

AMERICAN CUSANUS SOCIETY



2014

NEWSLETTER

Volume XXXI

The 550th Anniversary of Cusanus' Death



Photo by Il Kim

View of western Todi overlooking the Umbrian plains

Contents

1. 2014 ACS Business Meeting Reports 2

- American Cusanus Society Business Meeting October 10, 2014, Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary..... 2
- American Cusanus Society Business Meeting May 9, 2014, Kalamazoo 2

2. Recent Conferences..... 4

- Gettysburg 2014:** The 14th Biennial Conference of the American Cusanus Society and the International Seminar on Pre-Reformation Theology: “Nicholas of Cusa’s Legacy in the Renaissance and Reformation” 4
 - Conference Program 4
 - Paper Abstract: “Cusanus’ Philosophical Testament: *De venatione sapientiae / The Hunt of Wisdom* (1462)” by Donald F. Duclow..... 7
 - Paper Presentation: “Infinity of God and Infinity of the Universe: Cusanus and Bruno” by Sophie Berman..... 8

Kalamazoo 2014: Sessions of the American Cusanus Society at the 49th Annual Congress of Medieval Studies 13

- Conference Program 13
- Paper Presentation: “‘But Following the Literal Sense, the Jews Refuse to Understand’: Hermeneutic Conflicts in Nicholas of Cusa’s *De pace fidei*” by Jason Aleksander..... 13
- Paper Presentation: “Mirror, Seed, and Tree: Bridging Transcendence and Immanence in Cusanus and Spinoza” by Martin Sastri 19
- Banquet Address: “Cusanus and the Wonder Hosts of the Andechs” by Thomas M. Izbicki 23
- Watanabe Lecture: “Ramon Martí, the Trinity, and the Limits of Dominican Mission” by Thomas E. Burman.... 25

RSA 2014: Sessions of the American Cusanus Society at the Renaissance Society of America Annual Meeting 34

- Conference Program: 34
- Paper Presentation: “The Heritage of Cusanus’ New Anthropology and its Impact on Visual Culture in 15th-Century Germany and Flanders” by Elena Filippi..... 34

Cusanus Sessions at the Sixteenth Century Society

Annual Conference43

- Conference Program:.....43

Jubilee Symposium: “The Roman Years of Nicholas of Cusa”44

- Conference Program:.....44
- Report: “The Roman Years of Nicholas of Cusa”, by Donald Duclow, Thomas Izbicki, and Il Kim45

3. Bibliography47

4. Book Reviews & Descriptions.....57

- Michael Edward Moore: *Nicholas of Cusa and the Kairos of Modernity: Cassirer, Gadamer, Blumenberg*.....57
- Nicolai de Cusa Opuscula Bobemica. De usu communionis. Epistulae ad Bohemos. Consilium. Intentio (Opusculum dubium)*.....58
- Tom Müller: *Der junge Cusanus. Ein Aufbruch in das 15. Jahrhundert*.....59
- Morimichi Watanabe, *Concord and Reform. Nicholas of Cusa and Legal and Political Thought in the Fifteenth Century*60
- Acta Cusana, Quellen zur Lebensgeschichte des Nikolaus von Kues, Bd. II, Lieferung 1: 1452 April 1 bis 1453 Mai 29*.....56

5. Notice of Membership Dues for Academic Year 2014-2015.....63

Cusa is his sense of the radical contingency of all things other than God. The scientific question as to whether the universe is finite or infinite must be resolved by scientific investigation, not by theology or metaphysics. Whatever the answer to that question turns out to be, from the metaphysical standpoint the universe is finite, because it is not God. If we give up the reassurance of monism and acknowledge the incommensurability of the Creator with the created, we can truly give thanks for an existence that was not *owed* to us.

