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(Minneapolis, 1986)

**NICHOLAS OF CUSA'S DE PACE
FIDEI AND CRIBRATIO ALKORANI:
TRANSLATION AND ANALYSIS**

BY JASPER HOPKINS

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PREFACE

Present-day European and American societies have witnessed a revival of interest in Islamic religion and culture. Much of this interest has been stimulated by the course of political events and the ambience of mutual trade relations; but much of it also results from a prevailing spirit of religious ecumenism. It is a truism, perhaps, that just as the study of other cultures helps us better to understand our own, so also a proper assesment of the claims made by the religions of these other cultures requires a knowledge of the religions' historical origins. Since World War II scholarly study has produced a large corpus of monographs, translations, and critical editions that better focus the origins of Islam and better document the historical response to Islam on the part of medieval European Judaism and Christianity. Within the European Christian tradition two such responses were Nicholas of Cusa's *De Pace Fidei* and *Cribratio Alkorani*, both written shortly after the middle of the fifteenth century, within eight years or so of each other. In the former work Cusa's attitude toward Islam is fairly amiable; in the latter it is quite polemical. Yet, in both works he endeavors to exhibit the religious and theological common ground that he alleges to exist between Christians and Muslims, between the Gospel and the Koran.

In this present book I make available in English translation the foregoing Cusan texts—one a dialogue, the other a treatise.¹ Although these translations are intended for all students of fifteenth-century European thought, the works themselves will not be readily accessible to those who have little or no theological background. For such a background is presupposed by Nicholas both when he discourses upon the doctrine of the Trinity and when he extensively cites Scripture in support of his comparisons between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In my brief analysis of the translations I do not aim to expound Nicholas's theology; nor do I attempt, in the notes to the translations, to reproduce the many details that are available to any reader who takes in hand the critical editions of the Latin texts.² Instead, I deal only with selected significant aspects of Nicholas's two texts; and I add an appendix that emends certain passages in the critical editions. The English translations themselves provide a close rendering of Nicholas's Latin; and they read smoothly, in spite of an occasional clumsiness that seems mandated by accuracy and the desire to avoid paraphrase.³

The English translations of *De Pace Fidei* and *Cribratio Alkorani* were made, with permission, from the following editions:

Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia: Vol. VII: *De Pace Fidei*. Edited by Ramond Klibansky and Hildebrand Bascour. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1970.

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Preface

I am grateful to Ludwig Hagemann, editor of *Cribratio Alkorani*, and to Manfred Meiner, the publisher thereof, for permission to translate from the Heidelberg Academy edition (1986) of this work. The translation of *De Pace Fidei* was also made from the Heidelberg Academy edition (1970), which likewise was published by Felix Meiner Verlag.⁴ Some of the work of translating was done during the fall and spring of 1987-88, while I was, first, a visiting professor at the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich and, thereafter, a visiting researcher at the Istituto di Storia della Filosofia of the University of Padua. I herewith express appreciation to Professors Werner Beierwaltes and Giovanni Santinello, distinguished Cusanus scholars, for the cordial welcome that each accorded to me.

I wish also to acknowledge Dr. Julian Plante, Director of the Hill Memorial Monastic Library at St. John's University (Collegeville, Minnesota) as well as his colleagues and staff, including (and especially) Marianne Hansen. Over the years—as also recently—I have had occasion to make use of the Library's valuable microfilm collection and have met with a spirit of helpfulness and collegiality upon each visit.

Finally, I must not fail to pay tribute to the diligent staff at the Wilson Library of the University of Minnesota—especially the reference librarians, the personnel in the Department of Inter-library Loans, and Dr. Joan Fagerlie of Collection Development.

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INTRODUCTION

I. *DE PACE FIDEI*

The title "*De Pace Fidei*" must be understood in a broad sense, for the literal English translation "On the Peace of Faith" is scarcely illuminating. If anything, it conveys the mistaken impression that the dialogue deals with the topic of how inner peace of mind and soul can follow upon the act of religious commitment. But although Nicholas of Cusa undoubtedly does teach, in accordance with I John 3:23-24 and Colossians 3:15, that the act of faith can bring both assurance of salvation and peace of heart, this teaching does not constitute the subject-matter of *De Pace Fidei*. Indeed, the dialogue deals not with inner peacefulness but with outward harmony within a common system of doctrine—doctrinal agreement, that is, on the part of the adherents of all the diverse religions. The key to translating the title is found at the end of sections XVI, XVIII, and XIX of the text, where Nicholas tacitly clarifies his title in the course of completing his extended argumentation. Thus, at the very end of section XIX, the section that concludes the entire dialogue, he speaks of the establishment of "a single faith and . . . a perpetual peace with respect thereto, so that the Creator of all, who is blessed forever, may be praised in peace." This conclusion coheres with the speech in section III wherein the Word of God declares that "the Lord has had mercy upon His people and is agreeable that henceforth all the diverse religions be harmoniously reduced, by the common consent of all men, unto one inviolable [religion]."¹ The purpose of the dialogue, then, is to explain how there can be a single system-of-faith that can command the common assent of all men; and the English translation of the Latin title should clearly reflect this purpose. Accordingly, the meaning of the title "*De Pace Fidei*" is "On Peaceful Unity of Faith." And were a more expansive but equally appropriate rendering called for, it would be "On Peaceful Agreement in One Faith."²

Nicholas was mindful of the Gospel's commandment to pursue peace³ and of its reminder that God is a God not of dissension but of peace.⁴ Indeed, one of the symbolizing names by which the Christian community addresses the Divine Being is the name "God of Peace."⁵ Yet, in Nicholas's own lifetime peace among the nations and tolerance among the religions continued to be precluded by political wars and religious

persecutions. In particular, Nicholas laments, at the very outset of *De Pace Fidei*, the destruction and cruelty that attended the fall of Constantinople to the Turkish Muslim Muhammad II in May, 1453. Nicholas was familiar with Constantinople from his sojourn there between September 24 and November 27 of 1437 as a member of the delegation sent forth by the minority party of the Council of Basel. The delegates' mission, approved by Pope Eugene IV, was that of helping to effect reunification of the Western and the Eastern branches of Christianity—a reunification that was brought about only nominally on July 6, 1439 by the ratifying prelates at the Council of Florence.⁶

While in Constantinople Nicholas witnessed more closely, and examined more carefully, the response of the Eastern Church to the tenets of the Muslim religion—a religion that was being disseminated, in part, by force of arms. As the preface to *Cribratio Alkorani* indicates, Nicholas, during his stay, probed the meaning of the Koran in consultation not only with brothers of the Minorite Order who were living at the Church of the Holy Cross but also with other brothers affiliated with the Convent of St. Dominicus, located in Pera, on the periphery of the metropolis. Even earlier, while at Basel, he had engaged in discussion with John of Segovia († 1458), who in addition to being a Spanish delegate to the Council of Basel was also a professor of theology at the University of Salamanca. John, through his contact with the Moors, had been forced to confront the claims of the Koran; and his association with Nicholas served to stimulate the latter's own interest in the Muslim religion.

Tracing Nicholas's interest in Islam even further backwards, we see that long before he took the oath of the Council of Basel on February 29, 1432 and far prior to his having met, in Basel, John of Segovia, Nicholas was influenced by the works of another Spaniard—Ramon Lull (1232-1316) of Majorca, proselytizer of Muslims. This influence was mediated through Heimeric de Campo, one of Nicholas's teachers at the University of Cologne in 1425.⁷ Lull's *Liber de Gentile et Tribus Sapientibus* led Nicholas to take seriously the possibility of a universal religion—a religion such that Hindu, Jew, Christian, Muslim, and others could all alike be led to embrace its credos. Nonetheless, Nicholas's argument is far from being similar to Lull's. What Nicholas shared with Lull is the quest of *religio una in rituum varietate*: one religion in a variety of rites.⁸ That is, like Lull, Nicholas became persuaded that behind the various practices such as circumcising, baptizing, and fasting—

and behind the various ceremonies such as purifying, dedicating, and sacrificing—there is to be found a common core of doctrine that constitutes a religion for all nations. In *De Pace Fidei* VI (16:15-16) he uses the phrase “*una . . . religio et cultus*,” together with the verb “*praesupponitur*”: “there is one religion and worship, which is presupposed in all the diversity of the rites.” On Nicholas's view, such presupposing is not always explicit. Thus, he can write, in IX (26): “This is that Trinity which . . . is posited by the Arabs, although most of them are not aware of the fact that they confess a trinity.” And, in the dialogue, Nicholas puts into the mouth of a Jew the following speech that cites the Prophet Isaiah:

A certain prophet, disclosing the Trinity to us very briefly, said that God had asked how He Himself who bestowed on others the fecundity of begetting was able to be sterile. And although Jews shun the [doctrine of] the Trinity because they have considered the Trinity to be a plurality, nonetheless once it is understood that [the Trinity] is most simple fecundity, [the Jews] will very gladly give assent.⁹

So Nicholas takes as his task the showing to Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and others that their religions either presuppose or implicitly contain the truth of all the essential doctrines of Christianity. Accordingly, in his attempt at evidencing how Christianity constitutes a religion to which all others are “reducible,” he was not attenuating Christianity by repudiating the dogmas of *creatio ex nihilo*, *deus ut tres personae in una substantia*, and *Verbum caro factum est*. Rather, he was claiming that these very dogmas are essential to the non-Christian religions. Indeed, he went as far as to write: “All [men who believe that the Kingdom of Heaven exists] confess that some holy men in their own respective religious sect have obtained happiness. Therefore, everyone's faith—[being a faith] which confesses that holy men are present within the eternal glory—presupposes that Christ died and ascended into Heaven.”¹⁰

