

On the Peace of Faith

(1453)

Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa

CARDINAL NICOLAUS OF CUSA was born in 1401 in the city of Kues, opposite the city of Berncastel on the Mosel River in Germany. During the 64 years of his life, Cusanus became one of those rare universal geniuses whose work—centered on the concept of man as created in the living image of the Creator—fundamentally transformed not only his own generation, but generations to come.

Cusanus's emphasis on human creativity, which was affirmed at the ecumenical Council of Florence in 1439, was crucial to bringing an end to the Venetian dark age of the Fourteenth century, through a Renaissance of the arts and sciences, and the emergence in Europe of sovereign nation-states dedicated to the principle of the General Welfare. Venice attempted to counter these anti-imperial developments by assisting in the Turkish seizure of Constantinople in 1453, and by working to foment a "clash of civilizations" in the form of religious warfare.

Cusanus wrote "On the Peace of Faith" after the fall of Constantinople, in order to defeat what he referred to as the "power of the Prince of Darkness," through the power of creativity and the law of love, or agapē.

After his death in 1464, the Venetians did succeed in launching religious warfare throughout Europe, beginning with the expulsion in 1492 of the Jews, and later the Muslims, from Spain by the Spanish Inquisition, and continuing through the Thirty Years' War, until the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia reestablished peace on the basis of the Cusan idea of acting "for the advantage of the other."

This translation first appeared in the Schiller Institute's "Toward a New Council of Florence: 'On the Peace of Faith' and Other Works by Nicolaus of Cusa" (1993; 1995), edited by William F. Wertz, Jr.

I.

News of the atrocities, which have recently been perpetrated by the Turkish king in Constantinople and have now been divulged, has so inflamed a man who once saw that region, with zeal for God, that amongst many sighs he asked the Creator of all things if in His kindness He might moderate the persecution, which raged more than usual on account of diverse religious rites. Then it occurred that after several days—indeed on account of lengthy, continuous meditation—a vision was manifested to the zealous man, from which he concluded that it would be possible, through the experience of a few wise men who are well acquainted with all the diverse prac-

tices which are observed in religions across the world, to find a unique and propitious concordance, and through this to constitute a perpetual peace in religion upon the appropriate and true course.

So that this vision might at some time come to the knowledge of those who resolve such important matters, he has written it down clearly below, as far as his memory presented it to him.

He was transported to a certain intellectual altitude, where among those departed from life, in the council of the eminent over which the Almighty presided, the examination of this question was conducted thus. The King of Heaven and Earth said, that from the kingdom of this world sorrowful messengers have brought to Him

the groans of the oppressed; that many turn their weapons against each other for the sake of religion and in their power compel men to renounce long observed doctrines or kill them.

There were very many reports of such lamentations, which came from the whole earth, and the King commanded that they be brought before the full assembly of the holy. All seemed to be known to the residents of heaven, since they had been placed from the beginning by the King of the Universe over the individual provinces and sects of the world. According to their appearance they were not men, but rather intellectual powers.

One leader, the representative of all these ambassadors, spoke the following words: Lord, King of the Universe, what has each creature, that You have not given him? It pleased You to inspire the body of man, formed from the mud of the earth, with rational spirit, so that the image of Your ineffable power would reflect in him. From one man many people have been multiplied, who occupy the surface of the dry land.

Although the intellectual spirit, which is sown in the earth and is absorbed by shadows, does not see the light and the beginning of its origin, You have nonetheless created in him all that through which he, full of wonder over that which he attains with the senses, is at some time able to elevate his mental eyes to You, the Creator of all things, and to be reunited with You in the highest charity, and thus can finally return to his origin laden with fruit.

Nevertheless You know, Lord, that a great multitude cannot exist without much diversity and that almost all are compelled to lead a laborious life full of troubles and afflictions, and in servile subjugation must be subject to the kings who rule. Hence it has occurred, that only a few men have enough leisure time to employ the freedom of their will and to gain knowledge of themselves. They are distracted by many corporeal cares and duties. Thus they cannot seek You, who are the concealed God.

For this reason You have given Your people diverse kings and seers, who are called prophets, of whom the majority instituted cults and laws corresponding to the purpose of their legation in Your name, and thus instructed the uncultivated people. They subsequently accepted these laws, as if You, the King of Kings, had spoken with them face to face, and believed they heard not those men, but rather You in them.

To the various nations, however, You have sent various prophets and masters, the one for this, the other for another time.

It is a condition of earthly human nature to defend as truth lengthy custom, which is regarded as part of nature. And thus no small dissensions arise, when any community prefers its beliefs over another's.

Therefore, come to our assistance, You who alone are powerful. For this rivalry is on account of You, whom alone all venerate in all that they seem to adore. For no one desires anything in all that one seems to desire other than the Good, which You are. Also in all intellectual deliberation no one searches for something other than the true, which You are. What does the living search for other than life? What does the existing search for other than existence? You, therefore, who bestow life and existence, are that one, who seems to be sought differently in the diverse rites and is named with diverse names, since You as You are remain unknown and ineffable for all.

You, who are infinite power, are nothing of that which You have created, nor can the creature comprehend the concept of Your infinity, since there is no proportional relationship between the finite and the infinite.

You, omnipotent God, who are invisible to every mind, can in the manner You wish to be grasped, manifest Yourself visibly to him, to whom You wish. Conceal Yourself, therefore, no longer, Lord. Be gracious and manifest Your countenance and all people will be saved, who no longer can desert the vein of life and its too-little-tasted sweetness. No one departs from You, unless he is ignorant of You.

If You consider it worthy to act thus, the sword and the envy of hatred and every evil will cease. Everyone will know in what way there is only a single religion in the variety of rites. Indeed, one will not be able to annul this difference of rites, or in any case this will not be beneficial to do, since the diversity may bring an increase in devotion, if every region bestows the most vigilant effort upon its ceremonies, which it holds to be, as it were, the most pleasant to You, the King; however, at all events, just as You are only one—there ought to be only a single religion and a single cult of adoration of God.

Be therefore conciliatory, Lord, since Your anger is kindness and Your justice is mercy. Spare Your weak creature. Thus we, Your representatives, whom You have given to Your people as custodians and see here in this assembly, humbly entreat Your Majesty by every possible measure of our devotion.

II.

At this supplication of the archangel all the citizens of heaven inclined in the same manner towards the highest King and He, who sat upon the throne, spoke: He had sent man forth with his free will, and created him capable through this will of community with his fellow man. However, because the animal and earthly man is held down under the Prince of Darkness in ignorance and walks across the earth according to the conditions of that sensible life, which proceeds only from the world of the

Prince of Darkness, and not according to the intellectual and inner man, whose life proceeds from the land of his origin, He had called the errant man back with much care and diligence through various prophets, who were seers in comparison with the others.

Finally, as all these prophets could not sufficiently overcome the Prince of Ignorance, He had sent His Word, through which He has also created time. The Word clothed itself with humanity, in order in this manner to finally illumine the docile man with free will, so that the latter would see that he would have to walk not in accordance to the outer, but rather to the inner man, if he hoped to revert one day to the sweetness of immortal life. And since His Word put on the mortal man, witness was given in his blood of the truth, that man is capable of eternal life, for the sake of which his animal and sensible life are deemed as nothing, and that that eternal life is nothing other than the deepest longing of the inner man, i.e., the truth, which alone is desired, and which, since it is eternal, nourishes the intellect eternally.

This truth, which nourishes the intellect, is nothing other than the Word itself, in which everything is enfolded and by means of which everything is unfolded. It put on human nature, so that no man would have doubt, that according to the choice of his free will in his human nature he could achieve the immortal food of truth in that man, who is also the Word.

And God added thereto: Since this has been done, what then still remains that could be done and was not done?

III.

To this question of the King of Kings, the Word-Become-Flesh, who rules over all the residents of heaven, responded in the name of all: Father of Mercy! Indeed all Your works are complete and nothing remains that must be added to their completion! Nevertheless, human nature requires continual trials, so that the errors, of which there are very many in respect to Your Word, are extirpated and so the truth may constantly shine forth; this is so, because from the beginning You have decided that man would keep his free will and, since nothing in the sensible world perseveres constantly, opinions and conjectures and likewise also languages and their interpretations vary with

time. Since, however, the truth is one and is impossible not to be comprehended by every free intellect, all diversity of religion ought to be brought into one orthodox faith.

