



## Monthly letter n°140 - October 2016

On October 19<sup>th</sup> 2016, at the *Lycée Henri Brisson* in Vierzon our Jurisdiction will take part in the “Georges Lerbet” conference organised by the *Erasmus* Council of Kadosh, on the subject:

**“The work of Georges Lerbet: a source of passage(s) between educational research and humanism”.**

Georges Lerbet (1936-2013), 33<sup>rd</sup>, a member of the “*Sources*” research lodge, wrote a book titled *Ignorance and Wisdom*<sup>1</sup> which is a reflexion on knowledge and its limits.

There, among other thinkers, our Brother calls in Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464).

This Moselle born theologian of the early Renaissance belonged to a century which like ours experienced a breakaway from the world before and a corresponding need to think differently about the newly opening world.

Giordano Bruno called him the “Divine Cusan”, thus claiming his philosophical heritage. Nicholas of Cusa developed a prodigious intellectual activity with humanist intentions.

In brief, he influenced Pico della Mirandola, Rabelais, foreshadowed Copernicus and Leibniz, postulated heliocentrism 150 years before Galileo and affirmed that the universe has no bounds... Giordano Bruno burned at the stake for having taken up his ideas.

His modernity is so great that after he was rediscovered by Ernest Cassirer and extolled by Alexandre Koyré, his works were put on the syllabus of the “*agrégation*” of philosophy in 2017.

A forerunner of the declaration of the rights of man, he suggested convening an international conference in his book *De pace fidei – (On the Peace of Faith)* (1454) after Constantinople was taken by the Turks, and he wrote *Cribratio Alchorani – (Sifting the Koran)* (1461), so great was his hope for religious peace.

The concepts he developed and which we still use, today more than ever, are those of men’s freedom and natural equality, of access to all sovereignties by way of elections, of learned ignorance, of the union of opposites, of God As Not-Other, of Christ as the Maximum Man, of a world without a centre or a circumference, to mention just the major ones.

*De Docta ignorantia – (On Learned Ignorance)* (1440) was his first work. He borrowed the title from Saint Augustine. This oxymoron denounces the illusion of a self-contained knowledge, the produce of mere bookish erudition, which prevents man from reaching true Knowledge. He upholds the principle of the utmost power of ignorance.

In *De idiota, De Sapientia, De Mente – (Dialogues of the idiot, on Wisdom, on the Mind)* (1450) Nicholas of Cusa’s character is the idiot, meaning etymologically the simpleton, the ignorant, or the layman by opposition to the technician, or in the Middle ages, the lay person by opposition to the cleric.

A simple craftsman, a maker of wooden spoons, the idiot is like Socrates who knows that he knows nothing and like Maimonides for whom sapience can only be discovered through ignorance.

Thus the idiot, unique and unknowable, personifies learned ignorance, in all humility.

In every respect, the idiot is set against professional scientists, experts who are experts only. All through those three dialogues they are represented by the “Great Orator”<sup>2</sup> who proves, in his pride, to be a learned ignorant.

In him, back to back, ignorance and intellect are associated, the one ignoring the other and both being unaware of its own ignorance.

As to the Secret Master, and that means each member of the Jurisdiction, like the idiot in the philosophical meaning, he knows that he does not know, just as he does not know that he knows.

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Translated by JPGNT

<sup>1</sup> *L’ignorance et la sagesse* - Editions Vega, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Any confusion with an existing masonic office would be anachronistic