

PART 1

Cusanus and Islam



Cusanus, Islam, and Religious Tolerance¹

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Recently, it has become an urgent issue for us to consider the relationship between Christianity and Islam more seriously. This question, however, has existed since the seventh century, when Islam became a serious problem for Western Europe, resulting in numerous crusades between the twelfth and fifteenth century. As a medievalist who has for many years been studying one of the most prominent theologians, philosophers, and legalists of the fifteenth century, Nicolaus Cusanus (1401–1464), I wish to explore his ideas on religious tolerance, as expressed in his writings as well as in the activities throughout his life.

Cusanus and Islam

Cusanus must have had a great interest in Islam, even early in his career. This interest is already evident in his sermon given in Koblenz, Germany, in 1428 or 1430. In his *Sermo I*, the first part, *De nominibus Dei*, Cusanus mentions that in Turkey and among the Saracens, God's name, 'olla ubacber,' meant great and just God ("in Turkia et Saracenia 'olla ubacber,' id est 'iustus deus magnus'").² Also during 1433 and 1437, when he was attending the Council of Basel (1431–1449), Cusanus obtained the Latin translation of the Qur'an, and thus read and studied it, together with his close friend Juan de Segovia (c. 1400–1456), a Spaniard who is known for his keen interest in and knowledge about Islam.³ The aforementioned Latin translation of the Qur'an had been completed by an Englishman, Robert of Ketton (*Robertus Kettenensis*, fl. 1136–1157),⁴ under the

1 Editors' note: Professor Watanabe presented the first version of this article at the 2003 meeting of the Japanese Cusanus Society. In 2006 he revised and translated it into English. We thank his wife, Dr. Kiyomi Watanabe, for permitting us to publish this article.

2 *Sermo I*, n. 5 in *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia XVI* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1970). Hereafter this edition will be cited as 'I' followed by volume number.

3 *Cribratio Alkorani*, Preface, n. 2; h VIII; Jasper Hopkins, trans., *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio Alkorani* (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1990), 75.

4 The birthplace of this mathematician and astronomer is said to be: Ketton-Kettenensis, Reading-Retinensis, Chester-Castrensis, etc. He went to Spain and studied astronomy and

auspices of Peter the Venerable, the abbot of Cluny (1122–1156). The book is a part of the Toledo Collection (*Collectio Toletana*), which survives in Cusa's personal collection at the library of the St. Nicholas Hospital, established by Nicholas himself in Bernkastel-Kues, the town of his birth (Cod. Cus. 108).⁵

In the preface to his book *Cribratio Alkorani* (*The Sifting of the Qur'an*), Cusanus wrote the following account: while he was visiting Constantinople in 1437 he found an Arabic manuscript of the Qur'an which was owned by a Franciscan friar living at the Holy Cross church. Cusanus was also able to consult the same Latin translation of the Qur'an that he had previously obtained in Basel.⁶

The conquest of Constantinople by the Turks on May 29, 1453, must have been a shocking event for Cusanus, as for many other Europeans.⁷ Cusanus's famous book, *De pace fidei* (*On the Peaceful Unity of Faith*), completed in September 1453, can be considered as one of his responses to that catastrophe. As this work clearly shows, Cusanus was not only concerned with Islam, but also with Judaism, Hinduism, and other religions and nations. To discuss unity and peace among various religions, *De pace fidei* includes the following interlocutors: Greek, Italian, Arab, Indian, Chaldean, Jew, Scythian, Frenchman, Persian, Syrian, Spaniard, Turk, German, Tartar, Armenian, Bohemian, and Englishman.⁸ Cusanus included many nations and religions in the narrative's conversation, even Indians and Tartars (Mongols) from the East, though it is regrettable that he did not mention Buddhists.⁹

The general tone of *De pace fidei* is very peaceful and harmonious. It is clear that Cusanus took an attitude that sought harmony and tried to find a basic, common theme among the various world religions. Accordingly, Cusanus argued that although there are many differences in the rites (*ritus*) of various religions, their basic principles are "the one faith, *una religio*."¹⁰ Therefore, he

mathematics in Arabic in Toledo and other towns. He translated the Qur'an into Latin at the request of Peter the Venerable in 1142.

5 J. Marx. *Verzeichnis der Handschriften Sammlung des Hospitals zu Kues bei Bernkastel a./Mosel* (Trier: Selbstverlag des Hospitals, 1905), 106–108; James E. Biechler, "Three Manuscripts from the Library of Nicholas of Cusa," *Manuscripta* XXVII (July 1983): 92.