This pleased the King. He called the angels hither, which preside over all the nations and languages, and commanded each to bring one experienced man to the Word-Become-Flesh. And thereupon the most eminent men of this world appeared before the countenance of the Word, as though carried aloft in a state of ecstasy. To them the Word of God spoke as follows:

The Lord, King of Heaven and Earth, heard the sighs of the murdered and the fettered and those led into servitude, who suffer thus on account of the diversity of their religions. And since all who practice or suffer such persecution, are led to it for no other reason than that they believe, thus to promote their salvation and to please their Creator, the Lord has taken pity on His people and agreed to the plan to lead all diversity of religions through mutual agreement of all men harmoniously back to a single, henceforth inviolable religion.

To fulfill this task, He entrusts to you, the elected men. From His council He gives you helping and serving angel-spirits, who may protect and guide you. As the place of assembly He designated Jerusalem, which is the most suitable therefor.

IV.

One responded to this, who was older than all others and as it appeared, was a GREEK, after he had bowed in adoration:

We praise our God, whose mercy rules over all His works and who alone has the power to bring it about, that such a great diversity of religions would be brought together in one harmonious peace. We, who are His work, cannot disobey His direction. Nevertheless we request instruction, as to how this unity of religion can be introduced by us. For according to our persuasion, a nation will accept a faith with difficulty, which is different from that which it has hitherto defended with its blood.

The WORD responded: You will not find another faith, but rather one and the same single religion presupposed everywhere. You who are now present here, are called wise men by the sharers of your language, or at the very least philosophers or lovers of wisdom.



Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa

Permission of Dr. Helmut Gestrich, Cusanus-Gesellschaft, Berncastel-Kues

V.

So it is, said the GREEK.

If you all therefore love wisdom, do you not presuppose that this wisdom exists?

They proclaimed all at once that no one could doubt it.

The WORD continued: There can only be one wisdom. For if it were possible that there be several wisdoms, then these would have to be from one. Namely, unity is prior to all plurality.

GREEK: None of us doubts but that there is one wisdom, which we all love and on account of which we are called philosophers. Because of participation in it there are many wise men, whereas wisdom itself remains simple and undivided in itself.

WORD: You therefore all agree that the simplest wisdom is one, and that its power is ineffable. And everyone experiences that ineffable and infinite power in its unfolding. If one's view is turned towards that which is visible, and one considers that that which he sees has arisen from the power of wisdom—the same obtains for hearing and every single thing that affects the senses—then he affirms that the invisible wisdom exceeds everything.

GREEK: Also we, who practice this profession of philosophy, love the sweetness of wisdom in no other way than that of the previously tasted admiration of things, which are subject to the senses. Who would not be willing to die, in order to obtain that wisdom from which all beauty, all sweetness of life, everything desirable emanates? What power of wisdom is reflected in the frame of man: in his limbs, the order of these limbs, in the life infused in him, the harmony of the organs, in his motion, and finally in the rational spirit, which is capable of wonderful arts and is, as it were, the sign of wisdom, in which eternal wisdom, as in a close image, and truth as in a close similitude, shine forth over everything! And what is above all still more wonderful is: This reflection of wisdom comes always nearer to the truth through a vehement conversion of the spirit, until the living reflection, which comes from the shadow of the image, becomes constantly truer and more in conformity with true wisdom, even though that absolute wisdom, just as it is, can never be attained in another. And in this manner the eternal and inexhaustible wisdom is the perpetual and imperishable food of the intellect.

WORD: You are advancing to our goal, towards which we aspire, in the correct manner. Even though you acknowledge diverse religions, you all presuppose in all of this diversity the one, which you call wisdom. But say, does not the one wisdom embrace everything that can be stated?

The ITALIAN responded: Truly, there is no word outside of wisdom. The word of the wisest is in wisdom and wisdom in the word. Nothing is outside of it. The whole infinity is encompassed by wisdom.

WORD: Now if someone says, everything would be created in wisdom and another, everything would be created in the word, do they not then say the same thing or something different?

ITALIAN: Even though diversity appears in the manner of speaking, it is the same in regards to the meaning. For the Word of the Creator, in which he has created everything, can be nothing other than His wisdom.

WORD: What do you think: Is that wisdom God or a creature?

ITALIAN: Since God, the Creator, creates everything in wisdom, He Himself is necessarily the wisdom of the created wisdom. That is, prior to every creature there is wisdom, through which everything created is that which it is.

WORD: So wisdom is eternal, since it is prior to everything initiated and created.

ITALIAN: No one can deny that that, by which he understands that it is prior to everything originated, would be eternal.

WORD: It is therefore the origin.

ITALIAN: So it is.

WORD: Consequently it is also the simplest. Everything composed is originated. The composing can indeed not be after the composed.

ITALIAN: That I recognize.

WORD: Wisdom is therefore eternity.

ITALIAN: It cannot be otherwise.

WORD: It is, however, impossible, that there be several eternities, since unity is prior to all plurality.

ITALIAN: That also no one can deny.

WORD: Wisdom is therefore the one, simple and eternal God, the origin of everything.

ITALIAN: So must it be.

WORD: See, therefore, how you, the philosophers of various schools of thought, agree in the religion of the one God, whom you all presupposed in that which you as lovers of wisdom acknowledge.

VI.

At this the ARAB rose and responded: One can say nothing more clearly and truly!

WORD: If you recognize an absolute wisdom for the reason that you are a lover of wisdom, do you then

believe that there are men with vigorous intellects, who do not love wisdom?

ARAB: I believe with complete certainty, that all men naturally desire wisdom, for wisdom is the life of the intellect and this life can be maintained by means of no other food than the truth and the word of life or the intellectual bread, that is wisdom. Just as every existing thing desires all that, without which it is not able to exist, so does the intellectual life desire wisdom.

WORD: All men therefore acknowledge with you, that there is the one, absolute wisdom, which they presuppose. This is the one God.

ARAB: So it is. And no intelligent man can advocate some other one.

WORD: There is therefore only a single religion and cult for all those who are of vigorous intellect. This is presupposed in all the diversity of rites.

ARAB: You are wisdom, since You are the Word of God. I ask You: How should those who revere several gods concur with the philosophers in reverence of a single God? For it can be established, that the philosophers have at no time felt other than that it would be impossible for there to be several gods, over which the one, super-exalted God did not preside. The latter alone is the origin, from which the others have that which they have; He is more excellent by far than is the monad in number.

WORD: All who at any time worshiped several gods, presupposed the divinity to exist. They entreated it in all gods as if they participated in it. That is, as there is nothing white without whiteness, so there also are no gods without the divinity. The cult of gods therefore includes the acknowledgment of the divinity. And whoever says that there are several gods, says also that there is the one origin, which precedes all; similarly he who asserts that there are many sacred things, admits the sacredness of the sacred things, through the participation of which all other things are sacred. Never was a people so foolish, that it would have believed in several gods, of which each one would have been the prime cause, origin, or creator of the universe.

ARAB: I am also of this opinion. That is, one contradicts oneself, if one says there are several prime origins. Since the origin cannot be originated, because it would be originated from itself and thus would exist before it would exist, and reason does not grasp this, thus the origin is eternal. And it is not possible that there be several eternals, since unity exists prior to all plurality. Consequently, the one must be the origin and cause of the universe. Therefore, until now I have still found no people that had deviated in this from the road of truth.

WORD: If, therefore, all who venerate several gods looked to that which they presuppose, i.e., to the deity, which is the cause of all, and—as reason dictates—also assumed this latter in manifest religion, just as they worship this confusedly in all things which they name gods—the strife were dissolved.

ARAB: This were indeed not difficult. However, to terminate the worship of gods will be grievous. For the people holds as certain that it is granted support from its worship of the gods and therefore turns to these deities for its salvation.

WORD: If it were informed about its salvation, as we have done, then the people would seek salvation in that which has given existence and is itself the Savior and the infinite salvation, rather than in those who have nothing from themselves except that which is conceded to them by the Savior. However, if the people has recourse to the gods, which are regarded as sacred in the opinion of all because they lived in a deiform manner, as though to an intercessor in a state of infirmity or other necessity, or if it entreats one such in humble veneration or reverently attends to his memory, since he was a friend of God, whose life is to be imitated; then this would not contradict the single religion, so long as it dedicates the entire cult of worship to the one and only God. In this way the people could easily be satisfied.

VII.

Thereupon the INDIAN spoke: What then of statues and images?

WORD: The images which bring to our knowledge that which is conceded in the true cult of the one God, are not condemned. However, when they lead away from the cult of worship of the one God, as if something of the divinity were in the stones themselves and were attached to the statue, then, since they deceive and avert from the truth, they should deservedly be destroyed.

INDIAN: It is difficult to lead the people away from inveterate idol worship, and indeed on account of the oracles which are given by them.

