

**A MISCELLANY
ON NICHOLAS OF CUSA**

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CHAPTER TWO

THE ROLE OF *PIA INTERPRETATIO* IN NICHOLAS OF CUSA'S HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH TO THE KORAN

In his *Introduzione a Niccolò Cusano* Professor Giovanni Santinello accurately and pithily describes Nicholas's treatise on the Koran:

Il piano dei tre libri di cui si compone la *Cribratio Alchorani* non è molto chiaro. Tuttavia, malgrado varie digressioni¹ che spesso interrompono lo svolgimento, si può dire che nel primo libro il Cusano fa un confronto generale fra il Corano e il Vangelo, dimostra come il Corano non possa essere ispirato da Dio, e si sofferma a lungo a dare le prove della divinità di Cristo confutando le negazioni islamiche. Il secondo libro è dedicato ai principali articoli della fede cristiana negati dal Corano: trinità, morte et crocifissione di Cristo, sua resurrezione, redenzione dell'uomo e vita eterna nel paradiso, contrapposto al paradiso materialistico islamico. Il terzo libro contiene la confutazione di alcune dottrine più particolari (soprattutto la concezione di Dio di Maometto e quanto il Corano sostiene su Abramo) e termina con un discorso rivolto al sultano e al califfo di Bagdad.²

While rightly recognizing that Nicholas's procedure in *Cribratio Alkorani* is not altogether well-organized (as Nicholas himself concedes³), Santinello avoids the extreme judgment of Norman Daniel, who refers to the *Cribratio* as "rambling and repetitive, like Ricoldo's *Disputatio*."⁴ At the same time, Santinello indicates his awareness of Nicholas's interest in Scriptural exegesis, as when Nicholas focuses upon the Koran's understanding of the Old Testament's account of Abraham and the significance of his life. "Cusanus," notes Santinello elsewhere,⁵ "was not ignorant of the Hebrew-Christian, or of the Arabic, Scriptural texts," so that sometimes his discussion "could assume a hermeneutical tone," as in the case of his appeal to the Jews.⁶ For like the Arabs, the Jews themselves (claims Nicholas) need to discern

that Abraham was a Christian—a Christian by virtue of prophetically foreseeing the coming of the Messiah, i.e., the Christ.⁷ Similarly, Christians are said to be spiritual descendants of Abraham (CA III, 15).

In the present chapter I want to explore—in more detail and in accordance with Santinello's pointers—Nicholas of Cusa's hermeneutical approach to the Koran and his use of *pia interpretatio*.

1. *The Fragestellung*. Many previous evaluations of Nicholas's approach have been misleading. For example, Frederick Burgevin wrongfully accuses Nicholas of contradicting himself, in *Cribratio Alkorani*, with respect to identifying the Koran's purpose.⁸ Moreover, Nicholas Rescher, in an otherwise judicious article, makes the overstatement that the beauty of the Koran's language was "*wholly* lost on Nicholas, for whom the Qu'ran (seen only in dry-as-dust translations) might as well have been a dissertation of scholastic theology" (emphasis added).⁹ And R. W. Southern, in a half-truth, deems Cusanus to treat the Koran as "a document written in good faith, with a character and virtues of its own."¹⁰

Of course, the very title "*Cribratio Alkorani*" ("*A Scrutiny of the Koran*") trades upon the metaphor of a sieve, for "*cribratio*" in its root-meaning indicates the action of sifting, or, as it were, winnowing. And as Nicholas states in his prologue,¹¹ his intention is to scrutinize (*cribrare*)—i.e., metaphorically speaking, to winnow his way through—the Koran in order to find therein the truth of the Gospel and to separate out this truth from the teachings that exhibit the author's perversity, mendacity, and inconstancy. Nicholas makes clear that he considers the author of the Koran to be Muhammad rather than God.¹² Nonetheless, he likewise insists upon God's having willed there to be inserted into the Koran "things in which the splendor of the Gospel was so contained as hidden that it would manifest itself to the wise if it were sought for with diligent effort."¹³ Accordingly, Nicholas's approach toward the Koran is both dismissive and appreci-

ative at the same time, though not with respect to the same texts—texts which he is sifting into different compartments in the process of scrutinizing, or analyzing, them.

In critically examining the Koran, Nicholas aims to deal with its texts fair-mindedly. Thus, right at the outset, he devotes a chapter to presenting a “summary” of the Koran’s contents according to its followers; and only thereafter, in the succeeding chapter, does he characterize the contents from the point of view of the Koran’s Christian critics.¹⁴ Similarly, even when repudiating certain of the Koran’s statements where they contradict Christian doctrines, he seeks to attenuate the force of these statements by arguing that, if rightly understood, they *imply* the truth of the Gospel.¹⁵ He concedes, for example, that the Koran explicitly denies that Christ was the Son of God and was crucified—beliefs, he remarks, that from Christianity’s point of view are essential to salvation.¹⁶ But he endeavors to descry within the Koran’s explicit denials an implicit meaning that confirms, as it were, the truth of the Gospel. This endeavor takes two different directions. On the one hand, Nicholas argues that the Koran contains certain doctrines by *implication* and that these doctrines are at odds with some of the Koran’s explicit teachings. On the other hand, he argues that where such self-inconsistencies are found, the Koran is to be interpreted in the light of the Gospel—i.e., in such way as to be rendered, if possible, compatible with the Gospel. Let us examine more fully these two approaches—examine them first with regard to the question of Christ’s being the Son of God and, secondly, with regard to Christ’s having been crucified.

1.1. “The Koran,” writes Nicholas, “denies that Christ is the Son of God, although it exalts Him above every [other] prophet.”¹⁷ Here Nicholas acknowledges that, ostensibly, the Koran contradicts the Gospel. However, at one and the same time he pays tribute to the Koran’s exaltation of Christ.¹⁸ This tribute results partly from his having been misled by Robert of Ketton’s Latin translation of the Koran (e.g., the mistranslation of Surah 3:45

and Surah 2:253), but it also stems partly from his own eagerness to find the gospel hidden within the Koran, and thus from his proneness toward overinterpretation (as in the case of Surah 4:159, cited in *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 12 (117:3-5)).¹⁹ But even aside from faulty translation and tendentious exegesis, his tribute is also based upon his view that the Koran contains passages that *imply* the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, so that Muhammad is *committed to affirming* that Christ is divine, even though the affirmation is never explicitly made.²⁰ In *Cribratio Alkorani* III, 9 Nicholas lists several examples of such a commitment.²¹ The Koran, he reasons, proclaims that miracles are divine, and it ascribes the power of miracles to Christ.²²

For to have the general power of [working] all miracles is [to be] divine. For hereby Jesus proved that He was the Messiah—[proved it] when, from prison, John [the son] of Zecharias sent to Him two [men] who asked: “ ‘Are You the one who is going to come, viz., the Messiah, or are we expecting someone else?’ Jesus answered: ‘Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind see, the lame walk, the leprous are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise up, the poor have the gospel preached unto them.’ ”²³

So because the Koran ascribes to Jesus (more than to anyone else) the working of beneficial miracles, it thereby implies that He is divine, concludes Nicholas.

