

# Selections from the Supplication of the Archangel in Nicholas of Cusa's *De Pace Fidei*

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Source:

Nicholas of Cusa's *De pace fidei* was written in 1453 in response to the fall of Constantinople. Although many contemporary Cusanus scholars tend to emphasize the ecumenical themes of the text, there is a deep tension between these ecumenical impulses and its apologetic bent. Depressingly, the apologetic bent is most noticeable in the ways in which representatives of Islam are depicted as being persuaded to accept several central tenets of trinitarian theology as well as several unsavory characterizations of Jews and Judaism in the text. Admittedly, then, this is a strange text to quote in a Passover seder. And yet, even if he cannot acknowledge it (which is, in a way, merely to mimic the principle of charity involved in what Nicholas called his own peculiar method of "pia interpretatione"), the text seems to capture the pulse of several ideas central to the themes of the seder.

Traditionally, Bareich involves a number of prayers of gratitude to God and supplication for Mercy. In place of options from other aggagot, let us therefore read the following excerpts from the supplication of the Archangel in Nicholas of Cusa's *De pace fidei*.

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"O Lord, King of the universe, what does any creature have that You did not give to it? It was fitting that the human body, formed from the clay of the earth, was inbreathed by You with a rational spirit, so that from within this body an image of Your ineffable power would shine forth. From one [man] there was multiplied the great number of people who inhabit the surface of dry land....

"But You know, O Lord, that there cannot be a great multitude without much diversity and that almost all [men] are compelled to live a hard life full of troubles and miseries and to be underlings, in abject subjection, to kings who wield dominion. Consequently, it has come about that, of all [men], few have so much leisure that by using their freedom of choice they are able to arrive at a knowledge of themselves. For they are distracted by many corporeal cares and tasks.... [And] the earthly human condition has this characteristic: viz., that longstanding custom, which is regarded as having passed over into nature, is defended as the truth. In this way there arise great quarrels when each community prefers its own faith to another [faith].

"Aid [us], then, O You who alone are able to. For this strife occurs for the sake of You, whom alone all [men] worship in everything they are seen to adore. For no one, in whatever he is seen to desire, desires [anything] except the good, which You are. And in all intellectual inference no one seeks anything other than the truth, which You are.

"What does that which is alive seek except to continue living? What does that which exists seek except to continue existing? You, then, who are the giver of life and of existence, are the one who is seen to be sought in different ways in different rites, and You are named in different names; for as You are [in Yourself] You remain unknown and ineffable to all....

"Therefore, do not hide Yourself any longer, O Lord. Be propitious, and manifest Your face; and all peoples will be saved, who no longer will be able to desert the Source of life and its sweetness, once having foretasted even a little thereof. For no one departs from You except because He is ignorant of You."