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Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich
ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-42576>
Journal Article

Originally published at:
Campi, Emidio (2010). Early Reformed Attitudes towards Islam. *Theological Review of the Near East School of Theology*, 31:131-151.

Early Reformed Attitudes towards Islam^{*}

Emidio Campi⁺

The topic of this lecture is not exactly a “common place” in Reformation history. While there is a longstanding tradition of studies on “Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in sixteenth-century”¹ or even on “Luther and Islam,”² much remains to be learned about “Early Reformed Attitudes towards Islam.”

Some years ago, Professor Katya Vehlow from the University of South Carolina, Columbia, and the Hungarian-Swiss political scientist Victor Segesvary, drew attention to the particular subject “The Zurich Reformers and their attitude to Islam.”³ More recently William P. Stephens, former

^{*} Text of a lecture delivered at the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon, on November 25, 2009 and now published in a slightly different form. It was indeed a great honour to deliver this lecture in the year in which the Reformed churches around the world remembered the reformer John Calvin. The author would like to express his deep thanks for the invitation.

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1 Achim Detmers, *Reformation und Judentum: Israel – Lehren und Einstellungen zum Judentum von Luther bis zum frühen Calvin* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2001); Dean Philip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett (eds.), *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in sixteenth-century Germany* (Leiden : Brill, 2006).

2 Hartmut Bobzin, “Martin Luthers Beitrag zur Kenntnis und Kritik des Islam“, in *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* XXVII (1985), 262-289; Martin Brecht, “Luther und die Türken“, in Bodo Guthmüller et. al. W. Kuhlmann,(eds.), *Europa und die Türken in der Renaissance* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 9-27; Adam S. Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam. A Study in Sixteenth Century Polemics and Apologetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

3 Katya Vehlow, “The Swiss reformers Zwingli, Bullinger and Bibliander and their attitude to Islam (1520-1560)”, in *Islam and Christian-Muslim relations*, VI (1995), 229-254; Victor Segesvary, *L’islam et la réforme : étude sur l’attitude des réformateurs zurichoïses*

Dean of the Faculty of Divinity in the University of Aberdeen, Scotland and Francis Nigel Lee, retired Professor of Systematic Theology and Church History at the Queensland Presbyterian Theological College (Brisbane, Australia) have briefly but usefully written on Bullinger's and Calvin's image of the Islam.⁴ And yet much needs to be done to improve and strengthen the quality of research in this field of Reformation studies.

This paper is divided into three parts. First, I look briefly at the Late Medieval and Early modern ideas about Islam in Latin Christendom. Then, I present in some detail early Reformed attitudes towards Islam, examining Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zurich, the Hebraist and Arabist Theodor Bibliander, and John Calvin. Finally, I offer some brief reflections on the thorny problem of the reformers' engagement with the Turks and Islam.

1. Late Medieval and Early modern ideas about Islam in the Latin Christendom

1. 1. Understanding of Islam in Medieval Christianity

Nowhere is the burdensome character of the medieval influence upon the reformers more evident than in their apprehension of Islam. It is therefore worthwhile to take a little time to look at those interpretations that they inherited from previous Western writers of the Middle Ages.⁵

envers l'islam, 1510-1550 (Lausanne: Editions L'Age d'homme, 1977, repr. with an English preface, summary and updated bibliography: San Francisco [etc.]: International Scholars Publications, 1998 (hardback edition) and in paperback University Press of America, 1998). The references given in the notes are to the paperback edition.

4 William P. Stephens, "Understanding Islam - in the Light of Bullinger and Wesley", in <http://www.oxford-institute.org/docs/2007papers/2007-10Stephens.pdf>; Francis Nigel Lee, "Calvin on Islam", in <http://www.historicism.net/readingmaterials/CalvIslam.pdf> (2000).

5 The standard work still remains, though it repeats some older inaccuracies (see footnote 13) Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: University Press 1960, rev. ed., Oxford: Oneworld, 1993). See also Hartmut Bobzin, "Latin =

One of the crusades' disastrous effects was that medieval Christian concepts of Islam were based on ignorance, misperception, hostility and fear. Clerics, poets and storytellers exercised their imagination to spread bizarre tales about the Prophet, his religion, and the Middle East. Muslims were depicted as enemies of the faith, cruel, barbarous people who slaughtered Christians and destroyed churches.

A remarkable contribution to the reappraisal of the Church's relations with Islam came from Peter the Venerable (ca. 1092 – 1156), also known as Peter of Montboissier, abbot of the Benedictine abbey of Cluny.⁶ A proponent of studying Islam based upon its own sources, he commissioned a comprehensive translation of Islamic source material. The project included a number of texts known as the «corpus toletanum» and most importantly the first-ever translation into Latin of the Arabic Qur'an (the «*Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete*). The translation was completed in 1143 by Robert of Ketton, an English monk who knew Arabic and who was persuaded by Peter to help “defeat the vile heresy of Mahomet”. Despite

≡ Translations of the Qur'an. A short overview”, in *Der Islam*, LXX, 1993, 193–206; David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (eds.), *Western views of Islam in medieval and early modern Europe: perception of other* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1999); John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the medieval European imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Siegfried Raeder, *Der Islam und das Christentum: Eine historische und theologische Einführung*, (2nd and rev. ed., Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003); Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qur' n in Latin Christendom, 1140-1560* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Frederick Quinn, *The Sum of all Heresies. The Image of Islam in the Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17-54. Recently IDC Publishers, an academic publisher of rare primary sources based in Leiden, the Netherlands, issued a microfiche collection of 62 Qur'ans and Qur'an translations printed in the West between 1537 and 1857: *Early Printed Qur'ans: The Dissemination of the Qur'an in the West*, edited by Hartmut Bobzin and August den Hollander (Leiden: IDC Publishers, 2004).

