

**CUSANUS AS THEOLOGIAN:
Four Eastertide Sermons (1454)**

Translated and Introduced

by

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INTRODUCTION

Like most of the major Western Medieval and Renaissance metaphysical writers, Nicholas of Cusa was both a theologian and a philosopher. Nowadays, leading interpreters of his thought sometimes place emphasis on his being a theologian, sometimes on his being a philosopher. An example of the first kind of illustrious interpreter is Rudolf Haubst in his book *Streifzüge in die cusanische Theologie*. An example of the second kind of distinguished interpreter is Kurt Flasch in his book *Nikolaus von Kues. Geschichte einer Entwicklung. Vorlesungen zur Einführung in seine Philosophie*. Nevertheless, both Haubst and Flasch recognize Nicholas's competence in, and contributions to, *both* of the foregoing scholarly areas.

Focusing on Nicholas as a theologian, let us look at a focal set of examples: namely, his Sermon CLIV (*"Vere Filius Dei Erat Iste"*) together with the three subsequent sermons (with the same title). These form an Eastertide quaternary. In these sermons, three of which are obviously sermon-sketches, Nicholas shows his familiarity with the Scriptures—in particular, with the Gospels, the Pauline epistles, the Pentateuch, the Psalms, the Canticle of Canticles, and the Prophetic pericopes of Isaiah. Moreover, he does not hesitate to allude to earlier Scriptural exegetes, some of whom he names explicitly (e.g., Augustine; Aquinas; Aldobrandinus), some of whom he alludes to only indirectly by drawing upon, indeed repeating, their ideas (e.g., Anselm of Canterbury; Hugo of Strassburg). Let us look at how in these four sermons Nicholas functions principally as a theologian and an expositor; but he does not leave altogether aside philosophical considerations.

We may enumerate a series of significant points.

1. To begin with, Nicholas chooses a definitively theological theme: namely, the Christological theme of Jesus as the Son of God. He knows that there are no philosophical proofs of the affirmation of Jesus's Divine Sonship. And so, he does not seek to proffer any. But he does accept the testimony of Scripture as authoritative. Accordingly, he appeals to the testimony of various Scriptural writers, whose fulfilled

prophecies or whose eye-witness accounts attest—convincingly, he believes, but not so convincingly as to eliminate faith—that Jesus arose from the dead and was truly the Son of God.

2. Moreover, Nicholas emphasizes that Jesus was the Revealer of God the Father, to whom He was obedient even unto death—as we ourselves are to be obedient to God (and to truth as we know it) even unto death. He quotes generously from the Gospels of Matthew and John in order to identify these texts as central authorities.

3. Nicholas affirms that man was created in order to seek God (I, 2)* and that God created the whole universe, including man, in order to make Himself known (I, 9 & 21). Man envisions God primarily insofar as God is present in Christ, the God-man; and man is to seek God by seeking conformity to Christ in and through faith and love, and in and through obedience to His commands.

4. Christ, as God, is not only Truth itself (I, 3 & I, 13) but is also Love itself (II, 2-3). Christ died for the sake of truth. For He refused to save His life by denying the truth that He was indeed the Son of God (I, 5). Nicholas borrows this point—without expressly saying so—from Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo* II, 18. Similarly, He borrows (in I, 17) from *Cur Deus Homo* I, 16-18, where Anselm discusses at length how it is that in Heaven redeemed men take the places of the fallen angels. Moreover, Nicholas (in I, 16) takes over Anselm's theory of satisfaction, as articulated in the *Cur Deus Homo*. He does not, however, directly point to Anselm in this regard. Finally, in Sermon CLIV, in the section marked by margin number 3, Nicholas accepts Anselm's notion of God as Something than which a more excellent Being cannot be thought, even as he also accepts, but goes beyond, Anselm's own understanding of God as Something more excellent than can be thought.

5. As a theologian, Nicholas promotes the view that sin arises from ignorance (I, 2). Intriguingly, he reasons that any human being (who has reached the age of accountability) would know that God is always to be obeyed, inasmuch as God is understood to be a Supremely Perfect Being. Accordingly, if a human being disavows one of God's moral precepts, he shows thereby that he does not regard the precept as being from God. For if he knew that the command were from God, he would not disavow it, although he might still sin through moral weakness, by violating the precept which he knew should not be violated. Nicholas adopts a view of natural law, in accordance with

which human beings are deemed rationally to know that certain moral principles and rules are to be endorsed and that certain other principles and rules are to be shunned as being immoral. Nicholas will once again later mention this view in his Sermon CLXXXIX (16), just as he earlier mentioned it in *De Mente* 4 (77-78). In this regard he aligns himself with a theological tradition that extends back through Thomas Aquinas.

6. In signaling (in II, 1) the *pain* that Christ underwent on the Cross, Nicholas states plainly that he is following St. Thomas's *Summa Theologiae*, where Thomas emphasizes that Jesus's pain exceeded that of all other human beings. Both His pain of body and His pain of soul were so great that they could not have been greater. And Nicholas associates the Son's willingness to endure these salvific pains as an undeniable sign of the Father and the Son's love for mankind. Nicholas discerns such Divine love as humanly humbling and as rightfully to be acknowledged and reciprocated by human beings.

7. Although Nicholas oftentimes refers to God's love by using the Latin word "*caritas*," he also speaks of *dilectio* and *amor*, not making any strict distinction between his use of these terms.¹ In I, 6 he interchanges his use of "*caritas*" and "*dilectio*," even as in II, 2 he uses all three terms equivalently. "*Caritas*" is never used of profane love, whereas "*amor*" is used both of God's love and of profane love (e.g., "*amor mundi*").

8. Nicholas also uses other terms that need to be carefully considered by a reader—terms that he borrows from others.² For example, the use of the phrase "*verbum abbreviatum*" at II, 2 and, in the same section, the use of the word "*conclusio*" constitute usages that have special meanings and that can be misleading. At IV, 6 the Latin verb "*absorbere*" tends to be misleading insofar as, *prima facie*, it seems wrongly to connote a theological doctrine that is at odds with the creeds that the Church Councils had formulated and promulgated.

9. Interestingly, Nicholas's use of the adjective "*docta*" (in its various declined forms) at I, 12 and I, 21 shows that he does sometimes employ it to mean learn-*ed* (i.e., erudite)—a use that differs widely from its presence in the title "*De Docta Ignorantia*," where it refers to an ignorance that we have learned ourselves to have—once we have learned that we can never know what God is, or is like, in and of Himself.