6 *Cribratio Alkorani*, Preface, n. 2; Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 75.

7 Erich Meuthen "Der Fall von Konstantinopel und der lateinische Westen," *Historische Zeitschrift* 237 (1983): 1–35.

8 For Cusanus's opinion on Tartars, see Kazuhiko Yamaki, "Shinko no Heiwa (De pace fidei)," *Bunka Ronshu* 23 (September, 2003): 1–21.

9 K. Yamaki, trans., *Shinko no Heiwa*, (*De pace fidei*), 582. According to Cusanus, Buddhists were "idol worshipping Indians" (Yamaki, 597–598).

10 *De pace fidei*, I, n. 6; Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 35.

concluded that religions must seek harmony and mutual help through discussions and reciprocal understanding, rather than choosing to compete or reject each other. Such was the interpretation of Cusanus's idea and consequent proposal: 'one religion in a variety of rites, *una religio in rituum varietate*.'¹¹

The idea that many religions can co-exist—that is, the concept of religious pluralism—had been widely accepted in Europe; it was particularly popular among the scholars of the post-Enlightenment period.¹² One of the best examples is seen in the book published in 1787 by Johann Salomo Semler (1725–1791), *Des Kardinals Nikolaus von Cusa Dialogus von der Übereinstimmung oder Einheit des Glaubens*.¹³ Growing up in pietistic surroundings as the son of a Lutheran pastor, Semler entered the University of Halle at age seventeen, where he became the disciple, the assistant, and finally the literary executor of the rationalistic Professor Sigmund Jacob Baumgarten (1706–1757). In 1752 Semler became a professor of theology in Halle. His numerous writings, said to number about two hundred and eighty-two, indicate his interest in theology, Church history, classical languages, logic, mathematics, and other areas. One of the first German theologians to apply the historical-critical method to the study of the Biblical canon and text, Semler, as 'frommer Aufklärer', became the leader of 'Neologie', the second phase of the Protestant theology of the Enlightenment (c. 1740–1780). His book on Cusanus reflects this kind of approach to theology and Church history.¹⁴

In this connection, I may be permitted to recall my own experience many years ago. In 1964, I was invited to an International Congress that was held at Bressanone (Brixen), Italy, to celebrate the passage of five hundred years since the death of Cusanus. At the Congress, I was given the chance to present a

11 Among many studies on this concept, the famous ones are: Michael Seidlmayer, "Una religio in rituum varietate: Zur Religionsauffassung des Nikolaus von Cues," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 36 (1954): 145–207; and Bruno Decker, "Nikolaus von Cues und der Friede unter der Religionen," in *Humanismus, Mystik und Kunst in der Welt des Mittelalters*, ed. Josef Koch (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), pp. 94–121.

12 Decker, "Nikolaus von Cues," 111–112, 118.

13 Johann Salomo Semler, *Des Kardinals Nikolaus von Cusa Dialogus von der Übereinstimmung oder Einheit des Glaubens* (Leipzig: 1787).

14 On Semler's life and ideas, see Werner Raupp, "Johann Salomo Semler," *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* XIV (1998): 1444–1473; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (1911), 631. For a helpful study of four leaders of the nineteenth-century German Awakening, see David Crowner and Gerald Christianson, ed., trans. and intro., *Spirituality of the German Awakening* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004).

paper entitled “Nicholas of Cusa and the Idea of Religious Tolerance.”¹⁵ The presiding officer of the meeting was Prof. Raymond Klibansky (1905–2005), one of the leading authorities in this field; I was then a young fellow who had just received a Ph.D. degree. I still remember the fright and thrill during my presentation in front of so many distinguished scholars. Though my paper was a rather immature product, I emphasized two points: 1) In order to understand Cusanus’s *De pace fidei*, it is necessary not only to study its content but also to consider the background of the period; and 2) in support of some scholars’ interpretations, I argued that Cusanus’s attitude on the relationship between Christianity and other religions was not based on completely relativistic views of religious tolerance. Forty years later I am again discussing a similar subject. Hopefully I have gained more insight into the subject since then.