6 On Peter the Venerable and the Cluniac thinking about Muslims (but also Jews) see the excellent study by Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure: Cluny et la société chrétienne face à l'hérésie, au judaïsme et à l'islam, 1000-1150* (Paris: Aubier, 1998), (ET: *Order & exclusion : Cluny and Christendom face heresy, Judaism, and Islam, 1000-1150* (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 2002).

the polemical motive, the translation has been described as a landmark in Islamic Studies, because with this translation in elegant, elevated Latin, the West had for the first time a reliable instrument for the serious study of Islam rather than the abstruse tales of some earlier Western Christian writers.⁷ Peter used also the newly translated material in his own writings on Islam.⁸ Yet in these works he portrayed Islam as a Christian heresy that approaches paganism. His basic attitude was to gather information about Islam to more efficiently convert Muslims.

A wave of thirteenth-century Franciscan and Dominican friars totally opposed Islam as religion. In their missionary zeal they either sought the martyr's crown trying to convert Muslims, or wrote detailed refutation of their faith. A few exceptions were the English Franciscan friar Roger Bacon (1214-1294),⁹ or Ramon Lull (1232-1315),¹⁰ a Spanish missionary among the Muslims of Spain and North Africa, who was sharply critical of both Franciscans and Dominicans, and suggested to found schools at the universities of Padua, Oxford, Bologna and Salamanca in which not only the Arabic language but also the history, theology and philosophy of Islam were to be studied. But the crusading spirit prevailed, and his appeal fell on deaf ears.

Gradually, however, more information about Islam emerged, some of it from missionaries such as Ricoldo da Monte Croce (c.1243 – 1320),¹¹ a Dominican friar of Florence, who spent a decade in the Middle East, particularly in Baghdad. Few people combined his personal experience

7 Burman, *Reading the Qur'ān*, 60-87.

8 The most important are the *Summa totius heresis Saracenorum* (= The Summary of the Entire Heresy of the Saracens) and the *Liber contra sectam sive heresim Saracenorum* (= The Refutation of the Sect or Heresy of the Saracens). As the titles clearly indicate, Peter the Venerable essentially thought that Islam should be regarded as a Christian heresy.

9 See Franco Cardini, *Europe and Islam* (Oxford, U.K. ; Malden, Mass. : Blackwell 2001), 99-100.

10 See Anthony Bonner, *Doctor Illuminatus: a Ramon Lull Reader* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1993).

11 On Ricoldo, see Tolan, *Saracens*, 233-254.

in the Orient with academic learning about Islam. Ricoldo's best known work was *the Contra Legem Sarracenorum* (c. 1300), which enjoyed a vast popularity in his time as a polemical source against Islam and was influential on later scholars such as Nicholas of Cusa as well as Martin Luther. Other accounts came from long-distance traders in Muslim lands who described agricultural practices and local industries, customs. Fragmentary as they were, these accounts represented the faint emergence of fuller information on Islam.

Among those particularly interested in a dialogue with the Muslims was the German cardinal and philosopher Nicholas of Cusa, also referred to as Nicolaus Cusanus (1401 –1464).¹² To be sure, Nicolas supported the campaign of Pope Pius II for a crusade against the Turks. However, he was the first in the Latin Christianity to promote an extraordinary positive appreciation of the Islamic faith. Of particular note are two works which he wrote just after the Fall of Constantinople (1543): *De pace fidei* (= *On the Peace of Faith*, 1453) and *Cribratio Alcorani* (= *Sifting the Qur'an*, 1461). In the irenic treatise *De pace fidei* he was able to look beyond the Christian faith, and to see other religious traditions as being representations of the same basic religious truth, with each religion pointing in various ways to the one truth known and possessed by Christians. This is not to say that each religion is of equal value or worth; he believed that the founders of world religions were inspired by God, but the human equation got in the way, and led to various imperfections which need to be purified in order for the members of those religions to see how their faith and tradition ultimately point to what is found in the Christian faith. He believed that world religions had elements of value within them which could be brought into the Church itself (he believed world religions could become the foundations for many different religious rites within the Church, allowing the people of those different rites to develop their own ways of praise

12 See Ludwig Hagemann, *Christentum contra Islam: eine Geschichte gescheiterter Beziehungen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 68-80.

and worship, as friendly rivals, each trying to outdo each other in their devotion to God).

