

Two Introductions

a) A History of War

Muses withdraw whenever blows are loud and blood is spilled. They are tender ladies because they have reached a certain sensitive age. *Inter arma silent musae*. This also applies for the Muse of comparative religion and for the Muse of the philosophy of religion.

Christianity spread peacefully until 312 A.D; its monotheism was culturally superior and had the great ancient philosophy on its side. Its ethic of love was apparent and illuminated the hearts of the wretched and the needy. Beginning with the end of the 4th century, Western Christianity sided with the military and police. This was neither the time for a pertinent judgement on Manichean Christians, nor for a deep interest in the great number of pagan Gods. Only when paganism vanished from the Mediterranean world in the 14th century, did the philosophic interest in Greek polytheism rise.

Islam was associated with military actions right from its start. Just as Western Christianity before 1900, it adopted the idea of the Holy War from the Hebraic Bible; this occurred with almost no debate within Christian society. Before 1100 A.D., the Western world was not strong enough, not united enough and not aggressive enough to reconquer the land taken away by Islamic kingdoms; this trend was finally reversed in the age of the crusades.

Then came the Ottoman invasion. Between 1361 and 1450 A.D. the Ottomans conquered almost all of Southeast Europe. Around 1400, Byzantium/Constantinople was just an island in the Ottoman sea. The victory at Mohacs in 1526 assured Ottoman supremacy over the entire Balkan peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The counter-attacks of the Habsburgian, Polish and Venetian empires at the end of the 17th century, in particular the battle at the Kahlenberg in 1683, however, put a halt to this expansion. These military actions were paralleled by Western coinage, historic and theological publications, all of which in some way or another referred to the doctrine of the Holy War as the word of God.

At this stage, I would like to finish my little story of war; it reminds us how hard it was for Western Christians to even gain a balanced understanding of the Islamic world. My research on Cusanus demonstrates that even he could not entirely shake off this burden.

b) A historic, not an apologetic point of view

A short explanation regarding my approach: I'm aiming at a strictly historical analysis of Cusanus' attitude towards Islam. Cusanus' opinion did not fit into the contemporary ancient timeframe. Nonetheless, the philosopher has to be critically analysed with regard to the historic framework of his work, not outside of it.

After the Second Vatican Council, some supporters of religious peace –as laudable their intentions might be- instrumentalized Cusanus in an unhistorical fashion to found a Catholic variant of Oecumenics. They pointed to the friendly intentions of the Cardinal's factual position in a "religious dialogue" and tried to prove his point. In contrast to this approach, I am presenting an unapologetic presentation, an approach which might be called „clearly historical“. It has to be added, however, that even the historian of ideas has a consciousness of the present; a historian may present critical comments as long as he evaluates the textual material in a correct and unspeculative way. This is what I am aiming at; absolutely aware of the strong, current interest in this topic. The approach I am using is in an old-fashioned and positivistic manner. Just because of the current importance of Cusanus, an author of the 15th century should not be made modern. Further, it runs counter to good philological principles.

The textual materials I am talking about consist of two writings by Cusanus. First, the *De Pace Fidei* from 1453. Second, the *Cribratio Alcorani*, which reveal his view of the Qu'ran in 1460/61. As time is limited, I will restrict myself to these two important texts. This does not mean, however, that his interest in the abundance of religion and its concordances rose only after 1453. Already in 1431, he expressed his strong interest in the abundance of faith; he related the concordance of emergent neoplatonic monotheism and of negative theology to certain doctrines of the Qu'ran. He himself tells that he showed interest in the Qu'ran at a very early stage of his life.

II. The Turkish War and Eternal Peace

On May 29th 1453, Byzantium fell to the Turks. The immediate shock to the Christian world was immense. Cruelties of all kinds were ascribed to the Turkish invaders. Refugees reported that the Turkish sultan was greedy for war, that he was preparing a fleet to conquer Italy, that he longed for blood and that he regarded himself stronger than even both Alexander the Great and Caesar. He wanted to land on shore at Brindisi, destroy Venice, conquer Rome and extinguish Christianity there by the following summer. Some even claimed he sought for world domination.

