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How Martin Luther Killed Mars: The Effects of *On War Against the Turk* on the European
Psyche

With Europe being fractured and broken in the 1520s by the Protestant Reformation, the threat of an invading Islamic empire became even more imposing. The Protestant Reformation, which initially set to deal with the corruption in the Papal hierarchy and its encroachment into political affairs, led to a religious schism between those committed to reform and those who remained allied with the papacy. This theological split, in turn, created an even greater political divide between the feudal states within the vast Holy Roman Empire, a large empire loosely composed of feudal states in modern day Germany and north-eastern Europe, and also between larger kingdoms such as those situated on the Baltic (e.g. Northern German¹ states, Sweden, The Netherlands) and those situated on the Mediterranean (e.g. the Italian states, Spain, Portugal) (Greengrass). All of this was accompanied by the rise of Sultan Suleiman I (the Magnificent), the Ottoman Emperor who began to reclaim large portions of Eastern Europe, including Greece and the Balkans, and was soon closing in on the cultural hub of Vienna in 1528 (Francisco). The Ottoman Empire was a vast, Islamic empire that spanned from Eastern Europe to modern day Iran, and from Algeria to the end of the Arabian Peninsula (Figure 1). The Ottomans had been a thorn in Europe's side for hundreds of years, and were the conquerors of the Byzantine Empire

¹ As modern Germany was not created until the 1870s, all uses of 'Germany' or 'German' will refer to the geographical region or ethnic group, unless specified otherwise

in 1453, the final vestige of the Roman Empire (Reston). Roughly 70 years later, the same force that brought down the old cultural center of the West, Constantinople, was now about to do the same to the new cultural center of the West, Vienna.

But Martin Luther, the man responsible for the destruction of European religious unity, was not silent or indifferent to the Turkish threat. In order to address the threat and to clarify his position that there should be no crusades and that the Ottomans were God's punishment to an "...equally depraved" Europe—a position interpreted as pacifistic by many- that he had taken on the pulpit ten years earlier (Francisco 67-68), Luther released from Wittenberg the pamphlet entitled *On War Against the Turks*. Addressed to Philip Landgrave of Hesse, one of Luther's major supporters, for his largely German audience, this pamphlet gives a theological argument for what Luther claims is a non-theological issue. He argues that fighting Islam is not a matter of faith and that nowhere in the Bible is defending Christianity a matter of violence or force; on the contrary, fighting the Turks is solely a matter of submitting to political authorities (meaning the current Holy Roman Emperor). He draws this idea from his Two Kingdoms theology in his pamphlet *Concerning Christian Liberty*, which states that a Christian is free in spiritual matters, but bound in earthly matters to political authority as long as the latter authority does not affect the former. Though in *On War Against the Turk* he maintains the Ottomans to be a punishment to the European Church, he also argues for resistance to the attacks, just not on religious grounds. On the contrary, he makes the case that a Christian should not fight for Christianity's sake, but that they should fight only if their political authority should lead them into battle, thus dividing the notion of a political subject from that of a religious subject. So too, he argues for non-involvement on the part of the Catholic Church, as it is a religious institution and not a

governmental institution. In both arguments he introduces a major distinction between political and religious authority; a distinction (with the exception of his former work) that had not been well made before this point.



(Map of the Ottoman Empire in Sixteenth Century: Figure 1.)

All of this being said, *On War Against the Turk* did not simply have immediate effects on Ottoman-European relationships. Indeed, Luther's pamphlet and ideas stemming from this pamphlet had major, unintended effects on Europe. This piece serves as a hallmark of the development of European politics, society, and thought. So too, it also served as a rhetorical move within Lutheran² theology, as the struggle on which the Two Kingdoms theology was set in became not so much about territorial disputes and differing theological viewpoints held

² Not in the sense of the denomination, but of that which was expressed by Luther himself

between Catholics and Protestants, but it became a clash of entirely different religions and cultures altogether. The situation was an extreme example that put Luther's theology to the test more than any other event in his life time. By looking at Europe's shifting views on the Turks and how these shifted views toward Europe's "other" in turn affected the internal politics of Europe itself, this paper will show that Martin Luther's pamphlet *On War Against the Turk* served as major example of his Two Kingdoms theology, and therefore was a main contributor to the secularization of European thought, particularly European thinking about war. Though there is no shortage of scholarship on the general topics of Luther and the Ottomans, and the Reformation's effects on European thought, the two seldom meet.