Or again, the Koran refers to Jesus as God's messenger and as God's spirit and as the Word sent to Mary from Heaven.²⁴ This claim, Nicholas argues, commits Muslims to maintaining that Jesus is of the same nature as God. “For since the Divine Word is the Word of God, we cannot say that it is something other than the most simple God. For God and His Word are not two gods but are [one and] the same most simple God. So then, it is evident that God, who sends, and His Word, who is sent, are of the same divine nature. But since God, who sends, does not send Himself and does not send another God, He who sends will not be He who is sent, nor will He who sends be one God and He who is sent another God.”²⁵ Indeed, notes Nicho-

las, the Koran nowhere flatly denies that God has a son; rather, it denies that He has a son *who is another God*. For according to the Koran God cannot take unto Himself any creature as a son, for that creature would not be of the same nature as God, since a creature can never be of the same nature as the Creator. "Therefore, the Koran concludes that it is impossible for God to have a son who is another God. And Christians do not at all call this conclusion into question."²⁶ Indeed, Christians teach that God's Son is the one, self-same God as is God the Father.

However, Nicholas observes that the Koran also contains passages that *imply* that Jesus is *not* the divine Son of God (without, however, themselves flatly denying that He is the Son of God). In one place, for instance, it states that God could annihilate both Christ and Mary if He willed to²⁷—a statement that runs counter to the doctrine that Christ is of the divine nature. So in the end, Nicholas sees the Koran as doing three things: (a) explicitly denying that Christ is the Son of God, (b) making other statements that, nonetheless, imply that Christ is the divine Son of God, and (c) making still other statements that imply that Christ is not the divine Son of God. Confronted, as he supposes, with such self-contradictory views, Nicholas must separate the grain from the chaff. He attempts to do so by means of various exegetical rules that we shall consider later on.

1.2. The same outcome occurs regarding the Koran's teachings on Christ's death. For the Koran, claims Nicholas, (a) explicitly denies that Christ was crucified,²⁸ (b) makes other statements that, nonetheless, imply that Christ died,²⁹ and (c) makes still other statements that imply that Christ did not die.³⁰ In the end, then, as Nicholas sees the matter, the Koran contradicts itself on the topic of Christ's death.³¹ And so, he, Nicholas, views himself as having to winnow his way through *these* contradictions, just as he also has to do in the case of the putative contradictions concerning Christ's divine sonship. So in dealing with both topics he is confronted by what he considers to be self-contradictions in the Koran. Yet, he refuses to reject the

Koran *in toto* simply because of these supposed inconsistencies. Rather, he seeks an explanation for why the inconsistencies arose; and amid the inconsistencies he looks for the alternatives that he adjudges true, repudiating not the entire Koran but only those texts that do not cohere with the truth discernible throughout the Koran.

The self-inconsistencies of the Koran are not always viewed by Nicholas as consisting of an opposition that obtains between the express meaning of a proposition (e.g., the Koran's emphatic statement that God has no son) and the implied meaning of another proposition (e.g., the proposition that Christ, more than all others, worked miracles or that Christ, more than all others, was sent by God). Nor are the self-inconsistencies always inconsistencies between the *implicit* meanings of two different propositions, or sets of propositions, from the Koran (as when the Koran, on Nicholas's understanding of it, implies both that Christ died and that He did not die). Indeed, sometimes, asserts Nicholas, the Koran openly and expressly contradicts itself: "[Muhammad] very often affirms that all unbelievers are damned. For example, he says in Chapter 49: 'God's word is established regarding unbelievers: they will enter into everlasting fire.'³² But in Chapter 51 he says: 'Perhaps God will confound all unbelievers; perhaps he will pardon many [of them].' "³³

All in all, Nicholas sees himself as facing the problem of how to deal with three factors: the Koran's contradicting of the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures, the Koran's contradicting of itself (both expressly and by implication), and the Koran's speaking vaguely and ambiguously in order to accommodate conflicting opinions and to appeal to the widest audience possible.³⁴ Nicholas seeks to remedy these incongruities because he regards them as largely responsible for the hostility and open conflict between Muslims and Christians—i.e., as largely responsible for the earlier Christian Crusades and, in his own day, for the militant spread of Islam, culminating in the fall of Constantinople. In *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 13 (121:11-15) he alleges that

the Arabs are being untrue to the Koran when they persecute Christians: "It is especially absurd for the Arabs to persecute adherents of the Gospel on the ground that the Gospel does not agree with their Koran, according to their interpretation. For they act against the Koran in persecuting believers and in persecuting—in the believers—the Gospel that is approved of in the Koran." Nicholas harbors the conviction that if he can help the Arabs to see the truth of the Gospel within their own scripture—and can help Christians to see that that scripture, when rightly understood, is not at odds with Christianity's sacred books—then mutual persecution will cease and Christianity and Islam will come closer to actually being *religio una in rituum varietate*, the watchword of his previously written *De Pace Fidei*.

2. *Nicholas's Exegetical Rules.* In response to the foregoing *Fragestellung*, Nicholas makes use of several exegetical rules that flow from the hermeneutical principle of *pia interpretatio*. Before we consider the notion of *pia interpretatio* itself, let us review the exegetical rules that are elicitable from Nicholas's procedure in *Cribratio Alkorani*. For an awareness of these rules will enable us to determine just what Nicholas means by "*pia interpretatio*."

2.1. *Rule 1:* Attempt to interpret the Koran in such way as to show it to be compatible with the Old Testament and the New Testament; where a given text cannot be rendered thus compatible, reject its teaching as false.

