



A SYMPOSIUM ON THE 600TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF CARDINAL NICOLAUS OF CUSA

TRANSLATION

On Searching For God

(1445)

Nicolaus of Cusa

IN COMMENTING on Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadsky's groundbreaking 1938 article, "Problems of Biogeochemistry II: On the Fundamental Material-Energetic Distinction Between Living and Nonliving Natural Bodies of the Biosphere,"* Lyndon LaRouche emphasized that one cannot locate the cause of living processes within the domain of the non-living, nor the cause of cognition within living processes, but that each and all derive from the principle of universal creation.

Nicolaus of Cusa develops the same argument respecting the transfinite ordering of human mentation in "On Searching for God." In this work, Cusanus makes the point that vision sees colored sensible objects, but vision itself is colorless. If it were colored, vision would be deceived. Moreover, one cannot attain to vision from within the domain of the colored. Thus, the distinctions among colors are necessarily derived from a higher domain, i.e., vision. Cusanus then argues that this is true with respect to all sense perception.

Next, he argues that, although logical rationality is apprehended through the intellect (cognition), the intellect is not to be found in the domain of the rational; the intellect is as the eye, and the rational as the colors. The intellect is, as it were, a free vision, namely a true and simple judge of all rationality, in which there is no mixture with the species of the rational. Nowhere in the entire region of rationality does one attain the intellect.

Ascending further, Cusanus argues that if rationality is the king of the sensible world, and the intellect the king of rationality, then God is the King of the intellectual world, and in fact, the King of kings, i.e., the King or cause of each and all.

Moreover, since the mind of man is created in the image of the Creator, Who created the universe as a whole, then, as Cusanus argues in a number of places, one can know the lawful order of the universe as a whole, only to the extent that one becomes self-conscious, i.e., knows one's own mind from the standpoint of the intellect. This corresponds to Vernadsky's notion of the noosphere (noetic activity) in relationship to the biosphere and to the non-living domain.

Thus, there is a definite psycho-physical parallelism between the transfinite ordering of the non-living, the living, human cognition, and the principle of universal creation and that of the human mind, as was originally developed by Plato in the celebrated metaphor of the Divided Line in Book VI of his Republic.

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"On Searching for God" is reprinted from *Towards a New Council of Florence: 'On the Peace of Faith' and Other Works by Nicolaus of Cusa*, ed. by William F. Wertz, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Schiller Institute, 1995), 2nd ed.

I WANT to satisfy your desire as well as I can, venerable Brother in Christ, and attempt to repeat briefly and clearly in writing, what I endeavored to explain at the Epiphany festival to the people concerning the rational ground of the name of God. May we both be stimulated thereby in our meditation and may the inner man be transformed in the intellectual ascent of the light gradually into light, until he comes through the light of glory into clear knowledge and enters into the joy of his Lord.



*Donor portrait
of Cardinal
Nicolaus of Cusa,
altarpiece detail,
St. Nicolaus
Hospital, c. 1460.*

Courtesy of Dr. Helmut Gestrich

I.

First, dear Brother: You know well that Paul, who reports of himself, he had been transported into the third heaven all the way to the view of secrets, proclaimed the truth on the Areopagus to the men, who then dedicated themselves in Athens to the most highly praised study of philosophy. As introduction to his theme, he stated he wanted to bring them the Good News of that unknown God, to whom the Gentiles had consecrated an altar there. And as he commenced to explicate this, he began with how God had created all in one man; He has indulged them a definite time to be in this world to search for God, if they are able by chance to attain and find Him. He added thereto that He is not very distant from anyone, since in Him we indeed are, live, and are moved. Thereupon the Apostle repudiated idolatry and said thereto, that nothing can be in the cogitation of man, which were similar to the divine.

As often as I read the Acts of the Apostles, I admire this train of thought. Paul indeed wanted to reveal the unknown God to the philosophers and then affirms of Him, that no human intellect can conceive Him. Therefore, God is revealed therein, that one knows that every intellect is too small to make itself a figuration or concept of Him. However, he names him God, or in Greek, *theos*.

