philosophical) interpretation of the relation between the sign and its meaning, I have decided to use the concept of allegory as a key to the interpretation of the sermons by Nicholas of Cusa. It allows one to observe the textual dimension of *Sermones* but it also reveals one of the basic features of Cusanus' thought, i.e. the discovery of analogies in many philosophical disciplines (metaphysics, epistemology, anthropology).

The dissertation starts with the introduction where I present an overview of Polish research on Nicholas of Cusa as well as a description of manuscripts and critical editions of *Sermones*. The main part of the work consists of three chapters that analyse the sermons from three different points of view: historical, philological and philosophical. It reflects the three elements in the title: Nicholas of Cusa, allegory and philosophical system.

The first chapter describes Cusanus as a preacher by introducing the biographical context, supplemented by the analysis of structure, language, listeners and sources of the sermons. This part is also a presentation of the current state of research, complemented by the results of my own analyses. The consecutive paragraphs present the context of *ars praedicandi*, Cusanus' concept of the sermon and his understanding of philosophy. The chapter ends with a short discussion of the style and images in *Sermones*.

The second chapter is devoted to the problem of allegory. It begins with a brief overview of the history of the concept and introduces a key distinction between *allegoria in verbis* and *allegoria in factis* whereby the allegory is presented as a trope, a genre, a part of biblical exegesis, and a philosophical conception of the world.

The third chapter analyses the philosophical system of Nicholas of Cusa as shown in *Sermones*. This part has been based on images typical of Cusanus. I have adopted the metaphor of the mirror as a criterion for the selection of material for analysis. The content has been ordered according to the main topics of Cusanus' philosophy: the relationship between God and the world, theophanic structure of the world, conjectural cognition, anthropological idea of man as an image of God, and Christological plots.

The project is significant for Polish research because *Sermones* are often at the margin of scholars' interests. Since the project concerns medieval sermons, its importance exceeds the history of philosophy. Thanks to the historical and cultural context, the results could be a source of inspiration for various researchers of the 15th century. In a broader sense, the project can inspire the search for the hidden meaning of texts and promote the art of interpretation.