

Erasmus and the alleged ›dogma Lutheri‹ concerning War against the Turks

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Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote his treatise *Utilissima Consultatio de Bello Turcis inferendo* / *Most useful deliberations on War against the Turks*¹ in March 1530, half a year after the Ottoman army of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent had unsuccessfully besieged Vienna and was feared by many to return with a vengeance, possibly to advance all the way to the Rhine. Known from earlier works for his moderate Christian pacifism, in particular since his adage *Dulce bellum inexpertis* (1515), *Educatio Principis Christiani* (1516), and the *Querela Pacis* (1517), Erasmus had condemned, again and again, the inhumanity of war as such, and had bitterly deplored and castigated the constant random warfare between the so-called »Christian« princes. Now he saw himself pressed to ponder the looming inevitability of a large-scale defensive war against a powerful non-Christian aggressor, a conflict in which, as he feared, the survival of Europe and Christendom itself might be at stake.

Together with many of his contemporaries, including Martin Luther, Erasmus regarded the astonishing success of the Turkish advances into Europe as »as the voice or the scourge of God«², i. e. as a warning manifestation of God's ire and a God-sent punishment for sinful Christianity.

1 Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, *Utilissima Consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo et obiter enarratus Psalmus XXVIII* (Basileae: Hieronymus Froben, 1530); also in: *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami opera omnia*, ed. J. LE CLERK, (LB 5, 1706, repr. 1962, 345-368); modern critical Latin edition by A. G. WEILER (ASD V-3, 1986); English edition, with introduction and annotations, by M. J. HEATH (CWE 64, 2005, 197-266).

2 HEATH (s. n.1), 203; cf. C. A. PATRIDES, »The Bloody and Cruell Turke«: The Background of a Renaissance Commonplace (Stud Renaiss 10, 1963, 126-135); J. W. BOHNSTEDT, The Infidel Scourge of God: The Turkish Menace as seen by German Pamphleteers of the Reformation Era (TPS, N. S. 58, 1968, 5-23).

The central message of his *Consultatio* is, accordingly, the insistence on the need for Christians to repent so that their compunction and spiritual renewal might placate God's wrath – as a first step long before they should even think of taking any military measures against the Turks:

If we really want to heave the Turks from our neck, we must first expel from our hearts a more loathsome race of Turks [*teterrimum Turcarum genus*], avarice, ambition, the craving for power [...], anger, hatred, envy; having slaughtered these with the sword of the spirit, let us rediscover a truly Christian spirit and then, if required, march against the flesh-and-blood Turks under the banners of Christ and with him as our champion defeat them.³

When assessing already existing positions and attitudes towards war against the Turks, Erasmus refutes, on the one hand, the blind eagerness of those who plead for a crusading-style »Holy War« in the name of God in which the killing of Turks should be deemed a meritorious act in itself for the mere reason that they were »Infidels.« On the other hand, he rejects the »extreme pacifist« stance of those who – like the non-violent branch of the Anabaptists – maintained as a matter of principle that Christians were denied the right to make war under any circumstances.⁴ A third position Erasmus takes issue with is what he calls the *dogma Lutheri* in the Turkish question:

Now I deal with those who are pleased with Luther's doctrinal tenet [*dogma Lutheri*] in which he holds that those who wage war against the Turks rebel against God who chastises our wickedness through them. The Parisian Theologians cen-

3 ASD V-3, 243; CWE 64, 242. For a detailed analysis and evaluation of the main arguments of Erasmus' *Consultatio* see, besides Weiler's and Heath's introductions to their Latin and English editions, the following studies: M. CYTOWSKA, Érasme et les Turcs (Eos 62, 1974, 311-321); J-C. MARGOLIN, Érasme et la guerre contre les Turcs (PPol 13, 1980, 3-38); A.G. WEILER, The Turkish argument and Christian piety in Desiderius Erasmus' *Consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo* (1530) (in: Erasmus of Rotterdam: The Man and the Scholar. Proceedings of the Symposium held at the Erasmus Univ. Rotterdam, 9-11 Nov. 1986, ed. J. SPERNA WEILAND and W.T. FRIJHOFF, 1988, 30-39); M.J. HEATH, Erasmus and War against the Turks (in: Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Turonensis, Sept. 1976, ed. J-C. MARGOLIN, 1980, 991-999); M.J. HEATH, Erasmus and the Infidel (ERSY 16, 1996, 19-33); N. HOUSLEY, A Necessary Evil? Erasmus, the Crusade, and War against the Turks (in: The Crusades and their Sources: Essays presented to B. HAMILTON, ed. J. FRANCE and W.G. ZAJAK, 1998, 259-279).

