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EDITORS' *INTRODUCTION*

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In the long, conflicted history of Latin Christendom's relations with Islam, R. W. Southern describes a «moment of vision» in the years following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. In their correspondence and actions, four men achieved a vision of Islam that was «larger, clearer, and more lifelike than at any previous moment, or any later one for centuries to come».¹ Of these four, Juan de Segovia and Nicholas of Cusa stand out for their refusal to call for another Crusade and their intense efforts to understand the Qur'an. Segovia worked with a Muslim from Spain to translate the Qur'an into Castilian and Latin, and wrote against crusading until his death in 1458. In this special issue, Jesse Mann treats the ways in which Segovia used biblical texts in his writings on Islam. He advances the idea that Juan was trying to educate Christians, preparing them to enter into dialogue with Muslims.

Cusanus' story is more ambiguous. He wrote *De pace fidei* (1453), a heavenly dialogue where the wise men of the earth's nations seek to end religious violence and affirm «*una religio in rituum varietate*» – «one religion in a diversity of rites».² In 1461 Nicholas composed a very different work, *Cribratio Alkorani*, a detailed commentary that sought to confirm the presence of the Gospel within the Qur'an itself.³ As Pim Valkenberg notes, both works share the «missionary purpose» of converting Muslims to Christianity. While *De pace fidei*, with its apparent thrust toward tolerance and a universal religion, has been widely discussed, the *Cribratio* has received less attention, and therefore is the focus of these essays. Nicholas addressed this work to Pope Pius II – another of Southern's visionaries – who was drafting a letter urging Constantinople's conqueror, the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II, to convert to Christianity, while simultaneously working toward a new Crusade against

¹ Southern, R.W., *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1962, p. 103.

² Nicholas of Cusa, *De pace fidei*, eds. R. Klibansky and H. Bascour, in *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate academiae litterarum Heidelbergensis*, vol. 7, Hamburg, Felix Meiner, 1959, p. 7, n. 6.

³ Nicholas of Cusa, *Cribratio Alkorani*, ed. L. Hagemann, *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate academiae litterarum Heidelbergensis*, vol. 8, Hamburg, Felix Meiner, 1986, p. 11, n. 10.

him. Thus, as Nathan Ron and Walter Andreas Euler discuss, the *Cribratio* indicates Cusanus' sharpening opposition to Islam and his increasing support for Pius II's Crusade.

Cusanus' interest in Islam as displayed in the *Cribratio* was heavily based on texts. Maarten Halff demonstrates that Nicholas sought out copies of the Qur'an during his 1437-38 mission to Constantinople. Although he never actually spoke with Muslims, Nicholas did identify one of his informants on Muslim beliefs: the Bolognese merchant Balthasar Lupari, who worked with Cusanus during his time in Constantinople. José Martínez Gázquez recently discovered a manuscript of the Latin Qur'an which he believes Cusanus consulted to write the *Cribratio*; this manuscript, housed at the Vatican, is different than the one at Kues which Cusanus used earlier in his career.⁴ Here Martínez Gázquez connects Cusanus' notes in the Vatican manuscript with the doctrines advanced in the *Cribratio*.

To widen the frame, we shall also consider Nicholas' contemporary Juan de Torquemada, and two of their successors in confronting Islam: Erasmus of Rotterdam and Martin Luther. Torquemada wrote a scorching polemic against Islam which illustrates more traditional Western criticism of the Prophet and his "law". Thomas Izbicki examines one aspect of the polemic, rejection of the Islamic vision of paradise. Torquemada treated it as carnal, comparing it unfavorably with the Christian vision of glorified bodies in a spiritual paradise – a critique shared by Cusanus, Pius II, and many earlier medieval Latin Christians.

Nathan Ron shows the difference between Cusanus' idea of dialogue in *De pace fidei* and Erasmus' dismissal of Muslims as *semichristiani*. But Erasmus' views are closer to Nicholas' critique of Islam in the *Cribratio*. Erasmus rejected the Crusade but left no room for discussions with the Ottoman Turks. Walter Andreas Euler notes that Martin Luther wrote on Islam in the context of the continuing Ottoman threat. Although he rejected the medieval idea of Crusade as a religious war, he wrote to support military resistance to Ottoman aggression in Europe, and to encourage Christians held captive by the Turks. Although Luther knew Cusanus' *Cribratio*, he did not follow Nicholas' attempts to build bridges with Muslims in *De pace fidei*'s dialogue and the *Cribratio*'s unearthing of Gospel truths within the Qur'an. Rather, Luther limited himself to contrasting the Gospel with the message of Muhammad.

This issue of the *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval* springs from a symposium on «Cusanus, the Qur'an, and the *Cribratio Alkorani*» at United

⁴ Martínez Gázquez, J. «A New Set of Glosses to the Latin Qur'an Made by Nicholas of Cusa (Ms Vat. Lat. 4071)», *Medieval Encounters*, 15 (2015), pp. 296-309; and «Corrigendum», *Medieval Encounters*, 15 (2015), pp. 541-542.

Lutheran Seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, September 29-30, 2018. The symposium was sponsored by the American Cusanus Society and the International Seminar on Pre-Reformation Studies. We thank the Seminary for its generosity in hosting the symposium, and Gerald Christianson and Margaret Folkemer for expertly managing all of the weekend's practical details. We also thank Nicola Polloni for inviting us to publish these articles from the Symposium in *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval*.

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