Nicholas's fuller argument for the foregoing conclusion is intriguing, though unconvincing. Yet, his claim that Judaism and Islam are implicitly committed to believing that Christ rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven discloses another feature that he shares with Lull: viz., an intense optimism regarding the power of the human mind and the possibility of consensus: “Since truth is one and since it cannot fail to be grasped by every free intellect, all the diverse religions will be led unto one orthodox faith.”¹¹ Nicholas sees his task as presenting to the intellect of Christians

and non-Christians alike the truth about the one orthodox faith—a faith, he presumes, to which men will freely assent once it is made clear to them by a teacher. As he writes in another context: “We are all so influenced by the truth that, knowing it to be discoverable everywhere, we desire to have that teacher who will place it before the eyes of our mind.”¹² Nicholas’s confidence in the power of the intellect is at the same time a confidence in God’s general grace: because of the assistance rendered by God the Holy Spirit the intellect cannot fail to recognize religious truth.¹³ Accordingly, the intellect’s apprehending of such truth does not constitute a meritorious work—a work that justifies the human being in the sight of God. Indeed, Nicholas clearly taught, well before Luther, that faith alone justifies a man *coram deo*. This fact is evident from section XVI of the present dialogue: “*Tartar*: Do you mean, then, that that [Abrahamic] faith alone provides justification for receiving eternal life? *Paul*: I do.”¹⁴ Just as Nicholas here used the expression “*sola fides*,” so he earlier spoke of *pura gratia*, associating it with *credere deo*:

Paul: . . . if anyone is to be worthy of obtaining [fulfillment of] the promise that was made on the basis of grace alone [*pura gratia*], then he will have to believe God. Therefore, he is justified on the basis of the following fact: viz., that he obtains [fulfillment of] the promise solely because he believes God and expects God’s word to be kept.¹⁵

And yet, just as Nicholas’s display of tolerance for other religions did not keep him from insisting that these other religions assent to the doctrines of Christ’s incarnation and resurrection, so his use of “*sola fides*” and “*pura gratia*” did not prevent him from emphasizing that faith must be informed with love and that faith without works is faith that is dead. That is, without works faith will not save—not because works are essential for salvation but because without works faith is shown not to be genuine faith: “If you believe God, then you keep His commandments. For how is it that you believe God to be God if you are not concerned to carry out what He commands?”¹⁶ Thus, although faith alone saves, this faith must, invariably, be accompanied by good works. In this regard Nicholas’s position has a somewhat different tone from Luther’s. Yet, it does coincide with Luther’s in the following way: if anyone claimed that the act of religious belief were itself a meritorious work that justified a man before God, Nicholas, as also Luther, would not concur.

Of what tenets, then, does the one, universal religion consist?—the religion that will be common to Hindu, Jew, Christian, Muslim, and

others. To begin with, and most fundamentally of all, there will be a common belief in one God. Since Jews, Christians, and Muslims already believe in a unitary deity, Nicholas aims primarily to show that idolaters and polytheists have reason to endorse monotheism. His argument does not purport to be a proof. Rather, it is informal reasoning based upon what he takes to be common ground with polytheists: viz., that by nature they too, like all men, desire wisdom: “For just as every existing thing desires whatever it cannot exist without, so the intellectual life [desires] Wisdom.”¹⁷ And in loving wisdom and pursuing it, men presuppose its existence and will readily agree to its being a unicity—agree, that is, once they are taught that a plurality of wisdoms would have to derive from a unitary Wisdom, since “oneness is prior to all plurality.”¹⁸ Nicholas’s reasoning further presumes that men of all religions believe the world and everything in it to be created, and to be created wisely. Therefore, they may be led to believe that Wisdom precedes created things and is that through which and by which all things were created. Since Wisdom is prior to whatever is created, it is eternal; and as eternal, it is simple and incomposite (for whatever is a composite owes its inception to its composing parts and therefore is not eternal). Moreover, there can be only one eternal thing. For any eternal thing will be prior to all plurality and composition; and, as was already stated, prior to all plurality and composition there can be only oneness.

Nicholas reinforces his line of thought in a way that recalls Anselm of Canterbury’s reasoning in *Monologion* 4. Those who worship a plurality of gods, says Nicholas, presuppose that in these gods a common deity is present—a deity which the different gods share. “For just as there are no white things if whiteness does not exist, so if the deity does not exist, there are no gods.”¹⁹ This deity will itself be the sole Beginning of all things. The continued veneration of holy intercessors and saints is not incompatible with a universal religion, assures Nicholas, provided worship of the sole Sovereign God is not diminished. Even the practice of adoring idols—a practice Nicholas judges to stem from ignorance—would be tolerable for the sake of peaceful unity, provided the adoration were intended as a means to adoring the unitary Deity.²⁰

But how could the various religions all agree in their conception of the one Deity? Christians, for example, conceive of God as a trinity of persons, whereas Jews and Muslims do not. Indeed, Jews and Muslims accuse Christians of introducing plurality into the notion of the indivisi-

ble deity. Nicholas's reply to the foregoing question seems to draw upon Meister Eckhart's distinction between God and the Godhead, for the reply distinguishes between God as He is in relation to His creation and God as He is in Himself: "As Creator, God is trine and one; as Infinite, He is neither trine nor one nor any of those things that can be spoken of. For the names that are ascribed to God are taken from creatures, since in Himself God is ineffable and beyond all that can be named or spoken of."²¹ In *De Visione Dei* 13 Nicholas expresses much the same thought when he observes that the Infinite is infinitely above everything finite and is altogether absolute and unconditioned. And just as nothing can be added to the Infinite, so "the Infinite cannot be contracted to anything so that it becomes other than the Infinite. Infinite goodness is not goodness but is Infinity. Infinite quantity is not quantity but is Infinity. And so on."²² God qua Infinite is in every respect undifferentiated, so that He is not one thing rather than another. Thus, in Himself He is not Goodness rather than not-Goodness; instead, He transcends the very distinction between goodness and not-goodness. Similarly, He is not Trinity in contrast to not-Trinity; nor is He Oneness in contradistinction to not-Oneness. That is, He is not any of these things insofar as they can be conceived or spoken of by any finite mind. Even when the human mind conceives of Him as Creator, there does not follow that, in Himself, He is Creator in some respect that could be imagined by us. "Creator" is but a metaphorical term that we use to symbolize Him—who-is-ineffable, Him who is nonsymbolically conceivable only to Himself.

So in calling God "Creator" or "Wisdom" or in calling Him "trine" or "one," we are not thereby signifying Him in His infinite Self-Sameness, teaches Nicholas. We are simply representing Him in those symbolical ways which, because they indicate perfections, are the least inappropriate for purposes of worship. This view of Nicholas's regarding the divine names provides the basis for a harmony between those who maintain that God is a trinity and those who deny it. For "in the manner in which Arabs and Jews deny the Trinity, assuredly it ought to be denied by all. But in the manner in which the truth of the Trinity is explained above, of necessity it will be embraced by all."²³

How, then, was the doctrine of the Trinity "explained above" by Nicholas? Primarily, his explanation set out from a distinction between a plurality of essences and a plurality of relationships: in God the trinity is not such that there are three essences but is only such that one and the

same being is related to itself in three distinct ways. Nicholas distinguishes between essence and relationship when he asserts that in God the three relationships are not *numerically* three. For a numerical distinction, he says, is an essential distinction, since (for example) the number two can be posited independently of the number three, or the number three can be posited independently of the number two. But in the case of God the three persons, or relations, cannot be posited independently of one another: If the Father is posited, then so is the Son, since the Father is Father only in relationship to the Son.²⁴ Similarly, if the Son is posited, then so is the Father, since the Son is Son only of the Father. Likewise, if the Holy Spirit is posited, then so too are the Father and the Son, because the Holy Spirit is Spirit only of the Father and of the Son and would not exist without them, even as they would not exist without Him. Nicholas, however—here as oftentimes elsewhere²⁵—refers to the relationships in God by symbols other than "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit." Indeed, he here prefers the symbolic names "Oneness," "Equality of Oneness," and "Union of both Oneness and Equality of Oneness."²⁶ And he reasons (1) that Oneness, Equality, and Union cannot exist independently of one another and (2) that if Oneness is posited, then so too is Equality—just as, likewise, if both Oneness and Equality are posited, then so too is Union. Thus, the three are not essentially distinct and do not constitute a numerical trinity or a numerical plurality. In short, God—though triune in accordance with Nicholas's symbolizing conception of Him as Creator—is not a composite.

Although the clearest medieval formulation of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is to be found not in Nicholas of Cusa's writings but in those of Anselm of Canterbury,²⁷ nevertheless Nicholas's formulation is indeed orthodox. However, two differences between Anselm's explication and Nicholas's are especially noteworthy. First of all, Anselm, unlike Nicholas, does not regard a numerical distinction as being an essential distinction. Accordingly, he views the trinity of persons, or of relations, in God as numerically three: *tres personae in una essentia*. Secondly, Nicholas, unlike Anselm, infers that in Himself God is not a trinity, not even a nonnumerical trinity.²⁸ Nicholas elicits this conclusion from his starting point advanced in *De Docta Ignorantia* but repeated in *De Pace Fidei* and throughout his writings: viz., that there is no comparative relation of the finite to the Infinite.²⁹ In accordance with this starting point Nicholas maintains that even our conception of God as one or

as being is a conception that, necessarily, is infinitely distant from disclosing to us the God who infinitely transcends all humanly conceivable being and oneness. In other words, Nicholas's starting point of *nulla proportio finiti ad infinitum* has as its direct consequence the view that God is absolutely undifferentiated, that in Him *omnia opposita coincidunt*.

Having now "shown" that agreement among the religions is possible with regard to the oneness and the trinity of God, Nicholas goes on to discuss the doctrine of the Incarnation. At the end of *De Pace Fidei* X the Frenchman refers to this doctrine as "the greatest contradiction." And the Persian reinforces the point by asking how it would be possible for the Creator to become a creature, the Infinite to become finite, the Eternal to become temporal. Nicholas's response reasserts the orthodox conception of the Incarnation: the Incarnate Word of God would have both a human nature and a divine nature, neither one of which would pass over into the other, so that the uncreated, infinite, and eternal divine nature would not become the created, finite, and temporal human nature. What Nicholas attempts to explain is how there could be an indissoluble union of the two natures in a single (divine) person. He argues, through the figure of St. Peter, that such a union is possible only if it is a maximal union:

Peter: If there were so great a union of a lower nature to the divine [nature] that [the union] could not be greater, then [the lower nature] would also be united to the divine nature in one person. For as long as the lower nature were not elevated into a personal and hypostatic oneness with the higher [nature, the union] could be greater.³⁰

And he thinks that the Arabs, and others, can be led to affirm that the wonders worked by Christ were worked not by human power but by the power of the divine nature, to which the human nature was personally united. For even if the Arabs were to assert that Jesus worked miracles by the power of His human nature, they would have to maintain that His human nature had this power only because it was assumed into a maximal union with the divine nature.

