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THE STAGES OF LOVE  
IN CUSANUS' *SERMON VII*  
*REMITTUNTUR EI PECCATA MULTA*\*

In the fifteenth century, Mary Magdalene was one of the most popular saints, commonly identified with the biblical sinful woman and Mary of Bethany.<sup>1</sup> She was seen as a sister of Martha and Lazarus as well as a repentant prostitute and woman who had been cured of seven evil spirits by Jesus. Mary Magdalene was present at the key events in the Gospel. She was standing at the foot of the cross and was a witness to the resurrection which she announced to the disciples, thus becoming the “Apostle of the Apostles.” The biblical story is supplemented by the apocryphal story in the *Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine, according to whom Mary sailed to Marseille where she propagated the new faith and worked miracles. Then she withdrew to a hermitage where she spent thirty years until her death. On her deathbed she received the viaticum from bishop Maximinus.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion on the cult of Mary Magdalene in the Middle Ages, see Susan HASKINS, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (London: HarperCollins, 1993); Katherine Ludwig JANSEN, “Maria Magdalena: *Apostolorum Apostola*,” in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 57–96; EADEM, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> JACOBUS A VORAGINE, *Legenda aurea vulgo historia lombardica dicta*, ed. Johann Georg Theodor Graesse (Leipzig: Libraria Arnoldiana, 1850), 407–417.

Mary Magdalene is the main protagonist of *Sermon VII*, one of the early sermons by Nicholas of Cusa, delivered in 1431, probably in Koblenz. The sermon was prepared for the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene celebrated on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July and belongs to a series of sermons about active and contemplative life (*Sermons V-X*).<sup>3</sup> It is based on an exegesis of the words taken from the Gospel reading for the day: “Remittuntur ei peccata multa, quoniam dilexit multum” (Luke 7:47). The first two parts of the sermon focus on the subject of sin and its absolution, and refer to the first part of the biblical quote. The third part is an interpretation of the words “quoniam dilexit multum” which Cusanus elucidates with an allegorical exegesis.

The subject of my essay is the relationship between the thematic material and the narrative structure of *Sermon VII*. I intend to show how Cusanus adapts the philosophical subject to the sermon genre requirements, or even transcends them by employing various literary strategies. I have chosen *Sermon VII Remittuntur ei peccata multa* specifically because of its literary appeal determined by two forms of discourse organization: dialogue and allegory.

Dialogue, uncharacteristic of the sermon genre, appears several times in Cusanus’ *Sermones*, namely in sermons I, VII, XII, CLXXVI and CCLXXVIII. The second and third part of *Sermon VII* were written as a dialogue between Mary Magdalene and the person asking her questions, the *interrogans*, also referred to as *devotus* in some manuscripts. It would be very interesting to know how the dialogue functioned in the oral circulation of the sermon. Unfortunately, most of the questions in this respect remain unanswered. We do not know how the dialogue was read during the sermon. There is a hypothesis that it was actually read out by two people. It would thus resemble liturgical drama that originated from Easter liturgy where Mary Magdalene appears in the resurrection scene: *Quem quaeritis*.<sup>4</sup>

Being composed of questions and answers, the dialogue form primarily results in a high degree of textual clarity. Each topic (humility, absolution of sin, love) is initiated by a different question. The dialogue structure also influences the development of the character of Mary Magdalene who, while expounding the nature and stages of love, becomes the master of spiritual life and guide along the path of love.

<sup>3</sup> See Rudolf HAUBST, “Ein Predigtzyklus des jungen Cusanus über tätiges und beschauliches Leben,” *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 7 (1969): 15–46.

<sup>4</sup> See Blandine-Dominique BERGER, *Le drame liturgique de Pâques du X<sup>e</sup> au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Liturgie et Théâtre* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1976), 113–119.

