Editors' Introduction

This volume is the product of papers read at the 2012 conference of the American Cusanus Society and the International Seminar on Pre-Reformation Theology of Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary. The conference is held every two years at the Seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Our 2012 theme, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Late Middle Ages," harkens back to the very first Gettysburg Conference in 1986.¹ At that time, our fledgling society focused on Nicholas of Cusa's *De pace fidei* (*On the Peace of Faith*) in a new translation by H. Lawrence Bond and with a concordance by James Biechler, which was published in 1990.² Thus began the Society's publication program. With the 2012 conference and this book, we return once again to *De pace fidei*, but in new ways. Our focus is narrower and our textual base wider. Our conference theme this time was not world religions in general, but more specifically Christian-Muslim relations of the late medieval period. Our book's subtitle sharpens this theme by including the interrelated notions of polemic and dialogue, both of which played a role in medieval interreligious conversations. Finally, the essays in this volume consider not only *De pace fidei*, but also Cusanus's *Cribratio Alkorani* (*Sifting the Qur'an*), along with other Muslim and Christian texts, among them the Qur'an, Ibn al'Arabi's *Jesus Bezel*, and the writings of John of Segovia.

Why do we return to Christian-Muslim dialogue now? Two reasons come to mind. The first reflects the American Cusanus Society's own history. Of the Society's early members, only James Biechler has worked intensively on Cusanus and Islam.³ In recent years, however, a vigorous new crop of scholars has emerged and taken the stage in the Society's sessions at the International Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, and in Thomas Izbicki's panels with the Renaissance Society of America. The scope and quality of these sessions led us to the 2012 Gettysburg conference, and their participants are well

1 See Gerald Christianson, "First Regional Conference: A Recollection," *American Cusanus Society Newsletter* 4/1 (March, 1987): 2–3.

2 James E. Biechler and H. Lawrence Bond, *Nicholas of Cusa on Interreligious Harmony: Text, Concordance and Translation of De pace fidei* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990).

3 See James E. Biechler, "Interreligious Dialogue," in *Introducing Nicholas of Cusa: A Guide to a Renaissance Man*, ed. C. M. Bellitto, T. M. Izbicki, and G. Christianson (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 270–296. See also Biechler, "Three Manuscripts on Islam from the Library of Nicholas of Cusa," *Manuscripta* 27 (1983): 91–100.

represented in this volume: Marica Costigliolo, Rita George-Tvrtković, and Joshua Hollmann. But this volume also includes essays from a wider circle of experienced scholars who discuss Muslim responses to Christianity, as well as responses to Islam by Cusanus and other medieval Christian writers.

The second reason for our theme concerns a broader history. Sometimes horrific events remind thoughtful people of the need for conversation and dialogue. In the wake of September 11, 2001, it serves us well to recall some Christian responses to the 1453 conquest of Constantinople by Mehmet II and his Ottoman forces. This event lent urgency to what Richard Southern called 'a moment of vision' when several Latin Christians saw Islam in a "larger, clearer, and more lifelike [way] than at any previous moment, or any later period for several centuries at least."⁴ Among these visionaries were Nicholas of Cusa and John of Segovia, who corresponded about a conference that would lead to peace via reasoned conversation rather than a new crusade. Segovia intensified his efforts on a new translation of the Qur'an as a basis for discussion, and Cusanus wrote the dialogue *De pace fidei*, seeking 'a single easy harmony' among religions that would bring 'a lasting peace.'⁵ Enlightened as these efforts were, from our perspective they look conflicted, since conversion to Christianity remained a key aim for the proposed conference and translation, and Nicholas himself died while travelling to join Pope Pius II launch another crusade. For better or worse, neither the conference nor the crusade happened.

September 11 may be stimulating a new 'moment of vision' today. The attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon provoked a range of responses: the 'War on Terror', real wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, barrages of propaganda of every kind and from every quarter, an increase in Islamophobia, academic and policy debates about 'Islam and the West', and—most relevant for our purposes—renewed, energized dialogues between Muslims and Christians. These conversations range from local, informal meetings to academic conferences and gatherings of policy makers. At their best, they clear the air of stereotypes and simplistic notions like Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations',⁶

4 R. W. Southern, *Western Views of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 103.

5 Cusanus, *De pace fidei*, ch. 1, n. 1, in Biechler and Bond, *Interreligious Harmony*, 5.

6 Following 9/11, Huntington's earlier book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), became the focus for intense debate. Huntington wrote: "The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam. . . . The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense. It is the West. . . ." (217–218). For critiques, see Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation*, October 22, 2001, <http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance?page=full>, downloaded 8/25/2012, and Morimichi Watanabe, "Cusanus, Islam, and Religious Tolerance" in this volume.

while sharing a simple, practical goal: to live together in peace. The point is not to gloss over differences and disagreements, but, in Anthony Appiah's phrase, 'to get used to one another' as we come to recognize both our differences and our common ground.⁷ This project is hardly new, as it also marked the *conviven- cia* of medieval Spain under Muslim rule,⁸ and—more to the point—it recalls Cusanus's dream in *De pace fidei*. We hope that this volume, which focuses on Nicholas's writings on Islam and explores their wider historical contexts, will contribute to lively scholarly dialogue today.