An example of the religiously-focused scholarship on Luther and the Ottomans is the work of Adam Francisco, a theologian at Concordia Theological Seminary. In his book *Martin Luther and Islam: A Study in Sixteenth-century Polemics and Apologetics*, Francisco delves into Lutheran thought and theology on Islam. He compares Luther's teachings on Islam with that of his medieval, Catholic predecessors and finds that though they most starkly differentiate in thought in that "...Luther was convinced that... Christians could and should, if God led them to, live alongside Muslim in the domain of the Ottomans" (Francisco 23). He goes on to say that Luther also differed from them in that he thought that missions conducted in the Islamic world would be most effective if they were done by Christians living among Muslims, rather than traveling to an Islamic area for a short period of time. This assessment is important in understanding the development of European thought in that it introduces not only the possibility of obeying a non-Christian government just as much as one would a Christian government, but also shows that doing so in both acceptable and commendable. That being said, Francisco leaves

his assessment there and does not go into any further look into broader European thought.

Like Francisco, Jae Jerkins adds to the large discussion of early Protestant-Islamic relations in the sixteenth century. He starts at looking at both Luther and John Calvin's views on Islam. He argues that the two tend to be negative toward Islam, but then goes on to show how the two faiths had generally a more positive relationship with each other at the time due to a shared anti-Catholic sentiment, citing the English-Turkish alliance formed. Though he does turn to a few European changes and events for evidence of the positive relationship, he still, like Francisco, does not discuss the effects that these Protestant views had on the whole of European thought. This theme of neglecting the effects on Europe is common among scholarship on Protestantism and the Ottoman Empire. Similarly, scholarship on the Reformations effects on Europe is just as exclusive to Europe's changing relationship with the Ottoman Empire, and its causes.

On the other side of scholarship, Harold Grimm among others focus on connecting the historical importance of the Reformation with the development of the European psyche. His monograph *The Reformation Era: 1500-1650* spends the majority of its text on the Reformation, its background, and its effects. From this he concludes his book with the aftermath of the Reformation in terms of its societal and cultural impact. In this he concludes that one of the many results of the Reformation was the secularization of the European state and society, and that "The rulers of the secularized European states were now more concerned with the maintenance of law and order and the outward conformity to their state churches than with the theological views of their subjects" (Grimm 468). He thoroughly investigates this transformation through a purely European lens, yet he neglects both Luther's and Europe's interactions, views,

and relationships with its eastern, Islamic counterpart. Similarly, C. Scott Dixon in his book *The Reformation in Germany* concludes his study with the rise of the secular modern state, yet still hardly mentioning the Turks and never referencing Luther's pamphlet *On War Against the Turk*, a pamphlet aimed at the Emperor and the German people. Finally, like Grimm and Dixon, Jan Glete, Professor of History at the University of Exeter, shows the development of European war and state in the sixteenth century, but unlike them, he largely overlooks the religious aspect. He examines these developments from a purely secular standpoint, hardly mentioning the Protestant Reformation and not once discussing the Lutheran Two Kingdom doctrine. He assumes that a divisive secularism was the original thought process of European kingdoms. His arguments are flawed, or at least contextually impoverished, in their evaluation of European secularism. It is nearly impossible to look at the secular without looking at the religious in the Early Modern period, as the two were not well distinguished until after the Protestant Reformation. To ignore the relevance of such an important part of history is a misrepresentation of thorough historical interpretation. Luckily this is not a widely popular interpretation, yet it serves to show a sort of deficiency in scholarship on European secularism.

These two scholarly divisions, though largely thorough in their respective focuses, do not often join to show the greater effect that Lutheran theology on the Turks had on the broader scope of European society and their intrarelations within the continent. They do not attempt to reconcile the two, and so often Luther's *On War Against the Turk* is sidelined as merely a document of theology with little impact on European evolution.