Indeed, the capture of Constantinople by Sultan Mohammed II was a decisive moment. It brought about the abrupt end of a political, religious and cultural state that had lasted for over 1100 years. The expansion of Venice to the East was ended; the strongholds of Venetian power were toppled. Above all Byzantium had been the embodiment of glorious majesty. There were gold and relics. The people there –unlike the people of the entire Western world - had already used knives and forks for a long time. There were the intact treasures of Greek science and theology. Indeed, Mohammed II. did not seek to destroy the city; instead he built walls and public buildings; he relocated Muslims, Christians and Jews from different parts of the country to the capital. Today's historians view him as a supporter of the fine arts and sciences. However, the anguish in the West was immense. Enea Silvio Piccolomini, later known as Pope Pius II., wrote to

the official Pope Nicolaus V. on July 12th in 1453:

„What terrible news are these which just reached us from Constantinople? As I'm writing this, my hand is shaking and my soul is paralysed by shock. But my disgust doesn't allow me to be silent and I can't speak because of pain. Oh, miserable Christianity! One feels ashamed of being alive; what a good piece of good luck would it have been, if we died before this ruin...! Along with your sorrow, I have to mourn the downfall of Christianity. I mourn the destruction and desecration of the temple of Hagia Sophia, which is famous throughout the whole world. I mourn for the many holy churches which were wonderful buildings: now they are subject to destruction and the dirt of Mohamed. Shall I talk about the books which existed in large numbers and which were unknown to the Latin West? Oh, how many names of great men are lost forever? This is Homer's second death and a second dying for Plato. Where shall we find the spirit of philosophers and poets? The fountain of the muses has vanished. If we could just hold on to some spirit to mourn over the misery with dignified voices. All this, Holy Father, is breaking my heart. I see: faith and culture go down together.“

Rome was horrified. Sovereigns and laymen recommended a military counterattack, a preventive war. Some people, however, thought differently. Among them were Cardinal Cusanus and archbishop Johannes of Segovia. They wanted to negotiate and to talk about religion, not to wage war. Cusanus was on his way from Rome to Brixen, when the news of the fall of the imperial city at the Bosphorus reached him on July 28th 1453. He himself was shocked about the cruelties of the war, but he decided to react as a philosopher and writer. He wrote his book about „Peace in Belief“. With this he sought to demonstrate that wars waged on religious issues are preventable. All people, he wrote, would basically have the same religion, only ceremonies and traditions would be different. In September of the same year, he finished his book. It started:

„A man who used to live in this area and had heard of the cruelties lately executed by the Turkish leader in Constantinople became so mad with anger that he asked God that he may end the prosecution of Christians. Then it happened. The emotionally moved man had a divine vision. It turned out that it was possible for a few wise men familiar with all the different traditions of religion of the various areas of the world to reach an agreement. They could, in an appropriate and true way, settle an eternal peace, the peace of religion. In order to reach the minds of influential people, he described these things in a simple and straightforward manner, as long as his memory served him.“

Cusanus mentions that following many days of religious excitement, he had the idea of eternal peace. Just as a Roman layman, he promises a concordance that is easy to understand; but no return to scholastic circumstances. He by no means wants to trigger any unending discussions about religion, but a simple view, presented in an easy way. The book is not supposed to be very thoughtful, rather it is supposed to be useful. It shall put an end to the mutual slaughter in the name of God. He demands a meeting of a few philosophers from all religions. They would realise: although rituals are different, that they actually all refer to the very same religion. Everyone should practice it, although ceremonies may remain different. Philosophers would have to return to their own people in order to show them that the deep meaning of their controversial structures of belief and ceremonies in essence is THE only rational religion. As a consequence, peace would be restored.

