

'On the Peace of Faith'

by Nicolaus of Cusa

Translation by William F. Wertz, Jr.

How can mankind, separated into different cultures, speaking different languages, and practicing different religions, forever put an end to the sectarian strife and oppression which has characterized relations among the faiths for many centuries? This is the subject of the dialogue, On the Peace of Faith, written by the greatest scientist of his era, Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa, immediately following the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. The fall of the Paleologue dynasty of Byzantium was a setback to efforts by Cusa, and other leaders of both East and West, to forge an ecumenical alliance, reuniting the Christian church as planned several years earlier at the Council of Florence.

Cusa's reflections on the means available to end genocidal religious warfare are as timely today, at a time when humanity is swept into a maelstrom of religious fanaticism and irrationality, as when they were first written down over 500 years ago. Though posed in theological terms, they speak eloquently to the questions posed by nations struggling for freedom and sovereignty, against the logic of appeasement and pragmatic accommodation to evil which masquerades as peace, but leads to war.

I

News of the atrocities, which have recently been perpetrated by the Turkish king in Constantinople and have now been divulged, has so inflamed a man, who once saw that region, with zeal for God, that amongst many sighs he asked the Creator of all things, if in His goodness He might moderate the persecution, which raged more than ever on account of diverse religious custom. Then it occurred, that after several days—indeed on account of continual daily meditation—a vision was manifested to the deeply moved man, from which he concluded, that it would be possible, through the experience of a few wise men who are well-acquainted with all the diverse practices which are observed in religions across the world, to find a unique and propitious unity, and through this to constitute an eternal peace in religion upon the appropriate and true course.

So that this vision might at some time come to the knowledge of those, who resolve such important things, he has represented it simply and clearly in the following, as far as his memory presented it to him.

He was transported into a certain domain of intellectual altitude, where among those departed from this life in the council of the Heavenly, over which the Almighty presided, the examination of this question was conducted as follows. The King of Heaven and Earth said, that from the kingdom of this world sorrowful messengers have brought to His ears the complaints of the oppressed; that many turn their weapons against each other for the sake of religion and in their power compel men to renounce long-observed doctrines or kill them.

There were very many reports of such complaints, which came from the whole Earth, and the King commanded, that they be brought before the full assembly of the holy. All seemed to be known to the residents of Heaven, since they had been placed from the beginning by the King of the Universe over the individual provinces and religious sects of the Earth. According to their appearance they were not men, but rather intellectual powers.

A leader, the representative of all these ambassadors, spoke the following words: Lord, King of the Universe, what has each creature, that Thou hast not given him? It pleased Thee, to inspire the body of man, formed from the Earth, with rational breath, so that the image of Thine ineffable power would reflect in him. From one man many people have been generated, who occupy the surface of the firm Earth.

Although the intellectual breath, which is sown in the Earth and is absorbed by shadows, does not see the light and the beginning of its origin, Thou hast nonetheless created in him all that, through which he, full of wonder over that which he attains with the senses, is at some time able to elevate his mental eyes to Thee, the Creator of all things and to be united with Thee in the highest charity and thus can finally return to his origin laden with fruit.

Nevertheless Thou knowest, Lord, that a great multitude can not exist without much diversity and that almost all are compelled, to lead a laborious life full of troubles and afflictions and in servile subjugation must be subject to the kings who rule. Hence it has occurred, that only a few of all men have time and leisure, to employ the freedom of their will and to gain knowledge of themselves. They are distracted by many corporeal cares and duties. Thus they can not seek Thee, Thou who art the concealed God.

For this reason Thou hast given Thy people diverse kings and seers, whom one calls prophets, from whom the majority of them instituted cults and laws corresponding to the purpose of their mission in Thy name and thus instructed the uncultivated people. They subsequently accepted these laws, as if Thou, the King of Kings, had spoken with them face to face, and believed they heard not those men, but rather Thee in them.

To the various nations, however, Thou hast sent various prophets and masters, the one for this, the other for another time.

It is a condition of Earthly human nature, to defend as truth longstanding custom, which is regarded as part of nature. And thus no small differences of opinion arise, if any community prefers its beliefs over another's.

Therefore come to our assistance, Thou who alone art powerful. For this strife rages on account of Thee, whom alone all venerate in all that which they seem to worship. For no one desires in everything, of which one sees, that something is desired other than the Good, which Thou art. Also in all intellectual deliberation no one searches for something other than the true, which Thou art. What do the living search for other than life? What do the existing search for other than existence? Thou, therefore, Thou who bestowest life and existence, art that one, who is clearly sought for in the diverse customs and practices and is named with diverse names, since Thou as Thou art, remainest unknown and ineffable for all.

Thou, who art infinite power, art nothing of that, which Thou hast created, nor can the creature comprehend the thought of Thine infinity, since there is no proportional relationship between the finite and the infinite.

Thou, omnipotent God, who art invisible to every mind, canst in the manner thou wishest to be grasped, manifest Thyself visibly to him, to whom Thou wouldst manifest Thyself. Conceal Thyself, therefore, no longer, Lord. Be gracious and manifest Thy countenance and all people will be saved and delivered, who in the future can not desert the source of life and its still so seldomly tasted sweetness. No one departs from Thee, unless he is ignorant of Thee.

If Thou art in goodness willing, to act thus, the sword and the envy of hatred and every evil will yield. Everyone will know that, and in what manner, there is only a single religion in the variety of practices and customs. Indeed, one will not be able to annul this difference of practices and customs, or in any case this will not be beneficial to do, since the difference may bring an increase in devotion, if every land bestows the most vigilant effort upon its ceremonies, which it holds to be, as it were, the most pleasant to Thee, the King; however, at all events just as Thou art only one—there ought to be only a single religion and a single cult of adoration of God.

Be therefore conciliatory, Lord, since Thine anger is kindness and Thine justice is mercy. Spare Thy weak crea-

ture. Thus we, Thy representatives, whom Thou hast given to Thy people as guardians and seest here in this assembly, beseech and pray with the entire strength of our devotion humbly to Thy Majesty.

II

At this solemn supplication of the archangel, all the citizens of Heaven inclined in the same manner toward the highest King and He, who sat upon the throne, spoke: He would have placed man with his free will in the world, and made him able through this will, to hold communion with his fellow-man. However, because the animal and Earthly man is held down under the Prince of Darkness in ignorance and walks across the Earth according to the conditions of that sensible life, which proceeds only from the world of the Prince of Darkness, and not according to the intellectual and inner man, whose life proceeds from the land of his origin, He would have called the errant man back with much care and diligence through various prophets, who were seeing, in comparison with the others.

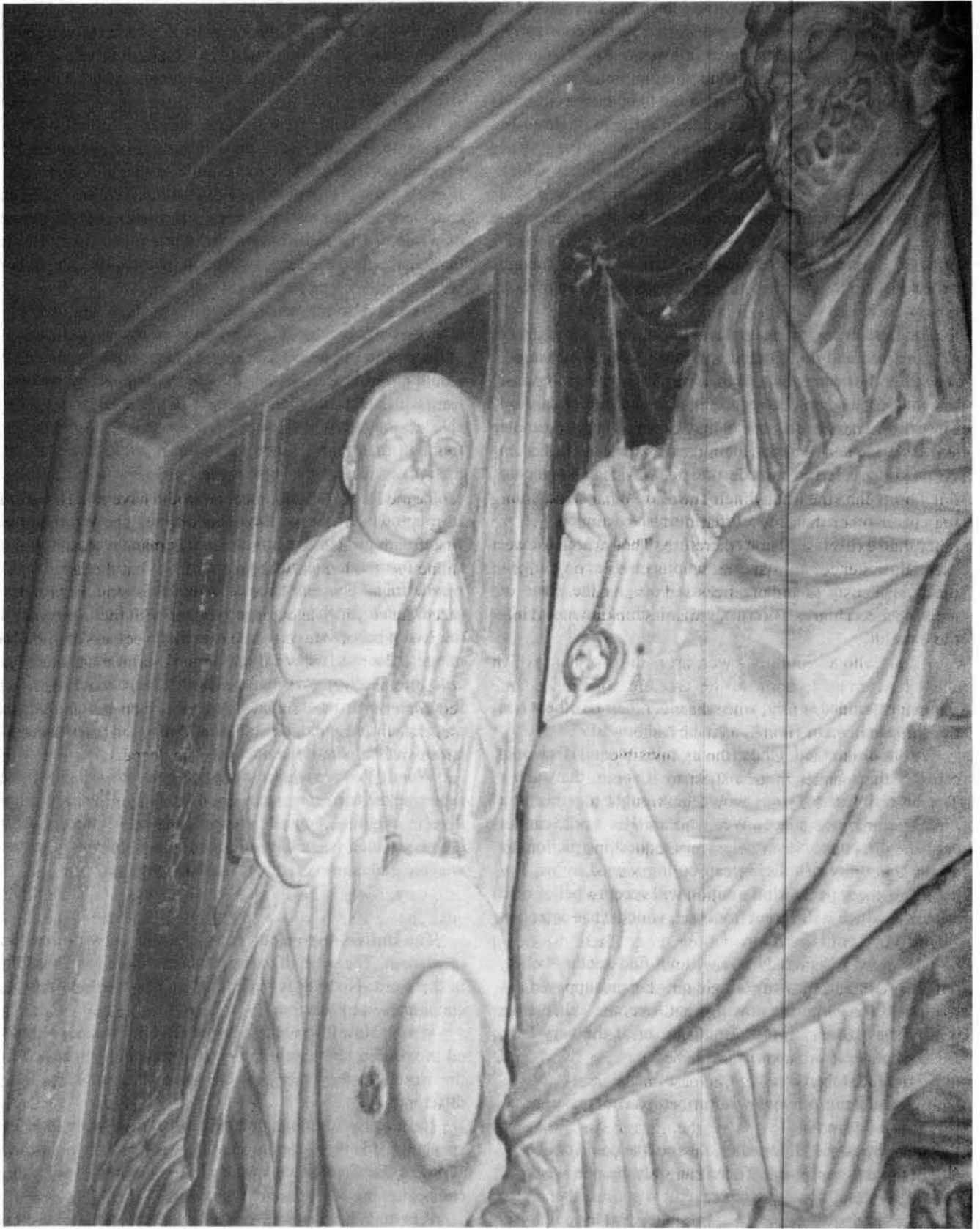
Finally, as all these prophets could not sufficiently overcome the Prince of Ignorance, he would have sent His Word, through which He has also created time. The Word clothed itself with humanity, in order in this manner to finally illumine the docile man with free will, so that the latter would know, that he would have to walk across this Earth not in accordance with the outer, but rather with the inner man, if he would hope, to revert one day to the sweetness of immortal life. And since His Word put on the mortal man, there was evidence in his blood for that truth, that man would be provided for eternal life, for the sake of which his animal and sensible life would be deemed as nothing, and that that eternal life would be nothing other than the deepest longing of the inner man, i.e., the truth, which alone he desires and which, since it is eternal, nourishes the intellect eternally.