As Nicholas puts it, "the things contained in the Koran are not to be accepted as the words of God if they are opposed to earlier books that were handed down by God and that are acknowledged [even] by the Koran itself [viz., the books of the Old and the New Testaments]." ³⁵ Accordingly, if the Koran denies the death of Christ, then assuredly "a stand must be taken on the side of the Gospel" ³⁶ But Nicholas goes even further, by generalizing: "Without a knowledge of the Gospel [the Arabs] cannot perfectly extract from the Koran any [teach-

ing].”³⁷ A few lines later he expresses this same idea in different words: “If any beauty or truth or clarity is found in the Koran, it must be a ray of the most lucid Gospel.”³⁸ And he argues that Muslims themselves view the Koran as not contradicting any of the prophets but as attesting to the truth of “the Testament of Moses, the Psalter of David, and the Gospel transmitted by Christ”³⁹ So Nicholas’s avowed strategy in *Cribratio Alkorani* is to presuppose the truth of the Gospel and, in the light of this presupposed truth, to scrutinize the Koran with an eye toward showing its agreement and its disagreement with Christ’s life and teachings.⁴⁰

2.1.1. According to Nicholas the Koran does not supersede the authority of the Scriptures; rather, the Koran itself approves of the Gospel⁴¹ and does not intend to affirm less of Christ than does the Gospel.⁴² Indeed, as he claims, “the author of the Koran did not have any doubts about the Gospel; for he cited passages and contents of the Gospel regarding the fact that some [men] turned away from Christ when He expounded the parables regarding the grain of wheat, regarding the man born blind, and regarding other matters.”⁴³ To be sure, then, notes Nicholas, only if the Gospel is included within the Koran does the Koran itself disclose the right way.⁴⁴

2.1.2. Just as the truth of the Gospel is included in the Koran, and vice versa, so the truth of the Old Testament is included in the Gospel, and vice versa.⁴⁵ “[The law] of the Testament and [the law] of the Gospel are not two laws but are one divine law, which Christ did not destroy but rather fulfilled, by manifesting the spiritual understanding of the law—[something] which is contained beneath the letter but [which] was not recognized.”⁴⁶ In fact, Nicholas distinguishes three laws, or ways to salvation: the law of Abraham, that of Moses, and that of Christ. And these three ways, he says, are only one way, which is most fully disclosed in the teachings of Christ⁴⁷ and which, in *De Pace Fidei*, he identifies as “the law of love.”⁴⁸

2.2. *Rule 2:* Attempt to interpret the Koran in such way as to render it self-consistent.

That is, we are supposed to generalize what Nicholas mandates in *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 12 (116:4-7): "Now, because the Koran, according to the followers of [that] Book, ought not to be understood as contradicting itself and because it approves of the Gospel and the Prophets, a [consistent] interpretation should be sought as to what is meant in the aforementioned [passages]." Nicholas does not pretend that a consistent interpretation can always be found—a fact that is evident from *Cribratio Alkorani* III, 7 (183:14-16). But fairness, he knows, demands that an interpreter not be quick to ascribe self-contradictions to a work into which its author does not introduce contradictions programmatically (as Plato seems to do in the second half of the *Parmenides* and as Moses Maimonides admittedly does in the *Guide for the Perplexed*).⁴⁹ Since *followers* of the Koran profess that the Koran ought to be construed as not contradicting itself, Nicholas advocates that Christian interpreters of the Koran agree with these adherents in making out the best possible case for the Koran's consistency. For any other approach would be tantamount to highhandedness.

A prime example of the application of Rule 2 has already been seen: the Koran's statement that God does not have a son is interpreted by Nicholas so as not to be inconsistent with the Koran's (alleged) statements approving of the Gospel and implying that Christ is of divine nature. According to Nicholas, as we saw, "God does not have a son" is properly construable as "God does not have a son who is another God."

2.3. *Rule 3*: Where there exist *prima facie* conflicts of the Koran with the Gospel or with itself, look for Muhammad's true intent, hidden beneath his use of symbolism and his accommodation of the uneducated.

This rule is invoked by Nicholas in his interpretation of the Koran's description of Paradise as a place of superabundant sensual delight, rather than as a place of supersensible delight. Nicholas endorses the explanation of certain Arabs to the effect that Muhammad was appealing to the unlearned, who had never experienced intellectual joy and who therefore would

have been unmoved by his appeal thereto. Accordingly, Muhammad's description of Paradise was intended by him as symbolic, just as both the Gospel and the Koran speak symbolically of Hell as a place of tormenting fire.⁵⁰ But the unlearned Arabs construed Muhammad's language literally. And Muhammad, knowing in advance that they would do so, chose to accommodate them in their misapprehension, knowing that the wise would discern that supreme joy does not consist of sensual pleasure. "And so, in last analysis, [Muhammad] does not seem to contradict the Gospel, which asserts that the Paradise of the intelligent and wise is the vision of God and of His Wisdom (i.e., of Christ)."⁵¹ Accordingly, Muhammad "seems to intend to proclaim one conclusion: viz., that God is a rewarder of believers who serve Him"⁵² Thus, Nicholas claims to have found Muhammad's true intent, which is discernible to those who seek it out, for they will understand the rationale for Muhammad's having hidden his meaning.

Still another example will help bring out Nicholas's point more vividly. Why, asks Nicholas, did Muhammad conceal from the simple Arabs such evangelical truths as that Jesus, and not someone resembling Him, died on the Cross? Why did he teach a "new" law rather than the law of the Gospel? The answer, proposes Nicholas, has to do with Muhammad's awareness that Arabs had previously not been moved from idolatry by the call of the Gospel. Moreover, the moral perfection to which the Gospel summons us was feared by the Arabs. For they had been taught that anyone who accepts Christianity but fails to keep its commandments will be punished by God more severely than will one who has not embraced Christianity. "Therefore, Muhammad hid from the Arabs the secrets of the Gospel, believing that in the future [these secrets] could become known by the wise—just as in its beginning period the Gospel, too, remained obscure and unknown to many but was made progressively more evident. And if this [procedure] had not been expedient, then Christ would not have spoken to the people in parables."⁵³

2.4. *Rule 4*: Interpret the Koran as intending to give glory to God without detracting from Christ.⁵⁴

Although Nicholas accuses Muhammad of oftentimes displaying self-glorification within the Koran and of detracting from Christ's glory, Nicholas's program of reconciling the doctrines of Islam with those of Christianity obliges him, on occasion, to look beyond Muhammad's intent to the true intent of the Koran—i.e., to God's intent in making use even of Muhammad's vainglory. Whereas, that is, exegetical Rule 3 required Nicholas to distinguish between what Muhammad wrote and what his true intent was in writing it, the present rule requires a distinction between Muhammad's intent and God's intent. For "in the Koran the splendor of the Gospel shines forth to the wise . . . even beyond the intent of the [Koran's] author."⁵⁵ In instances such as are governed by Rule 3, certain truths of the Gospel are known to Muhammad, and he mediates these truths to the Arabs by symbolic language and through hiddenness. But in instances governed by Rule 4 certain other truths of the Gospel are not recognized as such by Muhammad;⁵⁶ and yet, Muhammad makes statements that nonetheless *imply* these other truths. And in such cases the role of an interpreter is to disclose what God intends to be revealed even amid the Koran's inaccuracies and inconstancies. Thus, God discloses in and through the Koran that Christ is the Son of God, even though Muhammad misunderstood this doctrine and therefore was intent upon denying it in that misunderstood sense—a denial with which Christians agree. Indeed, from this very example we may elicit a fifth exegetical rule that is used by Nicholas.