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10. Yet, in his Eastertide sermons of 1454 Nicholas does indirectly allude to the notion of *docta* in the sense of *docta ignorantia*. For in I, 3 he appropriates Hugo Ripelin of Strassburg's formula to the effect that "*finitum nihil simile habet infinito*." Hugo's actual words in his *Compendium Theologicae Veritatis* (Book I, Chap. 16) are "*infiniti ad finitum nulla est proportio*"—a formula that he repeats in Book I, Chap. 21 and that Nicholas borrows in *De Docta Ignorantia* I, 3 (9) and II, 2 (102).

In the end, Nicholas is not only the philosopher who champions the doctrines of:

- *docta ignorantia*
- *nulla proportio*
- *coincidentia oppositorum*
- *vis iudicaria innata*

He is also the theologian who heralds the faith-beliefs of:

- *Christus ut Filius Dei*
- *Scriptura Sancta ut verbum Dei*
- *Deus ut Caritas ipsa*
- *Homo peccator*
- *Christus Salvator*

Correspondingly, in addition to being *philosophus modernus* he was also Bishop of Brixen and Cardinal of Saint Peter in Chains.

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NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

* References to the present set of sermons are such as to indicate which one of the four sermons and, within that sermon, which margin number. For example, "1, 2" indicates the first of the four sermons (namely, CLIV) and, within that sermon, margin number 2.

1. As to Nicholas's use of "*caritas*," "*dilectio*," and "*amor*," see the following passages in my *Nicholas of Cusa's Didactic Sermons: A Selection*: (a) Sermon CLXXIV (5) [my p. 227]; (b) Sermon CLXXXIX (8) [my p. 277 and p. 289, n. 38]; (c) Sermon CXC (5) [my p. 334]; (d) Sermon CCXLI (2) [my p. 342 & p. 350, n. 4]; (e) Sermon XXXVII (11) [my p. 390]; (f) p. xxx, n. 122 of my Introduction.

2. These terms were in circulation in Nicholas's day. E.g., "*Verbum Abbreviatum*" was the title of a work by Petrus Cantor.

**FOUR EASTERTIDE SERMONS (1454):
Cusanus Sermons CLIV - CLVII**

Vere Filius Dei Erat Iste*
(“Truly, This Was the Son of God”)
[April 14, 1454; preached in Brixen]**

[1] “Truly, this was the Son of God.”¹

The words are of the centurion and of those who together with him were keeping watch over Jesus on the Cross. Christ at that time said: “It is finished.”² And with drooped head He yielded up His spirit.³

My aim is to speak on four topics: First of all [I shall speak] *today* about the reason for [Christ’s] Passion. Secondly, [I shall speak] about the events recorded by the Gospel-writers—[the events] up to when Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives. And [I shall do] this *on Wednesday*. Thirdly, [I shall say something] about the events from that location up to the burial. And [I shall do] this *on Good Friday*. Fourthly, [I shall speak] about the departure from the tomb and about the Resurrection. [And I shall do so] *on Easter Sunday*.

[2] Now, the reason that Jesus suffered is mentioned in the [following] words: namely, in order that He might be known to be the Son of God and might through signs show Himself to be such.⁴ At the outset, then, it is necessary that you turn your attention to the words of Paul in Acts 17. He says that man was created in order to seek God.⁵ And because [man] remained ignorant [of God, God] sent His Son in order that in this way [man’s] ignorance would be removed. Therefore, the Son came in order to reveal⁺ the Father. But He could not reveal⁺ [the Father] to human beings unless He associated Himself with human beings and took on the form of a human being. Accordingly, He became a human being. Hence, in the presence of Pilate He avowed that He was born, and came into the world, for this purpose: namely, in order to bear witness to the truth, etc.⁶

But He—who alone knows the Father and alone is He who can reveal the Father—was not received as the Son of God. Hence, His every endeavor was to draw human beings to faith so that, indeed, they would believe with assured faith that He whom they saw to be the son of man was the Son of God. For unless they believed, they would not grasp His words. But after this [truth]—namely, that He is the Son of God—was certain on the basis of assured faith, then there would be understood by believers (a) all that He would disclose about the Father

and (b) all that He would promise as one who was sent by the Father and (c) whatever He would command. Therefore, He willed to instill, by means of His own [shed] blood, faith into human hearts in every way in which this could be done—[in particular,] by signs and, in the end, by the ultimate attestation (than which there could be none greater), namely, by means of death (and, in this respect, by means of a death more greatly to be shunned, namely, death on a cross).

[3] Moreover, consider the fact that ignorance furnishes the occasion for every sin. For there is no one who does not hold for undoubted [the judgment] that God is to be obeyed without any exception and that we are to hope in His promises and in His recompense without any reservation. No one—whatever sort of man he be or of whatever sect he be—worships as God one to whom he prefers someone else as being the more truthful. For in the opinion of all human beings God is Truth itself. For if something could be thought to be either truer or better than God, then [that exceeded being] would be esteemed to be [not God but] less excellent than God.⁷ And since into the mind of man there comes nothing that is so true and so good that the mind cannot conceive of something truer and better: it is evident that God is truer and better than all that which is conceived by the mind.⁸ And [it is evident that] no concept contains anything at all that is like God—even as the finite has no likeness at all to the infinite,⁹ as Paul also says in the [previously] cited seventeenth chapter of Acts.¹⁰

Accordingly, when it is said to a man that God gave a command either through Moses or the prophets or Jesus, then the man—because of his ignorance of God—does not grasp with undaunted faith that this [statement] is true. For he does not know whether or not God has given the command. For if he were to know that the precepts were of God, he could not reject them. For truth in and of itself is, when it is heard as truth, of the following nature: [namely,] that it can meet with no resistance in the intellect, since truth is the intellect's beginning and end. [4] Hence, it is impossible that God not be believed. However, there can be doubt about whether or not the words that are heard are God's. [There can be doubt] because of the aforesaid ignorance of God and because of the craftiness of Satan, who oftentimes transforms himself into an angel of light.¹¹ Therefore, Christ says that the Jews do not know God because they have not hearkened to His, [i.e., Christ's], words. It is as if [Jesus] were to say that it is impossible that they would not hearken to, and keep, [Jesus's commandments] if they *did*

know [God]. He says that He Himself knows God and for this reason obeys God's word.¹² Likewise, [Jesus] says that he who knows Him as the Son of God, doubtlessly would obey His word. As John the Evangelist [states] in his canonical [epistle]: "By this means we know that we have known Him: if we keep His commandments. He who says that he knows God and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But he who keeps His word: in him, to be sure, love is perfected."¹³ Note that perfect love exists only where the word of God is observed, and note that that observance presupposes knowledge.

