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Towards a reassessment

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INTRODUCTION

Nicholas of Cusa and Early Modern Reform: Towards a Reassessment

Abstract: Nicholas of Cusa is today widely acknowledged as a seminal thinker of modernity. Yet, in the words of Stefan Meier-Oeser, he still remains a “forgotten presence” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Here the theme of the entire volume, and especially the multivalent concept of reform employed, will be introduced and placed in relation to the existing scholarship on Cusanus and early modernity. The rationale for the section division into theological, ecclesiological, perspectival and methodological reform will then be explored. The introduction will conclude with a detailed contextual summary of each of the four sections and the papers within them.

Keywords: Nicholas of Cusa, modernity, early modern, perspective, method, theology, Church, reform

Cusanus and Modernity

Since at least the early twentieth century modern scholars have discovered in the thought of Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64), one of the most brilliant and creative thinkers of the fifteenth century, an important key to unlocking the origins of modernity. An enigmatic and paradoxical figure straddling the divide between the Middle Ages and emergent modernity, Cusanus was in many ways an embodiment of the manifold ideals and tensions of his age. While rooted in the piety and *Weltbild* of Latin Christendom, he was also deeply attuned to the new humanistic and scientific spirit of his age. A consummate intellectual, he was also a man of action who made his mark on both Church and State, even as he continually struggled for their reform. Secure in the certainty of his own faith, his continual striving to bring about “the establishment of a new relationship between...the ‘empirical’ and the ‘intellectual’” led him to mine the riches of Europe’s classical inheritance and gave him a remarkable openness to look for truth beyond traditional boundaries.¹ Indeed, his daring attempts to rethink – and reconfigure – the relation between the Triune God, the natural world, human society and the human individual not only anticipated some of the most important advances of modernity, but also, undoubtedly, paved the way for their development.

¹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 27.

Yet the precise nature of Cusanus' influence on modernity remains a hotly-disputed topic. Broadly speaking, scholarship may be divided into three opposing camps, which bear some relation to David Albertson's recent typology of three overlapping "waves of scholarship." According to Albertson the first wave (c. 1890-1960) "used seventeenth-century science as a backdrop for a prospective reading of Cusanus as forerunner of Kant," the second wave (1950-present) focuses on Cusanus in the context of his own time but within clear disciplinary boundaries, while the third wave (1980-present) views Cusanus from a more inter-disciplinary perspective.² It is clear that the first wave will have very definite things to say concerning Cusanus' subsequent influence, but, as we shall see, both the second and third waves have also had their impact on framing reception studies. For our purposes, however, instead of three overlapping waves it will make more sense to speak of three relatively distinct paradigms: the first views Cusanus not only as anticipating but even accelerating modernity, the second views his thought as a kind of accidental modernity, in "Janus-faced" fashion looking both backwards to the Middle Ages and forward to early modernity, and the third views Cusanus as a proponent, whether consciously or unconsciously, of a kind of alternative modernity. It is to an overview of each of these that we now turn, before considering the relation of our own project to them.

Accelerated Modernity

The view of Cusanus as the first modern philosopher was put forward most famously by Ernst Cassirer, the great German philosopher and historian of ideas, in his ground-breaking 1927 work *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*.³ Yet Cassirer was by no means the first to link Cusanus with modernity. As Morimichi Watanabe has shown, the origins of modern Cusanus research can be found within nineteenth-century German scholarship, especially in Neo-Kantian circles. For philosophers seeking the medieval roots of a definitively German intellectual and cultural tradition, Cusanus seemed like an ideal

² David Albertson, "Mystical Philosophy in the Fifteenth Century: New Directions in Research on Nicholas of Cusa," *Religion Compass* 4 (2010): 5-6.

³ See Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1927).

candidate.⁴ Important historians and philosophers of this time, including Robert Zimmermann, Richard Falckenberg and Heinrich Ritter, were thus all determined, as Jasper Hopkins has put it, to find in the German Cardinal a “forerunner of Leibniz,” a “harbinger of Kant” and a “prefigurer of Hegel.”⁵ Indeed, such a view clearly resonated at the time beyond Germany. In 1920, just a few years before the publication of Cassirer’s *Individuum und Cosmos*, Edmond Vansteenberghe’s important biography *Le Cardinal Nicolas de Cues (1401-1464): L’action – la pensée* had sought to place Cusanus not only at the origins of Italian and French Renaissance Neoplatonism but also of Hegel and German Idealism. For Vansteenberghe, Cusanus therefore had the right to be called “one of the fathers of German thought.”⁶

Cassirer too was steeped in this wider German tradition. His doctoral supervisor Hermann Cohen, the leader of the Marburg School of Neo-Kantians, had himself written enthusiastically on Cusanus’ philosophy, and especially his mathematics and natural philosophy. In this he made Cusanus a key representative of his own mathematical brand of Neo-Kantianism. Cassirer likewise shared many of these interests. His PhD dissertation, which made reference to Cusanus, was on Descartes’ mathematics, and the opening chapter of his 1906 work *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit* contained important reflections on Cusanus’ mathematical and scientific works in relation to his epistemology.⁷ Significantly, Cassirer’s *Erkenntnisproblem* was published just a few years before Pierre Duhem’s famous study of Cusanus and Leonardo da Vinci,⁸ and later, in *Individuum und Kosmos*, Cassirer would cite enthusiastically Duhem’s account of Cusanus’ scientific creativity, as well as the opinion of Moritz Cantor, the German historian of

⁴ Morimichi Watanabe, “The Origins of Modern Cusan Research in Germany and the Establishment of the Heidelberg *Opera Omnia*,” in *Nicholas of Cusa in Search of God and Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Morimichi Watanabe by the American Cusanus Society*, ed. Thomas M. Izbicki and Gerald Christianson (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 17-42.

⁵ Jasper Hopkins, “Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464): First Modern Philosopher?” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26 (2002): 13-14.

⁶ Edmond Vansteenberghe, *Le Cardinal Nicolas de Cues (1401-1464): L’action – la pensée* (Paris, 1920; repr. Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1963), 282 cited from Hopkins, “Nicholas of Cusa,” 13 n. 4, 14.

⁷ Watanabe, “Origins of Modern Cusan Research,” 26-31.

⁸ Pierre Duhem, *Études sur Léonard de Vinci II* (Paris, 1909), 97-279.

mathematics, that Cusanus had one of the most gifted and creative mathematical minds of the entire fifteenth century.⁹

Yet Cassirer's greatest fascination was with Cusanus' influence on the Renaissance philosophy of mind and freedom, which he saw as directly anticipating the Kantian subjective turn in philosophy. Though he still expressed himself in the scholastic language of the day, Cassirer opined that Cusanus' notion of coincidence brought about a completely novel intellectual perspective, wherein the empirical and the intellectual are both radically separate and yet immanently conjoined. In doing so he held that Cusanus denied the medieval connection between the realms of heaven and earth, the empirical and intellectual worlds, and so "by teaching us to see the One in the other, and the other in the One," he came to see that this (Kantian-like) "separation itself guarantees the possibility of true participation of the sensible in the ideal."¹⁰ Significantly, Cassirer held that this epistemological revolution had the effect of placing the individual at the centre of all reality as a kind of prototypical Kantian subject. Moreover, in Cusanus' twin theses of the soul's (contracted) infinity and its intrinsic capacity for self-movement and self-determination, Cassirer saw an anticipation of what he provocatively called – in terms which would make Cusanus blanch – the "basic Faustian attitude of the Renaissance."¹¹

As Michael Moore has argued, Cassirer's Cusan *ressourcement* was deeply influenced by the cultural and spiritual crisis of German society in the decades before the Second World War.¹² Written in the very different climate of post-War Germany, Hans-Georg Gadamer's celebrated *Truth and Method*, published in 1960, marks another important attempt at philosophical reconstruction. In this work inspired by the mid-twentieth-century Heideggerian turn in philosophy and by his own extensive retrieval of the Platonic tradition, Gadamer significantly gave considerable attention to Cusanus, whom he portrayed as a pioneer in the philosophy of language and a forerunner of his own attempt to reunite aesthetics with hermeneutics.¹³ Four years later, at an international congress in Bressanone

⁹ See Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, 59.

¹⁰ Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, 23-4.

¹¹ Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, 69.

¹² Michael Edward Moore, *Nicholas of Cusa and the Kairos of Modernity. Cassirer, Gadamer, Blumenberg* (Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books, 2013), 54-60. See also his chapter in this volume.

¹³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. William Glen-Doepel (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979), 393-447.

(Brixen) with the evocative title *Nicolo' Cusano agli inizi del mondo moderno* – “Nicholas Cusanus at the beginning of the modern world” – Gadamer broadened his perspective, offering his own important reflections on Cusanus and modernity.¹⁴ While conceding that the Neo-Kantian view of Cusanus was “one-sided,” his own views were clearly sympathetic to Cassirer. In particular, Gadamer argued that Cusanus’ accentuation of the Platonic division between the realms of the precise and imprecise, with its revolutionary de-centring of the Earth, upset the “dogmatic physics” of Aristotle and thus served as “spiritual preparation” for the new astronomy and physics. Likewise, while recognising, unlike Cassirer, that Cusanus’ own “Platonic mathematics” was very different in character from that of later thinkers such as Galileo, he still insisted that his mathematical reflections on infinity helped bring about the “spiritual intuition ... of the continuum” crucial for modern science.¹⁵

Even more important for Gadamer, however, was Cusanus’ conjectural epistemology – crucially also founded on the central insight of the distinction between the precise and imprecise – which he saw, like Cassirer, but with a sharper critical eye, as clearly anticipating aspects of Neo-Kantianism. In particular, he regarded Cusanus’ doctrine that the quiddity of a thing can never be attained in its purity as a fundamental departure from the classical doctrine of knowledge that had hitherto prevailed. In this he argued for the important influence of the Nominalist movement upon Cusanus, particularly in their shared insight that the conceptual order is not a pre-established given but is created by the mind through its dynamic, combinatorial nature. At the same time, Gadamer was also insistent that in his Trinitarian metaphysics of the “creative word” (*verbum creans*), Cusanus managed both to transcend Nominalism and overcome the emanistic temptations of Neoplatonic Realism.¹⁶ In this, as Michael Moore points out, language gains a luminous quality, “flooding reality and making it visible.”¹⁷ Language becomes rooted in a “logic of experience,” but at the same

¹⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Nikolaus von Kues im modernen Denken,” in *Nicolo' Cusano agli inizi del mondo moderno atti del Congresso internazionale in occasione del V centenario della morte di Nicolò Cusano Bressanone, 6-10 settembre 1964*, ed. Josef Gargitter (Florence: Sansoni, 1970), 39-48.

¹⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Nikolaus Cusanus and the Present,” *Epoché* 7 (2002): 71-9. Moore, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 62 n. 136 notes that this article was closely related to Gadamer’s 1964 paper at the Bressanone congress.

¹⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 393-7 and “Cusanus and the Present,” 77-9. Gadamer speaks of Cusanus as combining Platonic and Nominalist elements but the term transcending seems even more appropriate.

¹⁷ Moore, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 62.

time still reflects a real ontological order; finally breaking through the Kantian divide between the phenomenal and the noumenal.¹⁸ To cite Gadamer's own eloquent words, here "on the threshold of modernity, from out of the pathos of a new feeling for life, an ontological truth is brought to light, which outstrips even the most extreme height of the modern age."¹⁹ For Gadamer, Cusanus is therefore truly – albeit "tacitly" or "unintentionally"²⁰ – modern. Indeed, he belongs to that "line of great Classical figures of Western thought who, in the passing of the ages, establish for us the one and true."²¹ In this sense, Gadamer, recognising in Cusanus the seeds of an alternative, Christian modernity – and thus anticipating our third paradigm below – goes beyond Cassirer, even as he affirms some of his most important insights.