- Martin Sastri, University of Notre Dame: “Mirror, Seed, and Tree: Bridging Transcendence and Immanence in Cusanus and Spinoza”
- Sarah Scott, Manhattan College: “Nicholas of Cusa’s Ethics of Individuation and Martin Buber’s Dialogic Philosophy”

5:15 p.m. ACS Business Meeting
Chair: Peter Casarella, President

7:00 p.m. ACS Banquet
Martell’s Restaurant, Kalamazoo, MI

Friday, May 9

5:15 p.m. **The Twelfth Annual Lecture in the Morimichi Watanabe Lecture Series**
Organizer: Donald F. Duclow, Gwynedd-Mercy College
Presider: Peter Casarella, University of Notre Dame

- Thomas E. Burman, University of Tennessee Knoxville: “Ramon Marti, the Trinity, and the Religions of the Book”

Kalamazoo 2014:

Sessions of the American Cusanus Society at the 49th Annual Congress of Medieval Studies

May 8-9, 2014
Kalamazoo, MI

Conference Program

Thursday, May 8

3:30 p.m. *Nicholas of Cusa and Jewish Thought*
Organizer: Donald F. Duclow, Gwynedd-Mercy College
Presider: Thomas Izbicki, Rutgers University

- Jason Aleksander, Saint Xavier University: “But Following the Literal Sense, the Jews Refuse to Understand’: Hermeneutic Conflicts in Nicholas of Cusa’s *De pace fidei*”

“But Following the Literal Sense, the Jews Refuse to Understand’: Hermeneutic Conflicts in Nicholas of Cusa’s *De pace fidei*” by Jason Aleksander, Xavier University, Illinois

Were I to confine my remarks under the title of this essay to the question of Nicholas’ personal attitudes about Jews, I would have very little to add to what Thomas Izbicki has discussed in his essay on “Nicholas of Cusa and the Jews,”¹ in which he both surveys Nicholas’ remarks about Jews in his sermons and speculative works and reviews Nicholas’ legatine decrees of 1451 and 1452 concerning Jewish inhabitants in Salzburg, the Low Countries, and the

¹ Thomas M. Izbicki, “Nicholas of Cusa and the Jews” in *Conflict and Reconciliation: Perspectives on Nicholas of Cusa*, ed. Inigo Bocken (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 119-130.

Rhineland—many of which were regarded by the Christian occupants of those lands as being so severe that they were eventually suspended by pope Nicholas V. But, beyond Izbicki’s contribution in this arena, I believe that, by focusing on why and how Nicholas’ anti-Judaism expresses itself in the *De pace fidei*, we will have an important access to the hermeneutic principles that undergird his speculative theology. Unfortunately, to proceed in this manner requires that that we attend to Nicholas’ anti-Judaism, even while we endeavor not reduce the significance of his views to one of its most unpleasant manifestations.

But before wading any further into my topic, I feel that I owe you an explanation for how a paper that focuses on Nicholas’ anti-Judaism might fit in a panel on “Nicholas of Cusa and Jewish Thought,” for, after all, in one sense I’m presenting not on Nicholas and Jewish thought but on Nicholas and anti-Jewish thought. Consequently, if there is anything like Jewish thoughtfulness in what I am about to say, it may be something that I will have to import into the discussion. Indeed, there may be *some* truth to this since my own orientation to the question of Nicholas’ anti-Judaism might rightly be described by others as the orientation of an outsider to Nicholas’ religious tradition, and even more specifically as that of either a Jewish or atheist outsider. Though, as I said, there may be only *some* truth to this, since I am no more an insider to either atheism or Judaism than I am an outsider to Christianity. At the Passover Seder, for instance, my wife’s family and our Jewish friends like to joke that, even if I am not Jewish, at least I am *Jewish*. By a similar token, my relationship to atheism is an ambivalent one. As a matter of fact, it has often seemed to me that many of my friends who describe themselves as atheists (some of these professed atheists also identify themselves as Jews, by the way) find my views on the meaningfulness of religious discourse to be heretical with regard to the beliefs that they appear to maintain as a fundamental orthodoxy of atheism. In any case, from the standpoint of Nicholas’ Christianity, I am probably correctly called a pagan or infidel rather than heretic or apostate. Consequently, I offer an outsider’s perspective on the question of what Nicholas of Cusa’s anti-Judaism might reveal about the hermeneutic limitations of his

theological convictions. My hope is that, in the course of this discussion, it will be evident that that my characterization of Nicholas’ views will prove to be more faithful to him than he was in his depictions of the representatives of various non-Christian religions in the *De pace fidei*.