[5] Therefore, it is evident that Christ was able to reveal the Father only if Christ were received as the Father's Son. And if this faith, which is very deep, would have been received, then everything that Christ commanded and promised would have met with no resistance or no doubting. But where that faith is not present, darkness and ignorance remain. Accordingly, we must take note of the fact that the observance of [Christ's] commandments is a sign of that faith. If someone keeps Christ's commandments, it is a sign that he believes Christ to be the Son of God. If he does not keep [them], he does not have the spirit of Christ.¹⁴ Christ does not dwell in him, by faith, as the Son of God. If someone loves in the way in which Christ the Son of God commands—namely, [loving] even those who persecute [him] and [who are his] enemies¹⁵—then he is a true disciple of Truth. [6] Therefore, the love that is commanded is that love through which we apprehend that Christ dwells by faith in the hearts of believers. But the works of love are *sacraments* of this love; for they are *signs* which show that there is faith, as James the Apostle states.¹⁶ And so, it is a faith upon which there follows the fulfilling of the commandment, namely, love. This [faith] still remains hidden, but it is made manifest by perceptible works. And so, note that nothing is difficult for one who has faith; for if faith is had, then all these [good works] follow.

Hence, all the things that were written by the prophets prior to the coming of Christ aim only at Christ's being believed to be the Son of God. And all the things that Christ did are a *fulfillment of these Scriptures*, in order that, indeed, He would be known to be the Son of God. Moreover, this [point holds] true with respect to His Passion; for, as He said, "The Son of man goes [to His death], *as it is written of Him*."¹⁷ Now, [Christ] died because He bore maximal witness to truth, in that the charge was brought against Him that He made Himself out

to be the Son of God. And this attestation was only the final unfolding of the testimony of all the prophets. Hence, when the centurion and the others saw Him to be dead, they said: “Truly, this was the Son of God.” And this was the final goal of His death, namely, that this [Sonship] be believed [about Him], etc. And so, Christ said “It is finished.”

[7] And keep the following in mind: that we do not have certainty [in this regard] unless we have a discerning of the spirits.¹⁸ For since we are ignorant of God¹⁹ and since there are various spirits that attempt to draw us by their own light unto a knowledge of God—[a knowledge] which we so intently desire—the spirit of this world²⁰ presents God to us in terms of the concupiscent love that is present in [this] perceptible life. However, the spirit that is from God instructs us otherwise. For that [spirit] speaks of a love that is the life, and the pleasantness of life, of the rational spirit. And because this [rational] life is unknown to us, we do not know whether these [words about the rational life] are true. And because we are in this world we do not readily assent to them—as we do readily assent to the spirit of this world (that is, to concupiscent love). Hence, we cannot have a discerning of the spirits in any other way than through faith in Jesus.

[8] The Apostle John, situating the difference between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error,²¹ says that the spirit of God is known by means of the following [criterion]: “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.”²² Note that we can arrive at doubtless truth in no other way than that our faith as regards Jesus precede [our arrival], so that [truth] is preferred. Moreover, the Apostle proves that such ones in whom Christ is present through faith have the spirit that is of God. This [spirit] is greater than [the spirit] that is of the world.²³ And so, these individuals overcome the world. And [the Apostle] adds: “[The spirit] that knows God hearkens to us; [the spirit] that is not of God does not hearken to us.”²⁴ Note that to know God is to be of God. And so, since the spirit of Christ is of God, he who believes this fact hearkens to Christ’s words because [that person] is of God. For he who is of God hearkens to God’s words and has perfect love. He who is of God believes that Jesus is the Son of God; for this is the teaching of Jesus. Hence, the Apostle says: “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”²⁵ And he adds that although no one has seen God at any time,²⁶ nevertheless because God sent His Son as Savior of the world,²⁷ He gave us of His own spirit.²⁸ And this spirit which He gave us through His Son is love. If, then, we love one

another and there is perfect love in us, God remains in us, etc.²⁹ And later [the Apostle states]: “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God: God remains in him and he in God.”³⁰

[9] Therefore, to believe that Jesus is the Son of God is not possible unless faith is perfect, so that the believer keeps Jesus’s precepts and remains in His love, just as Jesus Himself kept His Father’s precepts and remained in His love. And Jesus was not able *not* to remain [in His Father’s love], because He knew the Father. Therefore, he who has perfect faith as regards Jesus has from the Father, through Jesus, all things—whatsoever he wills—as the Savior Himself teaches us.³¹ And all who rightly understand, as do Paul and the saints, hold only this opinion. Hence, martyrs are called [martyrs] because they are attestors of this truth.³² For they—having the spirit of Jesus, i.e., of truth—bore witness by their own blood that Jesus is the Son of God. Christ said that the spirit which the Father was going to send in Christ’s name was to bear witness regarding Christ; and those who were with Christ from the beginning, having had that spirit, would become witnesses. Now, every martyr glorifies Jesus by means of that spirit which is given to the martyr by the Father through the Son. For just as Jesus died, so all martyrs [die]: namely, because of their bearing witness by means of their blood to the truth that Christ is the Son of God. He who accepts this witness is freed from, and redeemed from, the shadow of the soul’s death, [a death] which is darkness and ignorance. And he is [situated] in the light in the schools of the Teacher of truth, where the Father who is in Heaven is revealed. The prophets who died because of their bearing witness to the truth by their word and with their blood have borne witness of Christ. And if you consider the matter carefully, [you will recognize that] God, the Creator of all things, created all things in order to reveal Himself. And because the Father can be revealed only in and through the Son, the Son is the ultimate Goal of all creation. And to the end that the Son be able better to reveal the Father, all [His deeds] were done and written about. And so, it was necessary that He die if He was to reveal the Father in the best way in which it could be done.

