Mediating Religious Cultures in Early Modern Europe

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Edited by

Torrance Kirby and Matthew Milner

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Matthew Milner
Torrance Kirby

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BL	British Library
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CH	Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. *De cœlesti hierarchia*. *Corpus Dionysiacum II.* Edited by Günther Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter. Berlin, 1991; *Complete Works*. Translation by Colm Luibhéid. New York, 1987.
DCC	Nicholas of Cusa, *De concordantia catholica. Opera Omnia iussu et auctoritate academiae litterarum heildelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita,* vol. 14. Edited by G. Kallen. Leipzig-Hamburg, 1939.
DDI	Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*. *Opera Omnia*…, Vol. 1. Edited by E. Hoffmann and R. Klibansky. Leipzig-Hamburg, 1932.
EEBO	*Early English Books Online*. Ann Arbor, Mich., 1999.
EH	Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*. *Corpus Dionysiacum II.* Edited by Günther Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter. Berlin, 1991; *Complete Works*. Translation by Colm Luibhéid. New York, 1987.
Inst.	John Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis*. 1559.
Letter to Rodrigo	Nicholas of Cusa, *Epistola ad Rodericum Sancium de Arevalo*. Latin text and English translation in *Nicholas of Cusa: Writings on Church and Reform.* Edited by Thomas Izbicki. Cambridge, Mass., 2008.
LW	*Luther's Works* (English translation). St Louis, Missouri, 1955-1886.
MNP	National Museum in Poznań

MT	Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, *De mystica theologia. Corpus Dionysiacum II.* Edited by Günther Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter. Berlin, 1991; *Complete Works.* Translation by Colm Luibhéid. New York, 1987.
NLS	National Library of Scotland
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by H.C.G. Matthew and Brian H. Harrison. Oxford, 2004.
PL	*Patrologia cursus completus, series Latina*. Edited by J.-P. Migne. Paris, 1844-1864.
Sigm.	Nicholas of Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*. Translation by Paul Sigmund. Cambridge, 1991.
STC	*A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475-1640.* 2nd edition. Edited by A. W. Pollard, G. R. Redgrave, and others. London, 1976.
WA	Martin Luther, *Werke*. Kritische Gesammtausgabe. Weimar, 1883–2007.
ZKW	Zamek Królewski w Warszawie (Royal Castle in Warsaw)

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, writing on early modern culture has turned from examining the impact and upheavals of the Reformation as the ruptured birth of the early modern out of the late medieval towards a striking emphasis on processes of continuity, transition, and adaptation. New histories of early modern literary, musical, and artistic life in Europe, moreover, are also returning to examine religious influences and confluences in serious and nuanced ways. No longer is the 'religious' seen as something profoundly institutional or doctrinaire, as evidenced in some tendencies in the last half of the twentieth century, but rather as a cultural and social phenomenon that exceeds the all too often rigid parameters of modern definitions. Younger scholars are increasingly offering analyses of late-medieval and early modern cultures and societies that position the ambiguities and vagaries of contemporary life at the forefront: translation, appropriation, and adaptation. Such approaches offer highly nuanced accounts that move well beyond the limits of traditional Christian historiography, and even the bounds of religious studies. At their centre is recognition that the scope of the religious can never be extricated from early modern culture. If we seek a *lingua franca* for the cultural self-understanding of the early modern period, despite its many conflicts and tensions, it remains ineluctably religious. Consequently, we know this language was not merely negotiated in explicitly religious contexts or venues, or even using explicitly religious topics. The early modern world wrestled with the radical challenges concerning the nature of belief beyond the confines of church or worship, but also within them. This vast process of negotiation was extremely complex and fuelled the social dynamics of early modern Europe. Without religion, in short, we cannot study or comprehend the myriad facets of early modern life, from markets, new forms of art, or associations.

In March 2012 the McGill Centre for Research on Religion (CREOR) in Montreal sponsored and hosted an invitational interdisciplinary symposium on the theme 'Religion and Modes of Cultural Mediation' in the late-medieval/early modern world, 1450-1700. Participants from the fields of Art History, English Literature, Early Modern History, Music, and Religious Studies representing several of Canada's research universities—Concordia University, University of Alberta, University of

British Columbia, University of Toronto, University of New Brunswick, and McGill University—were invited to address various and sundry intersections of religious themes with other realms of human activity in early modernity, and especially how cultural artefacts—whether in literature, art, or music—served to mediate religious concepts or contributed to the reconfiguration of beliefs or the redefinition of realms of inquiry such as the relationships between religious cultures and the practices and interests of the emerging new science.

