

Henology and Interfaith Dialogue in Nicholas of Cusa*

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De pace fidei is certainly one of cardinal Cusanus's most famous and most read texts. It has caused various interpretations and still today the scholars do not agree unanimously on certain crucial aspects of Cusanus's opinion. Indeed, although twentieth-century historiography seems to agree on *De pace fidei*'s distance from the modern, enlightenment ideal of tolerance¹, the same does not apply to the evaluation of the role of Christianity in relation to the sharp and synthetic expression »one religion in a variety of rites«², which effectively sums up Cusanus's proposal.

When first reading it, we may distinguish two possible lines of interpretation.³ According to the first line, the concept of *una religio* identifies essentially with Christianity, while other religions are multiple rites that

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1 Cf. BRUNO DECKER, *Die Toleranzidee bei Nikolaus von Kues und in der Neuzeit*, in: Nicolò da Cusa. Relazioni tenute al Convegno Interuniversitario di Bressanone nel 1960 a cura di Giuseppe Flores d'Arcais (Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di Magistero dell'Università di Padova 4), Firenze 1962, 197–213; KARL JASPERS, *Nikolaus Cusanus*, München 1964, 220; MORIMICHI WATANABE, *Nicholas of Cusa and the idea of tolerance*, in: Niccolò Cusano agli inizi del mondo moderno, a cura di Giovanni Santinello, Firenze 1970, 409–418; GIOVANNI SANTINELLO, *Nicolò Cusano e l'utopia dell'unità culturale e religiosa nel Quattrocento*, in: *Archivio di filosofia* 53 (1985) 381–391; MASSIMO CACCIARI, *Geofilosofia dell'Europa*, Milano 1994, 149–159; MARIA LAURA LANZILLO, *Tolleranza*, Bologna 2001, 28; ANNA A. AKASOY, *Zur Toleranz gegenüber dem Islam bei Lullus und Cusanus*, in: *Ramon Llull und Nikolaus von Kues: Eine Begegnung im Zeichen der Toleranz. Akten des Internationalen Kongresses zu Ramon Llull und Nikolaus von Kues (Brixen und Bozen, 25.–27. November 2004)* – Raimondo Lullo e Niccolò Cusano: un incontro nel segno della tolleranza, a cura di Ermenegildo Bidese/Alexander Fidora/Paul Renner, (*Instrumenta patristica et mediaevalia* 46; *Subsidia Lulliana* 2), Turnhout 2005, 105–124.

2 *De pace*, I: h VII, n. 6, p. 7, lin. 10–11.

3 Cf. PIO GAIA, *Introduzione*, in: NICOLO CUSANO, *Opere religiose (Classici delle religioni: Sez. 4: La religione cattolica)* Torino 1993, 57–64; ARNE MORITZ, *Die Andersheit des Anderen – noch einmal zum Problem der Toleranz in Nikolaus von Kues' Dialog De pace fidei*, in: *Litterae Cusanae* 6,1 (2006) 1–17.

relate to this one true faith; according to the second line, instead, all religions – including Christianity – are imprecise, hypothetical rites of that one *religio*, which does not identify with any particular creed and which cannot coincide with any of these, but into which all creeds blend and take part. However, both these hermeneutic options, although they provide valid reasons, appear to be incomplete and give rise to some relevant reservations. Such incompleteness is further testified by the variations in the interpretation of the two hermeneutic lines.⁴

According to the first view, if the *una religio* concept were identified with Christianity, then the fundamental bases of the Cusanus' speculation would be denied – that is, the definition of *docta ignorantia* and of the speculative character of human knowledge, the impossibility of objectifying truth and Divinity – and their transcendence of every expression of them. Indeed, all the other religions would be rites that have a meaning only with respect to the one Christian truth as its partial revelations and its unfolding. The task of dialogue, then, is to lead them all to the one and only manifested truth, by overcoming their singularity and depriving them of their partiality. However, it is clear that the *una religio* concept does not immediately identify with Christianity *tout court* and that the dialogue does not seek to convert all the non-Christians to Christianity.

If the second interpretative line serves to equalise all the religious creeds as bearers of the same revelational value, and thus if Christianity is considered only as a contracted realisation of the unreachable truth, then it is hard to understand why the dialogue would place the Word first, and then Peter and Paul at the centre of the Celestial council. In the work, indeed, all the representatives of the different religions do not debate with one another; they only do it with the *Logos* first and then with the two Apostles, who do not take part in the circle of the other religious representatives, they are in fact the centre of it, and they answer the wise men's questions because it is God's explicit will that they do so.⁵ Indeed,

4 Cf. DAVIDE MONACO, Dialogo interreligioso, intrareligioso e identità cristiana nel *De pace fidei* di Nicolò Cusano. Una prospettiva ermeneutica, in: *Filosofia e Teologia* 2 (2007) 323–335; DAVIDE MONACO, Cusano e la pace della fede, Roma 2013, 120–126; Id., NICHLOAS OF CUSA, Trinity, Freedom and Dialogue, Münster, in press.