Nicholas is not attempting to demonstrate, *de novo*, that Christ is the Incarnate God. Rather, he is attempting to guide the Arabs and others, on the basis of what they already believe or assume, unto a fuller belief that conforms to the essence of Christianity. Thus, he points out that the Arabs "say that Christ alone is the loftiest [man] both in this world and in the next, and that Christ alone is the Word of God."³¹ And he claims

that if brought to a keener understanding of what they are affirming, the Arabs would expressly agree that Christ is God-and-man, in the orthodox Christian sense. Similarly, the Jews, on the basis of what they already believe, can, in principle, be brought into agreement with Christians and Arabs. For, in principle, they can be led to see that the Old Testament refers prophetically to Christ and to His possession of the divine power and the divine nature. Nicholas concedes, however, that it will be more difficult to lead the Jews into a unity of faith than to lead the Arabs, since, unlike the Arabs, the Jews do not already expressly admit that Jesus is the loftiest among the prophets and the holy men.³²

Orthodox Jews do, nonetheless, profess together with Christians and Arabs a belief in resurrection from the dead—i.e., a belief that through resurrection dead men become immortal.³³ And perhaps they can be led from this belief, suggests Nicholas, unto faith in Christ. For they may be led to see that immortality is possible for human nature only because human nature adheres to the divine nature. So all who believe in immortality—all, including the Jews—are tacitly committed to believing that there is a union of human nature with the divine nature. And through what other man would this union be expected than through the Messiah? So faith in resurrection presupposes faith in the Messiah. And, it might be possible, thinks Nicholas, for the Jews to become convinced—through Old Testament prophecies, Jesus's earthly deeds, and the witness of the martyrs—that the Messiah whom they expect to come has already come in the person of Jesus.³⁴

Though Nicholas is more optimistic about winning over the Arabs than about winning over the Jews, to a common faith with Christians, he nonetheless deems the Old Testament implicitly to contain the truth of the Gospel, just as does also the Koran.³⁵ By appealing to the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Koran, and the *de facto* beliefs of other religions, Nicholas undertakes even more: viz., to urge universal assent to the following Christian doctrines: the virgin birth of Jesus, Jesus's real crucifixion and real death, Jesus's resurrection and ascension,³⁶ a Last Judgment with rewards and punishments, salvation by faith alone, and the sacramental efficacy of baptism and of the Eucharist. With regard to baptism Nicholas argues that it is an outward sign of faith in Christ, who washes away the guilt of previous sins.³⁷ But he supposes that Jews and Arabs will not find it hard to assent to this view, once they have been led explicitly to endorse the divinity of Christ and

the reliability of His teachings: "Baptismal washings occur, for religious devotion, both among the Hebrews and among the Arabs; [accordingly,] it will not be difficult for them to accept, for their profession of faith, the washing instituted by Christ."³⁸ As for the Eucharist, Nicholas does not waver in teaching that the bread and the wine are really transformed into the body and the blood of Christ. Yet, although he does not regard participation in this sacrament as necessary for salvation, participation is nonetheless essential, since the sacrament was instituted by Christ. Participating in the sacrament is therefore a sign of both faith and obedience. Nicholas makes allowance for regional differences of administration of the sacramental elements. And he recognizes that various religions other than Christianity will tend to construe the Eucharist as a superstitious desecration. But he attempts to explain the true meaning of the sacrament, which befigures, he says, the fact that by grace believers in Christ obtain, through faith, the nourishment of eternal life.

The long argument of *De Pace Fidei* concludes by declaring that where conformity in matters such as fastings, prayers, and ceremonies cannot be obtained, each nation should determine its own procedures, provided faith and peace are maintained.³⁹ Earlier, Nicholas included among these permissible variations the practice of circumcision, as long as circumcision is not taken to substitute for baptism.⁴⁰ In the last analysis, then, Nicholas did not attenuate the teachings of Christianity in his quest of a single faith which all nations could accept. Rather, he called upon other nations to accept with Christians the core doctrines indicated above. For this core is compatible, he declared, with a variety of rites.⁴¹

De Pace Fidei was written just after the middle of September, 1453⁴²—written with the fall of Constantinople (May 29, 1453) still shockingly in mind. Nicholas aimed to help foster an intellectual atmosphere in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims could lay aside their contentiousness and could together worship the one and only God with tolerance for one another's respective rite. Obviously, he was overly optimistic in supposing that such agreement could be reached. And from today's viewpoint he may well seem to have been parochial in supposing that the tenets of his "universal religion" could remain so distinctively Christian and still gain wide acceptance. Perhaps *De Pace Fidei* is best viewed not as an argument but as an invitation—as a work, that is, which invites the leaders of all religions to identify what they regard as the essence of their respective faith and to see whether they think that

Christianity and the faiths other than their own can be reduced to that one essence. In any event, Nicholas took the bold, Eckhartianlike initiative of maintaining that God qua Infinite is not a trinity. This theological step immediately allowed the possibility of a wider harmony than had previously existed among the religions—allowed it, that is, provided the "greatest contradiction," viz., the doctrine of Incarnation, could successfully be mediated. Nicholas's attempt to overcome this presumed contradiction was highly instructive. In all fairness, Nicholas should not be criticized as being myopic but should rather be commended for his efforts to peer beyond the perimeters of Western Christendom and to "proselytize" in a way that, *prima facie*, did not affront the intellect of those whom he addressed—a way that emphasized the inherence of truth in religions other than Christianity. Though *De Pace Fidei* is primarily an invitation issued by Nicholas to the religious communities of his day, it is nonetheless also an argument-sketch. For, clearly, Nicholas intended only to trace in broad terms the line of reasoning that was being developed. He could not hope to exhibit—nor did he endeavor to do so—the entire rationale that persuaded him of the real mystical presence of Christ in the Eucharist or that putatively supported the claim that baptism removes the guilt of original sin and of antecedent personal sins. In sketching his reasoning, Nicholas envisioned not an audience of skeptics but rather an audience of religious believers who would be moved by appeal to arguments that are *ex analogia*, *ad hominem*, *ex concessio*, or *ex revelatione*. Not to be overlooked is the fact that in his extended argument-sketch he frequently used the verb "*praesupponere*," thereby indicating that the other religions had already presupposed—sometimes unawaredly—the very dogmas that he himself was propounding. Thus, he was not concerned to overthrow these religions. Instead, his aim was *manuducere*: to guide them—not as being antichrists but as being potential allies—unto more explicit truth. Though the word "*manuductio*" is not used in *De Pace Fidei*, the concept is operative there throughout. This concept reoccurs in *Cribratio Alkorani*, accompanied by repeated use of the word itself. But this time Nicholas's tone is more severe; this time his guidance is combined with denunciation and with the reproofing epithet "antichrists."⁴³ Correspondingly, his argument is much more detailed than is a sketch.

II. CRIBRATIO ALKORANI

Nicholas's polemical tone in *Cribratio Alkorani* (*A Scrutiny of the Koran*) was not unprecedented. Indeed, it derived from those principal writers who influenced this work: viz., John of Damascus, Peter the Venerable, Ricoldo of Montecroce, Dionysius the Carthusian, John of Torquemada, and the unknown authors of the four works *Chronica Mendosa*, *Generatio Mahumeti*, *Doctrina Mahumeti*, and *Rescriptum Christiani*.⁴⁴ If anything, Nicholas was less strident than these predecessors, though he did nonetheless resort to open invective, even adopting some of his predecessors' denigrating attacks. Yet, he did not repeat accusations if he knew them to be false. Thus, he did not accuse Muslims of teaching that according to the Koran Muhammad is greater than Christ. Nor did he charge Muslims with maintaining that the Koran displaces the Gospel. Nor did he proceed like Ricoldo, who, in the words of Norman Daniel, "was too concerned with what are really only debating points. So much of what he wrote did nothing to illumine Islam for his contemporaries."⁴⁵ To be sure, a few of Nicholas's criticisms of Muhammad and the Koran seem to be quibbling and needlessly captious—as when, following Ricoldo, he (wrongly) judged to be a truism the Muslim profession "There is no god but God"⁴⁶ or when he (wrongfully) accused the Koran of inconsistently maintaining both that there is one God and that there are two Gods, one of whom is supreme over the other.⁴⁷ Equally quibbling appears to be the invidious claim, in *Cribratio Alkorani* III, 5, that in places the Koran contains statements implying that God is Muhammad's servant. And yet, all things considered, nothing justifies Daniel's verdict that "Cusa's *Cribratio* is rambling and repetitive, like Ricoldo's *Disputatio*. Here was a fresh mind working over old themes with varying success."⁴⁸ For *Cribratio Alkorani* is neither rambling nor strikingly repetitive; and it accomplishes significantly more than working over old themes.

Nicholas admitted that his treatise was not as highly organized as, ideally, it should be.⁴⁹ Asking his readers' indulgence, he attributed much of his problem to the disorganization of the Koran itself, upon which he was commenting. To his credit, *Cribratio Alkorani* is sufficiently well arranged: it is divided into three parts, each of which is subdivided into chapters having precise chapter-titles; and each of these chapters deals concisely with the specified topic. Moreover, Nicholas presents a coher-

ent line-of-reasoning that advances his overall position—a position which unfolds only as he proceeds but which nonetheless is clearly identifiable. Finally, Nicholas's use of the Koran—his selections from it, his comparison of its passages with one another, his accommodating construals of some of its teachings, as well as his occasional attacks—shows him to have been a programmatic interpreter who was anything but a quibbler and a rambler.