The treatise *Cribratio Alcorani* was a relatively fair book as compared to the existing superstitious and unjust views held about Islam, the Qur'an, and the Prophet in those times. While offering an original and thorough criticism of the Qur'an, he still tried to be as irenic about it as possible. He tried to give every benefit of the doubt to the Muslim faith, and indeed, he pointed out how many Christian interpretations of the Qur'an were merely polemical and false. Yet, he was also quite harsh when he discussed Muhammad and one can find many of the previous Christian indictments against him. Even then, he still allowed for the possibility that Muhammad had some valid religious inspiration as well. In this way, while being critical of others, even harsh as he tries to show their errors, this does not mean he went against the insights which inspired the *De Pace Fidei*. In fact, Cusanus produced a work eminently more positive than those of his predecessors or contemporaries.¹³

1.2. Renaissance and Humanism

Medieval concepts of Islam were generally informed and constrained by religious attitudes and rhetoric in which Muslims were depicted as enemies of the faith. As the Ottoman Empire advanced westward from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, humanists responded on a grand scale, leaving behind a large body of fascinating yet understudied works. These compositions included Crusade orations and histories; ethnographic,

13 Jasper Hopkins, *A miscellany on Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis : A.J. Banning Press, 1994),51 is not entirely wrong in criticizing Daniel's *Islam and the West* where Cusanus is cited as an example of those thinkers who were heirs of earlier anti-Islamic polemic. Daniel, argues Hopkins, clearly did not appreciate the significance of Cusanus's work and underestimated the deep influence the *Cribratio AlQur'ani* on the Western thought. Moreover, in chapter three, Hopkins analyzes the heavy literary dependence of Cusanus upon Ricoldo's *Contra contra legem Sarracenorum* and bitterly criticizes Daniel's treatment of Ricoldo.

historical, and religious studies of the Turks; epic poetry; and even tracts on converting the Turks to Christianity. In a recent work Nancy Bisaha (Vassar College New York) offers an in-depth look at the body of Renaissance humanist works.¹⁴

However, Biblical humanists like Erasmus, Lefèvre d'Étaples, Juan Luis Vives did not know much about Islam nor they moved entirely beyond the Medieval stance. Erasmus, for example, became involved with Islam in 1529, when the Turks were standing before the walls of Vienna. It was a classic dilemma for him as a pacifist. He sought his way cautiously, at one moment inclining towards non-violence, at the next recoiling from the consequences.¹⁵ In his *Consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo* Erasmus maintained that war is the work of the Devil, but unlike Luther, who regarded the Turks as a punishment from God which should not be resisted, Erasmus said that arms could be taken up against (these are his exact words) «Turks, Mohammedans, Saracens, Muscovites, Greeks and other half-Christian and schismatic nations.” But Erasmus had no illusions whatsoever about the motives of the ‘Christians’: “These days they have those who harass and plunder the Turks, who would rather take them dead than alive. The real games being hunted are the riches of the Turks, not the Turks themselves.”¹⁶

A most impressive effort to bridge the gap between Muslims and

14 Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). See also the fundamental work by Hartmut Bobzin, *Der Qur'an im Zeitalter der Reformation: Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik und Islamkunde in Europa* (Beirut, Stuttgart : Steiner, 1995).

15 Cardini, *Europe and Islam*, 146-148.

16 For the text, see *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* (=ASD) V/3, 1-82. For the significance of the *Consultatio* and Erasmus' vision of Turks, see Antonius G. Weiler, “The Turkish argument and Christian piety in Desiderius Erasmus “*Consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo* (1530)”, in J. Spera Weiland and W. Th. M. Frijhoff (eds.), *Erasmus of Rotterdam : the man and the scholar : proceedings of the symposium held at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 9-11 November 1986* (Leiden ; New York : Brill, 1988), 30-39.

Christians came from the French linguist Guillaume Postel (c. 1510-1581), professor of Greek, Hebrew and Arabic in what would become the Collège de France, he established the Arabistic as academic discipline. This eccentric scholar of universal breadth had a first hand knowledge of Islam, travelled extensively, knew the living faith of Muslims.¹⁷ In 1544, in *De orbis terrae Concordia* (= Concerning the Harmony of the Earth) Postel advocated a universalist world religion. The thesis of the book was that all Jews, Muslims and heathens could be converted to the Christian religion once all of the religions of the world were shown to have common foundations and that Christianity best represented these foundations. He believed these foundations to be the love of God, the praising of God, the love and the helping of humankind.

2. The Reformed Reformers

It is well known that war against the Turks formed the colourful background of the Reformation era. Constantinople had fallen to the Ottomans in 1453, allowing the Turkish forces to move into the Balkans and Hungary, consolidating their power up to the Danube River. In 1521, Suleiman II captured Belgrade, and in 1526 King Louis II of Hungary was killed as his army was overthrown in the Battle of Mohacs on the Danube. By 1529, the Ottoman army stood at the gates of Vienna. Again in 1532, the Ottoman threat would be turned back by European forces. It wasn't until 1683 and the last assault on Vienna that the Turkish threat abated. Nevertheless, the Ottoman forces were feared as a dangerous enemy--a fear that long survived the danger. Given their place in the centre of European consciousness, it is not surprising to find references to the "Turks" in writings from almost all Reformers.¹⁸

17 William J. Bouwsma, *Concordia mundi: the career and thought of Guillaume Postel, 1510-1581* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957); Marion L. Kuntz, *Guillaume Postel: Prophet of the Restitution of All Things. His Life and Thought* (The Hague [et al.]: Nijhoff, 1981).