5 KLAUS REINHARDT, Die cusanische Idee vom Frieden im Glauben nach der Interpretation von Raymond Klibansky (1905–2005), in: *Litterae Cusanae* 6,1 (2006) 24.

there seems to be an irremediable contradiction between the assignment of value to all the different religions and the privileged part taken on by the leading representatives of one of them. It appears contradictory that Christianity does not identify with the concept of *una religio* whilst most of Cusanus's work concentrates on questions such as the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation – fundamental dogmas of the Christian religion. The second interpretative line, thus, does not manage to explain the centrality of Christianity.

According to the writer of this piece, the only way to understand the contradiction intrinsic in *De pace fidei* is to read the work and try to reconstruct its contents by placing them in the wider context of the cardinal's philosophical speculation: Cusanus's position towards interfaith dialogue can only be fully grasped if it is thought of in the wider set of his philosophy.⁶ However, although it is undeniable that any interpretation of *De pace fidei* encounters many intrinsic complexities, according to the investigation carried out in this work it is not possible to understand the dialogue's contents without making its philosophical foundation explicit. The dialectic between the One and the many and that between the uniqueness of truth and the variety of its expressions are the speculative basis of the work.⁷

The dialectic between uniqueness and multiplicity – which had already appeared in other texts prior to *De pace fidei* and was completed in his last work – is an essential premise for understanding the theoretical proposal outlined in the work from 1453, a proposal dedicated to interfaith dialogue and to Cusanus's whole philosophy. The view of the relationship between God and the world – between the One and the many – is displayed through a close examination of the two most representative

6 For more extensive analyses of the *De pace fidei* and a more detailed exposition of our interpretation, cf. DAVIDE MONACO, *Cusano e la pace della fede*, cit.

7 Cf. *De pace* 1: h VII n. 6, p. 7, lin. 10–11: »una religio in rituum varietate«; ibid. 4: h VII, n. 11, p. 11, 20–21: »Ante enim omnem pluralitatem est unitas«; ibid. 5: h VII, n. 15, p. 14, lin. 18–19: »Non est autem possibile plures esse aeternitates, quia ante omnem pluralitatem est unitas«; ibid. 5: h VII, n. 17, p. 16, lin. 10–11: »Et qui dicit plures deos, dicit unum antecedenter omnium principium«; ibid. 5: h VII, n. 17, p. 16, lin. 19–20: »Et non est possibile plura esse aeterna, quia ante omnem pluralitatem unitas.« Ibid. 7: h VII, n. 21, p. 20, lin. 16–18: »Omnis autem multitudinis unitas est principium: quare principium multitudinis est aeterna unitas.« Ibid. 8: h VII, n. 22, p. 22, lin. 10: »In tantum enim res est in quantum una est«.

terms of the German philosopher's speculation – *complicatio* and *explicatio*. Thanks to the asymmetry between enfolding and unfolding – according to which an unfolded thing cannot be directly derived from an enfolded thing, while an enfolded thing necessarily derives from an unfolded thing – Cusanus manages to defend both God's freedom and omnipotence and the world's significance as theophany, trace and manifestation of its creator.⁸ Using another Cusanus term, the world achieves meaning and value because it is a contraction of God (*contractio Dei*), that is the ability of God's infinite power to concentrate, individualise and actualise itself in each and every created thing. The creature and the finite being thus have a positive value in their singularity in that they are a manifestation of God's transcendence and infinity in their unique individuality.⁹

Cusanus employs his view of the relationship between unity and multiplicity in a field of gnosiology as well, and he develops a perspectivist view of human knowledge. The German philosopher combines an idea of the truth as infinite and a speculative view of knowledge: the truth, in its unlimitedness and transcendence, can be accessed and expressed by man only within certain singular and particular points of view which, rooted in finiteness, can convey the infinity of truth.¹⁰ In this

8 Cf. *De docta ign.* I, 22: h I, n. 69, p. 45, lin. 21–22: »Nam posita complicatione non ponitur res complicata, sed posita explicatione ponitur complicatio.«

9 Cf. *De docta ign.* III, 1: h I, n. 188, p. 122, lin. 4–9: »Ut nihil sit in universo, quod non gaudeat quadam singularitate, quae in nullo alio reperibilis est, ita quod nullum omnia in omnibus vincat aut diversa aequaliter, sicut cum nullo ullo umquam tempore aequale in quocumque esse potest; etiam si uno tempore minus eo fuerit et alio maius, hunc transitum facit in quadam singularitate, ut numquam aequalitatem praecisam attingat«; *De ven sap.* 22: h XII, n. 66, lin. 1–8: »Sed una est omnium singularium causa, quae omnia singularizat, quae neque est totum neque pars neque species neque individuum neque hoc neque illud neque omne nominabile, sed est singulorum singularissima causa. Singulare cum sit ab aeterna causa singularizatum, numquam in non-singulare resolvi potest. A quo enim resolveretur ab aeterna causa singularizatum? Hinc singulare bonum numquam desinit, cum omne singulare sit bonum.«