This truth, which nourishes the intellect, is nothing other than the Word itself, in which everything is enfolded and by means of which everything is unfolded. It put on human nature, so that no man would have doubt, that according to the choice of his free will in his human nature he could achieve the immortal food of truth in that man, who is also the Word.

And God added thereto: Since this has been done, what then still remains, that could be done and was not done?

III

To this question of the King of Kings, the Word-Become-Flesh, who rules over all the residents of Heaven, answered in the name of all: Father of Mercy! Indeed all Thy works are complete and nothing remains, that must be added to its completion! Nevertheless, human nature requires continual trials, so that the errors, of which there are very many in respect to Thy Word, are extirpated and so the truth may constantly shine forth; this is so, because from the beginning



Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa kneels by St. Peter, in Andrea Bregno's sculpture on his tomb, Rome, Church of S. Pietro in Vincoli, 1465.

Thou hast decided, that man would keep his free will and, since nothing in the sensible world perseveres constantly, variable opinions and conjectures and likewise also languages and their interpretations alter with time. Since, however, the truth is single and is impossible not to be comprehended by every free intellect, all diversity of religion ought to be brought into a single orthodox faith.

This pleased the King. He called the angels hither, which preside over all the nations and languages, and commanded each, to bring one experienced man to the Word-Become-Flesh. And immediately the most eminent men of this world appeared before the countenance of the Word, as though carried aloft in a state of ecstasy. To them the Word of God spoke as follows:

The Lord, King of Heaven and Earth, heard the sighs of the murdered and the fettered and those led into servitude, who suffer thus on account of the diversity of their religions. And since all who practice or suffer such persecution, are led to it for no other reason than that they believe, thus to promote their salvation and to please their Creator, the Lord has taken pity on His people and agreed to the plan, to lead all diversity of religions through mutual agreement of all men harmoniously back to a single, henceforth inviolable religion.

To fulfill this task, He entrusts to you, the elected men. From His council, He gives you helping and serving angels, who may protect and guide you. As the place of assembly He designated Jerusalem, which is the most suitable therefor.

IV

One responded to this, who was older than all others and as it appeared, was a **Greek**, after he had bowed:

We praise our God, whose mercy rules over all His works and who alone has the power to bring it about, that such a great diversity of religions would be brought together in a single, harmonious peace. We, who are His work, cannot resist His direction. Nevertheless, we request instruction, as to how this unity of religion can be introduced by us. For according to our persuasion a nation will accept a belief with difficulty, which is different from that, which it has defended with its blood until that hour.

The **Word** responded: You will not find another belief, but rather one and the same single religion presupposed everywhere. You, who are now present here, are called wise men by the sharers of your language, or at the very least philosophers or lovers of wisdom.

So it is, said the **Greek**.

If you all therefore love wisdom, do you not presuppose, that this wisdom exists?

They responded all together, that no one could doubt it.

The **Word** continued: There can only be one wisdom. Were it possible, that there are several wisdoms, then these would have to spring from a single one. Namely, unity is prior to all plurality.

Greek: None of us doubt, that there is only one wisdom, which we all love and on account of which we are called philosophers. Because of participation in it there are many wise men, whereas wisdom itself remains simple and undivided in itself.

Word: You therefore all agree, that the simplest wisdom be a single one, and that its power is ineffable. And everyone experiences that ineffable and infinite power in its unfolding. If one's view is turned toward that which is visible and one considers, that that which he sees, has arisen from the power of wisdom—the same obtains for hearing and every single thing that affects the senses—then he affirms, that the invisible wisdom exceeds everything.

Greek: Also we, who practice this profession of philosophy, love the sweetness of wisdom in no other way than that of the previously tasted admiration of sensuous things. Who would not be willing to die, in order to obtain that wisdom, from which all beauty, all sweetness of life, everything desirable emanates? What power of wisdom is reflected in the frame of man: in his limbs, the order of these limbs, in the life infused in him, the harmony of the organs, in his motion, and finally in the rational spirit, which is capable of wonderful arts and is, as it were, the sign of wisdom, in which eternal wisdom, as in a close image and truth as in a close similitude, shines forth over everything. And what is above all still more wonderful is: This reflection of wisdom comes always nearer to the truth through a vehement conversion of the spirit, until the living reflection, which comes from the shadow of the image, becomes constantly truer and more in conformity with true wisdom, even though that absolute wisdom just as it is, can never be attained in another. And in this manner the eternal and inexhaustible wisdom is the perpetual and imperishable food of the intellect.

Word: You are advancing to our goal, toward which we aspire, in the correct manner. Even though you acknowledge diverse religions, you all presuppose in all of this diversity the one, which you call wisdom. But say, does not the one wisdom embrace everything, that can be stated?

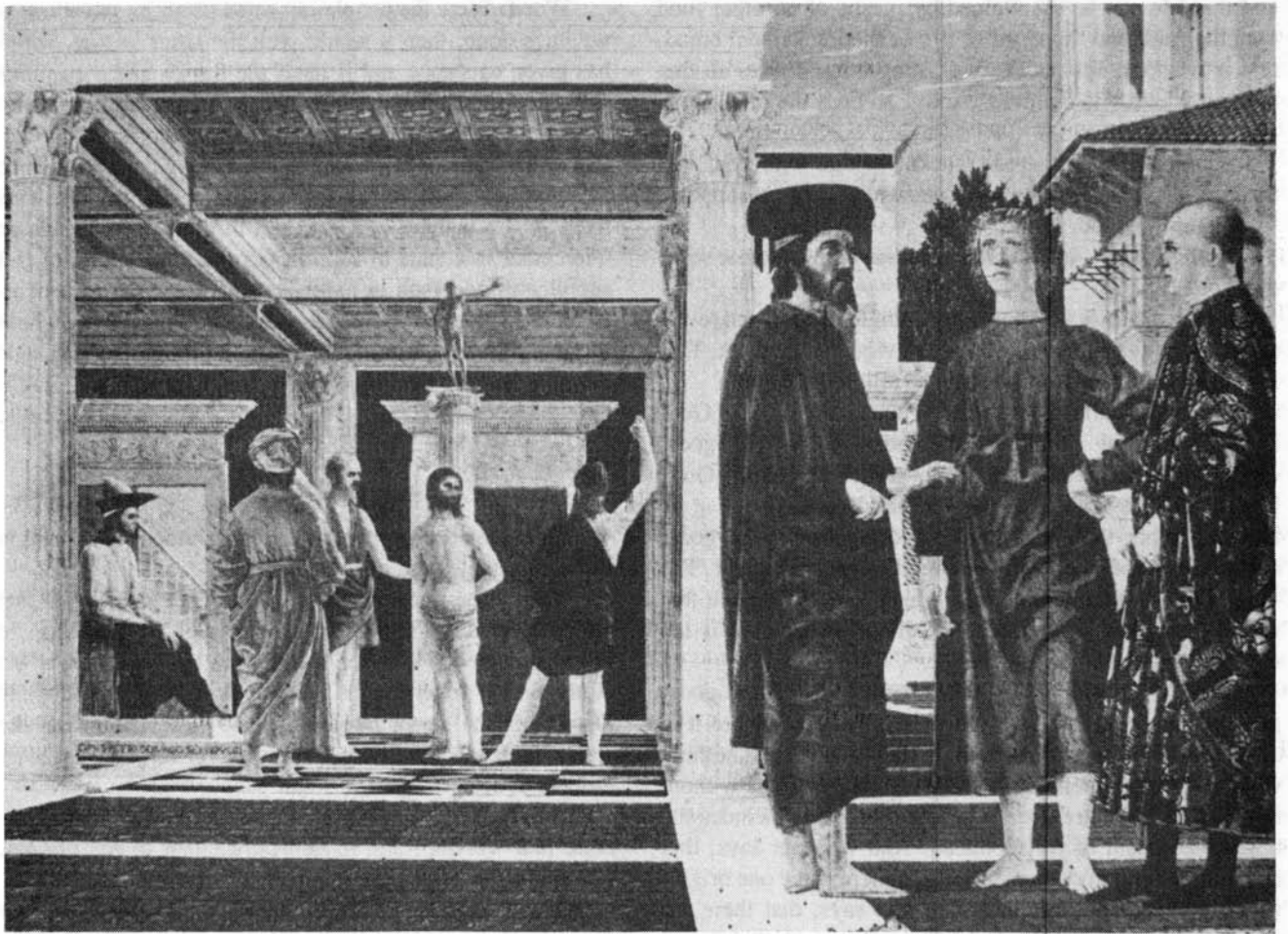
V

The **Italian** responded: Truly, there is no word outside of wisdom. The word of the wisest is in wisdom and wisdom in the word. Nothing is outside of it. The whole infinity is encompassed by wisdom.

Word: Now if someone says, everything would be created in wisdom and another, everything would be created in the word, do they then say the same thing or something different?

Italian: Even though diversity appears in the manner of speaking, it is the same in regards to the meaning. For the Word of the Creator, in which He has created everything, can be nothing other than His wisdom.