If, therefore, man has come into the world to search for God and, if he has found Him, to adhere to Him and to find repose in adhering to Him—man cannot search for Him and attain Him in this sensible and corporeal world, since God is spirit rather than body, and cannot be attained in intellectual abstraction, since one is able to conceive nothing similar to God, as he asserts—how can one, therefore, search for Him in order to find Him? One thing is certain: If this world were not helpful to the seeker, man were sent into this world to search for Him in vain. Therefore, this world must assist the seeker and

he must also know, that neither in the world nor in everything which man conceives is something similar to God.

We now want to see if the name *theos* or *deus* offers us assistance thereto. Indeed, the name *theos* is not the name of God, who excels every conception. Indeed, what can not be conceived, remains ineffable. To make effable is indeed to express an intrinsic concept through vocal and other figurative signs externally. Therefore, if one conceives no similitude of a thing, then its name is unknown. Therefore, *theos* is the name of God only insofar as He is sought by man in this world. Therefore, the seeker of God may consider attentively, how in this name *theos* a path is enfolded on which God is found, so that one can attain Him. *Theos* comes from *theo*, which means “I see” and “I run.” Therefore, the seeker must run by means of vision, in order to be able to advance to the all-seeing *theos*. Therefore, vision bears in itself a similitude of the path on which the seeker should proceed. We must therefore extend the nature of sensible vision before the eye of intellectual vision and form from it a ladder for the ascent.

Our vision is generated from a lucid and clear spirit descending from the brain above into the organ of the eye and, as soon as the extrinsic light concurs, a colored object multiplying the similitude of its species in it. Therefore, in the region of the visible nothing is found except color. However, vision is not from the region of the visible, but is constituted beyond everything visible; since it does not belong to the region of colors, vision has no color, and, in order to be able to see all colors, it is not contracted to something, and so that its judgment is free and true, it has no more of one color than of another, and so that its power is in relation to all colors, it is restricted through no color. Vision is not mixed with colors, so that its vision is true.

Through an experiment we demonstrate that vision is

deceived through a colored medium, through glass or a transparent stone or something other. Vision is so pure and free from every blemish of the visible, that in comparison with it everything visible is darkness and corporeal density in comparison to the spirit of vision.

However, if we intuit the world of the visible with the intellect and ask if knowledge of vision is found in it, then it becomes apparent that all this world of color does not know vision, because it attains nothing not-colored. And if we then said, there is vision and yet it is nothing colored, then this world of the visible will want to make of it a figure of similitude, yet in all its concepts will find nothing similar to vision, since its concept is impossible without color. And if inside the ambit of its region it finds neither vision nor something similar or configurable to it, it cannot attain vision; indeed it is not even able to attain that vision is something at all. For outside of color it attains nothing, but rather judges that everything not-colored is not something.

Therefore, of all the names which can be named in this region, no name befits vision; neither the name of whiteness nor of blackness, nor that of all mixed colors; for it is neither whiteness and not-whiteness copulatively nor blackness and not-blackness copulatively. Therefore, whether the region of the sensible denotes all names singularly and disjunctively, or whether it considers the names of contrary colors copulatively or the copulation of all nameable names, it attains nothing of the name and essence of vision.

If someone now stated that color is not distinguished and perceived from itself, but rather from a higher cause, i.e., vision, and if he then asked all visible things if this is true and how they conceive this cause, then they will respond: that presupposed, which has given them names, is—just as is vision—the best and most beautiful according to what can be conceived. However, if they prepare themselves to form a concept of this best and most beautiful, then they return to color, without which a concept cannot be formed. For this reason they say it is more beautiful than every white color, for in the region of color the white color is not so beautiful that it could not be still more beautiful, and not so lucid and resplendent, that it could not be still more lucid. Therefore, all visible things would not claim as their king some color of their region, which is actually among the visible things of this region, but rather would say, he is the highest possible beauty of the most lucid and perfect color.

