

## ISLAM IN LUTHER AND SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

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Europe faced many challenges in the 1500s. Martin Luther was a major headache to the Holy Roman Empire, specifically to Emperor Charles V and the papacy. Luther and his followers refused to submit to the emperor and the pope but continued to spread their message. Yet, there was a challenge faced by all—the emperor, pope, Luther, and, in fact, all of Europe—and there was no agreement on what to do. This challenge was the ongoing aggression from the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman Empire—Turks<sup>1</sup> as Luther refers to them—threatened the very existence of Europe. For Luther, it was not only an issue of invasion by another empire, it was the fact that another faith—Islam—challenged Europe and Christianity. Luther, as on many other topics, had much to say and said it in his characteristic strong language.

We will explore Luther's response to Islam and then look at the Seventh-day Adventist response to it. Furthermore, how have Adventists tried to fulfill their mission to bring their message to the whole world, including Islam? What are the lessons to be learned?

### 1. Europe under Siege

In the 1300s, Europe lost many to the Black Death and its consequences impacted the continent for many years. On the other hand, there were positive events in the next century. For example, Johannes Gutenberg, around 1440, developed the moveable printing press. The printing press was a major and lasting innovation. Several years after the Gutenberg

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to be consistent in the use of the terms Ottoman, Turk, and Islam. Luther usually referred to them as Turks and for him their faith was Islam. Even today, in some parts of Europe, the word *Turk* is used for Muslims, even though these individuals are not Turks.

event, Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantium Empire, fell in 1453 to the Ottoman Turks. By 1463, Bosnia<sup>2</sup> was conquered and Hercegovina fell in 1482.<sup>3</sup>

While Luther was at the imperial Diet at Worms in April 1521, Ottoman ruler Süleyman I (r. 1520–1566), also known as Süleyman the Magnificent, marched westward and, by August 1521, had taken Belgrade. That conquest exposed Vojvodina, Hungary, Slavonia, and Croatia to the Turks. Süleyman focused on the rest of Europe and in 1526, at the Battle of Mohacs, killed King Louis II of Hungary. Only three years later, in September and October 1529, Süleyman went even further west and attacked Vienna, Austria.<sup>4</sup> The Holy Roman emperor, Charles V (r. 1519–1556), the pope, and Francis I of France (r. 1515–1547) were busy fighting each other. Ferdinand I (r. 1558–1564), brother of Charles V, held Vienna against the Turks<sup>5</sup>; otherwise, Vienna would have been lost.

How serious were these Ottoman incursions into Europe and its political and religious situation? Ahmed Essa (with Othman Ali) attempts to minimize the scope of these invasions: “After Spain and Sicily, the Muslims made no further efforts at major conquests and expansion. This is important when judging the ensuing events involving the Muslims in Europe and the distorted views of their history.”<sup>6</sup>

The same writers maintain that the Europeans benefitted from these invasions: “History is full ironies. The European Christians, who most wanted to destroy Islam and the Muslim world, were the same people who benefitted most from the achievements of Islamic civilization.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The conquest was complete even though Bosnia is rather mountainous and has numerous secluded villages. During a lecture tour in Bosnia in the fall of 2016, my wife, Ruth I. Satelmajer, and I toured some of these secluded villages that were supposedly the last ones to be conquered. The villages are located near Konjic, a small city between Mostar and Sarajevo. Some of these villages are only accessible via small one-lane mountain roads.

<sup>3</sup> Today, both areas are part of Bosnia and Herzegovina with about 50 percent Muslims, 30 percent Serbs, and about 15 percent Croats. <http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/largest-ethnic-groups-of-bosnia-and-herzegovina.html>.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Siege\\_of\\_Vienna](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Siege_of_Vienna).

<sup>5</sup> Paula Sutter Fichter, *Emperor Maximilian II* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmed Essa and Othman Ali, *Studies in Islamic Civilization: The Muslim Contribution to the Renaissance* (Herndon, VA: The International Institute of Islam Thought, 2010), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Essa and Ali, *Studies in Islamic Civilization*, 243.

