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Autor: Venturelli, Greta

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GRETA VENTURELLI

Faith, unity, multiplicity: *De pace idiotae*?

The ‚one-many' problem is one of the most debated among Cusanus' scholars. This unsolved issue, which comes from the Cusanus' Platonic and Neoplatonic background, is present in almost all his production. Despite this fact, in this paper we focus on two specific dialogues in which the topic is discussed: *The Layman on Mind* (*Idiota de mente*, 1450) and *On Peaceful Unity of Faith* (*De pace fidei*, 1453). The purpose is to problematize the issue from the analysis of the philosophical contest of the beginning of the book *On Mind*, where the topic is hinted at. In this first section, the dialogue works as a thematical introduction to the book *On Peaceful Unity*, in which the 'one-many' problem is not only mentioned but mostly developed and discussed in terms of the interreligious topic of the relationship between the multiple of rites and the unity of religion.

According to Cusanus' interreligious concordance, we endeavor to analyze which metaphysical perspective could be assumed to understand the 'one-many' relationship, from Cusanus' metaphysical patterns: the enfolding-unfolding one (*complicatio-explicatio*) and the model-image one (*exemplar-imago*). In other terms, we attempt to find the more suitable metaphysical pattern on which Cusanus bases and justifies his own proposal expressed in the formula of "one religion in a variety of rites" ("*religio una in rituum varietate*"), where Christianity takes a specific role.

However, the dialogue *On Peaceful Unity* has not any explicit reference to the metaphysical pattern on which this formula relies. Therefore, due to this lack, we suggest returning to the dialogue *On Mind*. Indeed, the two books are connected: the thesis is that not only there is a circularity between them owing to the topic enquired, rather they are connected in the sense that the dialogue *On Mind* could be assumed as a text working as a metaphysical frame in which the ‚one-many' interreligious problem could be encased.

1. *IDIOTA DE MENTE*. THE RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

> "At a time when many people, in admirable devotion, were flocking to Rome because of the jubilee, a philosopher who is foremost among all those philosophers now alive was reported to have been seen on a bridge, marveling at those who were crossing over. A certain orator, very desirous of knowledge, was eagerly looking for him. Recognizing him from the paleness of his face, from his long toga, and from other marks indicating the serious demeanor of

> a thoughtful man, the orator greeted him deferentially and asked why he remained standing in that spot."[1]

This paragraph opens Cusanus' dialogue *The Layman on Mind* (*Idiota de mente*, 1450), which takes place in a very precise historical moment: the Jubilee of 1450 in Rome. The historical setting offers a context to the controversial and heavily debated question of the nature of the soul, which will be discussed by a philosopher, an orator, and a layman. Throughout the dialogue, the matter is tackled through an enquiry over the nature of the mind and the functioning of cognitive faculties. Although this is the main topic of the book, a key-point for Cusanus' theory of knowledge, this paper instead focuses on another theme: the issue emerging from the historical setting.

Contrary to the marginal role it has always played, the context of the dialogue could assume a particular value, whether considered as an effective exemplification of the relationship ‚one-many' in Cusanus' metaphysical perspective. Going back to the first lines of the dialogue, we see an orator approaching a philosopher loitering on Sant'Angelo Bridge to ask him the reason why he was there: "[Because of] wonder"[2] answers the philosopher, with a simple and direct reply that alludes to the origin of philosophy. Then he goes on explaining:

> "For when I observe the countless people, from nearly all regions of the world, thronging across [this bridge], I am amazed at the single faith of them all—a faith present in so great a diversity of bodies. For although no one individual can be like another, nevertheless among all these individuals there is a single faith that has brought them here, in such deep devotion, from the ends of the earth."[3]

The philosopher's remark introduces the issue of the unity of faith in the diversity and multitude of rites and clearly invites the other interlocutors to reflect on this fact—one faith, many bodies—which raises a more general question about the relationship between 'one and many'. At this point, the reader would expect the conversation to further develop the same topic, but the orator steers the dialogue to an observation on the cognitive power of faith, which allows men to understand more than they would if they only relied on intellect. Therefore, men of faith can easily concur on matters regarding the immortality of the soul. Philosophers, on the other

[1] Works by Nicolaus Cusanus (Nicholas of Cusa) are quoted in the English translation by Jasper Hopkinks, taken from the Cusanus-Portal, which follows this critical edition of Cusanus' texts: NICOLAI DE CUSA: *Opera Omnia*, iussu et auctoritate academie litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita). Indeed, the texts are signed according to *Merkblatt für Autoren der MFCG-Beiträge*. For the passage here quoted: *De mente* 1: h²V, n. 51, lin. 5–10.

[2] *De mente* 1: h²V, n. 51.