10 Cf. *De docta ign.* I, 3: h I, n. 10, p. 9, lin. 10–16: »Non potest igitur finitus intellectus rerum veritatem per similitudinem praecise attingere. Veritas enim non est nec plus nec minus, in quodam indivisibili consistens, quam omne non ipsum verum existens praecise mensurare non potest, sicut nec circulum, cuius esse in quodam indivisibili consistit, non-circulus. Intellectus igitur qui non est veritas numquam veritatem adeo praecise comprehendit, quin per infinitum praecisius comprehendi possit[...]«; *De theol. compl.*: h X/2, n. 3, lin. 24–25: »Est igitur veritas infinitas. Solum enim infinitas non

scheme, the mind (*mens*) has a central and essential role within the variety of the creation, from an ontological point of view and because it is God's and the One's first self-manifestation. The *mens* and the One are the two fundamental principles in the German philosopher's speculation as a whole. It is not by chance that they represent the axis around which his later philosophy rotates – the completed expression of his thought throughout the years. Only the *mens* can know the One or the *posse*, for it is a living image of God (*viva imago Dei*), unlike the rest of the created things, which are merely an unfolding of God (*explicatio Dei*).¹¹

The cognitive power of the mind, thus, is the image of the infinite divine *posse* it bears. Therefore, Cusanus represents a historical turning-point: the centre of the universe is no longer the earth, but the mind as God's living image in its creative power with regard to the world of knowledge. According to a *Leitmotiv* in the cardinal's thought, in the same way as God creates the world of being and the real entities, so man produces the world of knowledge and the entities that are part of it, in the image of the divine creation and the created being.¹²

potest esse maior nec minor.« *De coni.* I, prologus: h III, n. 2, lin. 2–5: »Quoniam autem in prioribus Doctae ignorantiae libellis multo quidem altius limpidiusque quam ego ipse nisu meo praecisionem veritatis inattingibilem intuitus es, consequens est omnem humanam veri positivam assertionem esse coniecturam.« Ibid.: h III, n. 2, lin. 9–11: »Cognoscitur igitur inattingibilis veritatis unitas alteritate coniecturali atque ipsa alteritatis coniectura in simplicissima veritatis unitate.« Ibid. I, 11: h III, n. 57, lin. 10–11: »Coniectura igitur est positiva assertio, in alteritate veritatem, uti est, participans.«

11 Cf. *De mente* 4: h ²V, n. 74, lin. 12: »Attende aliam esse imaginem, aliam explicationem.« Cf. *ibid.* 4: h ²V, n. 76, lin. 1–8: »PHILOSOPHUS: Videtur quod sola mens sit Dei imago. IDIOTA: Proprie ita est, quoniam omnia, quae post mentem sunt, non sunt Dei imago nisi in quantum in ipsis mens ipsa relucet, sicut plus relucet in perfectis animalibus quam imperfectis et plus in sensibilibus quam vegetabilibus, et plus in vegetabilibus quam mineralibus. Unde creaturae mente carentes sunt potius divinae simplicitatis explicationes quam imagines, licet secundum relucetiam mentalis imaginis in explicando de imagine varie participant.« *Comp.* 8: h XI/3, n. 23, lin. 13–14: »Et hinc in se reperit primum et propinquius signum conditoris, in quo vis creativa plus quam in aliquo alio noto animali relucet.« Cf. *De fil.* 6: h IV, n. 86, lin. 5–6: »Intellectus autem cum sit intellectualis viva dei similitudo, omnia in se uno cognoscit, dum se cognoscit.« *De mente* 7: h ²V, n. 106, lin. 8–10: »Utitur autem hoc altissimo modo mens se ipsa, ut ipsa est dei imago; et deus, qui est omnia, in ea relucet, scilicet quando ut viva imago Dei ad exemplar suum se omni conatu assimilando convertit.« Cf. also *De coni.* I, 1: h III, n. 5, lin. 3–8.

12 Cf. *De coni.* I, 1: h III, n. 5, lin. 3–8: »Coniecturas a mente nostra, uti realis mundus a divina infinita ratione, prodire oportet. Dum enim humana mens, alta dei similitudo,

It is only in the view of these fundamental moments of Cusanus's philosophy that it is possible to re-examine *De pace fidei* to understand its contribution to a philosophy of interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Cusanus identifies the origin of idolatry and the dangerous outcomes it can lead to with a reason that is narrowed down within the limits of the law of non-contradiction and the finite that absolutises itself, denying the transcendence of God and of the truth. The contradiction underlined at the beginning of this piece – that between the universality of the solution proposed and the particularity of the point of view used, between Christianity as one among the other religious creeds and the central position taken on by its representatives – reveals the contradictory nature intrinsic in Cusanus's thought, a contradiction Cusanus himself does not seek to solve because it is contradictory only at the level of finite discursive reason, not at the – higher – level of intellect.