Although it is outside the scope of this chapter to ascertain whether and how European Christians benefited from Islamic civilization, at least some of the invaders saw their mission as something other than spreading Islamic civilization or sharing their culture with the Europeans. At the University of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum, the following description, found on a talismanic shirt, shows the Ottomans were prepared for war:

In an often-quoted letter written in the 1530s Hürrem Sultan urged her husband, the Ottoman Sultan Süleyman [r. 1520-66], to wear the shirt she had dispatched to the battlefield as it would "turn aside bullets" and protect him from death. Fabricated by a holy man inspired by a vision of the Prophet Muhammad himself, this powerful garment was explicitly intended to be worn in the cause of Islam, deriving its efficacy from the sacred names that decorated it.<sup>8</sup>

Another source implies the Ottoman invasions of Europe were joint operations between Muslims and Christians. The title of the book, *Two Faiths, One Banner: When Muslims Marched with Christians across Europe's Battlegrounds*,<sup>9</sup> argues that the Ottoman military forays were joint operations between Muslims and Christians. The author Ian Almond, states,

The whole point of this chapter will be to dismantle some of the myths concerning the Turkish march on Vienna, especially the manner in which it is enrolled into some form of East-West conflict between Christian Europe and a Muslim Orient—an interpretation which is, in the end, nothing more than a Disney version of history .... Thousands of Greeks, Armenians and Slavs in the Ottomans' own armies who loyally fought for the sultan to the Transylvanian Protestants and disaffected peasants who, tired of the Habsburg's yoke (or their own Hungarian aristocracy) moved over to the Turkish side.<sup>10</sup>

Like most wars, armies pick up mercenaries and others, who may, at times, even fight against their own country. That, however, does not adequately explain Almond's point that these military actions were joint operations. Croatian historian, Rudolf Horvat, points out that the Ottomans took back with them many prisoners. According to Horvat, in 1532 the sultan took fifty thousand Croats to Turkey and a few years later another sixty thousand prisoners from Slavonia (the region east of Zagreb and

<sup>8</sup> Francesca Leoni and Christiane Gruber, *Power and Protection: Islamic Art and the Supernatural* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2016), 58.

<sup>9</sup> Ian Almond, *Two Faiths, One Banner: When Muslims Marched with Christians across Europe's Battlegrounds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

north of Bosnia).<sup>11</sup> Often, the prisoners were youth who were trained as soldiers for the Ottoman Empire and some became part of future invading armies.

Luther and his contemporaries lived in a Europe whose religious situation was unstable and, at the same time, was facing a powerful external adversary. When the Ottoman armies tried to take Vienna, they were only about 375 miles from Luther's city of Wittenberg. Luther's pilgrimage to Rome was nearly 900 miles. If he could travel that distance, surely Süleyman the Magnificent, should he succeed in taking Vienna, could travel another 375 miles to Wittenberg and other parts of Germany. Further invasions were real possibilities faced by Luther and his contemporaries.

## 2. Luther and Islam

With this background in mind, what did Luther write about the ongoing threat posed by the Ottoman Empire? As early as 1518, Luther stated, "To fight against the Turk is the same as resisting God, who visits our sin upon us with this rod."<sup>12</sup> Some held Luther "responsible both for the Turkish advance itself as well as for the unwillingness of many to resist the foe of Christendom."<sup>13</sup>

While Luther was concerned about the Turkish invasions, he was in some ways an indirect beneficiary of their military action. Emperor Charles V needed the support of the fragmented empire—the kings, princess, electors, and bishops—in order to mount a defense. Some of these rulers supported Luther and he, to some extent, benefited from the Turkish invasions. Charles V, for example, needed the support of Frederick III (r. 1486–1525), Elector of Saxony and Luther's protector. If Charles V did not need the support of Frederick, Luther's fate at the Diet at Worms in 1521 may have been different. Francis I of France did not help the situation and eventually entered into an alliance with the Turks. These were some of the complex issues facing Europe and Luther, specifically.

Luther's friends urged him to write on the topic, but other than making brief comments, he did not do so until 1528, two years after the decisive victory by the Ottoman forces at Mohacs, Hungary. His most exten-

<sup>11</sup> Rudolf Horvat, *Povijest Grada Varaždin* (Varaždin: Hrvatska Akademija Znanosti I Umjetnosti, 1993), 67, 68, 69.

<sup>12</sup> Introduction to "On War Against the Turk," *Luther's Works*, 46:158. Hereafter *LW*. For the German text, see "Vom Kriege wider den Türken," in *WA* 30ii, (81), 107-148. (My primary source and focus is this tract.)

<sup>13</sup> *LW* 46:158.

sive piece on the topic, *On War against the Turk*, was written by October 9, 1528 and printed on April 23, 1529<sup>14</sup> just six months before Süleyman's siege on Vienna started. Luther addressed his treatise to Philip I of Hesse (1504–1567) who, while a youthful ruler of seventeen, supported Luther at Worms. This is the same Philip whose later bigamous marriage caused problems for Luther and the Protestant movement.<sup>15</sup> What are the main points of Luther's message?