Word: What do you think: Is that wisdom God or a creature?



Flagellation of Christ, by Piero della Francesca (after 1453). "The Lord, King of Heaven and Earth, heard the sighs of the murdered and fettered and those led into servitude, who suffer thus on account of the diversity of their religions. . . . As the place of assembly He designated Jerusalem."

Italian: Since God, the Creator, creates everything in wisdom, He Himself is necessarily the wisdom of the created wisdom. That is, prior to every creature there is wisdom, through which everything created is that which it is.

Word: So wisdom is eternal, since it is prior to everything initiated or created.

Italian: No one can deny, that that by which he understands is prior to everything originated, would be eternal.

Word: It is therefore the origin.

Italian: So it is.

Word: Consequently it is also the simplest. Everything composed is originated. The composing can indeed not be after the composed.

Italian: That I recognize.

Word: Wisdom is therefore eternity.

Italian: It can not be otherwise.

Word: It is, however, impossible, that there are several eternities, since unity is prior to all plurality.

Italian: That also no one can deny.

Word: Wisdom is therefore the one, simple, and eternal God, the origin of everything.

Italian: So must it be.

Word: See therefore, how you, the philosophers of various schools of thought, agree in the avowal of the one God, whom you all presupposed in that which you as lovers of wisdom acknowledge.

VI

At this the **Arab** rose and responded: One can say nothing more clearly and truly!

Word: If you recognize one absolute wisdom for the reason that you are a lover of wisdom, do you then believe, that there are men with vigorous intellects, who do not love wisdom?

Arab: I believe with complete certainty, that all men naturally strive for wisdom, for it is the life of the intellect

and this life can be maintained by means of no other food than the truth and the word of life or the intellectual bread, that is wisdom. Just as every existing thing desires all that without which it is not able to exist, so does the intellectual life long for wisdom.

Word: All men therefore acknowledge with you, that there is the one, absolute wisdom, which they presuppose. This is the one God.

Arab: So it is. And no intelligent man can advocate some other one.

Word: There is therefore only a single religion and reverence of God for all those, who are of vigorous intellect. This is presupposed in all the diversity of religious custom.

Arab: Thou art wisdom, since Thou art the Word of God. I ask Thee: How should those, who revere several gods, concur with the philosophers in reverence of a single God? For it can be established, that the philosophers have at no time felt other than that there could not be several gods, above which the one, super-exalted God did not stand. The latter alone is the origin, from which the others have that which they have; He is more excellent by far than is the monad in number.

Word: All, who at any time worshipped several gods, presupposed, that the Godhead exists. They prayed to it in all gods as if they participated in it. That is, as there is nothing white without whiteness, so there also are no gods without the Godhead. The reverence of gods therefore includes the acknowledgment of the Godhead. And whoever says, that there are several gods, says also, that there is the one origin, which precedes all; similarly he, who says, that there are many sacred things admits the sacredness of the sacred things, through the participation of which all other things are sacred. Never was a people so foolish, that it would have believed in several gods, of which each one would have been the prime cause, origin, and creator of the universe.

Arab: I am also of this opinion. That is, one contradicts oneself, if one says, there would be several prime origins. Since the origin can be nothing originated, because it would be originated from itself and thus would exist before it would exist, and reason does not grasp this, thus the origin is eternal. And it is not possible, that there are several eternals, since unity exists prior to all plurality. Consequently, the one must be the origin and cause of the universe. Therefore, until now I have still found no people, that had deviated in this from the road of truth.

Word: If therefore all who revere several gods, looked at that, which they presuppose, i. e., at the Godhead, which is the cause of all, and—as reason commands—also manifestly revered this latter outwardly, just as they do this confusedly in all things, which they name gods—the strife were dissolved.

Arab: This were indeed not difficult. However, to terminate the worship of gods may be difficult. For the people holds firmly, that it is granted support from its worship of the gods and therefore turns to these deities for its salvation.

Word: Were the people informed about its salvation, as we have done, then it would seek the latter in that, which has given existence and is itself the Savior and the infinite salvation, rather than in those, who have nothing from themselves except that which is conceded to them by the Savior. However, if the people seeks refuge among the gods, which are regarded as sacred in the opinion of all, because they lived in the manner of God, and turns to them, as to an intercessor in a state of infirmity or other necessity, or if it supplicates one such in humble reverence or in respect attends to his memory, since he was a friend of God, whose life is to be imitated; then this would not contradict the single religion, so long as it brought the entire reverence of godliness to the one and only God. In this way the people could easily be satisfied.

VII

Thereupon the **Indian** spoke: Then how does it stand in respect to statues and images?

Word: The images, which bring to our knowledge that which is conceded in the true reverence of the one God, are not condemned. However, when they lead away from the cultivation of reverence of the one God, as if a part of the deity be in the stones themselves and were attached to the statue, then, since they deceive and avert from the truth, they deserve to be destroyed.

Indian: It is difficult to lead the people away from inveterate idol worship, and indeed on account of the oracles, which are given by them.

Word: Rarely are these oracles produced other than through priests, who report them as responses of the divinity. Has the question been set before them, then they give the answer pursuant to some art, i. e., the disposition of the Heaven, or they form the answer, which they ascribe to the deity, according to the circumstances, as if the Heaven, or Apollo, or the sun had commanded them to respond. Hence it occurs, that the majority of those answers are ambiguous, so that they do not openly convince by lies, or completely falsely; and if they are occasionally true, then are so accidentally. However, if a priest can conjecture well, then he issues oracles better and his answers come nearer the truth.

Indian: However, it is certain, that frequently a spirit, who is bound to a statue, patently imparts an oracle.

Word: Neither the soul of a man, nor of Apollo, nor of Aesculapius, nor of any other, which is worshipped as God; but rather the evil spirit, the foe of the human species from the inception on, sometimes, however rarely, feigns through the faith placed in him by man, to be bound to a statue and to be coerced into answers, in order thus to deceive. However, after the deception has been detected, he disappears. Therefore, today they have a voice and do not speak. After this deception of the seducer has become known through experience in many lands, idolatry has been condemned in nearly all locations by the wiser men. It will

also not be difficult in the Orient to detect its deception and achieve the invocation of the one God, so that its inhabitants are brought into conformity with the rest of the nations of the Earth.

Indian: Since the evident deceptions were detected and one can establish that, as a result thereof, the prudent Roman and likewise the Greek and Arab destroyed the idols, it is by all means to be hoped, that the idolatrous Indians will act similarly; above all, since they are wise and do not hesitate to acknowledge the necessity of religion in the worship of the one God. If they also thereby venerate their idols in their manner, they will come thus to a peaceful conclusion in respect to the adoration of the one God.

It will, however, be very difficult to achieve agreement from all sides in respect to the triune God. That is, it will appear to all, that the trinity can not be conceived without three gods. If there is a Trinity in the divinity, so there will also be plurality in the deity. However, it was previously said—and in fact, it is necessarily so—that there is only one absolute deity. There is no plurality in the absolute deity, but rather in the participating, who are not God in the absolute, but rather gods through participation.

Word: God, as Creator, is three and one. As infinite He is neither three, nor one, nor anything that can be stated. The names which are attributed to God, are taken from creatures, since He Himself is ineffable in Himself and stands above all that can be named or stated. Those, who worship God, ought to adore Him as the origin of the universe; in this one universe, however, there is a plurality of parts, inequality, and separation—the multitude of stars, trees, men, stones, is evident to the senses—the origin of all multitude, however, is unity; therefore, the origin of multitude is the eternal unity.

In the one universe there is inequality of parts, since no part is similar to the other. However, the inequality derives from the equality of unity. Consequently, eternal equality is prior to every inequality.

In the one universe, distinction or separation of parts is found. Before every distinction, however, is the connection of unity and equality. Separation, or distinction departs from this connection. The connection is therefore eternal.

However, there can not be several eternals. Consequently, in the one eternity is found unity, equality of unity, and the union of unity and equality, or connection. Thus, the most simple origin of the universe is triune, since in the origin the originated must be enfolded. Everything originated, however, signifies that it is thus enfolded in its origin. In everything originated a threefold distinction of this kind can be found in the unity of the essence. And for this reason, the simplest origin of everything must also be threefold and single.

VIII

The Chaldean: Even if the sages are somehow able to grasp this, it nevertheless exceeds the power of the common

man. For as I understand it, it is not true, that there are three gods, but rather it is one God, who is one and threefold. Dost thou not wish thereby to say, that that one is threefold in his power?

Word: God is the absolute power of all powers, since He is omnipotent. If there is, therefore, only a single absolute power, which is the divine essence, then to name this power triune, means nothing other than to say that God is triune. However, the divine power should not be conceived, such that it would be distinguished in opposition to reality, since in God power is reality itself. The same is true of absolute potentiality, which is also power.