2.5. *Rule 5*: Work, insofar as possible, with the interpretation that the wise among the Arabs assign to the Koran, and attempt to show that even their interpretation implies Christian doctrines.

This rule, too, is elicitable from *Cribratio Alkorani* I, 9 (51:1-2), where Nicholas indicates that *even according to the Arabs' own interpretation* the Koran does not deny that God has a son who is not another God. And this fact, he assumes, opens the way for his clarifying for the Arabs the Christian doctrines of

Trinity, Incarnation, and Redemption. Similarly, he elsewhere endeavors to point out that the Gospel is perfect, even according to the Koran.⁵⁷ And, as we saw previously, he also seeks to correct the Arabs' (alleged) misinterpretations of the Koran—to do so in order to infer Christian doctrines from the “corrected” interpretations.⁵⁸

So, as shown by Nicholas's construal of the Koran's teachings on Christ, several different exegetical rules are applicable to one and the same passage, or text. Moreover, neither from today's vantage point nor from the perspective of Nicholas's own day do these rules strike one as merely commonplace. Rather, they are controversial to the extent that they depend upon the conviction that the Gospel is contained tacitly within the Koran and that the Koran approves of the Gospel and exalts Christ above all other prophets. Nicholas subscribes to these views partly because of his reliance upon Robert of Ketton's misleading Latin translations of various passages in the Koran. But he also adopts this viewpoint because of his own Christian humanist commitment to the ideal of wisdom and because of his humanist belief that even religious truth is readily discernible to those who know how to look for it. And the proper way to look for it in the Koran is through *pia interpretatio*.

3. *Pia interpretatio*. We are now in a position to recognize that the program of *pia interpretatio*, i.e., of devout interpretation, is expressed in the five exegetical rules elicited from *Cribratio Alkorani*—especially (but not exclusively) what is expressed in Rule 4: interpret the Koran as intending to give glory to God without detracting from Christ.⁵⁹ Accordingly, *pia interpretatio* is not quite the same thing as charitable construal, though it involves charitable construal in the sense of interpreting the Koran's teachings in such way that through them God is glorified. Since, as Nicholas recognizes, God is not glorified amid inconsistencies or through Muhammad's vainglory, Nicholas strives to dissolve the contradictions and to put the best face upon the evidence regarding Muhammad's intent.

3.1. Crucial to an understanding of the concept of *pia interpretatio* is *Cribratio Alkorani* I, 7 (44:1-19):

But suppose we admit—as the followers of the Koran claim ([a claim] whose denial all the wise and zealous believe, as was made evident above)—that the goal and intent of the book of the Koran is not only not to detract from God the Creator or from Christ or from God's prophets and envoys or from the divine books of the Testament, the Psalter, and the Gospel, but also to give glory to God the Creator, to praise and to bear witness to Christ (the son of the Virgin Mary) above all the prophets, and to confirm and to approve of the Testament and the Gospel. [If so,] then when one reads the Koran with this understanding, assuredly some fruit can be elicited [from it].

Here we see most clearly what Nicholas means by “devout interpretation.” And we readily see that such devout interpretation on Nicholas's part is not incompatible with his *denial* (when not engaged in *pia interpretatio*) that the *sole* aim of the Koran's author (whom he alleges to be Muhammad) was to promote the glory of God.

3.2. Much of what commentators on *Cribratio Alkorani* have written about *pia interpretatio* is correct as far as it goes—though it usually has not gone far enough. And it has not gone far enough because it underemphasizes the foregoing passage from *Cribratio Alkorani* I, 7, choosing rather to focus attention upon the few passages where Nicholas actually introduces the phrase “*pia interpretatio*”⁶⁰ Although those several passages are important, they cannot by themselves disclose the proper significance of this phrase—something that only a look at Nicholas's examples and at his overall strategy can do. The unduly narrow focus of the commentators has resulted in their shying away from the most obvious and most natural construal of “*pia interpretatio*” as “devout interpretation”—that is, as an interpretation that gives glory to God and bears witness to Christ. Thus, F. A. Scharpf, in his German translation of *Cribratio Alkorani*,⁶¹ renders “*pia interpretatio*” as “nach einer milden Auslegung”—a rendering that is equivalent to “in accordance with a charitable construal.” By contrast, Gustav Hölscher⁶² construes the

phrase as meaning “nach gewissenhafter Auslegung”—i.e., in accordance with a conscientious, or careful, construal, a notion that is surely mistaken. Similarly, Paul Naumann's expression “ein rechtes Verständnis” does not capture correctly the meaning of the expression.⁶³ (Frederick Burgevin borrows Naumann's expression when he speaks of “a right interpretation.”)⁶⁴ Somewhat closer to a correct understanding is Ludwig Hagemann, who states: “Des weiteren erhellt aus dem Kontext, dass mit *pia interpretatio* weder eine gewissenhafte Auslegung noch ein rechtes Verständnis des Kur'ans gemeint sein kann; was Cusanus darunter verstanden hat, lässt sich vielleicht als gutmütige, weitherzige Auslegung, wohlwollende Interpretation charakterisieren.”⁶⁵ But even Hagemann's understanding is too weak. For it needs to emphasize not just that such an interpretation is “kind, generous, and favorable.” It needs, additionally, to characterize the interpretation in a theological way: viz., as one that gives glory to God, without detracting from Christ. For in engaging in *pia interpretatio* Nicholas is not dealing principally with texts that strike him as morally offensive or as lacking insight or as in some way alien, as Hagemann elsewhere suggests;⁶⁶ rather, he is dealing primarily with texts that he deems to be theologically erroneous.

3.2. A prime example of Nicholas's theological interest, and of its bearing upon *pia interpretatio*, is evident in his way of handling the Koran's claim that Jesus was not put to death by the Jews but that someone else who resembled Him was killed. Toward the Koran's statements Nicholas takes two different approaches—both of which exhibit devout interpretation. The first approach is best expressed by Nicholas himself in *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 13 (124), where he explains that the Koran *would not have been magnifying Christ* in the eyes of the Arabs had it taught the death of Christ. For the Arabs were ignorant of the hidden meaning of Christ's death⁶⁷ and therefore would have viewed His death as His having been abased. Moreover, in order to exalt Christ, the Koran would have had to teach the doctrine

of His resurrection. But this doctrine would have been at odds with the Koran's express claim that Jesus was not God. "Therefore," writes Nicholas, the Koran, on a devout interpretation thereof, "aimed to hide from the Arabs [Christ's] lowly death and to affirm that He was still living and would come [again] Nevertheless, [the Koran] makes these [statements] in such way that the wise can infer that the Gospel is altogether true" ⁶⁸ The second approach taken by Nicholas focuses upon the fact that, according to the Koran, the Jews did not put Christ to death. This statement leaves open the alternative, affirms Nicholas, that the Koran meant to deny not that Christ died but that He died by the hands of the Jews (instead of by the hands of the Romans). ⁶⁹ Here Nicholas is stretching to the limit the plausibility of his interpretation of the Koran. For here his interpretation is *too* generous, *too* contrived.