Such and many similar things, dear Brother, you see as most true. Therefore, ascend now from vision to hearing in a similar manner, and to taste, smell, and touch, thereupon to the universal sense, which stands above every other sense, as hearing above the audible, taste above the

tasteable, smell above the smellable, and touch above the tangible.

From there proceed higher to the intellect, which is above everything intelligible, which is above everything rational. Indeed, the rational is apprehended through the intellect, however, the intellect is not found in the region of the rational; the intellect is as the eye and the rational as the colors. If you would, extend your consideration; thus you will apprehend how the intellect is as it were a free vision, namely, a true and simple judge of all rationality, in which there is no mixture with the species of the rational. Therefore, its judgment of rationality is clear and intuitive in the variety of the region of rationality. In respect to knowledge of rationality, the intellect judges this necessary, that possible, this contingent, that impossible, this demonstrative, that sophistical and apparent, this commonplace, etc., just as vision judges this color as white, that as not-white but rather black, this as more white than black, etc.

Nowhere in the entire region of rationality does one attain the intellect. However, if this world or the universe wanted to portray its king, commander, and judge, then it would say he is the terminus or ultimate perfection of rationality. But the intellectual natures can likewise not deny that a king is placed over them. And just as the visible natures assert of this king placed over them that he is the ultimate perfection of everything visible, so the intellectual natures, which view the true intuitively, also affirm their king is the ultimate perfection of the intuition of all things. They name him *theos* or God, the speculation, as it were, or the intuition in the complement of its all-seeing perfection.

Nevertheless, nothing is found in the entire region of intellectual powers, to which the King is similar, nor is there a concept which is similar to Him in the entire intellectual region. Rather, He is above everything which is conceived or understood; His name, although it names and discerns everything intelligible, is not intelligible. And His nature is infinitely anterior to all intellectual wisdom in altitude, simplicity, strength, power, beauty, and goodness; everything which dwells in the intellectual nature is in comparison with Him shadow and impotence, grossness and meager wisdom; and one could extend such comparisons infinitely.

You are therefore able to run on this path, on which God is found above all vision, hearing, taste, touch, smell, speech, sense, rationality, and intellect. It is found as none of these, but rather above everything as God of gods and King of all kings. Indeed, the King of the world of the intellect is the King of kings and Lord of lords in the universe. For He is the king of the intellectual nature, which has dominion in the rational nature; the rational in turn

rules in the sensible and the sensible rules in the world of sensible things, over which vision, hearing, taste, feeling, smell preside as kings. All these kings discern, speculate, and theorize up to the King of kings and the Lord of lords, who is the speculation, and God or *theos* Himself, in whose power all kings stand and from whom all kings have that which they have: power to rule, beauty, entity, loveliness, joy, life, and everything good.

From this it follows that in the realm of the greatest and highest king all attractiveness of visible forms, the variety of colors, pleasing proportions, the resplendence of carbuncles, the greenness of meadows, the brightness of gold and whatever delights the sight, in which the sight reposes and takes delight as if in the thesaurus of its realm, have no value in the curia of the great King, because they belong to the lowest litter of the curia. Likewise the concordant resonance of all voices and that sweet harmony in the realm of hearing, the indescribable variety of all instruments, the melody of those golden organs, the songs of nightingales, and sirens and all the other exquisite riches of the king from the realm of hearing are as though dregs, which adhere to the pavement in the curia of the greatest and best King of kings. Likewise every sweet and sour, bitter and pleasant taste of paradise apples, of the most delicious fruits, of the grapes of Engaddi, of the wine of Cyprus, of the honey of Attica, the grain and oil and everything which India and the woods and water of this whole world present as refreshment and offer for pleasant taste, are of little moment in the palace of that most powerful ruler of the world. The pleasant smell of perfume, frankincense and myrrh, musk and everything emitting an odor, which dwells in the realm of olfaction—all this is not regarded as something precious in the great palace of the highest King, and still less all that which through its softness delights the sense of touch. If indeed the sense of touch of the king seems extensive and its realm extended throughout the world, it is, however, hardly a point, nearly imperceptible, in respect to the realm of the ruler of the universe.