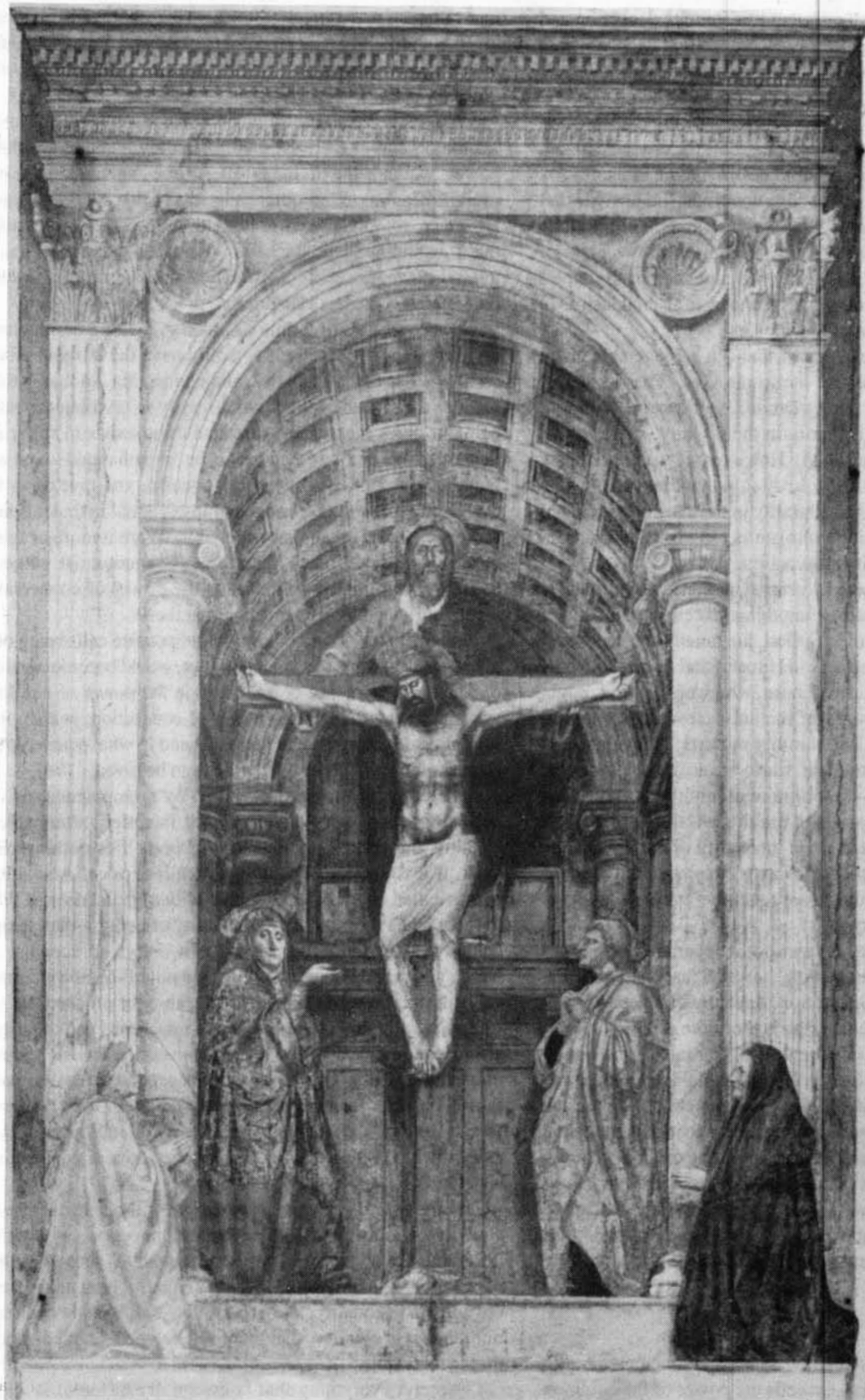
It appears absurd to no one, to say, that the omnipotent divinity, Who is indeed God, would have the unity in Himself, which is being, equality, and connection, so that in this manner the power of unity would unify everything that has being or gives it essence—that is, a thing exists in so far as it is one; the one and being can be interchanged—and so that the power of equality would equalize and give order to everything that exists. That is, a thing is equal in that it is not more and not less than that which it is. Were it more or less, then it would not exist. Therefore, it cannot exist without equality. And finally: so that thus the power of connection would unify and bind everything together.

Hence, in the power of unity, omnipotence calls being out of non-being, so that that which was not, would become capable of being. Omnipotence orders being in the power of equality and binds it together in the power of connection; just so one recognizes in the essence of love, that and in what manner love connects the loving with that, which can be loved.

Therefore, if man can be called by omnipotence out of not-being, then unity arises as first in order, after which equality and then the connection of both. For nothing can exist, if it is not one. The one is therefore prior. And since man is called out of not-being, the unity of man arises as first in order, then the equality of this unity or being—that is, the equality is the unfolding of order in unity, on account of which it is called the unity of man and not of the lion or some other thing. However, the equality can only proceed out of the unity, for not otherness, but rather unity or identity, produces equality. Finally, love or connection proceeds from unity and equality. That is, unity is not separable from equality and the latter from unity. The connection or love is therefore such that, with the positing of unity, equality is posited and with the positing of unity and equality, love or connection is posited.

If, therefore, there is no equality, without it being the equality of unity, and if there is no connection, without it being the connection of unity and equality, such that the connection is in unity and equality, equality is in unity, and the unity is in equality, and unity and equality are in connection, then it is obvious, that there can be no essential distinction in the Trinity.

Namely, everything that is essentially different is such



"Trinity Adored by Donors," life-size fresco by Masaccio and Filippo Brunelleschi, Florence, S. Maria Novella, ca. 1425.

that the one can be, without the other existing. However, because the Trinity exists such that with the positing of unity the equality of unity is also posited and, conversely, and with the positing of unity and equality connection is also posited, and, conversely, it appears not in the essence, but in the relationship, that and in what manner another is unity, another is equality and another is connection.

A numerical distinction is essential. The number two differs essentially from three. With the positing of the number two, three is not posited, and the three does not follow from the existence of two. Therefore the Trinity in God is not composed, plural or numerical, but rather the simplest unity. Whoever believes therefore, that God be one, does not deny, that He be threefold, in so far as he understands that Trinity as not different from the simplest unity, but rather as unity itself, such that that Trinity, were it not in unity, were also not the origin, which is so omnipotent, that it can create the universe and each individual.

The more unified a power is, the more powerful it is; however, the more unified it is, the simpler it is. Therefore, the more powerful or stronger it is, the simpler it is. Hence, if the divine essence is omnipotent, it is completely simple and threefold. For without trinity, it were not the simplest, strongest, and most omnipotent origin.

Chaldean: I am of the opinion, that no one can disagree with this deliberation. However, that God had a Son and participant in His Divinity, this the Arabs and many with them assail.

Word: Some name unity Father, equality Son, and connection the Holy Spirit, since those designations, although they are not really proper, nevertheless correctly designate the Trinity. The Son proceeds from the Father and Love or Spirit from unity and the equality of the Son. That is, the nature of the Father proceeds to the Son in equality. Therefore, love and connection arise out of unity and equality.

Could one find simpler designations they were more suitable, as are, for example, unity, sameness, and identity. These designations seem to unfold the infinitely fecund simplicity of essence better. Also notice, that there is a certain fecundity in the essence of the rational soul, that is, mind, wisdom, and love or will, since the mind can develop intellect or wisdom from itself, and from both proceeds the will or love. This trinity of the unity of essence of the soul is the fecundity which man possesses in his similarity to the infinitely fecund and uncreated Trinity. Likewise every created thing bears the image of creative power in itself and possesses fecundity in its manner in greater or more distant similarity to the infinitely fecund Trinity, which creates everything. It is therefore not so, that the creature would have obtained his being only from divine being, but rather the creature has obtained its triply fecund being in its manner from the infinitely fecund triune Being. Without this fecund Being, neither the world could exist, nor would the creature exist in the best manner, in which it is possible.

IX

To this the **Jew** responded: The Trinity, exalted above all, which no one can deny, has been explained in the best possible way. One of the prophets revealed it to us briefly, when he said, God would have asked, how He, Who would have given the fecundity of generation, could be sterile. And although the Jews shun the Trinity, because in their eyes it signifies plurality, they will nevertheless willingly agree, as soon as they have seen, that it signifies completely simple fecundity.

Word: Also the Arabs and all wise men will easily see on the basis of these deliberations, that to reject the Trinity means, to deny divine fecundity and creative power and that to acknowledge the Trinity is the renunciation of a plurality and community of gods. That fecundity, which is also a trinity, brings it about, that it is unnecessary, to have several gods, which mutually support each other in the creation of everything, for the one infinite fecundity suffices, to create all that which can be created.

The Arabs can grasp the truth much better in this way, as when they say in their manner, God would have essence and soul, and add thereto, that He would possess word and spirit. For if one says God would have a soul, then this soul cannot be understood except as the reason or Word, which is God. That is, reason is nothing other than the Word. And what is the Holy Spirit of God other than the love, which is God?

Nothing is truly verified about the completely simple God that is not He Himself. If it is true that God has the Word, then it is also true that the Word is God. If it is true that God has spirit, then it is true that the Spirit is God. Having does not befit God in the proper sense, since He Himself is everything; thus having in God is being. Therefore, the Arab does not deny that God is mind and from this the Word or wisdom is generated and from both the Spirit or love proceeds. This is that Trinity which was explained above and is posited by Arabs, even though most of them do not perceive that they acknowledge the Trinity.

Likewise you Jews also find in your prophets that the Heavens are formed by the Word of God and by His spirit. In the manner in which the Arabs and Jews deny the Trinity, it must certainly be denied by all. However, in the manner in which the truth of the Trinity was unfolded above, it must necessarily be accepted by all.

X

To this the **Scythian** responded: There can be no hesitancy in the adoration of the completely simple Trinity, which even now all those adore, who venerate the gods. The wise men say, God is the creator of both sexes and He is love; thereby they wish to explain the infinitely fecund Trinity of the Creator, as well as they can. Others assert that God, who be exalted above all, would exert the intellect or reason from Himself. They designate Him as God of God and as the Creator-God, since everything created has a cause and rea-

son, as to why it is this and not that.

The one infinite reason of all things is therefore God. However, the reason, which is *logos* or Word, emanates from that which produces it, such that, if the Omnipotent produces the Word, it becomes in the thing that which is enfolded in the Word; likewise if the Omnipotent says: Let there be light, the light enfolded in the Word thus exists actually. This Word of God is intellectual, such that a thing exists in reality, as soon as it is conceived as existing in His intellect.

They furthermore say, that the spirit of connection proceeds third in order. The latter connects all to one, so that there would be unity as the unity of the universe. That is, they posit a world soul or spirit, which connects everything and by means of which every creature obtains participation in the world order, in that it is a part of the universe. It is therefore necessary, that this spirit itself exists in the origin of the origin. Moreover, love connects. Therefore this spirit, whose power is diffused throughout the universe, can be called the love, which is God or charity. Thus, the connection through which the parts are connected to the one or the whole, and without which there would be no perfection, has God as its origin. In this manner one sees clearly, that all wise men touch upon something of the Trinity in unity. Therefore, when they shall hear the same explanation, which we have heard, they shall rejoice and praise God.