Where Nicholas erred he erred for reasons other than a lack of interpretive skill or an absence of critical reasoning ability. In particular, his not knowing Arabic meant that he was completely dependent upon Robert of Ketton's Latin translation of the Koran.⁵⁰ Robert's was the first translation of the entire Koran into Latin. Commissioned by Peter, Abbot of Cluny, it was completed during the summer of 1143 and came to be widely disseminated in the West. Nicholas first laid hands on it while a participant at the Council of Basel. And later he procured, for his own library at Kues, a manuscript⁵¹ that contained a copy of this so-called *Lex Sarracenorum*. Scholars today agree that the translation is too paraphrastic, though many of them also share Ludwig Hagemann's verdict:

Trotz der vielen Unzulänglichkeiten, Fehler und Mängel, die die erste lateinische Kur'anübersetzung zweifellos in sich birgt, gilt es doch festzuhalten, dass in ihr die wesentlichen Glaubensinhalte des Kur'ans authentisch interpretiert und wiedergegeben sind.⁵²

The fact remains, however, that at times Nicholas polemicized faultily as the result of his having followed some unrecognized mistake in the translation at his disposal. A prime example—one mentioned by almost all present-day commentators on Cusa's treatise—is found in *Cribratio Alkorani* I, 19, where Nicholas alludes to verse 45 of Surah 3 of the Koran. Following Ketton's translation, he construes this verse as proclaiming that Christ is *vir bonus et optimus et facies omnium gentium in hoc futuroque saeculo*.⁵³ He proceeds to use this text in partial support of his claim that adherents of the Koran are committed to affirming that Christ is the Son of God, "the one by whom the perfect will be judged."

A further example—this one more subtle and usually unmentioned by present-day commentators⁵⁴—is Nicholas's recourse to Ketton's translation of Surah 3:46, where the Latin has the word "*sapiens*," an erroneous rendering. In *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 17 (147:9-11) Nicholas appeals to this surah: "The book [of the Koran] mentions that [Christ] is also

wise [*sapiens*]. And it gives to Him the same name as it gives to God, whom it very frequently affirms to be incomprehensible and wise." Thus taking his lead from Ketton's translation, Nicholas infers: "Therefore, if [the Koran] confesses that Christ is absolutely wise, just as is also God the Father, then it will not be the case that the Wisdom of the Father-Creator is one Wisdom and the Wisdom of Christ another." This inference of Nicholas's has no real basis in the Koran—even aside from his illicitly switching from speaking of Christ as *sapiens* to speaking of Him as *absolute sapiens*.

As a final example of how Nicholas is misled by Ketton's translation, we may look at *Cribratio Alkorani* I, 8 (45:4-7), where he draws upon Surah 2:253, a part of which he quotes, in translation, as: "*Omnium prophetarum alio super alium per me sublimato et eorum quibusdam cum deo locutis Christo Mariae filio animam nostram proprie conferentes vim atque virtutem prae ceteris praebuimus.*"⁵⁵ But there is nothing in the Arabic that corresponds to "*prae ceteris*," an expression that, like others elsewhere, serves to induce him to view the Koran as elevating Christ above all other prophets.

The mistakes made by Nicholas because of Ketton's mistranslations should not prevent us from noticing the independent mistakes also made by him. These arise from an ignorance of historical fact, from special pleading, and from inattentiveness to details. In *Cribratio Alkorani* III, 18 (224:1) he presumes that in his own day there was a calif of Bagdad—something not the case. Moreover, Siegfried Raeder is correct when he concludes: "Die Hypothese vom Nestorianismus Mohammeds, auf der die Interpretation des Kusaners beruht, ist heute wissenschaftlich nicht mehr vertretbar, wenigstens nicht in dieser Form."⁵⁶ That is, Nicholas was mistaken in believing that Muhammad was initially converted from idolatry to Nestorian Christianity. Or again, in *Cribratio Alkorani* III, 12 (198:14-17) Nicholas asserts, against Muhammad, that the father of Abraham was not an idolater—a assertion, however, that runs counter to Joshua 24:2. At times an argument of Nicholas's seems unfair. In III, 18 (226), for example, his reasoning assumes that the Koran, in its present form, is arranged chronologically—even though in the second prologue to the entire treatise he explicitly acknowledges that it is not.⁵⁷ Similarly, in II, 12 (118) he points to the Koran's doctrine that only God will be the Judge in the future age. But he claims, as well, that the Koran also teaches that Christ will be the Judge, since Surah

4:159 speaks of Christ as a witness in the future age—a witness on behalf of believers. Hastening to identify the role of witness with the role of judge, he concludes (through special pleading) that the Koran tacitly contains the doctrine that Christ is God.

On the other hand, some criticisms made of Nicholas and his reasoning are themselves not fair. Let us consider his statement in I, 3 (28:13-15): "from both the Gospel and the Koran we know that Muhammad cannot prevail but [that] Christ will conquer in the end" It is true that no such statement is contained in the Koran. But it is unfair to maintain, in this regard, that Nicholas is simply misrepresenting the Koran. For he means to indicate only that the Koran tacitly implies that Christ will triumph over Muhammad. And so, he adds the words: "as will become evident later on [in this present writing]."⁵⁸ Accordingly, should Nicholas warrant criticism, it would not be for blatantly false ascription but rather for subsequent tenuous inference and for questionable exegesis. One must consider in a similar manner his statement in *De Pace Fidei* XII (39:14-16): "The Arabs say that Christ alone is the loftiest [man] both in this world and in the next, and that Christ alone is the Word of God."⁵⁹ Reacting to this statement, Heribert Busse writes: "Dass Christus der grösste Prophet sei, steht wörtlich, soweit ich sehen kann, nicht im Koran."⁶⁰ Of course, Busse is right. But he moves too swiftly to dismiss Nicholas's point, which, in the process, he oversimplifies. We have already seen that Nicholas, following Ketton's translation, does believe the Koran expressly to teach that Christ is the greatest prophet, for he believes the Koran to affirm that Christ is the Countenance of all nations and is that prophet who is provided with greater power than are all others. So when the Koran says that "Jesus, the son of Mary, is God's messenger and His spirit and the Word sent to Mary from Heaven,"⁶¹ it is understandable that Nicholas would infer: "Since He is the Word of God sent from Heaven (i.e., sent from the God of Heaven), then assuredly He is of the same nature as God, who sends [Him]. For since the Divine Word is the Word of God, we cannot say that it is something other than the most simple God." In *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 12 (117) he offers additional support for his view that the Koran exalts Jesus most highly. Appealing to Surah 4:159, he interprets it as tacitly affirming that Jesus is divine:

The Koran asserts that all men of the laws—whether [followers] of the Old Testament, the New Testament, or the law of the Arabs—will truly believe in Christ

before the Day of Judgment. Now, the entire endeavor of the Koran is to persuade men that they ought to believe in God alone. And because [the Koran] here asserts that all men of the laws will truly believe in Christ, assuredly it does not disassociate Christ from the divinity and does not make Him [out to be] someone other [than God]; rather, it tacitly affirms Him to be of the divine nature.

This time Nicholas appears to be on stronger ground, because here the Koran speaks of the men as “believing in Christ.” In any event, when analysts of *Cribratio Alkorani* reject Nicholas’s line of reasoning—as oftentimes they must—they should at least present it fully and fairly. Hagemann accuses Nicholas of misunderstanding the Koran when in *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 11 (114:4-5) Nicholas states that according to the Koran the Gospel is not less authoritative than is it itself.⁶² But together with his accusation Hagemann should refer the reader to Surah 5:46-48 and to Nicholas’s reasoning in *Cribratio Alkorani* I, 5. And he should be careful to construe Nicholas’s claim in the light of Nicholas’s attempt to understand the Koran *secundum piam interpretationem*.⁶³

One striking oversimplification—one that is, however, excusable—is Frederick Burgevin’s. “Let us . . . look,” says Burgevin, “at Cusanus’s contradictory statements about the purpose of the Koran”:⁶⁴

1. The real *purpose* of the entire Koran is to persuade men that Jesus is neither Messiah, nor Son of God, and that He was not crucified. [CA I, 3]

2. Yet, at the same time, he states that the Koran *intends* that one should follow Christ in preference to all others. [CA I, 8]

3. Again, the Koran avoids the use of the term “Son” (of God) simply because the primitive Arabs would not have been able to grasp the idea of spiritual filiation. And yet Cusanus contended that the author of the Koran identifies the term “Word” and “Wisdom” with the divine power of Christ. [CA II, 17]

4. Cusanus insists that the Koran has no intention of contradicting the Gospel, nor of affirming that Christ is any less than, or different from that Messiah who is foretold by the prophets, and revealed in the Gospel, namely, the Divine Son of God. Therefore, when the Koran speaks of the “Word” and the “Wisdom” it means the same as the Gospel when the latter speaks of Christ. The difference is *only* a matter of logomachy. [CA I, 13; I, 15; I, 17]

5. Nor does the Koran, when rightly understood, oppose the doctrine of the Trinity as set forth in the Gospel, nor its Christology. [CA II, 1; II, 5; III, 20]

Before dealing with Burgevin’s attack on the coherence of Nicholas’s reasoning, we must investigate the way in which Nicholas conceived of the Koran and its relationship to the Old and the New Testaments (as well as the way in which he viewed Muhammad and Abraham). For, on the surface, even in this regard some of Nicholas’s statements appear

inconsistent. So if Nicholas’s overall assessment of the Koran can be shown to be harmonious with his view of the Old and the New Testaments, then the rationale that he follows may help elucidate the passages cited by Burgevin regarding the Koran’s purpose. However, even if Nicholas’s view should prove to be consistent, this fact would not, *ipso facto*, guarantee its correctness.