Allegory is another phenomenon of key significance for the text of *Sermon VII*. The soul's love for God is presented through an allegorical image of Mary Magdalene's love. Cusanus follows the genre of a spiritual *itinerarium*, using the example of the saint. The biblical and non-biblical story of Mary Magdalene is subjected to an allegorical interpretation. The author focuses his attention not on the narrative based on biblical and apocryphal stories, but rather on the ascetic and mystical content that functions as *interpretans*. In fact, this content is not Cusanus' original work but is derived from mediaeval philosophical and devotional writings. Thus, *Sermon VII* is a kind of intertextual collage where two layers, narrative and speculative, overlap. The former is based on the Gospel's references to Mary Magdalene and on the *Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine. The images borrowed from these two sources are accompanied by texts by Bonaventura, both authentic ones (*Breviloquium*) and those attributed to him (*De diaeta salutis* by Guillaume de Lanicia and *De septem itineribus aeternitatis* by Rudolf von Biberach), as in the scene of the woman's entry into the Pharisee's house, which serves as a pretext for presenting an excerpt from *De humilitate* from *De dieta salutis*. *De fletu*, another text from this work, alludes to Mary Magdalene's weeping. The kissing of the feet refers to Bernard of Clairvaux's concept of three kisses. And Christ's words "quoniam dilexit" are interpreted with Bonaventura's *Breviloquium*.

Cusanus uses the works by other authors as material for invention that he freely transforms. He summarizes selected passages, switches from the impersonal to the personal style, and makes Mary Magdalene the narrator. Cusanus also highlights the motifs that are particularly linked with her, e.g. ointment, or the kiss.

Bonaventura's *Breviloquium* is the source of the concept of love which Nicholas of Cusa describes in *Sermon VII* with three terms: *amor*, *dilectio* and *caritas*.<sup>5</sup> The last of the three is defined as "rectus et ordinatus amor"

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<sup>5</sup> In *Sermo CCLVI* Cusanus distinguishes precisely between the various names of love: "Caritas enim conglutinat spiritum spiritui, quae si est naturalis, naturaliter et dicitur dilectio, si rationalis, rationaliter et dicitur amor, si intellectualis, intellectualiter et dici potest conexio, si divina et incorruptibilis, divine atque inseparabiliter atque aeternaliter et dici potest unio. Ideo spiritus rationalis, qui veritati quae Deus est, divina caritate annectitur, fit unus spiritus cum ipso Deo, qui est vita absoluta et aeterna." CCLVI 2, 8-17; NICOLAUS DE CUSA, *Opera omnia, Sermones IV (1455-1463)*, fasc. 5: *Sermones CCLVIII-CCLXVII*, ed. Heide Dorothea Riemann [et al.] (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2005). However, in the early *Sermon VII* this distinction is much more flexible.

(24, 8).<sup>6</sup> This short definition reflects the belief that *caritas*—love in harmony with its nature—is always directed towards God because God is the only proper object of love, as shown by the injunction to love Him *propter se*. However, the divine aspect of *caritas* extends much further. God is not only the object of love but also its goal and cause.

The goal of love is the “fruition of God” (*fruitio*) that gives a sense of happiness.<sup>7</sup> Cusanus describes it as a bilateral relationship where not only a soul rests in God but also God descends into a human being and inhabits his or her soul.<sup>8</sup> What is more, the initiative always rests with God. The soul is incapable of turning towards God on its own. *Caritas* is not a natural disposition of a human being; it is a gift of divine grace.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, love is caused by God Himself acting through the Holy Spirit who enables human beings or, specifically, human affective power (*affectum animae*), to strive towards God.<sup>10</sup> Cusanus summarizes this multifaceted presence of God in the process of love with a quotation from the First Epistle of St. John, “Deus caritas est” (1 John 4:8a).<sup>11</sup>

*Caritas Dei* is contrasted with *amor mundi*. The former is a love that has found its proper object and full self-realization, and does not yield to the temptation to love something besides God, which would degrade love to desire (*cupiditas*).