The cardinal goes beyond the Aristotelian-Scholastic model, which seeks to avoid contradiction at all costs, and he tries to confine the law of non-contradiction within the limits of the cognitive power it serves, the *ratio*, showing the ulteriority of the *intellectus* and its *visio*. What limits the two interpretations mentioned above is that they tone down the contradiction intrinsic in *De pace fidei*, instead of thematising it. It is definitely not to embellish the tale that the story opens with the narrator's intellectual ecstasy which raises him up to an intellectual height where a *vision* discloses in front of him, a vision whose contents he

fecunditatem creatricis naturae, ut potest, participat, ex se ipsa, ut imagine omnipotentis formae, in realium entium similitudine rationalia exserit. Coniecturalis itaque mundi humana mens forma exstitit uti realis divina.« *De mente* 3: h²V, n. 72, lin. 6–7: »Conceptio divinae mentis est rerum productio; conceptio nostrae mentis est rerum notio.« Cf. *De mente* 5: h²V, n. 85, lin. 1–4: »PHILOSOPHUS: Unde habet mens iudicium illud, quoniam de omnibus iudicium facere videtur? IDIOTA: Habet ex eo, quia est imago exemplaris omnium: Deus enim est omnium exemplar.« Ibid. 5: h²V, n. 81, lin. 6–10: »Unde, quia mens est quoddam divinum semen sua vi complicans omnium rerum exemplaria notionaliter, tunc a Deo, a quo hanc vim habet, eo ipso, quod esse recepit, est simul et in convenienti terra locatum, ubi fructum facere possit, et ex se rerum universitatem notionaliter explicare«; *De beryl.*: h²XI/1, n. 7, lin. 2–5: »Nam sicut Deus est creator realium et naturalium formarum, ita homo rationalium entium et formarum artificialium, quae non sunt nisi sui intellectus similitudines sicut creaturae dei divini intellectus similitudines.« *De ludo* II: h IX, n. 80, lin. 9–13: »Deus vis est creativa, secundum quam virtutem facit omnia veraciter esse id quod sunt, quoniam ipse est entitas entium. Mens nostra vis est notionalis, secundum quam virtutem facit omnia notionaliter esse.«

reported as far as *memory* let him, in order for them to be *communicated* to others. The elements mentioned – the vision, the memory and communication – recall two different cognitive fields: the *intellectus* and the *ratio*. Nicholas of Cusa presents the text as a vision he has transcribed based on his memory and within its limits and he wanted to render in a discursive and communicative way.¹³ According to one of the philosopher's *Leitmotivs*, it is only in the world of *ratio*, in discursive reason – which uses the law of non-contradiction as truth's fundamental criterion – that something that appears contradictory, while in the world of *intellectus* it is not.

De pace fidei's very genre, dialogue, is essential for understanding Cusanus's speculative proposal: not only does it report the philosophical contents of the work, it also *is* part of them. Significantly, the German thinker does not elaborate a theory of dialogue, he does not write a theoretical essay, he puts on a real dialogue. Therefore it is not about transcending one's historical situation, religious and cultural background, it is about living it in terms of one's perspective on reality, constantly deepening its knowledge, until it is an unlimited openness towards dialogue. Dialogue can only be achieved when it originates from a concrete and resolute position. If every statement is a hypothesis, if every view always holds a certain position, if we are only one of the various single mirrors which reflect the one and only truth, then Cusanus' conclusion cannot be absolute and impersonal: he does not elaborate an objective and universal theory of interfaith dialogue but, imagining a dialogue with the other creeds, he searches for an answer from his personal religious perspective, thus seeking the answer of Christianity, his faith. Cusanus' perspective, therefore, is the Christian answer to interfaith dialogue. The addressees of his work are Christians whom he addresses in order to identify another, different solution rather than that Crusade, invoked by his contemporaries to stop the dramatic clash with the Islamic world.¹⁴

13 Cf. *De pace* 1: h VII, n. 1, p. 3, lin. 8-p. 4, lin. 7: »Accidit ut post dies aliquot, forte ex diuturna continuata meditatione, visio quaedam eidem zeloso manifestaretur, ex qua elicit quod paucorum sapientum omnium talium diversitatum quae in religionibus per orbem observantur peritia pollentium unam posse facilem quandam concordantiam reperiri, ac per eam in religione perpetuam pacem convenienti ac veraci medio constitui. Unde, ut haec visio ad notitiam eorum qui hiis maximis praesunt aliquando deveniret, eam quantum memoria praesentabat, plane subter conscripsit.«

14 Cf. La caduta di Costantinopoli, a cura di Agostino Pertusi, 2 voll., Milano 1976; CESARE VASOLI, L'ecumenismo di Niccolò Cusano, in: Cusano e Galileo, a cura di

The centrality of Christianity, the centrality of its highest representatives, is justified by the conjecturality, the contraction, the historicity, the particularity and the singularity of every attempt to give an answer. Every attempt to solve the problem of religious pluralism and the dialogue between different cultures and religions is an attempt set within a particular conjectural perspective, a finite one. However, it is exactly in its contraction, historicity, particularity that the Cusanian proposal reveals its universal meaning, showing the universality of every answer's particular condition. The Cusanian search, since it is a deep analysis of a potential Christian way to dialogue, reveals how interfaith and intrafaith dialogue penetrate each other in a circularity that opens beyond sense: the encounter with the other stimulates us to deepen our singular and personal views as well as our religious, cultural and personal perspective, which can provide reasons for the dialogue to take place.