Accidental Modernity

In his classic 1957 work *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, the summation of years of reflection on the history of astronomy and metaphysics, Alexander Koyré offered one of the most influential accounts of Cusanus and modernity. Koyré's portrait of Cusanus is complex, fascinating and not a little ambiguous. On the one hand he can claim that "a new spirit, the spirit of the Renaissance breathes in the work of Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa," arguing not only that "his world is no longer the medieval cosmos" but also that his "bold assertions" go "far beyond anything that Copernicus ever dared to think of."²² On the other hand he can also describe him as the "last great philosopher of the dying Middle Ages," whose "deep metaphysical intuition" was "marred by scientific conceptions that were not in advance of but rather behind their time."²³ While he does not say it in so many words, there is a clear sense in which Cusanus' thought represents for Koyré a kind of accidental modernity. Thus, one might say that for him, Cusan metaphysics becomes relevant not as an integral part of the scientific revolution – contrary to Duhem, Cassirer and even Gadamer – but rather as an

¹⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 394-6.

¹⁹ Gadamer, "Cusanus and the Present," 78-9.

²⁰ Gadamer, "Cusanus and the Present," 73 refers to Cusanus becoming "unintentionally" modern while Moore, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 63 interprets this as becoming "tacitly" modern.

²¹ Gadamer, "Cusanus and the Present," 79.

²² Alexander Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), 8, 23-4.

²³ Koyré, *Closed World*, 6, 19-20.

important perspective, or vantage point, from which that revolution may be viewed – but crucially one that remains firmly embedded in the medieval worldview.²⁴ For Koyré it is therefore Bruno, not Cusanus, who is the true representative of the “new astronomy” and the “new metaphysics.”²⁵

In Koyré we clearly see an important prototype for the picture of Cusanus as a “Janus-faced maverick trapped between the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance” that has become so prevalent in our own time.²⁶ In this he paves the way for Hans Blumenberg, whose seminal 1966 work *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* was published less than a decade after Koyré’s own masterpiece. Like Koyré, Blumenberg was fascinated by Copernican cosmology and its complex relation to modernity – indeed, one of his own later works was *The Genesis of the Copernican World*. However, in *Legitimacy* his focus is not so much on Copernicus, but rather on the “epochal threshold” of modernity, which he sees – again in a manner reminiscent of Koyré – as straddled by Cusanus and Bruno.²⁷ For Blumenberg, Cusanus must be viewed as standing right on the cusp of the new age, even teetering on its edge. However, he himself always remained unaware of this. Rather, his own concern, profound but again largely unconscious, was to sustain the medieval Christian synthesis, which in the fifteenth century was threatening to fall apart due to internal pressure from the rival Realist and Nominalist schools and external pressure from Neoplatonic and humanistic currents. In particular, where Nominalism had threatened the divorce of the divine transcendence from the divine immanence, Cusanus, through his innovative notion of the coincidence of opposites, sought to reunite the two. Ironically, however, Blumenberg held that in doing his best to “save the Middle Ages out of its own material,” he actually prepared the way for its final dissolution. For he did not foresee that his own daring attempt to correlate the derivative infinity of the universe and the human soul with the original infinity of the divine nature,

²⁴ In sharp contrast to Duhem and Cassirer, Koyré is insistent in *Closed World*, 19 that “in deep opposition to the fundamental inspiration of the founders of modern science and of the modern world-view, who, rightly or wrongly, tried to assert the panarchy of mathematics, he [Cusanus] denies the very possibility of the mathematical treatment of nature.”

²⁵ See Koyré, *Closed World*, 35-54 for his fascinating comparison of Cusanus with the “new metaphysics” and “new astronomy” of Bruno.

²⁶ Johannes Hoff, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eedrmans, 2013), 69.

²⁷ See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 455-596. This section IV is entitled “Aspects of the Epochal Treshold: The Cusan and the Nolan.”

carried within it the potential to pit rival infinities in this “metaphysical triangle” against each other – leading to the end result of an infinite God receding infinitely from an infinite world.²⁸

Like Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, which was published only a few years before *Legitimacy*, Blumenberg therefore gave central importance to Cusanus’ relationship to late medieval Nominalism. Yet where Gadamer saw Cusanus optimistically as a pioneer of the “creative mind” of the Renaissance and early modernity, Blumenberg was much more pessimistic. For him Cusanus’ thought is ultimately incoherent. While it prepared the way for modernity, it remains trapped in the antinomies and contradictions of the late medieval world. In particular, Blumenberg sees Cusanus as trapped between the Scylla of scholastic rationalism (i.e. Realism) and the Charybdis of Nominalism. Indeed, while at first sight Cusanus’ apparent focus on the creative power of the mind might seem to lead out of this dilemma, according to Blumenberg it actually shipwrecks on his insistence that all meaning is ultimately grounded on the inscrutable decree of the divine will. In the final analysis man is not a true creator – as in Bruno – but merely a quasi-creator or imitator.²⁹ Indeed, it is here that we see the real difference from Gadamer, which goes much deeper than the difference between optimism and pessimism. This is that for Blumenberg, Cusanus has only half-broken through to the new epoch, and thus remains caught between the Middle Ages and modernity.

For Blumenberg, Cusanus’ failure was ultimately a failure of mediation. In positing an infinite universe he ended up actually weakening the bond between the world and God, thus helping to establish the new, purely immanent sphere of secular modernity.³⁰ In his influential *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* Amos Funkenstein likewise argued that key developments in late medieval metaphysics and natural philosophy – specifically the positing of the univocity of being and the homogeneity of the universe – led to a kind of domesticating of the divine transcendence, in which God became viewed simply as a being among beings. As he put it “the medieval sense of God’s symbolic presence in his creation, and the sense of

²⁸ Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 483-530. Blumenberg does not mention humanism explicitly here, but the humanist and Neoplatonic thesis of the “dignity of man” is clearly at the forefront of his mind, as may be seen from his comparison of Cusanus with the famous *Oration* of Pico della Mirandola (pp. 524-5).

²⁹ Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 518-38.

³⁰ Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 538-51 insightfully points to the radical difference between Cusanus’ understanding of Christ as the necessary mediating link between the infinite God, infinite world and infinite human, and Bruno’s rejection of the Incarnation due to his view that the infinite universe is in itself a sufficient embodiment of the divine.

a universe replete with transcendent meanings and hints, had to recede if not to give way totally to the postulates of univocation and homogeneity in the seventeenth century.”³¹ While Funkenstein does not devote anywhere near as much attention to Cusanus as Koyré or Blumenberg, it is clear that he sees him as occupying an important place in his wider narrative. In particular, he suggests that while Cusanus restored the analogical and symbolic reading of the universe characteristic of the High Middle Ages, his own provocative notion of the unbounded universe only intensified the late medieval process of its homogenization.³² While this is in fact a complete inversion of Koyré’s own thesis – which pitted Cusanus’ traditional physics against his innovative metaphysics, and not his innovative physics against his traditional metaphysics – for our purposes the fundamental point remains the same. Once again then, Cusanus becomes a kind of unwitting staging-post on the road to modernity.

Alternative Modernity

Against those who view Cusanus as either a modern philosopher in medieval garb or a conflicted thinker torn between the times, scholars in the third camp have sought to consider him as above all a fifteenth-century thinker. Frequently inspired by the scholarship of Albertson’s second and third waves, they view him “less as modern philosopher *avant la lettre* and more as an innovative Renaissance thinker who drew creatively upon medieval sources.”³³ In doing so they not only provide a valuable critique, or at least tempering, of other narratives of Cusanus and modernity – both the Cassiran and the Blumenbergian –but they also help to foster an understanding of Cusanus’ thought as a kind of “alternative modernity.”

Key to this approach, as Peter Casarella points out, was Cassirer’s own colleague Raymond Klibansky, whose work gave important impetus to the Heidelberg critical edition. While Klibansky undoubtedly saw the relevance of Cusanus for modernity, he also argued

³¹ Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 116.

³² Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 63-70. Funkenstein himself puts this slightly differently seeing Cusanus’ notion of the world as “explication” of God as anticipating the early modern, pantheistic, embodiment of God. However, since he sees this “re-embodiment” of God as the origins of secular modernity, the fundamental point remains the same.

³³ David Albertson, “Mystical Philosophy in the Fifteenth Century,” 5-6.

strenuously for his place within the long tradition of Christian Neoplatonism. In this way he opposed the Neo-Kantian view of him as the “first modern philosopher.”³⁴ However, Rudolf Haubst, who significantly stands at the head of Albertson’s second wave, was the first to really formulate it explicitly. Haubst revolutionized the view of Cusanus as a theologian – against Kurt Flasch and others who tended him to view him reductively as only a philosopher – and was a pioneer in uncovering Cusanus’ medieval sources, but at the same time clearly saw him as the “doorkeeper of a new age” (*Pförtner der neuen Zeit*). In a memorable image he held that Cusanus stood at the threshold of modernity, like a coachman ready to welcome people into the new age and providing them with important ideas to help them on their way.³⁵ Yet crucially, in contrast to other scholars, Haubst emphasized that Cusanus’ contribution to the new age was built explicitly on Trinitarian and Christological foundations.³⁶ In this opinion, as we shall see further below, he was joined by Charles Lohr, one of the leading Renaissance scholars of his generation.

As Casarella points out, Haubst’s own view on Cusanus as “doorkeeper” could at times be ambiguous.³⁷ By comparison, Louis Dupré’s acclaimed 1993 work *Passage to Modernity* left little room for ambiguity. Drawing on Henri de Lubac’s controversial *Surnaturel*, he launched a frontal attack on Blumenberg’s thesis. For Dupré the late Middle Ages and early modern period, under the pressure of Scotism and Nominalism, was a time of increasing polarisation of nature and grace. This split he held, made inevitable the modern conception of nature as an autonomous, immanent sphere so antithetical to Christian orthodoxy. According to him Cusanus’ Neoplatonic metaphysics, with its binding of immanence to transcendence and nature to grace, represented the only possible route out of this impasse. In this sense he regards his dialectical thought as the “last major alternative” to the dualist theologies of early modernity.³⁸

³⁴ Peter Casarella, “Nicholas of Cusa and the Ends of Medieval Mysticism,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Julia Lamm (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 392-3.

³⁵ Rudolf Haubst, *Nikolaus von Kues, “Pförtner der neuen Zeit”* (Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 1988) cited from Casarella, “Nicholas of Cusa,” 393.

³⁶ See Rudolf Haubst, *Das Bild des Einen und Dreieinen Gottes in der Welt nach Nikolaus von Kues* (Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 1952) and *Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues* (Freiburg: Herder, 1956); and *Streifzüge in die cusanische Theologie* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1991).

³⁷ Casarella, “Nicholas of Cusa,” 393.

³⁸ Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 57-61, 167-89. Dupré does not cite de Lubac but is clearly drawing on his *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad

Dupré's account of Cusanus as representing an "alternative modernity" has proven extremely influential and has subsequently been taken up by other scholars and developed in new directions. One of the most important of these accounts can be found in Karsten Harries' impressive 2001 work *Infinity and Perspective*. Without rejecting Blumenberg's comparison between the Cusan and the Nolan, Harries redirects our attention to Cusanus and his contemporary Leon Battista Alberti, the famous pioneer of perspective, as founders of two very different kinds of modernity. According to Harries while Cusanus was able to hold together within the horizon of the divine infinity a multitude of individual human perspectives, Alberti's absolute privileging of one-point perspective led to a disruption of the participatory relation between finite and infinite, fueling the perspectivalism of Descartes and Kant and preparing the way for the nihilism of Nietzsche.³⁹ In her *Immanence of the Infinite* – a major critique of Blumenberg – Elizabeth Brient develops the views of Harries, her former teacher, and Dupré in arguing that Cusanus alone was able to hold together the relation of immanence and transcendence. At the same time, in a manner reminiscent of Gadamer, she sees Cusanus as seeking to ground a distinctively modern notion of the mind's infinite capacity to transcend itself within a traditional Neoplatonic and Christological framework – and thus once again as reaching towards a kind of alternative, explicitly theological, modernity.⁴⁰

In recent years the work of John Milbank and the Radical Orthodoxy school has taken up and developed both Dupré's de Lubacian thesis and Harries' perspectival thesis in new ways. For Milbank, Cusanus played a crucial role in radicalising – and thus saving – Aquinas' analogical metaphysics from late medieval attacks. In doing so he sees him as explicitly representing an alternative Christian modernity, founded on analogy and open to infinite transcendence, contrasting sharply with the self-enclosed sphere of secular modernity with

Publications, 1998). Indeed, Dupré wrote the introduction for Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (New York: Crossroad Publications, 2000). For an earlier and more detailed treatment of Cusanus by Dupré see "Nature and Grace in Nicholas of Cusa's Mystical Philosophy," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64:1 (1990): 153-70. Louis Dupré and Nancy Hudson, "Nicholas of Cusa," in *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jorge Gracia and Timothy Noone (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 466-74 discusses further the dialectical character of Cusanus' thought.