Love *sensu lato* is described with two terms: *dilectio* and *amor*. The former directly alludes to the biblical quote opening the Sermon: “Remittuntur ei peccata multa, quoniam dilexit multum”. The participle form *dilectus* also appears several times alternately with *amatus*.

However, the author of *Sermon VII* refers to love as *amor* definitely more often. Particularly in the final part of the sermon, he ignores terminological differences and uses *amor* almost exclusively and thus considerably expands its meaning. On many occasions, the term *amor* has simply replaced the

<sup>6</sup> All Latin quotations from *Sermon VII* after: NICOLAUS DE CUSA, *Opera omnia, Sermones I (1430-1441)*, fasc. 2: *Sermones V-X*, ed. Rudolf Haubst [et al.] (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1973). In the brackets there are numbers of sections and verses.

<sup>7</sup> “Caritas [...] principaliter fertur in illud bonum, quo fruitur et in quo quiescit, et hoc ipsum est ratio diligendi, hinc est, quod illud praecipue diligit tamquam beatificativum.” (24, 8-12).

<sup>8</sup> “Tunc ex tota anima et omnibus viribus dilexi Deum, quando per caritatem habitavit in anima mea.” (27, 33-35).

<sup>9</sup> “Cognosco, o Maria, quod Dei opus est caritas et non hominis.” (28, 1-2).

<sup>10</sup> “Caritas Dei diffusa fuit in corde meo per Spiritum Sanctum suum: est enim opus Sancti Spiritus. [...] Erigit enim affectum animae solus Spiritus in Dei caritatem, qui affectus absque Spiritu Sancto cupiditas est.” (25, 3-5, 11-13).

<sup>11</sup> “Deum necesse est ut habeat, qui caritatem habere studet, quia «Deus caritas est».” (25, 23-25).

word *caritas*, which is not used at all in the last four paragraphs where Cusanus characterizes love instead of defining it. The semantic field of *amor* is broader than *caritas* and also refers to disorderly love: only *amor* can be used in the context of love of earthly objects (*amor mundi*).

In contrast to *caritas*, *amor* is an innate power of the human soul to such an extent that “anima sine amore esse non potest” (26, 3-4). It can direct its love upwards, and thus perfect itself, or downwards, and thus die. The love for living beings does not contradict divine love as long as the hierarchy is respected: God first, then the spirit, then other people and, lastly, the body.<sup>12</sup> The love of God has a community character, i.e. through the unity of Christ with the Church it encompasses everything in accordance with St. Paul’s words from 1 Cor 15:28; so that “erit Deus omnia in omnibus” (24, 41-42).

Love is attained gradually and its stages are the main subject of the last part of *Sermon VII*. For their description, Cusanus drew on *De septem itineribus aeternitatis*, attributed to Bonaventura but actually written by the German Franciscan monk Rudolf von Biberach. It was one of the most influential, even though not the most outstanding, books in the history of mediaeval mysticism.<sup>13</sup> It comprised quotations, in scholastic form, of more than forty mystical writers. Cusanus used Chapter IV, dedicated to *caritativa affectio*, for a description of the stages of love that he combined with motifs from the life of Mary Magdalene and Bernard of Clairvaux’s figure of three kisses.

In the eighty-seventh sermon, *De osculo sponsi, seu gratia contemplationis*, Bernard writes *Tria sunt oscula*, i.e. the kiss of the feet, hands and mouth.<sup>14</sup> Nicholas of Cusa adapts this distinction to the story of Mary Magdalene who kissed Christ’s feet during the dinner held by Simon the Pharisee, Christ’s hands when His body was taken off the cross, and His mouth during His retreat in the desert. The three kisses correspond to the three degrees of love identified by Rudolf von Biberach: *genita (infusa)*, *proficientis (roborata)* and *perfecta*.<sup>15</sup> Nicholas of Cusa borrowed the description of the signs (*signa*) of each stage from *De septem itineribus aeternitatis*

<sup>12</sup> Cf. AUGUSTINUS, *De doctrina christiana*: “Cum ergo quatuor sint diligenda, unum quod supra nos est, alterum quod nos sumus, tertium quod juxta nos est, quartum quod infra nos est.” L. I, C. XXIII, 22. *Œuvres de saint Augustin*, vol. 11, ed. G. Combès [et al.] (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer et Cie., 1949), 206.