Before turning to the specific issue of the *De pace fidei*’s anti-Judaism, however, I think it will be useful for me to add an additional prefatory remark regarding the tacit philosophy of history that I believe we may discern in Nicholas’ speculative philosophy. In some of my other recent work, I’ve endeavored to show that, especially in his later speculative works (e.g., *De visione Dei*, *De aequalitate*, *De principio*, *De ludo globi*, and *De venatione sapientiae*), Nicholas rejects a univocal conception of the meaning of Creation in favor of one that accentuates the role of the individuated human soul as always seeking for itself and creating itself as an image of an absconded God. As a consequence of this conception, I have also argued that these works permit Nicholas’ readers the latitude to argue that Nicholas generally maintains the understanding that all historical events, insofar as they are the unfolding of an eternal beginning, are conceptually linked to the significance of Incarnation even while allowing that these conceptual links may be nothing other than historically contingent images or “signs” (or interpretations) of the Incarnation. In light of this, to the extent that one might speak of an *arche* or *eschaton* for Nicholas, one may speak only of an eternal referent for *any* temporal activity whatsoever. Or, as he puts it in the *Triialogus de possess* (1460), there is no contradiction between the claim that “eternity as a whole is at once present at every point of time” and the claim that “God as the Beginning and the End is at once and as a whole present in all things.”¹ Thus, each and every historical unfolding derives its significance

¹ “Non repugnare aeternitatem simul totam esse in quolibet puncto temporis et deum principium et finem simul esse totum in omnibus” (§ 19). All Latin references are to *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia in ussu et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Heigelbergensis* as reproduced by the Cusanus Portal of the Institute for Cusanus Research at the University of Trier (<http://www.cusanus-portal.de/>). Unless otherwise noted, translations are those of Jasper Hopkins in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2001).

and self-justification solely in relation to the Incarnation, an “event” that is both unfolded in time and yet also enfolds the meanings of all other shared histories of temporal events. Nevertheless, because of the multiplicity of existent, individuated souls, the meaning of history is the product not of a stable referent but of an unstable one—or rather, to be more precise, the ultimate referent for the meaning of any contingent history remains an Incarnative Beginning that is beyond comprehension, but this Beginning, precisely because it is beyond comprehension, does not itself provide a univocal determination of the intelligibility of any particular range of history from which one might seek meaning. There are, in short, multiple histories, and each history provides a unique hermeneutic frame of reference for interpreting what is presupposed as the same underlying but otherwise inaccessible origin.

Let me now return to the *De pace fidei*. If I am at all correct in these general claims about Nicholas’ philosophy of history, then it should not be surprising to find that the *De pace fidei* depicts an ecumenical dialogue that illustrates this same general understanding. And, indeed, the *De pace fidei* does explicitly defend the claim that “there is one religion and worship, which is presupposed in all the diversity of rites” (6.16).¹ Therefore, Nicholas seems to say, so long as there are enlightened rulers who recognize, encourage, and participate in dialogue between wise representatives of the diverse religions, peace can be lasting. In a similar vein, it also makes a great deal of sense that Nicholas highlights the fact that, when—especially as a result of historical entrenchment—creeds and other aspects of religious rites are mistaken for the truth itself, an ossification of human possibility results. Moreover, as Nicholas explicitly notes in the *De pace fidei*, this process of ossification is a major cause of strife in the world, since “the earthly human condition has this characteristic: viz., that longstanding custom, which is regarded as having passed over into nature, is defended as the truth. In this way there arise great quarrels when each community prefers its own faith to another” (§ 1.4).

¹ “Una est igitur religio et cultus omnium intellectus videntium, quae in omni diversitate rituum praesupponitur.”