³⁹ Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 22-125.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold to Modernity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 188-251.

its roots in Scotus' univocity of being.⁴¹ Developing this, Johannes Hoff's 2013 work *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* presents an ambitious synthesis, which not only combines Milbank's focus on analogical metaphysics with Harries' account of perspective, but also extends this into a critical comparison of Cusanus with Descartes, Leibniz, Kant and the entire tradition of German Idealism and Romanticism. Against Scotus, Alberti and all their early modern successors, Hoff clearly sees Cusanus as offering "an alternative modernity that enables us to recover the pre-modern middle path between univocity and equivocity without losing sight of the emancipatory legacy of the modern age."⁴²

Reception Studies of Cusanus

For scholars seeking to trace Cusanus' concrete influence on early modern thought, and not only to map his broader affinities with key currents of modernity, a number of problems immediately present themselves. From the evidence of three major editions of Cusanus' *Opera Omnia* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and quite a number of further editions and translations of his works thereafter, it is clear that there was a definite early modern demand for his work.⁴³ Nevertheless, despite his considerable influence on a number of major fifteenth-century debates, it has proved surprisingly difficult to follow the path of his influence into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One of the principal reasons for this, as many scholars have suggested, is that Cusanus left no school behind him to consolidate

⁴¹ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006; 2nd ed.), xxv-xxx.

⁴² Hoff, *The Analogical Turn*, xv. See pp. 33-92 for the sections most relevant to early modernity, and not later Kantian debates. Here Hoff develops and refines the arguments of his earlier book *Kontingenzen, Berührung, Überschreitung: zur philosophischen Propädeutik christlicher Mystik nach Nikolaus von Kues* (Freiburg: Alber, 2007).

⁴³ According to the sixteenth century German printer Heinrich Petri, many publishers throughout Europe were in haste to publish Cusanus' works. See Stephan Meier-Oeser, *Die Präsenz des Vergessenen: Zur Rezeption der Philosophie des Nicolaus Cusanus vom 15. Bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1989), 6; The three main editions are the 1488 Strasbourg edition published by Martin Flach, the 1514 Paris edition prepared by Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and his circle, and the 1565 Basel edition printed by Henricus Petri. For a list of further early modern editions and translations see Meier-Oeser, *Die Präsenz*, 402-6; On early modern English translations of Cusanus' works see Thomas Wilson Hayes, "Nicholas of Cusa and Popular Literacy in Seventeenth-Century England," *Studies in Philology*, 84.1 (1987): 80-94.

and propagate his work.⁴⁴ As a result his influence was often fragmentary, and there was a tendency for rather an eclectic reception of his thought. Indeed, as Hans Gerhard Senger notes, it is this fact that misled a whole generation of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars into thinking that Cusanus' actual influence on early modern thought was negligible.⁴⁵

An important step towards reassessing Cusanus' early modern influence was the 1964 Bressanone congress. From this congress we gain some insight into the status of reception studies just two years before the publication of Blumenberg's *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. As well as Gadamer's piece, this contained important individual studies relating to Reuchlin, Luther and Bruno. However, most relevant for us was Günter Gawlick's essay on the reception of Cusan ideas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While Gawlick significantly saw "manifold bridges" between Cusanus' own thought and the systems of later philosophers such as Descartes, Leibniz and Hegel, his own focus was on mapping explicit citations, whether positive or negative, of Cusan ideas in the early modern period – an enterprise he noted that, astonishingly, no one up until that moment had undertaken. His own endeavours to this end are necessarily modest in scope, and largely focused on astronomical topics, yet they are important as providing a first hint of the richness and diversity of Cusanus' early modern reception.⁴⁶

Stephan Meier-Oeser in his *Die Präsenz des Vergessenen* has written the only exclusive reception history of Cusanus, tracing Cusanus' philosophical impact on a range of influential authors of the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries. For Meier-Oeser, Cusanus' forgotten presence is also, ironically, the presence of that which has been forgotten. That is to say, those who appropriated Cusan thought in this period often modified what they discovered there and even sometimes failed to see the coincidence of opposites as coincidence. Thus, Cusanus was often labelled as a theologian and relegated to an interpreter of Dionysian mystical theology rather than a philosopher. Others mined his mathematical conclusions for their own

⁴⁴ See, for example, Günter Gawlick, "Zur Nachwirkung Cusanischer Ideen im Siebzehnten und Achtzehnten Jahrhundert," in *Nicolo' Cusano agli inizi del mondo moderno*, 224-5; Hans Gerhard Senger, *Ludus Sapientiae: Studien zum Werk und zur Wirkungsgeschichte des Nikolaus von Kues* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 257-9; and Matthias Vollet, "Einleitung," in *Die Modernitäten des Nikolaus von Kues: Debatten und Rezeptionen*, ed. Tom Müller and Matthias Vollet (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 12.

⁴⁵ Senger, *Ludus Sapientiae*, 257-67.

⁴⁶ Gawlick, "Zur Nachwirkung Cusanischer Ideen," 225-39.

purposes. Mersenne, for example, used Cusa's *Koinzidenzlehre*, not as a medium for a metaphysics of unity, but primarily as an aid for lending certainty to the discipline of theology and rendering it more persuasive.⁴⁷ Some even attempted an abridgment of Cusanus' idea of learned ignorance by blending it with earlier Augustinian versions of antithesis.⁴⁸ Despite these conclusions regarding the presence of the forgotten Cusanus, Meier-Oeser's discoveries open an important 'forgotten' window into Cusanus' influence in the early modern world.

Since Meier-Oeser there have been no further attempts to offer anything like a comprehensive account of Cusanus' early modern influence. Yet this does not mean that he should be taken to have said the last word on the topic. Rather, as Hans Gerhard Senger suggests, Meier-Oeser's work should be taken as an invitation for further dialogue.⁴⁹ Indeed, while his impressive study remains the necessary starting point for all research in this area, and a principal inspiration for this volume, he himself was well aware of its relatively narrow focus and the need for much more in-depth study of many of the individual thinkers presented in his volume. It is this contextual gap which has been filled by subsequent scholarship. As a result, we now have a much better picture of the various contexts in which Cusanus' thought was received. At the same time there have been no lack of larger projects, which, although much less ambitious than Meier-Oeser's in scope, have undoubtedly thrown new light on Cusanus and early modernity.

Following Meier-Oeser, Karl-Hermann Kandler offered in 1997 a brief but helpful account of Cusanus' early modern reception in his aptly named *Nikolaus von Kues. Denker zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit*. While largely derivative this does present his own important research on Cusanus' influence on Luther and Lutheranism, highlighting Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples as an important mediating figure between Cusanus and early modernity – a point we shall return to below.⁵⁰ Even more significant is Senger's 2002 work *Ludus Sapientiae: Studien zum Werk und zur Wirkungsgeschichte des Nikolaus von Kues*. Like Kandler, Senger's account of Cusanus' influence is also largely derivative, yet it stands out as offering a carefully reasoned, philosophical, account of what it actually means to talk about "reception history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). In particular, against rather vague or nebulous accounts of "influence,"

⁴⁷ Meier-Oeser, *Die Präsenz*, 106.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 342-347.

⁴⁹ Senger, *Ludus Sapientiae*, 257-9.

⁵⁰ Karl-Hermann Kandler, *Nikolaus von Kues. Denker zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 119-35.

Senger emphasises the need to establish clear channels of mediation between Cusanus and early modernity – something that will be a primary focus of this volume.⁵¹

Since Senger a number of important companion volumes to Cusanus have appeared.⁵² For our purposes the most important of these is the 2012 compilation *Cusanus: A Legacy of Learned Ignorance* edited by Peter Casarella. Casarella is profoundly influenced by Louis Dupré and, in the spirit of our third paradigm, this volume therefore seeks to offer “a detailed historical background to Cusanus’ thinking while also assaying his significance for the present.” Although it does not have a distinct early modern focus it does contain important essays by Harries on Alberti and Cusanus, Brient on mathematics, Bernard McGinn on mysticism and Wilhelm Dupré on Cusanus and “world formation” – indisputably one of his most important early modern philosophical legacies.⁵³

A different kind of companion volume may be seen in the plethora of works edited by Harald Schwaetzer and his research group. Of these *Das europäische Erbe im Denken des Nikolaus von Kues: Geistesgeschichte als Geistesgegenwart* seeks to trace important European dimensions of Cusanus’ thought, while the *Nikolaus Cusanus: ein bewundernswerter historischer Brennpunkt: philosophische Tradition und wissenschaftliche Rezeption* highlights Cusanus’ thought as a key focal-point in the philosophical tradition.⁵⁴ However, undoubtedly the most important recent work on Cusanus and modernity is the impressive, but eclectic, 2014 compilation *Die Modernitäten des Nikolaus von Kues: Debatten und Rezeptionen* edited by Tom Müller and Matthias Vollet. Like Schwaetzer’s compilations, this contains a number of important articles on Cusanus in the context of early modern art, especially Van Eyck, Alberti and Dürer, as well as interesting reflections on his influence on

⁵¹ Senger, *Ludus Sapientiae*, 257-90. However, on pp. 291-352 Senger does present two examples of sixteenth-century reception of Cusanus’ thought not discussed in Meier-Oeser.

⁵² These mainly relate to Cusanus’ own fifteenth-century context. However, Marco Brösch, Walter Andreas Euler, Alexandra Geissler and Viki Ranff (eds.), *Handbuch Nikolaus von Kues: Leben und Werk* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2014), 361-74 contains a brief section offering an overview of Cusanus reception through the ages.

⁵³ Peter Casarella, *Cusanus: A Legacy of Learned Ignorance* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012). The quote comes from the editor’s description of the book. For Casarella’s relation to Louis Dupré see Peter Casarella and George Schner (eds.), *Christian Spirituality and the Culture of Modernity: The Thought of Louis Dupré* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁵⁴ See Harald Schwaetzer and Kirstin Zeyer (eds.), *Das europäische Erbe im Denken des Nikolaus von Kues: Geistesgeschichte als Geistesgegenwart* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2008) and Klaus Reinhardt, Harald Schwaetzer and Oleg Dushin (eds.), *Nikolaus Cusanus: ein bewundernswerter historischer Brennpunkt: philosophische Tradition und wissenschaftliche Rezeption* (Regensburg: S. Roderer, 2008).

alchemy, atomism and mathematics.⁵⁵ Perhaps most notable for our purposes is an essay by Frédéric Vengeon, which describes Cusanus as instrumental in the “metaphysical renewal of the human world.”⁵⁶ Significantly, this is the primary theme of another even more recent work dealing with Cusanus’ modernity, the 2016 *Nicolas de Cues (1401-1464), Le tournant anthropologique de la philosophie* edited by Hervé Pasqua, in which his legacy as “last of the medievals and first of the moderns” is thoroughly explored.⁵⁷ While approached from a different angle, this theme of the metaphysical reform of the human world, understood in multiple dimensions, remains central to our volume.