[3] *De mente* 1: h²V, n. 51.

hand, have a more doubtful nature that hinders their pursuit of the truth.[4] This is precisely the reason why a third character is introduced: a layman,[5] i.e. a man oblivious to academic teaching who learned everything he knows by his own experience, namely confronting directly the world attemptable, which is a divine theophany. With the arrival of this character, the introductory questions give way to the discussion over the soul and the historical setting will be mentioned again only in the last chapter of the dialogue. Despite the thematic evolution of the text, its main purpose remains to enquire the metaphysical question about the relationship 'one-many', which is also the core of another dialogue: *On Peaceful Unity of Faith* (*De pace fidei*, 1453).[6]

2. *Religio una in rituum varietate*. A metaphysical reading of the *De pace fidei*

In the dialogue *On Peaceful Unity of Faith*, i.e. *De pace fidei* (1453), Cusanus discusses the issue of the relationship 'one-many' from a religious perspective, summed up with the renowned formula "one religion in a variety of rites" ("*religio una in rituum varietate*").[7] As the Jubilee of 1450 in Rome is the historical setting in the background of the dialogue *The Layman on Mind*, the dialogue *On Peaceful Unity of Faith* takes place in a precise historical moment, too: the Fall of Constantinople (May 1453). In the autumn of the same year, Cusanus writes a dialogue meant to deal with the Turkish question and the situation inside the Christian world (at that time, there were frictions with the Bohemian church, for exemple),[8] shifting the focus once again to interreligious dialogue.[9]

4 In the following part, the orator steers the discourse from the problem of faith to the relationship it holds with reason. According to the text, the man of faith and the philosopher are nothing alike: while the first believes by the grace of God, the other thinks. Nevertheless, they are both moved by the same aim: they want the soul to be brought to the coveted life of the light. The presupposition is that the soul is immortal, which is something that the man of faith believes by the grace of God, while the philosopher realises it through his reasoning after quite some time and with much effort. The contraposition between the discursive reason of the philosopher and the faith of the man is not further developed in the dialogue and leads to the philosopher confessing the outcomes of his research.

5 The layman represents the simple man (*rudis)* because he does not belong to the category of the *mastri artium* or of the *magistri in sacra pagina*, i.e. of the professors of philosophy and of biblical exegesis. It is not by chance that the layman plays the starring role in the dialogue: he embodies—according to Gregorio Piaia—Cusanus' ideal of self-formation which seems similar to the Socratic paradox "I know that I know nothing" and to Augustine's doctrine of the divine illumination. (Cf. Piaia, Gregorio: *Introduzione*, in: Nicolò Cusano: *Idiota. La mente*. Pisa: Giardini Editori e Stampatori 2002, 15).

6 For the connection between the two dialogues, cf. Piaia: *Introduzione*, 9–20.

7 *De pace* 1: h VII, n. 6.

8 Cusanus returns to the question in another work, *Cribatio Alkorani* (1461), where—after the dedication to Pope Pio II—Islam is presented as a Nestorian heresy. Although this

In this context of historical and cultural tension characterized by the absence of interreligious dialogue, Cusanus offers a solution based on his idea of peace, which is not just a mere sign of harmony, but it is above all the only level on which the truth of the other can be manifested.[10] In other words, contrary to the Pope's choice of promoting the Crusades against the Turks, Cusanus—together with his friend John of Segovia[11]—believes that having an open attitude is the only way to save Christianity. Echoing Ramon Llull's *The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men* (*Liber de gentili et tribus sapientibus*)[12] and breathing already the Renaissance air, Cusanus abandons the traditional way of miracle and missionary preaching, to promote the way of discussion.[13] The purpose is to establish and keep the

work shows that fundamental virtues of Christianity are implicitly contained in the Koran, the text does not seem inspired by the same spirit of tolerance and community that animates *On Peaceful Unity of Faith*. Cf. BIECHLER, James E.: *A New Face toward Islam: Nicholas of Cusa and John of Segovia*, in: CHRISTIANSON, Gerald/IZBICKI, Thomas M. (eds): *Nicholas of Cusa in Search of God and Wisdom. Essays in Honour of Morimichi Watanabe by American Cusanus Society*. Leiden: Brill E.J. 1991, 198–200; to pursue the matter of the method of *pia interpretatio* here used, cf. HOPKINS, Jasper: *The Role of* pia interpretatio *in Nicholas of Cusa's Hermeneutical Approach to the Koran*, in: PIAIA, Gregorio (ed.): Concordia Discors. *Studi su Niccolò Cusano e l'umanesimo europeo offerti a Giovanni Santinello*. Padova: Editrice Antenore 1993, 251–273.

9 Both Cusanus and Cardinal Cesarini commit to the cause of the reconciliation between the Catholic and Orthodox Church, encouraging an interreligious dialogue during the Council of Florence (1438–1439). To get a better grasp of the historical context in which Cusanus developed his position, cf. BOND, Lawrence H.: *The Historical Matrix*, in: CHRISTIANSON/IZBICKI (eds): *Nicholas of Cusa in Search of God and Wisdom*, 143–146; and cf. IZBICKI, Thomas M.: *The possibility of Dialogue with Islam in the Fifteen Century*, in: CHRISTIANSON/IZBICKI (eds): *Nicholas of Cusa in Search of God and Wisdom*, 175–183.