3.3. Of the previous commentators the one who comes closest to comprehending the meaning of Nicholas's phrase "*pia interpretatio*" is Michael Seidlmayer. According to Seidlmayer the expression represents the attempt to show that even in the Koran, to use Nicholas's words, "there are contained those [teachings] through which the Gospel would be altogether confirmed, were it in need of confirmation, and that wherever [the Koran] disagrees [with Christ], this [disagreement] has resulted from Muhammad's ignorance and, following [thereupon], from his perverse intent." ⁷⁰ Hagemann objects to Seidlmayer's understanding because, as he claims, this understanding is incompatible with *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 19 (154:8). For this latter passage speaks of the use of *pia interpretatio* by the adherents of the Koran; and, assuredly, the adherents of the Koran do not seek to interpret the Koran in a manner that would make it compatible with the Gospel or that would denigrate Muhammad, judges Hagemann. ⁷¹ Hagemann is partly right and partly wrong. Nicholas's point, in II, 19, is that even though the Koran describes Paradise as a place of sensual pleasures, adherents of the Koran—at least those of them who are wise—understand this

description as a symbolism. For they recognize that in the Koran Paradise is referred to "through likenesses, since that which has never entered into human conception cannot be described otherwise than conjecturally, by reference to sensible things, which are images of intelligible things." In accordance with this recognition the adherents engage in *pia interpretatio*, for they look beyond the symbolisms to the reality of the soul's vision of God—a reality that can be apprehended by the mind *in coniectura* only. So Muslims, too, in this instance of devout interpretation, are giving glory to God without detracting from Christ. And thereby they are agreeing with the truth of the Gospel, which also uses symbolisms when referring to Heaven and whose followers also look beyond these *aenigmata* to the prospect of the *visio dei*. "And so, in last analysis," states Nicholas in *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 18, Muhammad "does not seem to contradict the Gospel, which asserts that the Paradise of the intelligent and wise is the vision of God and of His Wisdom (i.e., of Christ)." Nicholas's conclusion here follows from his agreeing with the attempt of certain Arabs—adherents of the Koran—to see in the Koran's description of Paradise the promise of utmost *supersensible* joy.⁷² So even the Arabs engage in devout interpretation; and in so doing, they confirm, as it were, the truth of the Gospel—whether or not they intend to do so.⁷³ In this light Seidlmayer correctly identifies a fundamental feature of devout interpretation.⁷⁴ But unlike others, whose understanding does not go far enough, Seidlmayer goes too far in including within the concept of devout interpretation the notion of an attempt to show that where the Koran is irreconcilable with the Gospel, the irreconcilability results from Muhammad's ignorance and perversity. And in pointing out this latter incongruity Hagemann's criticism of Seidlmayer is apt.

3.4. So previous commentators and translators have erred in one way or another—but mainly by not recognizing that the concept of *pia interpretatio*, as employed by Nicholas of Cusa, includes a theological as well as a moral dimension.⁷⁵ Since

Nicholas presumes that the theological position that gives the most glory to God is the position of orthodox Christianity, his enterprise of devout interpretation consists of interpreting the Koran in such way as to bring its teachings into alignment with the orthodox doctrines inferred from the Gospel. Only if this enterprise is successful will Nicholas, by his own account, have "found" within the Koran a glorifying of God and a praising of Christ.⁷⁶

4. *Conclusion.* Nicholas's hermeneutical approach to the Koran—an approach that makes use of the principle of devout interpretation—reflects his Christian humanist goals. As in *De Pace Fidei*, so also in *Cribratio Alkorani* he was in quest of what Giovanni Santinello alludes to as "la concordanza nelle cose essenziali della fede."⁷⁷ And Nicholas's advocacy of *concordanza*, Santinello seems to agree, differs significantly from the promoting of a mere "tolleranza tra fedi diverse." For too often, as in the subsequent Enlightenment, what inspired religious tolerance was a disdain-for-theology, accompanied by the conviction that one religion is as good (or as bad) as another, aside from its moral code. Yet, what motivated Nicholas's search for *concordanza* was a new appreciation of theology, once theology was freed from what was widely regarded as Scholastic caviling. The Koran itself was viewed by Nicholas not as a cultural expression of the human spirit but rather as a book of doctrines, a book of law—the *Lex Sarracenorum*. On the one hand, Nicholas's humanism is *Christian* because within it there is no tendency toward secularizing the gospel but instead a tendency toward finding the presence of the gospel in all other religions. On the other hand, his Christianity is *humanistic* by virtue of his awareness that in the sphere of theology and of metaphysics the human intellect operates by way of metaphor, learned ignorance, and surmise. And such an awareness leads him to embrace the ideal of *una concordanza delle religioni*—an ideal that, in turn, moves him to approach the Koran through *pia interpretatio*.

122. *Ap.* 26:10-11.

123. *De Mente* 3 (73:1-2).

124. *De Mente* 2 (67:4-6). See especially *De Mente* 2 (67-68). See also *De Mente* 5 (85:3-4). Also note *DI* II, 9 (149:8-10): "Therefore, when it is said that God created man by means of one essence and created stone by means of another, this is true with respect to things but not true with respect to the Creator" Note *VS* 28 (84:2-3): "Ideo [species] non habent exemplaria nisi mentem divinam, per quam id sunt quod sunt"

125. Nulla proportio infiniti ad finitum. See *DI* I, 3 (9:4-5).

126. "... ita quidem contingit rebus, quoniam maximum esse non posunt, ut sint diminuta, altera, distincta et cetera huiusmodi, quae quidem causam non habent. Habet igitur creatura a deo, ut sit una discreta et conexa universo"

127. See also *VS* 27-28.

128. See also *VS* 6 (14:24-25). *VS* 22 (67:16).

129. See also *Sermo* 22, *Dies Sanctificatus*, (27:15 - 28:11). Cf. *Sermo* 23, *Domine, in Lumine Vultus Tui*, (17:3-15). *Sermo* 24, *Jhesus in eyner allerdemutlichster Menschheit*, (18:11-30, Latin text).

130. P. 298 in Nikolaus M. Häring, editor, *Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and His School* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1971). I have altered spellings and punctuation in the passage cited.