18 Segesvary, *L'islam et la réforme*, chap. 1; Ludwig Hagemann, *Christentum contra Islam:* =

The Reformers had only a very limited knowledge of Islam, including a philologist and Arabist like Theodor Bibliander, and in that they did not differ from the great humanists, Erasmus, Lefèvre d'Étaples and Juan Luis Vives. Semitic philology had made considerable progress since the mid-fifteenth century - though most humanists, and Erasmus' first, did not view the Hebrew worthy of further study. In contrast, the study of Islamic religion was still trapped in the cul-de-sac of the medieval polemic concepts and the spirit of the Crusades. The first generation of Reformers limited themselves to draw on contemporary sources, historical or philosophical, among which we can count the product typical of the Renaissance, the "Cribatio Alcorani" by Nicolas of Cusa or the widespread *Commentario de le cose de' Turchi* by Paolo Giovio¹⁹; to that sources they added some descriptive or polemical works of the Middle Ages, for example Ricoldo da Monte Croce. However, all other works written by fervent missionaries, Dominican Friars or Friars Minors of XI and XII century, were excluded from the anti-Islamic arsenal of the reformers. Unquestionably, the best source on Islam which this generation relied upon was still the Cluny Collection, due to the initiative the Abbot Peter the Venerable.²⁰

= *eine Geschichte gescheiterter Beziehungen* (Darmstadt : Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999); Bodo Guthmüller, Wilhelm Kühlmann (eds.), *Europa und die Türken in der Renaissance* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000); Almut Höfert, *Den Feind beschreiben. "Türkengefahr" und europäisches Wissen über das Osmanische Reich 1450-1600* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus Verlag, 2003).

19 Paolo Giovio, *Commentario de le cose de' Turchi* (Rom: Blado, 1532). The work was translated into Latin by the Italian Protestant convert Francesco Negri with the title *Turcicarum rerum commentarius* (Strasbourg: Vendelinus Rihelius, 1537) and there is evidence that Bullinger used it extensively for his *Regnorum et monarchiarum regum item catalogus* (see Zentralbibliothek Zürich, MS B 133, Bl. 207^v-217^v).

20 Segesvary, L'islam et la réforme, 93-94 ; Harry Clark, "The Publication of the Qur' n in Latin: A Reformatio Dilemma", in *Sixteenth Century Journal* XV, 1984, 3-12.

2.1. *The Swiss Reformers*²¹

The reformed Reformation began – as we all know – in Zurich with the work of Ulrich Zwingli, who died at the battle of Kappel in 1531. He was followed by Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), who was not only a most effective ecclesiastical leader over more than four decades, but also a prodigious theologian, preacher, historian, and one of the most prolific letter-writers who offers fascinating insights into the age in which he lived. Without him, Calvin and Peter Martyr Vermigli the second generation of the Reformation wouldn't have thrived, and the theological “shape” of late Sixteenth and early Seventeenth century Reformed Protestantism is unimaginable.²²

While for Zwingli the Turks and Islam were peripheral concerns, the conflict between the Hapsburg and the Ottoman Empires formed the background of Heinrich Bullinger's ministry. It is therefore unsurprising to find so many references to the “Turks” in the writings of the second Zurich reformer. Bullinger's knowledge of Islam came therefore from contemporary reports as well as from source material. He must have read the Qur'an and he also benefitted from specialist knowledge of his colleague, the Zurich Hebraist and Arabist Theodore Bibliander. Let me therefore mention first of his outstanding contribution to the Christian-Muslim encounter.

Theodor Bibliander (1504-1564) succeeded Zwingli as professor of Old Testament at the Schola Tigurina. He made no efforts to conceal his criticism of Calvin's teaching on predestination and seemed to favour

21 See Rudolf Pfister, "Reformation, Türken und Islam", in *Zwingliana*, X, 1956, 345-375; Segesvary, *L'islam et la réforme*, chap. 4-6; Bobzin, *Der Qur'an im Zeitalter der Reformation*, 181-209; Vehlow, "The Swiss reformers", 229-254.

22 For an introduction see the various essays in Bruce Gordon, Emidio Campi (eds.), *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504-1575* (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Baker Academic, 2004), and the essays in Emidio Campi, Peter Opitz (eds.), *Heinrich Bullinger: Life, Thought, Influence, Zurich, Aug. 25-29, 2004, International Congress Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575)*, 2 vols. (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2007).

a form of universalism which echoed Zwingli's statements about the salvation of the "pious heathen." In February 1560, following a controversy with Peter Martyr Vermigli, Bibliander had to resign his office.²³ In his approach to Islam he was motivated by eschatological missiological urgency and studied Arabic with hopes of going to Egypt to convert the Moslems through missionary work, but was convinced by Bullinger to remain in Zurich. His first contribution to Protestant Reformed studies of Islam was a treatise titled *Ad nominis Christiani socios consultation* (= A Consultation to the People of the Christian Name),²⁴ The impetus behind this extensive account of Muhammad's life was apologetic. The farther the Turks extended their faith into the rest of the world the more Bibliander sensed a need to prepare Christians for contact with Muslims. Access to the Qur'an and its errors was central to approach Islam. Though familiar with Arabic, he had not mastered it to the point of being able to produce a completely new translation. Thus he edited in 1543 the translation of the Qur'an completed by Robert of Ketton under the patronage of Peter the Venerable. Scholars in the Reformation era found this translation wanting. Nevertheless, it was this edition, with editing from Theodor Bibliander that was printed in Basel by Johannes Oporinus in 1543: *Machumetis Saracenorum principis, eiusque successorum vitae, ac doctrina, ipseque Alcoran* (=The Life, Teachings, and Qur'an of Muhammad the Prince of the Saracens).²⁵

23 Besides Segesvary, *L'islam et la réforme*, chap. 7 and Bobzin, *Der Qur'an im Zeitalter der Reformation*, chap. 3, recent literature on Bibliander includes: Christine Christ von Wedel (ed.), *Theodor Bibliander. Ein Thurgauer im gelehrten Zürich* (Zurich: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2005); Lucia Felici, "L'Islam in Europa. L'edizione del Corano di Theodor Bibliander (1543)" in Cromohs, XII, 2007, 1-13; Burman, *Reading the Qur'an*, 110-121, *passim*; Christian Moser, *Theodor Bibliander (1505-1564) : annotierte Bibliographie der gedruckten Werke* (Zurich : Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009).