WORD: Rarely are these oracles produced other than through priests, who report them as responses of the deity. For if the question has been proposed, then they give the answer pursuant to some art, i.e., in observation of the disposition of the heavens, or they form the answer, which they ascribe to the deity, by casting lots, as if heaven or Apollo or the sun had commanded them to respond. Hence it occurs that the majority of those answers are ambiguous, so that they do not openly convince by lies, or completely falsely; and if they are occa-

sionally true, then are so accidentally. However, if a priest can conjecture well, then he issues oracles better and his answers come nearer the truth.

INDIAN: However, it is certain that frequently a spirit who is bound to a statue patently imparts an oracle.

WORD: Neither the soul of a man, nor of Apollo, nor of Aesculapius, nor of any other which is worshiped as God, but rather the evil spirit, the foe of human salvation from the inception, sometimes, however rarely, feigns through the faith placed in him by man, to be bound to a statue and to be coerced into answers, in order thus to deceive. However, after the deceit has been detected, he disappears. Therefore, today they have a mouth and do not speak. After this deception of the seducer has become known through experience in many lands, idolatry has been condemned in nearly all locations by the wiser men. And it will likewise not be difficult in the Orient to detect the deceit of idolatry and achieve the invocation of the one God, so that its inhabitants are brought into conformity with the rest of the nations of the world.

INDIAN: Since the evident deceits were detected and as a result thereof the most prudent Romans and likewise the Greeks and Arabs destroyed the idols, it is by all means to be hoped, that the idolatrous Indians will act similarly; above all, since they are wise and do not hesitate to acknowledge the necessity of religion in the worship of the one God. If they also thereby venerate their idols in their manner, they will come thus to a peaceful conclusion in respect to the adoration of the one God.

It will, however, be very difficult to achieve agreement from all sides in respect to the triune God. That is, it will appear to all that the trinity cannot be conceived without three gods. If there is a trinity in the divinity, so there will also be plurality in the deity. However, it was previously said—and in fact, it is necessarily so—that there is only one absolute deity. Therefore, there is no plurality in the absolute deity, but rather in the participating, who are not God in the absolute, but rather gods through participation.

WORD: God, as Creator, is three and one. As infinite He is neither three, nor one, nor anything that can be stated. The names which are attributed to God are taken from creatures, since He Himself is ineffable in Himself and is above all that can be named or stated. Those who worship God ought to adore Him as the origin of the universe; in this one universe, however, there is a multitude of parts, inequality and separation—namely, the multitude of stars, trees, men, stones is evident to the senses—the origin of all multitude, however, is unity; therefore, the origin of multitude is the eternal unity.

In the one universe inequality of parts is found, since no part is similar to the other. However, the inequality derives from the equality of unity. Consequently, eternal equality is prior to every inequality.

In the one universe, distinction or separation of parts is found. Before every distinction, however, is the connection of unity and equality. Separation, or distinction, departs from this connection. The connection is therefore eternal.

However, there cannot be several eternals. Consequently, in the one eternity is found unity, equality of unity, and the union of unity and equality, or connection. Thus, the most simple origin of the universe is triune, since in the origin the originated must be enfolded. Everything originated, however, signifies that it is thus enfolded in its origin, and in everything originated a threefold distinction of this kind can be found in the unity of the essence. And for this reason, the simplest origin of everything will be three and one.

VIII.

CHALDEAN: Even if the sages are somehow able to grasp this, it nevertheless exceeds the comprehension of the common man. For as I understand it, it is not true that there are three gods, but rather that there is one, which one is three. Do you not wish thereby to say that that one is threefold in power?

WORD: God is the absolute power of all powers, since He is omnipotent. If there is, therefore, only one absolute power, which is the divine essence, then to name this power triune, is nothing other than to say, that God is triune. However, the divine power should not be conceived such that it would be distinguished in opposition to reality, since in God power is reality itself. The same is true of absolute potentiality, which is also power.

It appears absurd to no one, if it is said that the omnipotent divinity, who is God, would have the unity in Himself, which is entity, equality, and connection, so that in this manner the power of unity would unify or give essence to everything that has being—that is, a thing exists insofar as it is one; the one and entity can be interchanged—and so that the power of equality equalizes and gives form to everything that exists. That is, a thing is equal in that it is not more and not less than that which it is. For if it were more or less, then it would not exist. Therefore, it cannot exist without equality. Thus the power of connection unifies and binds together.

Hence in the power of unity omnipotence calls being out of non-being, so that that which was not, becomes capable of being. And it gives it form in the power of

equality and binds it together in the power of connection; just as one sees in the essence of love, how love binds together the loving with the lovable.

Therefore, when man is called by omnipotence out of not-being, then unity arises as first in order, after which equality and then the connection of both. For nothing can exist, unless it is one. The one is therefore prior. And since man is called out of not-being, the unity of man arises as first in order, then the equality of this unity or entity—that is, the equality is the unfolding of form in unity, on account of which it is called the unity of man and not of the lion or some other thing. However, the equality can only arise out of the unity, for not otherness, but rather unity or identity produces equality. Finally, love or connection proceeds from unity and equality. That is, unity is not separable from equality and equality from unity. The connection or love is therefore such that, with the positing of unity equality is posited, and with the positing of unity and equality love or connection is posited.

If therefore no equality is found, without it being the equality of unity, and if no connection is found, without it being the connection of unity and equality, such that the connection is in unity and equality, equality is in unity and the unity is in equality, and unity and equality are in connection, then it is obvious that there can be no essential distinction in the trinity. Namely, everything that is essentially different is such that the one can be, without the other existing. However, because the trinity exists such that, with the positing of unity the equality of unity is also posited and conversely, and with the positing of unity and equality connection is also posited and conversely, it is seen not in the essence, but in the relationship, in what manner one is unity, another is equality, and another is connection.

However, a numerical distinction is essential. Indeed, the number two differs essentially from three. With the positing of the number two, three is not posited, and the three does not follow from the existence of two. Therefore, the trinity in God is not composed, plural or numerical, but rather the simplest unity. Whoever believes therefore that God is one, does not deny that He be three-

fold, insofar as he understands that Trinity as not different from the simplest unity, but rather as unity itself, such that that trinity, were it not in unity, were also not the origin, which is so omnipotent that it can create the universe and each individual.

The more unified a power is, the more powerful it is; however, the more unified it is, the simpler it is. Therefore, the more powerful or stronger it is, the simpler it is. Hence if the divine essence is omnipotent, it is completely simple and threefold. For without trinity it were not the simplest, strongest, and omnipotent origin.

CHALDEAN: I am of the opinion that no one can disagree with this deliberation. However, that God had a Son and participant in His deity, this the Arabs and many with them assail.

WORD: Some name unity Father, equality Son and connection the Holy Spirit, since those designations, even though they are not proper, nevertheless suitably designate the Trinity. For the Son is from the Father, and Love or the Spirit is from unity and equality of the Son. That is, the nature of the Father passes over in the Son into equality. Therefore, love and connection arise out of unity and equality.

And if simpler designations could be found, they were more suitable, as are, for example, unity, idity,* and identity. These designations seem to

unfold the most fecund simplicity of essence better. Also notice that there is a certain fecundity in the essence of the rational soul, that is, mind, wisdom, and love or will, since the mind exerts intellect or wisdom from itself, and from both proceeds the will or love. And this trinity in the unity of essence of the soul is the fecundity, which man possesses in his similarity to the most fecund, uncreated Trinity. Likewise every created thing bears the image of creative power, and possesses fecundity in its manner in greater or more distant similarity to the most fecund Trinity, Creator of everything. It is therefore not so, that the creature has its being only from divine being,



Albrecht Dürer, "Christ shows His disciples the signs in the heavens," 1503.

* The Latin *iditas* is derived from the demonstrative pronoun *id*, meaning it or that, and the suffix *itas*, meaning a state or condition. It could therefore also be translated as *itiness*.—WFW

but rather it has its triply fecund being in its manner from the most fecund three-and-one Being. Without this fecund Being neither the world could subsist, nor would the creature exist in the best manner in which it could be.

IX.

To this the JEW responded: The Trinity, blessed above all, which no one can deny, has been explained in the best possible way. One of the prophets revealed it to us briefly, when he said, he had asked God how He, who had given others the fecundity of generation, could be sterile. And although the Jews shun the Trinity, because in their eyes it signifies plurality, they will nevertheless willingly acquiesce, as soon as they have seen that it signifies the simplest fecundity.

WORD: Also the Arabs and all wise men will easily see on the basis of these deliberations, that to deny the Trinity is to deny divine fecundity and creative power, and that to acknowledge the Trinity is to deny the plurality and community of gods. That fecundity, which is also a trinity, brings it about that it is unnecessary to have several gods, which mutually support each other in the creation of everything, for the one infinite fecundity suffices to create all that which can be created.

