

COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM IN NICHOLAS OF CUSA'S SERMONS¹

COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM NOS SERMÕES DE NICOLAU DE CUSA

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ABSTRACT

The doctrine of the coincidence of opposites as it appears in Nicholas of Cusa's treatises and dialogues has been studied extensively though not exhaustively³. Yet, there remains, among other things, the task of highlighting this doctrine's thematic aspects as they surface in Nicholas's sermons.

Keywords: *Coincidentia Oppositorum*. Nicholas of Cusa. Sermons.

RESUMO

A doutrina da coincidência dos opostos, como aparece nos tratados e diálogos de Nicolau de Cusa, foi extensivamente examinada, mas não exaustivamente. No entanto, resta, entre outras coisas, a tarefa de destacar os aspectos temáticos dessa doutrina à medida que aparecem nos sermões do Cusano.

Palavras-chave: *Coincidentia Oppositorum*. Nicolau de Cusa. Sermões.

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³ E.g., among other studies, see Josef Stallmach, *Zusammenfall der Gegensätze. Das Prinzip der Dialektik bei Nikolaus von Kues* (Trier: Paulinus, 1960) and Kurt Flasch, *Die Metaphysik des Einen bei Nikolaus von Kues. Problemgeschichtliche Stellung und systematische Bedeutung* (Leiden: Brill, 1973). All Cusanus citations are to the Latin texts in the series *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, published by Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, Germany.

I

Before turning to the sermons, however, let us review the central tenets that are elicitable from the treatises and dialogues. These can be reduced to five in number: (1) *coincidentia* is to be distinguished from *complicatio*; (2) the notion of *coincidentia oppositorum* encompasses, but is not conflatable with, the notion of *coincidentia contradictoriorum*; (3) in God opposites coincide, and, yet, God is **beyond** the coincidence of opposites; (4) opposing ascriptions are coherently predicable of God; and (5) the declaration that opposites coincide is not necessarily to be construed as the claim that the opposites are identical.

Tenet 1: *coincidentia* is to be distinguished from *complicatio*. In *De Docta Ignorantia* Nicholas says both that God enfolds all things⁴ and that in God contradictories coincide⁵. John Wenck, in his attack on *De Docta Ignorantia*, equates these statements so as to view them together as teaching that all things coincide with God⁶. Hereby Wenck confuses *enfolding* with *coinciding*. For a correct interpretation of what Nicholas teaches is the following: Ontologically (not chronologically) prior to its creation the world is enfolded in God as an effect is enfolded in the power of its cause⁷. Now, in the power of the cause the effect is the cause, rather than being its subsequent singular self, which differs from its cause. Likewise, the world is present in God's infinite power ontologically before it exists as its finite self. Moreover, as it exists in God, it is God⁸ and is not the world as such. That is, in God the world does not exist as the world and cannot be said to coincide with God. The world can be said only to be enfolded in God's power, from which it is unfolded in the act of creation. Although Nicholas refers to God

⁴ *De Docta Ignorantia* I, 24 (p. 48, lines 13-16) and II, 3 (p. 70, lines 14-15).

⁵ Letter to Cardinal Julian (at the end of *De Docta Ignorantia*). See also *Apologia* 19:7-9. *De Visione Dei* 9 (37:8). At 9 (36:2) Nicholas uses "*coincidentia oppositorum*".

⁶ Wenck, *De Ignota Litteratura* 24.

⁷ *Apologia* 23:21-23.

⁸ *De Docta Ignorantia* I, 22 (p. 45, line 16) and II, 5 (p. 77, lines 19-22) and II, 8 (p. 87, lines 18-19).

as the Enfolding of all things⁹, he never calls Him the Coincidence of all things. Rather, he says that in the Divine Enfolding all things coincide without difference (*De Coniecturis* II, 1 (78)).

