

Pilgrimage and Religious Dialogue in Nicholas of Cusa

The late medieval Christian theologian and philosopher Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) is well known for his mystical masterpiece, *De visione Dei*, and for his constructive Christian engagement with Islam.

Nicholas of Cusa wrote *De visione Dei* the same year that he composed his Christian-Muslim dialogue *De pace fidei* (1453).

Both *De visione Dei* and *De pace fidei* feature the movements and modalities of medieval pilgrimage and the importance of sacred space, religious icon and text, and spiritual directive in the religious journey from God and the return to God.

On the one hand, Nicholas of Cusa is seeking to see God (pilgrimage), while on the other hand he is contemplating religious concordance between Christians and Muslims on the unity of God in the Word (dialogue).

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1. Nicholas of Cusa on Scripture and religious dialogue (overview).
2. Central ideas and texts of Nicholas of Cusa on seeing God (pilgrimage) and envisioning religious concordance (dialogue).

Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464)

De concordantia catholica (1433)

De docta ignorantia (1440)

De visione Dei (1453)

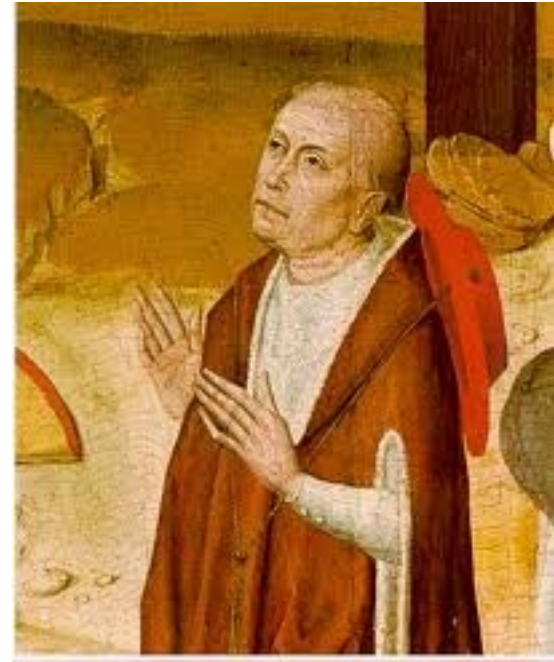
De pace fidei (1453)

Reformatio generalis (1459)

Cribratio Alkorani (1461)

“So I think it consistent that wondering, the cause of philosophy, precedes the desire to know in order that the intellect, whose understanding is its being, will be perfected by the pursuit of truth . . . a method of reasoning in theological matters which the enormous labor involved has made most pleasing to me.”

De docta ignorantia, prologue,
translated by H. Lawrence Bond.



Nicholas of Cusa (1401 –1464)



- *De pace fidei*, 1453
(= The Peace of Faith)
- *Cribratio Alcorani*, 1461
(= Sifting the Qur'an)

“una religio in rituum varietate”



De concordantia catholica, 1, 1, 8:

Christus est via, veritas et vita et omnium creaturarum caput, maritus sive sponsus ecclesiae, Ilquaell per concordantiam creaturarum omnium rationabilium ad eum unum et inter se plurium constituitur secundum varias graduationes (Heidelberg Edition).

Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and the head of all creatures, the husband or spouse of the church, which is constituted in a concordance of all rational creatures – with him [Christ] as the One, and among themselves, the many – in various [hierarchical] gradations (Translation by Sigmund).

De docta ignorantia, 3, epilogue, 264:

Negare enim nemo potest Christi fidem habens, quod hac via in desiderio altius non inflammetur, ita ut post longas meditationes et ascensiones dulcissimum Iesum solum amandum videat et cum gaudio omnia relinquens amplexetur et vitam veram et gaudium sempiternum (Heidelberg Edition).

For no one who has faith in Christ can deny that on this [pilgrim's] pathway he would like to be more highly inflamed with desire, so that after long meditations and ascensions he would see most sweet Jesus as alone to be loved and, abandoning all, would joyously embrace Him as his true life and eternal joy (Translation by Hopkins).

Reformatio generalis, 3:

Ipse enim cum in forma Dei esset, qui solum inhabitat immortalitatem, nostram assumpsit mortalem naturam servilemque formam, ut ipsam sic suae divinae naturae uniret, quod in eius immortalitatis formam transiret . . . Haec forma imitatione acquiritur . . . Humana vero natura a Deo habet docilitatem prae cunctis huius mundi creaturis, quam concreavit homini, ut possit felicitari; ideo erunt omnes docibiles Dei (Heidelberg Edition).

For He, although he was in the form of God, who alone inhabits immortality, assumed our mortal nature so that he could unite it to his divine nature, so that it could pass over into the form of his immortality . . . This form is acquired by imitation . . . Human nature has from God a teachability . . . so that it could be happy; thus all will be teachable by God (Translation by Izbicki).

De pace fidei, XXIII, 43 and De visione Dei, 2:

Jesus Christ is “the face of all peoples and the highest Messiah and Christ, as the Arabs and Jews call Christ” (Translation by Biechler and Bond).

“I am sending to Your Love a painting that I was able to acquire. It contains the figure of an omnivoyant [individual]; and I call it the "Icon of God” (Translation by Hopkins).

De pace fidei, 2, 7:

Quae quidem veritas intellectum
pascens non est nisi Verbum ipsum,
in quo complicantur Omnia et per quod omnia explicantur,
et quod humanam induit naturam,
ut quilibet homo secundum electionem liberi arbitrii in sua humana
natura, in homine illo qui et Verbum,
immortale veritatis pabulum se assequi posse non dubitaret
(Heidelberg Edition).

This truth which nourishes the intellect is nothing but the Word
Himself, in whom are enfolded all things and through whom all
things are unfolded. The Word assumed a human nature in order that
no man would doubt that in accordance with the election of free
choice he can obtain—in his own human nature, through that man
who is also the Word—the immortal food of truth (Translation by
Hopkins).



Cribratio Alkorani, prologue, 10:

Intentio autem nostra est praesupposito
evangelio Christi librum

Mahumeti cribrare et ostendere illa in ipso etiam libro haberi,
per quae evangelium, si attestatione indigeret,
valde confirmaretur (Heidelberg Edition).

Now, my intention is as follows: having presupposed the
Gospel of Christ, to scrutinize the book of Muhammad and to
show that even in it there are contained those [teachings]
through which the Gospel would be altogether confirmed,
were it in need of confirmation (Translation by Hopkins).



Summary of Central Ideas of Nicholas of Cusa:

Learned Ignorance and Learn-ed Ignorance; cataphatic and apophatic method of approaching God and the world;

The coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*); human knowledge as conjecture; faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*) of everything under the sun and beyond the sun;

Christocentric and constructive approach to Islam and the reform of church and society.

Dialectical and irenic synthesis: Nicholas of Cusa's Christocentric and sapiental approach to Scripture and religious dialogue constructively converges the coincidence of opposites and learned ignorance, and opens new pathways for religious reform and tolerance at the dawn of the reformation and early modernity.

Nicholas of Cusa and the Pilgrimage of Religious Dialogue and Peace

Nicholas of Cusa expands the medieval Christian experience of pilgrimage to the discovery of peace between the world's religions, as well as considering what this means for the nexus and praxis of mysticism and religious dialogue today.

On Nicholas of Cusa: “Our knowledge of God may be more or less adequate, and our worship may be more or less appropriate, and yet the ‘object’ of our worship can still be the same” (Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (New York: Harper, 2011), 58).

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