However, a closer examination and interpretation of Luther's pamphlet is needed for proper understanding of both its meaning and its wider significance. He begins his pamphlet by

addressing past misconceptions on his former's statements that he made on the Turks, and gives the explanation that the misinterpretations came from the fact that at the point in which he made his statements, there was nothing written on the doctrine of two kingdoms. He redefines his statements of not waging a crusade against the Ottomans was meant solely for the Catholic Church. From there he spends goes into depth on the religion of Islam and, though bringing out the good qualities, determines that it is an evil empire. This condemnation is then not left for Islam, but is then put also on the Catholic Church, saying that waging war (against Islam) in God's name as the Church had was the "...greatest of all sins and one that no Turk commits, for Christ's name is used for sin and shame and thus dishonored" (Luther). By doing this, he puts Europe and the Ottomans on the same level. He takes away any loftiness or self-righteousness that may have been held by the German people over the non-Christian Turks. Later on he even goes on to call a united Holy Roman Empire (represented by Emperor Charles V by way of synecdoche) equal to the Turks. It may be pointed out that at one point toward the end, Luther is quoted as saying that the "Turk is not like fighting against the King of France, or the Venetians, or the pope." However, in saying so to counter Luther's argument of equality, that argument would completely miss the context as Luther said this on a basis, not of faith or righteousness, but on a base of economic and military might.

From his condemnation of a 'holy war,' Luther proceeds into addressing the secular state in how it should respond to Turkish invasion. He mainly focuses on the role and duty of the secular state and the people's submission to it. He disqualifies the notion that the state has any part in advancing religion or taking actions in order to defend or fend off faith. On the contrary, the sole duty of the state in war is to "perform the work and duty of his [the emperor's] office,

which is to protect his subjects...” (Luther). This again separates the role of government and religion even in opposition to Islam. From there, he addresses the question of whether the Holy Roman Empire should fight against the papacy just as much as it would against the Turks, as he said both are equally evil. His answer, somewhat surprisingly yet very telling and supportive of his previous arguments, is yes. He states that if the papacy were to invade Germany as the Ottomans almost did (in reality they did not move past Vienna, but again, that was unsure of at the time), then they should just as strongly fight against the Pope as they would the Sultan. He then both qualifies and furthers this argument by saying that the Emperor should also tolerate both when they are not attacking. In other words, even though the Turks are evil, the only war the Germans should wage against them should be in defense, and so too with the papacy. Since Luther treats the papacy- the head of the Catholic Church; the very Church that the authority of the Holy Roman Empire aligns itself with- as the same as an Islamic state, in effect, Luther elevates matters of the secular state over matters of religion, giving the state authority over both secular institutions and religious institutions within its border.

The societal implications of these statements are huge. Though, in theory, these statements are similar to his earlier statements in *Concerning Christian Liberty*, they do something that increases the reach of the Two Kingdoms doctrine: they make the Ottomans as equals to Europeans and, in doing so, serve as the ultimate example of submitting one’s political authority despite tyrannical rule or religious difference. For nearly a decade the idea of submitting to political authority despite religious difference had been floating around in the European mind, but it was not until this idea was applied to the Turks also was it seen on a blown up scale. Their perceptions of the Ottomans shifted from a “...wild-eyed barbarian...

pagan worshipping false idols...” people, to an empire that “...was a worthy adversary equal to any collective of principalities of which Europe could boast” (Reston). This change, again, took away the image of religious enemy and turned into a national enemy. This transformation was startling because the idea of fighting another state for political and not religious reasons was displayed, not interdenominationally as it had been, on a scale of a different religion entirely, and that of Islam, the great enemy of Christendom for hundreds of years. The grandness of this shift cleared the path for almost the complete reversal of the importance of religious and political differences between states. If the Ottomans were to be repelled solely as a matter of protecting political authority and not of combatting Islam, then so could Christian states both unify despite religious differences and combat one another despite religious similarities, and all of this for the good of the state.

The idea of political priority over religion in matters of the state did not simply stay an intellectual idea, but it took hold of the people of the time, and particularly of the rulers. In doing so, the idea became common practice and was increasingly so as time progressed. This paradigm shift manifested itself in many ways through the rest of European history, but two of the most immediate (to the time of the change, that is) and important examples are the Anglo-Ottoman quasi-alliance and the Franco-Swedish Period of the Thirty Years War.