The **Gaul** responded: I have also occasionally heard the following argumentation among the learned: Eternity is either ungenerated or generated or neither ungenerated nor generated. I see that ungenerated eternity can rationally be called omnipotent Father, whereas the generated can be called Word or Son, and the neither ungenerated nor generated love or Holy Spirit, since the latter proceeds from both; it is neither ungenerated, since it is not the Father, nor generated, since it is not the Son, but rather proceeds from both.

Eternity is therefore single, and it is threefold and completely simple. The one deity is threefold, the one essence is threefold, the one life is threefold, the one potency is threefold, and the one virtue is threefold. In this deliberation I have now progressed so far, that that which was obscure, is clear as light in respect to the extent of our current understanding.

However, the greatest contradiction still remains in this world, since some assert, the Word would have become flesh, in order to redeem all; the others, however, think otherwise. Therefore it is necessary, to inform ourselves as to how we can attain concord in this difficulty.

Word: The Apostle Peter has undertaken to elucidate this part of our dialogue. Listen to him. He will instruct sufficiently concerning that which is obscure to you.

XI

And **Peter** appeared in their midst and began in the following way:

Peter: All diversity of opinion regarding the incarnation

of the Word seems to be of the following variety: First we have those who say, the Word is not God. This question has previously been answered, since the Word of God can only be God. This Word is reason. That is, the Word means *logos* in Greek, which is reason.

There is no doubt, that God, the creator of all rational souls and spirits, has reason. However this reason of God, as was explained above, is nothing other than God. Having coincides in God with being. That is, that One, from whom everything is, enfolds everything in Himself; He is everything in everything, since He is the Former of everything. Consequently He is the Form of forms. The latter, however, enfolds in Himself all formable forms.

The Word or reason, the infinite cause and the measure of all that can be, is therefore God. Therefore, those who admit that the Word is incarnate or human, must also acknowledge that that man whom they designate as the Word of God, is God.

At this point, the **Persian** spoke and said: Peter, the Word of God is God. How then could God, who is immutable, become not God, but rather a man, the Creator's creature? Nearly everyone denies that, except a few in Europe. And even if there are a few among us, who are called Christians, they agree with us, that it is impossible, that the infinite be finite and the eternal temporal.

Peter: This, i. e., that the eternal be temporal, I resolutely deny together with you. However since all of you, who adhere to Arab law, designate Christ as the Word of God—and you do that correctly—it is necessary, that you also acknowledge Him as God.

Persian: We acknowledge Him as the Word and the spirit of God, since among those, who are or were, no one possessed that excellence of the Word and of the spirit of God. Nevertheless, we do not therefore admit, that He has been God, for the latter knows no participant. So that we do not fall into a plurality of gods, we deny, that the former is God, but confess that he is nearest to God.

Peter: Do you believe in the human nature in Christ?

Persian: We believe and affirm, that this has truly been in Him and persisted.

Peter: Quite right. This nature, which is human, was not divine. And thus in everything which you see in Christ corresponding to His human nature, through which He was similar to other men, you have apprehended not Christ as God, but rather as man.

Persian: So it is.

Peter: Therein is no one of another opinion. Human nature was in Christ most perfectly. Through it He was a real man and mortal just as other men. According to this nature He was not, however, the Word of God. Tell me therefore: What do you intend, if you acknowledge Him as the Word of God?

Persian: We do not look at nature but rather at the grace, that is, we intend, that He has attained this lofty grace, that

God placed His Word in Him.

Peter: Has God not also placed His Word in a similar manner in the other prophets? For they all spoke through the Word of the Lord and were messengers of the Word of God.

Persian: So it is. However Christ is the greatest of all prophets. Therefore, it befits him in the proper manner, to be called the Word of God, like all other prophets. In particular businesses and provinces, several missives contain the word of the king. However, there is only one missive, which contains the word of the king, by which he rules the whole kingdom, that is, because it contains the law and precept, which all must obey.

Peter: It appears, that thou hast given us a good similitude for our purpose; the word of the king is written on various pieces of paper, however, these pieces do not change into another nature. They maintain the same nature, which they had, before the word was inscribed. Thus you say, human nature would be maintained in Christ.

Persian: That we do.

Peter: Very well. But notice the difference which exists between a missive and the heir of the king. In the latter, the king's own word is alive, free, and unlimited, however, not in the missive.

Persian: That I acknowledge. If the king sends his heir to the kingdom, then the latter bears the living and unlimited word of his father.

Peter: Is the Word not the true heir, who is neither messenger nor envoy, neither letter nor missive? And are not all the words of messengers and missives enfolded in the word of the heir? And although the heir of the kingdom is not the father, but rather the son, he is not different from the regal nature; rather, he is the heir on account of this equality.

Persian: I understand very well. However, there remains a difficulty: The king and his son are two different men. Therefore we do not admit, that God possesses a son. That is, the son would be another God than the father, just as the son of the king is another man than the father.

Peter: Thou impugnest the similitude well. It is not correct, if thou attendest to the substituted persons. However, if thou removest the numerical diversity of the substituted persons and reflectest on the potency which lies in the regal dignity of the father and of the son as his heir, then thou seest, that that regal power is one and the same in the father and in the son; in the father it is as in the ungenerated, in the son it is as in the generated or living word of the father.

Persian: Continue!

Peter: Therefore, that absolute regal power is ungenerated and generated, and the ungenerated shall summon to the society of connatural and generated succession, one who is by his nature different, so that the different nature may simultaneously and undividedly possess the kingdom in union with its nature. Then, do not the natural and the graced or adoptive successions concur in the one inheritance?

Persian: It is manifest.

Peter: Likewise, sonship and adoption are also united in the one succession of the one king. However, the succession of adoption does not exist in itself, but rather in succession of sonship. Adoption, which does not achieve succession through its own nature, must, if it would attain succession in the existence of sonship, endeavor to obtain it not in itself, but rather in the existence of that which succeeds through nature. Therefore, if adoption, since it succeeds with sonship in the attainment of the completely simple and indivisible inheritance, obtains succession not from itself, but rather from sonship, the adoptive and the natural successor can not be different, even though the nature of adoption and the natural are different.

How shall both concur in the succession of the indivisible inheritance, if the adoptive son were separated and did not subsist in the one and the same hypostasy with the natural son? We must therefore maintain, that in Christ the human nature is united to the Word or the divine nature, such that the human does not pass over into the latter, but rather adheres thus to it indissolubly, so that it is not separate in itself, but becomes a person in the divine nature; so that the human nature, which is now summoned to the succession of eternal life with the divine, can achieve immortality in the divine.

XII

Persian: I grasp that very well. However, clarify what has already been said, by means of another intelligible example.

Peter: It is impossible to form precise similitudes. However, behold: Is wisdom in itself an accident or substance?

Persian: As it is in itself, it is substance, as it occurs in another, it is an accident.

Peter: In all wise men, all wisdom comes from that which is wisdom per se, since it is God.

Persian: This has been demonstrated.

Peter: Is not one man wiser than another?

Persian: Certainly.

Peter: Whoever is wiser, is closer to wisdom per se, which is the absolute maximum. And whoever is less wise, is more distant from it.

Persian: That I admit.

Peter: However, according to his human nature, a man can never be so wise, that he could not be still wiser. For between contracted wisdom, i.e., human wisdom and wisdom per se, which is divine, maximum, and infinite wisdom, an infinite distance always remains.

Persian: That is similarly evident.

Peter: That is true in like manner of the absolute and of the contracted mastery. In absolute mastery, the art is infinite, in the contracted, the art is finite. Let us suppose, that the intellect of any man, possesses such mastery and such wisdom, that it is not possible, to have greater wisdom or mastery. This intellect then is to such a high degree united with wisdom per se or mastery per se, that this union could

not be greater. Would not this intellect achieve divine strength, in the strength of the united wisdom and mastery, which are maximal and with which it is united? And in a man, who possesses such an intellect, would not the intellectual nature of the man be united immediately with the divine nature or the eternal wisdom, the Word or omnipotent art?

Persian: I acknowledge all that. However, this union would still be one of grace.

Peter: If the union of the inferior nature with the divine were so great that it could not be greater, then it were united to it in personal unity. That is, as long as the inferior nature were not elevated into personal and hypostatic union with the superior, it could be greater. Therefore, as soon as the maximum union is posited, the inferior nature subsists in the superior, such that it adheres to it. That occurs not through nature, but through grace. This grace, however, is the maximum, which can not be greater. It is not separate from nature, since it is united with it. Therefore, even if human nature were united with the divine by means of grace, that grace, since it can not be greater, would nevertheless be immediately enclosed in nature.

Persian: Whatsoever thou mayest have said, to the effect that human nature in any man can be elevated through grace to union with divine nature, the man Christ can no sooner be called God than another saint, even though he is the most sacred among men.

Peter: If thou attendest to the fact that there is in Christ alone that highest height, which can not be greater and that maximum grace, which can not be greater and that maximum sanctity, and thus in respect to the rest; and attendest to the fact, that there can not be more than but one maximum height, which can not be greater—the same is true of grace and sanctity—and thereafter observest, that every height of every one of the prophets, whatsoever degree it may have had, is incomparably distant from that height, which can not be greater, such that for every degree of height these can be infinitely many greater or smaller between it and the sole-highest—the same is true of grace, sanctity, prudence, wisdom, mastery, and every single thing—then thou seest quite clearly, that it can only be Christ, in whom human nature is united in unity with its supposition to the divine nature.

The Arabs also acknowledge the same, although the majority do not fully consider it. They say namely, that in this world and in the future, one Christ is the sole-highest and the Word of God. Even those who describe Christ as God and man, indeed say nothing other than that Christ be the sole-highest man and the Word of God.