That king appears great, who commands these kings already named, and whose vassals they are; he is the universal sense, which enfolds in his power all the power of those already named. And yet he is a purchased slave and the lowest servant in the realm of the all-seeing and all-containing King.

In incomparable altitude above all the already named, the intellectual nature has obtained its realm. All the previously named and described realms are dependent on its power; it presides over them dominantly.

However, the kings of the intellectual nature are of the family of the highest commander and they enjoy being ascribed to his military. Their wish is nothing other than

to be able to obtain any available position in the court of the ruler, in which they can be refreshed in intellectual intuition by Him, who is called *theos*. And everything which is in the previously named universal realm, does not concern them, for it is nothing in comparison to the good, which they know in their ruler; in Him everything is in complement, in itself divine and exceedingly good; all that which is found in the other kings is not only imperfect, outside themselves and in shadow or image, but rather also contracted at an incomparable and disproportionate distance.

Therefore, the color, which is perceived in the realm of the visible by vision, does not see, but rather is only visible. It lacks life, vital motion, and perfection, such as the stem of a plant or subsistent forms have. But the senses, which are in the realm of the universal sense, the particular senses, have a nature which in the vitality and cognition of the sensible spirit enfolds in itself the form of the sensible world. Therefore, there is not less in the realm of the senses than in the realm of the sensible.

However, everything which is unfolded in the realm of the sensible is enfolds and vital in the realm of the senses in a more vigorous and perfect mode. For the realm of the sensible reposes in them. Likewise that which belongs to the realm of the senses is in a much clearer and more perfect mode in that realm, in which it is intellectually. Indeed, in the intellectual being of the intellectual realm, color has an incorruptible nature and differs through its perfection from the color of the sensible world, just as the perpetual from the corruptible, and the intellectual life from death, and light from shadow.

But in the realm of the Almighty, where the realm is king, where everything that is in all realms is the King Himself; where color is not sensible or intellectual but rather divine color, indeed God Himself; where everything, which in the sensible world is without motion and life, and everything which has vegetative, sensible, rational, or intellectual life is the divine life, which is the immortality, in which God alone dwells and where in Him everything is He Himself; there is the delight of all joys, which we drink up through the eyes, ears, taste, touch, smell, sense, life, motion, rationality, and intelligence, the divine, infinite, and inexpressible delight and the repose of all delight and delectation; for God is the *theos*, speculation and running, which sees everything, is everything, runs through everything. Everything looks to Him as to its King; at His command everything is moved and runs, and every running to the end of repose is a running to Him. Therefore, everything is *theos*, the beginning, from which everything flows out, the middle, in which we are moved, and the end, to which everything flows back.

Therefore, on this path, my Brother, endeavor to search for God in the most diligent speculation. If He is sought in the right manner, it is impossible not to find Him, who is everywhere. And He is then sought correctly and according to His name, if He is sought to the end that His laud, according to His name, fulfills our earthly nature up to the limit of its power.

II.

But now, turning to the second part of our inquiry, we want to see in what manner we are led in a stepwise ascent to the indicated theory—indeed we are not moved to the completely unknown, and in order to inquire into this, we want to look back again at vision.

First we state: A double light concurs, so that vision detects the visible discretely. For it is not the spirit of vision which imposes the name of colors, but rather the spirit of its father, who is in it. The spirit, which descends through the optical nerves from the brain into the eye, is struck by the obviation of the species opposite it and a confused sensation arises. The vital power is astonished by this sensation and endeavors to discern it. Therefore, the spirit which is in the eye does not discern it, but rather a higher spirit in it effects this distinction. We could demonstrate this to ourselves as true through an everyday experiment. Frequently we do not detect the transient—although its species is multiplied in the eye—since we do not perceive it when we do not attend to the others, and if several men speak, we understand only him, to whom we have turned our attention.