But although the basic argument of the *De pace fidei* seems to suggest that all temporal rites are equally accurate (or equally inaccurate) manifestations of the one true faith underlying them all, the dialogue also appears to argue that some specific rites such as the Sacraments of Baptism and Marriage are so intimately associated with the one true faith that they are not merely optional but are, rather, required for entrance into the one true faith. Still, even in these cases, I think it may be possible to argue that Paul’s role in the last third of the dialogue as adjudicator of the question of which particular rites must be enforced on behalf of the presupposed (but otherwise inaccessible) transcendent unity of faith tends to emphasize the practical (ethical) value of various rites rather than the question of their doctrinal veracity. For instance, while Paul allows a great deal of latitude concerning the extrinsic customs through which the Sacrament of Eucharist might be practiced (“provided faith is always maintained” § 18.66), he is less flexible about conventions regarding marriage since these conventions, he argues, concern moral behavior about which, unlike in matters of doctrine and speculation, it would *not* be prudent “to make allowances for the weakness of men” (§ 19.67). In other words, insofar as the *De pace fidei* offers a preference for the unique doctrinal content of Christianity, it does so on grounds that leave intact the presupposition that diverse religions each aim to perfect human beings with regard to the same underlying notion of the perfectibility of the species. Thus, even Paul’s role in the *De pace fidei* seems to offer a perspective on religious diversity that is generally consistent with the philosophy of history that I have been exploring in several of Nicholas’ other speculative works.

Unfortunately, at the same time, the manuductive process by which the *De pace fidei*’s representatives of non-Christian communities (especially those representing Islam) are depicted as being led to agreement with the Word and its apostolic representatives provokes suspicion. And, most disturbing of all, Nicholas seems to deny the representative of Judaism the one thing that every other participant achieves, for when the Jewish interlocutor is depicted as reluctant to acknowledge and accept the mystery of Incarnation, the Persian points out that “it will be more difficult to bring the Jews than others to this belief for they

admit nothing expressly about Christ.” To this remark, Peter simply responds:

In their Scriptures they have all these [teachings] regarding Christ; but they follow the literal meaning and refuse to understand. However, this resistance of the Jews will not impede harmony, for [the Jews] are few in number and will not be able to trouble the whole world by force of arms. (12.41)¹

Beyond this, even more astonishing to me is that, not much later, in his discussion with the German, Peter ironically adduces from the Jewish practice of *Kiddush HaShem* (it seems likely that Nicholas is relying on the reports of Christian crusaders in the Rhineland) the conclusion that Jews at least implicitly believe in the possibility of individual immortality since “for the sake of keeping and sanctifying the law, the Jews often deliver themselves over unto death,” which, according to Peter, means that the Jewish choice to die as a Jew rather than be forcibly converted to Christianity is legitimate evidence that Jews unwittingly maintain “a faith which presupposes Christ” (§ 15.53).

In essence, then, Nicholas does not reject Jewish ethical and liturgical practices on the grounds of their practical import (which is Paul’s strategy in the *De pace fidei*’s discussion of the quasi-universal value of some specific rites). Instead, Judaism is rejected because of a supposed stubborn refusal of Jews to practice hermeneutic charity in their interpretations of their own rites—i.e., Jewish stubbornness is characterized as a rational failure rather than a moral one. Needless to say, it is utterly vicious for Nicholas to assert that this correctly characterizes Jewish attitudes toward Christianity, let alone Jewish attitudes towards Jewish history and Judaism. So, in short, the *De pace fidei*’s anti-Judaism betrays both the philosophy of history that Nicholas explores in other speculative works as well as the possibility of reading the *De pace fidei* as

grounding the question of the legitimacy of particular modes of religious rites not in terms of the veracity of their orthodoxical relationship to a transcendently unified faith but in terms of their orthopraxical significance in guiding human conduct.

Moreover, the anti-Jewish sentiments of the *De pace fidei* also introduce a broader, perhaps more troubling question for Christian theology—one that can be made manifest by attending to the bitter ironies in Nicholas’ portrayal of Jewish stubbornness. The first of these ironies is a consequence of the fact that Nicholas’ Jewish interlocutor is, of course, a fiction. It is, after all, one thing for the biblical Moses to characterize Jews as stubborn, but at least Moses was, more or less, Jewish. But it is quite another thing, I think, for a 15th century cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church to depict, in the medium of an explicit fiction, Saint Peter as having asserted this in response to a question offered by an anonymous Persian interlocutor.