The Arabs can grasp the truth much better in this way, as when they say in their manner, God has essence and soul, and add thereto that He possesses word and spirit. For if one says God has a soul, then this soul cannot be understood except as the reason or word, which is God. That is, reason is nothing other than the Word. And what is the Holy Spirit of God other than the love, which is God?

Nothing is truly verified about the completely simple God, that is not He Himself. If it be true that God has the Word, then it is also true that the Word is God. If it be true that God has spirit, then it is true that the spirit is God. Having befits God improperly, since He Himself is everything; thus having in God is being. Therefore, the Arab does not deny that God is mind, and from this the Word or wisdom is generated, and from both the spirit or love proceeds. This is that Trinity which was explained above and is posited by Arabs, even though most of them do not perceive that they acknowledge the Trinity.

Likewise you Jews also find in your prophets, that the heavens are formed by the Word of God and by His spirit. In the manner in which the Arabs and Jews deny the Trinity, it must certainly be denied by all. However, in the manner in which the truth of the Trinity was unfolded above, it must necessarily be embraced by all.

X.

To this the SCYTHIAN responded: There can be no hesitancy in the adoration of the completely simple Trinity, which even now all those adore, who venerate the gods. Wise men say, God is the Creator of both sexes and He is love; thereby they wish to explain the most fecund Trinity of the Creator, as well as they can. Others assert that God, who is superexalted, exerts the intellect or reason from Himself. They call Him God of God, and assert that He is the Creator-God, since everything created has a cause and reason, as to why it is this and not that.

The one infinite reason of all things is therefore God. However, the reason, which is logos or word, emanates from that which produces it, such that, if the Omnipotent produces the Word, it becomes in the thing that which is enfolded in the Word; likewise if the Omnipotent says, "Let there be light," the light enfolded in the Word thus exists actually. Therefore, this Word of God is intellectual, such that a thing exists in reality, as soon as it is conceived as existing in His intellect.

They furthermore say that the spirit of connection proceeds third in order. The latter connects all to one, so that there is unity as the unity of the universe. That is, they posit a world soul or spirit, which connects everything and by means of which every creature obtains participation in the world order, in that it is a part of the universe. It is therefore necessary, that this spirit exist in the origin of the origin itself. Moreover, love connects. Therefore, this spirit, whose power is diffused throughout the universe, can be called the love, which is God or charity. Thus the connection, through which the parts are connected to the one or the whole, and without which there would be no perfection, has God as its origin. In this manner one sees clearly, that all wise men touch upon something of the Trinity in unity. Therefore, when they shall hear this explanation, which we have heard, they shall rejoice and give praise.

The GAUL responded: I have also occasionally heard the following argument brandished among the learned: Eternity is either ungenerated or generated or neither ungenerated nor generated. I see that ungenerated eternity can rationally be called omnipotent Father, whereas the generated can be called Word or Son, and the neither ungenerated nor generated love or Holy Spirit, since the latter proceeds from both; it is neither ungenerated, since it is not the Father, nor generated, since it is not the Son, but rather proceeds from both.

Eternity is therefore one and it is threefold and completely simple. The one deity is threefold, the one essence

is threefold, the one life is threefold, the one power is threefold, and the one strength is threefold. In this deliberation I have now progressed so far, that those things which were obscure are revealed as clearly as light, to the extent it is now granted.

However, the greatest contradiction still remains in this world, since some assert, the Word has become flesh for the redemption of all, the others, however, think otherwise; therefore it is necessary for us to be informed as to how we can attain concord in this difficulty.

WORD: The Apostle Peter has undertaken to elucidate this part of our dialogue. Listen to him. He will instruct sufficiently concerning that which is obscure to you.

XI.

And PETER appeared in their midst and began in the following way:

PETER: All diversity of opinion regarding the incarnation of the Word seems to be of the following variety: First we have those who say, the Word of God is not God. This question has previously been sufficiently answered, since the Word of God can only be God. This Word, however, is reason. That is, the Greeks call the Word *logos*, which is reason.

There is no doubt that God, the creator of all rational souls and spirits, has reason. However this reason of God, as was explained above, is nothing other than God. Having coincides in God with being. That is, that One, from whom everything is, enfolds everything in Himself; He is everything in everything, since He is the Former of everything. Consequently He is the Form of forms. However, the Form of forms enfolds in Himself all formable forms.

The Word or reason, the infinite cause and the measure of all that can be, is therefore God. Therefore, those who admit that the Word of God is incarnate or human, must acknowledge that that man, whom they designate as the Word of God, is also God.

At this point the PERSIAN spoke and said: Peter, the Word of God is God. How then could God, who is immutable, become not God, but rather a man, the Creator creature? Nearly everyone denies that, except a few in Europe. And even if there are a few among us, who are called Christians, they agree with us, that it is impossible that the infinite be finite and the eternal temporal.

PETER: This, i.e., that the eternal is temporal, I resolutely deny together with you. However, since all of you who adhere to Arab law, designate Christ as the Word of

God—and you do that correctly—it is necessary that you also acknowledge Him as God.

PERSIAN: We acknowledge Him as the Word and the spirit of God, since among all those who are or were, no one possessed that excellence of the Word and of the spirit of God. Nevertheless, we do not therefore admit that He has been God, for the latter has no participant. So that we do not fall into a plurality of gods, we deny, that the former is God, but confess that he is nearest to God.

PETER: Do you believe in the human nature in Christ?

PERSIAN: We believe and affirm, that this has truly been in him and persisted.

PETER: Quite right. This nature, which is human, was not divine. And thus in everything which you see in Christ corresponding to his human nature, through which he was similar to other men, you have apprehended not Christ as God, but rather as man.

PERSIAN: So it is.

PETER: Therein no one disagrees with you. For human nature was in Christ most perfectly. Through it he was a real man and mortal just as other men. According to this nature he was not, however, the Word of God. Tell me therefore: what do you intend, if you acknowledge him as the Word of God?

PERSIAN: We do not intend nature but rather grace, that is, we intend, that he has attained this lofty grace, because God placed His Word in him.

PETER: Has God not also placed His Word in a similar manner in the other prophets? For they all spoke through the Word of the Lord and were messengers of the Word of God.

PERSIAN: So it is. However, Christ is the greatest of all prophets. Therefore, it befits him more properly to be called the Word of God than other prophets. In particular businesses and provinces several missives can contain the word of the king. However there is only one missive, which contains the word of the king, by which the whole kingdom is ruled, that is, because it contains the law and precept, which all must obey.

PETER: It appears that you have given us a good similitude for our purpose: The word of the king is written on various pieces of paper; however, these pieces do not change into another nature. They remain of the same nature after the inscription of the word, as they were before. Thus you say, human nature is maintained in Christ.

PERSIAN: That we do.

PETER: Very well. But notice the difference which exists between a missive and the heir of the kingdom. In

the heir of the kingdom the king's own word is alive, free and unlimited, however, not in the missive.

PERSIAN: That I acknowledge. If the king sends his heir to the kingdom, then the heir bears the living and unlimited word of his father.

PETER: Is the Word not the true heir, who is neither messenger nor envoy, neither letter nor missive? And are not all the words of messengers and missives enfolded in the word of the heir? And although the heir of the kingdom is not the father, but rather the son, he is not different from the regal nature; rather he is the heir on account of this equality.

PERSIAN: I understand very well. However, there remains a difficulty: The king and his son are two. Therefore, we do not admit that God possesses a son. That is, the son would be another God than the father, just as the son of the king is another man than the father.

PETER: You impugn the similitude well. For it is not correct, if you attend to the supposed persons. However, if you remove the numerical diversity of the supposed persons and reflect on the potency, which is in the regal dignity of the father and of the son as his heir, then you see how that regal power is one both in the father and in the son; in the father it is as in the ungenerated, in the son it is as in the generated or living word of the father.

PERSIAN: Continue!

PETER: Therefore, that absolute regal power is ungenerated and generated, and the ungenerated summons to the society of connatural and generated succession one who is by his nature different, so that the different nature can simultaneously and undividedly possess the kingdom in union with its own nature. Then do not the natural and the graced or adoptive successions concur in the one inheritance?

PERSIAN: It is manifest.

PETER: Likewise filiation and adoption are also united in the one succession of the one kingdom. However, the succession of adoption does not exist in itself, but rather is supposed in the succession of filiation. Adoption, which does not succeed through its own nature, must, if it is to succeed in the existence of filiation, succeed not in itself, but rather is supposed in that which succeeds by nature. Therefore, if adoption, since it succeeds with filiation in the attainment of the completely simple and indivisible inheritance, obtains succession not from itself, but rather from filiation, the adoptive and the natural successor cannot be different, even though the nature of adoption and the natural are different.