This demonstrates to us that the spirit which is in the sense attains the operation of its activity through a higher light, namely, that of rationality. If, therefore, the eye says this is red and this is blue, then the eye does not speak but rather the spirit of its father speaks in it; namely this vital spirit, whose eye this is.

But although the attention of him who wants to see is present, the color is still not on that account visible; for that it is necessary that the visible be made visible by the other light of an illuminant. Indeed, in shadow and darkness the visible does not have the aptitude to be seen. Its adaptation occurs through the light which illuminates it. Thus the visible is only apt to be seen in the light, because it is not able to enter the eye by itself, and for this reason it is necessary that it be illuminated; for it is the nature of the light to enter into the eye by itself. Then, therefore, if the visible is in the light, which has the power to enter into the eye by itself, it can enter the eye. However, color is not in the light as in another, but rather as in its origin, for color is nothing other than the terminus of the light in the diaphanous, as we experience it in the rainbow.

Indeed, according as the ray of sun is terminated in a rain cloud in different ways, a different color is generated.

Color, manifested in its origin, namely, in the light, is therefore visible, because the extrinsic light and the spirit of sight communicate in clarity. The light, which illuminates the visible, penetrates a similar light and brings the opposing species of color to sight.

On this basis, Brother, prepare yourself a course, on which to inquire how the unknown God presides over all that through which we are moved to Him. For although it is already certain for you, that a vital spirit discerns in the spirit of the eye, and the light makes the visible apt to be seen, nevertheless vision detects neither the spirit itself nor the light. Indeed, the light does not belong to the region of colors, since it is not colored. Consequently, it is not to be found in the entire region where the eye holds sway. Therefore, the light is unknown to the eye and nevertheless is delectable to vision.

Therefore, as rationality, which discerns the visible in the eye, is a distinguishing spirit, so it is an intellectual spirit, which in rationality understands, and it is a divine spirit, which illuminates the intellect. However, the distinguishing light of the soul in the eye, ear, tongue, nose, and in the nerve, which governs the sense of touch, is one light received in various organs variedly, in order, according to the variety of organs, to discern variedly the things which are of the sensible world. And the light itself is beginning, middle, and end of the senses. For the senses are only for the purpose of distinguishing the sensible and they are only from that spirit and are moved in no other. In it also all the senses live. Indeed, the life of vision is to see, the life of hearing to hear, and the more perfect this life is, the more discrete it is. Indeed, the vision which discerns the visible more perfectly is more perfect, and the same is the case for the hearing.

Therefore, life and perfection, joy and repose and whatever all the senses desire, lie in the distinguishing spirit, and from it they have everything that they have. Even if the organs lose in power and the life in them decreases in activity, it does not decrease in the distinguishing spirit, from which they receive the same life, when the fault or infirmity is removed.

In like manner, conceive the same about the intellect, which is the light of distinguishing rationality, and from it elevate yourself to God, who is the light of the intellect. And if you run thus through that which you have discovered in vision, you will discover how our God, blessed be He in eternity, is everything which is in everything which is, just as the distinguishing light in the senses and the intellectual in the rational, and that it is He Himself, from whom the creature has that which it is, from whom it has life and motion, and that all our cognition is in His

light, so that it is not we who know but rather He in us. And if we ascend to cognition of Him Himself, then although He is unknown to us, nevertheless we are moved in nothing other than in His light, which enters into our spirit, so that we advance to Him in His light. Therefore, as being is dependent on Him, so also is being known. Just as the being of color depends on corporeal light, so the cognition of color depends on this light, as we have already said above.