24 Theodor Bibliander, *Ad nominis Christiani socios consultatio, quam ratione Turcarum dira potentia repelli possit ac debeat a populo Christiano [...]* (Basel:[Nikolaus Brylinger], 1542).

25 Theodor Bibliander (ed.), *Machumetis Saracenorum principis, eiusque successorum* =

The complex and intriguing story of how Bibliander's edition made it into print cannot be told here. It suffices to say that the project of printing a Latin edition of the Qur'an did not come about overnight and faced many difficulties. Basel's city council was divided on whether or not the book should be allowed within its walls. The tension was not eased until an influential outsider, Luther, wrote a letter in support of the project. Luther's letter is unequivocal in his criticism of the teachings of the Qur'an, but he argued that every Christian should be aware of the religion of the Turks, and that by making the Qur'an available the "abomination of Mohammed" would be exposed once and for all. Upon receiving Luther's letter the magistrates of Basel reversed their decision and the Qur'an was published by January 1543. It comprised three parts: the first contained the Qur'an itself, the second included several refutations of it by prominent scholars, and the final part was devoted to the history of Islam, particularly the Ottoman Empire, and testimonies of life under Islamic rule. Luther's letter to the city council was included as preface for the volume. Additionally, there was a "Warning to the Reader" penned by Melanchthon, in which he detailed the doctrinal errors of Islam.

Bibliander's approach is without doubt a polemical and apologetic one. But this is not a complete description of his undertaking. Beyond collating manuscripts and comparing Latin and Arabic texts, he also added to his edition an enormous number of marginal notes of his own to Robert's Latin translation. While some of them are polemical, there is no shortage of another sort of annotations, which were not extant in the medieval tradition: references to parallel biblical passages by book and chapter. The intensive comparison of Qur'an and Bible, is of course the natural result of the reformer's principle that all doctrines had to be tested in the light of Scripture (*sola scriptura*). This comparative approach offers the opportunity

= *vitae, ac doctrina, ipseque Alcoran [...]* ([Basel] : [Nikolaus Brylinger for Johannes Oporinus], [1543]).

to criticize Muslim society as well as any Christian society ignorant of its own biblical foundation. Thus Bibliander's reading of the Qur'an was not just a refutation of Islam's holy book, but also an attack on the Catholic church and the Anabaptists – as well as a call for the renewal of a Christian society whose degeneration was obvious, inasmuch as even the society of the false religion of Islam was more godly. Bibliander's *Machumetis* of 1543 and the slightly revised edition of 1550 became the sourcebook for information on Islam in the sixteenth century.

Back to Bullinger. The list of Bullinger's writings and occasional statements on Islam is long.²⁶ I have chosen to limit the presentation to one work, though the most important. The head pastor of the Zurich church wrote in 1567 a treatise, *The Turk*, which may be taken as a typical critique of Muslim faith and practice.²⁷ Although by no means up to the

26 In the *Decades* (Heinrich Bullinger, *Sermonum Decades quinque de potissimis Christianae religionis capitibus (1549–1552)*, ed. by Peter Opitz (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2008) Bullinger seldom writes about Islam, in any case less frequently than about Catholicism, Judaism or the ancient Roman religion. However, there is evidence that not only he is well informed about the subject, but also that he has a nuanced approach to it. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that, unlike Erasmus who in the *Consultatio* applied to the Turks epithets such as heathen or barbarians, he uses the term Mahometan (3), Saracen (5) or simply Turk (14). Besides the epistolary, other texts that deal with the issue are: Id., In *Apocalypsim Iesu Christi conciones centum* (Basel: Oporinus, 1557, HBBibl, 1,327), *concio 41*; Id., *Verfolgung. Von der schweren / lagwirigen verfolgung der Heiligen Christlichen Kirchen* (= Persecution, Of the severe protracted persecution of the Holy Christian Churches) (Zurich: Froschauer, 1573, HBBibl 1, 575), esp. 66r-70v; Id., *Uff sibem Klagartikel...verantwortung* (= *Reply to the seven charges*) (Zurich: Froschauer, 1574, HBBibl 1, 584), esp. 34v-35r and 46v-47r.

27 *Der Türgg. Von anfang und Ursprung deß Türggischen Gloubens /der Türggen/ouch jrer Königen und Keyseren / und wie fürträffenlich vil landen unnd lüthen/sy innet 226. jaren yn genommen / und der Christenheit abtrungen habind...* (= *Origin of the Turkish faith, kings and emperors of the Turks, and how capable they were to capture and take away within 226 years so many lands and people from Christianity*), [Zurich: n.p.] 1567, HBBibl 1, 557). For an accurate description of the content, see Stephens, "Understanding Islam" (footnote 4); for a thorough analysis, see Paul Widmer, "Bullinger und die Türken. Zeugnis des geistigen Widerstandes gegen eine Renaissance der Kreuzzüge", in Campi, Opitz (eds.), *Heinrich Bullinger: Life, Thought, Influence*, 593-624.

standard of contemporary Islamic studies, shows a sound knowledge of the Qur'an and Muslim religious beliefs. We consider in particular what he says about the Qur'an and Mohamed. Bullinger ascribes the Qur'an to Mohamed, not to God. He rejects Mohamed's claim to be a prophet, maintaining that he invented his revelations and visions. Following John of Damascus, who in the eighth century had regarded Islam not as an alien tradition but as a Christian heresy, Bullinger holds that the Qur'an was put together with the help of a heretical monk and the advice of perverted Jews and false Christians, corrupted by heretics such as Arians, Macedonians, and Nestorians. (A iv^{r-v}). Therefore the syncretic character of Islam and its inauthenticity as a divine message seem to him undeniable.