Mediation lies at the heart of both the historical and theoretical conceits of the period. If we are to talk of appropriation and continuity, it finds it locus in how religious cultures mediated the past and the present, or as much, the divine through the worldly. Consequently discussions of how early modern men and women altered and reshaped their everyday lives to conform to the realities of religiously pluralistic societies are inherently ones that must find their foundation in the question of cultural mediation. Key to understanding how these processes of change emerged and were configured is consideration of the ways in which religious ideas and concepts moved and migrated from lived practices of everyday piety and belief through cultural media, contexts and discussions, to the more esoteric complexities of academic debates in a range of fields. While we must understand the ways in which religious life leaked out and was translated in a variety of contexts, we would be remiss to see mediation as merely a cultural process in European early modernity. Strikingly, mediation was also at the heart of the period's cultural tensions and preoccupations. We are faced, therefore, with both tracing a cultural dynamic and a cultural conceit or preoccupation when we consider mediation. How the unseen related to the visible world, or the sacred to the secular, were defining problems of the fifteenth through to the eighteenth centuries. In discussions of images, the Eucharist, suicide, music, or street lighting, whether or not the sensible natural world presented or represented an otherworldly divine, which could disrupt or erupt into human existence, or not, was the fundamental preoccupation of the age. How human societies conceive of mediation of the divine or the ethereal through human artifice is only overtaken, in terms of the topic, by conceptions of how the natural world presents or manifests the same. Yet even in contexts where unbelief (rather than disbelief) might be considered, we find the religious providing the fundamental terminology and categories for explicating the very theories and views which sought to undermine it as a valid aspect of human life: e.g. atheism. Each section of our volume takes up these themes in particular ways. We move from the core problem of sacramental and mystical mediation of the divine within the seemingly

strict parameters of eucharistic and devotional life through discussion of images and iconoclasm, music and word, to the more blurred contexts of death, street life, and atheism. We find that the very processes of adaption—even change itself—were framed by religious concepts and conceits. In many ways this progression from sacrament to atheism also reflects the tension between the two valences of mediation that run throughout the volume: mediation of the sacred as a contemporary cultural and intellectual problem and how religious culture operated and informed the widest array of social and cultural tensions in the period.

In many ways, divergent interpretations of the mystical and the sacramental underpin early modern contention concerning the mediation of the sacred. This cannot be viewed simply as a doctrinal or liturgical issue. Rather, as each contributor demonstrates, the sacramental pervaded early modern cultural forms and problems—whether in poetry or persecution. This translation moreover outlines how sacramental concepts of mediation played an important role in the understanding of artifice and practices of social power. We also find, consequently, that as much as modern scholars seek to construct easy polarities, contemporary sacramental doctrine was complex and extremely nuanced. Such complexities were not limited to theological discourse, but found expression within various contexts, indicating that as much as heady debates over sacramental presence might be, they were an essential component of social and cultural forms as much as theological contention. The philosopher and theologian Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) remains an exceptionally important figure in the transition from late-medieval to Renaissance thought. The central question of Joshua Hollmann's essay, the first of four in a series on 'Mysticism, Hierarchy, and the Sacraments', concerns Cusanus' controversial shift of his support away from the General Council to the pope. The interpretation of this move remains contested among Cusanus scholars, but it is widely agreed that it marks a decisive change in his general theological and political outlook. Hollmann argues that Cusanus' vexing move from Council to Pope reveals the centrality of mediation in his concept of religion both before and after he switched ecclesiastical allegiance. Written directly after the fall of Constantinople, *De pace fidei* (1453) unfolds in illumined revelation and imagined realization Cusanus' unique and universal conception of one religion in many rites as understood and mediated through the Word of God. For Cusanus, the hierarchical and dialectical Word of God mediates religious unity. Beyond the pragmatic and political factors for his move from council to pope there appears a metaphysical rationale which reveals the deep coherence of Cusanus' thought about the relationship between the one acting from

above and the many from below. This synthetic study of two of Cusanus' major writings, *De concordantia catholica* (1433), the most important work of political thought in the fifteenth century, and *De pace fidei*, the most important dialogue on religious unity in the fifteenth century, reveals an underlying hierarchical and hypostatic mediating principle, hitherto unexamined in Cusanus studies, which renders his controversial move from council to pope thoroughly consistent with his dynamic theology of the Word of God both during his service at the council Basel and later as cardinal of the Roman curia.