<sup>13</sup> Bernard MCGINN, “Review” [of Rudolf von Biberach, *De septem itineribus aeternitatis*, ed. Margot Schmidt (Mystik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, vol. 1: Christliche Mystik, vol. 1), Stuttgart (Bad-Cannstatt): Frommann-Holzboog, 1985], *Speculum* 64 (1989): 213–214.

<sup>14</sup> BERNARDUS CLARAEVALLENSIS, *De diversis sermo* 87 n. I (PL 183, 703C-D).

<sup>15</sup> RUDOLF VON BIBERACH, *De septem itineribus aeternitatis*, it. IV, dist. 4 (pp. [51]-[57]).

as well. Thus, the signs of the first stage of love are the following: contrition, good intent with regard to the future, willingness to listen to the Word of God, and readiness to do good deeds. Wherever possible, Cusanus alludes to the figure of Mary Magdalene. Thus, when he writes about *delectatio in auditu divini sermonis*, he adds Mary's testimony: "Ego frequenter sedebam ad pedes Domini audiens eius sermonem" (VII 28, 15-16), which is a paraphrase of the parable about Jesus visiting Mary and Martha (Luke 10:39).

The signs of the second stage of love mentioned by Cusanus include: the examination of conscience, the reducing of lust, the exercise of spiritual senses, the keeping of the commandments and the exhibiting of the divine truths. Also here Nicholas of Cusa introduces a biographical element, adapting the last sign to the traditional belief that, after the Lord's resurrection, Mary Magdalene was spreading the Gospel just like the Apostles.

At the third stage of love, the external and internal signs appear at last. The former include: the desire to die, the love of enemies, patient endurance of adversity, renunciation of all things in order to follow Christ, and the fear of God. The latter signs comprise profound inner sighs of the spirit,<sup>16</sup> lofty desires, languid thoughts, waiting in drudgery, and ecstatic feelings.

It is worth noting that all these signs appear in the sermon in the first person. By having Mary Magdalene speak about them, the author goes beyond the theoretical description of the signs; he turns them into a description of experience. Mary Magdalene says that she loved, suffered, feared the Lord, languished and waited. Thus, the content of *De itineribus* becomes more internalized and subjectivized.

Nicholas of Cusa also repeats another description of the stages of love referenced by Rudolf von Biberach who quotes an unknown *doctor Cantuariensis*.<sup>17</sup> These are six degrees of *amor gratuitus* which precede *amor violentus sive vehemens*. Cusanus links this description with Jacobus de Voragine's account that Mary was lifted into heaven by angels seven times a day.<sup>18</sup> The author of the *Sermons* depicts the rising of Mary to the consecutive levels in the form of dialogue within dialogue. Mary's conversation

<sup>16</sup> "Profunda et intima mentis suspiria emisi" (29, 14).

<sup>17</sup> The author of footnotes to *Sermon VII* writes about him thus: "Quis sit ille doctor Cantuariensis, quem R. de Bibraco recitat, nescimus; fortassis est idem auctor, qui Comm. in Canticum in Cod. Bibl. Univ. Oenipont. 144 conservatum scripsit." NICOLAUS DE CUSA, *Opera omnia, Sermones I (1430-1441)*, p. 140, verses 3-4 from below.