The Qur'an rejects such central doctrines of the Christian faith as the person and work of Christ and the trinity. It denies that Jesus is the Son of God, regarding him only as a messenger of God. With the denial of Christ's sonship goes the denial of the trinity. The Qur'an also denies the death and resurrection of Christ and his being the only mediator. This rejection of the work of Christ means the rejection of the doctrine of justification through faith alone in Christ. Bullinger charges Mohamed with inventing ways through which people deserve and gain the forgiveness of sins, such as fasting, prayer, alms, fighting nobly, and dying in battle for the sake of Islam. For Bullinger, Muslim belief in salvation by works, like papal indulgences, is Pelagian. (A vii v and v^v – vi^r).

Bullinger challenges the Qur'an's understanding of eternal life, worship, marriage, and government, as fundamentally opposed to the Christian faith. It presents eternal life, but in a fleshly way, just as pagan fables do. It promises those who live according to the Qur'an that they will have honour, success, and riches here, and hereafter bodily delight, the best food, the finest drinks, and beautiful maidens. (A vii^r, cf. A viii^r and *Uff sibem Klagartikel*, 47^r). The Qur'an destroys marriage with its polygamy and subjects innocent women to the pleasure and caprice of men (A vi^v). An important aspect of the reformer's criticism of Islam is the use of violence, and the religious

duty of the holy war. Mohamed spread his new faith against the true faith with the sword (B i^v) and commanded his followers to persecute those who disputed the Qur'an (A vii^r). Bullinger compares Muslims with the Münster Anabaptists. (A vi^{r-v}). There are many other points where Bullinger shows how Islam diverges from Christianity, for example, in its rejection of the sacraments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Lord's Day. (A vi^v).

On occasion the reformer speaks positively of Muslims and negatively of the lives of Christians. Bullinger uses the evil lives of Christians to explain the rise and success of Islam. Bullinger explains Islam's success by analogy with God's punishing Israel in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament God punished his people through unbelieving heathen when they did not remain with God's word and law. Bullinger notes that the rise of Islam coincided with disputes in the church about Christ, images, the power of bishops, and whether Constantinople or Rome was the head of all churches. (A viii^v – B i^r)

After this, Bullinger sketches the history of Islam from the beginning to his own time. (B i^r – D vii^r). He concludes with a long prayer, in which he rehearses the infidelity of Christians in their faith and the disobedience of Christians in their life and work. For this God has given them the Turk as a teacher and executioner, as he did with Nebuchadnezzar and others. Bullinger's prayer is that as a result of this the people will repent. (D vii^r – ^v) There is the further prayer that God will convert Mohamed to Christ, who is the light and saviour of the whole world (D viii^r, cf A viii^r). Bullinger associates Mohamed and Muslims, like the papacy, with anti-Christ, that is the powers which are opposed to Christ.

We sum up: Bullinger approaches Islam from two perspectives: First, a theological perspective (Christological and soteriological controversy); moreover this theological perspective is eschatologically inclined, as the conflation of the pope and the Turks clearly indicates. Secondly, he looks at Islam from an ethical perspective (rejection some forms of piety, of polygamy as an institution, of violence and holy war).

3. Calvin

Unlike Bullinger, Calvin did not express his view of Islam in a specific treatise. A complete study of Calvin's attitude towards Islam would need to attend to his commentaries, sermons and lectures, where his criticism of the Islamic doctrine is extensively documented.²⁸ Much remained to be learned about this topic. The following is an example of what might be discovered in reading and evaluating such primary sources.

The first criticism addressed to the Prophet and his followers is that they represent a heretic sect separated from Christianity outside of which there is no true religion. Thus, in his 1550 Commentary on Second Thessalonians Calvin identifies the 'man of sin' and the apostasy with the Romanists, but he sets forth: "The defection has indeed spread more widely! For, since Mohammed was an apostate, he turned his followers, the Turks, from Christ.... The sect of Mohammed was like a raging overflow, which in its violence tore away about half of the Church."²⁹

The second criticism of Islam focuses on whether the Qur'an could be recognized as God's revelation. In his Sermons on Deuteronomy Calvin explains: "When the Turks set their Mahomet in the place of God's Son - knowing not that God has manifested Himself in the flesh (which is one of the chief articles of our Faith) - what a dealing is it? How many things so ever men term by the Name of 'God' - they be but devils of their own devising and setting up, if they keep not themselves fast enclosed within the bounds of the Holy Scripture! And therefore let us mark well, that we

²⁸ Lengthy quotations in English translation from Calvin writings can be found in Nigel Lee, "Calvin on Islam" (footnote 4).