How shall both concur in the succession of the indivisible inheritance, if the adoptive son were separated and did not subsist in the one and the same hypostacy with

the natural son? We must therefore maintain, that in Christ the human nature is united to the Word or the divine nature, such that the human does not pass over into the divine, but rather adheres thus to it indissolubly, so that it is not separate in itself, but becomes a person in the divine nature; so that the human nature, which is now summoned to the succession of eternal life with the divine, can achieve immortality in the divine.

XII.

PERSIAN: I grasp that competently. However, clarify what has already been said by means of another intelligible example.

PETER: It is impossible to form precise similitudes. However, behold: Is wisdom in itself an accident or substance?

PERSIAN: As it is in itself, it is substance, however, as it occurs in another, it is an accident.

PETER: In all wise men all wisdom comes from that which is wisdom per se, since it is God.

PERSIAN: This has been demonstrated.

PETER: Is not one man wiser than another?

PERSIAN: Certainly.

PETER: Therefore, whoever is wiser, is closer to wisdom per se, which is the absolute maximum. And whoever is less wise, is more distant from it.

PERSIAN: That I admit.

PETER: However, according to his human nature a man can never be so wise, that he could not be still wiser. For between contracted wisdom, i.e., human wisdom and wisdom per se, which is divine, maximum and infinite wisdom, an infinite distance always remains.

PERSIAN: That is similarly evident.

PETER: That is true in like manner of absolute mastery and of contracted mastery. In absolute mastery the art is infinite, in the contracted the art is finite. Let us therefore suppose, that the intellect of any man possesses such mastery and such wisdom, that it is not possible to have greater wisdom or greater mastery. This intellect then is to such a high degree united with wisdom per se or mastery per se, that this union could not be greater. Would not this intellect achieve divine strength, in the strength of the united wisdom and mastery, which are maximal and with which it is united? And in a man who possesses such an intellect, would not the intellectual nature of the man be united most immediately with the divine nature or the eternal wisdom, the Word or omnipotent art?

PERSIAN: I acknowledge all that. However, this union would still be one of grace.

PETER: If the union of the inferior nature with the

divine were so great, that it could not be greater, then it were united to it in personal unity. That is, as long as the inferior nature were not elevated into personal and hypostatic unity with the superior, it could be greater. Therefore, as soon as the maximum union is posited, the inferior nature subsists in the superior, such that it adheres to it. That occurs not through nature, but through grace. This grace, however, is the maximum, which cannot be greater. It is not separate from nature, since it is united with it. Therefore, even if human nature were united with the divine by means of grace, that grace, since it cannot be greater, would nevertheless be most immediately terminated in nature.

PERSIAN: Whatsoever you may have said, to the effect that human nature in any man can be elevated through grace to union with divine nature, the man Christ should no sooner be called God than another saint, even though he is the most sacred among men.

PETER: If you attend to the fact, that there is in Christ alone that highest height, which cannot be greater and that maximum grace, which cannot be greater and that maximum sanctity, and thus in respect to the rest; and attend to the fact, that there cannot be more than but one maximum height, which cannot be greater—the same is true of grace and sanctity—and thereafter observe, that every height of every one of the prophets, whatsoever degree it may have had, is incomparably distant from that height which cannot be greater, such that for every degree of height there can be infinitely many greater or smaller between it and the sole-highest—the same is true of grace, sanctity, prudence, wisdom, mastery, and every single thing—then you see quite clearly, that there can only be one Christ, in whom human nature is united in unity with its supposit of the divine nature.

The Arabs also acknowledge the same, although the majority do not fully consider it. The Arabs say namely, that in this world and in the future one Christ is the sole-highest and the Word of God. Even those who describe Christ as God and man, indeed say nothing other than

that Christ is the sole-highest man and the Word of God.

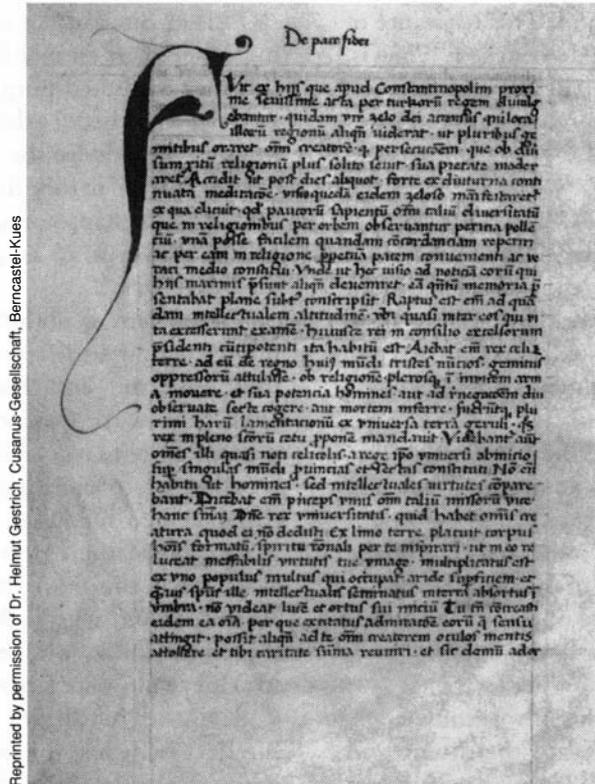
PERSIAN: It therefore appears that the Arabs, after they have considered well that union which is necessarily present in the highest, can be led to acceptance of this belief. For the unity of God, which they endeavor to guard with maximum strength, is in no way injured through this belief, but is saved. However, tell us how one can grasp, that that human nature obtains existence not in itself, but rather is supposed through its adherence to the divine.

PETER: Take the following example, even though it is remote. A magnetic stone attracts iron upwards. And while it adheres to the air around the magnet, the nature of the iron does not subsist in its own weighty nature. Otherwise, that is, it would not hang in the air, but rather according to its own nature fall towards the center of the earth. But by adhering to the magnet, the iron subsists in the air by means of the strength of the magnet's nature, and not by means of the strength of its own nature, in virtue of which it could not be there. However, the cause whereby the nature of the iron is thus inclined toward the nature of the magnet, lies in the fact that the iron bears the similitude of the magnet's nature in itself, from which it is said to receive

its origin. Therefore, if the human intellectual nature adheres most closely to the divine intellectual nature, from which it has received its being, it would adhere inseparably to it, just as to the source of its life.

PERSIAN: I understand.

PETER: There is still a large group of Arabs, who acknowledge that Christ has resuscitated the dead and created birds from clay and much else, which they expressly say, Jesus Christ, as he who had the power therefor, has done. On this basis they can very easily be won over, since it cannot be denied that he has done this in the strength of the divine nature, to which the human was united suppositively. The power of Christ, with which he commanded that that occur which is acknowledged by the Arabs to have occurred, could not be



Reprinted by permission of Dr. Helmut Gestrich, Cusanus-Gesellschaft, Berncastel-Kues

Manuscript copy, "De pace fidei."

according to human nature, unless the human had been assumed in union with the divine, in whose power it lies to so command.

PERSIAN: This and much else that is described in the Koran, the Arabs affirm of Christ. However, it will be more difficult to lead the Jews than all others to faith in these things, since they expressly admit nothing regarding Christ.

PETER: In their scriptures they have everything concerning Christ. However, since they follow the literal sense, they do not want to understand. This resistance of the Jews, however, does not impede concord. That is, they are few and cannot bring the whole world into disorder with arms.

XIII.

The SYRIAN responded to this: Peter, I have heard that greater concord could be found among every religious group on the basis of their presuppositions. Tell us now, how this shall be realized in respect to this point.

PETER: I will, however, first tell me: Is not God alone eternal and immortal?

SYRIAN: I believe so, for everything besides God has originated. Because it therefore has an origin, it will also have an end corresponding to its nature.

PETER: Does not nearly every religion—that of the Jews, the Christians, the Arabs and of many other men—hold, that the mortal human nature of every man is resurrected after temporal death to everlasting life?

SYRIAN: So one believes.

PETER: Therefore, all these religions acknowledge, that human nature must be united to the divine and immortal nature. For how else would human nature pass over into immortality, if it did not adhere to the divine in inseparable union?

SYRIAN: Faith in the resurrection necessarily presupposes this.

PETER: If faith therefore holds this, then human nature is first united with the divine in some man. This occurs in that one who is the countenance of all people and the highest Messiah and Christ, as Arabs and Jews call Christ. The latter, however, who in the opinion of all is nearest to God, will be the one in whom human nature is first united with God. He is therefore the savior and mediator of all, in whom human nature, which is one and through which all men are men, is united to the divine and immortal nature, so that all men, who are of the same nature, attain resurrection from death.

