

Adam S. Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam. A Study in Sixteenth-Century Polemics and Apologetics*, A History of Christian Muslim Relations, Vol. 8 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), xiv + 262 pp., €124.00 / US\$177.00 (ISBN 9789004160439).

Francisco has published an excellent study on Luther's theological view of Islam. Although there are a number of scholarly surveys dealing with Luther, the Turks and Islam, few have focused on his defense of the Christian faith over against Islam. This monograph, which began as a doctoral thesis at Oxford University, shows that Luther's approach toward Islam was much more theological and apologetical than generally thought. The results are interesting and informative, not just because they provide a new perspective on Luther's dealing with a non-Christian religion, but also because they show that Luther's thoughts 500 years later are still (or again) very relevant.

Before going into the details of Luther's engagement with Islam, Francisco presents the historical background of Christian views and approaches to the Muslim world from the beginning of the Crusades (1095) until the end of the 16th century. The sources from this period are important because Luther never spoke to a Muslim nor engaged with the Islamic culture. Although knowledge of Islam during this period was often inaccurate and limited, Luther was nevertheless surprisingly well-informed. As few others, he understood the points of contention between Islam and Christianity; that signifies the strength of Luther's approach.

Especially during the 16th century Christian Europe faced an unprecedented threat in the Ottoman Empire. The reality of approaching Turkish armies, the possibility of being conquered by the Turks, and especially the siege of Vienna in 1529, sent a shockwave through Christendom. It forced the Church to respond. Most Christians agreed that in one way or another the Turks were sent by God as judgment on Christianity because of its spiritual and moral weakness and sin, although they differed in their view on how to respond.

Initially, Luther's response was similarly introspective. The real danger to him was the papacy. The Turks were God's rod of discipline on a corrupted Church and once Christianity would turn its back on the Roman Church, God would withhold that rod. So even when Luther thought it was necessary to fight the Turks, he believed this should be a secular war, fought by the 'State', not the Church. The spiritual battle could only be fought by spiritual means: repentance and prayer.

When Luther heard rumors of Christians converting to Islam in Hungary and when the Ottomans moved further into Europe, he concentrated more and more on preparing Christians for an encounter with Muslims. His approach is pastoral and apologetic. He tries to prevent Christians from embracing Islam by strengthening them in their Christian faith. Even if Christians should find themselves in a "Mahometisch Reich" (an Islamic state) and were bound by God to obey even that authority, they should be able to live properly *coram Deo*, assured of their salvation. Only the righteousness of faith in the crucified Christ could provide a firm foundation against the temptation (*Anfechtung*) caused by Islam.

Luther tries to achieve his goal in two ways. On the one hand, he wants to undermine the legitimacy of Islam. He attacks the Qur'an and tries to expose its errors and argues that it is illogical and cannot be divinely revealed. Christians should not look at the outward

appearance and beauty of Islam, which even impressed Luther, but focus on the question of truth. On the other hand, he defends and explains the core doctrines of the Christian faith and provides Christians with arguments for the truth of what they believe.

Luther's approach differs from many others in his day who tried to refute Islam in order to convert Muslims. Luther wanted to convince Christians that Islam was not a truthful religion and that the Christian faith was superior. He feared Christian apostasy even more than he feared Islam. Only if Christians themselves were convinced of the truth of their own religion could the arguments for the Christian faith—as a side effect—also found to be convincing to Muslims.

Francisco's study is informative. Aside from the fact that he has given new insight to Luther's dealings with a non Christian religion other than Judaism, he has unlocked an important resource for Christianity today. Although to a certain extent Luther accepted medieval apocalyptic perceptions of the nature of the Ottoman empire, considering Islam an invention of the Devil, he nevertheless emphasized that Christians could and should live alongside Muslims in the Ottoman Islamic territory. This is very much one of the main theological challenges in the 21st century. There is an increasing encounter between Muslims and Christians; sometimes it also seems like there is a growing confrontation between Christianity and Islam. It could be helpful to reconsider Luther's approach and think of how Christians today could live in the context of Islam without fear of losing their identity. Anxiety about Islam is as much determined by internal weakness as by a perceived character of Islam. Whoever is insecure in his or her own faith and identity is easily threatened. Luther makes us aware that not only do Christians need to study Islam, which indeed is still very necessary, but also they must become more deeply rooted in their own faith. It would be interesting to know what contemporary Christians, who are being pressured in the context of Islam, think of Luther's approach.

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