Let’s pause on this thought for a moment. I’d like to read to you from Brian Klug’s public address marking the 75th anniversary of Kristellnacht at the Jewish History Museum in Berlin. For while racist anti-Semitism and Nicholas’ religious anti-Judaism are not entirely the same creature, the applicability of Klug’s discussion of the *function* of anti-Semitism to our consideration of the *De pace fidei* will be readily apparent. In his address, Klug remarks:

Antisemitism consists in collapsing [a] distinction, so that to be Jewish is to be ‘Jewish’. The image, so to speak, fastens on to the reality: it *uses* the reality to proclaim itself falsely as real. ‘The rats are underneath the piles. / The Jew is underneath the lot’, is how T S Eliot puts it in two odious lines of poetry. But ‘underneath the lot’ is not the *real* Jew, the flesh-and-blood Jew; it is *Eliot’s* Jew, the *figure* of the ‘Jew’, a kind of cud, chewed over and spat out by the poet. For Eliot, this distinction between *real* Jews and *his* Jews is a distinction without a difference. And there’s the rub: thinking that Jews are really ‘Jews’ is precisely the core of antisemitism.²

¹ Persa: “...Erit tamen difficilium Iudaeos ad huius credulitatem conducere quam alios, quoniam ipsi de Christo nihil per expressum admittunt.” Petrus: “Habent in suis scripturis de Christo illa omnia; sed litteralem sensum sequentes intelligere nolunt. Haec tamen Iudaeorum resistentia non impedit concordiam. Pauci enim sunt et turbare universum mundum armis non poterunt.”

² “What Do We Mean When We Say ‘Antisemitism?’” Page 5 of the ms. for a keynote lecture of a conference on “Antisemitism in Europe

In short, Klug points out that anti-Semitism—and, he goes on to say, bigotry in general—intends to rob its victims of the autonomy to define and live the meanings of their own identities. However, I think we need to go a little further than Klug does in the specific context of the remark I have just quoted (though I would be surprised if Klug would disagree very much about the gist of what follows) by noting that Klug’s definition clearly implies that the bigot’s own self-definition is also partially constructed on the basis of its fictional representation of the identity of its intended victim. In other words, bigotry doesn’t merely rob the autonomy of those who are its intended victims; bigotry also functions to deny the autonomy of self-definition to those who embrace it. Thus, whether or not they are successful in their intended oppression of others, it is nevertheless always true that bigots are victims of their own views.

It is (or, at any rate, it should be) troubling enough to Cusanus scholars to have to acknowledge that the Bishop of Brixen was at least a bit of a bigot. But, in truth, this observation is important today only insofar as it has the potential to open for us more interesting questions than those having to do merely with this detail of Nicholas’ biography. Thus, the reason I want to stress that the logic of bigotry undermines the autonomy not only of its intended victims but also of bigots themselves is that recognizing this phenomenon helps make clear why the anti-Jewish trope in the *De pace fidei* exposes even while it simultaneously betrays Nicholas’ apologetic strategy in this text. This tension exists within Nicholas’ apologetic framework because his apologetic strategy hinges in part on the argument that the superiority of Christianity is a function of the fact that its theology is uniquely capable of recognizing how it is that a diversity of religions might manifest the presupposed unity of the grace of divine self-communication. That is, Nicholas seems to argue that

Christianity’s legitimacy and superiority as a manifestation of the one, true faith is partly a function of its ability to encourage ecumenical relationships between human beings—to offer sacramental and liturgical practices whose explicit forms may vary considerably across time and place so long as, within those particular contexts, the practices are accommodated to the intellectual and ethical needs of their practitioners. Thus it is a bitter irony indeed that the “Jew” is offered as a representative of a religion that utterly fails to accommodate the ecumenical spirit of Christianity—and it is, of course, a bitter irony because, in constructing Jewish identity as a metaphor for religious intolerance, Nicholas undermines his own apologetic strategy—it is Nicholas who comes across as stubbornly clinging to a narrow interpretation of the ecumenical possibilities of Jewish practices, as is especially evident where the question of the correct methods of biblical allegoresis are concerned. (And, at this point, it should be safe for me to say that it is no mere personal prejudice on my part to point out the monstrous irony of Nicholas’ characterization as stubborn and narrow-minded a people who are fond of joking that where there are two Jews present, there are at least three opinions.)