SYRIAN: I understand that you would say: Faith in the

resurrection from death presupposes the union of human nature with the divine, without which this faith were impossible. This is the case, so you assert, in Christ. Therefore, this faith presupposes him.

PETER: You understand correctly. From this grasp, how all promises which are found among the Jews, are affirmed in the faith in the Messiah or mediator. Through him alone could and can those promises be fulfilled, as far as they concern eternal life.

SYRIAN: How is it with other religious bodies?

PETER: Similar. For all men strive and hope for nothing other than eternal life in their human nature. For this they instituted purgations of souls and sacred rites, in order to be better adapted in their nature to that eternal life. Men desire the beatitude, which is eternal life, not in another nature than their own. Man wants to be nothing but man, not an angel or another nature. He wants, however, to be a happy man, who attains the highest felicity.

This felicity is nothing other than enjoyment or the union of human life with its source, from which life itself emanates, and this is divine immortal life. However, how were this possible to man, if it were not granted to one, who shares the same nature with all to be elevated to such union, and through whom, as if through their mediator, all men could achieve the ultimate goal of their desires? And this one is the way, since he is the man through whom every man has access to God, who is the end of all their desires. It is therefore Christ, who is presupposed by all who hope to achieve ultimate felicity.

SYRIAN: This pleases me very well. For if the human intellect believes, it can achieve union with wisdom, where it obtains the eternal sustenance of its life, then it presupposes that the intellect of some highest man has achieved that union in the highest measure and has attained that highest mastery, through which mastery it itself similarly hopes to come at some time to this wisdom. For if it did not believe this possible in even some highest of all men, he would hope in vain. And since the hope of all is in being able to attain at some time that felicity, on account of which every religion exists—and there is no deception in this, since this hope stems from a connate desire common to all, to which religion, which consequently is likewise connate to all, conforms—I see that this master and mediator, who possesses the summit of the perfection of human nature and dominion, is presupposed by all.

But the Jews say, to be sure, that this prince of nature, in whom all defects of all men are remedied, has not yet been born, but will one day be born.

PETER: It suffices that both Arabs, as well as Christians and others, who have borne witness in their blood, by that which the prophets have proclaimed of him, and which he himself, while he abided in the world, has effected beyond the strength of all men, testify that he has come.

XIV.

SPANIARD: There will surely be another difficulty regarding the Messiah, of whom the greater part of the world acknowledges that he has come, namely in respect to his birth, since Christians and Arabs assert that he was born of the Virgin Mary, while others hold this to be impossible.

PETER: All who believe that Christ has come, acknowledge that he was born of the Virgin Mary. For since he is the ultimate perfection of nature and the sole-highest, of which father should he then be the son? For every generating father is in the perfection of nature so far distant from the ultimate perfection of nature, that he cannot communicate to the son this ultimate perfection, beyond which there can be none higher and which is not possible except for one man. Only that father can do this, who is the Creator of nature. Therefore, the highest has no other father than Him, from whom is all paternity. Therefore, by divine strength the highest is conceived in the womb of the Virgin, and in this virgin the highest fecundity concurred with virginity. Therefore, Christ was born to us, such that he is most connected to all men. Namely, he has Him for his Father, from whom every human father has it that he is a father. And he has her for his mother, who has joined carnally with no man, so that in this way everyone finds his nature in ultimate perfection through the closest conjunction in Christ.

TURK: A not insignificant difference still remains. Whereas the Christians assert that Christ was crucified by the Jews, there are others who deny this.

PETER: That some deny the crucifixion of Christ, but say that he still lives and will return at the time of the Anti-Christ, is due to the fact that they are ignorant of the mystery of death. And since he will come, as they assert, they believe that when he comes back, he will come back in mortal flesh, as if he could not otherwise conquer the Anti-Christ. That they deny his crucifixion by the Jews, they appear to do out of reverence for Christ, as if such men could have no power over Christ.

However, note that one must rightly give credence to those multifarious reports and the proclamation of the

apostles, who have died for the truth, i.e., that Christ has died thus. Likewise, the prophets also predicted that Christ would have to be condemned to the most ignominious death, which was death on the cross.

The reason for this is the following: Sent by God, the Father, Christ came, in order to announce the kingdom of heaven, and what he said of this kingdom could be confirmed in no better way than through the testimony of his blood. Therefore, in order to be most obedient to God the Father and to provide all certitude for the truth, which he announced, he has died. He took upon himself the most ignominious death, so that no man might refuse to accept the truth, in testament to which they would all know that Christ had voluntarily accepted death.

For he preached the Kingdom of Heaven and gave notice, how a man, who is capable of this kingdom, could attain it. In comparison to this kingdom, the life of this world, which is so tenaciously loved by all, is to be deemed as nothing. And so that one would know that the truth is the life of that Kingdom of Heaven, he gave up the life of this world for the truth, so that he would thus in the most perfect manner proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven, and liberate the world of the ignorance which prefers this life to the future one. He wished to sacrifice himself for the many, so that exalted thus before the eyes of all upon the cross, he would draw all to belief and clarify the Gospel, comfort the pusillanimous, and freely give himself for the redemption of the many, and do everything in the best way in which it could be done, so that man would achieve the faith of salvation, the hope of acquiring it, and the charity necessary for the fulfillment of the commands of God.

If therefore, the Arabs would attend to the fruit of the death of Christ, and to the fact that he saw himself as sent by God to sacrifice himself in order to fulfill the desire of his Father, and that there was nothing more glorious for Christ than to die even the most ignominious death for truth and obedience, then they would not take away the glory of the cross from Christ, through which he earned the merit of being the highest and becoming exalted above all in the glory of the Father.

If Christ further proclaimed, that men will achieve immortality after their death in the resurrection, how could the world have been able to achieve better certainty concerning it, than by means of the fact, that he himself has died of his own will, is resurrected, and appeared among the living? Namely, the world was then given ultimate certainty, when it heard that the man Christ, who had died on the cross openly and publicly, was resurrected from the dead and lives—according to the testimony of many who saw him alive and died in this testi-

mony, in order to be faithful witnesses to his resurrection. This was the most perfect evangelization, which Christ revealed in himself, and it could not be more perfect. However, without death and resurrection it would always have been able to be more perfect.

Therefore, whoever believes that Christ has fulfilled the will of God the Father in the most perfect manner, must thereby also acknowledge all this, without which the evangelization would not have been the most perfect.

Consider further, that the Kingdom of Heaven was concealed from all until Christ. It is indeed the Gospel of Christ to proclaim this unknown kingdom to all. There was neither faith, nor hope of attaining the Kingdom of Heaven, nor could it be loved by anyone, since it was completely unknown. It was also not possible, that any man would come to that kingdom, as long as human nature had not yet been elevated to that exaltation, so that it would become a consort of the divine nature. Christ has therefore made the Kingdom of Heaven accessible to us in every way. Yet no one is able to enter Kingdom of Heaven, unless he lay aside the kingdom of this world through death. Therefore, the mortal must lay aside mortality, that is, the possibility of dying. This cannot occur except through death. Then can he put on immortality.

As mortal man, if he had not died, Christ would not yet have laid aside mortality. Likewise he would also not yet have entered the Kingdom of Heaven, in which no mortal can be. If therefore he, who is the first-fruit and the first born of all men, has not yet opened up the Kingdom of Heaven, our nature united with God has not been introduced into the kingdom. Thus no man could be in the Kingdom of Heaven, as long as the human nature united with God has not yet been introduced. All men who believe the Kingdom of Heaven to exist, assert the contrary. That is, all acknowledge that certain saints of their religion have achieved felicity. The faith of all, therefore, who acknowledge that there are saints in eternal glory, presupposes that Christ has died and ascended into heaven.

XV.

GERMAN: That is all very well. But I see not a few discrepancies in respect to felicity. For it is said that the Jews are promised under their law nothing but temporal things, which consist of sensuous goods. To the Arabs nothing but carnal, albeit perpetual goods have been promised under their law, which is written in the Koran. The Gospel, on the other hand, promises angelicity, i.e., that men will be similar to the angels, who have nothing of carnality.

PETER: What can one conceive in this world, for

which the desire does not decrease, but rather constantly increases?

GERMAN: All temporal things die away, only the intellectual do not. Eating, drinking, luxuriating and more of the same, if they please at one time, displease at another and are unstable. However, to know and to understand and to see the truth with the eyes of the mind are always pleasant. And the older the man becomes, the more this pleases him and the more he obtains of it, the stronger becomes his appetite to possess it.