Let it be said outright that Nicholas believed the Koran both to promulgate turpitude and to propound heresies, lies, and contradictions. His invective against the Koran was in many respects as caustic as his predecessors’; indeed, he tended to adopt the very same accusations that he found in his sources. According to these sources God is not the Koran’s author. The author may have been Muhammad himself, assisted by religious advisers, or may have been men other than Muhammad who composed or compiled the book either during Muhammad’s lifetime or after his death. One tradition names Satan as the revealer of the Koran—an accusation that Nicholas himself adduces in *Cribratio Alkorani* I, 1 (23). In any event, according to all these sources the final redaction was made after Muhammad’s lifetime. Among other things, it included the precepts collected by Muhammad from the Old and the New Testaments, and it was given the name “Koran,” or “collection of precepts.”⁶⁵ According to another tradition cited by Nicholas certain Jews, after Muhammad’s death, induced Ali, son of Abitalip—to whom Muhammad was said to have entrusted his collection—to make additions and deletions, so that the final version of the precepts differed importantly from the actual version transmitted by Muhammad.⁶⁶

Uncritically true to his sources, Nicholas denigrated Muhammad by terming him effeminate, lewd, and a lover of the world.⁶⁷ He denounced him for his polygamy,⁶⁸ his oath-breaking,⁶⁹ his lies about the Mosaic Testament and the Gospel,⁷⁰ his use of force,⁷¹ his blasphemy,⁷² and his self-glorification and hypocrisy.⁷³ Nicholas also accepted the opinion—common among Muslims in his day and still prevalent among them in ours—that Muhammad was unable to read and write.⁷⁴ Muslims reasoned that because Muhammad was illiterate, the exceptionally beautiful style of the Koran was proof that the book was God’s work, not Muhammad’s.⁷⁵ Muhammad, they said—and the Koran itself bore them out—received his communication by successive stages from the archangel Gabriel over a period of some twenty years. In turn, he recited it to his followers, who memorized separate portions of it—from whose memo-

ries it was later committed to writing. Nicholas, for his part, showed no respect for this tradition. If Gabriel appeared to Muhammad, he noted, it was not the archangel but rather an emissary-of-Satan who, using the name "Gabriel," presented himself in the guise of an angel of light.⁷⁶ In all likelihood, he supposed, the Koran's admirable style was due to a talented compiler—possibly Muhammad himself—who took pains to make the work seem divine.⁷⁷ Nicholas even cavils about Muhammad's alleged illiteracy by arguing that it is incompatible with the text of Surah 73:1-4, where God is said to have commanded Muhammad to read the Koran even at night.⁷⁸

In painting the foregoing picture of Muhammad, Nicholas reproduced the image of Muhammad that had become virtually official within European and Byzantine Christianity. Both the Western and the Eastern Churches were scandalized by Muhammad's endorsement of polygamy and could see in it only an acceding to lust. Moreover, they were alarmed by the forceful spread of Islam, evidenced in the fall of Constantinople to the Muslim Turks and in the earlier capitulation of Spain to the Muslim Moors. It would not have been possible for Nicholas, making use of sources such as Ricoldo's *Contra Legem Sarracenorum*, Peter the Venerable's *Summa Totius Haeresis Sarracenorum*, Dionysius the Carthusian's *Contra Perfidiam Mahumeti*, and Pseudo-Al-Kindi's *Rescriptum Christiani*, to paint a favorable picture of the prophet Muhammad. By contrast with Nicholas's evaluation of the Prophet's life, many of today's scholars of Islam hasten to remind us that during Muhammad's time polygamy was a common practice among Arabs, that it was condoned even by the Old Testament, and that the New Testament contains no specific injunction against it except in the case of bishops.⁷⁹ Amid this polygamous society Muhammad remained monogamous for over fifteen years. And his later marriages "were due partly to political reasons and partly to his concern for the wives of his companions who had fallen in battle . . . Pity and elementary concern prompted him in later years to take on wives who were neither beautiful nor rich, but mostly old widows. The wives of companions fallen in battle had to be looked after, and Muhammad married them in order to offer them shelter and care."⁸⁰ Nonetheless, his marriage to the youthful 'A'ishah was one of deep love and attraction.⁸¹ All in all, we must not forget that Muhammad was moved by a strong sense of social justice, that he did not use religion to accumulate personal wealth, that at the height of his

authority he did not exercise power autocratically, and that he never constrained, on pain of torture or confiscation of property, conquered Jews and Christians to adopt the worship of Islam.

Along with attacking Muhammad, Nicholas also inveighed against the Koran for its contradictions and blasphemies. Sometimes, he noted, Muhammad called Christians unbelievers because they ascribe to God a son, whereas at other times Muhammad numbered Christians among the saved.⁸² Moreover, Nicholas accused the Koran of inconsistently teaching both that Christ has already been judged by God and that He is yet to be judged by God at the future Day of Judgment.⁸³ And he repeated the frequently echoed criticism that, according to the Koran, the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, was the sister of Aaron and the daughter of Amram.⁸⁴ He was also bothered by the Koran's statement that Mary confirmed the words of God's book—a book that Nicholas identified as the Koran, in accordance with what he took to be the Muslim interpretation of the designated surah.⁸⁵ And he pointed to discrepancies that he found no way to harmonize: "How, then, will the following [claim in the Koran] stand up?: that by the command of God Gabriel foretold to the prophet [Daniel] the death of Christ and that after the lapse of the time that had been foretold by Gabriel, this same [angel] states that Christ did not die—[thereby] making both God and himself liars."⁸⁶ In *Cribratio Alkorani* III, 1 Nicholas recorded other perceived incoherences, which he assumed to be deliberate: "One who reads the Koran is bound to notice that while it preserves the faith that there is no god but God, it aims not to contradict anyone. And so, where it knew that there are dissensions, it varies its [statements] in such way that each [man]—no matter to what heresy or sect he belongs—will find something acceptable."⁸⁷

Nicholas saw the Koran as contradicting both itself and the previous Scriptures (the Old and the New Testaments).⁸⁸ Yet, he realized that the Koran repudiated inconstancy on God's part,⁸⁹ and so he drew the conclusion that God was not the Koran's author. Where he thought the Koran to be in conflict with the Gospel, he chose to disbelieve the former.⁹⁰ But wherever he could, he strove to interpret the Koran in such way that it did not conflict with the Gospel—and, more importantly, in such way that it did not conflict with itself.⁹¹ A prime instance of this strategy occurs in *Cribratio Alkorani* I, 16 (71), where he concludes:

Those who claim that in the Koran Muhammad often repeated these words (viz., that Christ called God his own Lord and the others' Lord) in order to show that Christ did not affirm that he was God (since he calls God his Lord) interpret the Koran wrongly. For to agree that Jesus is the Christ and that the Gospel is true [as does Muhammad] and to deny that Christ is the Son of God involves a contradiction.

Nicholas was concerned to construe the Koran, insofar as possible, as compatible with the Gospel and the Old Testament because such a construal is called for by his principal goal: viz., to find in the Koran the truth of the Gospel, in spite of the fact that Muhammad himself failed to comprehend much of the Gospel.⁹² In this respect Nicholas praised, not the Koran, but God Almighty, who willed that amid the Koran's contradictions and blasphemies "there also be inserted things in which the splendor of the Gospel was so contained as hidden that it would manifest itself to the wise if it were sought for with diligent effort."⁹³ These concealed truths shine forth "even beyond the intent of the [Koran's] author."⁹⁴ This is the rationale in accordance with which Nicholas could claim that the Koran tacitly affirms Christ to be of the divine nature,⁹⁵ while at the same time he acknowledged that it explicitly denies God to have a son.⁹⁶ For the Koran, according to Nicholas, teaches propositions from which it follows that Christ is divine. And these propositions it teaches openly—whether or not the Arabs are aware of the propositions' implications.⁹⁷

But Nicholas went further: on occasion, he sought to explain away certain perceived contradictions between the Koran and the Gospel—doing so not by suggesting that truth shines forth beyond the intent of the Koran's author but by apprehending, behind the surface phenomena, the "true intent" of the author. That is, in these instances he did not argue that in spite of Muhammad's lies and blasphemies God concealed in the Koran the truth of the Gospel—a truth which may have escaped even Muhammad's apprehension. Instead, he reasoned that Muhammad, in compiling or dictating the Koran, was himself the one who hid certain truths that he rightly apprehended. Two cases are especially striking: what the Koran says about Christ's death and what it states regarding Paradise. Why does the Koran deny that Christ died on the Cross? Why does it teach, instead, that He was caught up unto God's presence and that someone else who resembled Him was mistakenly crucified? Nicholas's response made use of the notion of *pia interpretatio*: the Koran, on a devout interpretation thereof (*secundum piam interpretationem*), "aimed

to hide from the Arabs [Christ's] lowly death and to affirm that He was still living and would come [again]."⁹⁸ It did so in order to magnify Christ in the minds of the uneducated Arabs, who would not have understood His shameful death as a glorification. According to Nicholas, then, the Koran aimed to exalt Christ,⁹⁹ and in order to do so, it represented Him as not having been crucified. In accordance with *pia interpretatio* Nicholas did not regard this representation as a vicious misrepresentation. Instead, he moved to put the best face on it: the Koran denies that the *Jews* crucified Christ, but it does not deny that Christ was crucified by Pontius Pilate;¹⁰⁰ and it agrees with Christianity that Christ is presently alive rather than dead.¹⁰¹

Nicholas's second striking example is found in *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 18-19 and concerns the Koran's notion of Paradise. More than against Muhammad's endorsement of polygamy, Nicholas railed against his depicting of Paradise as a realm of sensual pleasures. He contrasted this "licentious" picture with the Christian doctrine that in Paradise there will be no copulation but that men will be as are the angels of God.¹⁰² And he spoke of this future Kingdom of Heaven as a domain of intellectual joy and satisfaction. To be sure, Nicholas himself compared the believer's life in the future age to a perpetual banquet where the food would both satisfy and whet the appetite at one and the same time. But he made it clear that this illustration was symbolic of intellectual nourishment and desire.¹⁰³ In *Cribratio Alkorani* he made an "excuse" for Muhammad's having described Paradise in sensual terms—the same excusing explanation as was offered by various Muslims in his own day: unless Muhammad had used such examples, the uneducated Arabs would not have been moved by Muhammad's message; for having never experienced intellectual joys, they would not have found attractive the conception of Paradise as a place of supersensual delight.¹⁰⁴ By this edifying interpretation, this *pia interpretatio*,¹⁰⁵ Nicholas sought to render the Koran consistent with the Gospel. For, in the end, both books instruct men that God is a rewarder of believers, and both teach that the vision of God is the believer's due reward.¹⁰⁶