In order to illustrate this passage it is useful to recall the experiment of the all-seeing portrait, the image of the divine face, illustrated by Cusanus in his *De visione Dei*. In this speculative masterpiece – rarely and delicately beautiful, and with a mystical afflatus – which was written shortly after *De pace fidei*, Cusanus proposes an experiment to the addressees of the text – the Tegernsee monks. Along with the manuscript of his work, the cardinal sends them a painting which represents an all-seeing man, who seems to be staring at all his observers at the same time, and this man is used as a metaphor for God's image. First, the monks should hang the portrait on the wall towards the North, then sit around it and look at it from different angles. While gazing at the portrait, they would experience the fact that the face stares at them so intensely that it does not seem possible that it might be looking at other directions at the same time. Even when one of the monks would move and change his position, the portrait would keep following his move without abandoning the other ones staring, and still the person moving would feel as if he is the only one being looked at.¹⁵ The only way that each one of the

Enrico Castelli (Archivio di filosofia 3), Padova 1964, 9–51; ERICH MEUTHEN, Der Fall von Konstantinopel und der Lateinische Westen, in: MFCG 16 (1984) 35–60; ROGER CROWLEY, The Holy War for Constantinople and the Clash of the West, New York 2005.

15 *De vis.* praef.: h VI, n. 4, lin. 5–8: »Et dum attenderit quomodo visus ille nullum deserit, videt, quod ita diligenter curam agit cuiuslibet quasi de solo eo, qui experitur se videri,

monks would know that the portrait is gazing at him and at others at the same time may only be achieved by means of dialogue, when asking to each other and trusting each other.¹⁶

The monks understand that the divine gaze never abandons anyone, but follows everybody at the same time and in every direction they are moving, observing exclusively and contemporarily each and everyone. They thus experience the infinity of truth can only be achieved through dialogue, turning to the other and opening up to them. It is only in openness, contact with each other, attention, faith and dialogue that it will be possible to grasp the truth in its infinity and inexhaustibility, beyond every finite and contracted perspective and to every historically and personally determined position or point of view. Considering oneself the only depositary of the truth and of God's revelation is an ever-impending danger intrinsic in every finite position, thus always risking to deny one's finiteness, absolutising it. The encounter with the other increases our awareness of the singularity of every concern and expression of truth and – through dialogue, collaboration and attention towards the other – it helps us grasp the transcendence and infinity of truth, the possibility of a plurality of relations with the divine truth, in which this truth, in its ulteriority that needs to be found constantly, is present simultaneously in each and every one, with infinite love. We are driven from interpersonal and interfaith dialogue to intrapersonal and intrafaith dialogue, and then, roundly, back from intrafaith and intrapersonal dialogue to interfaith and interpersonal dialogue. This is not a necessary, but free dialectic, which requires our concern and our trust towards the other, in an in-depth analysis of how truth always transcends and exceeds such circularity.

»Quisque enim intellectualis spiritus videt in te deo meo aliquid, quod nisi aliis revelaretur, non attingeret te deum suum meliori quo fieri posset modo. Revelant sibi mutuo secreta sua amoris pleni spiritus et augetur ex hoc cognitio amati et desiderium ad ipsum et gaudii dulcedo inardescit.«¹⁷

et nullo alio curet, adeo quod etiam concipi nequeat per unum, quem respicit, quod curam alterius agat.«

16 Cf. *De vis.* praef.: h VI, n. 3, lin. 18–23: »Et dum hoc experiri volens fecerit confratrem intuendo eiconam, transire de oriente ad occasum, quando ipse de occasu pergit ad orientem, et interrogaverit obviantem si continue secum visus eiconae volvatur, et audierit similiter opposito modo moveri, credet ei, et nisi crederet, non caperet hoc possibile.«

17 *De vis.* 25: h VI, n. 117, lin. 5–7.

The interfaith and interpersonal dialogue is not a secondary and extrinsic element with regard to the possession of the truth of faith, aimed at simply avoiding the conflict and favouring peaceful coexistence, but it is an essential moment of faith itself, of the search for the divine truth, a fundamental step towards the investigation of one's faith as well as personal and religious perspective. According to Cusanus's speculative proposal, dialogue between religions is not a necessity only based on practical reasons – as urgent and serious as they might be, such as bringing peace on earth – but its necessity, to which only man can respond, is rooted in the transcendence of truth, the infiniteness and freedom of God, and in the mystery and the ulteriority of its revelation.

The infinity and freedom of God and the truth require a never-ending search with which dialogue coincides, for it is the continuous investigation of the singular personal and religious perspectives regarding the infinite divine transcendence and an investigation of one's understanding of the infinite truth and its particular expression, an improvement that is only possible through the dialogical encounter with the other's – singular and finite – personal and religious perspectives on the inexhaustible truth. From Cusanus's point of view, the truth-bearing, cognitive and religious perspectivism has dialogue as its direct consequence: it is its very truth-bearing aspect that establishes the positive possibility and the necessity of dialogue between different perspectives, for it is an exploration of one's position and of the ever-ulterior truth.