131. In *Ap.* 24:17 Nicholas calls the *mode* (whereby we speak of God) "*discretus indiscrete*." But in speaking of God in accordance with this mode, we are speaking of Him Himself as *discretus indiscrete*.

132. Heinrich Rombach, *Substanz, System, Struktur. Die Ontologie des Funktionalismus und der philosophische Hintergrund der modernen Wissenschaft* (Freiburg: K. Alber, Vol. I, 1965).

133. Henry Bett, *Nicholas of Cusa* (London: Methuen, 1932).

134. Vincent Martin, "The Dialectical Process in the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa," *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 5 (1949), 213-268.

NOTES TO CUSA'S HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH

1. Nicholas himself uses the word "*digressio*," for example, in the title of *CA* I, 20. (Here as elsewhere I use "*CA*" as the abbreviation for "*Cribratio Alkorani*.")

2. Giovanni Santinello, *Introduzione a Niccolò Cusano* [Bari: Editori Laterza, 1987 (2nd edition), pp. 122-123]: "The plan of the three books that compose *Cribratio Alkorani* is not very clear. Nevertheless, in spite of various digressions which often interrupt the development [of the plan] we can say that in the first book Cusanus makes a general comparison between the Koran

and the Gospel, shows how it is that the Koran cannot be inspired by God, and dwells upon giving proofs of the divinity of Christ, while refuting the Islamic denials [of Christ's divinity]. The second book is dedicated to the principal articles of the Christian faith that are denied by the Koran: [viz., articles regarding] the Trinity, the death and crucifixion of Christ, Christ's resurrection, the redemption of man, and eternal life in Paradise ([a Paradise that is] opposed to the materialistic Paradise of Islam). The third book contains the refutation of several more-narrowly-focused doctrines (above all, Muhammad's conception of God and what the Koran says about Abraham); and it ends with a discourse directed toward the Sultan and toward the Calif of Bagdad."

3. *CA*, Second Prologue (16:8-10). All references to the Latin text of *CA* are to the Heidelberg Academy's edition = *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, Vol. VIII: *Cribratio Alkorani*, edited by Ludwig Hagemann (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1986). The reference numbers given in parentheses are the margin number followed by the line numbers.

4. Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1966 edition), pp. 277-278. The reference is to Ricoldo of Montecroce. By contrast with Daniel, R. W. Southern [*Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 93] judges that in *CA* Nicholas "carried out in detail that plan of systematic literary, historical, and philological examination which John of Segovia had desired."

5. "Nicolò Cusano e l'utopia dell'unità culturale e religiosa nel Quattrocento," *Archivio di Filosofia*, 53 (1985), 387.

6. E.g., his appeal at the end of *De Pace Fidei* XII (41). All references to the Latin text of this work are given in terms of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, Vol. VII: *De Pace Fidei*, edited by Raymond Klibansky and Hildebrand Bascour (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1970). This work is hereafter abbreviated as "*PF*". The reference numbers given in parentheses are the margin numbers in the Latin text.)

7. *CA* III, 15 (214).

8. *Cribratio Alchorani: Nicholas Cusanus's Criticism of the Koran in the Light of His Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Vantage Press, 1969), pp. 30-31. Burgevin's accusation has been demonstrated to be baseless. See J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's De Pace Fidei and Cribratio Alkorani: Translation and Analysis* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 1990), pp. 18-26. In the present chapter all English translations of *PF* and *CA* are from this book.

9. Nicholas Rescher, "Nicholas of Cusa and the Qur'an: A Fifteenth-Century Encounter with Islam," *Muslim World*, 55 (July 1965), 200. In fact, however, Cusa pays tribute to the Koran's elegance of style; and he treats the Koran as a religious text, in addition to treating it as a theological one. His

second-hand appreciation of the Koran's beauty meant that this beauty was not altogether lost on him. Furthermore, he nowhere shows signs of regarding Robert of Ketton's Latin translation of the Koran or the Koran itself as dry-as-dust.

10. Richard W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, *op. cit.*, p. 94. Southern passes silently over the fact that Nicholas ascribes much of the Koran to Muhammad's perverse intent and to his self-glorifying tendencies. See *CA* II, 19, where Nicholas inveighs against the Koran. Cf. Nicholas Rescher, "Nicholas of Cusa and the Qur'an," *op. cit.*, p. 200: "Nicholas is able to see merit in the Qur'an only at those points at which it agrees with the Gospels. He is flatly unwilling to grant that there may be some special merit of insight or inspiration in the Scripturally nonredundant parts of the Qur'an—not, to be sure, as regards its declarations on matters of faith and doctrine, but in its essentially secular ordinances, for example, those regarding the reformation of the social or communal affairs of the Arabs." But see n. 75 below.

11. *CA*, Prologue (10).

12. *CA* I, 1. Cf. *CA* III, 5 (178:3-5). III, 14 (212:6). III, 7 (183:last lines).

13. *CA* II, 19 (158:6-8). Cf. *CA* II, 13 (124:11-12).

14. *CA* Book I, Chapters 2 & 3 respectively.

15. Nicholas concedes that some of the Koran's discrepancies with the Gospel cannot be thus attenuated—e.g., the Koran's references to the Virgin Mary as the sister of Aaron and the daughter of Amram. See *CA* I, 4 (32:8-9). Surah 3:35-36. Nicholas also has in mind the Koran's claim that Muhammad is referred to in the Old Testament and in the Gospel. See *CA* III, 2 (167:2-5) and Surah 7:157.

16. *CA* I, 3 (28:5-10). So the Koran, maintains Nicholas, is to a large extent inconsistent with the Gospel, as well as with the Old Testament. See especially *CA* III, 4.

17. *CA* I, 9 (52:3-4).

18. Nicholas considers the Koran's exaltation of Christ to result, in part, from the alleged fact that Muhammad was converted from idolatry to Nestorian Christianity by Sergius the Monk. See *CA*, Second Prologue (11).

19. All references to the Koran are to the English translation by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Glorious Koran* (Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 3rd printing, 1980).

20. "The Koran often says of Christ such things as imply that He is a partaker of the divine nature." *CA* III, 9 (185:4-5). Cf. *CA* II, 12 (117:7-9): the Koran tacitly affirms Christ to be of the divine nature, writes Nicholas.