Yet we must also address another difficult question. When we first announced the conference's theme of "Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Late Middle Ages," one colleague quipped, "Was there any?" For many, the answer is "No." The historian of Arabic philosophy, Rémi Brague, cautions against projecting our dream of interreligious dialogue and tolerance onto the Middle Ages, and writes: "In the Middle Ages, true dialogues between Islam and Christianity were extremely rare, and, if we mean by that such dialogues as we think desirable, simply nonexistent." John Tolan's book *Saracens*, which provides an overview of the complicated history of medieval Christian-Muslim relations, bears out Brague's observation to a certain extent.⁹ But while relations varied greatly across time and place, polemics do seem to have dominated, and a dialogue like *De pace fidei* appears "more a literary genre than a reality."¹⁰ Indeed, *De pace fidei* is no stenographic record of an interfaith summit meeting, but rather a dream vision, describing a conversation in a heavenly council where the Almighty God presides. But is not Nicholas's dream of peace among religions and nations more like ours than Brague allows? We may also question Brague's standards for 'true dialogue'—that is, according to *our* standards—and ask the question differently: what did dialogue look like in the

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- 7 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Norton, 2006), 85. See Mahmoud Ayoub, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Goals and Obstacles," in Ayoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, ed. I. A. Omar (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 64–69.
 - 8 There is a voluminous literature on Christian-Muslim-Jewish relations in medieval Spain. Here is just a sampling: Olivia Remie Constable, ed., *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2011); Thomas E. Burman, *Religious Polemic and the Intellectual History of the Mozarabs*, c. 1050–1200 (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Lucy Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence: Archbishop Rodrigo and the Muslims and Jews of Medieval Spain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); and María Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002).
 - 9 John Tolan, *Saracens* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
 - 10 Rémi Brague, *The Legend of the Middle Ages*, trans. L. G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 202.

Middle Ages?¹¹ At the level of daily life, we can safely assume that Muslims and Christians talked to each other in areas where they lived together for centuries—the eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, Spain, Sicily, the Balkans, etc. Similarly, commerce required travel, so that Turkish merchants established their own centers in Venice, Ragusa, and elsewhere. Interestingly, in corresponding with John of Segovia, Cusanus suggests that merchants and lay people—not clerics and theologians—should participate in their proposed conference of Muslims and Christians. Missionaries also travelled, and the Dominicans Riccoldo da Montecroce and William of Tripoli not only wrote polemical works against Islam, but also praised the moral integrity of the Muslim communities where they lived.¹²

Sacred texts, their translations, and commentaries open other levels of engagement and dialogue. One of the authors in this volume, Asma Afsaruddin, emphasizes that the Qur'an "usually refers to itself as confirming prior revelations"—the Hebrew and Christian Bibles—rather than superseding them, as triumphalist commentators later claimed.¹³ But even in claiming the Qur'an to be the final revelation that renders the Bible obsolete, these Muslim commentators acknowledge its biblical background. Either way, the issue concerns a complex textual history, where interpreters—depending on their points of view—often considered the Bible or the Qur'an to be riddled with distortions and corruptions. For example, as Sandra Keating discusses in this volume, Muslim critics like Ibn Ḥazm regularly identify falsifications (*tahrif*) in Biblical manuscripts, and Cusanus similarly blames Muhammad's Jewish

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- 11 It is beyond the scope of this introduction to provide an overview of medieval Christian-Muslim relations, or to outline questions of genre, audience and manuscript tradition; we leave this to the articles that follow. For such an overview, see John Tolan's *Saracens*, or Norman Daniel's classic *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1962). For a comprehensive list of primary texts related to medieval Christian-Muslim relations, see the magisterial: David Thomas et al., eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, 5 volumes (Leiden: Brill, 2009–2013).
 - 12 See Rita George-Tvrtković, "After the Fall: Riccoldo da Montecroce and Nicholas of Cusa on Religious Diversity," *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 641–662; George-Tvrtković, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq: Riccoldo da Montecroce's Encounter with Islam* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012); and Thomas F. O'Meara, "The Theology and Times of William of Tripoli, O.P.: A Different View of Islam," *Theological Studies* 69 (2006): 80–98.
 - 13 Asma Afsaruddin, "Finding Common Ground: 'Mutual Knowing,' Moderation and the Fostering of Religious Pluralism," in *Learned Ignorance: Intellectual Humility among Jews, Christians, and Muslims*, ed. James L. Heft, Reuven Firestone, and Omid Safi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 77. See also her essay in this volume, "The Messiah 'Isa, Son of Mary: Jesus in the Islamic Tradition."