Cusanus's dialogical proposal is based on the double register that marks his thought: on the one hand the negative register, according to which God's transcendence and unobjectifiability lay the foundations for dialogue among different positions as a common search for the divine, since none of these positions is his precise expression; on the other hand the positive register, according to which the variety of expressions of God who, as infinite and inextinguishable, is expressed and revealed in singular ways by each particular position and therefore is an encouragement to dialogue as the way of understanding its singularly and uniquely revealed truth. In order to establish interfaith and intercultural dialogue, Cusanus wisely combines both the negative dimension of the hidden God, and the positive dimension of the plurality and variety of religious creeds. Both aspects – the transcendence of God and the plurality of his expressions – combine in order to build peace based on faith. Dialogue is

not accidental in the search for peaceful coexistence of different religions; instead, it is an essential moment of the search and investigation of the divine truth and of one's personal and common faith and religious perspective.

According to *De pace fidei* peace will only be achieved through the evidence of the existence of a single faith, although it is expressed in a variety of confessions and religious creeds. It is not about persuading people to accept a faith that is different from the one they have always believed in; instead, it is about finding that one and only faith required everywhere. His proposal of a form of peace that arises from faith is based on the idea that, beyond every human – positive, historically finite – attempt to think of, worship or give name to a divinity, there is a negative dimension of mystery and ultimate transcendence that appertains to God for he is infinite – the faith in the hidden God (*Deus absconditus*). Every religion safeguards this faith in order for it not to turn into idolatry.

»Tu ergo, qui es dator vitae et esse, es ille qui in diversis ritibus differenter quaeri videris et in diversis nominibus nominaris, quoniam uti es manes omnibus incognitus et ineffabilis. Non enim qui infinita virtus es, aliquod eorum es quae creasti, nec potest creatura infinitatis tuae conceptum comprehendere, cum finiti ad infinitum nulla sit proportio.«¹⁸

Cusanus does not seek to deny the various historical and finite forms by which the divinity is expressed, conceived and worshipped in order to favour a non-temporal, indifferentiated faith in the hidden God; instead, he seeks to reconstruct the original dimension of mystery, ineffability and obscurity that is always preserved in every positive form of ritual. It is not about removing or overcoming single beliefs and religious traditions by branding them as wrong or inappropriate, but remembering their historical and human formation and understanding that it is starting from this finiteness and historicity that they might become the revelation of the divine transcendence. It is about renewing that dimension of transcendence that lives inseparably yet unmistakably in each single and authentic positive expression of God and in each religious ritual. The aim is to reacquire awareness of the transcendence of God, the consciousness that he is beyond every possible experience or manifestation, although he is in each and every one of them at the same time, in relation with each

18 *De pace* I: h VII, n. 5, p. 6, lin. 14-p. 7, lin. 19.

authentic expression of veneration or acceptance of the divinity. As it has already been argued, that very plurality and historicity of religious rituals is the outcome of the divine will, it is God who freely sends prophets and guides to humanity, in different times in history.

»Deus, ut creator, est trinus et unus; ut infinitus, nec trinus nec unus nec quicumque eorum quae dici possunt. Nam nomina quae Deo attribuuntur, sumuntur a creaturis, cum ipse sit in se ineffabilis et super omne quod nominari aut dici posset.«¹⁹

It is not even possible to argue that God is triune, because he even goes beyond the concept of Trinity itself, as well as that of One and that of infinity – they are all just name, thus finite and inaccurate. God is beyond every possible determination, beyond every expression words try to entail and manifest. The very concept of truth is nothing but one of the options God may choose to manifest himself and communicate himself to men. According to the mystical and negative theological tradition re-elaborated by the German thinker, the hidden God is beyond every possible positive determinations which the various religious traditions ascribe to the divine, even beyond the Trinity – one of the fundamental dogmas of Christianity.

Obviously, this does not imply that the cardinal denies his belief in the Holy Trinity, as well as in the other positive expressions of his and the other religious creeds; instead, it means that he wants to restore the original mysterious dimension of cults, the one related to the divine transcendence which lives in each single confession or religious creed that is authentic. It is about a mystical dimension which – starting from the positive, historical expressions of Christianity – the cardinal wants to show as approachable not only within Christianity but also within every religious expression which must preserve the difference between the human and the divine, and the transcendence of the latter. It is not about removing differences and diversities; rather, it is about finding the intimate and essential faith in divine transcendence and God's mystery which every religion presupposes.

Cusanus's position regarding the dialogue between the various religions represents a different implication of the relationship between the One and many, the truth and its expressions – applied, in this case, to the relationship between God and the other religious confessions. The plu-

¹⁹ *De pace* 7: h VII, n. 21, p. 20, lin. 9–12.

rality of cults and of the positive expressions of the divine meaning is possible on the basis of their intimate and constitutive relation with faith in that mystical dimension which, on the one hand, makes them possible and, on the other hand, lets the hidden God reveal himself as the unintelligible, obscure, infinite and face of the divine, present in every positive affirmation of him. It is a truth that is inseparable from its expressions, but at the same it cannot be mistaken for them.