The book continues to construct a meeting of wise men from all parts of the world who meet in heaven and how they peacefully come to the conclusion that there is essentially just one religion guiding all the various rituals. *Una religio in rituum diversitate* is the guiding principle. The differences do not justify the use of violence. Pious people believe they do God a favour by trying to convert people through the use of violence and even kill resistant people, but they are wrong. The philosophy of tolerance should be taught to these violent people by the philosophers as soon as they return from the heavenly convention of the philosophers held under the chairmanship of God.

This program is an essential step towards the development of tolerant thinking. The various ways of worship, the different ways of sacrifice, the different ways of preaching, they are all rituals, but they are not the fundamental part of religion. For dogmatic thinkers, this idea is offensive. They feel that the fundamental basics of their belief are true and they reject the idea that these are just external rituals, whose true meaning could only be explained to them by the philosophers returning from the heavenly congress. They believe these formulas come directly from God; therefore they would rather give their lives and kill others than accept the Cusanic interpretation with respect to the complexity of religion. This opposition remains alive even today -not just with Christians, but also with fundamentalists of all kinds.

The most famous Catholic philosophic historian of the 20th century doubtlessly was Etienne Gilson. With regard to the religious scripts of Cusanus, he found two astonishing aspects: First, that it was written by a Christian, maybe even by a Cardinal. Second, the Catholic church had not forbidden it a long time ago. I personally find two aspects astonishing: First, the fact that the writing explicitly contains a program for eternal peace. Second, that it asks people to look for one true meaning in their religion, a religion based on human reason, not on historic facts or regional habits. These ideas, the ones regarding eternal peace and rational religion, are regarded as quite modern. Both concepts came up in the 17th or 18th century and belonged to the Age of Enlightenment. The professors who researched this subject were probably competent experts for the 17th and 18th century. But their research carries one quintessential shortcoming: these experts have not read the writings of peace by Nikolaus von Kues.

I call Kues' idea a milestone in the history of tolerance. It pointed in this direction. But it does not teach a tolerance based on the same principle in a later sense. Cusanus thought he could show at his convention of philosophers, how all the various religions basically point to a philosophic, neoplatonic Christianity and that this could be proved in a philosophical fashion. He wanted to tolerate the difference of the various rites. That was a strikingly new mode of thinking. Basically he wanted to tolerate it, because he thought he could prove all these rites were partial truths of Christianity.

In fact, these were occurrences that took place in the real world. How far did tolerance reach the minds, the heaven of *ratio*? Even Cusanus did not think about tolerating other religions the way they were. He wanted them to accept the truth inherent in the Plato-Christian concept. This would not be difficult, but it would be necessary to remove some disturbing objections and to lessen the importance of some external appearances. Thus, the path of the heavenly teaching was predicted: From this point, the assembled wise men get in contact with all other major teachings of Christianity. During this process, all objections of Muslims and Jews will be abolished. It was time to show that the Christian doctrine of trinity does not exclude the unity of God and that the Christian doctrine of incarnation does not mean the worship of a single individual as God.

In the following, a philosophical concept of happiness will be developed which takes for granted the nature of intellect as a starting point and which either disproves the Islamic tales of a pleasurable paradise of proven warriors or tolerates it by regarding it as essentially symbolic. Cusanus wants to keep baptising as an indispensable precondition for healing; furthermore he wants to show that the doctrine of the Holy Communion of the 12th and 13th century with its thesis of transubstantiation does not contradict a spiritual interpretation. The main topics are: trinity, incarnation, blissfulness and the sacraments.

The Congress of philosophers proves that all religions are guided by the same inherent principles of these four concepts. They contain the same truths, and these are the pure Christian doctrines with its meaning of trinity, becoming a human being, eternal blessing, and external signs as a necessary precondition for otherworldly life. The policy of the Cardinal was different, however. Cusanus developed his argument over time; but in 1453 he reminded the people about the truth of the New Testament which says that the person that uses a sword will be killed by the sword itself. Later, he participated in the preparations for the crusade against the Turkish people. In fact, he was an active enemy of Jewish people. His oecumenical attitude has often been exaggerated. To him concepts of heaven did not directly translate into binding laws on earth. On this earth there were laws which for example obliged Jews to carry some kind of the Star of David. He roughly tried to carry through the old directions of the Lateran Council of 1215.