21. Also note *CA* II, 12 (118:1-7).

22. Surah 41:53. Surah 17:59. *CA* III, 9 (185:5-6).
23. *CA* III, 9 (185: 10-17). Cf. *CA* I, 17 (74:10-12). See Matthew 11:2-5.
24. *CA* I, 12 (59:1-2). Surah 4:171.
25. *CA* I, 12 (59:5-11).
26. *CA* I, 9 (52:1-2).
27. *CA* III, 9 (188:6-7). Surah 5:17.
28. *CA* II, 12 (115:3-4). Surah 4:157-159. *CA* II, 14 (126:1).
29. *CA* II, 12 (118:7-13). *CA* II, 14 (128:1).
30. *CA* II, 15 (130:15-18).
31. Note especially *CA* II, 13 (122:11-14).
32. Surah 40:6.
33. Surah 42:34. See *CA* III, 2 (164:1-4). Nicholas is at the mercy of Robert of Ketton's Latin translation, which he interprets through the eyes of Ricoldo of Montecroce's *Contra Legem Sarracenorum* and in terms of his own predisposition to disavow the divine authorship of the Koran.
34. In *CA* III, 1 Nicholas accuses the Koran's author of deliberately vague and ambiguous expression that serves the intended purpose of appealing to men who hold conflicting opinions, so that these men will not be alienated from Islam. As an example, he notes that the Koran "often states that in between the death and the resurrection of each [man] scarcely an hour elapses; thus, there need be no question about the status of souls prior to the [Day of] Judgment. Nevertheless, it also inserts [the claim] that during the intervals [between death and resurrection] some [souls] are situated in a pleasant place that abounds with fountains . . ." (159:7-10).
35. *CA* I, 4 (34:11-13). According to Nicholas, Muhammad was initially converted to Nestorian Christianity, so that the Koran reflects this Christian heresy. Additional errors, thinks Nicholas, were introduced by the Jews Phineas and Abdia-called-Salon. *CA* I, Second Prologue (11); I, 1 (23:12-13).
36. *CA* II, 13 (122:19-20).
37. *CA* I, 6 (40:6-7).
38. *CA* I, 6 (41:1-2). Cf. *CA* II, 15 (132:15-17): "Therefore, the Arabs have to understand such discrepancies with the Gospel in the [same] way as do Christians, who adhere to the Gospel. And so, with very good reason the Koran said that the Gospel, which it often asserted to be very clear, is the right way." Also note *CA* I, 6 (39:3-4): "Moreover, it is evident that, within the Koran, only that which agrees with the Gospel ought to be called the light of truth and of the right way."
39. *CA* I, 2 (26:9-12). Hence, Muslims too will need to sift through the Koran and to make use of *pia interpretatio* in accordance with their belief that the Koran approves of the Gospels. What Nicholas fails to realize is that Mus-

lims (and Christians) will also have to sift through the *Gospels*. Nicholas was unaware of the many difficulties posed by the synoptic problem of the Gospels. He does not succeed in foreclosing the possibility that where the New Testament and the Koran conflict, Muslims, for their part, would reject the New Testament teaching. His reference, in *CA* II, 19, to *pia interpretatio* on the part of the adherents of the Koran occurs in the context of their understanding of the doctrine of Paradise. Nicholas is not claiming that *pia interpretatio* is *exactly* the same thing for Christians and for Muslims. For as a Christian he is presupposing the truth of the Gospel and requiring that the Koran be assessed in the light of this presupposition. By contrast, Muslims presuppose the truth of the Koran, while insisting that the Gospel be assessed in the light thereof. See notes 73 and 74 below.

40. *CA*, Prologue (10:1-5).

41. *CA* II, 12 (116:6). II, 13 (122:3-4). I, 2 (26:9-12).

42. *CA* I, 15 (67:3-5). Cf. *CA* I, 5 (37:5-10).

43. *CA* I, 6 (39:4-7). Though Nicholas uses "Gospel" ("*evangelium*") in the singular, he often (as here) intends to signify the four Gospels as well as their teachings (viz., the gospel). See also the reference at the beginning of n. 39 above.

44. *CA* I, 6 (39:2-3).

45. Cf. *CA* III, 1 (162:4-6) with III, 12 (198:3-4).

46. *CA* III, 11 (195:10-13). Cf. *PF* XII (41:last speech): "In their Scriptures [the Jews] have all these [teachings] regarding Christ; but they follow the literal meaning and refuse to understand."

47. *CA* III, 11 (196:1-7). Also note the expression "*via seu lex*" in *CA* III, 11 (196:4).

48. *PF* XVI (59:last lines).

49. These works employ contradictions for different reasons; but each of them makes deliberate use thereof. Maimonides aims to discourage the naive or the frivolous reader. As for Plato, debate continues over how rightly to characterize his aims in the *Parmenides*—over whether or not the arguments in the second half are intended as serious. Strong considerations can still be advanced for judging to be intentional many of Plato's fallacious arguments not only in early works such as the *Euthydemus* and the *Protagoras* but also in the later *Parmenides*.

50. *CA* II, 18 (152:8-9).

51. *CA* II, 18 (152:1-3).

52. *CA* II, 18 (151:1-2).

53. *CA* II, 12 (120:6-11). Cf. *CA* II, 13 (124:11-12).

54. *CA* I, 14 (63:13-15): "I reply that this surah ought to be understood in such way that through it [the Koran] intends to give glory to God and not

to take away praise from Christ." Although Nicholas is here addressing a particular passage within the Koran, the point he is making is presumed by him to have wider applicability.

55. CA I, 6 (42:1-2).

56. Note CA, Second Prologue (16:1-2): "Therefore, there will be no difficulty in finding, in the Koran, the truth of the Gospel, although Muhammad himself was very far removed from a true understanding of the Gospel."

57. CA II, 13 (121:8). See note 41 above.

58. E.g., CA II, 13 (121:11-15).

59. See n. 39 above.

60. Viz., CA II, 1 (86:4); II, 12 (119:1); II, 13 (124:3-4); II, 19 (154:8).

61. See p. 331 of *Des Cardinals und Bischöfs Nicolaus von Cusa wichtigste Schriften in deutscher Übersetzung*, translated by F. A. Scharpff (Freiburg, 1862). Reprinted in Frankfurt a.M. by Minerva Verlag, 1966. Cf. Maurice de Gandillac's rendition "en interprétant le Coran de façon bienveillante" on p. 513 of his *Oeuvres choisies de Nicolas de Cues* (Paris: Aubier, 1942).

62. See the relevant passages in *Sichtung des Alkorans. Cribratio Alkoran*, Books Two and Three, translation and notes by Gustav Hölscher (Leipzig: F. Meiner Verlag, 1946).

63. See p. 48, line 1 of Naumann's introduction to *Sichtung des Alkorans. Cribratio Alkoran*, Book One, translation and introduction by Paul Naumann (Leipzig: F. Meiner Verlag, 1948 (2nd edition)). Also see p. 66, line 2.

64. Burgevin, *op. cit.*, p. 50, line 7. Cf. p. 44, lines 7-8, where Burgevin uses the phrase "when rightly interpreted."