Persian: It therefore appears that the Arabs, after they have considered well that union which is necessarily present in the highest, can be led to acceptance of this belief. For the unity of God, which they endeavor to guard with maximum strength, is in no way injured through this belief, but is saved. However, tell us how one can grasp, that that human nature obtains existence not in itself, but rather through its adher-

ence to the divine.

Peter: Listen to the following example, even though it is not very precise. A magnetic stone attracts iron upward. And whilst it adheres to the air around the magnet, the nature of the iron does not subsist in its own weighty nature. Otherwise, that is, it would not hang in the air, but rather, according to its own nature, fall in the direction of the center of the earth. Through adherence to the magnet, the iron hangs in the air by means of the strength of the magnet's nature, not however by means of the strength of its own nature, in consequence of which it could not be there. However, the cause whereby the nature of the iron is thus inclined toward the nature of the magnet, lies in the fact that the iron has the similitude of the magnet's nature in itself, from which it shall have taken its origin. Therefore, if the intellectual human nature were most closely bound to the divine nature, from which it has received its being, it would be inseparably bound to it just as to the source of its life.

Persian: I see that.

Peter: There is still a large group of Arabs, who acknowledge Christ would have raised the dead and created birds from clay and much else, which they expressly say, that Jesus Christ, as He who had the power therefore, would have done. On this basis, they can very easily be won over, since it can not be denied, that He has done this in the strength of the divine nature, to which the human was united in the manner of the supposition. The power of Christ, with which He commanded that that occur which has occurred, according to the Arabs' acknowledgment, could not be according to human nature, unless the human would have been received in union with the divine, in whose power it lies to so command.

Persian: This, and much else that is described in the Koran, the Arabs affirm of Christ. However, it will be more difficult to lead the Jews than all others to the belief in these things, since they expressly admit nothing regarding Christ.

Peter: In their writings they have everything concerning Christ. However, since they follow the literal sense, they do not want to understand. This resistance of the Jews, however, does not impede concord. That is, they are few and can not bring the whole world into disorder with arms.

XIII

The Syrian responded to this: Peter, to begin with, I have heard that greater concord could be obtained among every religious group on the basis of their presuppositions. Tell us now, how this shall be realized in respect to this point.

Peter: I will. However, first tell me: Is not God alone eternal and immortal?

Syrian: I believe so, for everything besides God has originated. Because it therefore has an origin, it will also have an end corresponding to its nature.

Peter: Does not nearly every religion—that of the Jews, the Christians, the Arabs, and of many other men—hold,



The Transfiguration of Christ (detail) by Raphael. "Does not nearly every religion hold that the mortal human nature of every man is resurrected after temporal death to everlasting life?"



Leonardo da Vinci's Adoration of the Magi, 1480-82. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. "All who believe, that Christ would have come, acknowledge, that He is born of the Virgin Mary."

that the mortal human nature of every man is resurrected after temporal death to everlasting life?

Syrian: So one believes.

Peter: Therefore, all these religions acknowledge that human nature must be united to the divine and immortal nature. For how else would human nature pass over into immortality, if it did not adhere to the divine in inseparable union?

Syrian: Belief in the Resurrection necessarily presupposes this.

Peter: If the belief therefore bespeaks this, then human nature is united with the divine for the first time in some man. This occurs in that one who is the countenance of all people and the highest Messiah and Christ, as Arabs and Jews call Christ. The latter, however, who in the opinion of all is nearest to God, will be the one in whom human nature is united for the first time with God. He is therefore the savior and mediator of all in whom human nature, which is one and through which all men are men, is united to the divine and immortal nature, so that all men, who are of the same nature, attain resurrection from death.

Syrian: I understand, that thou wouldst say: The belief in the resurrection from death presupposes the union of human nature with the divine, without this union such a belief were impossible. This is the case, so thou assertest, in Christ. Therefore, this belief presupposes him.

Peter: Correct. And from this, one can see how all promises which are found among the Jews are reaffirmed in the belief in the Messiah or mediator. Through him alone could, and can, those promises be fulfilled, as far as they concern eternal life.

Syrian: How is it with other religious bodies?

Peter: Similar. For all men strive and hope for nothing other than eternal life in their human nature. They institute ceremonies to purify souls and sacrifices, in order to be better adapted in their nature to that eternal life. Men desire the beatitude which is eternal life, not in another nature, but in their own. Man wants to be nothing but man, not an angel or another nature. He wants, however, to be a happy man, who attains the highest felicity.

This felicity is nothing other than enjoyment and the union of human life with its primary source, from which that

life emanates. It is divine and immortal life. However, how were this possible to man, if it were not granted to one, who shares the same nature with all, to be elevated to such union, and through whom, as if through their mediator, all men could achieve the ultimate goal of their desires? And this one is the way, since he is the man, through whom every man has access to God, who is the goal of all their desires. It is therefore Christ, who is presupposed by all who hope to achieve ultimate felicity.

Syrian: This pleases me very well. For, if the human intellect believes it can achieve union with wisdom where it obtains the eternal sustenance of its life, then it presupposes that the intellect of some highest man achieves that union in the highest measure and has attained that highest mastery, through which every other mastery hopes to come to this wisdom in a similar manner. If he did not believe that this were possible in the highest of all men, then he would hope in vain. And since the hope of all is in being able to attain that felicity, on account of which every religion exists—and there is no deception in this, since this hope stems from an innate desire which is common to all, and religion ensues from it, which is innate to all in a similar manner—I see that this master and mediator who possesses the summit of the perfection of human nature and dominion, is presupposed by all.

But the Jews say, to be sure, that this prince of nature, in whom all deficiency of mankind is removed, be not yet born, but will one day be born.

Peter: It suffices, that both Arabs as well as the Christians and all those who have borne witness to it in their blood, because of that which the prophets have proclaimed of Him, and which He Himself, whilst He abided in this world, has effected beyond the strength of all men, acknowledge that He would have come.

XIV

Spaniard: There is indeed yet another difficulty regarding the Messiah, of whom the greater part of the world acknowledges, that He would have come, namely in respect to His birth. Whereas Christians and Arabs are of the opinion, He would be born of the Virgin Mary, others hold this to be impossible.

Peter: All who believe that Christ would have come, acknowledge that He is born of the Virgin Mary. For since He is the ultimate perfection of nature and the sole-highest, which father's son should He then be? Every generating father is in the perfection of nature so far distant from the ultimate perfection, that he can not impart to the son this ultimate perfection, beyond which there can be none higher and which is not possible to a single man. Only that father can do this, who is the Creator of nature. Therefore, the highest has no other father than Him, from whom all paternity has its source. Therefore, in divine strength the highest is conceived in the womb of the Virgin. The highest fecundity

is united with virginity in this Virgin. Therefore, Christ is born to us, such that He stands nearest to all men. Namely, He has Him for His Father, from whom every human father obtains his paternity. He has her for His mother, who has been united with no man in the flesh, so that in this way everyone finds His nature in ultimate perfection through the nearest union in Christ.

Turk: A not-insignificant difference of opinion still remains. Whereas the Christians say, that Christ was crucified by the Jews, there are others who deny this.

Peter: That many deny the crucifixion of Christ and say, that He still lives and will return at the time of the Antichrist, is due to the fact that they are ignorant of the mystery of death. Since He will come, as they say, they believe, that when He comes back, He will come back in mortal flesh, as if He could not otherwise fight the Antichrist. That they deny His Crucifixion by the Jews, they appear to do so out of reverence for Christ, as if to suggest that such men would have no power over Christ.

However, one takes note, that one must rightly give credence to those multifarious reports and the proclamation of the Apostles, who have died for the truth, i.e., that Christ has died thus. Likewise, the prophets also predicted, that Christ would have to be condemned to the most ignominious death, which was death on the cross.

The reason for this is the following: Sent by God, the Father, Christ came, in order to announce the Kingdom of Heaven. What He said of this kingdom could be confirmed in no better way than through the testimony of His blood. Therefore, in order to be completely obedient to the Father and to provide all certitude for the truth, which He proclaimed, He has died. He took upon Himself the most ignominious death, so that no man might refuse to accept the truth, since one knows that Christ has voluntarily taken death upon Himself as testament to the truth.

He preached the Kingdom of Heaven and gave notice, how the man who is fit for this kingdom could attain it. In comparison to this kingdom, the life of this world, which is so tenaciously loved by all, is to be deemed as nothing. And so that one would know that the truth be that life of the Kingdom of Heaven, He gave up the life of this world for the truth, so that He would thus in the most perfect manner proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven and liberate the world of the ignorance, in which it prefers this life to the future one. He wished to sacrifice Himself for the many, so that exalted thus before the eyes of all upon the cross, He would bring all to belief and clarify the joyful tidings, comfort the pusillanimous, and freely give Himself for the redemption of the many, and do everything in the best way, in which it could be done, so that man thus achieved belief in salvation, hope in its fulfillment, and charity through fulfillment of the commands of God.

Therefore, would the Arabs attend to the fruit of the death of Christ and see in it that it was incumbent upon Him as sent



Berlin, Gemäldegalerie

Moses Destroying the Tablets of the Law, by Rembrandt, 1659. "It is proper to fulfill the commandments of God."

by God, to sacrifice Himself, in order to fulfill the desire of His Father and that there was nothing more glorious for Christ, than to die even the most ignominious death for truth and obedience, then they would not take away the glory of the cross from Christ, through which He earned the merit of being the highest and becoming exalted above all in the glory of the Father.

If Christ further proclaimed that men will achieve immortality after their death in the Resurrection, how would the

world have been able to achieve better certainty concerning it, than by means of the fact that He Himself has died of His own will, is resurrected, and appeared among the living? Namely, the world was then given ultimate certainty, when it heard that the man Christ, who had died on the cross in the presence of all, was resurrected from the dead and lives—according to the testimony of many, who saw Him alive and died in this testimony, in order to be trustworthy witnesses to His Resurrection. This was the most perfect evangelization,

which in itself revealed Christ. It could not be more perfect. However, without death and Resurrection, it would always have been able to be more perfect.