»Nam quod dicendum est, convenienter exprimi nequit. Hinc multiplicatio sermonum perutilis est.«²⁰

Such synthetic affirmation is significant in Cusanus's method: since it is not possible to convey God or the truth through any way of expressing them – for they are always finite and contracted – it is useful to multiply them in order to better prove their infinity. The variety of religious cults is not a limit, it does not come with a negative value, but with a positive one, since it represents a manifestation of God's intelligibility and transcendence as well as the best way man has to understand and prove his infinity. The negative moment, the transcendence of God with respect to every negative determination, his infinity, provides a chance to move towards the positive moment, to the pluralisation of the forms of expression of the truth and the divine. Although God transcends every affirmation, he never denies himself expression, but he himself claims it and creates it, showing its limit at the same time, because it is in this relation that its transcendence reveals itself. Therefore, the plurality of positive expressions and of religious cults finds its foundations in God's transcendence: although he always reveals himself as infinite and beyond, God inspires an inextinguishable search for new ways of expressing his mystery.

Again, it is about an implication of the particular dialectic between the One and the many, the truth and the various perspectives elaborated by the cardinal. Like the plurality of the many and the contractions of the One and of the creatures, also the variety of rituals and of religious cults and the multiplicity of the divine names express God's infinity, inexhaustibility and unobjectability.

»Sed immultiplicabilis infinitas in varia receptione melius explicatur, magna enim diversitas immultiplicabilitatem melius exprimit.«²¹

20 *De mente* 4: h²V, n. 74, lin. 10–11.

21 *De sap.* I: h²V, n. 25, lin. 10–11.

Not only does not multiplicity contrast with unity, but it is the best expression of infinity in the world of finite.

»Sed quia unus est pater et fons luminum, tunc omnia sunt apparitiones unius dei, qui, etsi sit unus, non potest tamen nisi in varietate apparere. Quomodo enim infinita virtus aliter quam in varietate apparere posset?«²²

The variety of single individuals does not contrast with the unity of the One at all; rather, it represents its best image and expression. In the same way the singularity of all things represents the most suitable image of God's absolute singularity, so the plurality or multiplicity of his disclosures represents the best way to express his infinity and inexhaustibility. The plurality and the variety of the world originate from the One's overabundance and opulence, and they are the sign and the revelation of his infinity. According to an analogy – still imprecise – given in *De visione Dei*, like a painter uses different colours to portrait himself and to have an image of himself, God – who is one, non-multipliable and indivisible – produces many portraits, because the best way his infinite power can reveal itself is in multiplicity²³. Indeed, since the One is single and unitary and it cannot be either multiplied or divided, his manifestation best reveals his non-multipliability and absoluteness.

Just as the ability to know something is more likely to be achieved through the use of all the five senses rather than two of them, in the same way, no creature can be God's perfect and precise expression, because it only manifests itself in a contracted way, multiplying signs to make a better knowledge of God possible. The very goal of such manifestation through a variety of theophanies is God's revelation: visible things only exist in order for man to see God in them, and to exhort him to approach Him. Thus man is enlightened by the variety of creatures and this *varietas* exhorts him to turn to the transcendent and infinite light that constitutes the essence of creatures.

Just as in the sphere of knowledge the plurality of conjectures does not deny the uniqueness of truth and in the metaphysical and ontological spheres the plurality of the many does not deny the uniqueness of the

²² *De dato* 4: h IV, n. 108, lin. 8–11.

²³ *De vis.* 25: h VI, n. 116, 13-n. 117, lin. 2: »Cum ipse unus sit immultiplicabilis saltem, modo quo fieri potest, in propinquissima similitudine multiplicetur. Multas autem figuras facit, quia virtutis suae infinitae similitudo non potest nisi in multis perfectiori modo explicari.«

One, in the same way, from a theological-religious point of view the variety of rituals and of confessions does not deny or contradict the one God, but instead reveals his incommensurability and his inextinguishable power. Not only is the multiplicity of religious cults legitimated, it also acquires an essential positive value for it is manifestation and evidence of the revelation of God's infinity as well as his transcendence. This is why the variety of rituals can increase devotion.

»Augebitur etiam fortassis devotio ex quadam diversitate, quando quaelibet natio conabitur ritum suum studio et diligentia splendidiorem efficere, ut aliam in hoc vincat et sic meritum maius assequatur apud deum et laudem in mundo.«²⁴

The positive evaluation of variety and plurality lets the cardinal elaborate a proposal to solve the religious conflicts which does not aim to eliminate the differences among the various religious confessions; instead, it seeks to investigate those differences with what might be addressed as a »competition« – a definitely pacific one – among the different religions in order for them to foster their specific and particular rites so that they can achieve God's approval in front of the world.

The solution to the religious conflict lies in the comprehension of the positive value of religious pluralism for not only can it increase devotion, but it can also represent a source of wealth through dialogue for deepening one's understanding of the divine and of the truth.