The *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola comprise a manual of devout activities: of meditation, contemplation, and prayer. Their aim is to instruct an exercitant in the proper function of these activities with a view to aligning the soul with the will of God and, ultimately, to achieving salvation. According to Rebecca Coughlin, Ignatius' approach to salvation in the *Exercises* has its roots in the religious practice, belief, and mysticism found in the work of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Various themes emerging in Ignatius' work of participation in God's plan for Salvation; of imitation of the divine, especially the life of Jesus; and of prayerful praise and reverence for God all have their source in medieval mysticism and practice. These themes can, in turn, be traced to ideas found in the mystical and ecclesiastical texts of the Pseudo-Areopagite. These include especially the focus in the *Spiritual Exercises* on the role of the church as mediator, including the particular mediating function of the liturgy and religious objects, and Ignatius' emphasis on contemplation as an active participation in God's saving work. By drawing out the Dionysian foundations of the thought of Ignatius Loyola, Coughlin's essay sheds new light on the way that medieval mysticism was taken up and transformed in the early modern period.

Shaun Ross explores John Donne's use of eucharistic imagery in his secular poetry. While literary historians of the early modern period in England have tended to ascribe to the theological developments of the Reformation an almost necessary teleological movement towards secularism, this kind of narrative has generally suggested that, in the early modern period, ideas about sacramentality, and with them, conceptions of the immanence of language, began to be destabilized and eventually abandoned altogether. Regina Schwartz, for example, in her recent book *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (2008), reads the ubiquitous eucharistic imagery in the poetry of John Donne as reflective of a traumatic disjunction between the believer and a God who is no longer bodily available in the transubstantiated eucharist. So it is that when Donne writes in 'Twicknam Garden', 'But O! self-

traitor, I do bring/The spider Love, *which transubstantiates all'* (5-7), he uses eucharistic imagery to mark a fundamentally unfulfillable desire. Read in conjunction with Donne's other presentations of the sacrament, Ross argues that these images in his so called 'secular' poetry cannot be interpreted simply as an elegiac nostalgia for a 'Catholic' sense of the relationship between signifier and signified, but rather draw on a variety of competing theological models of participation in the eucharist to explore similarly variegated paradigms of poetic affect.

In the fourth essay of this first part, Cheryl Petreman considers the matter of Christ's physical presence in the consecrated host. The Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation was difficult for lay folk to grasp. The idea that bread and wine were transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ, conflicted with immediate personal experience. To allay doubts some preachers repeated and embellished stories of host desecration, an imagined crime involving the theft and abuse of consecrated hosts. It was widely believed that since God was physically present the host would bleed or cry out to protest such treatment and alert Christians to its predicament. Between the mid-thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, Jews were sporadically accused of acquiring and desecrating hosts. Having confessed under torture to witnessing the expected miracles, they were then either expelled or eradicated. After the Reformation, Anabaptists directly challenged the theological assumptions which lay behind such accusations by purposely desecrating hosts in order to demonstrate that they were just bread. Since few Jews remained in Western Europe at this time, new 'witnesses' were sought by fervent Catholic and Lutheran preachers who still craved empirical verification of real presence through transubstantiation or consubstantiation. Petreman explores how 'witches' were made to confess to having desecrated the host as part of their pact with the devil. Witches were thought to abuse the host either as a deliberate insult to Christ or in the attempted manufacture of magical unguents.