Therefore, we must attend to the fact that wonderful God created the light among His works. In its simplicity it excels all the other corporeal things, so that it is the middle between spiritual and corporeal nature, through which this corporeal world ascends, as it were, through its simplicity into the spiritual world. Indeed, it brings the forms into vision, so that the form of the sensible world ascends to rationality and the intellect, and through the intellect attains its end in God. Thus the world itself also enters into being, so that this corporeal world is what it is through participation in light; and one regards the corporeal things in the corporeal genus as more perfect, the more they participate in light, as we experience it stepwise with the elements. Also a creature that has the spirit of life is the more perfect, the more it participates in the light of life. Thus a creature of intellectual life is the more perfect, the greater its participation is in the intellectual light of life.

However, God cannot be participated in and He is the infinite light, which shines in everything, just as the distinguishing light in the senses. However, the varied termination of this light, in which nothing can participate and which cannot be mixed, shows varied creatures, just as the termination of corporeal light shows various colors in the diaphanous, although the light itself remains unmixable.

III.

I do not doubt, Brother, that you are able to advance from these explanations in clarity and to apprehend that as color is only visible through the medium of light, that is to say, as color can ascend only in the light of its origin to repose and to its end, so our intellectual nature can only attain the felicity of repose in the light of its intellectual origin. And vision does not discern, but rather the distinguishing spirit in it discerns; thus also in our intellect, which is illuminated by the divine light of its origin according to its aptitude to let it enter, we shall not know or live through ourselves in intellectual life, but rather God will live in us in infinite life. And this is that eternal felicity, where the eternal intellectual life, that excels every concept of living creatures in inexpressible joy, lives

in us in strictest unity, just as the distinguishing rationality lives in our most perfect senses and the intellect lives in the clearest rationality.

It is already apparent to us, that through the motion of the light of His grace, we are drawn to the unknown God, who cannot be detected otherwise than if He manifests Himself. And He wants to be sought. And He wants to give light to the seekers, without which they cannot seek Him. He wants to be sought, and He also wants to be apprehended, for He wants to reveal and manifest Himself to the seekers. Therefore, He is sought with the desire to be apprehended and He is sought theoretically, with the running leading the runner to the repose of motion, when He is sought with maximum desire. Hence, one proceeds correctly towards attaining wisdom, only if He is sought with maximum desire. And when He is sought thus, He is sought on the correct path, where without doubt He will be found through the manifestation of Himself. No other path is given us than this one and in all the teachings of the saints, who attained wisdom, no other is bequeathed to us.

Therefore, they all erred, the proud, the presumptuous, who regarded themselves as wise, who trusted in their own genius, who in ascending arrogance deemed themselves to be similar to the highest, who arrogated to themselves the knowledge of the gods; they closed off to themselves the path to wisdom, because they believed it to be no other than that which they measured with their own intellect; they passed away in their vanities, they embraced the tree of knowledge and did not apprehend the tree of life. Therefore, to the philosophers who did not honor God, there was no other end, than to perish in their vanity.

Those, however, who saw that one cannot attain wisdom and perennial intellectual life, unless it be given through the gift of grace, and that the goodness of the Almighty God is so great that He hears those who invoke His name, and they gain salvation, became humble, acknowledging that they are ignorant, and directed their life as the life of one desiring eternal wisdom. And that is the life of the virtuous, who proceed in the desire for the other life, which is commended by the saints.

There is no other tradition of the holy prophets and those who obtained the grace of divine light in this life, than that everyone who wishes to attain the intellectual life and immortal divine wisdom, first must believe that God exists and that He is the Giver of all goods; that one must live in fear of Him and advance in His love; that one must in all humility implore Him for immortal life and, so as to be worthy of attaining it, must embrace everything which is ordered to this immortal life in deepest devoutness and the most sincere worship.

Now you see, Brother, that not some virtue nor cult nor law nor instruction justifies us, so that we deserve to obtain this most excellent gift. But a virtuous life, observation of the commandments, sensible devotion, mortification of the flesh, contempt for the world, and all the rest of this kind accompany everyone who seeks correctly divine life and eternal wisdom. If they are not with him, then it is manifest that he is not on the path, but rather outside of it.