Cusanus and Early Modern Reform

Thus while a host of eminent scholars have all recognised Cusanus as a central figure in the story of modernity, it is clear that the precise nature and character of his influence has proved much harder to pin down, and in fact remains highly contested. At the same time, it should also be clear that while very valuable work has been done in tracing Cusanus’ legacy into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there still remains much more to be done before anything like a complete picture can be given. In Meier-Oeser’s evocative phrase Cusanus still remains something of an elusive and “forgotten presence” in the early modern world.

Our volume *Nicholas of Cusa and Early Modern Reform* seeks to bring Cusanus out of the shadows. To attempt a comprehensive study of his legacy, even confining the scope to the early modern period, would require far more than a single volume – something which itself bears ample testimony to the importance of this topic. Instead, following consciously in the footsteps of Gerhart Ladner, our volume seeks to use the potent and multi-faceted notion of reform to shine new light on Cusanus’ relationship to early modernity.

In his classic work, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*, Gerhart Ladner focuses on the Christian concept of *reformatio* and *renovatio ad imaginem Dei* as the image and icon by which followers of Christ refocus and reformulate their individual and corporate lives in Christ through the Holy Spirit. According to

⁵⁵ See Müller and Vollet (eds.), *Die Modernitäten des Nikolaus von Kues*.

⁵⁶ Frédéric Vengeon, “L’instauration métaphysique du monde humain chez Nicolas de Cues,” in *Die Modernitäten des Nikolaus von Kues*, ed. Müller and Vollet, 175-86

⁵⁷ Hervé Pasqua (ed.), *Nicolas de Cues (1401-1464), Le tournant anthropologique de la philosophie* (Paris: Vrin, 2016).

Ladner, the fundamental transformative realities of “*reformatio-renovatio* and *imago* or *similitudo Dei* were never lost” throughout the Middle Ages.⁵⁸ Ladner concentrates especially on the idea of reform in St. Augustine of Hippo.⁵⁹ In the theology and ecclesiology of Augustine, Ladner posits that Western Christian understandings of reform and renewal revolve on the axis of Christ’s Passion and Crucifixion, and radiate away from the earlier Greek idea of Christocentric recapitulation.⁶⁰ There is a salvific shift from returning to primordial origins toward realizing the fullness of the infinite Christ in finite personal and social reality that both inhabits the flux of dissimilitude and transcends temporal notions of personhood and politics. Thus, Augustine’s *Confessions* navigate the personal journey of rest in God and the cosmic *exitus-reditus* of all things being made new in Christ.⁶¹ In *The City of God*, Augustine traces the ages (*aetatum*) of God’s providence and the tension between the city of humanity and the city of God, as well as the subsequent capacity for moral action in the intrepid interplay of nature and grace between Christians living in, with and under both realms.⁶² Charles Norris Cochrane states that Augustine “bears witness to the faith of Christians that, notwithstanding all appearances, human history does not consist of a series of repetitive patterns, but marks a sure, if unsteady, advance to an ultimate goal.”⁶³ Ladner concludes his discussion of Augustine’s theology of reform by stating, “Through St. Augustine’s whole life there runs the search for a perfect communal or societal way of Christian life.”⁶⁴

Thus, when Cusanus writes about reform in *De concordantia catholica*, it is for the renewal of the Church and society within Christendom and steadying the sacred balance of heaven and earth, eternity and time as realized in the body of Christ.⁶⁵ For Cusanus, the

⁵⁸ Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 3.

⁵⁹ Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, chapter V, pp. 153-283.

⁶⁰ Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 153-154.

⁶¹ In Augustine of Hippo’s *Confessions*, chapters 1-9 present Augustine’s own life-story, while chapters 10-13 frame his life within God’s cosmic plan. Augustine, *Confessions*, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library, trans. William Watts (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912).

⁶² Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. William M. Green (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), XXII.xxx (VII.383-384).

⁶³ Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944), 484. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time, History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1986), 140-151.

⁶⁴ Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 282-283.

⁶⁵ Nicholas of Cusa, *De concordantia catholica*, 1.1.4-8; 3.41.580-595 (h XIV.29-33; 466-473).

substance and shape of reform were thoroughly Christocentric.⁶⁶ F. Edward Cranz observes that Cusanus applies Augustine's Platonic-Christian philosophy-theology of reform-renewal universally.⁶⁷ Indeed, as Cranz writes, "Nicholas sees all human society in terms of Augustine's Christian city of God, and so he works to establish in it the concord which reflects the concord of the Trinity."⁶⁸ More recently, and attesting to the influence of the ideas of personal and public reform on this, the five-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* transmits Christian understandings of finding personal and cultural fullness within the immanent frame, as well as tracing the porous transmutations of spirituality in self and society over the last half millennium.⁶⁹ Christian ideas of renewal and reform in the reformations of the sixteenth century and the early modern period inherited, inhabited and interrogated Augustine's Christ-centered reform both of the corporate church and of the individual believer in society, and influenced conceptualizations of being and time from Cusanus to Heidegger and beyond.⁷⁰

Within the ongoing interplay of ideas on modernity and reform, our volume focuses on four major thematic areas – the reform of Church, the reform of Theology, the reform of Perspective, and the reform of Method – which together aim to encompass the breadth and depth of Cusanus' own reform initiatives. In particular, in examining the way in which he served as inspiration for a wide and diverse array of reform-minded philosophers, ecclesiastics, theologians, and lay scholars in the midst of their struggle for the renewal and restoration of individual, society, and world, our volume seeks to combine a focus on Cusanus as a paradigmatic thinker with a study of his concrete influence on early modern thought. In doing so our volume embraces all three aspects of Cusanus' heritage, seeking to view him in the kaleidoscope of accelerated, accidental and alternative modernities which together provide a comprehensive vision of early modernity.

PART I. *Reformatio Generalis*: Reform of Church

⁶⁶ Nicholas of Cusa, *Reformatio generalis*, 1-6 (h XV.19-30), especially 6 (h XV.28-30).

⁶⁷ F. Edward Cranz, "Saint Augustine and Nicholas of Cusa in the Tradition of Western Christian Thought," *Speculum* 28, no. 2 (1953): 298.

⁶⁸ Cranz, "Saint Augustine and Nicholas of Cusa," 298.

⁶⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁷⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein and Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996).

From his first major treatise, *De concordantia catholica* (1433-34), to his *Reformatio generalis* (1459), penned just five years before his death, Nicholas of Cusa was an ardent reformer of the Church. Morimichi Watanabe surveys the conciliarist *De concordantia catholica* within the spectrum of Church reform stretching back to the middle ages and early Church.⁷¹ Watanabe also surmises that “the problem of Church reform was a central one throughout his active life.”⁷² Thomas Izbicki notes that the *Reformatio generalis* is “a substantial contributon to reform thought.”⁷³ Throughout Cusanus’ mutlifaceted writings and varied Church work, as Brian Pavlac observes, “at the heart of his activities was reform of Church.”⁷⁴ Scott Hendrix comments that the ecclesiology of Nicholas of Cusa can help answer the recurring question of whether the Reformation of the sixteenth century was something new or a continuation of the medieval search for reform.⁷⁵ In commemoration of the five-hundreth anniversary of the Reformation, the opening section of this volume examines Cusanus’ long career as Church reformer and his enduring influence on early modern Church reform.

Thomas M. Izbicki and Luke Bancroft’s essay, “A Difficult Pope: Eugenius IV and the Men around Him,” recounts and reviews the relationship between Cusanus and Pope Eugenius IV as it relates to Church reform. Nicholas of Cusa became known as the Hercules of the Eugenian cause, supporting Eugenius IV against the Council of Basel. Eugenius had at first been closely allied with Rome’s Orsini clan and served mostly by fellow Venetians. By the time he returned to Rome in late 1443 Eugenius had come to welcome into his circle of advisors a broad cohort whose various skills and perspectives proved invaluable in the struggle to win back authority for a papacy that was at one time threatened on all fronts.

⁷¹ Morimichi Watanabe, *Nicholas of Cusa: A Companion to his Life and Times*, ed. Gerald Christianson and Thomas M. Izbicki (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 26.

⁷² Morimichi Watanabe, *Concord and Reform: Nicholas of Cusa and Legal and Political Thought in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Thomas M. Izbicki and Gerald Christianson (Burlington, VA: Ashgate, 2001), 187.

⁷³ Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Writings on Church and Reform*, trans. Thomas M. Izbicki (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), xv.

⁷⁴ Brian A. Pavlac, “Reform,” in *Introductiong Nicholas of Cusa: A Guide to a Renaissance Man*, ed. Christopher M. Bellitto, Thomas M. Izbicki and Gerald Christianson (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 59.

⁷⁵ Scott H. Hendrix, “Nicholas of Cusa’s Ecclesiology Between Reform and Reformation,” in *Nicholas of Cusa on Christ and the Church: Essays in Memory of Chandler McCuskey Brooks for the American Cusanus Society*, ed. Gerald Christianson and Thomas M. Izbicki (Leiden, Brill: 1996), 107.

Izbicki and Bancroft detail how Eugenius discovered during a troubled reign the need to employ Cusanus, rather than just relying on Orsini clients and natives of the Veneto. Izbicki and Bancroft also observe how Cusanus' service to Eugenius did not prevent him from seeking, often in vain, the reform of Church and Curia.

In "The Reform of Space for Prayer: *Ecclesia primitiva* in Nicholas of Cusa and Leon Battista Alberti," Il Kim examines how Cusanus' *Reformatio generalis*, a proposal for change in the entire church in 1459 on the eve of the Reformation, also shaped liturgical space. According to Kim, for Cusanus this meant the restoration of the original, primitive principles of the Apostles' Church (*ecclesia primitiva*). Although the idea itself was a prevailing theme in the mid-fifteenth-century curia in general, Cusanus devised a plan by which to achieve it, which included simple places for devotion. Concurrently, in his *De re aedificatoria* (1440s-1472) Alberti expressed his support for reform and proposed a return to a more austere Church interior, which was in line with Cusanus' theological approach and with the new, monochromatic interior style developed in Florence.

Richard J. Serina also examines Cusanus' *Reformatio generalis* in his "'Papista Insanissima': Papacy and Reform in Nicholas of Cusa's *Reformatio Generalis* (1459) and the Early Martin Luther (1517–19)." Serina compares Luther's writings from the nascent indulgence controversy with the *Reformatio generalis*. While it is unquestionable that by the time of the Leipzig Debate Luther's opinions on papal authority and the prospects for reform had taken a new, irrevocable direction, Serina assesses Luther's earlier writings in connection with Cusanus to underscore the common ground they share in their diagnosis of problems within the Roman curia, the possibility of papal reform, and the consequences of that reform for the *bene esse* of the Church.

In the final essay in this section on reform of Church, "Nicholas of Cusa and Paolo Sarpi: Copernicanism and Conciliarism in Early Modern Venice," Alberto Clerici argues that the main link between Sarpi and Cusanus is conciliar theory. According to Clerici, the political and intellectual debates over the Venetian *Interdetto* led to a European-scale dispute between Sarpi and Cardinal Bellarmine, opposing two different ways of interpreting the need for a Catholic Reformation, and demonstrating the strong ties between late medieval conciliarism and early modern constitutionalism, thereby exhibiting the early modern expanse of Cusanus' influence as Church reformer.