[10] Take note [of the following]: The fruit of Christ’s death is a becoming free, for we are freed from doubt about whether the spirit of Christ is the spirit of error or the spirit of truth. And we find it to be the spirit of truth; and [we find] this on the basis of the attestation of His death on the Cross. For although there are also found obstinate heretics

having the spirit of error who by their own blood have borne witness to their [heretical] claim, nevertheless [they have not done so] in the way that Christ [did so]. Hence, [Christ's] death under its particular circumstances led the centurion to a recognition, so that he said: "Truly, this was the Son of God." And as the Gospel-writer indicates: When [the centurion] saw such concomitant miracles (namely, the sun's being eclipsed, etc.)³³ and when he heard [Jesus] expire as He cried out [with a loud voice, the centurion] spoke as he did. Therefore, although the spirit of error leads an obstinate [heretic] to his death, nevertheless the death of heretics is devoid of light and of a manifesting of truth. However, the death of Christ, who sent forth His spirit with a great cry, so greatly manifested [truth] that it showed itself to be voluntary, and it made evident by means of miracles that His spirit is the spirit of truth. And we do not find that a heretic has done any such miracle during his death or after his death, through which miracle he is glorified by the innocence of his death.

[11] From the foregoing [observations] you know that each of the events that happened with respect to Christ's death is an attestation of the maximal mystery of His voluntary and innocent death. Thus, the death itself is the consummate witness to the truth. For [Christ] was made [to die] in agony for the following reason: [namely,] that the horrible death that was undergone would better witness to the truth for whose sake Christ underwent death. Etc.

[12] From the foregoing, infer that Christ's death causes in us consummate faith, hope, and love. On the Cross Christ said: "It is finished." For by means of His death all the mystery is cleared up. Suppose that the Teacher, who alone knows the truth which He teaches, hands it down as He experiences it. And [suppose that] it cannot be handed down more truly. But He sees that His disciples do not believe Him (even though by many signs He shows that He has beheld that which He teaches) unless He supports [His teachings] by means of evidence. And He cannot furnish this [evidence] on the basis of reason, because the things which He has seen are above reason. Therefore, if He uses the witness of His death (than which witness there is none greater), then such [a Teacher] by His death frees His disciples from all doubt and renders them informed. Thereupon, because He died for the sake of His disciples, He shows how greatly He loved them; for He was not able to love them more greatly. Then again, because he died on account of truth He shows that truth is to be preferred to death. [13] Moreover, He

shows that truth is more noble than life—than the perceptible life—because of which fact [this] perceptible life is esteemed as nothing. He elevates His disciples unto living hope, to the effect that they hope to be able, by means of truth acquired through faith, to live forever with the Teacher of truth and to the effect that to die for the sake of truth is to live. But if the Teacher is Truth itself, which by means of death thus diffuses itself into the hearts of believers, then consummate faith begets consummate hope; and from those [two there is begotten] consummate love, which is the life of the spirit.

Therefore, the fruit of [Christ's] Passion is maximal. For if by means of consummate obedience the Son of God obeyed even unto death—indeed, death on the Cross—and if for this reason He was exalted above every creature,³⁴ then we have the teaching that, likewise, God is to be obeyed without any remonstrance, [obeyed by us as by] a beast of burden. Abraham obeyed in this way with regard to the sacrifice of Isaac. [He did so] because God willed [the sacrifice; and he did so] without asking for a reason. Note in what way handmaidens obey: they have eyes [directed only] toward their [respective] mistress. [Note the way in which] caring servants [obey]: that [they obey] even in the face of afflictions—and some of them even up to imprisonments and bruising. But consummate obedience is [obedience] in the face of a most shameful death.

[14] God willed that Christ was to humble himself in this way because thereby He glorified the Father, and revealed Him, in the best way in which it could be done. For herefrom it is evident that God the Father is He whom even the only Son obeyed even unto a most shameful death. And Christ showed Himself to be the true Emissary of the Father—[an Emissary] who did only the Father's will. For in the Son there was only the Father.³⁵ For in a true emissary—who seeks not his own advantage but seeks [only] to fulfill those [assignments] for which he was sent—there is only the will of the sender, and the emissary does nothing of himself. Perfect obedience in a legate, or an emissary, is [the legate's] fulfilling his mission without any exception [and] all the way to the extreme of very horrible outcomes. [15] We have from the fruit of [Christ's] Passion the witness of all Christ's statements, and we have all knowledge. For we know that through faith the vigor of our soul's strength is increased by the word of Christ—[increased] up to the point [of working] miracles, which are above the soul's nature.

Note that oftentimes it is said that Christ suffered such and such

so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. This [statement] was made in order that the attestation might be certain and that unbelievers might be without excuse. The Jews had received the Scriptures as having been revealed by God. In the Scriptures [the coming of] Christ was promised by suitable signs by which He was to be known. Thus, Christ appeared—and not otherwise than as the Scriptures say of Him—to the end that because of the witness of the Scriptures the Jews would be without excuse when they saw done the deeds which were done by no one else and in the way in which the received Scriptural text announced that [the doer] would be Christ.

[16] There are twelve fruits of the Tree of Life: (A) four with respect to the human race, (B) four with respect to the universe, (C) four with respect to the Church.³⁶

The four with respect to human beings are: (A₁) the price of our redemption, (A₂) the prerogative of Divine love, (A₃) the shield of our defense, (A₄) the summit of our exaltation.

(A₁a) In our [first] parent, [Adam], we have offended against Infinite Good. A mere creature, [who was not also God], was, because finite, unable to make satisfaction for this [offense]. God, who is infinite, took on a human nature in order to satisfy justice. The [Book of] the Apocalypse [says]: “By Your blood You have redeemed us to our God.”³⁷ (A₁b) Secondly, sin deprives of infinite glory. Therefore, the sinner merits infinite punishment, from which he could not be redeemed except by means of such a payment—[i.e., an infinite payment]. (A₁c) Thirdly, if the world were to last for an infinite time, an infinite number of human beings would be born. They all would have been in Adam [and would be] punishable because of sin. Therefore, *the payment* that is to redeem human nature *would have to be infinite*.