However, the indications that someone is not off the path but rather is on the path, we can obtain from the works which accompany those proceeding correctly. Whoever endeavors with the greatest desire to apprehend eternal wisdom places nothing before it in his love; takes care not to offend it; affirms that, in comparison to it, everything else is nothing; also regards everything else as nothing and spurns it. To please the loved wisdom he adapts his whole effort to it, knowing that he cannot please it if he clings to the other, corruptible prudence of the world or sensible delectation. Therefore, abandoning everything, he hastens freely in the fervor of his love. As the deer desires the font of water, so does such a soul desire God. Thus, we merit the incomparable thesaurus of glory not through works which we accomplish, but rather God loves who love Him; for He is charity and love and gives Himself to souls, so that they enjoy this best good in eternity.

Now you see, Brother, to what purpose you have come into this world, as we have already mentioned in the introduction, namely, in order to search for God. You see that *theos* means for the seekers, how one can seek Him on a certain path. If you walk on this, then it will be your path and it will be well known to you; you will delight in it on account of its loveliness and the fecundity of its fruits, which are found all around it. Therefore, exercise yourself by multiplying your action and theoretical ascension and you will find the pastures, which augment and strengthen you on your path, and which inflame you more from day to day in desire.

For our intellectual spirit has the power of fire in itself. For no other purpose is it sent by God to the earth than that it glow and grow into a flame. When it is excited by admiration, then it grows, just as if the wind entering into a fire excited its potential to actuality. If we apprehend the works of God, we marvel at eternal wisdom. And through the extrinsic wind, which proceeds from works and creatures of such varied powers and operations, we are incited so that our desire grows into love of the Creator and attains to the intuition of His wisdom, which has ordered everything wonderfully.

If we turn our view to the minimum grain of mustard seed and intuit its strength and power with the eye of the

intellect, then we find a vestige, which excites us in admiration of our God. For although its body is so small, nevertheless its power is without limit. In this granule is a large tree with leaves and little branches and many other seeds, in which similarly is the same power beyond all number. Thus I see in the intellect the power of the grain of the mustard seed; if it should be unfolded as actuality, this sensible world would not suffice thereto; not even ten or a thousand, indeed not even so many worlds as one could enumerate.

Who is not seized by admiration, when he reconsiders this, especially when one adds that the intellect of man embraces all the power of the grain of seed and apprehends this as true, and thus excels in its capacity of apprehension all that of the whole sensible world, and not only of this one, but rather of infinitely many worlds? And so our intellectual power embraces every corporeal and measurable nature.

What magnitude therefore is in our intellect! If, therefore, the merely punctual magnitude of the intellectual spirit embraces every possible sensible and corporeal magnitude with infinitely greater capacity of apprehension, how great then is the Lord! And how laudable is He, whose magnitude is infinitely more excellent than the magnitude of the intellect! And just because He is so great, everything is in comparison to Him nothing and can be in Him nothing other than God Himself. Blessed be He in eternity! You could likewise ascend through a similar ascent from the power of a millet seed, just as from the power of every vegetative and animal seed, and no seed has less power than the grain of mustard seed. And there are infinitely many such seeds. Oh how great is our God! He is the actuality of every potentiality, for He is the end of every potentiality; not only the potentiality which is contracted to a grain of mustard seed or millet seed or a grain of corn or to the seed of our father Adam or to others, and thus to infinity!

But because, in all these, immeasurable strength and power is contracted according to their genus, absolute potentiality, which is also infinite actuality, is in God without contraction. What man would not be astounded by the power of God, if he seeks thus? Who would not be inflamed to the highest ardor and fear and love for the Almighty? Who can observe the power of the minimum scintilla of fire without being filled with admiration for God beyond everything that can be said? If the power of a scintilla, insomuch as it is in actuality—for in order to be actual, the scintilla is obtained from potentiality by means of the motion and striking of iron against the flint—is so great, that it is in its power to resolve everything into its nature and to place all fire in potentiality into actuality, wheresoever it is in this world,

although there were infinitely many worlds, oh, how great is the power of our God, who is a fire that consumes fire! And if you turn yourself, Brother, to the nature and conditions of fire (there are twenty-four, as the highest contemplator of divine things, Dionysius, explains in the hierarchy of the angels), then you have a wonderful path for seeking and finding God. Look there and you will be astonished.