Here another clarification regarding Nicholas's teachings must be adduced: according to Nicholas the world as unfolded from God is not God unfolded, is not God in His unfolded state, as it were. For God is complete Actuality and as such has neither an unfolded nor an enfolded state. Nor is the world in any sense God or in any sense divine. Although Nicholas speaks of the world as a contracted reflection of God¹⁰, a reflection of God is not God – any more than the mirror-image of a man is that man. Nicholas has no tendency toward pantheism¹¹, contrary to Wenck's interpretation of him.

Tenet 2: The notion of *coincidentia oppositorum* encompasses, but is not conflatable with, the notion of *coincidentia contradictoriorum*. Nicholas sometimes says that opposites coincide in God¹² and sometimes indicates that contradictories coincide in God¹³. The difference lies in the fact that the meaning of the word “opposites” includes not only contradictories but also contraries¹⁴. So when Nicholas says that in God opposites coincide, he sometimes is referring to contradictories such as not-being (*non-esse*) and necessary being (*essendi necessitas*)¹⁵ and sometimes is referring to contraries such as motion (*motus*) and rest (*quies*)¹⁶.

Tenet 3: In God opposites coincide, and, yet, God is beyond the coincidence of opposites. *That in God opposites coincide*¹⁷ is Nicholas's way of saying that God is altogether undifferentiated. Although He can

⁹ *De Docta Ignorantia* I, 22 (p. 44, lines 15-16) and II, 3 (p. 70, lines 6 & 14-15).

¹⁰ *De Docta Ignorantia* II, 2 (p. 67, lines 21-23).

¹¹ [Cite my article from the Buenos Aires conference.]

¹² *De Possess* 74:16-19. Cf. *De Visione Dei* 9 (36:2).

¹³ *De Visione Dei* 13 (53-54). See the references in n. 3 above.

¹⁴ *De Docta Ignorantia* II, 4 (p. 73, lines 8-16).

¹⁵ *De Possess* 53:14. Note also *De Possess* 29:12-13, where Nicholas says that in God not-being (*non-esse*) is Actualized-possibility (*ipsum possess*).

¹⁶ *De Possess* 74:17-18.

¹⁷ *De Possess* 74:17-18.

admissibly be symbolized as Being itself and as Oneness itself, there is in Him no distinction between Being and Not-being, between Oneness and Not-oneness. Likewise, He is not *a* being, since all beings are finite and differentiated; nor does He have – in 2 and of Himself – a plurality of attributes. That God is beyond the coincidence of opposites¹⁸ is Nicholas’s way of saying that no finite mind can comprehend God, since finite minds cannot conceive of what it is like for God to be altogether undifferentiated. As Nicholas writes in *De Possesit* 74:

When we attempted to see Him beyond being and not-being, we were unable to understand how He could be visible. For He is beyond everything plural, beyond every limit and all unlimitedness; He is completely everywhere and not at all anywhere; He is of every form and of no form, alike; He is completely ineffable; in all things He is all things, in nothing He is nothing, and in Him all things and nothing are Himself; He is wholly and indivisibly present in any given thing (no matter how small) and, at the same time, is present in no thing at all.

So the claim that in God opposites coincide is not incompatible with the claim that God is beyond the coincidence of opposites. For God, as undifferentiated Being itself, just is ineffably beyond all comprehension¹⁹.

Tenet 4: Opposing significations are coherently predicable of God symbolically. Although Nicholas makes this point in the text just quoted from *De Possesit*, he makes it even more clearly when in *De Possesit* 11 he writes: “It does not matter what name you give to God, provided that ... you mentally remove the limits with respect to its possible being”. So we may appropriately refer to God as sun²⁰, as does the Psalmist²¹, as long as we remove limits from the physical sun:

¹⁸ *De Visione Dei* 10 (title) and 13 (53:15-16). Cf. *De Possesit* 62:9. Cf. *De Venatione Sapientiae* 13 (38:1-6).

¹⁹ *De Possesit* 41:1-3.

²⁰ *De Possesit* 11:1-2 ff. Note also Sermon XXII (3:6).