We are now in a position to recognize that by "*pia interpretatio*" Nicholas did not simply mean charitable construal, as some commentators on *Cribratio Alkorani* have suggested. For the notion of charitable construal does not cohere with *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 19 (154:8), where Nicholas speaks of *pia interpretatio* on the part of the adherents of the

Koran. Still, Nicholas meant something akin to charitable construal: viz., an interpretation that places the theologically and religiously most satisfactory construal upon a passage—as occurs, for example, when the wise among the Muslims interpret Muhammad's allusions to sensual pleasures in Paradise as a necessary accommodating of ignorance. Nicholas, in relating devout interpretation to the idea of accommodation, also related it to the concept of progressive disclosure:

Therefore, Muhammad hid from the Arabs the secrets of the Gospel, believing that in the future [these secrets] could become known by the wise—just as in its beginning period the Gospel, too, remained obscure and unknown to many but was made progressively more evident. And if this [procedure] had not been expedient, then Christ would not have spoken to the people in parables.¹⁰⁷

Nicholas's complex approach to the interpretation of the Koran may now be summarized: (1) Some incoherences and errors in the Koran cannot be mitigated; they show that God is not the author of this book. Nonetheless, in spite of these defects, God uses even the Koran to disclose Himself to the wise. (1a) This disclosure exceeds Muhammad's own intent. (1b) Sometimes, therefore, Muhammad denies a doctrine that he is really committed to by other, more central, statements that he makes elsewhere in the Koran. (2) Some of the Koran's self-contradictions, as well as some of its inconsistencies with both the Gospel and the Old Testament, are only apparent. They can be explained away by *pia interpretatio*. (2a) This latter notion includes the ideas of accommodation and progressive disclosure, although it is not reducible to these alone. For it also includes the requirement to view the Koran, insofar as reasonable, as seeking both to glorify God and to avoid unsteadfastness. (2b) The notion of *pia interpretatio* also allows the possibility that Muhammad himself intentionally introduced into the Koran concealed truths. These truths will be discerned by the wise but will not be detected—and if not detected, then not misrepresented—by the ignorant. (2c) If viewed *secundum piam interpretationem*, the Koran can be seen to approve the Gospel and not to detract from Christ.¹⁰⁸ But if viewed otherwise, the Koran appears (in certain instances) to deceive and to blaspheme.¹⁰⁹

If Nicholas is correct, then the Koran's apparent inconstancy and its use of deliberate concealment lend themselves to comparison with the role of inconsistency in a writer such as Moses Maimonides. In his *Guide for the Perplexed* Maimonides states that he has incorporated contradictions into this work in order to discourage from further reading of it

those who are unlearned in metaphysics. Maimonides did not want certain of his views—such as his view on the immortality of the soul—to be misunderstood or calumniated either within the Jewish community or without. And he presumed that the best way to avoid this result was simply not to allow all of his views to be detected with certainty by those who either were hostile to Judaism or were not deeply schooled in its theology. He was certain, however, that the learned would detect his real doctrines amid the (few) contradictions. So whereas Muhammad (on Nicholas of Cusa's comprehension of him) chose to accommodate his teachings to the unlearned, Maimonides opted against accommodation, on the grounds that not everyone “perplexed” could be rightly guided. In the cases of both Muhammad and Maimonides there is purported to be esoteric truth; and in both cases this truth is kept esoteric in order to avoid misapprehension. But whereas Muhammad was addressing the uneducated, Maimonides was writing for the schooled. Correspondingly, the two approaches differ.

We are now in a position to evaluate Burgevin's charge that Nicholas contradicts himself in his statements about the Koran's aim. We can see almost immediately that Burgevin has oversimplified and that this oversimplification results in his misidentifying Nicholas's position as incoherent. Let us examine only a part of Burgevin's complaint, since no wider examination will be necessary in order to illustrate the oversimplification and since this limited examination will not itself be an oversimplification of Burgevin's own position. According to Burgevin, then, Nicholas teaches (a) that the Koran aims to persuade men that Jesus is not the Son of God, (b) that the Koran aims for men to follow Christ in preference to all others, and (c) that the Koran does not aim to deny that Christ is the Son of God. Against Burgevin's charge of incoherence the following reminders can be adduced: When Nicholas states *b*, he is indicating that the Koran prefers Christ above all other *prophets*, as even a superficial reading of *Cribratio Alkorani* I, 8 will evidence. And this claim is consistent with statement *a*. But statement *c*—as Nicholas means it—is also consistent with statement *a*. For in *c* Nicholas is engaged in *pia interpretatio*, as is evident not only from *Cribratio Alkorani* I, 17 (74) but also from a cognate passage in *Cribratio Alkorani* I, 7 (44):

But suppose we admit—as followers of the Koran claim ([a claim] whose denial all the wise and zealous believe . . .)—that the goal and intent of the book of the

Koran is not only not to detract from God the Creator or from Christ or from God's prophets and envoys or from the divine books of the Testament, the Psalter, and the Gospel, but also to give glory to God the Creator, to praise and to bear witness to Christ (the son of the Virgin Mary) above all the prophets, and to confirm and to approve of the Testament and the Gospel. [If so,] then when one reads the Koran with this understanding, assuredly some fruit can be elicited [from it].¹¹⁰

One of the fruitful teachings that Nicholas elicits from the Koran is that Jesus is the Son of God—a truth that shines forth, he says, even beyond Muhammad's own intent in writing the Koran. Because of Nicholas's notion of double intent (i.e., Muhammad's intent and the Koran's "intent beyond Muhammad's intent") and because of his notion of devout interpretation, he is not contradicting himself. Nor does his distinction between the two intents collapse. Nor is such talk about the Koran's "intent beyond Muhammad's intent" either philosophically or theologically meaningless. Indeed, as we have seen, such discourse involves talking about what Muhammad's statements logically and theologically commit him to, even though Muhammad himself did not realize that he was thus committed. Nicholas regarded many of these commitments as compatible with the Gospel and as so central that they overrode Muhammad's explicit criticisms of the Gospel. Moreover, Nicholas saw the hand of God as at work in the Koran. For the Koran's "intent beyond Muhammad's intent" is really God's intent in making use of the Koran. Thus, Nicholas could write: "God Almighty willed that amid all these filthy and vain things [in the Koran], and things such as are abominable to the wise even among the Arabs, there also be inserted things in which the splendor of the Gospel was so contained as hidden that it would manifest itself to the wise if it were sought for with diligent effort."¹¹¹ Indeed, given the expenditure of diligent effort, "there will be no difficulty in finding, in the Koran, the truth of the Gospel, although Muhammad himself was very far removed from a true understanding of the Gospel."¹¹² Finally, even apart from any recourse to a doctrine of double intent, Nicholas reminds us of the following: The Koran does not conclude merely that it is impossible for God to have a son; rather, it concludes that God cannot have a son who is another God. And with this conclusion, and the aim that points to it, Christians do not disagree.¹¹³

Though Burgevin's accusations do not hold up, Siegfried Raeder's reproach will still stand: "Dass Christus Gottes Sohn sei, von gleicher

Natur wie Gott-Vater, dass er gekreuzigt worden und auferstanden sei, enthält der Koran gewiss nicht, auch nicht auf verborgene Art."¹¹⁴ Where Nicholas went wrong was not in contradicting himself but in proposing tendentious interpretations of the Koran in accordance with his plan to exhibit the message of the Gospel therein. In most cases these tendentious construals are overinterpretations, some of which are due to his dependence upon Ketton's mistranslations but all of which are due to his zealous optimism as a Renaissance humanist. For it was qua humanist that he believed in the possibility of *religio una in rituum varietate*. And this belief was as operative in *Cribratio Alkorani* as it had been in *De Pace Fidei*.¹¹⁵

Though our attention has been focused upon Nicholas's assessment of the Koran, we must not neglect his view of the Old Testament. Obviously, as a Christian, he believed the Old Testament to be the authoritative word of God, and he regarded its revealed truths as perfectly compatible with the truths revealed in the New Testament. Christ, he affirmed, came to fulfill the Old Testament law, not to destroy it. Accordingly, the law of Moses and the commands of the Gospel "are not two laws but are one divine law."¹¹⁶ Moreover, the Mosaic law "did not deviate from the law¹¹⁷ of Abraham but rather explicated those things that were commanded with regard to Abraham—in particular, [the command] that he walk before the Lord, in order to be perfect."¹¹⁸ So Abraham, Moses, and Jesus all taught the Gospel and all understood that a man must walk before God by faith. In observing the ordinances of the New Testament, the Christian is likewise observing the spirit of the law of Abraham.¹¹⁹ This point is true, thought Nicholas, because the law of Abraham is contained in the Gospel,¹²⁰ for both the Abrahamic rite and the Christian rite teach that a believer's faith is counted as righteousness.¹²¹ Indeed, claimed Nicholas, "believers in God are descendants of Abraham insofar as they are justified by faith."¹²² And, in turn, Abraham is said to have been a Christian,¹²³ because in his spirit he foresaw the coming of the Messiah¹²⁴ and hoped that through the Messiah he would attain unto immortality.¹²⁵ In *Cribratio Alkorani* Nicholas could compatibly have repeated what in *De Pace Fidei* XII (41) he had already asserted regarding the Jews: "In their Scriptures they have all these [teachings] regarding Christ; but they follow the literal meaning and refuse to understand [the true prophetic meaning]."