After writing *De pace fidei* in 1453, Cusanus had to face another and bigger challenge in dealing with Islam. At the request of his close friend, Pope Pius II (1458–1464), Cusanus wrote *Cribratio Alkorani, The Sifting of the Koran*, between 1460–1461.¹⁶ In its preface, Nicholas describes the books and manuscripts that he used to write the work. Those books are still kept in the library of the St. Nicholas Hospital, mentioned above as Cod. Cus. 107 and Cod. Cus. 108.¹⁷ The preface also reports that he had urged Dionysius the Carthusian (1402–1471) to write a book against Islam, and that Dionysius consequently wrote a voluminous work entitled *Against the Infidelity of Mohammed (Contra Perfidiam Machometi)*,¹⁸ which was dedicated to Pope Nicholas V (1447–1455).¹⁹ Cusanus also mentions that he had consulted the following books: *Against the Law of Saracens (Contra Legem Saracenorum)*, by the Dominican friar Ricoldus de Monte Crucis (c. 1243–1320);²⁰ *On the Basis of Faith written to Cantor of Antioch (De Rationibus Fidei ad Cantorem Antiochenum)*, by Thomas Aquinas;²¹ and

15 This paper was later published as: Morimichi Watanabe, “Nicholas of Cusa and the Idea of Tolerance,” in *Nicolò Cusano agli inizi del mondo moderno* (Firenze: G. S. Sansoni, 1970), 409–418; and reprinted in Watanabe, *Concord and Reform*, ed. T. M. Izbicki and G. Christianson (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2001), 217–226.

16 *Cribratio Alkorani*, h VIII, ed. Ludwig Hagemann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1996).

17 Cf. Note 4.

18 *Cribratio Alkorani*, Prologue, n. 4.

19 Cod. Cus. 107, fol. 1r–193v; Ludwig Hagemann, *Christentum Contra Islam* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 72.

20 Cod. Cus. 107, fol. 194r–232v; Hagemann, *Christentum*, 50, 55, 60–61. For Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, see Ludwig Hagemann, *Der Kur’an in Verständnis und Kritik bei Nikolaus von Kues: Ein Beitrag zur Erhellung islamisch-christlicher Geschichte* (Frankfurt: Verlag Josef Knecht, 1976), 56–57.

21 Hagemann, *Christentum*, 51–54; Hagemann, *Der Kur’an*, 67–68.

Against Basic Errors on Mohammed's Unfaithfulness (Contra Principales Errores Perfidi Mohameti), by Juan de Torquemada.²²

There is no doubt that *Cribratio Alkorani* is much more critical of Islam compared to the harmonious attitude shown in *De pace fidei*. In the first book of *Cribratio* the emphasis is mostly on the oneness of God and, therefore, no strong criticism of Islam is set forth. However, in the latter part of the work, particularly in Chapter 19 of Book II, which is entitled "An Invective against the Qur'an," very severe criticisms are presented.²³

In this connection I wish to cite a similar change in attitude toward Islam by Ramon Llull (1232–1316), who greatly influenced Cusanus. Llull was, in his early career, very much interested in Islam, making a great effort to study Arabic as well as the Qur'an. Llull's earlier works include his more irenic *Book of the Gentile and Three Wise Men*. However, in his later years Llull changed his attitude and developed a very strong criticism against Islam. This eventually led to Llull's activities that were based not on peaceful conversation and persuasion, but on more forceful and aggressive debates.²⁴

There are many reasons why Cusanus, who at first adopted a very peaceful and cooperative attitude toward many religions, including Islam, later changed and became very critical of Islam. First, more serious and deeper studies of Islam may have brought a deeper understanding of the Qur'an and a clearer revelation of the nature of Islam, thus exposing its weaknesses and mistakes, or its anti-Christian doctrines.²⁵ The Qur'an denies Jesus Christ as Son of God several times. It also denies not only the death of Christ on the Cross,²⁶ but also the Trinity, a most fundamental doctrine in Christianity.²⁷

Second, there were changes in Cusanus's life and in his position within the Catholic Church. Since 1458 he resided in Rome, the center of the Catholic Church, and in 1459 he temporarily became a representative of Pope Pius II, who was at the Congress of Mantua (1459–1460); the holder of such a post had to defend the existing system of Christendom. The responsibilities of this position must have made Cusanus more sensitive to and critical of Islam; thus, he tried to defend Christianity against the attack on the Catholic Church and

22 Hagemann, *Christentum*, 72; Hagemann, *Der Kur'an*, 68.

23 *Cribratio Alkorani*, II, 19, nn. 154–158, *Invectio Contra Alkoranum*; Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 146–149.

