

Warsaw, 12.12.2017

The Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences would like to invite you to a seminar in the series

Men and Ideas in the Renaissance

to be held at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology PAN

(Staszic Palace, room 154, 1th floor)

20.12. 2017 (Wednesday) at 3.00 p.m.

Mikhail Khorkov

(Institute of Philosophy-Russian Academy of Sciences)

will present a paper entitled

***Nicholas of Cusa and the Erfurt Carthusians: Controversies
on Wisdom and Mystical Theology***

The organizers:

Danilo Facca
Valentina Lepri

Abstract

The study of the reception of the works of Nicholas of Cusa in the manuscripts from the Erfurt Charterhouse is based mostly on two manuscripts from the second half of the 15th century: Weimar, Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek (HAAB), Q 51 (previously: Erfurt, Kartause Salvatorberg, D 51), and Eisleben, Turmbibliothek St. Andreas 960 (previously: Erfurt, Carthusian monastery Salvatorberg D 19).

The manuscript Eisleben Turmbibliothek St. Andreas 960 contains some Cusanus' treatises copied by the Carthusian librarian Jacobus Volradi in the period from 1466 to 1487: *De quaerendo deum*, *De visione dei*, *De docta ignorantia*, *De coniecturis*, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, *De sapientia*, *De mente*, *De filiatione*, *De dato patris luminum*, *De genesi*, *De deo abscondito*, *De theologicis complementis*, some sermons, *Compendium* (cap. 8). The origin of this manuscript is clearly associated with the reform activities of the Erfurt Carthusians in the East and Central Germany in the second half of the 15th century, initiated by Nicholas of Cusa during his stay in Erfurt (1451). The context of Cusanus' reception is clearly associated in this manuscript with the debates on mystical theology, documented in this manuscript in the following texts: *Recommendatoria quedam, introductoria et preparatoria ad theologiam mysticam id est occultam* (ff. 264r-265r) and *Quid aut qualis sit sapientia que in theologia mistica traditur et de eius differentia a ceteris* (265v-267r).

The manuscript Weimar HAAB Q 51 is a huge collection of spiritual, devotional and mystical texts, anonymous as well as written by or attributed to the most important representatives of medieval spirituality like Augustine of Hippo, Honorius Augustodunensis, Francis of Meyronnes, Robert Grosseteste, John of Kastl, Hugh of Saint Victor, Nicolas of Dinkelsbühl, John Ruusbroec, John Tauler. But the main and most important difference from many other late medieval manuscript collections with such kind of texts is that it contains excerpts from the selected works of Nicolas of Cusa. The presence of the Cusanus' excerpts in this Carthusian *raparium*-collection of devotional and spiritual texts is quite unusual, but seems to have been a conscious choice of an anonymous compiler. This Carthusian monk was also the writer at least of one another collected theological and spiritual manuscript (composed from 1482 to 1485 in Erfurt Charterhouse, Latin and German), in which Mechthild of Magdeburg, Johannes Tauler, Kutenmann and Hugo de Balma were excerpted, in some cases also the same passages from the same texts as in Q 51 (now Berlin, SBB-PK, Ms theol. Latin oct. 89). However, if the presence of excerpts from the subtle metaphysical Cusanus' books *De coniecturis*, *De filiatione dei*, *De dato patris luminum*, *Idiota de mente*, *De visione dei* included in the Weimar collected manuscript with a very strong thematic unity (in which almost every single text deals with meditation and contemplation, exhorts readers to the pious devotional practices, or teaches how to improve them) may well seem like a normal range, the presence of the *Corollaries regarding motion* (*Correlaria de motu*) from *De docta ignorantia* (book II, chapters 11-12, nn. 156-174; they are included in the collection almost entirely, in the Ms ff. 87r-89v) should surprise, at least, at first glance.

In fact, in the context of reception of Cusanus' works in the collected manuscript Weimar HAAB Q 51 his *Corollaries regarding motion* fully comply with the logic of

three-stages Carthusian model of spiritual life and practice in accordance to it: lection (*lectio*), meditation (*meditatio*) and contemplation (*contemplatio*), as they were described by Guigo II the Carthusian. More concretely, it was demonstrated that the Cusanus' *Corollaries regarding motion* had to be read in the Weimar manuscript from the perspective of the practice of meditation on *lectura divina* as a thought experiment focused on meditation, which is based on the individualized reflection of the images and mental pictures of the universe. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the "heliocentric" text of Nicholas of Cusa is accompanied in the Weimar manuscript by geocentric images and diagrams of the structure of the world, borrowed from the works of other authors. It is much more important that in the framework of the Carthusian practice of meditation the new model of individualized knowledge was formed. It allowed to combine in a single text collection different images of the world and different scientific theories.

This context of the practice of Carthusian intellectual meditation was important for the formation of a close connection of the *De-idiota* dialogs of Nicholas of Cusa with his reading of Plato's dialogues during the preparation of his visitation to Erfurt and discussions with the Erfurt Carthusians on the nature of wisdom. It means in a broader perspective of history of late medieval religiosity that after the condemnation of Meister Eckhart in 1329, the rationalistic-metaphysical foundations of his mysticism were completely revised in the course of time and reinterpreted in the direction of a more affective mysticism. Compared with the relatively moderate Tegernsee Benedictines and the Austrian Carthusian Vincent von Aggsbach, with whom Cusanus discussed mystical theology in the middle of the 1450s, this "affective" and "irrationalist" tendency seems to be particularly radical in the works on mystical theology by the Erfurt Carthusians of the 15th century (Jakob de Paradiso, Johannes de Indagine). Following Jean Gerson, they gave an irrationalist-affective interpretation of the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. As far as we know, Nicholas of Cusa was very intensely involved in the discussions with Erfurt Carthusians on this topic during his visitation trip in 1451, when he was about two weeks in Erfurt at the end of May and the beginning of June.

The whole structure of argumentation in the treatises on mystical theology from the Erfurt Carthusian monastery, especially in the published tractate *De mystica theologia* by Jacobus de Paradiso, as well as in two unpublished treatises with the same title by John de Indagine, seems clear and unambiguous. Mystical experience has something to do with the rational faculties of the human soul only at the first primitive stage, at which it works as bad conscience. The mystical ecstasy as such is affective and irrational, and has nothing in common with the intellectual activity of the human person. Such a conceptualization of the nature of mysticism was obviously entirely alien to the Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, as before him to the Dominican master Meister Eckhart, who were supporters of a speculative Albertistic interpretation of the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Nevertheless, the Erfurt Carthusians praised the arguments of Nicholas of Cusa in favor of the idea of an unmediated knowledge of God. Apparently, it was the main reason for the reception of his works

among them in the late 15th century.

Prof. Dr. M.K. is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences. His research extends to several fields such as Medieval Scholastic, German and Dutch Medieval Mysticism, Nicolas of Cusa and his influence on later intellectuals trends, Philosophical anthropology of the 20th century (with special regard to Max Scheler). Among his publications: *Meister Eckart: An introduction to Philosophy of Great Rhineland Mystic*, Moscow 2003 and *Thomism, Albertism and Augustinianism in the Intellectual and Spiritual Culture of the Rhineland Region in 14th-15ty Centuries*, Moscow 2007