advisors for introducing errors into the Qur'an.¹⁴ Translation and interpretation further complicate these hermeneutical issues. As Thomas Burman, the author of our preface, has documented in his earlier writings, close study and translation of the Qur'an lead to the 'slippages' that occur in Latin translations of the Qur'an:

The gradual and unaware transformation of purpose that extensive engagement with a text sometimes brings an insensible shifting of pragmatic, polemical interest in the text into a 'drive for completeness' and systematic coverage.¹⁵

Marica Costigliolo, another author in this volume, finds this slippage in Cusanus's *Cribratio Alcorani*, where his polemical intent led him to undertake "an out-and-out textual comparison between the Christian tradition and the Qur'anic text."¹⁶ She thus considers the *Cribratio* a 'dialogic work,' and describes "the medieval dialogue [as] a sort of exegetical commentary on the text."¹⁷ In this respect, dialogue becomes less a matter of face-to-face conversation than a hermeneutical affair, as polemicists, translators, and interpreters address each other through their readings of the Qur'an and Bible. Traditions of reading and interpretation thicken as Muslim and Christian commentators use and criticize their predecessors' works. In addition, theologians and mystics take these exegetical discussions in new directions, as when Ibn 'Arabi develops his novel Christology. The outcome resembles a maze of postmodern hypertexts within which medieval authors and we ourselves must find our way.

We therefore suggest that this hermeneutical view of medieval dialogue provides a useful framework for this volume of essays, which considers Christian-Muslim conversations by reading an assortment of texts, from the Qur'an to Cusanus to Ignatius of Loyola. In the process, we inevitably continue this dialogue among ourselves as we consider these texts' implications for Christian-Muslim relations today.

14 Nicholas of Cusa, "Cribratio Alcorani," in *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, ed. L. Hagemann, vol. VIII (Hamburg: Meiner, 1986), n. 11.

15 Thomas Burman, *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom, 1140–1560* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 75.

16 Marica Costigliolo, "Qur'anic Sources of Nicholas of Cusa," *Mediaevistik* 24 (2001): 237. See also Costigliolo, "Perspectives on Islam in Italy and Byzantium in the Middle Ages and Renaissance" in this volume.

17 Costigliolo, "Qur'anic Sources," 228.

This volume is divided into three sections. Part I centers on Nicholas of Cusa's engagement with Islam, especially in the texts *De pace fidei* and *Cribratio Alkorani*. The essays place these works within Cusanus's career and trace their connections to his other writings on Islam, as well as to his well-known treatise, *De docta ignorantia*. They also highlight Nicholas's Christology, Trinitarian theology, and his irenic formula: 'one religion in a variety of rites (*una religio in varietate rituum*).' Part II, "Historical Perspectives," considers the medieval Christian context out of which Cusanus wrote. Jesse D. Mann translates and analyzes a text by Juan de Segovia, who corresponded with Nicholas about Islam. Other essays take a wider view. Rita George-Tvrtković compares Cusanus's views of Muslim and Jewish religious practices or 'rites' with those of Alan of Lille and Riccolodo da Montecroce. Marica Costigliolo places Nicholas's work within the broad panorama of Latin and Byzantine perspectives on Islam, and Paul Richard Blum contrasts Raymond Lull's and Ignatius of Loyola's personal encounters with Muslims. By presenting a variety of medieval Muslim responses to Christianity, Part III marks an essential feature of the Gettysburg conference and this book. For if we are to take seriously dialogue and polemic between Christianity and Islam, we cannot limit ourselves to Christian views of Islam. We must consider Muslim perspectives as well. Here, Asma Afsaruddin and Robert J. Dobie discuss Muslim accounts of Jesus—'Isa ibn Maryam—from the Qur'an and the Islamic tradition up to the Sufi theologian, Ibn 'Arabi. Sandra Toenies Keating and Tamara Albertini survey critical views of Christianity and its sacred texts, and the interpretive strategies that drive these Muslim critiques.

To conclude, a collaborative book like ours incurs many debts, but here we can acknowledge only a few. Because the book stems from the 2012 Gettysburg conference, we thank the Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary for their gracious hospitality, and the Community of Christ in the City for their grant in memory of Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, whose generosity over the years as chair of the Arthur Carl Piepkorn Fund helped make these conferences possible. We thank the St. Nicholas Hospital in Kues and its librarian, Marco Broesch, for providing the perfect cover illustration for this book: the opening leaf of *De pace fidei* from the manuscript of Cusanus's works that he himself commissioned. We are also grateful to Christopher Bellitto for introducing this book project to Brill, and to Arjan van Dijk and Ivo Romein for skillfully guiding us through the editorial process. But most of all, we thank our authors. Not only are they colleagues, friends, and exemplary scholars, but their timely cooperation has made editing this volume a joyful task.