24 Hagemann, *Christentum*, 63–67.

25 For example, see the following verses of the Qur'an, Suras 5:66, 9:30–31, etc.

26 Sura 4: 157–158.

27 Sura 4: 171.

Christian world.²⁸ It should be remembered that Pope Pius II wrote his famous letter to the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II (1451–1481) in 1461, proudly stressing the strength of the Christian world.²⁹

Third, Cusanus had a deep friendship with Pope Pius II, and desired to help him in his great effort to organize the crusade against the Turks, for which the pope had made a declaration at the Congress of Mantua. This is clearly shown in the beginning sentence of the *Cribratio Alkorani*, which Cusanus dedicated to Pope Pius II:

O, most holy Pope, accept this book composed with zealous faith by your humble servant. Accept it so that when . . . you show . . . that the Mohammedan sect (which has arisen from this heresy [the Nestorian heresy]) is in error and is to be repudiated, you may readily have at hand certain basic points needful to know.³⁰

Fourth, the Latin translation of the Qur'an, which had been completed by Robert of Ketton in 1143, contained several errors, and thus Cusanus could have misunderstood parts of the Qur'an.³¹

Cusanus and *Pia interpretatio*

In *Cribratio Alkorani* Cusanus proposes a “generous, or sympathetic interpretation, *pia interpretatio*”³² of the Qur'an, hoping to apply this interpretation to understand the Muslim holy book. However, according to L. Hagemann, “it should be understood that such an interpretation of the Qur'an by Cusanus is nothing but a generous, harmonious and friendly attitude toward Islam, though standing firm at the basis of Christianity.”³³ As he did with his well-

28 Hagemann, *Christentum*, 6–63.

29 Giuseppe Toffanin, *Lettera a Maometto II* (Naples: Pironti, 1953); Albert R. Baca, ed., *Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini: Epistola ad Mahometem II* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).

30 *Cribratio Alkorani*, n. 1; Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 75. Here Cusanus understands Islam as “Mohammad's sect.” Hagemann, *Christentum*, 71.

31 For the faults in the Latin translation of the Koran by Robertus, see Thomas E. Berman, “Tafsir and Translation,” *Speculum* 75/3 (July 1998): 703–732. Cf. James E. Biechler, “Nicholas of Cusa and Muhammad: A Fifteenth Century Encounter,” *The Downside Review* 101 (January 1983): 55.

32 Biechler, “Nicholas of Cusa and Muhammad,” 55–56; Hagemann, *Christentum*, 69.

33 Hagemann, *Christentum*, 69.

known revelation of the forgery of 'Emperor Constantine's donation' in *De concordantia catholica* (1433/34),³⁴ Cusanus must have employed meticulous attention in studying the Qur'an, as well. His enthusiasm for a literal, interpretative, and humanistic approach is clearly seen in his *Cribratio Alkorani*.³⁵

The phrase '*pia interpretatio*' appears four times in Book II of *Cribratio*.³⁶ Cusanus's own marginal notes, added to the Latin translation of the Qur'an that still exists in the St. Nicholas Hospital Library in Bernkastel-Kues, show that he must have written such notes three times. The first notes were probably written in 1433, at the time of the Council of Basel. The second notes were written in 1453, before the publication of his *De pace fidei*, and the third were in 1460–1461, during the writing of *Cribratio Alkorani*.³⁷ Cusanus was almost sixty years old when he wrote the last footnotes, which was when he read the Qur'an most seriously. His notes are short, but they reveal his enthusiasm and meticulous attention to his study.³⁸

In order to write *Cribratio Alkorani*, Cusanus studied the Qur'an intensely but ignored those Qur'anic verses that were problematic for Christians, such as the polygamy of Mohammed and his supposedly unethical lifestyle, as well as the erotic pleasures given at entering paradise, where one meets beautiful ladies with sparkling eyes.³⁹ He also suggested ignoring those parts that were related to the Jewish or Nestorian faiths. Cusanus recommended that, in the Qur'an, one should pay attention only to the teachings that are more agreeable to the Christian gospel and harmonious with the writings of the New and Old Testaments. In his letter to John of Segovia (1454) he wrote: "We must always strive to make that authoritative book for the Muslims applicable to us."⁴⁰ Thus, it is easy to understand why Cusanus wrote the following in the *Cribratio Alkorani*:

Now, my intention is as follows: having presupposed the Gospel of Christ, to analyze the book of Muhammad and to show that even in it there are

34 Morimichi Watanabe, *The Political Ideas of Nicholas of Cusa, with Special Reference to his De concordantia catholica* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1963), 145–156.