While official sacramental life and the devotional prescriptions sharply focused the issue of mediation of divine grace and experience of the sacred, the problems traced by Ross, Petremann, Hollmann, and Coughlin bled outwards in profound ways. Perhaps none is more obvious than that of visuality; whether conceived of as figurative imagery or text, religious artwork at its core sought to offer viewers a glimpse of something unseeable, or graspable. Of course, the rub is in whether or not images or texts could adequately display or present the sacred, either as presenc, or message, to viewers and beholders. Much religious and cultural strife hung on these core questions, and scholars have spilt much ink on the subject of

imagery and iconoclasm. This said, our contributors add to the growing shift within early modern studies that reconfigures textual artwork as a kind of imagery. Appreciation of the visuality of textual representation, long the means of sacred art in Islam for instance, is only coming of age in the study of early modern European Christianity. With it we're finding strong continuities and confluences regardless of the iconoclastic fury of Protestants throughout the early modern period. Equally as important, however, is consideration of the ways images, whether textual or figurative, operated as objects, and how such objects were configured in the act of their being viewed.

In the first of a series of three essays on the theme 'Images and Iconoclasm', Tomasz Grusiecki argues that the epistemological shift leading to the birth of a new conceptual category of 'art' in early modernity cannot be fully understood without taking account of the visual culture of Poland-Lithuania. The critical potential of the images produced in this geographical locale, according to Grusiecki, lies in the coexistence of different confessional practices within the Polish-Lithuanian state, as well as fraught relationships between members of various religious and social groups. Such a culturally diverse milieu was particularly conducive to an intermixing of practices and discourses drawn from a broad spectrum of European experiences with images. The Polish-Lithuanian images discussed by Grusiecki in his essay cast additional light on our understanding of an early modern epistemology of images across Europe because they open an enquiry into the unstable nature of early modern religious paintings that moves beyond the customary schema of iconoclasm and discursive practice (both theological and proto-aesthetic). This framework approaches an explanation towards the process of epistemological transition within the domain of visual imagery which Grusiecki provisionally refers to as an enquiry into the fluid epistemology of early modern religious imagery.

Olenka Horbatsch explores the role of sacred images in the visual culture of the newly formed and predominantly Protestant Dutch Republic (1648-1669). She compares the significance and popularity of earlier representations of the relic of St. Veronica's veil in northern Europe with images of Moses holding the Tablets of Law in the Dutch Republic. The *Sudarium* and the Tablets were considered *acheiropoieta* (not made by human hands), and were both mediated to the public through a divine intercessor. According to Horbatsch, artistic representations of both subjects signified not only God's presence, but also referenced the function of religious images as replicas of an original relic or artefact. This case study aims to demonstrate how the Protestant visual tradition

depended on earlier Catholic images in formulating its own material religion. Scholarship on Post-Reformation religious art emphasizes the Protestant rupture in the status and function of religious imagery, and the subsequent emergence of an entirely new art. However, by looking at Protestant assimilations, adaptations and manipulations of late medieval visual culture, Horbatsch contends that these precedents were crucial in the formulation of a distinctly visual tradition. Building on the work of Mochizuki and Vanhaelen, she illustrates how conceptualizing the text as image offers scholars much more flexible means for tracing the continuities of artistic practices between Reformed art of the Low Countries, and its pre-Reformation precedents. While the status and function of religious imagery did indeed undergo a drastic shift, examining the formal continuity between Catholic and Protestant visual practices sheds light on the Dutch process of configuring a distinct visual language, one which represented and adhered to new ideas, beliefs and practices.

In the third essay on 'Images and Iconoclasm', Eric Parker focuses his attention on Lucas Cranach's painting customarily referred to as '*Gesetz und Gnade*' (Law and Grace) the iconography of which was supervised by Martin Luther himself. Recent interpretations of Cranach's altarpiece place the piece within the genre of antithesis. For Joseph Koerner, the stark division in the piece, between the man on the left panel being driven into hell by death and Satan and the man on the right standing bathed in the blood of Christ, represents a stark either/or dichotomy wherein the interpreter is meant to loose one's ability to choose through the condemnations represented in the left panel. Terrence Irwin argues for a similar dichotomy in Luther's moral theory. According to Irwin, Luther departs from the Western tradition of eudaemonistic ethics by eliminating the necessity of self-love for the pursuit of moral virtue. Parker argues that these interpretations do contextualize Luther's moral theory within the German theology of the time, which was influenced by the negative theology of the Pseudo-Dionysius and Johannes Tauler. When viewed through the lens of the Neoplatonic concept of procession, abiding, and return, Luther does not ignore Christian civic responsibility nor reject *eudaemonism.* He argues, rather, that faith (modeled on the two natures of Christ) unifies the Law and the Gospel, action and contemplation, and thus, it must become incarnate and proceed outward in the form of all of the virtues. *Gesetz und Gnade*, therefore*,* represents these two aspects of faith in unity: the Law that prepares the soul for its return by reducing the intellect and the self to nothing, and the Gospel which enables the believer's return to union with the One who is Christ and, ultimately, true self-love by loving oneself in one's neighbour.