10 Cf. MERLO, Maurizio: *L'universale*. Fides *e* Religio *nel* De pace fidei, in: DALL'IGNA, Antonio/ROBERI, Damiano (eds): *Cusano e Leibniz. Prospettive filosofiche* (= Bibliotheca Cusana). Milano: Mimesis 2013, 139–151.

11 As proof of their friendship, cf. *Epistula ad Ioannem de Segovia* (29 December 1454), written by Cusanus. In the letter he congratulates John of Segovia for the issue proposed, stressing the need to defend the unity of orthodox faith (*una fides othodoxa*).

12 In this work, a gentleman asks three religious men (a Christian, a Muslim, and a Jew) some information about their own religion in order to choose the best one. However, the dialogue ends without the gentleman's answer. According to Pauline Moffitt Watts' interpretation, on the one hand, the conclusion reflects Lull's spirit of tolerance, based on the idea that monotheistic religions can and should coexist; on the other hand, it is possible to affirm that the answer is not expressed because it is kept implicit. It means that, according to Lull's metaphysics, the *principium*, the ontological, and epystemological foundation is the God of Christianity. (Cf. MOFFITT WATTS, Pauline: *Talking to Spiritual Others: Raimond Lull, Nicholas of Cusa, Diego Valdès*, in: CHRISTIANSON/IZBICKI (eds): *Nicholas of Cusa in Search of God and Wisdom*, 203–218). About the influence of Raimond Lull on Nicholas of Cusa, cf. COLOMER, Eusebio: *Nikolaus von Kues und Raimond Lull. Eine vergleichende Untersuchung*, in: *Nicolò da Cusa. Relazioni tenute al convengo interuniversitario di Bressanone nel 1960*. Firenze: Sansoni Editore 1962, 125–145).

13 According to James E. Biechler, John of Segovia's strategy „is structured in three succesiveds stages: first, the establishment and maintenance of peace with Muslim peoples; second, a deeping of cultural relations leading to neutralization of suspicion and antagonism

peace between religions through an open confrontation on those doctrinal aspects that cause disagreements.

Although it would be interesting to better compare Cusanus' and John of Segovia's visions, we deal with another problematic aspect: we wonder whether there is a way for the multiplicity of religions to coexist peacefully and, if so, which metaphysical principle would make it possible. Answers to these questions could be found in the first chapters of the dialogue *On Peaceful Unity of Faith*, a dialogue of Neoplatonic inspiration where Cusanus tells the tale of a clergyman who, after a mental raptus in an otherworldly region,[14] happens to overhear a dialogue between the divine messengers of every nation and religion in the world, Saint Peter, and the Son of God:

> "[...] there is only one religion in a variety of rites.[15] But perchance this difference of rites cannot be eliminated; or perhaps it is not expedient [that it be eliminated], in order that the diversity may make for an increase of devotion, since each region will devote more careful attention to making its ceremonies more 'favorable,' as it were, to You, the King. If so, then at least let there be one religion—just as You are one—and one true worship of You as Sovereign. Therefore, be placable, o Lord, because Your wrath is Your graciousness and Your justice is Your mercy."[16]

The formula "one religion in a variety of rites" (*religio una in rituum varietate*) is set as foundation and can be considered as both the presupposition and the aim to tend towards. Contrary to what could be assumed, Cusanus intends to stress that this formula, founded on the metaphysics of unity of unquestionable Neoplatonic origin, does not imply the elimination of differences among rites. The multiplicity needs to be preserved for at least two reasons: firstly, it encourages the cult; secondly, it protects the respect for those differences related to the historical setting. The common ground for both these motivations can be traced in the whole metaphysical system of Cusanus' philosophy, where he deals with the issue of the alterity (*alteri-*

and, finally, peaceful discussion of basic doctrines which separate the two ideologies. The discussion must involve both theologians and civil authorities." (BIECHLER: *A New Face Toward Islam*, 192).

[14] The ecstatic rapture—which occurs often in the medieval tradition, especially in the tales of lives of saints and pious pilgrims looking for Eden—is not just a literary device. It represents the ineffability and inaccessibility of the otherworldly region, which is only approachable via a momentary raptus. (Cf. GRAF, Arturo: *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del Medioevo*. Milano: Mondadori 2002).

[15] This expression is not casual. As J.E. Biechler explains, in the margin of his own copy of the book entitled *Lex sive doctrina Mahumeti* (*summa* of the previous doctrine about the interreligious problems), Cusanus wrote: *„fides una, ritus diversus"*. (Cf. BIECHLER: *A New Face toward Islam*, 197; cf. HELANDER, Birgit H.: *Nicholas of Cusa as Theoretician of Unity*, in: CHRISTIANSON, Gerald/IZBICKI, Thomas M. (eds): *Nicholas of Cusa on Christ and the Church*. Leiden: Brill E.J. 1996, 309–321.