During Queen Elizabeth I’s reign in in the late sixteenth century, Protestant England increasingly sought to sever its ties with Spain and the Hapsburgs, one of the most powerful royal families in Europe and rulers of both Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. There was a constant threat (and five attempts) by the Spanish King Phillip II to conquer England for reasserting both Catholicism and, most importantly, Hapsburg dominance. In order to help

protect itself, England sought out an alliance with the Ottoman Empire. So too, as the Ottomans were still looking to expand into Germany, they were looking for alliances to combat the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, a Hapsburg himself. Though a concrete Anglo-Ottoman alliance never quite came to fruition, their nations grew quite close to each other, and trade between them flourished (Jerkins 9-17). Though not a formal alliance, this loose coming together of a Protestant and Islamic nation shows the overcoming of religious difference in the name of furthering national interests. Even though a European allying with the Turks was not advocated by Martin Luther, he said this as a matter of religious principle for the individual Christian. Luther's ideas of a governmental self-defense was what most influenced England in their alliance, as this was an important concept floating around in the general European psyche and in the continent's political and theological conversation in this period. For if they were attacked by an equally as evil Hapsburg nation, as Luther argued, then they had a right to politically align themselves with another nation that did not threaten England and opposed their enemies- this nation being the Ottoman Empire. This example of the ability of a state to align itself with a religiously different state for political purposes is then best accompanied with its partner-religiously-aligned states fighting against one another for political purposes.

The last 13 years of the Thirty years war (1618-48) is commonly titled the Franco-Swedish Period. Without prior knowledge of the war, one might surmise that this name as a war between the Swedes and the French, which would make sense given their religious differences, Sweden being Protestant and France being Catholic. However, this was not the case. Instead, these two nations were allied against their common enemy, the Hapsburgs. Though the French had supported the Catholic cause early on in the war, by the end they had given up on any

notion of religious unity with Austria and Spain, and had switched sides to advance their own political strength. The greatest illustration of their focus on state interests over faith was that the people leading the French nation against the side tied to the papacy were Catholic cardinals, the most notable among them being Cardinal Richelieu. Grimm in his monograph shows this dramatic turn of events by stating that "...the war was no longer a religious war by the wildest stretch of the imagination" (427). This alliance shows the other side of the effects of *On War Against the Turk*; it shows that just as countries of religious difference should ally for the good of the state, so too should countries of the same religion forfeit unity for the sake of that state good. Once again, we see the change of priorities shown on a grand scale. Though the French were not followers of Lutheranism, Luther's theology had seeped into the European, and specifically in this case French, way of thinking, altering both their motives for war and their actions.

European history is the story of the religious and secular worlds fighting and supporting each other. Indeed, the two were for most of history inseparable ideas, with little distinction in the mind of the European hierarchy, peasantry, bourgeois, and clergy. But after Martin Luther introduced the Two Kingdoms theology, European thought was never the same. At the start, this paper asked the question of how *On War Against the Turk*, a pamphlet meant to address mainly how Germans should engage war with the invading Ottomans, fit into this larger narrative of the European secular nation-state. Luther's expressed ideas on how to approach fighting a war against the Turks catalyzed an already ongoing process of state secularization, by way of presenting them as a political rather than religious enemy. As it tore down the institutions of religion in foreign politics, Luther's pamphlet elevated the interests of state to pre-eminence in government, leading eventually to European wars being fought for state reasons with little regard

to religious unity or difference. Though spoken of in large historical terms, ultimately this pamphlet created new meaning for its readers as it prioritized a secular rather than a religious institution in the lives of individuals. As religion had been the center of European life for hundreds of years, secularism, whether the individuals were religious or not, took its place. This led to both the dissolution of the feeling of unity among religious believers, and to a new feeling of national unity among peoples of the newly emerging nation states. This paper shows *On War Against the Turk*'s effect on the secularization of the European nation state in the matters of war, yet the document remains to be explored in terms of its reach beyond the realm of war; it was a predecessor to all secular development in European war and peace, expansion and retention, science and art, influencing individual and collective thought for many years up to the present.

Bibliography

Dixon, C. Scott. *The Reformation in Germany*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2002. Print

Francisco, Adam. *Martin Luther and Islam: A Study in Sixteenth-century Polemics and Apologetics*. Leiden: Brill, 2007. Print.

Written for historical and theological academia by Adam Francisco (D.Phil. in Historical Theology, University of Oxford, Guest Professor of Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, IN), this monograph presents a brief history of Medieval to 16th century Christian-Islam relations, and focuses on Martin Luther's theological views and teachings on Islam. I will use this secondary source to give proper background to my paper and to address the first question pertaining to Islam.