²⁹ *Comm. On 2 Thess. 2:3*, CO 52, 197: «Paulus autem non de uno homine loquitur, sed de regno quod a Satana occupandum sit, ut sedem abominationis in medio Dei templo erigat: quod videmus impletum in papatu. Latius quidem defectio grassata est: nam Mahometes, ut erat apostata, Turcas suos a Christo alienavit [. .]. Nunc intelligunt lectores sectas omnes, quibus ab initio imminuta fuit ecclesia, totidem fuisse defectionis rivos, quae aquam a recto cursu abducere inceptit: sectam vero Mahometis, instar violentae exundationis fuisse, quae dimidiam plus minus partem suo impetu raperet..»

must hold us to the pure Religion”.³⁰ In the Sermons on Job more explicitly Calvin states: “Devilish curiosity is not contented to be taught simply by the Holy Scripture! Behold also -- whereupon the religion of the Turks is founded!“ Mahomet has reported himself to be the party that should bring the full revelation – over and besides the Gospel.”³¹ One point of the Qur’anic doctrine is particularly criticized: the strict monotheism of Islam, rejecting the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity.³²

Although Calvin’s engagement with Islam was polemical, it was not morally disqualifying. This is somewhat surprising, given the history of Christian polemical literature against Islam, literature of which Calvin was certainly aware. Calvin’s criticism focuses on doctrine and not on ethics. It was doctrinal difference and not ethical moral behaviour the source of his fierce condemnation of the Prophet’s religion. This is different from Bullinger’s approach to Islam. For Bullinger, Islam was a heresy at the level of doctrine and practice; and this second level represents for the Zurich reformer a truly dividing line, an unbridgeable abyss between Christians and Muslims.

There is another important difference between the two founding fathers

30 *Sermons on Deuteronomy* 13, 6-11, CO 27, 261: “Quand les Turcs mettent leur Mahomet au lieu du Fils de Dieu, et qu’ils ne cognoissent point que Dieu est manifesté en chair, qui est l’un des principaux articles de nostre foy: et où est-ce aller? Ainsi donc tout ce que les hommes appellent Dieu, sinon qu’ils demeurent là enserrez en ces bornes de l’Ecriture sainte: ce sont autant de diables qu’ils se forgent, et qu’ils se bastissent. Et ainsi, notons bien qu’il nous faut tenir à la pure religion”.

31 *Sermons on Job* 4:12-19, CO 33, 204: «Cela est venu de ceste curiosité diabolique, qu’ils ne se sont point contentez d’estre enseignez simplement en l’Ecriture sainte. Voila sur quoy aussi est fondée la religion des Turcs: Mahomet a dit qu’il estoit celuy qui devoit apporter revelation pleine outre l’Evangile. »

32 *See Inst.* II.6.4; *Comm. on 1 John* 2:23, CO 55,325: “Iterum dico, non hic agitari subtilem disputationem de aeterna Christi essentia quam unam cum patre habet. Abunde quidem ad eam probandam sufficit hic locus: sed Iohannes ad fidei praxin nos vocat: nempe quia Deus se totum nobis in Christo fruendum dedit, frustra alibi quaeri: vel (si quis malit clarius) quoniam in Christo habitat tota plenitudo divinitatis, extra eum nihil esse Dei. Unde sequitur, Turcas, Iudaeos, et similes, Dei loco merum habere idolum.”

of Reformed Protestantism which is worth pointing out here. Bullinger, like Luther and Melancthon, identified the Prophet Muhammad with the Antichrist, prophesied by Daniel. The attribute Antichrist, in the Zurich Reformer's conception, designates all those who oppose the Christian message, the enemies of the true faith.³³ He became increasingly convinced that the signs of the times in which he believed himself to be living were related directly to the papacy and the Ottoman Turks, simultaneously. They were two sides of the same coin.

Barbara Pitkin in her study on "Prophecy and History in Calvin's lectures on Daniel" has found that Calvin's treatment of this theme runs counter the dominant interpretative patterns of his fellow reformers³⁴ In the same situation of religious and political ferment, Calvin is the only reformer who in his interpretation of Daniel 2, 7, 8 and 11 explicitly refutes, at time by name, those who relate these prophecies in any way to the Antichrist.³⁵ He consistently interprets the prophecies of Daniel as

33 For an exhaustive overview of this topic in Bullinger's writings see Christian Moser, "Papam esse Antichristum" Grundzüge von Heinrich Bullingers Antichristkonzeption", in *Zwingliana* 30, 2003, 65-101.

34 Barbara Pitkin, "Prophecy and History in Calvin's lectures on Daniel", in *Die Geschichte der Daniel-Auslegung in Judentum, Christentum und Islam : Studien zur Kommentierung des Danielbuches in Literatur und Kunst*, Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 2007, 323-347. See for example Praelectiones in Danielem 7:8, in CO 41,50: "Hic incipiunt variare interpretes : quia alii hoc ad papam detorqueant, alii vero ad Turcam. Sed neutra opinio videtur mihi probabilis. Falluntur autem utriusque, quoniam existimant hic describi totum cursum regni Christi, quum tamen Deus prophetae suo tantum indicare voluerit quid futurum esset usque ad primum Christi adventum. Hinc igitur omnium error".