<sup>18</sup> "Qualibet autem die septem horis canonicis ab angelis in aethera elevabatur". JACOBUS A VORAGINE, *Legenda aurea*, 413.

with love sets the question-and-answer structure for the particular degrees. The first degree is *amor incomparabilis*, the second—*incontaminabilis*, the third—*infatigabilis*, the fourth—*inseparabilis*, the fifth—*insuperabilis* and the sixth—*insatiabilis*. The description of the seventh degree has its source in *De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis* by Richard of St. Victor, quoted by Rudolf von Biberach.<sup>19</sup> It is based on the motifs of being hurt, languishing, incapacitation and yearning.

To the depiction of the spiritual journey Cusanus adds a description of a journey around the world, undoubtedly allegorical but with a different level of abstraction. Love guides Mary Magdalene across the world, with all its sinfulness, and through hell until she finally reaches holy Jerusalem where her journey comes to an end. Mary asks for death after thirty years in the hermitage. Cusanus closes the sermon with an account from the *Golden Legend* about the circumstances of Mary's death.

Alongside this narrative framework, the sermon features other references to the figure of Mary Magdalene. One of them is the highlighted motif of the ointment, traditionally linked with Mary Magdalene, also in iconography. There was a sinful woman who anointed Christ's feet. Mary of Bethany also poured perfume on Christ before His crucifixion (cf. Mark 14:3; John 12:3). Mary Magdalene was among the women who came to anoint Christ's body after the entombment. When describing the anointing before Christ's death, the Evangelists specify that the woman brought a jar of perfume made of spikenard.

Nicholas of Cusa encountered the motif of the ointment in *De dieta salutis*, a work by Guillaume de Lancia.<sup>20</sup> This compendium, attributed to Bonaventura, listed the means necessary for salvation according to the structure of the catechism (cardinal sins, virtues, commandments, beatitudes, gifts of the Holy Spirit, etc.). Featuring a collection of allegorical images accompanied by biblical quotations, the work was used by mediaeval preachers. The structure of the work is based on nine chapters corresponding to the nine days of a journey called *dietae*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> RICHARDUS SANCTI VICTORIS, *Tractatus de quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis*, PL 196, 1209C.

<sup>20</sup> Guilelmus de Lancia (de Lancea, de Lavicea; Wilhelm de Lancia); died ca. 1310; see Barthélemy HAURÉAU, "Guillaume de Lavicea, frère mineur," in *Histoire littéraire de la France*, vol. 26: *Quatorzième siècle* (Paris: Palmé, 1873), 552–556.

<sup>21</sup> [GUILIELMUS DE LANICIA], *Dieta salutis* (Paris: [[Félix Baligault] partially for François Regnault], 1500).

In *Sermon VII* we can find quotations from the chapter *De humilitate* with reflections about humility. However, Nicholas of Cusa subordinates them to the image of spikenard, of marginal importance from the perspective of *Dieta salutis*. Cusanus writes:

Portavi unguentum pretiosum, decorum, odoriferum, quia quaesivi quidquid valore pretiosus, odore deliciosus, decore gratiosus. Erat de nardo unguentum, quia ut arbor nardi parva et odorifera humiliabam me ad pedes magistri, ut mea nardus daret odorem suum. (20, 17-23)<sup>22</sup>

The image of the ointment combines the traits that Guillaume de Lanicia ascribes to various objects and phenomena. Gold is quite precious in value; incense, spikenard and cinnamon are quite fragrant in aroma, and the green is quite pleasing in loveliness.<sup>23</sup> The author of *Dieta salutis* compares humility to them. Cusanus holds on to the metaphor of spikenard (“ut arbor nardi parva et odorifera”, “mea nardus daret odorem suum”, cf. Song of Songs 1:11). At the same time, he enriches the image, adding another layer of meaning to it. In *De dieta salutis*, spikenard symbolizes humility while in Cusanus’ sermon it is a symbol of Mary Magdalene who personifies humility. He weaves this image into the narrative. He writes that Mary Magdalene bowed down at the feet of the Master like a small, fragrant spikenard tree.