Glete, Jan. *War and the State in Early Modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic, and Sweden*

as *Fiscal-military States, 1500-1660*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Jan Glete, professor in History at the University of Stockholm, wrote this monograph to look at the political, social, and economic change in early modern Europe due to military change, citing many primary and secondary sources in able to do it. This was meant as a scholarly book for historical academia. I would make use of mainly the first two sections of the book before it goes into the three specific cases, and I would use it to help look at changes in warfare and views on warfare during this time period.

Greengrass, Mark. *Christendom Destroyed: Europe 1517-1648*. New York: Penguin Group, 2014. Print.

Grimm, Harold J. *The Reformation Era: 1500-1650*. New York: Macmillan, 1964. Print.

Jerkins, Jae. "Islam in the Early Modern Protestant Imagination: Religious and Political Rhetoric of English Protestant– Ottoman Relations (1528-1588)." *Eras* 13.2 (n.d.): n. pag. *Monash University*. Web. 11 May 2016.

Jae Jerkins has their M.A. in the Interdisciplinary Humanities at Florida State University, is a doctoral student in the Department of Religion at the Florida State University, and a Professor at Tyler Junior College. The thesis of this journal article is to show how both mutual positive opinions about each other and a common enemy in the Catholic Church led Protestant England to ally with the Islamic Ottoman Empire, and many primary and secondary sources to support this. This is a scholarly article for the academic journal at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, and is meant for both pre- and postgraduates in the humanities discipline. This secondary source gives a good depiction of relations between Protestants and Muslims in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but more

importantly shows the allying of two nations based on political goals rather than religious affiliation. I would use this to show the change in European psyche and the change in authority.

Luther, Martin. *On War Against the Turk*. N.p.: n.p., 1528. Print

Martin Luther, founder of the Protestant Reformation, wrote this pamphlet to Philip Landgrave of Hesse (a major supporter of Luther) in response to the Ottoman Empire laying siege on Vienna in order to clarify comments that he had previously made on going to war with the Turks which was that Christians should only go to war with the Ottoman's in submission to earthly authority, not for religious reasons; so to, the papacy should not involve itself with such a war or any war. He cites mainly his older work in order to clarify it, and he cites the Bible as his argument is mainly theological. I would use this primary source as the bases for my paper as it is the artifact that I have chosen to use.

Luther, Martin, Henry Wace, and C. A. Buchheim. "Concerning Christian Liberty." *First Principles of the Reformation, Or, The Ninety-five Theses and the Three Primary Works of Martin Luther*. London: Murray, 1883. N. pag. *Online Library of Liberty*. Liberty Fund. Web. 25 May 2016.

Miller, Gregory. "From Crusades to Homeland Defense." *Christian History* 21.2 (2002):

31. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 11 May 2016.

Dr. Gregory Miller is the director of General Education and Professor of History at Malone University and has written many scholarly works on Protestantism and Islam.

The thesis of the article is to explore the teachings, writings, and views of Martin Luther,

and those specifically related to the Ottoman Empire, in order to show how these things influenced the European view of and toward the Ottomans as a whole. He cites several primary sources and artifacts (many of which were written by Luther), but due to the nature of the article (being from an online news source) lacks citations to other scholarly articles. The audience of this article is directed towards modern Christians (most likely Protestants), most likely in the U.S. and abroad (due to its original publication being in *Christianity Today International*). I think this secondary source gives good interpretation of Luther's theology and is very useful in both the background given, and also the conclusion ends in the direction that I am heading (the two conclusions being that Christians should fight the Turks only in defense of homeland, and that a Christian should submit to Turkish authority if they are conquered). I do realize that this source may be biased towards Luther and Christianity due to its source of publishing, but the pedagogical history-heavy nature of the article would leave it not too weighted to be used.

Reston, James. *Defenders of the Faith: Charles V, Suleyman the Magnificent, and the Battle for Europe, 1520-1536*. New York: Penguin, 2009. Print. Wood, John E. *Growth of the Ottoman Empire*. Digital image. *Teaching the Middle East: A Source for Educators*. University of Chicago, n.d. Web. 25 May 2016.