The problem may be that Christianity is just not very good at trying to defend itself on ecumenical grounds, and perhaps Nicholas’ failure is a consequence of trying to shoulder the burden of defining Christianity in part by thinking about what would constitute a rejection of its revealed content. That is, even though Nicholas clearly intends to defend Christianity’s legitimacy on the grounds that it correctly sees the temporal world as imbued and leavened by an unchanging, eternal, and divine power, he must also nevertheless both make allowances (in the case of human beings) for the freedom to reject the significance of this act of divine communication while simultaneously reading those rejections as confirming the significance of the very thing that is being rejected. In short, Nicholas is caught in the bind of allowing for the possibility of the anonymous Christian and implicit acts of faith but not being able to make space for genuine, willful indifference to the veracity of Christian orthodoxy. Put differently, the *De pace fidei*’s underlying incarnational metaphysics basically

Today: the Phenomena, the Conflicts,” organized by the Jewish Museum Berlin, the Foundation for Remembrance, Responsibility and Future, and the Centre for Research on Antisemitism, Berlin Institute of Technology, to mark the 75th anniversary of Kristallnacht. The text and a recorded video of the keynote can be found on the Jewish Museum Berlin’s website: http://www.jmberlin.de/main/EN/02-Events/Events_2013/2013_11_08_klug.php (viewed August 16, 2014).

requires that everyone who does not identify herself as a Christian is either an unwitting Christian or an unredeemably wicked person who stubbornly rejects the grace of divine self-communication.

In Nicholas' case, the nearest thing to an absolute rejection of Christianity is metaphorically identified with "Jewish" stubbornness. I do not need to say that this way of thinking about Jews and/or Judaism is not merely an aberration of Nicholas' own personal bigotry since anti-Judaism is hardly unique in the history of Christian theology. In fact, perhaps it is necessary for Christianity to understand itself as emerging out of a peculiar moment in a history that its flock tends to believe it shares with Judaism at least up until that time. The trouble is that Christianity, in Nicholas' hands at any rate, also sees Judaism itself as basically nothing more than a *part* of the single unified hermeneutic framework of the revealed history of Christianity. But, for obvious reasons, this is not how Jews understand themselves in relationship to what Christians tend to insist or assume is a shared history—which is to say nothing more than that there actually is more than one history here, and that, consequently, the particular rites that develop within the contexts of these different historical perspectives can only truly share, at best, an orthopraxical justification rather than any justification that that depends upon certitude regarding specific doctrinal content of the various possible meanings of revelation.

Leaving Nicholas' own specific case aside for a moment, my fundamental worry at this juncture¹ is whether Christianity is ultimately capable of such an understanding of itself. To put this question in its most abstract form, I wonder to what extent Christianity's emphasis on defining itself in terms of the veracity of its creeds (orthodoxy) hinders its ability to seek justification for itself as an orthopraxis. Christianity—by which I suppose I mean those who choose to identify themselves as Christians—

¹ I should note that my own thoughts about this "worry" have been in flux for the greater part of my life, and even I suspect that this will be a "worry" that stays with me, I don't by any means suppose that I will continue to worry about it in the same way or for the same reasons I do at this particular juncture in my life.

have a choice to make. On the one hand, Christianity may continue to define itself as a set of practices rooted in utter conviction about the veracity of its own unique interpretation of the revelation of an unchanging univocal reality, even while acknowledging that this univocal reality is only truly knowable by a single divine author. Unfortunately, this Christianity will tend to regard those who choose not to be Christians either as unwitting Christians or as fundamentally defective human beings who are incapable of charity and toleration. For non-Christians, of course, this strategy will seem not only hypocritical and incoherent but also prone to devolving into a rigid dogmatic scheme that, in practice, defines itself by constructing and imposing on those whom it regards as infidels and heretics a meaning that differs from how those others understand themselves.