[16] *De pace* 1: h VII, n. 6.

tas). As already expressed in *On Learned Ignorance* (*De docta ignorantia*, 1440), alterity constitutes a contingent reality one can rise beyond—over the coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*), Cusanus would say—in order to reach God. In the religious purview, this could be translated as multiplicity, diversity, and heterogeneity of the religious rites, which are a necessary expression of the universality of faith.[17] Therefore, the formula "one religion in a variety of rites" legitimizes Cusanus' instance to trace the multiplicity of rites back to the one true orthodox faith: the Christian religion.

At this point, it is suitable to problematize and explain the kind of connection between the absolute religion (a.), the revealed one (b.), and historical religions (c.), focusing on the relationship between unity and multiplicity. After having reiterated the need for multiplicity, Cusanus resumes the Neoplatonic principle that unity (*unitas*) is the presupposition of plurality (*pluralitas*); for this reason, the philosopher affirms that „for oneness is prior to all plurality".[18] This principle is the key to analysing the metaphysical relationship between the multitude of rites and the one true religion, which will most likely lead us to a subtended metaphysical scheme, which are (I.) enfolding-unfolding pattern (*complicatio-explicatio*) and (II.) model-image pattern (*exemplar-imago*).

Before trying to analyze the two metaphysical patterns proposed, it is necessary to clarify the following Latin terms: *ritus* (rite), *religio* (religion), *religiones* (religions) and *fides* (faith).[19] Firstly, the term *ritus* (rite) must be understood as practice of worship and could be used to refer to religions in general, as a set of behaviors codified by norms established by the religious community (social dimension of religion). In other words, 'religions as rites' could be considered mostly as practices of worship. According to this interpretation of the related meaning of these two words, i.e. rites and religions, this acceptation of *religiones* (religions) establishes a delicate balance with the concept of one religion (*religio*). The singular noun *religio* (religion) refers to the only real cult and hides, in a way, a second meaning: faith (*fides*), i.e. the one true creed, the absolute truth of faith that would define the other religions (*religiones*) as declensions of that very truth they all stem from, rather than meaningless practices.[20] This endeavor to define these terms shows the inevitable ambiguity of them and urges us to move to the metaphysical plan.

[17] Cf. CASSIRER, Ernst: *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (1927), *Individuo e cosmo nella filosofia del Rinascimento*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri 2012, 33–34.

[18] *De pace* 3: h VII, n. 11.

[19] Cf. MERLO: *L'universale*. Fides *e* Religio *nel* De pace fidei.

[20] Cf. MERLO: *L'universale*. Fides *e* Religio *nel* De pace fidei, 140.

The first metaphysical pattern that we are going to apply is the enfolding-unfolding one (*complicatio-explicatio*).[21] According to this pattern, the term religion (*religio*) in translatable into the German word *Urreligion*,[22] namely the true original religion, i.e. the religion itself. Moreover, this original religion is the absolute unity that enfolds all the other religions (*religiones*), which are the historical ones, and unfolds a multitude of rites. Instead, applying the second metaphysical pattern the model-image one, the absolute religion (*religio*) is considered as the original model (*exemplar*) of the other historical religions (*religiones*) that are images of truth, which is always well distinguished from the rites, mere practices of worship.

Deciding which pattern is more suitable is a very tough endeavour: as other researchers have already noticed,[23] in the text there is not a specific reference to either of the patterns. Nevertheless, tracing a valid pattern might still be feasible. Before clarifying this, it is appropriate to ponder over the possible reasons that brought Cusanus to avoid mentioning a precise metaphysical pattern. Assuming that the explicit lack of mentioning of a specific pattern does not mean that there is not one, there might be two reasons behind Cusanus' choice. Firstly, it might be a stylistic choice: the dialogue has a speculative tone that is different from the one in *On Learned Ignorance* (although they share the same theological themes), and its style is easier and intelligible, presumably because it was meant to be published and it needed to be immediately comprehensible to the readers. Secondly, we could not rule out that the author took precautionary measures: applying a pattern might have consequently strengthen the position of Christianity. This move would have been incredibly dangerous, considering the already tense cultural and historical atmosphere (as we have mentioned before), and misleading because Cusanus' aim was to bring harmony between religions and tolerance between rites (instead of the usually advocated conversion).

[21] For a deeper analysis of the usage of this pattern from Cusanus' first philosophical works, *On Learned Ignorance* and *On Surmises* (*De coniecturis*, 1441–1442), cf. GANDILLAC, Maurice de: Explicatio-complicatio *chez Nicholas de Cusa*, in: PIAIA (ed.): *Concordia Discors*, 77–106.

[22] To be specific, this term is not Cusanus'. It has been assumed by critics, as it is adequate to the issue of the matter concerning the being original and absolute of the *religio*. As Thomas P. McTighe explains, the "*Ur-religion* [is the true religion] of which all the empirical religions are imperfect expressions or unfoldings". (MC TIGHE, Thomas P.: *Nicholas of Cusa's Unity-metaphysics and the Formula* religio una in rituum varietate, in: CHRISTIANSON/IZBICKI (eds): *Nicholas of Cusa in Search of God and Wisdom*, 90).