The motif of the ointment recurs in the subsequent passage of the sermon. This time it comes from a fragment of *De dieta salutis* mentioning the tears of sympathy symbolized by *unguentum lenificativum*.<sup>24</sup> Cusanus links it with Mary Magdalene standing at the foot of the cross (“dum starem ad monumentum”), sometimes depicted with a jar of ointment with which she wanted to anoint Christ’s body after the Sabbath.

*De dieta salutis* also constitutes a source of themes and images used in another part of *Sermon VII*, namely the following words spoken by Mary Magdalene:

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<sup>22</sup> “I brought ointment that was precious, lovely, fragrant—because I was in search of something quite precious in value, quite fragrant in aroma, quite pleasing in loveliness. It was ointment of spikenard, because I humbled myself as a small, fragrant tree of spikenard at the feet of the master, so that my spikenard would yield up its fragrance” (p. 145). All English translations from *Sermon VII* according to: NICHOLAS OF CUSA, *Early Sermons (1430-1441)*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Colorado: Banning Press, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> “Item nota quod humilitas est quicquid in valore est pretiosus, quicquid in odore est deliciosus, quicquid in decore est gratiosus” [GUILIELMUS DE LANICIA], *Dieta salutis*, fol. 77a.

<sup>24</sup> “Secundus fletus est compassionis. Et est sicut unguentum lenificativum. Nam sicut unguentum unguendo sanat membra paralitica, sic humor compassionis sanat cupidos ad paralisi, id est ab avaricia.” *Ibidem*, fol. 83b.



Habui aurum probatum et ferrum ignitum ductile et vinum conditum dulce, acutum et forte, quia dilexi fortiter, prudenter et perseveranter. Habui aves rapaces, nisi eum praedantur, terram tangunt. Habui magnam maris navem, quae flatu Sancti Spiritus ducebatur. Habui mortis malleum, quo carnem mortificarem. Habui fontem et puteum viventis aquae, quae mundano aeri contrariabatur; frigidus erat aestatis tempore et econverso, et eius urna pendebat in fune bene torta, quae fortis est. Habui canem venaticum nobilem, qui spinas non sentit, dum quaerit. Erat domus mea de latere bene cocto, quae non dissolvebatur tempestatibus et pluviis. Habui arbores fructiferas, quae habebant fructus pietatis, flores honestatis, folia veritatis. Habui vestem nuptialem mirabilis texturae et materiae; multum flagrans erat et rubei coloris, quam ex Christo glutino ignis Sancti Spiritus contexit etc. (30, 10-31)<sup>25</sup>

Although this passage is an integral part of the dialogue's narrative, it clearly stands out. It cannot be understood without knowing the context, i.e., the work of Guillaume de Lanicia. The large number of allegories here is in striking contrast to other, much more abstract passages of *Sermon VII*.

The excerpt above is a reply to the question put to Mary: "Quid tecum habebas, paupercula?" (30, 6). The question is asked in the context of Mary's sojourn in the wilderness ("asperrimus eremus") where, according to Jacobus de Voragine, there was no stream, no trees nor plants.<sup>26</sup> Cusanus constructs Mary's reply, "Non eram paupercula" (30, 7), using the antithesis of wealth and poverty. It can be understood both in its literal and allegorical sense. In the latter case, she was not poor because she had love. In order to convey this idea, Cusanus has Mary Magdalene use allegories of love that, if interpreted literally, conjure up an image of a well-equipped hermit who had gold, a home, a dog, wine, etc.