But let us continue with the document of peace. It creates a sort of literary fiction. It can also be called a *visio*: he was a person mentally touched by the violence of the siege of Constantinople, and he was a person who asked god to stop the fighting that centred around the various methods of worshipping of god in the various religions (*ob diversum ritum religionum*). He was also a person who had been to Constantinople and who could be recognised as the bishop of Brixen. Such a person had a vision –he realised that a convention of a few wise men from different religions was necessary to assure harmony in religious issues and to secure eternal peace. In order to proclaim this vision to the leaders of the various religions, he wrote down his *visio* in this book.

This person was “lifted up to certain intellectual heights” (*raptus enim est ad quandam intellectualem altitudinem*). There, he saw divine spirits. The angels of various peoples stood beside and examined the possibility of a concordance; they formed a council whose president was the Almighty. The King of Heaven and Earth opened the assembly by declaring that his messengers had brought sad news from earth. He had heard the groaning of the oppressed who had been forced by weapons to either give up their old religions or to die. Finally one of the spiritual creatures interrupted the congress and addressed God:

God’s gift to the people was their intellectual powers. Although their minds were clouded by shadows, they were still able to lift their eyes up to God and to become one with him in love. He continued that God knew that a huge number of humans causes huge differences. Besides, most people are forced to spend their lives in misery and servitude. As a result, few people have the luxury of making use of their freedom of will and to realise their own divine self. They are distracted by sorrow and worldly activities; indeed, they cannot manage to search for God. For that reason, God sent prophets to the peoples to teach them worship and law (*cultum et leges*) and to instruct the uneducated. These uneducated people (*rudes*) took the doctrines of the prophets seriously and acted as if God himself had told them. The peoples finally believed they were listening to God, not to his prophets. God had sent different prophets to different peoples at different times. As people have the tendency to take long-established habits as facts and to defend these with their lives, this is how quarrels arise; each group tends to regard their faith as of higher value than that of others.

Of particular interest here is the wide gap between the educated and the uneducated, and also the realistic image of political rule drawn by Cusanus. Apparently, the prophets came for the *rudes*. They do not only bring the cult, but also the laws that govern them. Often, however, their revelations are misunderstood and taken as the true voice of God. This leads to a confusion of truth and habit, resulting in violence in the long run.

The angel continued: All people are looking for the good things, all intellectual effort is made to reach the truth. God is the good and the truth. All beings therefore look for advice from God; they only praise him by different names. The real name of God is unknown and cannot be voiced (*incognitus et ineffabilis*). No being can understand God, because there is no relation between this world and the other. (*cum finiti at inditum nulla sit proportio*). God should not hide himself anymore. He should show his real face and reveal his divinity, because ignorant people often turn away from God (*ostende faciem tuam*). The quest for divine faith was one of the principal motives of the spiritual philosophy of *De mente*; in the fall of 53 A.D., the search becomes more urgent; we will see how this key motif returns.

The angel begs God to show mercy to the humans, for war and hatred will then come to an abrupt end. The moment God would show his face, every person would realise that there is a variety of ways to worship God, but there is just one religion inherent in all of them (*agnoscent omnes quomodo non est nisi religio una in rituum diversitate*). If the differences of religions in worshipping God could not be abolished, then everybody should honour God through practising his own religion. This way there would only be one religion, governed by the higher principles of just one God.

The King of Heaven, sitting on a throne, replies to the speech of the angel: he himself gave the people their own will so that they may

rule themselves. Through this he has given them the skill to have communion with God. But both the animal and the worldly human being are ruled by the lord of darkness. The lord of darkness keeps the people in a state of ignorance. This is why human beings often retain the conditions of their sinful lives. This is also the reason why he constantly sent prophets to the world. In the long run, however, the prophets did not manage to defeat the lord of darkness; for that reason he send his own *verbum*. He sought to enlighten the people and to show them that they should not seek material, but spiritual gains; as a consequence, he would reward them with the sweetness of immortal life. The *verbum* took the form of a mortal human being and proved the truth with his blood. This truth has the following meaning: the human being is able to live through eternity; he only would have to disregard sinful and worldly life.