While the role of visuality in early modernity is increasingly complicated by text-as-image, scholars are also turning towards the aural as a similar sight of contestation and adaptation. The third set of essays in this volume wrestle with the nature of 'Music and Verse' in seventeenth-century England. It is clear from Anna Lewton-Brain and Justin Irwin's contributions that many of the same concerns over sensuousness also pertain to music and poetry; equally, however, music and poetry had divine qualities, ones which did not easily fit into neat prohibitions on imagery. How both moved and affected its hearers were essential elements of English Protestant culture; as Irwin and Lewton-Brain recount, both poet and clergyman John Donne, and Anabaptist minister Benjamin Keach used music and verse to bring about spiritual edification.

Anna Lewton-Brain contemplates the musical mediation of John Donne's verse in the seventeenth century**.** 'Harmony added to this Hymn has raised the Affections of my heart, and quickened my graces of zeal and gratitude.' John Donne thus described (as reported by Izaak Walton) the effect that his poem, 'A Hymne to God the Father', had on him when he heard it set to music. Donne, it seems, felt that his 'Hymne' found its fullest expression when sung. John Hilton's setting of this hymn is a late addition to a substantial corpus of early seventeenth-century musical settings of Donne's poetry. Before Donne became the great sermonizing Dean of Saint Paul's, his poetic career was already linked closely with music, in particular with the popular form of the air, or lute song. The first instance of Donne's poetry in print was Alfonso Ferrabosco's setting of 'The Expiration' in *Ayres* (1609), and more soon followed from John Dowland, Orlando Gibbons, and William Corkine in 1612. In Donne's time, his poetry seems to have been most readily encountered through song. Donne's insistence on the theological significance of aurality in his sermons as well as the aural imaginativeness of his poetry attest to his belief that sound, and musical sound in particular, offers a unique mode of spiritual transcendence. In a 1624 sermon, Donne preached 'The Organ that God hath given the natural man is the eye; he sees God in the creature. The Organ that God hath given the Christian is the ear; he hears God in the Word' (*Sermons* 2:114). Donne's poetry reflects this doctrine of the spiritual significance of sound, heard and performed, just as his diction evinces careful attention to sound, and even his secular poetry is not unrelated to his theological insistence on the aurality and orality of the Word. Like many of his time, Donne invoked the Pythagorean-Platonic doctrine of the music of the spheres, so that the universe constitutes 'an excellent song' of God, and both literary prosody and musical settings in general reflect that. In Donne's view, music mediates between the physical

and metaphysical realms on both micro- and macro-cosmic scales; it penetrates the individual body and attunes the individual soul, just as it mediates between earthly and heavenly order (*musica mundana*). Lewton-Brain's essay goes on to examine a selection of early seventeenth-century musical settings of Donne's verse in the light of these musical mediations.

The story of music continues with Justin Irwin's account of Baptist hymnody in seventeeth-century London. Writing in 1675, Benjamin Keach put into the Devil's mouth an endorsement of 'Mellodious sounds, sweet mirth, and Musick rare' as among the benefits of a conversion to Roman Catholicism. According to Justin Irwin, Keach suggests thereby that that music, art, and outward beauty appeal to the carnal impulses of the atheist. Despite his apparent distrust of art's seductive quality, Keach wrote and had printed dozens of poems and several collections of hymns. This willingness to engage with and make use of such media in the literary culture of the English Restoration, Irwin argues, demonstrates not only a desire to make spiritual use of carnal forms, but also a means through which a minority dissenting religious group made use of the print medium in order to claim a space for itself within the established culture of the Restoration. Claiming space within the world of print and literature may be seen as a strategy of engagement with, as opposed to separation from, a sometimes hostile and generally incompatible majority. By focusing on Keach's poetry and hymns, Irwin constructs this argument primarily within the limits of the world of print, with passing reference to such communal behaviour of congregations as singing, prayer, and sermons.