*It is not Luther's fault.* Luther knows the urgency and is also upset that "some stupid preachers among us Germans ... are making people believe that we ought not and must not fight against the Turks."<sup>16</sup> Luther rails against those who want the Turks to come and "rule because they think our German people are wild and uncivilized—indeed, that they are half-devil and half-man."<sup>17</sup> Without a doubt Luther would not agree with a recent source already quoted in this chapter stating "that the European Christians ... were the same people who benefited most from the achievements of Islamic civilization."<sup>18</sup> Finally, Luther lashes out against those who blame him "for every bad thing that happens in the world."<sup>19</sup>

*The pope is not doing his work.* Luther is upset because Pope Leo X (r. 1513–1521), who put Luther under a ban, condemned him for writing that fighting the Turk is the same as resisting God.<sup>20</sup> In response, Luther acknowledges such a statement but claims that it is not fair to use it against him because when he took the position, the situation was different.<sup>21</sup> At the time he wrote the pamphlet, Luther had no sympathy for the Turkish invasion, for "the Turk certainly has no right or command to begin war and to attack lands that are not his."<sup>22</sup>

While the pope is criticizing Luther for his position about the Turks, Luther charges that the pope only "pretended to make war on the Turk."<sup>23</sup> According to Luther, the pope "used the Turkish war as a cover for their

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Essa and Ali, *Studies in Islamic Civilization*, 243.

<sup>19</sup> LW 46:161.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>23</sup> LW 46, 163.

game and robbed Germany of money by means of indulgences.”<sup>24</sup> As far as Luther was concerned, the pope and cardinals had many sources of income, such as vacant benefices, if they were serious about fighting the Turks.<sup>25</sup>

Luther not only criticizes the pope for not doing anything about the Turks, he also passes judgment on the character of the popes. According to Luther, Pope Julius III (r. 1503–1513), the pontiff when Luther made his 1511 pilgrimage to Rome, was “a wicked iron-eater” and “half devil.”<sup>26</sup> Some considered Pope Clement VII (r. 1523–1534), the pope at the time Luther wrote his treatise, “almost of a god of war”<sup>27</sup> but not Luther. As far as Luther is concerned, the “pope pays as little heed to the gospel or Christian faith as the Turk, and knows it as little.”<sup>28</sup>

*Who should fight the Turks?* The editors to the English translation *On War against the Turk*, provide a helpful summary. According to them, it is the “Christian, who by prayer, repentance, and reform of life takes the rod of anger out of God’s hand and compels the Turk to stand on his own strength.”<sup>29</sup> Luther writes that the Christian is to fight under the banner of the emperor and not under the banner of bishop, cardinal, or pope.<sup>30</sup> He does not urge anyone to go against the Turks but if they do, they first must repent “and be reconciled to God.”<sup>31</sup>

The Christian is the first man to fight against the Turks and the second is the emperor. Luther writes, “The second man who ought to fight against the Turk is Emperor Charles, or whoever may be emperor; for the Turk is attacking his subject and his empire, and it is his duty, as a regular ruler appointed by God, to defend his own.”<sup>32</sup>

The emperor’s role is to protect his people, and one’s fighting should be under the “emperor’s command, under his banner, and in his name.”<sup>33</sup> Luther laments that the emperor has been seen as the head of Christen-

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *LW* 46, 168.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>29</sup> *LW* 46, 159.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *LW* 46, 185.

dom and protector of the church and the faith. He vehemently objects this concept:

Not so! The emperor is not the head of Christendom or defender of the gospel or the faith. The church and the faith must have a defender other than emperor or kings. They are usually the worst enemies of Christendom and of the faith as Psalm 2[:2] says and as the church constantly laments.<sup>34</sup>

If the emperor was the defender of the faith and was to destroy non-Christians and unbelievers, he "would have to begin with the pope, bishops and clergy, and perhaps not spare us or himself."<sup>35</sup> The emperor should not fight the Turks because of their idolatry, for idolatry exists in his own empire. Then, to make certain that he does not leave out anyone, Luther takes a broad swipe because "there are entirely too many Turks, Jews, heathen, and non-Christians among us with open false doctrine and with offensive, shameful lives."<sup>36</sup> He wants the emperor to protect the people from the invading Turks but as far as the faith of the Turks is concerned, Luther gives them freedom: "Let the Turk believe and live as he will, just as one lets the papacy and other false Christians live."<sup>37</sup> While there is not even a hint of theological approval of Islam, Luther is willing for them to believe and live as they wish.

