CHAPTER FOUR

THE ARTICULATION OF FAITH AND REASON IN
CUSAN PREDICATION

Discussions of faith are spread across Cusanus’ predicative oeuvre, and we find no fundamental alterations in his position on the relation of faith and reason over the years. On the contrary, the same motifs and arguments recur throughout his work, from his earliest to his latest sermons. One does find, however, a marked and continual development in these discussions, which grow in length and complexity, from short excurses in the earlier sermons to longer and more complex investigations in the later ones, some of which comprising the entire sermon. These discussions

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2 Euler confirms this position, making furthermore the good point that, had Cusanus changed his position on anything fundamental over the years, he certainly would have edited it out when preparing the Vatican manuscript collection of his sermons—since we know that he revised his sermons for this publication, and also that he was willing to exclude from his own collection works that he no longer endorsed (as he did De concordantia catholica). See Euler, W. “Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Etappen und Schwerpunkt-mässige Themenverschiebungen in den Sermones?” in MFCG 30. Trier: Paulinus, 2005, 71–91, p. 76.
moreover expand to include the role of hope, love, and the will within the faith-reason matrix.

The sermons we will examine here range from 1446 to 1459. The majority of discussions of faith do occur in the sermons from the Brixen period, which is however most likely just a reflection of the fact the bulk of his sermons were composed during this time. More significant is the concentration of discussions related to faith and reason around the time of his participation in the “Tegernsee” debate on mystical theology, some of which were certainly inspired by issues and questions brought up by the likes of Bernard of Waging, as evinced by certain references in Cusanus’ letters. We see this, for example, in Sermon 148 (March 17, 1454), which is dated one day prior to the letter to Bernard in which Cusanus responds at length to the prior’s doubts about the Cardinal’s intellective approach to mystical theology. In addition, three of the sermons we will examine from early July 1455 are likely among those Cusanus had in mind when he referred Bernard to his recent predication on the subject of “the coincidence of the motions of the intellect and love”.

Detailed inspection of the sermons in which faith is discussed shows that, far from contradicting the philosophical and theological views presented in the treatises, the discussions of faith in the sermons serve to buttress Cusanus’ highly intellective view of theology, even in those cases where faith is said to dominate or “conquer” reason. Indeed, discussions

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5 In this letter, dated July 28 (approximately three weeks after the sermons in question), Cusanus advises Bernard: « Verum de coincidencia motuum intellectus et affectus aliqua in sermonibus huius anni, maxime festi purificacionis, laxis locutus sum; et sermones suo tempore, quos nunc ordino ut scrinantur, videbitis etc. » Letter of Cusanus to Waging, July 28, 1455 (Vansteenberghe [1915], pp. 159–160). The sermon collection to which Cusanus refers here must be that which ultimately became the Vatican manuscripts, although this was not completed until 1461, since it cannot refer to his first collection of sermons, which he had already given to Tegernsee in 1452 (receipt of which Aindorffer acknowledged in a letter to Cusanus, written prior to September 22, 1452, in which he reported that the collection had been “diligently and avidly copied by the brothers” (Vansteenberghe [1915], p. 109)).