[23] "Instead of *explicatur*—writes T.P. McTighe—we get the more neutral, non-technical *praesupponitur*, which [...] I have rendered as ‚lies at the bottom of'. The 'in' of ‚one religion in the diversity of rites' simply registers what all rites (religions?) have in common, their *gemeinsam Grundbbestand*, as Stallmach calls it. With *praesupponitur* Cusanus neatly evades the issue of an antecedent unitary religion from which all the empirical religions are unfolded". (MCTIGHE: *Nicholas of Cusa's Unity-metaphysics and the Formula* religio una in rituum varietate, 168).

After having discussed the validity of the present enquiry, the research wants to winnow the applicability and adequacy of the patterns, since both Christianity and the Neoplatonic metaphysics[24] play major roles in Cusanus' philosophy. Considering these elements, both patterns seem inadequate: the enfolding-unfolding pattern (*complicatio-explicatio*) would attribute to the Christian religion the metaphysical exceeding role of absolute religion, whereas the model-image pattern (*exemplar-imago*) would reduce Christianity to a religion among many others. Indeed, according to the former pattern, if we were to replace the term *religio* (here meant as *Urreligion*) with 'Christianity' and the term *rites* (here meant as religions) with 'religions' (in the sense of any other historical religion), then the Christian religion would be the absolute one enfolding all the other historical religions, which would just be the unfolding of the true religion (*religio* as *Urreligion*): the Christianity. Therefore, it is evident that the application of the enfolding-unfolding pattern would be inappropriate because it does not seem to respect the rule of no proportions (*nulla proportio*) between the Absolute (i.e. *maximum absolutum*) and the created entities (i.e. *maximum contractum*). This means that there could not be any comparative relation between the original religion (*Urreligion*), which is before the created and revealed world, and any historical religion (*religiones*), which—due its contingence—could not be set as the absolute one. In other words, if we assume that Christianity is the revealed religion and not the absolute and original one, then it cannot take the role of *Urreligion*, which is metaphysically different from the revealed ones. Thus, Christianity cannot seem to find its place in the metaphysical scheme and then the relationship between absolute religion (*religio*) and historical religions (*religiones*) remains unaccounted for.

In addition, we wonder instead whether the second pattern (the model-image one) might help us to solve the issue. With the application of the model-image pattern (*exemplar-imago*), *religio* (as *Urreligion*) would be considered the exemplar religion, the perfect model, unreachable and ineffable, which can be grasped only through its image. The image of this absolute *religio* would then be the revealed religion: Christianity. The position of the Christian religion would consequently be explained and properly resized. However, the role of the other religions remains unclear: they could either be negligible or implied. If this were the case, the only role they could assume would be the one of images (*imagines*). Therefore, according to this pattern expressing the model-images relationship, there is a horizontal perspective which neutralizes all the differences. The result is that Christianity then would be just another religion among the others.

[24] Cf. BEIERWALTES, Werner: *Denken des Einen. Studien zur neuplatonischen Philosophie und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte*. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann 1985.

Nevertheless, these conclusions are not in consonance with Cusanus' thought, because Christianity should hold a privileged position when compared to other religions, without occupying an absolute position. In fact, this perspective concerning the role of Christianity needs to be clarified and justified, since it could be easily criticised. Whether we only consider that Christianity should have a priority due to the fact that Cusanus was a cardinal and that he had no other choice but to plead his own cause, then we would be making a reductive and misleading assumption. The reason why Cusanus puts Christianity apart from other religions lies instead in Christianity's very nature. Owing to its presupposition (the Unity of Wisdom which makes it knowledgeable), its foundation (the Trinity), and its core (the Christology), the Christian religion is reasonably above the multiplicity of rites, to which it still remains linked, although distinguished as necessary foundation.[25] In other words, Christ is the core of the true religion because he is the way, the life, and the truth: he is the means and the end of both men and nature, the foundation of peace itself, and the truth everything aims at.[26] This metaphysical foundation is inherent to human nature and Christ is undoubtedly the ultimate end of every religion:[27] he is the face (*facies*) of every population (*gentium*), recognized even by pagans and Muslims.

Starting from the recognition of the common foundation (the key-figure of Jesus Christ), it is possible to endeavor to establish an interreligious harmony that goes beyond tolerance and pacifism and that could be helpful to interpret the relationship between the components here discussed. This harmony or concordance (*concordantia*) among religions (*religiones*) is based on the metaphysical assumption of the absolute religion, na-

[25] In *The Catholic Concordance* (*De concordantia catholica*, 1434), Cusanus talks about the Church (*ecclesia*) stressing that it is its duty to eliminate conflicts and harmoniously coordinate the variety of rites though reason, something that is supposedly shared by all human beings and that Christianity ultimately represents. (Cf. QUILLET, Jeannine: *La paix de la foi: identité et différence selon Nicolas de Cues*, in: PIAIA (ed.): Concordia discors, 237–250). However, we cannot tackle the ideal connection between these two works – *The Catholic Concordance* and *On Peaceful Unity of Faith*. Giuseppe Saitta also recognizes a relationship with another text, *De coniecturis*, insofar as the same religious issue also has an epistemological foundation. (Cf. SAITTA, Giuseppe: *Nicolò Cusano e l'Umanesimo italiano*. Bologna: Tamari editori 1957).