(A₂) Next, [as regards] *the prerogative of Divine love*: Since life is that which we love most greatly, and [since] Christ gave His life for us, we are obliged to love Him most greatly. And, consequently, the fruit of His Passion binds us to loving Christ maximally. (A₃) Next, from [Christ’s] Passion we will have *a shield for resisting the Evil One*, who has been conquered by Christ. And evil spirits are weakened, so that no one succumbs unless he wills to. (A₄) Next, we have from [Christ’s] Passion *the summit of our exaltation*. Just as there would be honor to the state if someone from the state were put in charge of the world, so [there is honor] to our human nature because Christ in our nature conquers the Prince of the world³⁸ by dying. And in our nature

He will judge the world.

[17] (B) Furthermore, with respect to the entire universe:

(B₁) [Christ] *despoiled Hell*³⁹ and (B₂) *blotted out the handwriting*.⁴⁰ Moreover, (B₃) He *mitigated [the punishment in] Purgatory*. For the sacrifice that is done in memory of [Christ's] Passion⁴¹ frees from Purgatory. Moreover, (B₄) He *repaired the world*. For man held a higher position but through sin fell unto a lower position. However, through the Passion his fall was repaired. Hence he who subsequently to the Passion has died without sin does not descend to Hell but ascends to Heaven. Likewise, (B₅) He *repaired Paradise*. For through sin the number of the angels [in Paradise] was diminished.⁴² This ruinous situation is restored through men's salvation.

[18] (C) Furthermore, with respect to the Church and the ecclesiastical office: (C₁) The first fruit is present in the *sacraments*. For baptism cleanses from guilt and punishment by virtue of [Christ's] Passion. For in the death of Christ, in which there is sufficient merit for all, the one who is baptized dies and is buried, as Paul says.⁴³ (C₂) The second [fruit] is present in the [*eucharistic*] *aliments*, because unto the memory of His death He has sent His own Body for us into the viaticum, from which the [believer's] soul is nourished. (C₃) The third [fruit is found] in *indulgences*. For the blood of Christ and of the saints is a treasure of infinite merit for the Church. The established pope draws upon this treasure and distributes it when issuing indulgences. (C₄) The fourth [fruit] is present in *penances*. For a priest by means of the power-of-the-keys⁴⁴ which, because of the merit of the Passion, removes something of the penalty, although it is not known how much ..., etc.

[19] If you rightly consider the matter: to receive the attestation of Christ's death is consummate knowledge. After Paul had come to knowing Christ and Him crucified,⁴⁵ he had consummate knowledge. Christ died in order that all things would be consummated by Him; and the fruit of His death is that we obtain all consummation. From the attestation of [His] death we obtain consummate enlightenment against ignorance; and it is faith in and through which that light shines. Having been justified by the blood of the Undefined One, we obtain the consummate justice. If we receive Christ, we obtain consummate obedience, consummate humility, consummate devoutness, consummate sonship, consummate conformity-to-God, consummate spirit-of-God, or love, [consummate] joy, peace, and whatever the spirit can desire consummately. Moreover, [we receive] a consummate remedy against this world's spir-

it of error and against adversities, including perceivable ones.

[20] Consummate are the mystery of Christ, the submissiveness of Christ [to the Father], and Christ's warfare with His enemies. Ambrose in his [sermon] "Blessed Are the Undeclared" ⁴⁶ [wrote]: 'The consummation of evil is the consummation of sins: The Lamb has come who takes away the sins of the world.⁴⁷ Christ is the End-goal of the Law.⁴⁸ I saw the end of every consummation.'⁴⁹ In other words, 'I saw the remission of consummate adultery; I saw [the remission] of consummate licentiousness and lust, of consummate cruelty and torment, [and], finally, of wickedness—[remission] through His Cross, [remission] that pardons sins.' Ambrose [says] these things.

Paul says to the Hebrews: '... on account of Christ' and 'through Him all things.'⁵⁰ "And although [Christ] was the Son of God, He learned obedience from the things that He suffered. And being consummated, He became to all that obey Him the Cause of eternal salvation."⁵¹ Christ teaches that all the Scriptures are about Him: "Search the Scriptures ...," etc.⁵² "The Son of man goes [unto His death], *as it is written*." Etc.⁵³ "Moses wrote of me."⁵⁴ Isaias⁵⁵ and likewise the Psalmist [wrote of me].⁵⁶

[21] If we think about it, [we realize] that the intellect communicates itself with joy—as we experience through writings [by means of which] the writers endeavored to communicate their understanding. But God, who is purest Intellect, willed to communicate, and to make known, His riches. And in this respect man is the final goal among [all] creatures, for he has an intellect which is capable of knowledge—[an intellect] which God created in order that He be known. The more learn-*ed*⁵⁷ someone is, the more willingly he communicates his learning. The more the glory of a king is known, the more glorious is the king. An unknown king does not differ from [someone who] is not a king. But since man was not able to approach God, who is invisible to man since [man] cannot see Him or His form or hear His voice (as Christ says in John 5),⁵⁸ then the End-goal of creation is the man who is the Son of God. For the Son is the Son of the Father, even as a word is [the word] of an intellect. For since the living word is a conception of the intellect, it issues forth from the intellect and it knows from whence it has gone out; and it knows the intellect. By way of illustration: If a [mental] word that is hidden beneath the written word of a teacher were alive as is the intellect from which it issued, then it would know its father, [namely, the intellect], and would reveal him by means

of a living voice—even as does a dead word by means of a dead voice, i.e., by means of writing. Accordingly, unless God had created such a man [as Jesus], whose intellect was exalted unto union with the Word of God, God would have remained unknown. Therefore, every creature exists on account of such a man, because such a man is the End-goal [of creation]. And this is the Teacher who can remove ignorance and enlighten every man who comes into this world,⁵⁹ if only His teaching is received as being [the teaching] of the Only-begotten of the Father—[begotten] in the fullness of grace and truth.⁶⁰ Without Him no man can attain [his own] goal, since his goal is a knowledge of God. But to the end that [Christ] be thus received, [namely, as Son of God], all things were written and were consummated by Him.

[22] Christ, then, is the Father's Incarnate Word (*verbum abbreviatum*) on earth.⁶¹ The humanity of Christ is, as it were, a Living Book that contains the living word of the Father. And note that [this Living Book] is, as it were, the Purpose (*conclusio*) of all books and writings and figures and forms and theoretical and practical arts—even as it is a Brief Word (*breve verbum*) that enfolds in its power all the things that cannot be sufficiently unfolded by many books. But the Purpose is *that on account of which* all things are written and is likewise *that by means of which* all things are written.⁶² For the things written are only an unfolding of the Purpose.