PART II. *Coincidentia Oppositorum*: Reform of Theology

Cusanus' conception of the *coincidentia oppositorum* is directly related to his theological vision and method of learned ignorance.⁷⁶ The structure and substance of *De docta ignorantia* is Christological.⁷⁷ Thus, for Cusanus, the counters and content of his concept of the coincidence of opposites is ultimately Christ-centered. Furthermore, unity in diversity, as found for Cusanus par excellence in the person of Christ, is also the motivation and mode of his reform of theology. Thus, the *Reformatio generalis* is not only a practical proposal for Church reform but also a profound meditation on ecclesial unity between diverse members of the mystical body of Christ.⁷⁸ For Cusanus, Christ is both the body (ontological) and example (moral theology) of and for the Church, and Christ is the very "glue" (*glutino Christi*) that binds the Church as one.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Christ, for Cusanus, is the ultimate reformer, the way by which one is led by word (*Logos, Verbum*) and example (*Christiformes*) away from sin and ignorance to the contemplation of God, the goal of theology.⁸⁰ The essays in this section survey Cusanus as a Christ-centered reformer of theology in light of the Protestant Reformation's adherence to the foundational principle of *solus Christus*. These essays compare Cusanus' Christocentric and Trinitarian theology and method of learned ignorance with the seemingly opposite Christology and Trinitarian theology of the magisterial reformers Luther and Calvin, thereby presenting novel coincidental appraisals in historical theology. They also mark the influence of Cusanus' theocentric formula *complicatio-explicatio* and the underlying unity of all things upon early modern Roman Catholic theology.

In the first essay in this section, "Nicholas of Cusa and Martin Luther on Christ and the Coincidence of Opposites," Joshua Hollmann examines Cusanus' theological method of learned ignorance and the corollary Christocentric coincidence of opposites in light of Luther's

⁷⁶ Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, 263-264 (h I.163-164). See also Birgit H. Helander, "Nicholas of Cusa as Theoretician of Unity," in *Nicholas of Cusa on Christ and the Church*, 316.

⁷⁷ Book three of *De docta ignorantia*, on Christ, is the synthesis of the entire treatise-method of learned ignorance.

⁷⁸ Cusa, *Reformatio generalis*, 6 (h XV.28-30).

⁷⁹ Cusa, *Reformatio generalis*, 6 (h XV.28).

⁸⁰ Cusa, *Reformatio generalis*, 5 (h XV.27): "*Nos igitur, qui cunctos christianos reformare cupimus, utique aliam nullam possumus eis formam quam imitentur proponere quam Christi, a quo nomen receperunt.*" Nicholas of Cusa, *De apice theoriae*, 28 (h XII.136). In the concluding paragraph of *De apice theoriae*, Cusanus connects Christ and Trinity in the the final contemplation of God.

fundamental teaching on Christian liberty and justification by faith alone through Christ alone. While theological differences remain, Hollman contends that Cusanus' theology and theological method of Christ and the coincidence of opposites bear striking similarities to the coincidental Christology of Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian*, thereby proposing a new perspective on the importance of Christology and the coincidence of opposites in Luther and pre-Reformation thought.

From Luther our volume moves to Calvin. Gary Jenkins' "*Ignorantia Non Docta: John Calvin and Nicholas of Cusa's Neglected Trinitarian Legacy*" notes how Cusanus' 1453 treatise *De visione Dei*, written as an exercise in mystical theology, marks a final stage in Cusanus' Trinitarian theology, one developed from his initial statements in *De docta ignorantia*. According to Jenkins, far from being based on a mere reworking of Latin Trinitarianism, Cusanus demonstrates a detailed and imaginative theology that is at once Augustinian and Dionysian. Jenkins observes that this presents a strange legacy for Cusanus in subsequent thought: since most of the Reformers rejected Dionysius' hierarchical theology, they would blatantly disdain Cusanus' ecclesiology in *De concordantia catholica*; and since they held to the medieval inheritance of God as first *actus purus* they could never extricate themselves from the interminable debates about relationships within the Trinity.

In the final essay in this section, "Nicholas of Cusa and Pantheism in Early Modern Catholic Theology," Matthew Gaetano traces Cusanus' influence on the Catholic/Counter-Reformation. Although Johann Wenck and some nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars associated Nicholas of Cusa with pantheism, major Roman Catholic theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries embraced Cusanus' view of the relation of the world to God. Indeed, as Gaetano examines, Théophile Raynaud, a learned Jesuit theologian, saw his doctrine of God as the *complicatio* or enfolding of all things as useful for opposing medieval pantheists like David of Dinant and Amalric of Bena. Gaetano's essay argues that Johann Eck, Théophile Raynaud, and Louis Thomassin drew upon Cusanus' teaching on God as enfolding all things and other elements of his thought in their renewal of early modern Catholic scholastic theology.

PART III. *Explicatio Visionis*: Reform of Perspective

The chapters in the third section explore the reform of perspective between Cusanus, Giordano Bruno and the Cambridge Platonists. Cusanus' method of learned ignorance relies, as Karsten Harries explains, on "the principle of perspective," that is, on the recognition that human knowledge is perspectival by nature, as it always occurs within the purview of an infinite Other.⁸¹ For Cusanus, God's self-knowledge functions as the Measure of all being, a measure to which only God himself has direct and immediate access. Our knowledge, originating in our reflection of the divine image, is mediated, limited, and conjectural, and therefore, our access to what is ultimately real is intrinsically perspectival. Though our mind (*mens*) is incapable of measuring (*mensurare*) the infinite circle of reality by discursive reason alone, the very fact that we can know and speak about the reality of an infinite perspective beyond our own reveals "an intuition of the translinguistic."⁸²

To recognize the limitations of finite knowledge and its inability to satisfy our desire for an infinite Good provokes us to get behind the "wall of coincidence." By the use of intuition or self-reflection, we are capable of viewing the *minimum* and the *maximum* measures as a pair of united lenses, through which we can analyze and take some measure of the immeasurable. This intuitive vision of coincidence enables us to leap beyond the opposing perspectives of identity and otherness and to see ourselves and all things coinciding in the divine perspective.⁸³ Like Copernicus' revolutionizing of the visible world, Cusanus redefined human perspective by placing the finite universe within infinity – with Christ, in whom the finite and infinite perfectly coincide, at the center. And so, for Cusanus, any "vision of reform" requires a "reform of vision," a new perspective with a new pair of intellectual eyeglasses.⁸⁴ Cusanus put this method into practice in his proposed ecclesiastical and

⁸¹ Harries, *Infinity*, 42.

⁸² Harries, *Infinity*, 52.

⁸³ For Cusanus, the coincidence of identity and otherness in the divine being and human perspective is based on the Trinitarian notion of God's self-reflective knowledge. See Werner Beierwaltes, *Identität und Differenz: Zum Prinzip cusanischen Denkens* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1977), 14.

⁸⁴ Inigo Bocken, "Visions of Reform: Lay Piety as a Form of Thinking in Nicholas of Cusa," in *Reassessing Reform: A Historical Investigation into Church Renewal*, ed. Christopher M. Bellitto and David Zachariah Flanagin (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 216.

communal reforms, seeking peace by reducing societal differences to their highest abstraction in their underlying unity.

Cusanus' reform of perspective denotes what Cassirer terms "a totally new intellectual orientation" (veränderten geistigen Gesamtorientierung), which bears the potential for engendering radical concepts of reform.⁸⁵ Giordano Bruno and the Cambridge Platonists also sought the reform of perspective, yet in ways that would push (and sometimes break) the doctrinal bounds of Christianity. Scholarship on Bruno has long noted his indebtedness to Cusanus' coincidence method, which provided him with the motive to radically collapse the traditional distinction between divine and human perspectives.⁸⁶ Bruno radicalized Cusanus' method by coupling it with his philosophical rejection of Trinitarianism, resulting in the conclusion that the "world" rather than the divine "Word" signifies the "absolute self-realization of divine omnipotence," as Blumenberg notes.⁸⁷

The Cambridge Platonists – Benjamin Whichcote, Henry More, Ralph Cudworth, John Smith, Peter Sterry, Nathanael Culverwel, and Anne Conway – in their opposition to the perceived atheism of Hobbes, Spinoza, and others, strove to see "Reason re-enthroned in her Majestick Seat" within religion, though not to such a radical degree as Bruno.⁸⁸ Together the Cambridge Platonists upheld the heart of Trinitarian religion in the rationalistic spirit of Origen, with More and Sterry positing the preexistence of the human soul in the divine being and the ultimate salvation and restoration of all things (*apokatastasis*) in Christ and Cudworth seeking philosophical basis for the Christian Trinity in the Neoplatonic triads of Plotinus.⁸⁹ As Cassirer notes, the Cambridge Platonists were instrumental in bringing about a "Platonic Renaissance" in England that would have important implications for the development of

⁸⁵ Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos*, 29.

⁸⁶ See, for instance, Felice Tocco, "Le fonti più recenti della filosofia del Bruno," *Rendiconti della R. Accademia dei Lincei* (Rome: Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, 1892), I:538-612; Sandro Mancini, *La sfera infinita. Identità e differenza nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno* (Milan: Mimesis, 2000), 245-274.

⁸⁷ Hans Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 564.

⁸⁸ Ralph Cudworth, *A sermon preached to the honourable Society of Lincolns-Inne* (London: J. Flesher for R. Royston, 1664), 38; Douglas Hedley, "Real Atheism and Cambridge Platonism: Men of Latitude, Polemics, and the Great Dead Philosophers," in *Platonisms: Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern*, ed. Kevin Corrigan and John D. Turner (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 155-174.

⁸⁹ On Origen and the Cambridge Platonists see the chapters by Douglas Hedley and Sarah Hutton in *Autonomie und Menschenwürde: Origenes in der Philosophie der Neuzeit*, ed. Christian Hengstmann and Alfons Fürst (Münster: Aschendorff, 2012); On Cudworth and the Trinity see Benjamin Carter, *The Little Commonwealth of Man: The Trinitarian Origins of the Ethical and Political Philosophy of Ralph Cudworth* (Louvain: Peeters), 2011.

modern philosophy.⁹⁰ Indeed, John Muirhead makes the somewhat exaggerated claim that Cudworth is the “real founder of British Idealism.”⁹¹ In more concrete terms, their influence on Newton, Locke, Leibnitz, Herder, Coleridge and others has received scholarly treatment.⁹² Cassirer remarks on the resemblance of their thought to Cusanus, particularly in their combination of subjective and objective perspectives within religion.⁹³ James Bryson has proven Cassirer’s supposition about Cusanus’ influence on the Platonic Renaissance in England to be true, namely, that Cusanus did exercise some influence on the Oxford predecessor of the Cambridge theologians, Thomas Jackson.⁹⁴ No study of the Cambridge Platonists, however, has analyzed their thought vis-à-vis Cusanus in any detail.

There are many notable parallels between Cusanus and the Cambridge Platonists, partly due to their deep emergence in Neoplatonic sources as well as the influence of Rene Descartes (himself a reader of Cusanus) on the Cambridge Platonists (Henry More and Ralph Cudworth in particular).⁹⁵ Their interest in the reform of perspective manifests itself in many of their ideas: the idea that Reason is “the Spirit of Man,” which is the “Candle of the Lord” and the essential mechanism of human deification;⁹⁶ an exemplarist metaphysics coupled

⁹⁰ Ernst Cassirer, *Die Platonische Renaissance in England und die Schule von Cambridge* (Berlin: Teubner, 1932), esp. 110-141.

⁹¹ John H. Muirhead, *The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1931), 27.

⁹² On Newton see Danton B. Sailor, “Newton’s Debt to Cudworth,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49.3 (1988): 511-518; On Locke see G.A.J. Rogers, “Locke, Plato, and Platonism,” in *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity*, ed. Douglas Hedley and Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 198ff; and Sarah Hutton, “Some thoughts on Ralph Cudworth,” in *Studies on Locke: Sources, Contemporaries, and Legacy*, ed. Sarah Hutton and G.A.J. Rogers (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 143-158; On Leibnitz see Justin E.H. Smith and Pauline Phemister, “Leibniz and the Cambridge Platonists: The Debate over Plastic Natures,” in *Leibniz and the English Speaking World*, ed. Pauline Phemister and Stuart Brown (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 95-110; On Herder see Alexander J.B. Hampton, “An English Source of German Romanticism: Herder’s Cudworth Inspired Revision of Spinoza from ‘Plastik’ to ‘Kraft’” *The Heythrop Journal*, published 14 July 2015, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/heyj.12272/pdf>; On Coleridge see Douglas Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy, and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 34-40.