[26] Cf. REINHARDT, Klaus: *Jesus Christ Herz des cusanischen Theologie*, in: KREMER, Klaus/ REINHARDT, Klaus (eds): *Nikolaus von Kues 1401 2001. Akten des Symposions in Bernkastel-Kues vom 23. bis 26. Mai 2001* (= MFCG 28). Trier: Paulinus 2003, 165–187.

[27] This religious desire (*Sehnsucht*) increase through faith in Christ's mediator role. Presupposed the dialectic of *maximum* (as in *On Learned Ignorance*), Christ is both a man and a way, truth and life (cf. HAUBST, Rudolph: *Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder 1956, 202–206). Talking about Christ's role, Cassirer states that from the cosmologic theory (expressed in *On Learned Ignorance*) derives the negation of a physical centre and the affirmation of God as metaphysical centre everything—in this case, every rite—tends to. (Cf. CASSIRER: *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, 28–32).

mely the one religion (*una religio*) which corresponds to the one orthodox faith (*una fides orthodoxa*) and transcends every historical determination. According to this interpretation, both the aforementioned metaphysical patterns could be assumed as valid. Actually, on the one hand, the model-image pattern explains the relationship between one absolute religion (here meant as *Urreligion*) and Christianity meant as image (*imago*): the religion (*Urreligion* or *religio*) is the model, it is the exemplar and ineffable religion which is revealed to men as Christianity, which is then the living image (*viva imago*)[28] of the model and also the true historical determination of the orthodox faith. On the other hand, the enfolding-unfolding pattern explains the relationship between Christianity and the other religions: at the same time, Christianity is the enfolding of the unity of the multitude of religions and the unfolding of the multitude of rites, expression of the multiplicity of religions.[29] This pattern disentangles the relationship between religions because they are meant as rites and they trace back to that one religion based on the dogmas of the Holy Trinity and the incarnation of Jesus Christ, which are implicitly present in every religion. For this reason, Cusanus states that each religion becomes able to find its origin in the Christianity, which is different from the common conception of it.

In order to avoid misunderstandings,[30] it is important to point out that the Christianity Cusanus talks about, is not the Christianity commonly thought of (i.e. the historically determined doctrine), but the revealed religion: the Christian religion quantitatively and qualitatively purified from its own contingency. This means that we should think about it in a more radical and metaphysical way: it is not just a religion of dogmatic statements and codified rites. Rather, Christianity is founded on two metaphysical, as well as theological, principles, which base all reality: the absolute Principle

[28] Here, it is not possible to deep this question of the living image (*viva imago*), which is also central in Cusanus' Christology. To get a better grasp of the matter, see the work of Gianluca Cuozzo who explored the question comparing the artistic production of different authors from the Renaissance, such as Albrecht Dürer. (Cf. CUOZZO, Gianluca: *Raffigurare l'invisibile. Cusano e l'arte del tempo*. Milano: Mimesis Mophé 2012; cf. CLIFTON, Olds: *Aspect and Perspective in Renaissance Thought. Nicholas of Cusa and Jan Van Eyeck*, in: CHRISTIANSON/IZBICKI (eds): *Nicholas of Cusa on Christ and the Church*, 251–264).

[29] It should be noted that Cusanus' idea is based on his ecumenical conception – clearly inferred from the variety of rites – that the unity of the Christian church is necessary. Cusanus has put much effort into stressing the importance of its preservation and restoration ever since the case of Bohemia, as can be seen by the letters to the Bohemians (1433–1434). Cf. EULER, Walter A.: *Der Christliche Ökumenismus von Cusanus und Leibniz*, in: DALL'IGNA/ROBERI (eds): *Cusano e Leibniz. Prospettive filosofiche*, 153–160.

[30] Cf. DECKER, Bruno: *Die Toleranze bei Nikolaus von Kues und in der Neuzeit*, in: *Nicolò da Cusa. Relazioni tenute al convegno interuniversitario di Bressanone nel 1960*, 199–216). Although this essay highlights the issue stressing the distance between one religion ‚*una religio*' and Christianity, it takes a way too modern interpretation of Cusanus' intentions. His idea of reason (*ratio*) is not such as to justify the founding of a "natural religion" which, according to Decker, is close to Cusanus' conception.

(to which corresponds the divine Tri-Unity) and the incarnation of this Principle (i.e. Jesus Christ: the metaphysical union of two natures, of the human and the divine).

3. *De pace idiotae*?

This last section deals with the idea of 'consent' (consensus), which is present in both the dialogues, *The Layman on Mind* and *On Peaceful Unity of Faith*, and strengthens the supposed connection between them. From this point, it is possible to show that the two texts are connected and to define how they are related.