All the images presented by Cusanus originate from *Dieta salutis*. They appear there as metaphors of love. Guillaume de Lanicia discusses them in

<sup>25</sup> "I had gold that was tested by fire and had iron that was made malleable by fire; I had spiced-wine that was tasty, pungent, and strong, because I loved strongly, prudently, and perseveringly. I had birds of prey, which rarely (except when they prey) touch the ground. I had a large sea-ship that was propelled by the breath of the Holy Spirit. I had a mallet-of-death by means of which I mortified the flesh. I had a fountain, and a well, of living water — water [whose temperature] was opposite to that of the mundane air: the well was cold in the summertime and vice versa. And the bucket for the well's water hung on a tightly-twisted rope, which is strong. I had a fine-specimen of a hunting dog that did not feel the thorns while hunting. My house was of well-baked brick; it was not broken apart by storms and rains. I had fruit-bearing trees — [trees] which had fruit of graciousness, blossoms of honorableness, leaves of truth. I had a wedding dress of wondrous texture and fabric; the dress was very shiny and was red in color; the fire of the Holy Spirit wove it from Christ's blood, etc." (p. 152).

<sup>26</sup> JACOBUS A VORAGINE, *Legenda aurea*, 413.

the following manner: “Love is compared to...”<sup>27</sup> Then he unravels a particular image and indicates a specific characteristic that it shares with love.

Nicholas of Cusa adopts the same image while rejecting the interpretation part. The link between the image and love remains implicit. Thus we know that Mary in the desert had gold tested by fire but we do not know that it means her love was greater than all other virtues.<sup>28</sup> The author writes that she had iron made malleable by fire, but no mention is made that it represents a soul fired up by love, soft and malleable like iron in fire.<sup>29</sup> Birds of prey, a sea-ship, a well also appear without indicating the context for interpretation.

These images are interlinked in various configurations. On the one hand, the clarity of the comparison presented in *Dieta salutis* is lost. On the other hand, new, condensed images are conjured up. In some cases Cusanus crosses the threshold of tangibility, for example, when he writes about a sea-ship that was propelled by the breath of the Holy Spirit. This image encompasses the allegory as well as its explanation. According to Guillaume de Lanicia, a wind-propelled ship denotes love led by the breath of the Holy Spirit. Similar in character but, in this case, faithfully quoted from *De dieta salutis*, are “arbores fructiferas, quae habebant fructus pietatis, flores honestatis, folia veritatis” (30, 26-27).<sup>30</sup>

The most condensed imagery resulting from the combination of several images from the preachers’ textbook occurs in the following sentence, still confusing to readers today: “Habui vestem nuptialem mirabilis texturae et materiae; multum flagrans erat et rubei coloris, quam ex Christo glutino ignis Sancti Spiritus contextit” (30, 28-31). There is a *vestis nuptialis* that can be described with four qualities: *artificio* (*textura* in Cusanus), *materia*, *color*, *fragrantia* (misread by Cusanus as *flagrantia* in the sermon).<sup>31</sup> There is also *ignis virtualis* and *glutinum*, the latter causing the greatest problems. The meaning intended by the author is revealed by the relevant passage from *Dieta salutis*: “sicut glutino iunguntur asseses [...], sic caritate uniuntur fideles”.<sup>32</sup> Love is compared to an adhesive that binds wooden planks. In Cusanus’ work, the role of such a binding agent is played by Christ.

<sup>27</sup> “Caritas comparatur...” [GUILLELMUS DE LANICIA], *Dieta salutis*, fol. 54b.

<sup>28</sup> “Nam sicut aurum in valore excedit omnia metalla, sic caritas excedit omnes virtutes et omnia bona opera.” *Ibidem*, fol. 54a.

<sup>29</sup> “[Anima] ignita vero caritate est ductilis per obedientiam et mollis per misericordiam.” *Ibidem*, fol. 54a.

<sup>30</sup> “Caritas enim est sicut arbor vel lignum fructuosum in quo pendent fructus pietatis, flores honestatis, folia veritatis.” *Ibidem*, fol. 55b.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, fol. 56a.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, fol. 55b.