The final set of three essays in taking up the theme of 'Life and Death', move beyond discussion of human art forms into more social contexts of urban life and the shifting natures of seventeenth and eighteenth-century intellectual cultures. In 1704, West Ham vicar John Smith published *The Judgment of God upon Atheism and Infidelity*, an account of the 'irreligious life' and suicide of George Edwards, a young atheist from his parish who had recently shot himself. According to Lara Apps, Smith sees Edwards' suicide as symptomatic of a wider malaise among atheists at the end of the seventeenth century. Smith means to convince atheists of the error of their ways and to bolster Christians' faith against atheists' 'Impious Principles.' Smith presents Edwards' arguments for atheism and then counters them, in the process covering all of the major atheist and anti-atheist themes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Smith then criticizes practical atheism, or the immoral conduct of professed Christians, arguing that it leads to speculative, or intellectual atheism and, thus, to miserable lives like that of George Edwards. Apps engages in a close reading of Smith's *The Judgment of God*, in order to show how this

work mediates faith and true Christian behaviour through atheism and irreligious behaviour, and in particular how Smith's exploitation of Edwards' suicide mediates learned debates about atheism for a general reading public.

In the succeeding essay, Richard Greydanus examines the rapid adoption of artificial street lighting in the latter half of the seventeenth century in major cities across Europe with a view to problematizing the usual modes through which the narrative of secularization is told. According to Greydanus, the spread of artificial light enabled a detachment of rhythms of social intercourse from the natural rising and setting of the sun, which has frequently been cast in a celebratory narrative of technological mastery over nature or, alternatively, in sensational accounts of the dark of night populated by things praeter-, super-, and un-natural. He argues that insufficient attention has been paid to the devolution of Christian beliefs about the New Jerusalem, upon which the sun will never set, onto actual urban centres by means of the introduction of street lighting, whose purpose was to make streets safe by eliminating violent crime and other moral disorders. Greydanus explores changing symbolic associations between the pairing of light and darkness, virtue and vice with the introduction of artificial lighting into older analogies drawn from natural sunlight to the light of God and/or of reason. He sets the express aims of late 17th century urban planners over against the early modern tradition of utopian literature with particular reference to Johann Valentin Andreæ's *Reipublicae christiano politanae descriptio* (1619).

Finally, Greg Bouchard examines aspects of David Hume's death, specifically his efforts to shape his public image at the end of his life within the broader history of early modern funerary monuments and autobiography. Hume exerted an extraordinary amount of control over the artefacts he would leave behind, composing an autobiography entitled *My Own Life*, and publishing it posthumously alongside his previously-withheld *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), and commissioning his own funerary monument. The latter was a grand spectacle: a towering neoclassical mausoleum perched on Edinburgh's horizon erected by the famed Scottish architect Robert Adam. Containing no inscriptions other than Hume's name and birth/death dates, it left later generations to form their own judgement of Hume without the weight of tradition. Bouchard aims to show that Hume sought a 'pagan' death, died a proud atheist, and did his utmost to ensure that his memory should live on through secular relics. Bouchard looks at models and precedents for Hume's death, drawing comparisons with such earlier figures as John Toland, John Evelyn, and Michel de Montaigne, who in various ways reflected on their

impending passing and similarly attempted to exert control over their memory. According to Bouchard, Hume's death captures the concept of the afterlife merging with a modern sense of 'fame', just then beginning to shift from its early modern predecessor, where one could create one's identity in an increasingly open marketplace using culturally resonant symbols that might just as well be Christian or pagan.