⁹³ Cassirer, *Platonische*, 22.

⁹⁴ James Bryson, *The Christian Platonism of Thomas Jackson* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 109-155.

⁹⁵ On Cusanus and Descartes see Karsten Harries, “Problems of the Infinite: Cusanus and Descartes,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64.1 (1990): 89-110.

⁹⁶ See Robert A. Greene, “Whichcote, the Candle of the Lord, and Synderesis,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52.4 (1991): 617-44.

with an autonomous ethic;⁹⁷ the criticism of Aristotelian faculty psychology and the crucial role that self-reflection plays in their philosophical notion of religion (More's "boniform faculty," Cudworth's "hegemonikon," and Peter Sterry's "omniformity" of the soul);⁹⁸ the promotion of man as the "measure of all things" along with an idealistic epistemology and a theory of representative perception;⁹⁹ the notion of the world-soul as a "plastick nature" mediating between material and spiritual realities;¹⁰⁰ and finally, their efforts to promote universal tolerance (Cudworth and Sterry played a role in Cromwell's commission for the readmission of the Jews to England), all testify to the cosmic breadth of their notion of reform.¹⁰¹

Despite these similarities, Peter Sterry is the only member of the Cambridge Platonists to refer explicitly to Cusanus in his writings, as Eric Parker demonstrates in his chapter in this volume, though Ralph Cudworth owned a copy the Basil (1565) edition of Cusanus' *Opera Omnia*.¹⁰² Sterry's acceptance and public promotion of Cusan ideas during his tenure as a chaplain to Oliver Cromwell and other Parliamentarians provides even further justification for

⁹⁷ See Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal Ought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 23-52, and 109-148; and Michael Gill, *The British Moralists and Human Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7-74.

⁹⁸ On More see Robert Crocker, "Mysticism and enthusiasm in Henry More," in *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies*, ed. Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), 137-155; On Cudworth see Darwall, *Internal Ought*, 109-148; Also see Peter Sterry, *A Discourse on the Freedom of the Will* (London: John Starkey, 1675), 90; and Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 51-86.

⁹⁹ See J.A. Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation*, 1951 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 29-39; On More see Robert Crocker, "The Role of Illuminism in the Thought of Henry More," in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics and Religion*, ed. G.A.J. Rogers, Jean-Michel Vienne, and Yves C. Zarka (Dordrecht: Springer, 1997), 129-144; also see Eric Parker's chapter on Sterry below.

¹⁰⁰ See Lutz Bergemann, *Ralph Cudworth - System aus Transformation: Zur Naturphilosophie der Cambridge Platonists und Ihrer Methode* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); and Jasper Reid, *The Metaphysics of Henry More* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 313-348.

¹⁰¹ See Luisa Simonutti, "Reason and toleration: Henry More and Philip van Limborch," in *Henry More*, ed. Hutton, 201-218; David Pailin, "Reconciling Theory and Fact: The Problem of 'Other Faiths' in Lord Herbert and the Cambridge Platonists," in *Platonism*, ed. Hedley and Hutton, 93-111; and Louise Hickman, "'Love is all and God is love': Universalism in Peter Sterry (1613-1672) and Jeremiah White (1630-1707)," in *All shall be well: Explorations in Universalism and Christian Theology from Origen to Moltmann*, ed. Gregory MacDonald (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2011), 95-115.

¹⁰² Ralph Cudworth, *Bibliotheca Cudworthiana, sive Catalogus Variorum Librorum Plurimis Facultatibus Insignium Bibliothecæ Instructissimæ Rev. Doct. Dr. Cudworth* (London: Edward Millington, 1691), 1.

viewing the Cambridge Platonists in light of Cusanus' reform of perspective. Many of their ideas, as mentioned, stem from the influence of Descartes, yet, their criticism of certain key aspects of Cartesianism – voluntarism, mechanism, and the method of doubt, etc. – more closely align them with Cusanus.¹⁰³

The chapters in this section aim to fill a gap in scholarship on Bruno and the Cambridge Platonists by addressing “the forgotten presence” of Cusanus in their various attempts to reform human perspective of the individual and the world. Luisa Brotto's chapter “The Notion of Faith in the Works of Nicholas Cusanus and Giordano Bruno” analyses the radical nature of Giordano Bruno's concept of epistemological faith, in which he was influenced by Cusanus. It is well known that Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), the famous Italian philosopher and scientist, was deeply influenced by Nicholas of Cusa. Yet scholarship so far, perhaps unsurprisingly given Bruno's heterodoxy, has neglected the important relation between their accounts of faith. From his first works Bruno shows a deep knowledge of Cusanus' writings, frequently using Cusan terminology and sometimes quoting entire passages from him. In the *De umbris idearum* Bruno states the importance of faith by almost paraphrasing the third book of the *De docta ignorantia*. In his *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* Bruno proposes a reform of religion and moral values, and holds trust and charity as the principles of human society.

As Brotto points out, Cusanus' philosophy always remains a major source for Bruno's epistemology and for his conception of the search for divinity. However, Bruno's interpretation of faith is not the same as Cusanus'. For, as Meredith Ziebart has argued, Cusanus aims at merging faith intended in an epistemological sense (as a non-rational kind of knowledge that can orientate human reasoning) and faith intended in a religious sense (as faith in God and in Christ). By contrast, Bruno omits every reference to the Christian God and to Christ when writing about faith. He conceives faith as a disposition of the soul that evaluates the activities of every faculty, thus laying the foundation of every relationship that man can establish with external objects. This kind of faith becomes a key element in Bruno's epistemology, ethics and magic. Thus, as Brotto shows, Bruno remodels the Christian virtue of faith in a non-Christian philosophy, but one that is inspired to some degree by Cusanus.

¹⁰³ See David Leech, *The Hammer of the Cartesians: Henry More's Philosophy of Spirit and the Origins of Modern Atheism* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013); and see the chapters by John Cottingham and Marialuisa Baldi in *Philosophical Context*, ed. G.A.J. Rogers et alia, 145-158, and 159-172 respectively.

In the second chapter “‘The Sacred Circle of All-Being’: Cusanus, Lord Brooke, and Peter Sterry,” Eric Parker reveals the dependence of the Cambridge Platonist, Peter Sterry on Cusanus’ perspectivalism. Sterry’s first employer, Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, a prominent Member of Parliament and general during the English Civil War, showed his support for universal reform in his treatise *The Nature of Truth* (1641). Brooke, who was among the sponsors of Jan Amos Comenius in his voyage to England, very likely wrote this highly Platonic treatise with Sterry’s aid. Brooke uses the logic of coincidence to form his central argument that all truths, even the contradiction of “Esse and Non-Esse,” are in reality unified in the ultimate Truth that descends from God.

In his writings Sterry refers explicitly to Cusanus, making reference to *De docta ignorantia* and *De coniecturis*, as well as betraying a knowledge of *De visione Dei* and *Idiota de mente*. Like Cusanus, Sterry argues that only the “higher” kinds of intellection, such as the divine and angelic intellects, are set above the “wall of Paradise” as Cusanus describes it in *De visione dei*. Sterry appeals to Cusanus’ Trinitarian names (Unity, Equality, and Union) to explain his own understanding of the “arithmetical Trinity.” He promotes this ‘glass’ of the Trinity as the proper lens for viewing all of reality. Parker shows that for Brooke and Sterry, the Cusan logic of coincidence initiates a conversion of perspective as it persuades the soul to agree, “*Ne te quaesiveris extra.*” Most importantly, the acceptance of coincidence provides for a broader sense of tolerance and freedom in the individual as well as society as it limits human ambition, specifically the quest for absolute certainty in matters of religion and politics. Thus, Brooke and Sterry represent two prominent and influential proponents of the idea of “coincidence” as the means to universal reform and peace in seventeenth-century England.

In his chapter “Varieties of Spiritual Sense: Cusanus and John Smith” Derek Michaud offers a window into the theologies of Cusanus and the Cambridge Platonist John Smith (1618-52) by illuminating their contrasting appropriations of Origen’s concept of the spiritual senses. Both early modern Neoplatonists of sorts, they evince many common concerns even while a definitive link between them remains elusive. The idea of spiritual sensation, common in mystical theology, is essential to a proper account of Christian experience not adequately addressed by the scholasticism of their times. While both Cusanus and Smith use the language of spiritual sensation throughout their extant works, their understandings thereof are

markedly different. Each appropriated and reformulated the spiritual senses to meet their intellectual and religious contexts.

Cusa attempted what has been called a synthesis of Aristotelian and Origenist aesthetics while Smith's Reformed Neoplatonism led him to reject peripatetic philosophy outright. For Cusanus, spiritual sensation is a fundamentally apophatic process whereby we come to "see that we do not see" which points back to the sacramental practices and eschatological hope of the Catholic Church. For Smith, spiritual sensation is a direct and personal kataphatic process whereby we leave unfitting modes of perception behind in exchange for the divine intellect within us. For the Cardinal, ordinary sense perception, including contemplating images, is central. But this sacramental showing includes hiddenness within itself. For this reason spiritual sensation supplies a mediated 'foretaste' of things only fully revealed in the eschatological future. Smith, on the other hand, allows little to no positive role for ordinary sense perception. Instead, he emphasizes that spiritual sensation is an intellectual matter more or less achievable in this life. Both sought to reform the Origenist tradition for their own situations sure that contemplation of the divine is more tasted than calculated.

In the final chapter in this section "Motion, Space and Early Modern Re-formations of the Cosmos: Nicholas of Cusa's *Anima Mundi* and Henry More's Spirit of Nature" Nathan Strunk examines the efforts of the Cambridge Platonist, Henry More, to reform our perspective of the cosmos. In the "Parable of the Madman" Nietzsche famously describes how Copernicus' decentering of the earth culminated in its desacralisation so that humanity having "unchained this earth from its sun...are straying as through an infinite nothing." Yet, as Louis Dupré argues in his book by the same title, while the "passage to modernity" may have torn the theo-cosmic synthesis of the middle ages asunder, thinkers like Cusanus "anticipated and avoided the problems a heliocentric picture would cause to the traditional religious worldview by rethinking the relationship between God and nature." This is particularly true of Cusanus' transposition of the traditional notion of God's omnipresence with the help of the Platonic notion of a "world-soul."

In book II of *De docta ignorantia*, Cusanus describes how the world-soul unfolds the divine mind by actualizing potentiality through the medium of motion. Around two hundred years after Cusanus, Henry More also sought to rethink the relationship between God and nature after Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo. Significantly, he does so by advancing a doctrine

of the “universal soul of the world,” which he calls “the spirit of nature.” In More’s *Immortality of the Soul*, the “spirit of nature” names God’s immediate contact with the world for communicating motion to matter. Comparing Cusanus and More shows that as science “progressed” they accommodated it by appropriating notions as ancient as Plato’s “world-soul.” For neither of them does the fact that the world is perpetually moving and adrift in the universe mean it is estranged from the divine. Rather, the motion of the unchained planet further instances God’s intimate, omnipresent relation with a living, interconnected world.

The pursuit of *docta ignorantia*, and its radical change in epistemological perspective, provides a persuasive lens through which to view Cusanus’ forgotten presence in the early modern world, particularly in the thought of Bruno and the Cambridge Platonists. These essays point to differing conclusions regarding the reform of perspective among these figures, yet their rejection of the medieval hierarchical universe, their criticism of Aristotelian method and their promotion of Neoplatonism, as well as their turn to the natural principles of reason as the “Candle of the Lord,” reveal similarities with Cusanus’ radical perspectivalism.