²¹ Psalms 84:11 (King James version): “For the Lord God is a sun and shield”.

If ... we construe [this statement] as [a statement] about a sun which is actually all it is able to be, then we see clearly that this sun is not at all like the sensible sun. For while the sensible sun is in the East, it is not in any other part of the sky where it is able to be. [Moreover, none of the following statements are true of the sensible sun:] “It is maximal and minimal, alike, so that it is not able to be either greater or lesser”; “It is everywhere and anywhere, so that it is not able to be elsewhere than it is”; “It is all things, so that it is not able to be anything other than it is” – and so on.

Similarly, in *De Venatione Sapientiae* 22 (67) and 30 (89) Nicholas alludes to Pseudo-Dionysius and endorses his view that “opposites are to be affirmed and denied of God at the same time”. And in *De Visione Dei* 21 (91:5-7) Nicholas notes that we affirm of God Incarnate “most true contradictories. For You are Creator and likewise creature, the Attracting and likewise the attracted, the Infinite and likewise the finite”.

Tenet 5: The declaration that opposites *coincide* is not necessarily to be construed as being the claim that opposites are *identical*. Nicholas does sometimes use “*coincidentia*” in a way that makes it interchangeable with “*identitas*”; but he does not routinely do so. An example of such interchangeability is found in *De Docta Ignorantia* III, 1 (182), where he indicates that in the universe no thing coincides with another thing. By this statement he means that no two things are exactly identical, no two things differ in number alone. Likewise, in *De Possess* 8 he states that absolute possibility coincides with absolute actuality; and he focuses this statement by indicating that “possibility and actuality are *identical* in God”. But even further, Nicholas goes on *explicitly to indicate* that “coincidence” does sometimes have the meaning of identity. For in discussing the two natures of Christ, he writes (prayerfully addressing Christ): “You are *not* the 3 coincidence of creature and Creator in the way in which a coincidence causes one thing to be another thing”.²² So although the two natures in Christ

²² *De Visione Dei* 23 (101:8-10).

may in one sense be acceptably said to coincide²³, such coincidence is certainly not identity, emphasizes Nicholas, adhering to an orthodox Christology. Accordingly, then, a reader must take pains to decide in a given context whether or not Nicholas is using “coincidence” in the sense of “identity”.

II

Turning now to Nicholas’s sermons, we see that the five tenets elicited from his treatises and dialogues are repeated in the course of his invoking what he terms the *regula coincidentiae*²⁴. But we also notice a newness and a freshness as Nicholas goes about embellishing, expanding, and re-contextualizing these tenets. Let us focus our attention upon this newness. And as we do so, we will see vividly that the notion of *coincidentia* becomes expanded, so that Nicholas now speaks not only of *coincidentia oppositorum* in Deo and *coincidentia contradictoriorum in Deo* but also of a coincidence of opposites other than in God, as well as simply of *coincidentia extremorum in Christo*²⁵ – not to mention his speaking of a higher level that he calls *coincidentia coincidentiarum*²⁶.

Furthermore, in the sermons the word “*coincidentia*” takes on additional senses. Sometimes two things are said to coincide simply because they *occur inseparably* and, indeed, can occur only inseparably. Thus, in Sermon CXXXIV (3:11) Nicholas asserts that unbelief coincides with faith – a radical-sounding assertion at first glance. But he qualifies the assertion so as to make it palatable: unbelief coincides with faith, he says, in the case of someone who is seeking to see a sign in order to believe. The Gospel of John, Chapter 6, Verse 30, for example, depicts the people as asking Jesus for a sign: “They said therefore to Him: What

²³ Sermon CCLXII (20:14-16). Sermon XXII (37:12-14). Cf. *De Docta Ignorantia* III, 7 (223:4), where Nicholas says that in Jesus the human things coincide with the divine things.

²⁴ Sermon LVII (20:11-12). Sermon LX (6:6-7).

²⁵ Sermon CCLXXX (28:9-10).