*Sermon VII*, obviously, features many other allegories and Cusanus explains some of them right away. The two wings of an eagle in the Apocalypse stand for intellect and feeling, the angels are the most profound affections (“profundissimae et subtilissimae et ignitae affectiones et desideria” 32, 2-3), and the desert represents contemplation and penitence. Phrases where the key word has a literal meaning while the attribute carries a hidden meaning often have an allegorical character: “oculus intellectus”, “vinculum amoris”, “suspiria mentis”, “alae altissimae contemplationis et manna caelestis dulcedinis”, “chorda amoris”, “habenae amoris”, “tabernaculum animae”, “ignis caritatis”. Some of these phrases are already highly petrified and belong to the standard set of stylistic devices used in ascetic and mystical texts and even in secular love poetry.

All these minor metaphors indicate two semantic layers characteristic of an allegorical text. In *Sermon VII* they are bound by the figure of Mary Magdalene who is an allegory of the soul but also goes beyond the indefiniteness of *anima*. Nicholas of Cusa describes her in a particularly vivid way, mainly in the form of dialogue. Her figure is composed of images of several different women: besides Mary Magdalene, there is the biblical sinful woman, Mary of Bethany and Mary of Egypt. The last one is linked with some eremitical motifs in the legend of Saint Magdalene and with the theme of *vita contemplativa*. In *Sermon VII*, Cusanus describes the stages of love which predominantly constitute the stages of contemplation as well. According to the mystical tradition, at the end of this spiritual ladder is the union with the Beloved.

*Translated from Polish by Sławomir Nowodworski*

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STOPNIE MIŁOŚCI W KAZANIU VII MIKOŁAJA Z KUZY  
*REMITTUNTUR EI PECCATA MULTA*

Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia fragment jednego z wczesnych kazań Mikołaja z Kuzy – *Sermo VII Remittuntur ei peccata multa*, które wyróżnia się nietypową w praktyce predykanckiej formą dialogu. Jego główną bohaterką jest Maria Magdalena, której postać została skonstruowana w oparciu o wątki zarówno biblijne, jak i apokryficzne i stanowi alegorię miłości duszy do Boga. W artykule zawarto analizę Kuzańczykowego pojęcia miłości poprzez omówienie obecnych w tekście terminów (*amor, caritas, dilectio*) oraz wyodrębnienie dwóch wykorzystanych przez autora schematów drogi miłości (trój- i siedmiostopniowego). Zostały również wskazane zależności intertekstualne między kazaniem Kuzańczyka a pismami pseudo-bonawenturiańskimi, zwłaszcza *De diaeta salutis* Wilhelma de Lanicia i *De septem itineribus aeternitatis* Rudolfa von Biberach. Charakter wpływu obu autorów przybliżają analizy fragmentów szczególnie gęstych semantycznie, o wyrazistym charakterze alegorycznym i licznych metaforach.

THE STAGES OF LOVE IN CUSANUS' *SERMON VII*  
*REMITTUNTUR EI PECCATA MULTA*

Summary

The article discusses one of the early sermons by Nicholas of Cusa—*Sermo VII Remittuntur ei peccata multa*, written in a dialogue form, uncharacteristic of the sermon genre. The main protagonist is Mary Magdalene, who was described on the basis of biblical and apocryphal stories. According to *Sermo VII* she is an allegory of the soul's love for God. The article contains the analysis of Cusanus' concept and terminology of love (*amor, caritas, dilectio*) as well as the description of the image of three and seven stages of love. Moreover, there have been identified intertextual relations between the sermon and sources attributed to Bonaventura such as *De diaeta salutis* by Guillaume de Lanicia and *De septem itineribus aeternitatis* by Rudolf von Biberach. Finally, there are also deeper semantic analyses of more difficult fragments.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Mikołaj z Kuzy, kazania, stopnie miłości, Maria Magdalena.

**Key words:** Nicholas of Cusa, sermons, stages of love, Mary Magdalene.

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