Furthermore, this eternal life is the aim everybody longs for; this truth feeding the intellect is the *verbum* itself. The *verbum* contains everything and radiates everything, *in quo complicantur omnia et per quod omnia explicantur*. The divine word has taken human nature in order to insure that every human being could feel safe to reach the immortal nourishment of truth.

God's speech ends with the question of what else he could have done and what he had already done so far. On behalf of all heavenly creatures the godly word replied:

God certainly had created everything perfectly, but as he had given people the gift of having their own free will, and as there was nothing stable in the world, there was a great variety manifested in the most different views and theories, languages, and interpretations. In the face of this variety, he said, mankind would have a strong need for divine lessons (*indiget humana natura cerebra visitatione*) to make the truth shine forever. As there is just one truth that could be understood by any intellect (*cum sit una et non possit non capi per omnem liberum intellectum*), the entire variety in religions should guide one to a single unique belief in God (*perducetur omnis religionum diversitas in unam fidem orthodoxam*).

The King of Heaven likes this proposition. He commands the angels to teach one single wise man from each religion. The angels obey and bring about the most honourable men of the world, who are overwhelmed by the godly word. The *verbum* turns to them with a speech: The Lord of Heaven and Earth has heard the groaning of the killed and the enslaved people suffering from the difference of religions. The reason why God had empathy with those people persecuting other people in the name of God was because they did it in his name. He therefore ordered the wise men to condense the variety of religions into just one religion, a religion that would last forever (*omnem religionum diversitatem communi omnium hominum consensu in unicam concorditer reduci amplius inviolabilem*). He further ordered the wise men to gather in Jerusalem to carry out this mission under the guidance and supervision of the angels. This is the beginning of the conversation about religion, which is always under the guidance of the divine *verbum*.

Then, the oldest of the gathered philosophers, a Greek man, stepped forward and asked: how should we condense this great variety of religions to just a single faith? People have always fought for their own religion with great zeal; they certainly will not cooperate if we tell them to adopt a new, universal religion.

The divine *verbum* replied: you are not supposed to introduce a new faith, but to understand that this faith is the basis of all other religions.

This anticipates the direction of my argument: philosophers are not supposed to construct a new artificial religion –an Esperanto of faith– but they are supposed to acknowledge the universal premise of all religions and then spread their wisdom.

Then, the divine *verbum* and the Greek man conducted a Socratic dialog: All of you carry the name of a wise man, friend of wisdom, or philosopher. Thus all of you presuppose the existence of wisdom and the fact that there is just one wisdom. To this, all philosophers agreed. Their premise was the Platonic concept of a universal faith. Participation (*particio*) is the cue. Participation brings together the experience of diversity and the knowledge of unity.

The simple starting-point lay in the fact that all people gathered called themselves philosophers. The divine word traces this single expression back to one reality, to one faith. Here, the theory of vocabulary of *De mente* can be applied. When more closely examining the one wisdom, Cusanus relies on motives from *De sapientia* in that wisdom is enchanting. We start looking for wisdom when we admire something. At this point the divine world silently corrects the dualistic overtones the Lord had just raised. God had drawn a stark contrast between the evident and the intellectual world. He perceived the evident world as a place of darkness ruled by the devil. Aside from this, Satan does not occupy a dominant role in the writings of Cusanus.

The conversation between the Greek man and the *verbum* also shows the contrast between the evident and the ideal world. The evident world leads us further: in it we see one wisdom being effective.

This also applies for the human body and the rational spirit. The Greek man enthusiastically talks about our *spiritus rationalis*: he is capable of many trades and arts; he is *capax artium mirabilium*. Following this, the Greek man sings a hymn to the perfectibility of the human spirit: once a person turns to the direction of wisdom, he gradually approaches it. Although we never touch absolute wisdom, we come closer and closer to it. The closer we come, the better it tastes. Based on this understanding, we have finally found the starting-point for everything that is to come. The *verbum* highlights this: unity is saved; the spirit/mind is a basis for wisdom and truth; participation negotiates between the One and Many.