Nicholas recognized that the Jews, being dispersed, were not a mil-

itant force¹²⁶ and that, in any event, they were not prone to proselytize or to persecute, as in his day the Arabs were doing. In *De Pace Fidei*, therefore, he did not consider the Jews to be a threat to religious and political peace. In *Cribratio Alkorani* he taught that Arabs, too, insofar as they are true believers in God, are spiritual descendants of Isaac, in addition to being of the biological ancestry of Ismael. The divine covenant, he asserted uncompromisingly, passed down through Isaac, not through Ismael, though both were descendants of Abraham. The law of the Gospel, regarded by Nicholas as the perfection of the law of Abraham,¹²⁷ was also supposed by him to link Christianity more closely to Judaism than to Islam. Yet, he added, Muhammad taught that Christians are closer friends to Muslims than are Jews.¹²⁸ In a way, *Cribratio Alkorani* may be viewed as Nicholas's attempt to build a better conceptual bridge between Christian and Muslim cultures so that both cultures might profit thereby. For as he had already argued in *De Pace Fidei*, there is no intellectual or religious reason why Jews and Christians and Muslims cannot be equally close.

At times in *Cribratio Alkorani* Nicholas chided Muhammad for having surrounded himself with a handful of Jews who led him astray.¹²⁹ And he opprobriously labelled these Jews perverse and blasphemous and cunning. Yet, this was not his attitude toward the Jews generally. He seems to have agreed with Anselm of Canterbury that the sin of having put Christ to death is the greatest conceivable evil because it is a sin against the person of God.¹³⁰ Yet, no doubt, he also approved of Anselm's further judgment that "a sin done knowingly and a sin done in ignorance are so different from each other that the evil which these men could never have done knowingly, because of its enormity, is venial because it was done in ignorance."¹³¹ With Nicholas of Cusa there is no talk of the weight of infinite guilt having befallen the Jews—a guilt for which they must suffer throughout the future.

Most likely completed in 1461, *Cribratio Alkorani* remains a testimony to Nicholas's Christian humanist ideals. For Renaissance humanism was significantly more than a revival of interest in classical Greek and Latin literature, more than a systematic attempt to rehabilitate the Latin language by making its style more gracious and less filled with Scholastic jargon. It was also much more than a championing of rhetoric and of the *ars dictaminis* or a prizing of texts and a fascination with textual criticism. Indeed, it was even more than an encyclopedic studying of *omnes*

scientiae, together with a renewed appreciation of *totus homo*. For it was also an invitation to *rapprochement*, whether intellectual, religious, or political. And such *rapprochement* was thought to be possible only because truth was assumed to be attainable by those who diligently pursued it. Nicholas was optimistic about the possibility of identifying a common truth and a common faith. To be sure, his spirit of optimism impelled him toward exegetical exuberance and special pleading. But at least he exuberantly pled for peaceful unity of religious belief and doggedly struggled to find a way to exhibit its possibility.

ABBREVIATIONS

- CA** *Cribratio Alkorani* [Vol. VIII (edited by Ludwig Hagemann) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1986)].
- DI** *De Docta Ignorantia* [Latin-German edition: *Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues in deutscher Übersetzung*, published by F. Meiner Verlag. Book I (Vol. 264a), edited and translated by Paul Wilpert; 3rd edition with minor improvements by Hans G. Senger, 1979. Book II (Vol. 264b), edited and translated by Paul Wilpert; 2nd edition with minor improvements by Hans G. Senger, 1977. Book III (Vol. 264c); Latin text edited by Raymond Klibansky; introduction and translation by Hans G. Senger, 1977].
- DP** *De Possesi* [Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 3rd edition, 1986)].
- DVD** *De Visione Dei* [Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 1985 and 1988)].
- M** *Monologion* [by Anselm of Canterbury. Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *A New, Interpretive Translation of St. Anselm's Monologion and Proslogion* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 1986)].
- MFCG** *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft*, edited by Rudolf Haubst. A continuing series published in Mainz, Germany by Matthias-Grünewald Verlag.
- NA** *De Li Non Aliud* [Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-other: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Li Non Aliud* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 3rd edition, 1987)].
- P** *Proslogion* [by Anselm of Canterbury; see citation under "M" above].
- PF** *De Pace Fidei* [Vol. VII (edited by Raymond Klibansky and Hildebrand Bascour) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1970)].
- S** Schmitt, F. S. [Schmitt edition of *Sancti Anselm Opera Omnia* as reprinted in Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt by F. Frommann Verlag, 1968; e.g., 'S I, 237:7' indicates Vol. I, p. 237, line 7].
- TB** Theodor Bibliander, editor. *Machumetis Sarracenorum Principis Vita ac Doctrina*. Basel, 1543 (3 vols.); 2nd, revised edition published in Zurich in 1550.
- VS** *De Venatione Sapientiae* [Vol. XII (edited by Raymond Klibansky and Hans G. Senger) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1982)].

1. *PF* III (9:10-13).
2. Also fully appropriate is John P. Dolan's rendering of "*De Pace Fidei*" as "Concerning Concord in Religious Belief." See his *Unity and Reform: Selected Writings of Nicholas of Cusa* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962).
3. I Peter 3:11.
4. I Corinthians 14:33.
5. Romans 16:20. I Thessalonians 5:23. II Thessalonians 3:16. Regarding Nicholas's view of the names of God see *DI* I, 24 & 26.
6. The Council of Basel was transferred, by Pope Eugene IV, first to Ferrara, Italy (September, 1437) and then to Florence (January, 1439). The ratification uniting the Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox churches was signed in Florence on July 6, 1439.
7. See Eusebio Colomer, *Nikolaus von Kues und Raimund Llull* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1961), pp. 39-46 and 119. Colomer maintains that Nicholas was familiar with some of the works of Lull as early as 1428—i.e., even earlier than was Heimeric. Yet, Colomer endorses the view that Nicholas's knowledge was greatly enhanced, and his motivation greatly intensified, through Heimeric's teaching.
8. *De Pace Fidei* I (6:2-3). Nicholas uses the word "*ritus*" ("rite") to refer to rituals or sacraments such as baptism, circumcision, the Eucharist, the observance of Passover, the keeping of Ramadan, etc. [See *PF* XVI (especially 60:2-4) and XVIII (66).] However, sometimes when he uses "*ritus*" in the singular, he is referring, collectively, to the features that distinguish one set of religious practices from another. [See *PF* I (1). *CA* III, 8 (184:8-9); III, 16 (218:1-2).]
9. *PF* IX (25).
10. *PF* XIV (49:19-23).
11. *PF* III (8:10-12).
12. *NA* I (2:1-3).
13. See *PF* III (8:8), where Nicholas alludes to the assistance, or visitation, of the Holy Spirit.
14. *PF* XVI (58:1-2).
15. *PF* XVI (55:21-24).
16. *PF* XVI (59:2-3). James 2:17. Regarding faith informed by love see *PF* XVI (58:24-25).
17. *PF* VI (16:9-10). Nicholas's line of reasoning is also based upon the belief that some manner of religious conviction is as innate to all men as is the desire for happiness. See *PF* XIII (45).
18. *PF* IV (11:3).
19. *PF* VI (17:10-11).
20. *PF* VII (20:13-18).
21. *PF* VII (21:1-4). Cf. *DVD* 17.
22. *DVD* 13 (57:18-20 and 58:9-12).
23. *PF* IX (26:23-26).
24. Cf. Anselm of Canterbury, *De Processione Spiritus Sancti* 1.
25. E.g., *DI* I, 9. *DVD* 17.
26. *PF* VIII (22).
27. *De Processione Spiritus Sancti. De Incarnatione Verbi*.
28. Cf. *DVD* 17 (78:1-3).
29. *PF* I (5:11). For other references see *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, Vol. 7, p.
69. The date there cited for the sermon *Dies Sanctificatus* should be changed to 1440.

30. *PF* XII (38:1-4).
31. *PF* XII (39:14-16). Heribert Busse's observation is correct: "That Christ is the greatest prophet is not expressly contained in the Koran . . ." See p. 186 of *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft*, Vol. 16 (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald Verlag, 1984).
32. *PF* XII (41:11-13).
33. *PF* XIII (42). Cf. *PF* XV (53:6-8): "Therefore, the Jews do not believe that there is no eternal life and that they cannot attain it; otherwise, none of them would die for the Law."
34. *PF* XIII (43-45). Cf. *CA*, Prologue (9:1-3).
35. *CA* I, 6.
36. "Therefore, everyone's faith—[being a faith] which confesses that holy men are present within the eternal glory—presupposes that Christ died and ascended into Heaven." *PF* XIV (49:21-23).
37. *PF* XVII (62:1-2).
38. *PF* XVII (61:9-12).
39. *PF* XIX (67).
40. *PF* XVI (60).
41. See n. 8 above.
42. *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, Vol. 7, p. xii.
43. *CA* I, 6 (42:3).
44. See, below, notes 3, 7, 8, 9, and 11 of Notes to the Translation of *Cribratio Alkorani*: Salutation and Prologues. For a detailed discussion of Nicholas's sources see Ludwig Hagemann, *Der Kur'an in Verständnis und Kritik bei Nikolaus von Kues. Ein Beitrag zur Erhellung islamisch-christlicher Geschichte* (Frankfurt, W. Germany: Josef Knecht, 1976), pp. 15-68. Also see p. 194 of the present book. It lists the works contained in Nicholas's mss. 107 and 108—works which furnished much of the basis for his preparation of *CA*.
45. Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1960), p. 67.
46. *CA* III, 2 (165).
47. *CA* III, 4.
48. Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, op. cit., pp. 277-278. Nicholas does, however, praise Ricoldo's work more than the works of others. See *CA*, Prologue (4:3-5).
49. *CA*, Second Prologue (16).
50. See, below, n. 2 of Notes to the Translation of *Cribratio Alkorani*: Salutation and Prologues.
51. Codex Cusanus 108.
52. "In spite of the many insufficiencies, mistakes, and defects which the first Latin translation of the Koran undoubtedly contains, it is nonetheless valid to maintain that therein the Koran's essential tenets of faith are authentically interpreted and reproduced." Ludwig Hagemann, *Der Kur'an in Verständnis und Kritik bei Nikolaus von Kues*, op. cit., p. 30.
53. That is, in accordance with the Koran's utterance Muslims are obliged to agree

that "Christ is a good man and the best man and the Countenance of all nations in both this and the future age."

54. This example is, however, mentioned by Gustav Hölscher in the notes to his German translation and by Ludwig Hagemann in his edition of the Latin text.