35 Biechler, "Three Manuscripts," 96, 100. Cf. R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 93–94.

36 *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 1, n. 86; II, 12, n. 119; II, 13, n. 124; and II, 19, n. 154; Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 115, 129, 132, and 147; Hagemann, *Christentum*, 69.

37 Biechler, "Three Manuscripts," 93, 95.

38 Biechler, "Three Manuscripts," 95.

39 Suras 44:54, 52:20, 55:56, 72, and elsewhere. Cf. Biechler, "Nicholas of Cusa and Muhammad," 53, 55; Hagemann, *Christentum*, 61.

40 Biechler, "Nicholas of Cusa and Muhammad," 53; Hagemann, *Christentum*, 69.

contained those teachings through which the Gospel would be altogether confirmed, were it in need of confirmation, and that wherever the Koran disagrees with Christ, this disagreement has resulted from Muhammad's ignorance.⁴¹

This attitude of Cusanus in interpreting the Qur'an shows that he recognized the significance of Christianity, but also found a similar doctrine in the teachings of Islam. Accordingly, Hagemann says that Cusanus believed that he "could find even in the Qur'an, the gospel's principle."⁴²

In 1464 Pope Pius II was at the port of Ancona in Italy. Although he had made a strong request to the kings of many countries to participate in a crusade, only a few vessels had come, and the Pope was greatly disappointed. Cusanus left Rome on July 3, traveling to Ancona to participate in the crusade for the Pope. However, he fell ill along the way and died at Todi on August 11. Three days later Pope Pius II also passed away in Ancona. I wonder what Cusanus would have done had he arrived in Ancona. Could he willingly support the crusade, though he had always believed in peace? If so, how would he have convinced himself to take such a position? Many questions remain unanswered; in history, ironic turns of events often occur.

The Clash of Civilizations

Professor Samuel P. Huntington of Harvard University published his article, "The Clash of Civilizations," in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993. Here, he wrote that world politics is now in a new age: it is no longer the age of ideology and economics as before, but now struggles center upon culture. Thus, world politics is governed by the clash of civilizations. The idea was further extended in his book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), which evoked a great response.⁴³

Huntington suggests that, although the famous historian Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889–1975) proposed in *A Study of History* (12 volumes, 1934–61) that there were twenty-one major civilizations, at present only seven or eight among those twenty-one still exist. These are: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic/Orthodox, Latin American, and, possibly, African civilizations.

41 *Cribratio Alkorani*, Prologue, n. 10; Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 78–79.

42 Hagemann, *Christentum*, 78.

43 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

Whether or not such classification by Huntington is correct is not a question this essay can address. The real question for me is whether or not it is more appropriate and important to discuss present and future world politics on the basis of *religion*, rather than culture and civilization. This is because religion certainly lies at the base of civilization. I wonder why such an approach was not clearly taken by Huntington, though I suppose that it may be too problematic and may lead to too much struggle and fear among people. Aside from the question of whether Confucianism can be considered a religion, it is possible to divide Huntington's classification into Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu religions.

It is particularly clear that the relationship between Christianity and Islam has played an important role not only in European history, but also in present world politics.

We must remember that, throughout the medieval period and up to the present, many historical events brought about a big influence on the relationship between Christianity and Islam. One can recall some major events, such as the First Crusade beginning in 1095 and ending with the Eighth in 1291, the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire (1299–1923), etc. It is unnecessary to point out that the current problems and unrest in the Near East are based on struggles between Christian and/or Jewish and Islamic countries. (As mentioned before, Cusanus did not have much knowledge of Buddhism, and, of course, this religion may not be classified as monotheistic.)⁴⁴ However, there is no doubt that Cusanus, as a great thinker, made a serious effort to reach a clear understanding of the relationships between the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths.

