Learning in the Face of Uncertainty and Division

Nicholas of Cusa's Contributions to Intellectual Culture in his Times and for Today

Interdisciplinary LECTIO Symposium

8–9 October 2026, Leuven

On the occasion of the publication of *Brill's Companion to Nicholas of Cusa*

Description

The symposium combines academic lectures, interdisciplinary responses, and artistic-philosophical reflection. The program opens with the inaugural Jos Decorte Lecture, dedicated to the memory of the late theologian and mentor whose intellectual generosity shaped generations of students and scholars.

Thursday 8 October 2026

19:00 – Welcome Reception

19:45 – Introduction (Inigo Bocken, KU Leuven, Radboud University)

This inaugural Jos Decorte Lecture reflects on the relation between intellectual formation, community, tradition, and the future of shared learning in an increasingly fragmented cultural landscape.

20:00 – The Jos Decorte Lecture (Stephan van Erp, KU Leuven)

From Opposites to Catholicity: Thinking God with Nicholas of Cusa and Roman Guardini

Romano Guardini claims in his essay Der Gegensatz (1925) that God cannot be thought of as the unity of opposites, and that his theory of the living concrete differs radically from the notion of coincidentia oppositorum, which features in the work of Nicholas of Cusa. Guardini's concern is that this notion will lead to pantheism, for which Cusa was criticized in his time. Cusa, however, argues that although opposites coincide in God, God is beyond the coincidence of opposites. Then, the difference between the two thinkers will be brought in relation with their views of catholicity. Cusa defined catholicity in terms of concord and consensus, while Guardini defined it as the totality of existence in the living concrete. Which view is more helpful for Catholic thought and practice today?

Friday 9 October 2026

09:30 – Coffee and Registration

10:00 – Opening Remarks (Andrea Robiglio, KU Leuven)

Session I — Learning in Times of Transition

10:15 – Philosophy and Learning in Nicholas of Cusa (Isabelle Mandrella, University of Munich)

What does Cusanus want us to learn when we engage in philosophy? He answers this question by considering the human capacity for knowledge—distinguishing between the discursive-rational and the intellectual faculty, each of which yields a different kind of knowledge. In the rational realm, knowledge remains conjectural—that is, mutable and incomplete. It requires supplementation by intellectual knowledge of the Absolute One—the origin and measure of all things—which man is able to discover within himself, as there is no external object corresponding to it. Yet how can such knowledge be attained—and can it be taught and learned at all? These questions will be addressed through an examination of *De mente* and Cusa's engagement with Aristotle.

Response: Paolo Colizzi (Milano) / Maarten Hoenen (Basel)

11.30-11.45: Coffee break

Session II — Visuality, Imagination and Transformation

11:45 – ***Learning by Being Seen: Vision, Perspective and Transformation in Nicholas of Cusa*** (Inigo Bocken, KU Leuven, Radboud University)

For Nicholas of Cusa, learning begins when the observer discovers that he is himself being seen. De visione Dei turns vision into an exercise in perspective: the gaze that addresses me also addresses others from positions I cannot occupy. Learning thus becomes a transformation of one's own standpoint, opening a space in which different perspectives can encounter one another without being reduced to one.

Response: Gert den Hartogh (PThU) / Marco Böhlandt (München)

13:00 Lunch

Session III — Learning Through Difference

14:30 – ***Learning to Transcend*** (Arne Moritz, University of Vienna)

The lecture takes as its starting point Cusanus's concept of the transcending of knowledge as the core of the doctrine of docta ignorantia. It interprets this transcending not as a shifting of the object of knowledge, but as a holistic exploration of the foundation of this object through a whole that is only partially grasped in prior distinctions. The way in which Cusanus conceives of teaching and learning on this basis—particularly in contexts of absolute claims to truth and contexts of division—is examined as an alternative to modern norms.

Response: Andrea Robiglio (KU Leuven) / Pasquale Arfé (Accademia Vivarium Novum, Frascati)

15:45 – Coffee Break

16:15 – Concluding Panel Discussion

Can We Still Learn Together? Nicholas of Cusa and the Future of Intellectual Culture

Discussion leader: Gert den Hartogh (Titus Brandsma Institute)

17.15 – Reception

This symposium is funded by: KU Leuven LECTIO Institute; Dondeyne Foundation; Titus Brandsma Institute, Radboud University; University of Vienna, Institute of Philosophy, Professorship for Ethics in School and Society