Thus, you see that the Word [both] remains with the Father and has been sent into the world by means of a human nature—just as the intellectual word of a teacher [both] remains with the teacher and is sent onto paper by means of letters and signs. And just as a teacher sends his word by means of letters known to those to whom he sends—because otherwise he would be sending in vain—so God sent to us His Word by means of a human garment known to us by nature; otherwise, He would have sent to us in vain.

From the foregoing things you will be able to assist yourself to understand the things that Christ says about Himself: namely, that (1) He speaks only those things which the Father, who is in Him, either speaks in Him or sends in Him⁶³ and that (2) those things which are the Father's are [also] His; and vice-versa.⁶⁴ And [He says] that (3) the Father is in Him and He in the Father⁶⁵ and that (4) he who receives Him receives the Father⁶⁶ and that (5) he who sees Him sees the Father⁶⁷ and that (6) no one can come to the Father except through Him.⁶⁸ And [He says] similar such things, etc.

NOTES TO *Vere Filius Dei Erat Iste*

* Sermon CLIV.

**April 14 was Palm Sunday.

+ Here at 2:7-8 of the Heidelberg Academy's Latin text the Latin words "revelaret" and "revelare" are misprinted as "relevaret" and "relevare".

1. Matthew 27:54.

2. John 19:30.

3. Matthew 27:50.

4. Note John 20:30-31.

5. Note Acts 17:26-27.

6. John 18:37.

7. Nicholas, here as in *De Docta Ignorantia* and elsewhere, is influenced by Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. See J. Hopkins, "Nicholas of Cusa's Intellectual Relationship to Anselm of Canterbury," pp. 54-73 in Peter J. Casarella, editor, *Cusanus: The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*. Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006. See n. 42 below.

8. Cf. *De Docta Ignorantia*, Book I, Chap. 3.

9. *Loc. cit.*, first sentence. Nicholas draws this point from Hugo Ripelin of Strassburg's *Compendium Theologicae Veritatis*, Book I, Chapters 16 and 21.

10. Acts 17: 29.

11. II Corinthians 11:14.

12. Cf. John 10:15 with John 14:31. Cf. John 5:30 and 6:38.

13. I John 2:3-5. (Nicholas does not mean to be quoting exactly.)

14. Romans 8:9.

15. Matthew 5:44.

16. James 2:14-18.

17. Matthew 26:24.

18. I Corinthians 2:14-15.

19. I Corinthians 2:11-12.

20. I Corinthians 2:12.

21. I John 4:6.

22. I John 4:2.

23. I John 4:3-4.

24. I John 4:6.

25. I John 4:8.

26. I John 4:12.

27. I John 4:14.

28. I John 4:13.

29. I John 4:12.

30. I John 4:15.

31. John 14:13-14.

32. The word "martyr" means, etymologically, *witness*.

33. Matthew 27:45, 54.

34. Philippians 2:9.

35. John 12:45, 49 and 14:10-11.
36. The editors of the Latin text of Nicholas's present sermon indicate that the section that follows is adapted by Nicholas from Aldobrandinus of Toscanella's sermon entitled "Ex utraque parte fluminis".
37. Apocalypse (Revelation) 5:9. Acts 2:24-28.
40. Colossians 2:14.
41. This seems to be an allusion to the eucharist.
42. Nicholas here alludes once again to Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. This time he has in mind Book I, Chapters 16-18. The number of fallen angels is to be made up for by the number of redeemed human beings—the number of Heavenly occupants being a fixed number.
43. Romans 6:3-4.
44. Matthew 16:19.
45. I Corinthians 2:2.
46. The editors of the Heidelberg edition of the Latin text of this sermon refer the reader to Ambrose's *Expositio de Psalmo CXVIII*.
47. John 1:29.
48. Romans 10:4.
49. Psalms 118:96 (119:96).
50. Hebrews 2:10.
51. Hebrews 5:8-9.
52. John 5:39.
53. Matthew 26:24.
54. John 5:46.
55. Note the quotations in Matthew 4:14 and John 12:38-41.
56. Note the quotations in Luke 1:67-70.
57. Nicholas here uses a form of the adjective "*doctus*" in the sense of *erudite*. By contrast, in the title *De Docta Ignorantia*, "*docta*" does not mean *learned* in the sense of *erudite* but signifies the state of one's knowing that he is ignorant (of what God is in and of Himself).
58. John 5:37.
59. John 1:9.
60. Cf. John 1:14.
61. The term "*abbreviatum*" is drawn from Romans 9:28. Nicholas uses it of the Incarnate Christ in his Sermon XXIII ("Domine, in Lumine Vultus Tui") at **3 8:3-4**. [See my *Nicholas of Cusa's Early Sermons: 1430-1441* (Loveland, Colorado: Banning Press, 2003), p. 392.] His more important use of the term is found in his Sermon CCLVIII ("Multifarie Multisque Modis") at **4:1-14** and **5:1-4** [See my *Nicholas of Cusa's Didactic Sermons* (Loveland, Colorado: Banning Press, 2008), p. 21.]
62. Cf. Colossians 1:15-18.
63. John 12:50.
64. John 17:10.
65. John 10:38.
66. Matthew 10:40.
67. John 14:9.
68. John 14:6.

Vere Filius Dei Erat Iste (2)*
("Truly, This Was the Son of God")
[April 17, 1454; preached in Brixen]**

[1] "Truly, this was the Son of God."¹

In accordance with what was promised [by me]² we must today speak about that which the Apostle John writes—and [about which] the other Gospel-writers likewise [make mention]—in his Chapter 12 and thereafter, down to the end of the supper [at Bethany] and the end of Christ's discourse. [We must do so] in order that on Friday we can continue [examining] the Passion-story according to John, insofar as [this text] will then be read in Church.