PART IV. *Mathesis Universalis*: Reform of Method

The papers in the fourth section on ‘Method’ explore Cusanus’ impact on the early modern reform of method. Importantly, all the papers are connected by the theme of the “universal reformation,” which in recent years, through the work of scholars such as Joseph Freedman, Howard Hotson and Vladímír Urbánek, has emerged as a vital category for understanding early modernity and its connected intellectual, scientific and religious revolutions.¹⁰⁴ Like the

¹⁰⁴ The literature is extensive and growing rapidly but see, for example, Joseph Freedman, *Philosophy and the Arts in Central Europe, 1500-1700: Teaching and Texts at Schools and Universities* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Howard Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted 1588-1638: Between Renaissance, Reformation and Universal Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); *Commonplace Learning: Ramism and its German Ramifications, 1543-1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and “The Instauration of the Image of God in Man: Humanist Anthropology, Encyclopaedic Pedagogy, Baconianism and Universal Reform,” in *The Practice of Reform in Health, Medicine and Science, 1500-2000: Essays for Charles Webster*, ed. Margaret Pelling and Scott Mandelbrote (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 1-21. Howard Hotson and Vladímír Urbánek are the editors of the new Routledge series “Universal Reform: Studies in Intellectual History, 1550-1700.” The modern scholarship on universal reform has roots in the pioneering work of earlier scholars such as Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954); Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1966) and Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform 1626-1660* (London: Duckworth, 1975).

various types of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century *reformatio*, the notion of universal reform has the advantage of being rooted in the language and consciousness of its age – as a hermeneutic of modernity it arises from within modernity itself. Significantly, it also embraces within itself all of the other major categories of reform surveyed in this volume. Indeed, despite their many differences, the universal reformers all shared the conviction – well exemplified by Cusanus – that without a fundamental reorientation of epistemological and metaphysical perspectives there could be no chance of establishing lasting social, political or ecclesial reform.¹⁰⁵

As the term suggests, universal reformation referred to the desire for a comprehensive and complete reformation of contemporary Church and society, going beyond the partial and incomplete reformations of the previous two centuries. Universal reform was thus intended to reach broader and deeper than anything that had gone before it, towards its ultimate goal of the reform of the human spirit itself. Fundamental to this was the concept of a universal idea, or universal pattern, of reform located in the divine mind and accessible to humanity through a variety of channels.¹⁰⁶ What all the diverse streams that make up universal reformation shared in common therefore, was some kind of dynamic convergence between epistemology, ontology and theology. In this sense, as Jan Patočka insightfully recognised, there was an important connection between universal reform and the Realism and exemplarism of Cusanus' own age of the fifteenth century.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, perhaps in no other age was Ladner's "idea" of reform articulated so explicitly as in the late medieval and early modern period.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Inigo Bocken, "Visions of Reform," 214-31 emphasises the foundation of Cusan reform in a "reform of vision." The fascination of the universal reformers with the theme of light and vision can be seen above all in Jan Amos Comenius, *Panaugia, or, Universal Light*, trans. A.M.O. Dobbie (Shipston-on-Stour: Drinkwater, 1987). See also Jan Rohls, "Comenius, Light Metaphysics and Educational Reform," in Hedley and Hutton (eds) *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity*, 63-74.

¹⁰⁶ See the important discussion in Jan Amos Comenius, *Panorthosia or Universal Reform: Chapters 1-18 and 27*, trans. A.M.O. Dobbie (Shipston-on-Stour: Drinkwater, 1995), 5.1-28 (pp. 87-98) and *Panorthosia or Universal Reform: Chapters 19-26*, trans. A.M.O. Dobbie (Shipston-on-Stour: Drinkwater, 1993), 23.2-3 (pp. 58-9).

¹⁰⁷ Jan Patočka, "Comenius und Cusanus," in Jan Patočka, *Andere Wege in die Moderne: Studien zur europäischen Ideengeschichte von der Renaissance bis zur Romantik*, ed. Ludger Hagedorn (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 237-43.

¹⁰⁸ For Ladner the "idea of reform" was simply a "provisional conceptual tool" (*Idea of Reform*, 35). However, in the late medieval Realist movements stemming from John Wyclif and Jan Hus we find an intimate connection between Scripture, philosophical, theological and ecclesiastical reform and the pattern of the divine ideas (cf. Ian Levy, *John Wyclif: Scriptural Logic, Real Presence and*

Yet what made universal reformation particularly distinctive was the way in which the notion of method became the centre of this convergence. It is for this reason that scholarship on universal reform has focused so much attention on methodological movements such as Ramism and Lullism.¹⁰⁹ For while at first sight these may appear to be only on the periphery of the intellectual “high culture” of their age, on closer inspection their concerns turn out to register right at the very centre of its consciousness. One need only think of Descartes’ epochal *Discours de la méthode* to understand the valence of method in the seventeenth century. Yet what is fascinating, as Paolo Rossi and others have demonstrated, is the way in which the philosophical projects of Descartes, Bacon, Leibniz and other luminaries of the seventeenth century can be seen to be motivated at the deepest level by methodological concerns first raised by the Ramists and Lullists themselves.¹¹⁰

In many ways the same can also be said of the new mathematical awareness of the century, in which methodological, mathematical and philosophical concerns became entwined in the all-encompassing quest for *mathesis universalis*. While it is true that the links between universal reformation and *mathesis universalis* have not yet been adequately

the Parameters of Orthodoxy (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2003); Kantik Ghosh, “Logic and Lollardy,” *Medium Aevum* 76:2 (2007): 251-67 and Vilém Herold, “Die Philosophie des Hussitismus: Zur Rolle der Ideenlehre Platons,” in *Verdrängter Humanismus, Verzörgete Aufklärung. Vol. 1: Vom Konstanzer Konzil zum Auftreten Luthers*, ed. Michael Benedikt (Vienna: Verlag Leben-Kunst-Wissenschaft, 1996), 101-18). Fascinatingly, in both Puritan Ramism and Comenian *pansophia*, the divine ideas expressed in nature and Scripture also become the ground of a comprehensive philosophical and theological reform programme (cf. Miller, *New England Mind*, 145-53; William Ames, *Technometria*, 1-11 and *Demonstratio Logicae Verae*, 1-4 in *Philosophemata* (Cambridge, 1646); and Jan Amos Comenius, *Pansophiae Prodromus* (Leiden, 1644), 23ff.).

¹⁰⁹ See Howard Hotson, “The Ramist Roots of Comenian Pansophia,” in *Ramus, Pedagogy and the Liberal Arts: Ramism in Britain and the Wider World*, ed. Steven Reid and Emma Wilson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 227-52; *Johann Heinrich Alsted*; and *Commonplace Learning*.

¹¹⁰ Walter Ong, *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005) first demonstrated the central importance of Ramism to the intellectual and cultural revolutions of early modernity. Leroy Loemker, “Leibniz and the Herborn Encyclopedists,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22:3 (1961): 323-38; Paolo Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*, trans. Stephen Clucas (London: Athlone, 2000), 97ff. and Maria Rosa Antognazza, “Bisterfeld and *immeatio*: Origins of a Key Concept in the Early Modern Doctrine of Universal Harmony,” in *Spätrenaissance Philosophie in Deutschland 1570-1650: Entwürfe zwischen Humanismus und Konfessionalisierung, okkulten Traditionen und Schulmetaphysik*, ed. Martin Mulrow (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2009), 64-81; and “*Immeatio* and *Emperichoresis*: The Theological Roots of Harmony in Bisterfeld and Leibniz,” in *The Young Leibniz and his Philosophy (1646-76)*, ed. Stuart Brown (London: Kluwer Academic, 1999), 41-64 explore the influence of Ramism and/or Lullism on key Enlightenment figures.

mapped out – something this volume in fact hopes to address – it is evident that in Ramus himself, as well as in Lullists such as Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and Charles de Bovelles, we see the beginnings of a new and influential alliance between mathematics, philosophy and pedagogy.¹¹¹ Significantly, this carried through into the Ramist-Lullist encyclopaedism of the seventeenth century, which as Rossi and others have demonstrated had intimate connections with the parallel movement of *mathesis universalis*, especially as it was conceived in the fertile minds of Jan Amos Comenius and Leibniz himself.¹¹²

That one of the most important figures in this line of succession was Cusanus himself is beyond doubt. Not only was Cusanus strongly influenced by Lull and the Lullist thought of his friend and mentor Heimeric de Campo, as studies by Eusebio Colomer, Rudolf Haubst, Charles Lohr and others have all shown, but he himself was crucial in the transmission of the revolutionary new Lullist worldview to early modernity.¹¹³ For this reason Lohr places Cusanus centre-stage in his breathtaking narrative of the emergence of early modern metaphysics.¹¹⁴ Likewise, Maria Rosa Antognazza, drawing on Thomas Leinkauf, has argued convincingly that he was a crucial mediator between Renaissance Platonism, universal reform and early modern thought. Indeed, Antognazza's work especially has served to reconnect the philosophical and theological trajectories of universal reform, establishing this as a key "missing link" between the medieval world of Lull and Cusanus and the early modern world

¹¹¹ See Joseph Victor, *Charles de Bovelles, 1479-1553: An Intellectual Biography* (Geneva: Droz, 1978), 57-72, 129-31, 150, 160; Richard Oosterhoff, "Idiotae, Mathematics, and Artisans: The Untutored Mind and the Discovery of Nature in the Fabrist Circle," *Intellectual History Review* 24:3 (2014): 301-19; Nelly Bruyère, *Méthode et Dialectique dans l'oeuvre de la Ramée: Renaissance et Age Classique* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1984) and Robert Goulding, *Defending Hypatia: Ramus, Savile and the Renaissance Rediscovery of Mathematical History* (New York: Springer, 2000), 35-74.

¹¹² See, for example, Rossi, *Logic*, 130-44, 176-94. On the early modern movement of *mathesis universalis* and its prehistory see especially David Rabouin, *Mathesis Universalis: L'Idée de "Mathématique Universelle d'Aristote à Descartes"* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009).

¹¹³ For earlier discussion of this see Rudolf Haubst, "Zum Fortleben Alberts des Grossen bei Heymeric von Kamp und Nikolaus von Kues," *Studia Albertina* (1952): 420-47; Eusebio Colomer, *Nikolaus von Kues und Raimund Llull aus Handschriften der Kueser Bibliothek* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1961); and Charles Lohr, "Ramon Lull und Nikolaus von Kues. Zu einem Strukturvergleich ihres Denkens," *Theologie und Philosophie* 56 (1981): 218-31. Recently, there has been an upsurge of interest in Cusanus' relation to Heimeric, as may be seen in publications such as Klaus Reinhardt, Harald Schwaetzer and Franz-Bernard Stammkötter (eds.), *Heymericus de Campo: Philosophie und Theologie im 15. Jahrhundert* (Regensburg: S. Roderer Verlag, 2009) and Florian Hamann, *Das Siegel der Ewigkeit: Universalwissenschaft und Konziliarismus bei Heymericus de Campo* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2006), 230-57.

¹¹⁴ Charles Lohr, "Metaphysics," in *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 537-99.

of Leibniz.¹¹⁵ More recently, the pioneering work of David Albertson has identified in Cusanus' thought the beginnings of a fifteenth-century Renaissance in Christian Pythagoreanism and mathematical theology, the extent and influence of which remains to be charted.¹¹⁶ This only reinforces the pressing need for a detailed re-evaluation of Cusanus' reform thought and its multi-faceted legacy.

Continuing and developing these themes the papers in this section argue for Cusanus' place right at the heart of the early modern movements of universal reform and *mathesis universalis*. Significantly, the papers follow a line of historical succession which Lohr, Antognazza and others have reconstructed. For going beyond Cassirer they have been able to provide a convincing and historically-documentable chain of influence stretching from the fourteenth century through to the end of the seventeenth century.¹¹⁷ This focuses on two intimately-connected intellectual movements – the sixteenth-century Parisian circle around Lefèvre d'Étaples and the seventeenth-century Herborn circle around Johann Heinrich Alsted. For, as Antognazza notes, despite the “confessional, geographical and chronological distance” separating them, these were unified by their common grounding in the thought of Lull and Cusanus. Indeed, both circles were vital in disseminating Lull's and Cusa's works to early modern European readers.¹¹⁸ Together they may therefore be seen as twin “epicentres” of universal reform, from which Cusanus' influence radiated out all over early modern Europe, in the process crossing intellectual, theological and confessional borders.