A second option would be for Christianity to come to understand its own legitimacy on orthopraxical grounds rather than in terms of the supposed veracity of its revealed doctrinal content. This would probably be all well and good for many non-Christians, but for many Christians the pluralistic tendencies of this approach may seem too wishy-washy on the question of Christianity's underlying metaphysical commitments. The concern, in short, is that this second approach is liable to treat the person of Jesus mythologically and, in so doing, risk either denying the doctrine of the hypostatic union or leaving no ground on which to identify an actual point or points in history in which divine self-communication is uniquely manifested as a (sacred) ground for the development of a spiritual dimension in human life.

It's not for me to say in which direction Christian theology ought to head. Yet, even if I must insist that I understand myself to be a no more than a fellow-traveler with many Christians in this world, I don't think it is in any way illegitimate for me to communicate what I find problematic about Christian theology. Besides, in other contexts, I'd also be happy to tell you what I find appealing about Christianity. But I remain, nevertheless, an infidel, and it is not my intention to offer an apology for a worldview that I do not consciously profess. I do, of course, invite those for whom that sort of apology is

warranted to evaluate my diagnosis of this problem and offer a solution to it if they think the diagnosis is correct. At any rate, this broader concern is well beyond the specific scope of my interest in exploring the tension that I see within the hermeneutic principles that are at work in Nicholas' philosophy of history, his theology, and his philosophical anthropology. I'd like to conclude, then, by returning to my *terra familiaris* and offer a comment on the tension between the *De pace fidei*'s ecumenical aims and its apologetic strategy. Because the text's treatment of the representatives of Islam and Judaism makes this tension so obvious, it has often seemed strange to me that Cusanus scholars frequently look to the *De pace fidei* for evidence of the practical ecumenical import of Nicholas' speculative philosophy when other speculative works seem much more capable of shouldering that burden. But, to be fair, perhaps the abstractness of the speculative scope of the other works does not actually lend itself to thinking through the most significant practical implications of the fact that the human being is the sort of being whose felicity would require an insight into its very constitution as a being who must create meaning for itself. That is, it is one thing to explain in an abstract manner why a rational soul must strive to understand itself as a microcosm of the world and to offer that explanation through the idiom of a theology that articulates this view as a consequence of the human being's unique situation in its relationship to its divine author. It is likely to be quite another thing, however, to try to grapple with the way in which concrete political practices (religious practices being a species of political practices in this regard) foster or hinder human strivings. Perhaps, then, it is fair to say that the *De pace fidei*'s value for us consists both in its explanation of the political perils of doctrinal entrenchment and, at the same time, in its exhibition of the very failure that Nicholas works so hard to caution us against. But in order to appreciate its value in this regard—in order to keep faith with the insights that the text offers—we need to be prepared to see both aspects of this particular text even while we endeavor to guard against—and acknowledge the likelihood that we will fail to guard against—these same failures in responding to our own temptations either to valorize or condemn the text to the extent that it agrees or

disagrees with the assumptions that frame our own interpretative activities. And if my call for this kind of interpretive disposition sounds to some others as if I am calling for something like Christian charity and humility, well, then, at least I've had the opportunity to make my own case for what I regard to be the value of such an approach.

Paper Presentation: "Mirror, Seed, and Tree: Bridging Transcendence and Immanence in Cusanus and Spinoza" by Martin Sastri, University of Notre Dame, Indiana

It would be a naïve distortion to give a broad, universal characterization to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. However, it can be said that Deleuze's attention to the history of philosophy is directed in part by a desire to establish immanence as a positive principle. And so Deleuze will refer to moments in philosophy—such as Duns Scotus' univocity of being—as making up a "secret history," in which immanence is covertly established as a positive principle, overlaid by a superstructure of transcendence and remote divinity.

In his monograph *Spinoza et le Problème de l'Expression*,¹ Deleuze finds in Spinoza the perfect mechanism for the emergence and maintenance of immanence from cause to effect. Spinoza's God is a unique, infinite substance expressing an infinity of attributes. What is crucial here is the activity, *expression*. It is not so important—at least to Deleuze—what God is in himself; absolute infinity is an important precondition for what God does, but ultimately it is the expression of this infinity into attributes, explicating the divine essence, that makes this such an important part of the history of immanence. The continuity of Spinozan substance, attributes, and modes is unbroken and can be traversed by the mind as seamlessly

¹ (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1968). There is an English translation available, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1990). All references will be to the French edition.