

sion to counter what is being done by Bush and Sharon, to bring peace to the Middle East, to make an effort to overcome this terrible danger of war, of which he is absolutely aware. Today, he's going to a mosque, which houses the tomb of John the Baptist. It's the first time that a Pope has ever gone to a mosque. So, you know, this is not theoretical, academic stuff from many centuries away; this has the highest political significance if we want to find peace.

Now, modern historians refute these horror stories, and say that Mohamed II did not intend to destroy the city. On the contrary, they say that he reconstructed pub-

lic buildings, and that he brought groups of Muslims, Christians, and Jews into the city for resettlement, and sponsored the arts and the sciences. That may be historically true; I only mention this quotation, to show you that these horror stories were the image the West had at the time of what had happened.

It is all the more amazing, to see the elevated, lofty view which Nicolaus presents in *De pace fidei*, about the peace of belief, of faith, knowing it was written under the impression of the terrible reports I mention above.

Nicolaus begins *De pace fidei* with the following words:

Pope John Paul II on Nicolaus of Cusa

In a beautiful message sent to Bishop Leo Schwarz in Trier, Germany on May 15, on the occasion of the 600th birthday of Nicolaus of Cusa, Pope John Paul II pays homage to Cusanus in a way no Pope has done before him. The Pope writes, "Nicolaus Cusanus, with his world of ideas, despite the distance of time, has a message to give to all those who on the first Pentecost asked St. Peter: 'What should we do?'" The Pope stresses that the life of Nicolaus Cusanus can give us some guiding principles in answer to that question today.

He calls him "this great personality of the Church," who received his main education in Heidelberg, Padua, and Cologne, and whose heart was filled with the desire to serve the Church. The Pope recounts Cusanus's participation in the Council of Basel, and how he broke from the conciliarism of that Council to engage in many "diplomatic missions as well as initiatives to reform the Church": "He was member of the small delegation which went to Constantinople and which brought the Greek delegation—with the Emperor heading it—to the Union Council in Ferrara and Florence."

When Basel elected an anti-Pope, Cusanus, the Pope writes, urged the German dukes to give up their neutrality and to recognize Eugene IV as Pope. He became a Cardinal in 1448 and made trips as Papal legate throughout Germany to promote reforms of the Church and the monasteries. Aside from being an "excellent organizer," the Pope says, Nicolaus Cusanus understood himself as a "spiritual man," and he completely sacrificed his life as somebody living in the succession of the "Good Shepherd." He was actively

engaged in "exploring the treasury of the Holy Scripture and interpreting the Biblical word with the help of theological and philosophical ideas, so as to make them transmissible in a pedagogical way."

He mentions Cusanus's role in the negotiation with the Hussites, his efforts to end the Hundred Years War between France and England, and his 1459 proposal for General Reform of the Church. He then stresses that one cannot talk about Cusanus, without "mentioning the gigantic scientific work which he left behind," his library in Bernkastel-Kues being a living example of this: "Through his genial ideas, the Cardinal was inspired to think further ahead, and he laid out ideas which are efficient up to this day, or merit being taken up again, in Astronomy, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Medicine, Geography, Law, but especially in Philosophy and Theology." Of his many writings, the Pope mentions "On the Hunt for Wisdom."

Christ, the Pope stresses, was the main axis of Cusanus's thinking. The Pope uses the image of two elliptical points: the triune God and Jesus Christ, God-become-man. It was this message, the Pope says, which Cusanus wanted to transmit to non-Christians such as the Muslims and Jews. He "looked for a common basis in many religions while respecting the diversity."

Lastly, the Pope emphasizes the quality of "*Caritas*," in the spirit of "*Devotio moderna*," in Cusanus, which is demonstrated by his Founding of the "*Armen Hospiz*" (House for the Poor). "What Cusanus left behind" is an "obligation for the Church on its way into the third millennium," the Pope concludes. —WFW