²⁶ Sermon CCLXVIII (9:10-15 and 10:1-4).

sign, then, do You show that we may see and may believe You?” Now, if they are truly seeking a sign in order to believe, then (says Nicholas) they will find a sign only if they already believe. Accordingly, faith and seeing a sign coincide. That is, seeing a sign is *inseparable from* – is *coincident with* – the seekers’ having faith²⁷. Hence, the sign does not create faith but can only confirm faith. Accordingly, Matthew’s Gospel says of Jesus that in Nazareth He did not do many mighty works – because of the people’s unbelief²⁸.

A second sense of “*coincidentia*” has to do with *correlation*. In Sermon CCXXV (3) Nicholas offers the example of men’s wills coinciding with women’s wills, inasmuch as and insofar as by nature each sex seeks the other. Thus, their wills coincide – that is, are correlated with one another. As a further example Nicholas, in Sermon CXXIV (2:1-2), alludes to the coincidence of seeking and being sought. Luke’s Gospel tells us that Zacchaeus the publican sought out Jesus and climbed a tree in order to see Him²⁹. But, notes Nicholas, Zacchaeus would not have sought out Jesus unless Jesus had first sought him out – so that Zacchaeus’s seeking Jesus is correlated with Jesus’s seeking Zacchaeus. As Jesus affirms in another context: “You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you”.³⁰ Or as Nicholas adapts this idea: You have chosen me because I have first chosen you. Thus, the very desire to seek God is instilled by God – in such a way that man’s pursuit of God coincides with, is correlated with, God’s pursuit of man.

A third sense of “*coincidentia*” has to do with *different points of view*. A given event can oftentimes be looked at in two different ways, which are then said to coincide in the event. An illustration of this fact is Nicholas’s telling us that the Apostle Paul’s entering in unto God by way of rapture coincides with his withdrawing from the body³¹. That is, the event of Paul’s ascending in spirit unto God

²⁷ Sermon CXXXIV (3).

²⁸ Matthew 13:58.

²⁹ Luke 19:1-10.

³⁰ John 15:16.

³¹ Sermon CCLXIX (9:1-12) See II Corinthians 12:2-4.

is likewise the event of his having a fading consciousness of his body – even though ascending is not the same thing as withdrawing. Nor is ascending to be understood as *correlated with* withdrawing. In a further illustration Nicholas points out that a Christian’s being a servant of God constitutes a servitude that is not servitude³². For the Christian 4 serves willingly and freely. Indeed, a Christian’s serving God is his loving God. Serving and loving coincide. Or, as Nicholas prefers to say, one’s loving God and serving God occur beyond the coincidence of the opposites *being a servant* and not *being a servant*³³. For viewed outwardly by unbelievers, a believer’s obligations to God seem as if they would be burdensome, restrictive, and even oppressive. But viewed inwardly by believers, these obligations are delightful – much as the Psalmist spoke of delight in the Law of the Lord³⁴.

A fourth sense of “*coincidentia*” has to do with differing respects rather than simply with differing points of view. In Sermon CCLXV (9:9-10) Nicholas, making an inference from Scripture, observes that in Christ human weakness wondrously coincided with Divine strength. Because of Christ’s human weakness He thirsted, became weary, was crucified. By His Divine strength He healed the sick, cast out devils, and was resurrected. So with respect to His human nature He was passible and subject to pain, whereas with respect to his Divine nature He was immutable and omnipotent; weakness and strength coincided in one and the same Divine person. In this instance we have not just one phenomenon or one truth as seen from two different points of view. Rather, we have opposites that are true of one individual in two different respects. In a cognate way Nicholas alludes, in Sermon CCLXIX (15), to St. Paul, who said of himself: “When I am weak, then I am strong”.³⁵ Hence, notes Nicholas, weakness here coincides with strength. However, it is not Paul’s weakness that coincides with Paul’s strength. Rather, it is *Paul’s* weakness that coincides with Christ’s

³² Sermon LVII (22:10-13).