Therefore, whoever believes, that Christ has fulfilled the will of God in the most perfect manner, must thereby also acknowledge all this, without which, the evangelization of the joyful tidings would not have been the most perfect.

One notices furthermore, that the Kingdom of Heaven was concealed from all until Christ. It is indeed the news of Christ, to proclaim the kingdom unknown to all. There was neither faith, nor hope of attaining the Kingdom of Heaven, nor could it be loved by anyone, since it was completely unknown. It was also not possible that any man would come to that kingdom, as long as human nature had not yet been elevated to that exaltation, so that it would participate in the divine nature. Christ has therefore made the Kingdom of Heaven accessible to us in every way. Yet no one is able to enter it, unless he lays aside the kingdom of this world through death. Therefore, the mortal must lay aside mortality, that is, the possibility of dying. This can occur only through death. Then can he clothe himself with immortality.

As mortal man, Christ would not yet have laid aside His mortality, as long as He had not yet died. Likewise He would also not yet have entered the Kingdom of Heaven, in which no mortal can be. Therefore, as long as He, the first-fruit and the first born of all men, has not yet opened up the Kingdom of Heaven, our nature is not united with God and led into the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, no man could be in the Kingdom of Heaven, as long as the human nature, which is united with God, would not have been led into the Kingdom of Heaven. All men who believe in the Kingdom of Heaven assert the contrary. That is, all believe that certain saints of their religion had achieved felicity. The belief of all, therefore, who acknowledge that there are saints in eternal glory, therefore presupposes that Christ has died and ascended into Heaven.

XV

German: That is all very well. I see a not insignificant difference of opinion in respect to felicity. To the Jews, only temporal things, which consist of sensuous goods, are promised under their law. To the Arabs, only carnal, albeit eternal goods have been promised under their law, which is written in the Koran. The Gospel, on the other hand, promises angelicality, i.e., that men will be similar to the angels, who have nothing carnal in themselves.

Peter: What can one conceive in this world, for which the desire does not decrease, but rather constantly increases?

German: All temporal things die away, only the intellectual do not. Eating, drinking, luxuriating, and more of the same, please at one time and displease at another, and are unstable. However, knowledge and understanding and to see the truth with the eyes of the mind are always pleasant. And the older the man becomes, the more this pleases him and the more he obtains of it, the stronger becomes his appetite

to possess it.

Peter: If, therefore, the desire and nourishment shall be eternal, the nourishment can be neither temporal nor sensible, but rather only intellectual life. Hence, although the promise of a paradise, where there are streams of wine and honey and a multitude of virgins, is found in the book of the Koran, there are nonetheless many men in this world who abominate this. How will the latter then be happy, if they attain that there, which they do not wish here? It is said in the Koran, that one will find wonderfully beautiful, dark-skinned maidens, with eyes which have large, bright white eyeballs. No German would strive for such a maiden in this world, even if he had surrendered to the lusts of the flesh. One must therefore understand those promises as similitudes.

At another point, the Koran prohibits coitus and all other pleasures of the flesh in churches, or synagogues, or mosques. However, one can not believe, that the mosques are holier than paradise. How shall that be prohibited in the mosque, which is promised yonder in paradise?

In other locations, the Koran says that everything is found there, that we yearn for here, since the fulfillment of all must take place there. Thereby, it reveals sufficiently what it wants to say, that the like is found there. For since these things are so much desired in this world, provided that an equal desire exists in the other world, they must be exquisite and abundant there; however different, for in this similitude it is not able to express that that life be the completion of all desires. Nor did it wish to express to uneducated people other, more hidden things, but rather only that which appears felicitous according to the senses, so that the people who do not value the things of the spirit, would not despise the promises.

The whole concern of him who wrote that book, therefore appears to have been primarily to avert the people from idolatry. To this end, it made these kinds of promises and it put everything together. However, it did not condemn the Gospel, but rather praised it, and thereby intimated that the felicity which is promised in the Gospel would be in no way less than that corporeal felicity. The initiated and the wise men among them know that this is true. Avicenna prefers the intellectual felicity of the vision or enjoyment of God and the truth incomparably to the felicity described in the book of the Arabs. Nevertheless, he adhered to that law. Likewise did the other wise men.

Therefore, there will be no difficulty in uniting all religions. One must only say that that felicity transcends everything that can be described or said, since it is the fulfillment of all desires, the attainment of the good in its source, and of life in immortality.

German: How is it then with the Jews, who do not accept the promise of the Kingdom of Heaven, but rather only the promise of temporal things?

Peter: The Jews very often take death upon themselves

out of observations of the law and its consecrations. If they did not believe that they would attain felicity after death, in that they prefer zeal for the law to life, then they would not die. The belief of the Jews therefore does not mean that there would be no eternal life and that they could not attain that life. Otherwise, no one would die for the law. However, the felicity which they expect, they do not expect on the basis of the performance of the law, since that law does not promise this to them, but rather on the basis of the belief which presupposes Christ, as one can find it stated above.

XVI

Tatar: I have heard much here, that has been previously unknown to me. The Tatars, who are a numerous and simple people, who worship the one God above others, are astounded over the variety of rites which others have, who worship one and the same God with them. They laugh at the fact that many Christians, all Arabs, and Jews are circumcised, that others are marked on their brows with a brand, and others are baptized. Furthermore, there is great diversity in respect to matrimony; the one has one wife, another is legally married to one wife, nevertheless has several concubines, yet another has several lawful wives. As regards sacrifice, the rites are so diverse, that one can not even enumerate them. Among these various forms of sacrifice, there is the Christian sacrifice, in which they offer bread and wine, and say it be the body and blood of Christ. That they eat and drink this sacrifice after the oblation, seems most abominable. That is, they devour what they worship. How in these cases, which, moreover, are varied by location and time, a union can be realized, I do not grasp. However, as long as there is not a union, the persecution will not cease. That is, diversity produces division and enmity, hatred, and war.

Then **Paul**, teacher of the people, commissioned by the Word began to speak.

Paul: It must be shown, that the salvation of the soul is granted, not on the basis of works, but rather on account of faith. Abraham, the father of the faith of all the believing—be they Christians, Arabs, or Jews—believed in God and he was reckoned to be justified; the soul of the just will inherit eternal life. If that is admitted, then the various kinds of rites are not disturbing, for they are instituted and understood as sensible signs of the verity of faith. The signs, not the designated, assume variability.

Tatar: Please explain, how faith saves.

Paul: If God promises something by virtue of His pure liberality and grace, must one then not believe Him, who has the power, to give everything, and who is truthful?

Tatar: Certainly so. No one, who believes in Him, can be deceived. And whoever does not believe in Him, would be unworthy to receive any gift of grace.

Paul: What therefore justifies him, who attains justice?

Tatar: Not merits, or else it were not grace, but rather something owed.

Paul: Very well. However, since no living being is justified in the sight of God on the basis of his works, but rather through grace, the Almighty gives him, to whom He wishes to give, that, which He wishes to give. If therefore someone shall be worthy of obtaining the promise, which is issued out of pure grace, then it is necessary, that he believe in God. In this therefore is he justified, since he obtains the promise only on the grounds, that he believes in God and expects, that the Word of God takes place.

Tatar: After God has promised, it is just, that His promise be kept. Whoever believes in God, is therefore justified more through the promise, than through the faith.

Paul: God, who promised Abraham a seed in which all would be blessed, justified Abraham, so that he attained this promise. However, had Abraham not believed in God, then he would have attained neither the justification nor the promise.

Tatar: Indeed.

Paul: The faith, therefore, in Abraham only effected that the fulfillment of the promise was a just one. Otherwise, it would neither have been a just one, nor would it have been fulfilled.

Tatar: What therefore has God promised?

Paul: God promised Abraham, to give him a seed in Isaac, in whom all people would be blessed. This promise was issued, when in accordance with the common course of nature it was impossible for Sara, his wife, to become pregnant by him and to give birth. However, because he believed, he obtained his son, Isaac. Consequently, God tempted Abraham to tender and sacrifice to Him his son Isaac, in whom the promise of the seed had been fulfilled. Abraham obeyed God; he nonetheless believed that the future promise would be fulfilled even in the dead son, and the latter would be raised. From this, God saw Abraham's great faith. He was justified and the promise of the one seed, who descended from him through Isaac, was fulfilled.

Tatar: Who is this seed?

Paul: It is Christ. In Him all people attained the divine blessing.

Tatar: Which blessing is that?

Paul: The divine blessing is the ultimate desire or felicity, which is called eternal life and concerning which thou hast heard enough above.

Tatar: Thou wouldst say therefore, that God in Christ has promised us the blessing of eternal felicity?

Paul: I wish to do just that. For this reason, it is necessary to believe in God, just as Abraham has believed, so that he who so believes would be justified with the faithful Abraham in obtaining the promise in the one seed of Abraham, i.e., in Jesus Christ. This promise is the divine blessing, which enfolds every good in itself.

Tatar: Wouldst thou therefore say, that this faith alone justifies assumption into eternal life?

Paul: I wish to do that.



National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

The Apostle Philip Baptizing the Ethiopian Eunuch, drawing by Rembrandt. This Biblical episode was often interpreted as demonstrating the universality of Christian redemption to all human beings, regardless of their origin or physical condition.

Tatar: How wouldst thou impart to the simple Tatars the understanding of this, so as to comprehend, that it is Christ, in whom they can attain felicity?

Paul: Thou hast heard, that not only Christians, but also Arabs, acknowledge Christ be the highest of all, who were in this or a future age will be, and that He be the countenance of the peoples. Therefore, if the blessing has been given for all people in a single seed, then it can only be Christ.

Tatar: What indication canst thou adduce for it?

Paul: The testimony of the Arabs as well as of the Christians, that the spirit which vivifies the dead is the spirit of Christ. Therefore, if the spirit of life is in Christ, which has the power to vivify whomever it wishes, then it is the spirit without which no one who has died resuscitates or any spirit can love eternally. That is, the spirit of Christ is inhabited by the plentitude of divinity and of grace, and from this plentitude all who shall be saved receive the grace of salvation.