Starting with the last chapter of the dialogue *The Layman on Mind* entitled *Our Mind is Immortal and Incorruptible*, we read that the interlocutors finally end the discussion over the nature of the soul, which has been until then developed through a reflection on the nature and the functions of the mind. Without entering into the merits of the matter, we focus on one of the last lines, where consent (*consensus*) is brought up:

> "Religion—which is innate [to us] and which has brought these countless people to Rome this year and has led you, a philosopher, unto intense wonderment, and which has always been manifest in the world in a diversity of modes—attests that immortality-of-mind is naturally bestowed upon us. Thus, the immortality of our mind is known to us from the common, undisputed affirmation of all men—just as the humanity of our nature [is so known]. For we do not have more assured knowledge that we are human beings than we have that we possess immortal minds, since the knowledge of both is the common affirmation of all men."[31]

The first observation is about the context. With unexpected circularity, the last lines of the dialogue are again inscribed into the historical setting of the beginning: the gathering of all the Christian believers for the Jubilee in Rome. Indeed, also the topic of "one religion in a variety of rites" is here indirectly recalled: the layman refers to religions as the different ways in which the religion manifests itself in the world and he also stresses that only the innate character of religion makes it natural to concur on the immortality of the soul, which is known by common consent.

At this point, without dealing with the issue of the innatism,[32] it is appropriate to notice how the category of consent (*consensus*) is considered related to the innate character of religion. Amplifying the perspective, this might lead to suppose that consent is related to innate ideas. In this sense, borrowing a category which does not properly belong to Cusanus' philosophy, we could define this as a sort of 'common sense', summoned

[31] *De mente* 15: h²V, n. 159–162.

[32] Cf. Fiamma, Andrea: *La questione dell'innatismo nel* De mente *di Nicola Cusano*, in: Dall'Igna/Roberi (eds): *Cusano e Leibniz. Prospettive filosofiche*, 101–115.

to intervene on gnoseological and metaphysical questions, where the common and undoubted consent does not represent primarily the starting point of the enquiry, but mostly the temporary point of arrival. Thus, consent is not only a strategy used to reach the purpose, but it is also a path to follow in order to establish a wider perspective, as it comes out from the reading of *On Peaceful Unity of Faith*.

Tracing some continuity with the ending of *The Layman on Mind*, in *On Peaceful Unity of Faith* the discussion between the divine messengers of every religion on the peace of faith starts from the definition of consensus. Indeed, Cusanus explains:

> "The Lord, King of heaven and of earth, has heard the moaning of those who have been killed, those who have been imprisoned, and those who have been reduced unto servitude—[the moaning of those] who suffer on account of the diversity of the religions. [...] Therefore, the Lord has had mercy upon His people and is agreeable that henceforth all the diverse religions be harmoniously reduced, by the common consent of all men, unto one inviolable [religion]."[33]

Having as background the atrocities resulting from the Fall of Constantinople by the hands of the Turks, due to these conflicts all the different religions are made to trace back to only one. The fundamental presupposition is clearly God's consent, since this ambition of reunification must be pursued by and in the grace of God. Another form of consent is then included: the "common consent of all men" ('*communi omnium hominum consensu*').[34] In this context, consent seems to be the necessary common ground to achieve this goal but the main concern might be the fear of losing each one's autonomy. The idea of common consent as prerequisite to form unity discloses the issue of individual freedom, a question that Cusanus untangles resorting to the metaphysics of participation; this means that many participate in one, still preserving the principle of individuation. In the dialogue, Cusanus argues that the variety of rites needs to be preserved in the unity of faith,[35] and, similarly, each man, actor of the religious rites, will preserve his own freedom: many participate in one retaining their own identity. In Cusanus' perspective, it could not be otherwise because a creature, as such, accepts plurality and individuation, which instead are not traits of the unity (*unitas*).[36]

33 *De pace* 3: h VII.

34 *De pace* 3: h VII.

35 Cf. REINHARDT, K.: *La idea cusana de la unidad de las religiones y su proyeción en la teología contemporanea*, in: MACHETTA, Jorge M./D'AMICO, Claudia (eds): *Nicolás de Cusa: identidad y ateridad. Pensamiento y dialogo*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos 2010, 463–473.

36 It is therefore evident, according to Cassirer, that every individual is denied participation to the ultimate and highest being. It is then a game of balance between divine immanence and transcendence, which swings between the attempt at keeping the pristine purity