PART I:

MYSTICISM, HIERARCHY, AND THE SACRAMENTS

CHAPTER ONE

MEDIATING RELIGIOUS UNITY: NICHOLAS OF CUSA'S SHIFT FROM COUNCIL TO POPE

JOSHUA HOLLMANN

In 1433 or early 1434 an aspiring young canon lawyer submitted a treatise to the council of Basel on unity in the Church. The author of the conciliatory work was a humanist with a penchant for discovering ancient and forgotten sources in monastic libraries.[1] German by birth and culture, he also studied in Italy where he imbibed the Renaissance.[2] He was a profound intellectual, pacific in philosophical temperament and prone to constructive concepts of unanimity with a predilection for Neoplatonic hierarchical gradations. *De concordantia catholica* was presented to the council by its up and coming author Nicholas of Cusa (Latin: Cusanus,

[1] *De concordantia catholica*, preface, 2. Latin citations of *De concordantia catholica*, *De docta ignorantia*, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, *De pace fidei* and *Epistula ad Ioannem de Segobia* refer to the definitive Heidelberg critical edition of the writings of Cusanus: *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia iussu et auctoritate academiae litterarum heildelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita*, 22 Volumes (Leipzig-Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1932-2012). For English translations used in this essay: *De concordantia catholica*, Nicholas of Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*, edited and translated by Paul E. Sigmund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *De docta ignorantia*, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, translated by H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 87-206; *De pace fidei*, James E. Biechler and H. Lawrence Bond, *Nicholas of Cusa on Interreligious Harmony: Text, Concordance and Translation of De Pace Fidei* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990).

[2] In 1417 at a time when the Renaissance was thriving south of the Alps, Cusanus transferred his studies from the University of Heidelberg to the University of Padua, a centre of humanism, medicine, and civil and canon law. Paul E. Sigmund, *Nicholas of Cusa and Medieval Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 23.

1401-1464).[3] The impressive gathering of theologians convened at Basel in 1431 and followed the general councils of Constance (1414-1418) and Siena (1423-1424). As the successor of these councils, the ecumenical gathering at Basel, which was called to continue the reform of the church, faced many of the same challenges as its predecessors. Pope Martin V convoked the council shortly before his death and it was presided over by his appointment as president, the mentor of Cusanus, Cardinal Julian Cesarini (1398-1444).[4]

Although Cusanus formally joined the council of Basel in 1432 and thereafter submitted his treatise, *De concordantia catholica*, which speaks of the natural concordance between hierarchy from above and consent from below, the pope, and the membership of the general council, the one and the many, he nonetheless left the council in 1437 leaning in favour of the papacy. Why this seemingly sudden change of loyalties? In only four years since the completion of *De concordantia catholica* the harmony of which he once wrote now resounded with dissidence and discord. Relations between Martin V's successor Eugenius IV and the council worsened, and by 1435 deputations at Basel forbade outright the payment of annates and taxes to Rome. Then in 1436-37 the majority of the council moved to pursue reunion with the Greek Church in Basel or Avignon, while the pope, Cesarini and Cusanus favoured a city in Italy. The dispute over where to hold the council of union resulted in Cusanus and Cesarini leaving Basel for Italy to join the pope. As he had done as a young man, Cusanus once again went south of the Alps. This time it was not to study canon law but to serve in the papal curia. This new career path would soon take Cusanus as far as Constantinople.[5] Representing the older, more

[3] For a succinct life of Cusanus, see 'Life and Works' by Donald F. Duclow in *Introducing Nicholas of Cusa: A Guide to a Renaissance Man*, edited by Christopher M. Bellitto, Thomas M. Izbicki and Gerald Christianson (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 25-56. For primary documents on the life of Cusanus, see *Acta Cusana: Quellen zur Lebensgeschichte des Nikolaus von Kues* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1976).

[4] On Cesarini, see Gerald Christianson, *Cesarini, the Conciliar Cardinal: The Basel Years, 1431-1438* (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1979). On Cesarini and Cusanus, see Gerald Christianson, 'Cusanus, Cesarini and the Crisis of Conciliarism' in, *Conflict and Reconciliation: Perspectives on Nicholas of Cusa*, edited by Inigo Bocken(Leiden: Brill, 2004), 91-103.

[5] *De pace fidei* I, 1. On Cusanus' visit to Constantinople see H. Lawrence Bond, 'Nicholas of Cusa from Constantinople to 'Learned Ignorance': The Historical Matrix for the Formation of the *De Docta Ignorantia*' in *Nicholas of Cusa on Christ and the Church: Essays in Memory of Chandler McCuskey Brooks for the*