65. Ludwig Hagemann, *Der Kur'an in Verständnis und Kritik bei Nikolaus von Kues. Ein Beitrag zur Erhellung islamisch-christlicher Geschichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: J. Knecht, 1976), p. 72.

66. "Vielmehr kommt in diesem Motiv die irenische Haltung des Cusanus selbst jenen Passagen des Korans gegenüber, zum Ausdruck, die ihm fremd, uneinsichtig, moralisch abstossend und verwerflich erschienen. 'Pia interpretatio' meint deshalb nichts anderes als eine aus christlicher Sicht wohlwollende, gutmütige und weitherzige Auslegung des Korans—*manuductio*." Ludwig Hagemann, *Nikolaus von Kues im Gespräch mit dem Islam* (Altenberge, Germany: Verlag für Christlich-Islamisches Schrifttum, 1983), pp. 8-9.

67. See CA II, 16 and DI III, 6.

68. CA II, 13 (124:3-5 and 11-12).

69. CA II, 14 (129:7-11).

70. CA, Prologue (10:2-5). Michael Seidlmayer, *Wege und Wandlungen des Humanismus. Studien zu seinen politischen, ethischen, religiösen Problemen*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1965), p. 235. Seidlmayer translates "*pia interpretatio*" by "fromme Auslegung," i.e., as "pious interpretation,"

or "devout interpretation." A correspondingly similar translation (viz., "pia interpretazione," "piamente interpretato") is given by Pio Gaia in his *Opere religiose di Nicolò Cusano*.

71. Ludwig Hagemann, *Der Kur'an in Verständnis und Kritik bei Nikolaus von Kues*, op. cit., p. 72. Hagemann makes CA II, 19 (154:8) the touchstone for understanding the phrase "*pia interpretatio*." He is therefore an example of those who focus too narrowly upon the passages in CA where the phrase actually occurs.

72. CA II, 18 (150:14-16 and 151:1-20).

73. In CA I, 2 (26:9-12) Nicholas maintains that adherents of the Koran affirm the following: that their book "does not contradict any of the prophets but rather endorses them and corroborates the books transmitted to the prophets by God (viz., the Testament of Moses, the Psalter of David, and the Gospel transmitted by Jesus Christ, the son of the Virgin Mary)." See n. 38 above.

74. See n. 39 above. It is wrong to infer from CA II, 19 that Nicholas understands "*pia interpretatio*" to be *exactly* the same thing for Christians and for Muslims. It is, he thinks, *essentially* the same thing—viz., that which is expressed in Rule 4 above. But because orthodox Christians presuppose the truth of the Gospel and orthodox Muslims presuppose the truth of the Koran, *pia interpretatio* for Nicholas—but not necessarily for the Muslims—includes exegetical Rules 1 and 5. Yet, Nicholas thinks that the wise among the Arabs ought to (and may be led to) resolve discrepancies between the Koran and the Bible in favor of the Bible. (See n. 73 above.) He can therefore regard some Muslims as accepting Rules 1 and 5 and, thus, as utilizing devout interpretation in the full sense of the phrase. Hagemann, by insisting that Nicholas's statement in CA II, 19 articulates a necessary condition for *pia interpretatio*, fails to distinguish "essentially the same thing" from "exactly the same thing." As a consequence, he has watered down Nicholas's conception of *pia interpretatio* to a *wohlwollende, gutmütige, und weitherzige Auslegung*.

75. With regard to the moral dimension, consider CA I, 6 (41:3-14): "From where does [the Koran's] contempt for this world and [its] preference for the future age come? [From where does] the persuasion to justice, to works of mercy, and to love of God and of neighbor [come]? Whence comes the conviction that the selling to God of all one's possessions and even of one's soul is of maximum profit? Whence comes the view that to die for God is to live eternally? Whence did both the Koran's love of virtue and its prohibition of usury, murder, perjury, fornication, adultery, and lusting for married women receive the splendor of their brightness except from the Gospel's perfection and fittingness? Why are many other things which are promised in the Koran regarding sensual pleasure and impurity of flesh deemed by all the wise

(even by wise Arabs) to be shady and abominable and vile?—[why] except because they are at variance with the Gospel's promises”

76. CA I, 14 (63:15).

77. Giovanni Santinello, *Introduzione a Niccolò Cusano* (2nd edition), *op. cit.*, p. 119.

NOTES TO RICOLDO AND NICHOLAS OF CUSA

1. We do find in Daniel occasional positive remarks about Ricoldo, such as on p. 172: “Ricoldo was charitable towards Islamic belief when it fell within his direct, as opposed to his literary, experience.”

In this present chapter, references to Ricoldo's *Disputatio* will be given in terms of Codex Cusanus 107 (Cusanus Stift, Bernkastel-Kues, Germany) and the printed text in *TB* (1550), Vol. II [i.e., in Vol. II of the 1550 revised edition of Theodor Bibliander's *Machumetis Sarracenorum Principis Vita ac Doctrina* (Zurich; first edition published in Basel, 1453)]. But I have also consulted Latin ms. 4230 of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, Latin ms. 449 of the Bavarian Staatsbibliothek in Munich, and Latin ms. Royal 13.E.IX of the British Museum. I use the chapter divisions found in Codex Cusanus 107, with which divisions Bibliander's printed text agrees. The text in Bibliander can serve only as a *pis aller*, since it is the translation of a translation—i.e., is the retranslation into Latin of a Greek translation of a copy of the original Latin text. As such, it is inferior to the ms. sources just cited.

In citing only the *Disputatio* and not Ricoldo's *Itinerarium*, I am dealing only with the one work of Ricoldo's that influenced Nicholas of Cusa. (The gist of the polemical points made in the *Itinerarium* against the Muslims is repeated in the *Disputatio*.) In this present chapter the Latin quotations from the *Disputatio* have been taken from Codex Cusanus 107, unless indicated otherwise.

2. See, below, the first two paragraphs of Section III.3 of the present chapter.

Regarding Ricoldo's knowledge of the Koran, note Ugo Monneret de Villard's verdict [*Il libro della peregrinazione nelle parti d'oriente di Frate Ricoldo da Montecroce* (Rome: S. Sabinae, 1948), p. 112]: “Vediamo ora quale conoscenza intrinseca Ricoldo ebbe del testo coranico. È certo che egli lavorò sempre direttamente sul testo arabo e si direbbe che non ebbe nemmeno conoscenza del l'antica traduzione latina di Roberto di Chester. Prova ne è che egli cita ogni surah col suo nome arabo, dandone poi la traduzione.”

3. Daniel regards this conclusion itself as unfair. *Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966 edition), p. 156.

4. Condemning a writer's ideas on the basis of standards of a later period