These explanations provide the chance to shift the issue on the epistemological level. As free and not reductive adhesion to unity, consent is translated as adhesion to religion (*religio*), the unity of orthodox faith (*una fides orthodoxa*), which is the truth itself, the one truth that religion is living image of (*viva imago*). In this sense of Cusanus' epistemological theory, the revealed religion is the image of the only truth while the rest is conjecture. Therefore, the many practices of worship correspond to the different positions and do not express a false knowledge, but its conjectural value. Actually, the unity of the truth coexists with the rational forms of knowledge, which are conjectures. According to this perspective, it is evident both consent's nature and foundation. While the first (consent's nature) is supposed to be a joint proceeding from the conjectural level (*alteritas)* of the shared knowledge of the only truth (*unitas*), the second (consent's foundation) lies in the human nature. In this last one, we can recognise the *Streben*, namely the "natural desire towards the innate pursue", a desire, which is both the constituent of man and the consequence of the original sin.[37] This *Streben* can be translated as the yearning that expresses a joint thrust towards the pursuit and reaching of the truth. Consequently, the inevitability of the consent on the unity of the rites in one religion is apparent: the religion (*religio*) is nothing but the truth or, better yet, the image of the truth that everyone seeks. In *On Peaceful Unity of Faith*, consent (*consensus*)—an elusive and intangible truth only cognizable in alterity[38]—is finally translated on a historical-religious level as message of interreligious harmony. The pursuit of the truth, one faith in this case, converges on a religious concordance, which is not just a mere juxtaposition: it becomes the acknowledgment of a speculative need of metaphysical-gnoseological nature.[39]

At this point, we can conclude that this analysis shows that there are many elements proving a connection between the two texts—the book of *The Layman on Mind* and the dialogue *On Peaceful Unity of Faith*. Usually, the nature of intertextual relationships is expressed in terms of autonomy or dependency. However, in the case of Cusanus' works, this approach seems hardly adequate insofar as he usually presents the same topics many times

of God and the effort of including the individual in his particularity. (Cf. CASSIRER, Ernest: *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*. Band 1: 1906).

37 Cf. REINHARDT, K.: *Das Streben des Geistes nach Selstbestätigung, Ruhm und Ehre in der Sicht des Nikolaus von Kues, vor allem in seinen Predigten*, in: EULER, Walter A./GUSTAFSSON, Ylva/WIKSTRÖM, Iris: *Nicholaus of Cusa on the Self and Self-Consciousness*. Åbo: Åbo Akademie University Press 2010, 13–23.

38 Cf. D'AMICO, Claudia: *Ignorancia y conjectura en la propuesta de concordia de Nicolás de Cusa*, in: MACHETTA, Jorge M./D'AMICO, Claudia (eds): *El problema del conocimiento en Nicolás de Cusa: genealogía y proyeción*, 267–279.

39 Cf. CASSIRER: *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, 33–34.

in different texts. In this way, Cusanus neither confirms or denies whatever he stated previously, nor organises his work so that it can only be understood if read in chronological order. Once again, circularity is the original feature of Cusanus' work. In this perspective, the two dialogues here examined could be considered both autonomous and mutually dependent. Indeed, they could both be accounted complete if read independently, as they are fully developed in form and content. Although, a complementary reading of the two texts grants a more colourful depiction of the thoroughness of Cusanus' work. In other words, whether the dialogue *On Peaceful Unity of Faith* could be deemed as a plausible development and perfecting in religious terms of some of the issues initially brought up in *The Layman on Mind*, then this dialogue on mind offers additional support with argumentations that supposedly work as framework, insofar as it explicitly mentions the two patterns that are instead implied in *On Peaceful Unity of Faith*. Therefore, due to the explicit mention of both the metaphysical patterns, the dialogue on the mind would work as a metaphysical support, which is helpful in order to disclose the issue tackle in the other dialogue, on peaceful unity.[40]

In addition, going back to the title of this last paragraph *De pace idiotae?*, we would suggest that it is plausible and legitimate to talk about the peace of the layman, owing not only to the circular connection between the two texts here stressed, but also due to the fact that the dialogue on the mind could work as a framework in which to inscribe the metaphysical issues of the dialogue on the peace. Furthermore, the circularity which characterises them, is also the realisation of the "divine pedagogy"[41] that brings many believers to the One (and only God) and makes the truth of the divine message manifest through the plurality of the rites. According to this interpretation, we see not only that unity (one) and alterity (many) coexist, but also that they walk together on the path of concordance, which is a perspective strengthened by the mutual dependency of the two dialogues. In other terms, it is through the revelation of the Word, i.e. the divine *Logos*, that we can acknowledge the one true faith that each man participates of and tends towards.

[40] To be more specific, we find reference to the pattern *exemplar-imago* when talking about the mind and its assimilative function as living image of God (*viva Dei imago*), i.e. entification of God, while the second pattern, *complicatio-explicatio* comes out at the beginning and at the end of the dialogue when Cusanus talks about the *consensus*.

[41] Cf. PIAIA: *Introduzione*, 20.

Abstract
The aim of this paper is to discuss the 'one-many' problem in Cusanus' dialogue On Peaceful Unity of Faith (De pace fidei, *1453) in dialogue with another text:* The Layman on Mind (Idiota de mente, *1450). After having introduced the contention of the work* On Mind *in which the topic is set, we analyse it in the dialogue* On Peaceful, *where the issue concerns the relationship between the multiplicity of rites and the unity of religion. According to Cusanus' interreligious concordance, we attempt to find a more suitable metaphysical perspective to frame the problem, proposing the dialogue* On Mind *as a metaphysical framework in which the foundation of the metaphysical and interreligious perspective proposed may be justified.*