[2] In accordance with what was said in the other—the preceding—sermon, Jesus is, then, the Incarnate Word (*verbum abbreviatum*) on earth and is [creation's] Purpose (*conclusio*). In this regard we are taught from the deeds done that this Word is the Word of love [*caritas*]. For from the Word there flows forth only love. God is Love (*caritas*).³ The Word of God is the Word of Love. What does love (*amor*) seek except to be loved? This being loved is to know love. The intellect communicates itself through love. But because God is Intellect that is Love, He can be known only by means of love [*dilectio*]. Therefore, if anyone who claims to know God does not love God, he is a liar.⁴ Moreover, he who loves God knows Him whom he loves;⁵ and his degree of love is a manifestation of his degree of knowledge. And because God exceeds all understanding,⁶ He is never loved to the extent that He is lovable, because He is Love itself.

[3] Jesus is the Word of love; in Him only love speaks. Only Jesus loves the Father in the way in which [the Father] is lovable, because [Jesus] knows the Father in the way in which the Father is knowable. Insofar as one-who-loves *loves*, he endeavors to manifest his beloved in every possible manner, so that the beloved may be known. Thus, we learn that Jesus disclosed—by everything that He did in this world—the Absolute Love, whose Legate and Word He was. [4] God the Father did not spare His own Son⁷—in order to show that He, [the Father], could not love us more [than He did]. The Son did not spare His own soul, i.e., His own life, in order to show that He, [the Son], was a true Legate of love. The Father's love could not have been greater; and [the Father] showed this fact by *not* preferring His own

and sole Son to this [love]. Moreover, the Son's love for us could not have been greater, because in order to fulfill His mission of love He did *not* prefer His own life to [this] love.

[5] Let us see by what signs Jesus showed Himself to be the Word of, and Legate of, love; and let us elicit signs from the [biblical] narrative. We have one sign from the events at the supper at Bethany, which took place six days before Easter. Another sign is from the events on Palm Sunday and on the two subsequent days. A third sign is from the events at the Last Supper. However, the last, and greatest, [sign] comes from the events on Good Friday. [6] From the text of John in regard to the discourse at the supper [at Bethany] it is shown that for the following reason the Jews did not accept the word of Jesus: [namely,] because they did not believe that He was sent by God the Father. And [it is shown] that this was also the reason that they did not believe the Apostles and persecuted them in the belief that they themselves would be doing God a service if they killed the Apostles. And this [belief] came about because they knew neither the Father nor Jesus, etc., [as we elicit] from Chapters 15 and 16. And in Chapter 17 Jesus also shows clearly that sin originates from an ignorance of God and of Himself and that happiness comes from a knowledge of God and of Himself.

[7] Moreover, note the text of John 17: "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given me from the world. They were Yours; and You have given them to me; and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given me are from You. And the words which You gave me I have given to them. And they have received them and have known, truly, that I came from You. And they have believed that You sent me."⁸ Note the text—that to receive the Word is to arrive at the knowledge that the Word is the Word of God, as John the Baptist also said earlier (in John 3): "But he who accepts His witness will attest that God is truthful."⁹ And earlier [John] said that the Word would condemn those who do not receive Him, etc.¹⁰ From this we know that God's word does not need confirmation. Rather, if [His word] is received, it is known ..., etc.¹¹

NOTES TO *Vere Filius Dei Erat Iste* (2)

- * Sermon CLV.
- **April 17 was the Wednesday after Palm Sunday.
- 1. Matthew 27:54.
- 2. See the previous sermon (1:6-12).
- 3. I John 4:8.
- 4. I John 2:4.
- 5. I John 4:7-8.
- 6. Romans 11:34.
- 7. Romans 8:32.
- 8. John 17:6-8.
- 9. John 3:33.
- 10. John 3:17-18. See also 3:36.
- 11. John 7:17.

Vere Filius Dei Erat Iste (3)*
("Truly, This Was the Son of God")
[April 19, 1454; preached in Brixen]**

[1] "Truly, this was the Son of God."¹

Today we commemorate the death of Jesus Christ—something that no Christian can rightly do without compassion, since on account of us the Lord underwent [this] very bitter suffering. [2] For the external pain from the laceration of His body and the internal pain from His grief could not have been greater, as St. Thomas states in Part III of his *Summa [Theologiae]*, Question 46, [Article 6]. The external, physical [pain] is evidenced to have been maximal by the fact that Christ was of very noble physical constitution and because of His very delicate build. And [it is also evidenced] by the fact that He suffered in all His bodily parts and had pity on His very sorrowful mother. How much [pity] is evident from the fact that amid the agonies of being a martyr, He turned to His mother [and] said: "Woman, behold . . .," etc.²

Moreover, [He suffered enormously] because of the *kind* of suffering. For the death of those who are crucified was extremely harsh, in that [their bodies] are transfixed in nerve-filled areas and the death is quite protracted. Furthermore, [He suffered enormously] because of His young and vigorous age. Likewise, He willed to free all human beings from their sins—[to do so] not on the basis of force but on the basis of justice. And so, He suffered for all sins and for innumerable sinners—even for maximal [sins and sinners]. Moreover, He was sorrowful above all others,³ because He was sorrowful because of all sins, etc. And the multitude and magnitude of the sins prove Him to have been extremely sorrowful, etc. And the vividness of His awareness of the sins increased His sorrow: [for] evil distresses the more that it is known. Furthermore, His maximal love of God (*caritas et dilectio Dei*), which is transgressed-against by sins, added to His sorrow. He was grieved when He beheld such great thanklessness on the part of the Jews, to whom He had given so many goods—a land flowing with milk and honey, etc.—and so many protections, etc. Likewise, the defection of His disciples and the fact that He was sold by a disciple [brought Him grief]. Then too, because His soul perceived very distinctly all the things that inflicted vexation, His soul was extremely grieved.

[3] Furthermore, note the illustration of the bronze serpent⁴ in John 3. As the viewing [of the serpent] brought healing,⁵ so too does the remembrance of [Christ's] Passion. However, the bronze serpent cured only someone who with faith approached in order to behold it. Similarly, if with faith Christ is approached as He is on the Cross, then He heals.⁶ Etc. Consider the best illustration: A living serpent bites; but the dead serpent frees [from sin and death]. And note Augustine's exposition.⁷ [4] Also, consider carefully the course of [Christ's] Passion—[namely,] that all events occurred in an orderly fashion, so that [Christ] bore witness by means of His blood, against which [attestation] no gainsaying can be thought. [The course of His Passion] took place in agony, so that there was demonstrated (1) *not to be the case* that by virtue of His being the Son of God He suffered less than any other human being and (2) *to be the case* that by virtue of His being the Son of God death presented itself to Him more horribly than to any others. He suffered in the daytime, so that in the sun's fading light His fading life (*mors*) was attested to be innocent. [He suffered] under Pilate, who judged Him innocent of so many accusations; but, nevertheless, sin prevailed in Pilate.