Ytalus continues the conversation with the *verbum*. He highlights the universal character of wisdom. It therefore makes no difference if everything was created in wisdom or everything was created through the *verbum*. The only difference lies in expression, but the view remains the same in substance (*diversitas in dictione, idem in sententia*). There is only one, everlasting wisdom, which is the reason for

everything; so the *verbum* shows to the philosophers that while searching for wisdom, they presume the existence of just one God, himself the holder of wisdom.

Then, an Arab rises and agrees: wisdom, he says, is the one thing every intellect needs to survive; to nourish it is a condition for life. The *verbum* insists: is this relevant to all people? -Yes, is the answer of the Arab; this is something every thinker has to agree with. Finally, after the unity of wisdom was accepted, the *verbum* turns the attention back to the various religions: if the relation to the one wisdom is inherent in the human nature of the intellect, then there is only one religion and one worship of God for all intellectual beings. This is presumed in the difference of all rituals.

One can see how the divine word shapes the content of speech. It urges philosophers to explore the underlying conditions. The meaning of philosophy thus is a search for assumptions – this is Platonic, just as the participation and the evaluation of the evident world, both as a possible obstacle and an ascent. So far the divine word had not spoken about the various religions. It had addressed philosophers as thinkers rather than members of distinct religious groups.

It was not until the philosophers had realised the inherent wisdom in the divine concept that the *verbum* came to speak on the differences in religion:

In your intellect you have always worshipped one God, and you have one worship of God, *cultus*. You have to become aware of this condition. You have to understand the distinct religions by that which connects you to all people, the intellect. Intellect exists in all people and has an essential regard for a universal wisdom.

Upon hearing this, the Arab concludes that polytheism is untrue. The nature of philosophy accepts the existence of only one God. The *verbum* went even further: those who talked about many Gods presumed that every single God to be part of the universal essence of God, just as the many white things are white through the essence of the colour white.

In essence, there is an overriding principle which qualifies them all to be a God. This is an argument from Plato's dialogues. The divine word talks as if it had just arisen from reading the Platonic *Phaidon*. It concludes: there has never been a people so foolish as to understand polytheism in the sense that the many Gods were the reason for the creation of the universe.

The argumentation of the *verbum* and of the Arab against polytheism consists of the use of Plato's model of participation on the many Gods. Ancient Gods disappeared when they were confronted with the philosophic question regarding the Arche. The *verbum* makes good for the historic triumph of philosophic monotheism over ancient peoples religions. It explicitly points out that this was an example for the search for the origins of this thought. The peace promoting new unity of religion is not based on a new faith, but on what reason tells all those who have understood the premises. Philosophers have to become aware of the concept of reason, (*ratio ipsa dictat*).

The Arab, however, had doubts, arguing that people will not stop worshipping their distinct Gods, because they hope to receive help in all needs of life. The Arab talked about polytheistic peoples as if he only had the Catholic worship of Saints in mind; and the divine *verbum* picks this topic up – a worship of those regarded as Saints, a *dulia* that does not turn into a *latría*, was meaningless. As long as the people do not attribute divine powers to their Saints, everything was alright. As long as people honoured them and regarded their lives as worth imitating, it does not contradict the true religion. This is what the philosophers are supposed to tell their people, then the people would soon understand.

III. An Examination of the Qu'ran

Starting in 1460, Cusanus lived in Rome as a representative of Pope Pius II. He occupied himself with the Qu'ran in an atmosphere of heightened turmoil and preparations for the crusades (which finally were called off). Cusanus went through the Qu'ran step by step; and he separated the compatible from the incompatible. Cusanus wrote the book as advice for the Pope. He claimed he had written it out of religious enthusiasm; he wanted to demonstrate how Mohamed's erroneous belief... could be reputed by arguments. They are not based on the original doctrine of Cusanus; the words *coincidere* and *coincidentia* do not appear in it. He wanted to write simple, for the ones who had power but lacked time. He wanted to prove the validity of the gospels; so he checked the book of Mohamed in order to show if it continued the Gospels. And it did not, whether it was because of ignorance or a mean intention.