»Et sunt omnes intellectuales spiritus cuilibet spiritui opportuni. Nam nisi forent innumerabiles, non posses tu, deus infinitus, meliori modo cognosci. Quisque enim intellectualis spiritus videt in te deo meo aliquid, quod nisi aliis revelaretur, non attingeret te deum suum meliori quo fieri posset modo. Revelant sibi mutuo secreta sua amoris pleni spiritus et augetur ex hoc cognitio amati et desiderium ad ipsum et gaudii dulcedo inardescit.«²⁵

It is not possible to read these passages from *De visione Dei* and forget that it was written only few months after *De pace fidei*, or that there is a relation between the cardinal's words and the multiplicity of religions. Cusanus strongly affirms the positive value of the plurality of knowers thought of not only as single subjects but also as plural subjects, hence as people and religious communities. The positivity of pluralism of knowing subjects and of religions is founded in the infinity of truth or God: it is because God and truth are infinite that such plurality acquires a positive

24 *De pace* 19: h VII, n. 67, p. 62, lin. 5–8.

25 *De vis.* 25: h VI, n. 117, lin. 2–9.

value as a more adequate expression of them or the best way in which they can be known. If God, in his inexhaustibility and freedom reveals himself in the ever-plural singularity of the diverse religious perspectives, that very finite freedom to embrace his revelation is the object to which turn: for only having a dialogue with it makes it possible to understand the divine truth in its specific and unique, free self-revelation to that finite freedom. At the basis of a possible positive evaluation of the plurality of religious rituals there is Cusanus's view of the relation between the One and the many, according to which not only does the One reveal itself in the many as infinite and the many are always conjectural expressions of the One, but the theophanic element is the singularity of each finite being that acquires a proper value because it is finite and singular, unrepeatable and the One's only expression. Therefore, not only does the plurality of confessions and cults become legitimized by the very transcendence and divine infinity and is not a negative limit of faith and peace, but the variety of rituals becomes a potential source of wealth from a cognitive and religious point of view, an essential moment of the investigation of one's religious perspective.

De pace fidei does not seek to provide a speculative basis for Christianity's claim to possess the one and only truth and divine revelation; instead, it seeks to identify a Christian way to interfaith dialogue which can push forward a vision of Christianity as a space of legitimisation and encounter among the various religious confessions as signs that lead to the same truth of faith in one God. A potentially universal meaning of Christianity also emerges as a message that gives space to the plurality of the religions and confessions so that each becomes one of the multiple manifestations of the same human experience of God, of the one search, relation and prayer for him. A vision of Christianity as an identification of the value of the various finite human expressions of the ever-transcending God, which can serve to legitimate every experience and single interpretation of the inexhaustibility of the only *veritas semper indaganda*, and potential space for dialogue between different expressions of the transcendental experience and of the infinity of the truth and of God.

Probably, the formulation that best expresses Cusanus's position with regards to interpersonal, as well as interfaith and intercultural dialogue is the one he chose as a title for his work: *De pace fidei*, *On the Peace of Faith*. Indeed, in the various manuscripts of the work there are different

variations of its title – a sign that the work was received in different ways ever from the copyists themselves – among the titles, *De unitate fidei et sanctorum [sic] diversitate in unum reducenda*, *De concordia religionum*, *De pace et concordia unice fidei*, *De pace seu concordia fidei*²⁶. However, in a letter to John of Segovia in which he presents his work to the theologian, Cusanus himself calls it *De pace fidei*, leaving no room for doubt²⁷.

The expression »peace of faith« provides an explanation for Cusanus's position, underlying a constitutive duality in his proposal. First of all, peace originates from faith, or faith makes peace possible because it is only through faith towards the Other – who is so 'other' that he becomes 'non-other' – towards the infinite and inextinguishable God that a dialogue between different religious, cultural and personal perspectives can be achieved. Without any faith that can transcend the single finite positions no kind of dialogue would be possible, for truth should lie either in one of them – meaning the others can only be brought back to it even in violent ways – or there would be no truth at all, and then free will would reign, and violence with it as well. At the same time, having faith in other people lets the law of non-contradiction be overcome and prevents us from getting stuck in the *principium firmissimum*, which are both obstacles to the understanding of the truth neither in the Other nor in the others. It is only by having faith and believing in what the other presents us as the truth, relying on the other, abandoning usual and rational certainties and risking betrayal that we are able to understand even what it might not be possible to know for the perspective of our reason only. However Cusanus is not inviting us to abandon the reason supported by the law of non-contradiction, but he incites us to recognize it as one of the possible cognitive sources. Moreover, he is not suggesting that we deny the path of knowledge, but that we enrich and thoroughly investigate it and open ourselves to a form of knowledge that may let us hear and comprehend the voice of the Other and to discuss with the others. All this should be achieved by accepting one's rationality, which is not negated in its validity to draw reality, but confined within its own limits and taken back to its own finiteness by avoiding the risk and danger of any absolutisation.

²⁶ Cf. *De pace*, 3, nota 1.

²⁷ *Epist. Io. de Segobia* II: h VII, p. 97, lin. 2.