PETER: If therefore the desire shall be perpetual and the nourishment perpetual, the nourishment will be neither temporal nor sensible, but rather only intellectual life. Hence, although the promise of a paradise, where there are streams of wine and honey and a multitude of virgins, is found in the law of the Koran, there are nonetheless many men in this world who abominate this. How will the latter then be happy, if they attain that there, which they do not wish to have here? It's said in the Koran, that one will find wonderfully beautiful, dark-skinned maidens, with eyes which have large, bright white eyeballs. No German would desire such a maiden in this world, even if he had surrendered to the lusts of the flesh. One must therefore understand those promises as similitudes.

At another point the Koran prohibits copulation and all other pleasures of the flesh in churches or synagogues or mosques. However, one cannot believe that the mosques are holier than paradise. How shall that be prohibited in the mosque, which is promised yonder in paradise?

In other locations the Koran says that everything is found there that we desire here, since the fulfillment of all must take place there. Thereby it reveals sufficiently what it wants to say, when it says that such things are found there. For since these things are so much desired in this world, presupposing that an equal desire exists in the other world, then they will be found exquisitely and abundantly there. For it could not express that that life is the completion of all desires other than by this similitude. Nor did it wish to express to uneducated people other, more hidden things, but rather only that which appears felicitous according to the senses, so that the people, who do not have an appetite for things of the spirit, would not despise the promises.

The whole concern of him who wrote that law, therefore, appears to have been primarily to avert the people from idolatry. And to this end he made these kinds of promises and wrote down everything. However, he did not condemn the Gospel, but rather praised it, and thereby intimated that the felicity which is promised in the Gospel would not be less than that corporeal felicity. And the intelligent and the wise men among them know, that

this is true. Avicenna prefers the intellectual felicity of the vision or fruition of God and the truth incomparably to the felicity described in the law of the Arabs. Nevertheless he adhered to that law. Likewise did the other wise men.

Therefore, there will be no difficulty to unite all religions. For it must be said, that that felicity is above everything that can be written or said, since it is the fulfillment of all desires, the attainment of the good in its source, and of life in immortality.

GERMAN: What then about the Jews, who do not accept the promise of the Kingdom of Heaven, but rather only the promise of temporal things?

PETER: The Jews very often take death upon themselves out of observations of the law and its sanctimony. If they did not believe that they attain felicity after death, in that they prefer zeal for the law to life, then they would not die. It is not therefore the belief of the Jews, that there is no eternal life and that they cannot attain that life. Otherwise no one would die for the law. However, the felicity, which they expect, they do not expect on the basis of works of the law, since those laws do not promise this to them, but rather on the basis of the faith which presupposes Christ, as it is found stated above.

XVI.

TATAR: I have heard much here that has been previously unknown to me. The Tatars, a numerous and simple people, who worship the one God above others, are astounded over the variety of rites which others have, who worship one and the same God with them. They deride the fact that some Christians, all Arabs and Jews are circumcised, that others are marked on their brows with a brand, others are baptized. Furthermore, there is such great diversity in respect to matrimony; the one has only one wife, another is legally married to one wife, but nevertheless has several concubines, yet another has several lawful wives. As regards sacrifice, the rites are so diverse, that one cannot even enumerate them. Among these various forms of sacrifice there is the Christian sacrifice, in which they offer bread and wine and say, it is the body and blood of Christ. That they eat

and drink this sacrifice after the oblation seems most abominable. They devour what they worship. How in these cases, which moreover are varied by location and time, a union can be realized, I do not grasp. However, as long as there is not a union, the persecution will not cease. For diversity produces division and enmities, hatred and war.

Then PAUL, teacher of the peoples, commissioned by the Word, began to speak.

PAUL: It must be shown, that the salvation of the soul

is granted, not on the basis of works, but rather on account of faith. For Abraham, the father of the faith of all the believing, whether they are Christians, Arabs or Jews, believed in God and he was reckoned to be justified; the soul of the just will inherit eternal life. If that is admitted, then the various kinds of rites are not disturbing, for they are instituted and received as sensible signs of the verity of faith. The signs, not the signified, assume variability.

TATAR: Explain how faith saves.

PAUL: If God promises something by virtue of His pure liberality and grace, should not He, who has the power to give everything, and who is truthful, be believed?

TATAR: Certainly so. No one who believes in Him can be deceived. And whoever does not believe in Him, would be unworthy to receive any gift of grace.

PAUL: What therefore justifies him, who attains justice?

TATAR: Not merits, or else it were not grace, but rather something owed.

PAUL: Very well stated. However, since no living being is justified in the sight of God on the basis of his works, but rather through grace, the Omnipotent gives to whomsoever He wishes, whatsoever He wishes. If therefore someone shall be worthy of obtaining the promise, which is issued out of pure grace, then it is necessary that he believe in God. In this therefore is he justified, since he obtains the promise only on the grounds that he believes in God, and expects that the Word of God be done.



Albrecht Dürer, "St. Paul," 1514, second state.

TATAR: After God has promised, it is just that His promise be kept. Whoever believes in God, is therefore justified rather through the promise, than through the faith.

PAUL: God, who promised Abraham a seed in which all would be blessed, justified Abraham, so that he attained this promise. However, had Abraham not believed in God, then he would have attained neither the justification nor the promise.

TATAR: It is so.

PAUL: Therefore, the faith in Abraham only effected that the fulfillment of the promise was just. Otherwise it would neither have been just, nor would it have been fulfilled.

TATAR: What therefore has God promised?

PAUL: God promised Abraham to give him one seed in Isaac, in whom all people would be blessed. And this promise was issued, when in accordance with the common course of nature it was impossible for Sara, his wife to conceive by him and to give birth. However, because he believed, he obtained his son, Isaac. Consequently, God tempted Abraham to offer and slay the boy Isaac, in whom the promise of the seed had been fulfilled. And Abraham obeyed God, nonetheless he believed no less in the future promise, even though it would be fulfilled after the resuscitation of his dead son. From this God found great faith in Abraham. Then Abraham was justified and the promise of the one seed, who descended from him through Isaac, was fulfilled.

TATAR: Who is this seed?

PAUL: It is Christ. In Him all people attained the divine blessing.

TATAR: Which blessing is that?

PAUL: The divine blessing is the ultimate desire or felicity, which is called eternal life, and concerning which you have heard enough above.

TATAR: Do you wish to say, therefore, that God in Christ has promised us the blessing of eternal felicity?

PAUL: I wish to do just that. For this reason it is necessary to believe in God, just as Abraham has believed, so that he who so believes would be justified with the faithful Abraham in obtaining the promise in the one seed of Abraham, i.e., in Jesus Christ. This promise is the divine blessing, which enfolds every good in itself.

TATAR: Would you therefore say, that this faith alone justifies being received into eternal life?

PAUL: I wish to do that.

TATAR: How would you impart to the simple Tatars the understanding of this, so that they comprehend that it is Christ, in whom they can attain felicity?

PAUL: You have heard that not only Christians, but

also Arabs, acknowledge Christ is the highest of all who have been or will be in this or a future age, and that He is the countenance of the peoples. Therefore, if the blessing of all people is in a single seed, then it can only be Christ.

TATAR: What kind of sign do you adduce for it?

PAUL: I adduce the testimony of the Arabs as well as of the Christians, that the spirit which vivifies the dead is the spirit of Christ. Therefore, if the spirit of life is in Christ, who has the power to vivify whomever he wishes, then he is that spirit, without which no one who has died can be resuscitated or any spirit can live eternally. That is, the plenitude of divinity and of grace inhabits the spirit of Christ, and from this plenitude all who shall be saved receive the grace of salvation.

TATAR: It is pleasing to have heard these things from you, the teacher of the peoples, since in conjunction with that which I have heard above they satisfy our purpose. I also see that this faith is necessary for salvation. Without it no one can be saved. But I ask you whether faith suffices?

PAUL: It is impossible that someone please God without faith. However, it must be a formed faith, for without works it is dead.

TATAR: What are these works?

PAUL: If you believe in God, you keep His commandments. For how would you believe God is God, if you were not to take care to fulfill that which He prescribes?

TATAR: It is proper to keep the commandments of God. But the Jews say they have received these commandments from Moses, the Arabs say they have them from Mohammed, and the Christians from Jesus. And there are perhaps other nations who honor their prophets, through whose hands they assert they have received the divine precepts. Therefore, how shall we arrive at concord?

PAUL: The divine commandments are very brief and are all well known and common in every nation, for the light that reveals them to us is created along with the rational soul. For within us God says to love Him, from whom we received being, and to do nothing to another, except that which we wish done to us. Love is therefore the fulfillment of the law of God and all laws are reduced to this.