The focus of Richard Oosterhoff's chapter “Our Boethius' and Cusan Mathematical Theology in the Early French Reform” is on Antognazza's first epicentre – the Fabrist circle of Lefèvre d'Étaples. Drawing attention to their programme of patristic and medieval

¹¹⁵ Maria Rosa Antognazza, “Leibniz and the Post-Copernican Universe: Koyré Revisited,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 34 (2003): 309-27; “*Immeatio* and *Emperichoresis*,” 41-64 and “Bisterfeld and *immeatio*,” 64-81; cf. Thomas Leinkauf, *Mundus Combinatus: Studien zur Struktur der barocken Universalwissenschaft am Beispiel Athanasius Kirchers SJ (1602-1680)* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 11-34, 84ff. and *Einheit, Natur, Geist: Beiträge zu metaphysischen Grundproblemen im Denken von Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz* (Berlin: Trafo, 2012), 15-50.

¹¹⁶ David Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies: Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹¹⁷ Lohr, “Metaphysics,” 537-99 and Antognazza, “Bisterfeld and *immeatio*,” 64-81. Cassirer was famously attacked by Eugenio Garin and others for his account of Cusa's influence on Renaissance Italian philosophers such as Ficino and Pico. However, in his chapter in this volume Michael Moore notes the (partial) rehabilitation of Cassirer's thesis of Cusanus' Italian influence by Erich Meuthen and Kurt Flasch.

¹¹⁸ Antognazza, “Bisterfeld and *immeatio*,” 63-4.

ressourcement, which saw the publication of major editions of Boethius, the Victorines, Lull and of course Cusanus himself in the celebrated *Opera Omnia* of 1514, he argues that at its heart was an ambitious attempt to bridge the arts and theology. In doing so the Fabrists hoped to initiate a comprehensive reform of both philosophy and theology with important implications for both the academy and the Church. The inspiration for this programme lay in Boethius, whose works provided tantalising hints of what such a mathematical theology might look like, but it was Cusanus especially who provided them with their key notion of the “mathematical Trinity.” In focusing on their reception of this notion, Oosterhoff explores the way in which the Fabrist Circle deployed Cusan mathematical theology in their ill-fated attempts to reform the diocese of Meaux, with its far-reaching consequences for the French evangelical movement and the French Reformation itself.

Roberta Giubilini’s chapter “Nicholas Cusanus and Guillaume Postel on Learning and *Docta Ignorantia*,” focuses on Guillaume Postel, the visionary French reformer and prophet of “universal concordance” who has been called by Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann “one of the most interesting intellectual figures” of the sixteenth century.¹¹⁹ Postel was influenced by the Fabrists and a number of scholars have noticed his profound affinities with Cusanus, but Giubilini’s chapter is the first to investigate their relationship in depth. While highlighting important connections in their understanding of the universal harmony of religions and cultures, their focus on the problem of mediation between God and men and their fascination with rational apologetic for the Trinity, especially in Christianity’s engagement with Islam, Giubilini focuses on their joint desire to uncover the process of human learning. In particular, she demonstrates how Postel appropriates, albeit in a very different context and for different purposes, Cusanus’ linguistic and mathematical approaches to knowledge and above all his ideal of *docta ignorantia*.

Jan Amos Comenius, the focus of the third and fourth chapters in this section, is a major figure in the universal reformation. As the outstanding representative of the Herborn Circle – Antognazza’s second epicentre – he was an inheritor of both the Ramist and Lullist traditions. Moreover, as scholars such as Patočka, Pavel Floss, Simon Kuchlbauer and others have recognised, his pansophic project of universal reform was deeply influenced by Cusanus,

¹¹⁹ Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis: Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004), 352.

whose thought he encountered at a formative stage in his intellectual development.¹²⁰ Petr Pavlas' chapter "The Book Metaphor Reformed, that is Triadised: A Layman's Bible and God's Books in Raymond of Sabunde, Nicholas of Cusa and Jan Amos Comenius" explores the Lullist and Cusan influence on Comenius' understanding of the three books of nature, Scripture and the human mind – a central, unifying notion in his *pansophia*. From its roots in patristic and medieval theologians he traces the development of the understanding of the "book of nature" in the fifteenth-century Lullist Raymond of Sabunde, whose ideas were a major influence on the Fabrist Circle, and in Cusanus himself. Sabunde's own role as a pioneer in the development of natural theology is well known – if only through the ironic lens of Michel de Montaigne's famous *Apologie de Raymond Sebond* – but Pavlas explores the way in which Cusanus transforms the Sabundian pattern of natural theology by his influential connection of the book of nature and the book of the mind. In doing so he not only helped prepare the way for the key early modern understanding of nature as a book designed to be read by humans – a development which proved so influential on the mathematical and scientific understanding of the time – but he also laid the groundwork for Comenius' own attempt to order European, and ultimately global, society according to the rule of the three books.

Comenius' *pansophia* and its connection to both his Trinitarian theology and his quest to develop a *mathesis universalis* is the principal theme of Simon Burton's chapter "'Squaring the Circle': Cusan Metaphysics and the Pansophic Vision of Jan Amos Comenius." Drawing on the recent scholarship of Kuchlbauer, this situates Comenius' pansophic project squarely in the context of his anti-Socinian writings.¹²¹ In particular, it argues that Comenius drew deeply on Cusanus' metaphysics of enfolding and unfolding and his programmatic notion of the coincidence of opposites in order to construct an epistemology in which reason opens upwards through sense and Scripture towards the transcendent mystery of the Triune God. In this way the Cusan coincidence of opposites comes to encode for Comenius a "logic of faith" responsive to the Trinitarian and participatory structure of reality, expressing God as the transcendent and immanent ground of all creation. Burton then explores the way in

¹²⁰ Jan Patočka, "Centrum Securitatis und Cusanus," in Jan Patočka, *Andere Wege in die Moderne*, 245-56; "Comenius und Cusanus," 237-43; Pavel Floss, "Cusanus und Comenius," *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 10 (1973): 172-90; and Simon Kuchlbauer, *Johann Amos Comenius' antisozinianische Schriften: Entwurf eines integrativen Konzepts von Aufklärung* (Dresden: Thelem, 2011), 200-21.

¹²¹ Kuchlbauer, *Comenius' antisozinianische Schriften*, 125ff.

which Comenius takes up this understanding, through the mathematical motif of squaring the circle, into his developing *pansophia*. In his later works this led him to attempt a fusion of Augustinian and Cusan methodologies in order to develop an alternative *mathesis universalis* – one which affirms with Descartes and the new philosophy the mathematical structure of all reality, but always remains open to its Trinitarian and transcendent ground. In this he seeks to establish his own Christian Enlightenment, treading with Cusanus an alternative “passage to modernity.”

The final chapter in this concluding section by Jan Makovský on “Cusanus and Leibniz: Symbolic Explorations of Infinity as a Ladder to God” is devoted to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, a quintessential Enlightenment figure. As remarked on above, Leibniz’s connection to both the Fabrist and Herborn circles is now well established. Indeed, following the pioneering scholarship of Willy Kabitz, Leroy Loemker and Rossi, leading Leibniz scholars such as Leinkauf, Antognazza and Christia Mercer have emphasised the centrality of Renaissance Neoplatonism, Encyclopaedism and the universal reformation for understanding Leibniz’s philosophy and theology.¹²² Nevertheless, Leibniz’s relation to Cusanus remains a neglected topic, despite a widespread acknowledgement of Cusanus’ own important role in the centuries-long refinement of geometrical ideas that eventually led to the development of the calculus.¹²³ In light of this Makovský explores the connections between Cusanus’ mathematical theology and Leibniz’s own reflections on infinity as a ladder to God. Taking up again Cusanus’ understanding of squaring the circle, he shows how Leibniz’s famous mathematical investigations of infinity may be understood as a symbolic comprehension and rationalisation of Cusanus’ rule of learned ignorance. In doing so he argues that Leibniz’s Cusan-inspired notion of infinity became a means for him to implement a reform of science and philosophy, transcending what he viewed as the deadening rationalism of Cartesian

¹²² Willy Kabitz, *Die Philosophie des jungen Leibniz. Untersuchung zur Entwicklungsgeschichte seines Systems* (Karl Winter’s Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1909); Loemker, “Leibniz and the Herborn Encyclopedists,” 323-38; Rossi, *Logic*, 176-94; Leinkauf, *Einheit, Natur, Geist*, 15-50; Antognazza, “Bisterfeld and *immetatio*,” 64-81; and Christia Mercer, *Leibniz’s Metaphysics: Its Origins and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 21-59, 173-252. Of recent scholars, however, it is Leinkauf who has given the most attention to Leibniz’s relationship to Cusanus.

¹²³ While Ulli Roth, “Die Bestimmung der Mathematik bei Cusanus und Leibniz,” *Studia Leibnitiana* 29:1 (1997): 63-80 has sought to play down affinities between Cusanus and Leibniz concerning infinitesimals, Jean-Michel Counet, *Mathématiques et Dialectique chez Nicolas de Cuse* (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 258, 277 and others have clearly seen Cusanus’ thought as belonging to a trajectory leading to the calculus.

natural science. As with Comenius, this had important consequences for what Leibniz called the “perfect republic of spirits” – in other words for the Church.¹²⁴ In this we have come full circle, albeit now in a very different confessional context, back to the Cusanus of the *De concordantia catholica* and his irenic vision of the universal harmony of angels and men in the bonds of the Trinity.

PART V. Epilogue

As a Christian reformer, Cusanus was well aware that reform always exists within the horizon of time and eternity. Indeed, according to Ladner’s paradigm, reform must always be perfectible since it conforms to an ultimately transcendent pattern.¹²⁵ At the same time, as we may see from his early *Conjectura de ultimis diebus*, Cusanus’ own efforts at reform, like those of Luther, Comenius and the universal reformers, were driven by his apocalyptic expectations.¹²⁶ Fittingly, this eschatological element of reform frames Michael Moore’s epilogue to our volume. Taking us back to the turbulent era of the Weimar Republic, under the looming shadow of its false messianism, Moore argues that the work of prominent medievalists and Renaissance scholars such as Aby Warburg, Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and above all Ernst Cassirer was motivated not only by historical interests but also by a desire to resource the intellectual and spiritual reconstruction of the contemporary German, and indeed European, ethos. While Cassirer, unlike Cusanus, was not a “Messianic thinker,” his meticulous historical research made him thoroughly attuned to the enduring vitality of cultural forms. In particular, he was deeply attracted to Cusanus’ innovative synthesis of transcendence and freedom, as well as his emphasis on the dignity of the individual human being. More than simply a key figure in the emergence of modernity, Cusanus came to represent for him the modern spirit in one of its purest and most elevated

¹²⁴ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, th. 36-7, in *Discourse on Metaphysics and the Monadology*, trans. George R. Montgomery (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005), 45.

¹²⁵ Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 35.

¹²⁶ Nicholas of Cusa, *Conjectura de ultimis diebus*, 123-40 (h IV.91-100). For intriguing connections between Cusa’s apocalypticism and that of the Lutheran Reformation see Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 126-33. For early modern apocalypticism, including Comenius, see Howard Hotson, *Paradise Postponed: Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2000).

forms. As Moore reminds us, such thinking remains just as relevant to us today in our own historical moment of *kairos*. By raising anew the question of Cusanus and (early) modernity, our volume also reveals him as a figure of enduring relevance, whose significance far transcends the bounds of his own era, indeed, perhaps, of any era.