*Luther's view of Islam.* In his treatise, Luther addresses the question of how to deal with the invasion by the Turks and who should respond to those invasions. In more detail and in stronger language, he gives an assessment of Islam, the Turkish faith. Not what one might expect.

Luther is familiar with the *Koran* and he would like to translate it into German so that "everyone may see what a foul and shameful book it is."<sup>38</sup> While Christ is presented as a holy prophet, Christ is not recognized as the savior of the world,<sup>39</sup> and that is not acceptable to Luther.

Luther objects strongly to Islam's view of government and marriage. According to him, the Turkish man is a destroyer and blasphemer who "ruins all temporal government and home life or marriage."<sup>40</sup> In his

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> LW 46, 186.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> LW 46, 176.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 195.

strongest indictment on marriage he not only condemns the Turks but, for good measure, includes the pope: "Since they [pope and Turks] think lightly of marriage, it serves them right that there are dog-marriages (and would to God they were dog-marriages), indeed, also 'Italian marriages' and 'Florentine brides' among them; and they think these things are good."<sup>41</sup>

Luther is never shy in expressing his views. What makes him use such strong and judgmental expressions about the Turks and at times adding the papacy? For Luther, it is not sufficient that Turks praise "Christ and Mary as being the only ones without sin" and that Christ "is a holy prophet." The Turks, according to Luther, believe that Christ is *nothing* more than a prophet and that is not acceptable to him.<sup>42</sup> He acknowledges that Turks allow the Christian belief in the resurrection to stand, but that is not enough for him. If that is the only article of belief allowed, then "Christ is no redeemer, savior, or king; there is no forgiveness of sins, no grace, no Holy Ghost."<sup>43</sup> Everything is destroyed, he maintains, because "Christ is beneath Mohammed."<sup>44</sup>

Did Luther understand Islam's view of Christ? It seems that his assessments are accurate and that the Islam's views of Christ have not changed. In a recent interview, Muslim theologian Zeki Saritoprak calls Jesus "one of the five [Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad] great messengers of God." Nevertheless, Saritoprak states, "But for Muslims, Jesus is neither God nor the Son of God."<sup>45</sup> Saritoprak sees some hope because "by understanding who Jesus is in Islam, Christians might find common ground with Muslims."<sup>46</sup> It seems that Luther *did* understand Islam's view of Christ and that view, according to Saritoprak, is still the same. It is because Luther understood Islam's view of Christ that he rejected it. It was not acceptable to him.

Luther's response to the Turks and Islam was theological, not political. The emperor had the responsibility to defend the empire, but Luther was interested in sharing the Christian faith with the Turks. He seemed to "have envisioned missionary work amongst Muslims being carried out

<sup>41</sup> LW 46, 198. Luther is referring to homosexual unions.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>43</sup> LW 46, 177.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>45</sup> Zeki Saritoprak, "Who Is Jesus for Muslims?" *Christian Century* (June 2017): 32.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.



discreetly through Christian prisoners and slaves of the Ottomans.”<sup>47</sup> Yet, interestingly, about two years after he wrote his treatise on Turks, Luther did not pursue “an opportunity for an audience with Süleyman in 1530 when a former member of the Habsburg ambassadorial party informed him that the Turkish sultan made friendly inquiries about the German Professor.”<sup>48</sup>

More than thirty years later, Hans von Ungnad, a convert to the Reformation faith, also wanted to bring Christianity to the Turks. His approach was a Serbian NT translation printed in Cyrillic. His goal was to distribute it to the Turks as far as Constantinople. Some contacts, though limited and few, were made with the Turks.<sup>49</sup>

### 3. Seventh-day Adventists and Islam

Luther has had a significant impact on Seventh-day Adventists. Adventists have a high view of Luther even though there are areas of disagreement. Luther is mentioned in Adventist literature more than any other reformer. It is thus natural to compare the Adventist view on Islam with those of Luther. We will look at the Adventist view of Islam from two perspectives—the prophetic view and the mission view.