Just before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Professor Bernard Lewis of Princeton University published a book entitled *What Went Wrong*, which criticizes Islamic countries. In the book, Lewis writes: "In the Muslim's own perception, Islam itself was indeed coterminous with civilization, and beyond its borders there were only barbarians and infidels."⁴⁵ If faithful Muslims did take such a proud and arrogant attitude as Lewis suggests, it is understandable why there have been so many struggles between the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian religions. As a result, according to Hagemann, history has become "the history of aggression and suspicion."⁴⁶

44 Cf. Note 9.

45 Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

46 Hagemann, *Christentum*, ix.

Going back to Cusanus's solution toward Islam and the problems he faced, we recall that he emphasized mutual discussion without using military power. However, due to many conditions and problems in his time, it seems Cusanus eventually became inclined to support a crusade, as was already discussed. Regardless of his action (to help Pope Pius II in his crusade), though, Cusanus did not give up his peaceful and sympathetic attitude towards Islam, and tried also to interpret the Qur'an from the most favorable point of view. Although *Cribratio Alkorani* has been studied by many scholars in the past, in comparison with Cusanus's earlier books—such as *De concordantia catholica* (1433–34), *De docta ignorantia* (1440), and *De conjecturis* (1442)—*Cribratio* has received much attention only in recent years. As Volume VIII of the authoritative Heidelberg edition of Cusanus's *Opera omnia*, *Cribratio Alkorani* was published in 1986, with Hagemann as its editor. To those 'ecumenists' who were encouraged by the 'religious tolerance' expressed in Cusanus's *De pace fidei*, *Cribratio* may be disappointing. From the latter work one may get an impression that Islamic people are uneducated, ignorant, and idol worshippers—a view simply based on the old image of Arabs. The great Christian scholar on Islam, Georges C. Anawati, even said that it is better not to show *Cribratio Alkorani* to Muslims.⁴⁷

The theology of Cusanus, however, is 'a theology that is meant to continue dialogue' (*theologia sermocinalis*). This means that one cannot lose hope of reaching an understanding and peace between the various religions. As mentioned before,⁴⁸ in Cod. Cus. 107, which Cusanus had used for writing his *Cribratio*, he made a long footnote on 'the essence of love (*De essentia amoris*).'⁴⁹ There, he wrote: "Please note that love brings harmony and peace. As love is bigger, the larger concordance (harmony) is accomplished." The same discussion on the essence of love is also present in his *Cribratio*.⁵⁰

47 Georges C. Anawati, "Nicolas de Cues et le problème de l'Islam," in *Nicolò Cusano agli del mondo moderno* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1970), 141–175, 179.

48 Cf. Note 4.

49 Biechler, "Three Manuscripts," 97.

50 "Nota amor unit. Et quanto maior et perfectior quanto magis unit," in *Adnotatio de essentia amoris* (Cod. Cus. 107, fol. 21), cited in Biechler, "Three Manuscripts," 100. In Cusanus's *Cribratio Alkorani* (II, n. 104), the following description is present: "Quoniam autem amor unit, amor perfectissimus, qui maior esse nequit neque minor, cum sit substantialis, maxime unit. Video igitur in essentia ipsius amoris unientis unitatem. Quomodo enim esset unus uniens amor sine unitate?"

Conclusion

Presently there are about 1.6 billion Muslims in the world. They are not only in the Near East, but also in South and Southeast Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Among the forty-four countries in which the majority of the population is Muslim, there are great differences regarding their political stand on Islam. Some countries officially declare themselves to be Islamic countries, such as Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. In others, Islam is described as a 'national religion,' for example in Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iraq, and Malaysia. Others, moreover, have a constitution that does not mention Islam, such as Albania, Lebanon, Syria, Indonesia, and Sudan. Finally, some countries claim to be 'secular states,' such as Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and Turkey.

In Cusanus's period, as in the present age (though problems differ), the clash between Christian countries in Western Europe and Islamic countries in the Middle East was a great concern. However, there are others who argue that present-day struggles may not be those between Christian and Islamic countries. In a book called *No god but God*, a young Iranian scholar, Reza Aslan, claims that in the future, the problem of the world will not be a struggle between Western European and Islamic countries. Rather, he claims, a more important problem is the intolerance and continuous fighting between Islamic countries and their people.⁵¹

Under such a state of the world as it is today, it may be argued that a religious concordance (harmony) based on 'discussion' and 'unity based on love' is ineffective and impossible. Even Cusanus appeared to have lost his confidence in this idea, due to the many hindrances he faced during his lifetime. On the other hand, when one takes a long view of human history, one can say that the very approach taken by Cusanus is the most hopeful and the best approach to solving important problems for mankind. As stated in the Bible: "Love is patient" (I Corinthians 13:4).

51 Reza Aslan, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution and Future of Islam* (New York: Random House, 2005).