³³ Sermon LVII (22:10-13).

³⁴ Psalms 1:1.

³⁵ II Corinthians 12:10.

strength as it works in and through Paul, so that Paul can confidently exclaim: “I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me”.³⁶

A fifth sense of “*coincidentia*” has to do with identity – as we have already seen. An example of this sense is found in Sermon CCLXVIII (19:23-24), where Nicholas maintains that the seeable and the unseeable coincide in and for faith, because faith is the seeing of the Unseeable One. Here we come upon the doctrine of learned ignorance: to see God in and through faith is to see Him-who-is-unseeable and to see Him as Him-who-is-unseeable. Thus, the object of the believer’s faith is an unknowable object, so that (as Nicholas, following Pseudo-Dionysius, states in *De Docta Ignorantia* I, 17 (51:11-12) and *Apologia* 29:5-8) our understanding of God seems to draw nearer to nothing than to something. And just as nothing is unseeable, i.e., unknowable, so too God is unknowable. Or better: for the believer who is instructed in ignorance, seeing God is the same thing as not seeing God. For the believer sees God insofar as he sees that *what God is* cannot be known other than in terms of symbols.

III

Let us now look at five of the many striking ways in which Nicholas makes use of the notion of “*coincidentia*” and “*coincidentia oppositorum*” in the sermons. It will be left to the listener/reader to discern the respective sense in which Nicholas is using these terms in the different contexts.

1. In Mary, who was *theotokos*, being-a-mother and being-a-virgin coincided³⁷.⁵ Or as Nicholas writes elsewhere³⁸, in Mary fertility coincided with virginity. Now, usually one thinks of being a mother as opposed to being a virgin. However, Mary’s motherhood was not opposed to her virginity, which she did not lose. Indeed, teaches Nicholas, she remained a

³⁶ Philippians 4:13.

³⁷ Sermon CXXXII (5:35).

³⁸ Sermon XXX (6:6-8).

virgin throughout her lifetime, giving birth to no more children³⁹ Nicholas thus aligns himself with the previously unbroken tradition of the Church and with the dogma of the Lateran Council of 649.

2. According to Nicholas, not only does supreme mercy coincide with supreme justice in God and in Christ⁴⁰, but even at the level of human beings justice coincides with mercy. For no one can hunger for justice unless he is merciful, reasons Nicholas⁴¹: Justice requires an individual to do unto others as he would have others do unto himself. But each person wants others to show him mercy and compassion. Accordingly, one cannot be just without showing mercy, continues 5 Nicholas's reasoning⁴². In other words, justice includes mercy, in such a way as to coincide with it.

3. Especially striking is Nicholas's claim that prayer coincides with compulsion⁴³. Usually, we think of *petitionary* prayer as a form of making a *request* of God, a form of *asking* God to do something for oneself; and we think of *intercessory* prayer as asking God to do something for others. But even when petitionary and *intercessory* prayers are importunate, they are never supposed to be demanding, and they can scarcely be considered to be a means of "compelling" God to do something. So Nicholas's claim immediately catches our attention and rouses our interest because it sounds irreverent. Indeed, how can it be other than impudent? Yet, when further examined, Nicholas's assertion is neither impudent nor irreverent. For he has in mind the New Testament parable of the unjust judge and the importunate woman⁴⁴. Though the judge remains unmoved by the justice of the woman's cause, he yields to settling her complaint because she tires him with her persistence. God, in a remotely analogous way, is said to be moved by the just causes that His children bring to Him in pureness of heart. He is not, so to speak,

³⁹ *De Docta Ignorantia* III, 5 (p. 135, lines 6-10).

⁴⁰ Sermons CCLXXX (28:5-7) and LIV (3:24-29).

⁴¹ Sermon CXXXV (16:1-2).

⁴² Sermon CXXXV (16:11-13).

⁴³ Sermon CCLXXI (12:15-18).