There, the polemical overtones increased. In particular against Jews. They were said to have tricked Mohamed to condemn Christ. After Mohamed's death, they were said to have falsified the Qu'ran in an anti-Christian sense. The Jews, the *perversi Iudaei*, he claimed, were instruments of the devil; they are the reason why the Turks were fighting the Christians so fiercely.

The result: the Qu'ran could not possibly come from God. It contained too many injustices, lies and contradictions and was a blasphemy to regard it as a gift of God. The Qu'ran, he claimed, therefore came from Satan, the ruler of this world. Nonetheless, it contained some essential truths. It had re-established the strict belief in only one God and had taught a truculent people the fear of judgement day. It accepted other religions as well; Cusanus declared. he could also find his doctrine of one religion in the Qu'ran. However, the Qu'ran used the fight against many Gods as a pretence to polemicize against Christ. The good part of the Qu'ran was the acceptance of the Old Testament, as well as the regard of Jesus as the word of God. As a consequence, the Gospels must be preferred to the Qu'ran. The good about the Qu'ran was that it was like a ray of light shining from the Gospels on the Qu'ran.

While reading the Gospels, educated Moslems should realise that the Qu'ran even ruins those aspects it has in common with it. The Qu'ran teaches a doctrine of disdain of the present world, for a high regard for the future world, as well as a belief in justice and benevolence. That is the reason why wise Muslims understand the Qu'ran in the sense of the evangelic. The Qu'ran rejects murder, perjury and adultery. It was Mohamed, so the argument went, who darkened the glory of this doctrine and who promised sexual pleasures in paradise. The essence of the Qu'ran, the unity of God and the recognition of Jesus as his messenger, was darkened by this doctrine. The teachings of the Trinity hold a great problem for ardent monotheists. Cusanus has always worked on depicting the Trinity as the true and undivided doctrine of Christianity. Here he turns to the world of images. He considers a glass-blower, who transfers the idea of the future glass to the material he works with. His mind and inner knowledge arise from the very same source, namely the Holy Ghost. All resources of the glass are one. The purpose of this argumentation: the doctrine of the Trinity and the belief in the divinity of Christ do not contradict monotheism; both are the same but monotheism is the more developed and more concrete form.

The second book of Cibrat is about ethics: Christian thinkers were fascinated, but also extremely worried about the Muslim paradise with its huris. Cusanus strongly rejects the Muslim paradise, notwithstanding the fact that Christians themselves also speak about physical occurrences in hell – even physical fire – and about choirs in heaven. Muslims who interpreted this figuratively for him suspected Christians. In general, however, Cusanus reaches a relatively balanced judgement about the ethics of the Qu'ran: God made sure that the rays of faith once in a while shone in the darkness of ignorance.

The third book points to various uncertainties of the Qu'ran. One thing Mohamed was certain about, however, was his belief in monotheism and his own role as prophet of God. He was inconsistent, however, on the use of arms and their role in questions of faith. He also claims to have reestablished the law of Abraham, which Cusanus denies.

Towards the end, Cusanus turns to the Sultan of Babylon and the Khalif of Baghdad. In former times, the Sultan used to be a Christian himself, but had only abandoned his belief and turned to Islam to strengthen his political power. But the day may come when only the Christian faith will rule. The Sultan may command his people to believe in the Gospels. By issuing this order, he would earn eternal fame and be awarded with eternal life on earth. Thus, he will bring peace to mankind. Cusanus asks the Khalif of Baghdad to become aware of the fact that Muslims had been cheated by clever, blasphemous Jews; that they had later included the passages about Abraham in the Qu'ran, and that they falsified the Qu'ran in an anti-Christian manner.

In 1461 the Pope indeed wrote to the Sultan and asked him to turn to the Christian faith, or would he refrain from that little bit of water? –What he meant was becoming baptised. He never received a reply.