TATAR: I do not doubt that both faith as well as the law of love, of which you have spoken, will be accepted by the Tatars. But I have great doubt in respect to the rites. For I do not know how they shall accept circumcision, which they deride.

PAUL: The truth of our salvation does not depend upon accepting circumcision. Indeed, circumcision does not save, and salvation exists without it. However, he

who does not believe that circumcision is necessary for achieving salvation, but permits it to be done to the foreskin in order that he might be in conformity with Abraham and his successors, is not condemned on account of circumcision, if he has the faith of which we have spoken above. Thus Christ was circumcised and many Christians after Him, while hitherto the Ethiopians mentioned by St. James and others were not circumcised, as if it were a sacrament necessary to salvation. Yet how peace can be preserved among the faithful, if some are circumcised, and others not, remains a great question. If therefore the greater part of the world is without circumcision, one should attend to the fact that it is not a necessity, so that consequently—as I indeed judge opportune—the smaller part should adapt itself to the larger, with which it is united in faith, in order to preserve the peace. Indeed, even if for the sake of peace the larger part should conform to the smaller and accept circumcision, I would think that it should be done, so that peace might be established on the basis of mutual communication. Thus the peace would be better and firmer, if the other nations would accept faith from the Christians and the Christians would accept circumcision from the latter. However, I think that the realization of these ideas is difficult. It should therefore suffice to establish peace in faith and in the law of love, while the rites are tolerated from this time forth.

XVII.

ARMENIAN: How do you think one should regard baptism, since it is considered among Christians to be a necessary sacrament?

PAUL: Baptism is the sacrament of faith. Whoever believes some justification can be attained in Jesus Christ, also believes ablation of sins is attained through him. Every believer will manifest this cleansing, which is signified in the baptismal lotion. For baptism is nothing other than the confession of faith in the sacramental sign. He would not be a believer, who did not wish to confess his faith in the word and in the signs which have been instituted for this by Christ. Among both Hebrews as well as Arabs there are baptismal lotions, in order to express devotion on account of religion. It will not be difficult for these to accept a lotion instituted by Christ for the profession of faith.

ARMENIAN: It appears to be necessary to accept this sacrament, since it is necessary for salvation.

PAUL: Faith is necessary for adults, who can be saved without the sacrament if they cannot obtain it. However, where they can in fact obtain it, they cannot be called

believers, who do not wish to show themselves as such by means of the sacrament of regeneration.

ARMENIAN: What about children?

PAUL: They will acquiesce without difficulty to letting children be baptized. If they have undertaken on account of religion to circumcise male children on the eighth day, then the commutation of that circumcision into baptism will be agreeable. And the option will be given, whether or not to be content with baptism alone.

XVIII.

BOHEMIAN: It will be quite possible to find concord in everything that was previously stated. But it will be very difficult as regards sacrifices. For we know that the Christians cannot give up the oblation of bread and wine as the sacrament of the Eucharist, in order to please the others, since this sacrament was instituted by Christ. However, that the other nations, which do not have the practice of sacrificing in this way, will accept this mode of sacrifice, is not easy to believe, above all since they say it is insane to believe in the conversion of the bread into the flesh of Christ and of the wine into his blood and afterwards to devour the sacrament.

PAUL: This sacrament of the Eucharist represents nothing other than that we achieve by grace the refreshment of eternal life in Christ Jesus, just as in this world we are refreshed through bread and wine. If we therefore believe that Christ is the food of the mind, then we receive him under the species which feed the body. And since it is necessary to be in agreement in this faith, that we obtain nourishment of spiritual life in Christ, why then should we not show that we believe this in the sacrament of the Eucharist? It is to be hoped that in this world all men of faith will want to taste that food through faith, which will be in truth the food of our lives in the other world.

BOHEMIAN: How will one persuade all people, that in this sacrament of the Eucharist the substance of the bread is converted into the body of Christ?

PAUL: Whoever is a believer knows that the Word of God will transfer us in Jesus Christ—since nothing is impossible for God—out of the misery of this world to the filiation of God and to possession of eternal life. If we therefore believe and hope for this, then we doubt not that the Word of God can change bread into the body according to the ordination of Christ. If nature accomplishes this in animal life, how then shall the Word, through which God has created the ages, not be able to accomplish this? The necessity of faith therefore demands believing this. For if it is possible that we, the

XIX.

sons of Adam, who are made out of earth, are changed in Jesus Christ through the Word of God into sons of the immortal God, and we believe this and we hope for the future; and if it is possible, that we then like Jesus will be the Word of God the Father; then we must likewise believe that the transubstantiation of the bread into flesh and of the wine into blood is possible through the same Word, through which bread is bread and wine is wine, flesh is flesh and blood is blood, and through which nature converts food into the fed.

BOHEMIAN: This conversion of the substance of bread is difficult to comprehend.

PAUL: For faith it is very easy. For this is only comprehensible to the mind, which alone looks at substance as the that-it-is and not as what-it-is. For substance precedes every accident. And since consequently the substance is neither qualitative nor quantitative, and it alone is converted, so that it henceforth is no longer the substance of bread, but rather the substance of the flesh, this conversion is only spiritual, since it is totally remote from everything which is attainable by the senses. Consequently, the quantity of the flesh is not augmented by virtue of this conversion, nor is it multiplied numerically. Therefore, there is only one substance of the flesh, in which the substance of the bread is converted, even though this bread is sacrificed in diverse locations and there are many loaves, which are served in the sacrifice.

BOHEMIAN: I grasp your teaching, which is very agreeable to me; namely, as to how this sacrament is the sacrament of the nourishment of eternal life, through which nourishment we obtain the inheritance of the sons of God in Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and how there is a similitude of this in the sacrament of this Eucharist; and that it is only obtained in the mind and only tasted and grasped in faith. However, what if they do not comprehend this mystery? For the uneducated will perhaps not only abhor believing this, but also abhor accepting so great a sacrament.

PAUL: In its sensible signs this sacrament, as long as faith exists, is not of such necessity, that without it there would be no salvation. For it suffices to believe in salvation and thus to eat the food of life. Therefore, no law of necessity has been posited concerning its distribution: whether, to whom, and how often it should be given to people. If therefore someone who has faith, regards himself unworthy to approach the table of the highest King, then this humility is preferably to be praised. Therefore, in respect to the usage and rite of this sacrament, one will be able to establish that which appears more suitable to the leaders of the Church according to the times, as long as the faith is preserved, so that despite the diversity of rites, the peace of faith will persevere no less inviolate by means of a universal law.

ENGLANDER: What should be done concerning the other sacraments, namely matrimony, ordination, confirmation, and extreme unction?

PAUL: One ought to take into account the infirmity of man as much as possible, unless it contravenes eternal salvation. For to demand exact conformity in everything, is rather to disturb the peace. Yet it is to be hoped, that concord can be found in matrimony and in ordination. In all nations matrimony appears to have been introduced in some way by the law of nature, so that one man possesses only one true wife. Thus also the priesthood is similarly found in all religions. Concord therefore will be easier to find in these common points. And the Christian religion is proven in the judgment of all others, to observe the most laudable purity in both sacraments.

ENGLANDER: What about fasts, ecclesiastical offices, abstinence from food and drink, the forms of prayer and other such things?

PAUL: Where no conformity in the mode can be found, as long as faith and peace are preserved, one may indulge the nations in their devotions and ceremonies. Perhaps the devotion is even augmented by virtue of the diversity, since every nation will attempt to produce its rite more splendidly with zeal and diligence, in order to outdo the others therein and thus to obtain greater merit with God and praise in the world.

After these things had been discussed with the wise men of the nations, several books were produced of those who have written about the observances of the ancients; in every language there were excellent authors, like, for example, Marcus Varro among the Latins, Eusebius, who has gathered together the diversity of religion among the Greeks, and many others. In their examination it became apparent, that all diversity is located more in the rites than in the worship of the one God, whom all have always from the inception presupposed and cherished in all worship, as could be found in one collection of all the writings; even if in their simplicity the people, seduced by the power of the Prince of Darkness, frequently were not mindful of what they were doing.

The concord of religions was therefore concluded in the manner described in the heaven of reason. And it was commanded by the King of kings, that the wise men return and lead the nations to the unity of the true cult and that the spiritual administrators guide them and assist them. And finally, endowed with full authority for all, they should gather together in Jerusalem as the common center and in the name of all accept the one faith and upon it establish perpetual peace, so that the Creator of all, who is praised in peace, be blessed forever.

—*translated by William F. Wertz, Jr.*