35 For example, Praelectiones in Danielem 7:8, CO 41,50: "Hic incipiunt variare interpretes: quia alii hoc ad papam detorqueant, alii vero ad Turcam. Sed neutra opinio videtur mihi probabilis. Falluntur autem utriusque, quoniam existimant hic describi totum cursum regni Christi, quum tamen Deus prophetae suo tantum indicare voluerit quid futurum esset usque ad primum Christi adventum. Hinc igitur omnium error". See Mario Miege, "Regnum quartum ferreum und lapis de monte. Die kritische Wende in der Danielinterpretation im 16. Jahrhundert und ihre Folgen in Theologie und Politik", in Mariano Delgado et al. (eds.), *Europa, Tausendjähriges Reich und Neue Welt: zwei Jahrtausende Geschichte und Utopie in der Rezeption des Danielbuches*, Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 2003, 239-251.

relating entirely to historically past events, to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, on the one hand, and ancient Rome, on the other. According to Pitkin Calvin's approach is both original and unique in the history of Danielic interpretation and sheds light on his understanding of prophecy, history, and the best way to derive present meaning from biblical past. However, although in *the Praelectiones in Danielem* (1561) Calvin appears to exhibit a stronger historical awareness than his fellow reformers, it must be pointed out that in other places he saw the Antichrist as both the papacy and Islam. In the Sermons on Deuteronomy (1555/1556), for example, the papacy was the Western Antichrist and Islam the Eastern Antichrist and he referred to them as the "two horns".³⁶ Whether this, in the end, represents a critical shift inaugurated with the *Praelectiones in Danielem* is an issue that cannot be decided here and requires exploration. Nevertheless, it is undoubted that images of the Turks as Antichrist were quite obvious in the rabbinic literature as well as in the early Protestant exegesis. Given this context, and the content of his statements, Calvin's support for more responsible apprehension of Islam – even if in late stage and when ensconced in the vale of polemical refutation – can be charitably approached. This nuanced attitude, together with Calvin's admission that the Roman church is still "the temple of God in which the Pope bears rule, but profaned by innumerable sacrileges,"³⁷ and that there will always be "a church in the papacy, but

36 *Sermons on Deuteronomy 18:15*, CO 27, 502-503: "...depuis que le Fils de Dieu est apparu, est-ce raison que les hommes mettent en avant leurs songes et resveries, et que Jesus Christ se taise? [...] Tout ainsi que Mahomet dit que son Alchoram est la sagesse souveraine, autant en dit le Pape: car ce sont les deux cornes de l'Antechrist." See also *Comm. on 1 John 4 :3-6*, CO 55, 351: "Sic hodie papistae sua omnia commenta, spiritus oracula esse, magistrali supercilio iactant. Nec Mahometus aliunde se hausisse praedicat sua deliria quam e coelo."

37 *Comm. on 2 Thessalonians 2:4*, CO 52, 199: "Paulus non alibi Antichristum locat, quam in ipso Dei sanctuario. Non enim externus est hostis, sed domesticus, qui sub ipso Christi nomine Christum oppugnat. Sed quaeritur quomodo vocetur ecclesia specus tot superstitionum, quae columna debebat esse veritatis. Respondeo, sic vocari, non quod retineat omnes ecclesiae qualitates: sed quia aliquid residuum habeat. Templum ergo Dei esse fateor, in quo dominatur papa, sed innumeris sacrilegiis profanatum."

hidden and wonderfully preserved,”³⁸ may indeed be interpreted as a particular form of toleration.

Conclusion

Dialogue with Islam is one of the greatest challenges facing the Christian churches today. In our approach to Islam and our relations to Muslims, we can learn from the insights that come from our tradition. Besides looking to scripture and the early church, if we look particularly to the reformers what can we learn?

It is important – I stress it very much - to place their writings and statements in their historical context. While many aspects of their thinking were products of the age in which they lived and are therefore only of historical interest to us now, the deeper one ventures into the whole body of their works, the more one is struck by just how rich in fundamental theological insights they are. And having been left by and large untouched for centuries, these nuggets are now just waiting to be unearthed.

There are major issues involved here, which need to be discussed. But let me mention two good reasons for this. First of all, there is the question of form and the finality of form. Reading the texts of the reformers one receives the striking impression that despite the existentially pressing military and spiritual threat represented by the Ottoman Turks, the bulk of their contributions to the discourse did not consist of irresponsible *ad hominem* attacks. It was indeed a holistic approach, including both intellectual and existential engagement. This, I think, should also inform our understanding of and dialogue with Islam. Dialogue is much more than “small talk”. Dialogue encompasses all dimensions of being human; it implies a global, existential dimension and involves the human subject in his or her entirety.

38 *Praelectiones in Ezechielis proph.* 16:20, CO 40, 354: « apud ipsos [papistas] quidem ecclesiam esse, hoc est Deum illic habere suam ecclesiam, sed occultam, et mirabiliter etiam servari.»

Dialogue is communication in a comprehensive sense; it means ultimately living together and living in solidarity for each other. Today dialogue among cultures, religions and churches is a presupposition for peace in the world. It is necessary to pass from antagonism and conflict to a situation where each party recognises and respects the other as a partner.

Secondly, when all we can hear in the texts of the Reformers is the simple certainty that sharp differences remain in the theologies of the two religions, we have missed their point, and so we only widen the gap between Muslims and Christians. And this then leads to hatred and violence. For it is then that we lose the most characteristic note of the Reformation heritage, namely that salvation is the work of God, not of human beings, that God's attitude to people is one of mercy, and that God is the judge of all, so that we are not to pass judgment on others.

This is in particular true for Bullinger, who firmly held that God's will is the salvation of all. However, it applies equally to Calvin and his doctrine of predestination which - if rightly understood - means that in no way is salvation based on human goodness or godliness, but solely on God's grace and mercy. This central axiom of the Reformation's message serves indeed as an excellent starting point for those who want to work for greater understanding between Muslims and Christians.