⁴⁴ Luke 18:1-8.

constrained by their insistence; rather, He is moved by – Nicholas says compelled by – His own mercy toward them and by His knowledge of their just cause and of their torment.

4. Equally striking is Nicholas’s talk about the coincidence of Christ and faith: “Christ, then, does not save [one] unless it is believed [by that one] that Christ is Savior. Therefore, faith that approaches Christ as Savior brings it about that Christ saves. Thus, in this way, salvation is of Christ and of faith – not as of two things, so that faith is one thing and Christ another thing, but by means of a coincidence, so that Christ is the Faith that saves”.⁴⁵ This statement that “Christ is the Faith that saves” sounds strange. For in what sense *is* Christ *Faith*? That is, what sense does it make to speak of Christ as *Faith*? Although, to be sure, this expression is bizarre, Nicholas’s meaning is clear enough: namely, that Christ is the Savior, who saves through the believer’s faith in Him. In other words, faith in Christ is the faith that saves. And this faith is the gift of God, is the gift of Christ (Ephesians 2:8). So Christ, who is the Faith that saves, gives the faith that saves. What Nicholas here says corresponds to what he says in *De Docta Ignorantia* III, 12, where he refers to Christ as “Him who is Faith and Love”⁴⁶ and where he also ascribes to Christ, qua human, maximal faith, or trust, (in God the Father) and maximal love (for God the Father)⁴⁷.

5. Fifthly, Nicholas speaks of a coincidence of sonship-by-nature and sonship-by-adoption⁴⁸. Ordinarily, these are contrasted: an adopted son differs genetically, and sometimes in social and cultural background, from a natural son. A son is either natural-born, we tend to say, or else adopted. And yet, observes Nicholas, these two forms of sonship come together in Jesus, who by nature, or essence, is *the Son of God* and who by adoption is *a son of God*, as are all true believers in

⁴⁵ Sermon LIV (18:15-22).

⁴⁶ *De Docta Ignorantia* III, 12 (p. 159, line 20).

⁴⁷ *De Docta Ignorantia* III, 12 (p. 157, line 26 – p. 158, line 1).

⁴⁸ Sermon CCLIX (14).

God⁴⁹. Since Jesus is the God-man, He is two natures in one person. In accordance with His human nature He is an adopted son; in accordance with His Divine nature He is God the Son, the Second Member of the Holy Trinity. In Jesus the Infinite and the finite coincide, as do the Divine and the human, as do nature and grace. For it is by grace that God *adopts* – whether the adoption be of the man Jesus or of those foreordained human beings who are the redeemed.

IV

In his sermons Nicholas sometimes simply repeats the examples that he uses in his treatises and dialogues. Let us look at several instances of his doing so.

- In Sermon CXXXVII (4) Nicholas notes that in Jesus *future* and present, as well as *past*, coincide. Jesus Himself declares: “Before Abraham was, I am”.⁵⁰ Jesus the Christ always is; but also, He is born before the ages and was to be born of the Virgin Mary. And, as Revelation 1:4 and 11:17 disclose, He “is and was and is to come,” even as Hebrews 13:8 calls Him “the same yesterday, today, and forever”. That Jesus is with us in the present – and is, for us, the same one who is going to come in the future – can be apprehended only *beyond* the coincidence of opposites, we are told⁵¹. These are the same points that Nicholas makes in *De Visione Dei* 10 (41:19-22 and 42:19), where, however, he illustrates **coincidence** and **beyond coincidence** by referring to Jesus and Adam rather than to Jesus and Abraham.
- Likewise, Nicholas repeats in the sermons his view that in God the Divine attributes coincide with one another – although he expresses this idea more broadly by speaking of “*coincidentia appropriatorum in Deo*”.⁵² Accordingly, loving and knowing are said to coincide in God and to be one thing. Moreover, in Sermon

⁴⁹ Galatians 4:7. I John 3:2.

⁵⁰ John 8:58.