IV.

But if you search for another path to the wisdom of our Master, then take heed. For with the eye of the intellect you apprehend that in a small piece of wood, in this most minute stone, in a piece of ore or gold, in a grain of mustard seed or millet all the artificial corporeal forms are in potentiality. Indeed you doubt not that in each of them the circle, triangle, tetragon, sphere, cube, and whatsoever else geometry names is included; thereby also the forms of all animals, all fruits, all flowers, leaves, trees, and the similitude of all forms, which are in this world and could be in infinite worlds.

Therefore, if that one is already a great artist, who knows how to educe from a small piece of wood the face of a king or of a queen, an ant or a camel, how great then is the mastery which can form as actuality everything which is in all potentiality? Therefore, God, who is able to produce from the most minute piece of matter the similitude of all forms which can be in this world and in infinitely many worlds, is of admirable subtlety.

Still more wonderful, however, is the power and knowledge of Him who has created the grain of millet itself and has placed this strength in it. And truly stupendous is the mastery of that wisdom, which knows how to excite all possible forms in the grain of seed, not in accidental similitude, but rather in essential truth. Beyond all intellect, however, is the indescribable stupor over the fact that it not only knows how to excite living men from the stones, but rather also men from nothing, and to call into being that which is, as well as that which is not. And since it is certain that all created arts only attain something in something, i.e., some similitude, which is not without defect, namely, in something created—for example a statue in the material of iron, which is somehow similar to a man—who then is this master, who produces not a similitude with a defect, but rather the true essence without some material from which it is brought into being?

On such paths we advance to God in vehement admiration, and then the spirit glows with desire to find Him completely securely, and it is consumed in loving longing, that ultimate salvation be shown it.

V.

Finally, there is still a way to search for God, in yourself, which is the ablation of terminations. For when an artist seeks the face of the king in a piece of wood, then he discards all other terminations besides the face itself. Through the concept of his faith he sees in the wood the face, which he seeks to make visibly present to the eye. For the face, which through faith exists in the present for the mind in the intellectual concept, is in the future for the eye.

If, therefore, you conceive that God is better than can be conceived, then you discard everything that is terminated or contracted. You discard the body, in that you say that God is not body, therefore, is not terminated through quantity, location, form, or situation. You discard the senses, which are also terminated: You do not see through a mountain, nor into the hidden depths of the earth, nor in the clarity of the sun; for hearing and the other senses it is the same. Indeed, they all are terminated in potentiality and power. Therefore, they are not God. You discard the universal sense, fantasy and imagination, for they do not exceed corporeal nature. Indeed, the imagination does not attain the incorporeal. You discard rationality, for it frequently fails and does not attain everything. If you wish to know why this is a man, why that is a stone, you do not attain the rational ground in all the works of God. The power of rationality is slight; therefore, God is not rationality. You discard also the intellect, for the intellect itself, although it embraces everything, is terminated in its power. It is not able to attain perfectly the quiddity of a thing in its purity, and in everything which it attains, it sees that it were attainable in a more perfect mode. God is therefore also not intellect.

But if you search further, you find in yourself nothing similar to God, but rather you affirm that God stands above all this as cause, origin, and the light of life of your intellectual soul.

You will be happy to have found Him above everything which belongs to your interior, as a font of goodness, from which everything flows out to you which you have. You turn yourself to Him, from day to day you enter into Him more deeply, you abandon everything which is turned towards the outside, so that you are found on that path on which God is found, so that you are able to apprehend Him after this life in truth. This He would grant you and me; He, who gives Himself abundantly to those who love Him. Blessed be He in eternity. Amen.

—*translated by William F. Wertz, Jr.*