First of all, we ask whether it was fitting that Christ die because of Adam's sin. It *seems* that it was not, because it would not be fitting that a household overseer should be crucified because of the theft of an apple or that a master [should be crucified] because of a servant. Etc. See [the considerations that are found] in the sermons of Aldobrandinus of Tuscanella.

NOTES TO *Vere Filius Dei Erat Iste* (3)

* Sermon CLVI.

**April 19 was Good Friday.

1. Matthew 27:54.

2. John 19:26.

3. Matthew 26:38.

4. John 3:14.

5. Numbers 21:9.

6. John 3:15.

7. Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium Tractatus CXXIV*, Tractatus XII, Section 11 (*Patrologia Latina* 35:1489-1490).

Vere Filius Dei Erat Iste (4)*
(“Truly, This Was the Son of God”)
[April 21, 1454; preached in Brixen]**

[1] “Truly, this was the Son of God.”¹

Jesus had the power of laying down His life and of taking it up again.² And so, truly He was the Son of God.

[2] First, [let us look to the Gospel]: The Resurrection was confirmed by the attestations of creatures: heavenly creatures, earthly creatures, and netherworldly creatures. Heavenly [creatures] because the angel [attested], etc.³ Earthly [creatures] because the earth trembled, etc.⁴ Netherworldly creatures because the two sons of Simeon the Just arose, etc.⁵ Likewise, [the Resurrection was confirmed] by proofs:⁶ namely, by means of sight, of taste, and of touch. By means of sight: “See my hands ...,” etc.⁷ By means of taste: “Do you have anything to eat?”⁸ Also by means of touch: “Handle and [see],” etc.⁹ Moreover, [His Resurrection] was confirmed by indicators, because He manifested in His body signs of His Passion, in accordance with [the text]: “Put your finger ...,” etc.¹⁰ Likewise, [the Resurrection] was perfect with respect to its retinue; for “many bodies ...,” etc.¹¹ Furthermore, [it was perfect] with respect to timing, because it was at daybreak¹² after night [had passed]. And it was perfect with respect to circumstance, because it was on the third day.¹³

[3] Moreover, it *seems* that it was not necessary that Christ arise, because He [had already] completed all things. He said: “It is finished.”¹⁴

Solution: It was fitting that Christ arise—[fitting] because of (a) the completeness of perfection, (b) the merits of humbleness, and (c) the object of delight. The [following] consideration is not opposed to [our solution]: that one who is in a bodily prison needs first to be released and then to be clothed.

Or again, the Resurrection was necessary for the sake of (a) the perfection of nature, (b) the enactment of justice, (c) the blossoming of glory, and (d) the strengthening of trust.

[4] Furthermore, concerning the manner [of the Resurrection] we must say that [Christ] arose as (a) crowned, (b) decorously garbed, and (c) fortified. The first point [is mentioned] *here*: “Go forth, daughters

of Sion ...," etc.¹⁵ And the *crown of flowers* was here: "The flowers have appeared in our land;"¹⁶ [and] He arose *decorated with light*. Thirdly, He arose *armed with impassibility*; likewise, He was *fortified with quickness and penetrativeness*.

[5] Consider how it is that—as John the Evangelist writes—Jesus worked signs and miracles in order to be believed to be the Son of God.¹⁷ Thus, He showed Himself by many proofs¹⁸ to be alive after the Crucifixion in order to be believed to be the Son of God. And the Apostles became witnesses of the Resurrection, as [we read] in the Acts of the Apostles. For if the [occurrence of] the Resurrection is apprehended because of the testimony of those who witnessed that He had arisen—[witnessed] from sight, from conversations, and from meals, etc.—then no one need doubt that He is the Son of God who laid down His life and took it up again.¹⁹

[6] If you rightly consider the matter, Christ by means of miracles showed prior to His death that His mortal nature was united to an immortal nature. And after the Resurrection He showed that the mortal [nature] was absorbed²⁰ into the immortal [nature] by a laying aside of mortality. Before His death, miracles were worked in order that the hidden divinity would be believed to be present in the manifest humanity that was seen. The proofs after the Resurrection occurred in order that the hidden humanity would be believed to be present in the manifest divinity. Jesus entered unto the disciples when the doors were closed.²¹ And lest they believe that therefore He had no human nature, He showed them that He did have one—[showed them] by means of those [traits] which befit human nature: He spoke, He was seen by them, and He ate with them, etc. No one doubted that there was a human nature in Christ prior to His death. But there was doubt about the divine [nature]; and He manifested that [nature to them] by means of such proofs—namely, by means of works that are super-human. No one doubted that God is immortal; but there was considerable doubt as to whether a human [nature] was hidden in the divine nature. And so, He manifested this [human nature] by means of many proofs.²² These so proved [the nature] to the Apostles that they bore witness by their own [shed] blood that He had arisen—[He] whom no one [of them] doubted to have been a human being. Etc.

NOTES TO *Vere Filius Dei Erat Iste* (4)

* Sermon CLVII.

**April 21 was Easter Sunday.

1. Matthew 27:54.

2. John 10:18.

3. Matthew 28:2-6.

4. Matthew 28:2.

5. The referent of Nicholas's allusion is uncertain. Cf. Matthew 27:52-53.

6. Acts 1:3.

7. Luke 24:39.

8. Luke 24:41.

9. Luke 24:39.

10. John 20:27.

11. Matthew 27:52.

12. Luke 24:1.

13. Matthew 16:21.

14. John 19:30.

15. Canticle of Canticles (Song of Solomon) 3:11.

16. *Ibid.*, 2:12.

17. John 10:37-38.

18. Acts 1:3.

19. John 10:17.

20. Nicholas's use of the word "absorbed" lacks precision, as does the remainder (in this the sermon's closing section) of his discussion of the two natures of Christ. Nicholas needs to make explicitly clear his belief, in accordance with the (so-called) Athanasian Creed (4th c.) and the Chalcedonian Creed (451), that there is no confusion of the two natures in Christ. Nicholas can be expected to have made this point clear in the present sermon *as preached*.

21. John 20:26.

22. Acts 1:3.