⁵¹ Sermon CXXXVII (4:15-18).

⁵² Sermon LVII (18:2).

XLVI (2) he repeats, from *De Docta Ignorantia*, the idea that being and oneness coincide⁵³ not only in God but also in every created being. Nicholas's view contrasts here with the ordinary view, which does not think of loving and knowing, being and oneness, as *opposites* but which, ordinarily, thinks of them as almost always separable and uncoinciding.

- Moreover, in conformity with his ascription in *De Visione Dei* 10 (42:9) and in accordance with Revelation 1:8, Nicholas several times in the sermons⁵⁴ alludes to the coincidence of alpha and omega in God. And in Sermon CXXXV (3) he repeats, from *De Docta Ignorantia*, the view that all things are in God and that as present in God they cannot be comprehended, because God cannot be comprehended and because in God these things are God.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let us briefly review – with regard to the coincidence of opposites – five thematic approaches that are new in Nicholas's sermons, as compared with his treatises and dialogues. **First**, in the sermons Nicholas does not concentrate on opposites that are either contradictories or contraries, although he does explicitly mention such opposites and does discuss them to some extent. Instead, he focuses more on a coincidence of extreme differences – *coincidentia extremorum*⁵⁵ – that are usually thought not to be conflatable. Thus, he speaks of the coincidence of nature and grace in the sonship of Jesus⁵⁶ and of the coincidence of poverty and riches in the humble Christian believer⁵⁷. These passages manifest a **second** newness of emphasis in the sermons: namely, the fact that Nicholas moves beyond concentrating on coincidences in God and instead focuses more on coincidences that

⁵³ *De Docta Ignorantia* I, 2 (p. 7, lines 5-6).

⁵⁴ Sermon CLXVIII (2:10-11); cf. Sermon CCXVI (8:8-9).

⁵⁵ Sermon CCLXXX (28:9-10).

⁵⁶ Sermon CCLIX (13:8-10 and 14:14-15).

⁵⁷ Sermon CXXXV (9:16-20).

occur *in the God-man* and on other coincidences that occur *in Christian believers*. **Thirdly**, the mathematical illustrations from *De Docta Ignorantia* and *De Coniecturis* vanish and are replaced by illustrations from Biblical texts, such as I Corinthians 3:18-19: “If any man among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool in order that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God”. In conjunction with this passage Nicholas likewise understands that divine wisdom is like foolishness to unbelievers; and he alludes to the belief that the opposites foolishness and wisdom coincide in the humble Christian⁵⁸. **Fourthly**, he introduces, as we have seen, the notion of *coincidentia appropriatorum in Deo*⁵⁹. And in accordance with this particular notion he tells us that there is a coincidence between God’s loving and God’s knowing, so that if anyone loves God, he is both loved by God and known by God. **Fifthly**, and lastly, Nicholas in his sermons favors paradoxical expressions when he seeks to illustrate his doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum*. Thus, it seems initially paradoxical that in God retributive justice coincides with mercy⁶⁰, that in Christ humility coincides with exaltation⁶¹, that in Christian believers liberty coincides with servitude⁶², and that in the oneness of a master-artisan the efficient, formal, and final causes coincide⁶³. But Nicholas is able to expound these oppositions in such a way as to make sense of the coincidences and in such a way as to motivate our reflection upon them. 7 In the end, then, if we are accurately to assess Nicholas of Cusa’s doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum*, we must not be blind to its richness and multi-dimensionality. Indeed, it is this richness that makes the doctrine so intriguing and so exciting to those who study it.

⁵⁸ Sermon CXXXV (10:4-10).

⁵⁹ Sermon LVII (18:2).

⁶⁰ Sermon LIV (3:24-29).

⁶¹ Sermon CCLXVIII (48:304). Cf. *De Docta Ignorantia* III, 6 (p. 139, lines 1-4).

⁶² Sermon LVII (22:7-13).

⁶³ Sermon XXXVIII (10:21-25).