55. "Of all the prophets—the one of them having been elevated by me above the other, and certain of them having spoken with God—we have provided strength and power to Christ, the son of Mary, more than to the others, and we have especially conferred upon him our soul."

56. Siegfried Raeder, "Der Christus des Korans in der Sicht des Nikolaus von Kues," pp. 71-93 of *Toleranz und Absolutheitsanspruch* [Heft 6 of *Christentum und Islam*], edited by Willi Höpfner (Brekum, W. Germany: Breklumer Verlag, 1975). The quotation is from p. 88: "The hypothesis of Muhammad's Nestorianism—[the hypothesis] on which Cusa's interpretation is based—is today no longer scholarly defensible, at least not in this form."

57. *CA*, Second Prologue (16).

58. See, below, n. 16 of Notes to the Translation of *Cribratio Alkorani*: Book One.

59. See also *CA* I, 8 (45) and I, 9 (52:3-4).

60. Heribert Busse in the discussion that follows Rudolph Haubst's "Die Wege der christologischen manuductio," *MFCG* 16 (1984), p. 186: "That Christ is the greatest prophet is not contained literally in the Koran, as far as I can tell."

61. Quoted from *CA* I, 12 (59:1-2). See Surah 4:171.

62. *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, Vol. 8, edited by Ludwig Hagemann (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1986), p. 237, n. 118.

63. A brief discussion of the notion of *pia interpretatio* will follow below.

Also note Nicholas's view: The Koran "does not contradict any of the prophets but rather endorses them and corroborates the books transmitted to the prophets by God (viz., the Testament of Moses, the Psalter of David, and the Gospel transmitted by Jesus Christ, the son of the Virgin Mary). And [the book of the Koran] concludes that all who believe the aforesaid [tenets] and who observe the law written down in their own books of law will be saved from Hell." *CA* I, 2 (26:9-14).

64. Frederick Burgevin, *Cribratio Alchorani: Nicholas Cusanus's Criticism of the Koran in the Light of His Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Vantage Press, 1969), pp. 30-31.

65. *CA* I, 1 (21-22).

66. *CA*, Second Prologue (11). Nicholas found this tradition recorded in the *Rescriptum Christiani*. See, below, n. 3 of Notes to the Translation of *Cribratio Alkorani*: Salutation and Prologues.

67. *CA* I, 7 (44:11-12).

68. *CA* III, 5 (177).

69. *CA* II, 19 (155).

70. *CA* III, 3 (168:3-4).

71. *CA* III, 3 (170).

72. *CA* II, 19 (156:1); III, 16 (218:2-4).

73. *CA* III, 8.

74. *CA* III, 5 (178:9-11); I, 4 (29:3-4).

75. *CA* I, 7 (43).

76. *CA* I, 1 (23). II Corinthians 11:14.

77. *CA*, Second Prologue (16). Nicholas concedes the possibility that the style was Muhammad's own, God-given style of recital. *CA* I, 7 (43).

78. *CA* III, 5 (178:9-11). Here Nicholas takes Ketton's word "*lege*" to mean *read* (rather than *recite*). There is no conclusive scholarly verdict on whether or not the Arabic word "*ummi*" in Surah 7:158 really means *illiterate*. But "illiterate" has become the established rendering.

Nicholas's quibbling is comparable to someone's arguing: "You, Nicholas, state in the Second Prologue to *CA* that 'Muhammad seems to have been unwilling to write (*scribere*) anything against [the doctrines of] the most holy trinity . . . , even though in I, 4 you deny that Muhammad was able to write. Thus, you contradict yourself."

79. The injunction applies to bishops and deacons. I Timothy 3:2; 3:12.

80. Caesar Farah, *Islam: Beliefs and Observances* (New York: Barron's, 1987, 4th edition), p. 69. See also p. 38.

81. Farah, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

82. *CA* III, 2 (163).

83. *CA* I, 9 (52:17-19).

84. *CA* I, 4 (32). Cf. Caesar Farah, *Islam: Beliefs and Observances, op. cit.*, p. 87: "The inconclusive manner in which these narratives survive in the Qur'an, moreover, often in vague and sometimes in erroneous confusion, for example where Muhammad mistakes Miriam, Moses' sister for Mary, Jesus' mother, suggests that he derived his knowledge of these Biblical accounts and personalities either from uninformed sources or from informants, perhaps Monophysite Christians, whose views of their religion did not comport with the orthodox version of the same. The motive, nevertheless, clearly shows through his narration of these accounts: to illustrate more forcefully the main theme of God's great design for man, namely, to reward the righteous and punish the wicked."

85. *CA* I, 4 (33). Surah 66:12.

86. *CA* II, 13 (122:11-14).

87. *CA* III, 1 (159:4-7).

88. *CA* I, 7 (44:8-10). Cf. Caesar Farah, *op. cit.*, p. 81: "Perhaps one reason for the differing conceptions of the Qur'an's background lies in the seeming contradictions to the untrained eye. The orthodox theologians had insisted that the duty of the faithful was to accept it literally and not to question the tenor or meaning of the revelations. In the twenty-three years of Muhammad's prophethood, revelations were received as the occasion merited. Chronology was not the factor, and what appeared out of focus at first was usually set in perspective by further revelation at a later date. Many of the revelations were recorded in the Prophet's lifetime, often under his own supervision, albeit the final recension of the Qur'an was made after his death. Henceforth, the only avenue left for further clarification was exegesis. While the wording of the verses was important, Muhammad stressed content instead. Indeed, it has been alleged that he himself often determined the order of verses during prayer sessions, relayed later by his followers and immediate companions. Western scholars who point to the role of exegesis as an indication of incomplete wording often neglect to mention that it resulted more often from lexical and philological discrepancies than from confused wording."

Also note p. 82: "We have . . . revelations recognizing the two pagan deities, al-'Uzza and al-Lat as the daughters of Allah; we have also revelations rescinding the same; yet both types are preserved in the Qur'an. To Muhammad there was no contradiction here because if Allah is absolute and arbitrary, why should there be any restraint on what He commands and forbids? Allah may vary His ordinances at pleasure, prescribing one set of laws for the Jews, another for the Christians, and still another for Muslims."

89. *CA I*, 7 (43:14-16).

90. *CA II*, 13 (122:19-20); *I*, 6 (42:5-7).

91. *CA II*, 12 (116:4-7).

92. *CA Second Prologue* (16).

93. *CA II*, 19 (158:4-8).

94. *CA I*, 6 (42).

95. *CA II*, 12 (117:7-9).

96. *CA I*, 9 (49 and 52:3-4). Cf. Nicholas's earlier statement in *PF IX* (26:19-21):

"And this is that Trinity . . . which is posited by the Arabs, although most of them are not aware of the fact that they confess a trinity."

97. "Nevertheless, because [the Koran] feared that unbelievers would not be able to attain unto the spiritual divine nature of the Word of God, it quite prudently considered that to these unschooled and unlearned [men], (to whom it was necessary to speak as to those who by means of such sensible things detect nothing concerning intelligible things) there ought to be said, negatively, that Christ, the son of Mary, was not the Son of God; for the son of Mary was a corporeal and visible man Nevertheless, [the Koran] openly affirmed that Christ had divine power-and-might . . ." *CA I*, 17 (74:4-12).

98. *CA II*, 13 (124:3-5). Earlier, in *CA I*, 7 (44:1-7), where Nicholas was not engaging in devout interpretation, he called into doubt the Koran's aim of magnifying Christ.

99. In another context cf. *CA I*, 14 (63:14-15): "This surah ought to be understood in such way that through it [the Koran] intends to give glory to God and not to take away praise from Christ."

100. *CA II*, 14 (129).

101. *CA II*, 13 (121:4-5).

102. Mark 12:25.

103. *DI III*, 12 (259). Cf. *DVD* 16 (74).

104. *CA II*, 18 (150:11-13). Cf. *PF* 15 (51).

105. *CA II*, 19 (154:8).

106. *CA II*, 18 (151:1-3; 152:1-3).

107. *CA II*, 12 (120:6-11).

108. *CA II*, 12 (116:4-6). *I*, 6 (40:1-3).

109. *CA I*, 7 (44:1-7).

110. Cf. *CA I*, 14 (63:13-15): ". . . this surah ought to be understood in such way that through it [the Koran] intends to give glory to God and not to take away praise from Christ."

111. *CA II*, 19 (158:4-8).

112. *CA*, Second Prologue (16:1-2).

113. *CA I*, 9 (52:1-2).

114. "Assuredly, the Koran does not contain—not even in a hidden way—[the doctrines] that Christ is the Son of God—of like nature as God the Father—and that He was crucified and resurrected." Siegfried Raeder, "Der Christus des Korans in der Sicht des Nikolaus von Kues," *op. cit.*, p. 88.

115. *CA I*, 2 (27:9-10). *PF I* (6:2-3).

116. *CA III*, 11 (195:10-11).

117. By "law" Nicholas refers to a body of commandments that prescribe a set of religious practices. Accordingly, he also elsewhere speaks of the law of the Gospel. Cf. *CA III*, 18 (227:5-10) with *III*, 11 (195:10-11).

118. *CA III*, 11 (195:13-15).

119. *CA III*, 18 (227:9-10).

120. *CA, ibid. CA III*, 12 (198:3-4).

121. Genesis 15:6. Romans 4:3 and 4:23-24. *CA III*, 13 (204:2-4).

122. *CA III*, 13 (206:1-2).

123. *CA III*, 15 (214:8).

124. *CA III*, 13 (208:11-12).

125. *CA III*, 15 (214:8-9).

126. *PF XII* (41: last lines).

127. *CA III*, 18 (227:9-10).

128. *CA III*, 8 (184:12-14).

129. *CA III*, 18 (228).

130. Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo II*, 14. See Nicholas's Sermon 3, "*Hoc Facite*," pp. 44-45 (6:1 - 7:16) of Vol. 16, fascicle 1, *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, edited by Rudolf Haubst, Martin Bodewig, and Werner Krämer (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1970).

131. *Cur Deus Homo II*, 15. My translation from *Anselm of Canterbury: Volume Three* (New York: Mellen Press, 1976), pp. 117-118.