Tatar: It pleases me to have heard this from thee, the teacher of the people, since it suffices for our purpose in conjunction with that which I have heard above. I also see, that this faith is necessary for salvation. Without it no one can be saved. But I ask thee, whether faith suffices?

Paul: It is impossible, that someone please God without faith. However, it must be a formed faith, for without works

it is dead.

Tatar: What are these works?

Paul: If one believes in God, one keeps His commandments. For how would one believe, God be God, if one were not to take care to fulfill that which he prescribes?

Tatar: It is proper to fulfill the commandments of God. But the Jews say that they would have received these commandments from Moses, the Arabs say they would have obtained them from Mohammed, and the Christians from Jesus. And there are perhaps other nations, who honor their prophets, through whose hands they have obtained according to their words the divine precepts. Therefore, how shall we achieve concord here?

Paul: The divine commandments are very brief and are all well known and common in every nation, for the light that reveals them to us, is innate to the rational soul. In us God says, to love Him, from Whom we received being and to do nothing to another, except that which we wish done to us. Love is therefore the fulfillment of the law of God and all laws are reduced to it.

Tatar: I do not doubt, that both faith as well as the law of love, of which thou hast spoken, will be accepted by the Tatars. But I entertain great doubt in respect to the rites and practices. I do not know how they shall accept circumcision, which they deride.

Paul: The truth of our salvation does not depend upon accepting circumcision. Indeed circumcision does not save and salvation exists without it. However, he who does not believe that circumcision is necessary for salvation, but permits it to occur in order that he might be in conformity with Abraham and his successors, is not condemned on account of circumcision, if he has the faith, of which we have spoken above. Thus, Christ was circumcised and many Christians after Him, while hitherto the Ethiopians mentioned by St. James and others, were not circumcised, as if it be a sacrament necessary to salvation. Yet, how peace can be preserved among the faithful, if some are circumcised, and others not, remains a great question. If therefore the greater part of the world does without circumcision, one should attend to the fact, that it is not necessary, so that consequently—as I indeed judge opportune—the smaller part adapts to the larger, with which it is united in faith, in order to preserve the peace. Indeed, even if the larger part would have to conform to the smaller for the sake of peace and would accept circumcision, I would decide that it thus occurs, so that peace would be established on the basis of mutual communication. Thus, the peace would be better and firmer if the other nations would accept the faith of the Christians and the Christians would accept circumcision from the latter. However, I am of the opinion that the realization of these ideas is difficult. It should therefore suffice to establish peace in faith and in the law of love, whilst the rites are tolerated from this time forth.

XVII

Armenian: How thinkest thou, should one regard baptism, since it is considered among Christians to be a sacrament necessary for salvation?

Paul: Baptism is the sacrament of faith. Whoever believes justification can be attained in Jesus Christ, also believes ablation of sins is attained thereby. Every believer will express this cleansing, which is manifested in the baptismal bathing. That is, baptism is nothing other than the confession of faith in the sacramental sign. It were the non-believer who did not wish to confess his faith in the word and in the sign, which have been instituted thereby by Christ. Among both Hebrews as well as Arabs there are baptismal bathings, in order to express devotion on account of religion. It will not be difficult for these to accept a cleansing ritual instituted by Christ for the profession of faith.

Armenian: It appears to be absolutely necessary, to accept this sacrament, since it is necessary for salvation.

Paul: Faith is necessary for adults, who can be saved without the sacrament, if they can not obtain it. However, where they can in fact obtain it, one can not call them believers, who do not wish themselves to appear as such by means of the sacrament of regeneration.

Armenian: What about children?

Paul: They will acquiesce without difficulty, to letting

children be baptized. If they have taken it upon themselves on account of religion, to circumcise male children on the eighth day, then the commutation of the circumcision into baptism will be agreeable to them. One will give them the option, whether or not to be content with baptism alone.

XVIII

Bohemian: It will be quite possible, to achieve concord in everything, that was previously stated. But it will be very difficult as regards sacrifice. For we know, that the Christians can not give up the offering of bread and wine as the sacrament of the Eucharist, in order to please the others, since this sacrament was instituted by Christ. However, that the other nations, which do not have such a sacrifice, will accept this kind of sacrifice, is not easy to believe, above all, since they say, it is insane to believe in the conversion of the bread into the flesh of Christ and of the wine into his blood and afterward to devour the sacrament.

Paul: This sacrament of the Eucharist represents nothing other than that we achieve by grace the refreshment of eternal life in Christ, just as in this world we are refreshed through bread and wine. If we therefore believe that Christ is food for the mind, then we obtain him under the forms, which feed the body. And since it is necessary, to be in agreement in the faith, that we obtain nourishment of spiritual life in Christ, why then should we not visibly show, that we believe in the sacrament of the Eucharist? It is to be hoped, that in this world all men of faith may through faith taste that food, which will be in truth the food of our lives in the other world.

Bohemian: How will one persuade all people, that in the sacrament of the Eucharist the substance of the bread is converted into the body of Christ?

Paul: Whoever is a believer knows, that the Word of God will transfer us in Jesus Christ—since nothing is impossible for God—out of the misery of this world to the sonship of God and to possession of eternal life. If we therefore believe and hope for this, then we doubt not, that the Word of God can change bread into the body according to the ordination of Christ. If nature accomplishes this in the living being, how then shall the Word, through which God has created time, not be able to accomplish this? The necessity of faith therefore demands believing this. For if it is possible, that we, the sons of Adam, who are made out of earth, are changed in Jesus Christ through the Word of God into sons of the immortal God—and we believe this and we hope for the future—and if it is possible, that we then like Jesus will be the Word of God the Father, then we must also believe similarly, that the Transubstantiation of the bread into the body and of the wine into blood is possible through the same Word, through which bread is bread and wine is wine, flesh is flesh and blood is blood, and through which nature converts food into the fed.

Bohemian: This conversion of the substance of bread is difficult to comprehend.

Paul: For faith it is very easy. For this is only comprehensible to the mind, which alone looks at substance as the that-it-is and not as what-it-is. For substance precedes every accident. And since consequently the substance is neither qualitative nor quantitative, and it alone is converted, so that it henceforth is no longer the substance of bread, but rather the substance of the body, this conversion can exist only spiritually, since it is totally remote from everything, which is attainable for sensuousness. Consequently, the quantity of the flesh will also not be augmented by virtue of this conversion, nor is it multiplied numerically. Therefore, there is only one substance of the flesh, in which the substance of the bread is converted, even though this bread is sacrificed in diverse locations and there are many loaves, which are placed on the sacrificial altar.

Bohemian: I grasp your teaching, which is very agreeable to me; namely, that that sacrament is the sacrament of the sustenance of eternal life, through which we obtain the inheritance of the Son of God in Jesus Christ, the Son of God; that a similitude thereof is given us in the sacrament of the Eucharist; that it is only obtained in the mind and only tasted and grasped in faith. However, what if they do not comprehend this mystery? The uneducated will perhaps not only abhor believing this, but also abhor accepting so great a sacrament.

Paul: In its sensible signs this sacrament, as long as faith exists, is not of such necessity, that without it there would be no salvation. Namely, it suffices to believe in salvation and thus to eat the food of life. Therefore there is no necessary law concerning its administration; if, to whom and how often it should be given to people. If therefore someone, who has faith, regards himself unworthy to approach the table of the highest King, then this humility is preferably to be praised. Therefore in respect to the usage and rite of this sacrament, one will be able to establish that, which appears to be suitable to the leaders of the Church according to the time and place, as long as the faith is preserved, so that despite the diversity of rites, the peace of faith thus perseveres inviolate by means of a universal law.

XIX

Englander: What should be done concerning the other sacraments, namely Matrimony, Ordination of Priests, Confirmation, and Extreme Unction?

Paul: One ought to take into account the infirmity of man as much as possible, unless it contravenes eternal salvation. To demand exact conformity in everything, means rather to disturb the peace. Yet it is to be hoped, that concord is found in matrimony and in ordination. In all nations matrimony appears to have been introduced in some way by the law of nature, so that one man possesses only one true wife. Thus also the priesthood is similarly found in all religions. Concord therefore will be relatively easy to find in these common points. The Christian religion is proven in the judgment of

all others, to observe the most laudable purity in both sacraments.

Englander: What about fasts, ecclesiastical offices, abstinence from food and drink, the forms of prayer, and others of such kind?

Paul: Where no conformity in the manner of religious practice can be found, as long as faith and peace are preserved, one may indulge the nations in their devotions and ceremonies. Perhaps the devotion is even augmented by virtue of the diversity, since every nation will attempt, to produce its rite more splendidly with zeal and diligence, in order to outdo the others therein and thus to obtain greater merit with God and praise in the world.

After these things had been discussed with the wisemen of the nations, several books were produced by others, who

The King of Kings commanded, that the wisemen should return and lead the nations to the unity of the true worship of God. . . . they should gather together . . . and in the name of all accept the one faith and upon it establish eternal peace, so that the Creator of all, who be praised forever, be blessed in peace.

have written about the observances of the ancients; in every language there were excellent authors, like, for example, Marcus Varro among the Romans, Eusebius, who has catalogued diverse types of religion, among the Greeks and many others. In their examination it became apparent, that all diversity of religion is located more in the rites than in the worship of the one God, whom all have always from the inception presupposed and cherished in all worship, as could be found by means of a concerted comparison of all the writings; even if in their simplicity the people, seduced by the power of the Prince of Darkness, frequently are not mindful of what they do.

The harmonious agreement of religions was therefore concluded in the described way in the heaven of rationality. The King of Kings commanded, that the wisemen should return and lead the nations to the unity of the true worship of God and that the spirit of assistance should guide them and stand by them. Consequently, endowed with full authority for all, they should gather together in Jerusalem as the common center and in the name of all accept the one faith and upon it establish eternal peace, so that the Creator of all, who be praised forever, be blessed in peace.