*Prophetic view of Islam.* From the earliest days, Seventh-day Adventists have emphasized biblical prophecies, especially those in Daniel and Revelation. Two of the denominations’ websites: [www.adventistdigitallibrary.org](http://www.adventistdigitallibrary.org) and [www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org)<sup>50</sup> list numerous entries on Islam or Turkey in prophecy, although we will review only two sources. W. A. Spicer (1865–1952), a church leader and author, addresses the issue of Turkey in one of his books. In reference to Dan 11 and 12, Spicer rather

<sup>47</sup> Adam S. Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam: A Study of Sixteenth-Century Polemics and Apologetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 93.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>49</sup> Nikolaus Satelmajer, “A Bold Sixteenth-Century Mission: The First New Testaments for Croats, Bosnians, Serbs, Bulgarians and Turks,” (S.T.M. Thesis, The Lutheran Theological Seminary), 2014, 85. Also, see other chapters in this book by the same author.

<sup>50</sup> [www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org). June through December 1972 *Ministry, International Journal for Pastors*, published a seven part series titled “The Challenge of Islam.” This is just one example of the ongoing effort of Seventh-day Adventists to find ways of reaching the Muslim world with the Adventist message.

cautiously refers to Turkey in connection with these prophecies.<sup>51</sup> Uriah Smith (1832–1903), a long-term editor and writer, authored interpretations on Revelation (1867) and Daniel (1873).<sup>52</sup> His commentaries on these apocalyptic books have been republished numerous times. His views on Turkey are more specific than those of Spicer. Smith, for example, held the position that the king of the north in Dan 11:40 is Turkey.<sup>53</sup> According to Adam S. Francisco, Luther also connected the Turks to prophecies in Daniel, though Luther related the vision in Dan 7, rather than chs. 11 and 12, to Islam. According to Luther, the little “horn’s [Daniel 7:8] blasphemous mouth was synonymous for the false teachings of Islam.”<sup>54</sup>

*Mission view of Islam.* The missional response of Seventh-day Adventists to Islam reaches back to the earliest days of the church. Spicer gives a positive review of mission activity to Turkey by William Goodell in the early 1800s, even though Goodell was not an Adventist. According to a Boston University posting, Goodell was ordained in 1822 and sent to Syria and the Holy Land under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. In 1831, he published an Armeno-Turkish NT. He moved to Constantinople where he served until 1865.<sup>55</sup> According to Spicer, Goodell encountered major difficulties in Constantinople: “In 1839 the rage of the opposition had reached the point of uncontrollable fury. The Greek patriarch, the Armenian bishop, and the sultan, as caliph of the Moslem religion, joined to quench the little light of Protestant truth being kindled.”<sup>56</sup>

Adventists since the 1870s have provided enormous human and financial resources to proclaim their message to the world, and that proclamation includes Muslims. In 1989, the church established the Seventh-day Adventist Global Centre for Islamic Studies. The first objective is “to study ways, means, methods, and approaches meaningful for willing Muslims

<sup>51</sup> W. A. Spicer, *Beacon Lights of Prophecy* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1935), 132, 133.

<sup>52</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Smith, Uriah,” 11:618.

<sup>53</sup> Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1944), 307.

<sup>54</sup> Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam*, 82.

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/g-h/goodell-william-1792-1867/>.

<sup>56</sup> W. A. Spicer, *The Hand That Intervenes* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1918), 327.

in their varied cultural and social contexts.”<sup>57</sup> The implementation has been governed by available opportunities in light of the fact many areas are not open to Christianity or Christianity faces major limitations.

#### 4. Conclusion

Luther left the matter of military incursions by the Turks to the emperor. Seventh-day Adventists are not facing the same situation. Yet, generally, the church has not attempted to influence government functions, unless it or certain principles are directly impacted.

Luther and Seventh-day Adventists have looked at Islam from a faith perspective. Luther was not willing to compromise theologically and Seventh-day Adventists uphold their theological perspectives. They continue to believe that the Seventh-day Adventist message must be presented to all “nations, tribes, and peoples” and that includes Muslims. Luther hoped that Christian captives or slaves would share the gospel with the Turks. Adventists have attempted, through friendship and service, to share their message with Muslims. Mission is key to understanding Luther’s response to Islam and that is also true for Seventh-day Adventists.

<sup>57</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Seventh-day Adventist Global Centre for Islamic Studies,” 11:585. In order to understand Islam and not relate to it in the context of mission, other resources have been made available. For example, see Hans Heinz and Daniel Heinz, *Das Christentum begegnet dem Islam: Eine religiöse Herausforderung* (Zürich: Advent-Verlag, 2007).