4 ASD V-3, 52-54; CWE 64, 232-233.

sured this sentence with the following words: »This proposition, when understood universally [i. e. without any qualifying restrictions], is false and not in conformity with the Holy Scriptures.⁵

The sentence condemned by the Theological Faculty of the Sorbonne as Martin Luther's stance on war against the Turks, »Praeliari adversus Turcas est repugnare Deo visitanti iniquitates nostras per illos« [»To fight against the Turks is to resist God who punishes our iniquities through them«]⁶, which was issued together with other anti-Lutheran censures in April 1521, is, at closer inspection, a verbatim repetition of the thirty-fourth of altogether forty-one specific errors ascribed to Martin Luther in the Roman bull *Exsurge Domine* (15 June 1520) of Pope Leo X.⁷ Many of Luther's opponents seem to have taken this concise Roman condemnation formula at its face value, convinced, or at least pretending, that it adequately represented Luther's attitude toward the Turkish threat. Soon widely publicized, it had caused the impression that Luther went far beyond the widespread view of the Ottoman Turks as the rod of God's wrath against impenitent Christianity, by supposedly preaching that any resistance against their military advances, even when undertaken by the lawful civil authorities in charge of defending their countries, would amount to sinful rebellion against God.⁸

5 ASD V-3, 54; translation by C. S.; M. J. Heath, in CWE 64, 234, translates the beginning of the passage as follows: »Now I come to those who agree with Luther's contention, in which he claims that those who make war on the Turks are rebelling against God, who punishes our sins through them«, a somewhat freer rendition of the Latin text which says: »Nunc cum his ago, quibus placet Lutheri dogma, quo censet eos qui belligerantur cum Turcis rebellare Deo per illos nostra celera castiganti.«

6 Contained in the *Determinatio theologicae facultatis Parisiensis super doctrina Lutheriana hactenus per eam visa* of 15 April 1521 (in: C. E. du Boulay, *Historia universitatis Parisiensis*, 1665-1673; repr. 1966, VI, 116-127).

7 See DH⁸, 1999, 492; cf. P. FABISCH and E. ISELOH, eds., *Dokumente zur Causa Lutheri* (1517-1521) (CCath 41-42), 1988-1991, II, 383-384.

8 The Viennese humanist and imperial diplomat Johannes Cuspinianus speaks of this position, allegedly held by Luther, as something generally known when, under the immediate impression of the destruction wrought by the Turks in Hungary at and after the Battle of Mohács (1526), he admonishes: »Don't falter by giving in to the hollow persuasions of a certain person who pretends that fighting against the Turks means fighting

Apparently agreeing with the anti-Lutheran censure of the Parisian theologians, Erasmus can easily refute this alleged *dogma Lutheri* by showing, in his *Consultatio*, that if it was wrong to fight the Turks because they were being used by God as an instrument to chastise sinful Christendom, Christians would, by the same logic, also rebel against God's will if they call a doctor to get healed from a sickness that might have been sent by God to discipline and cleanse them. Or, to state it over-subtly, they would not even be allowed to resist the ruses and attacks of the devil which God permits as a device to tempt and test them.⁹

The question is, however, whether Erasmus did Luther justice by nailing the German reformer down on what he calls the *dogma Lutheri*, as condemned by Rome and Paris in 1520/21 – a question which appears to have not received any explicit attention from modern Erasmus and Luther scholarship. Luther did not get down to publish anything that would specifically deal with the Turkish threat until April 1529, when his *Vom Kriege wider die Türken / On War against the Turks* appeared¹⁰ (the printing of which was delayed for several months by circumstances beyond his control). In September 1529 followed Luther's *Heerpredigt wider den Türken / An Army Sermon against the Turk*,¹¹ which had been written under the immediate impact of the Ottoman siege of Vienna. A main purpose of both tracts is to show how Christians can fight with a clean conscience in a defensive war against the Turks. They make it clear that Luther refutes any papal instigation and any Church involvement in the anti-Turkish military defense, reserving the duty of repelling the Turkish aggressor exclusively to the holders of the secular power. At the same time, Luther exhorts his German followers to prepare for this war with prayer and a contrite heart in order to first reconcile with God and then lend their armed fist to military combat in obedience to the emperor's command.¹²

against God.« Quoted after C. GÖLLNER, *Turcica*, III: Die Türkenfrage in der öffentlichen Meinung Europas im 16. Jahrhundert, 1978, 195; cf. WA 30,2; 95.

9 ASD V-3, 58; CWE 64; 237; Cf. Eph 6,11 and 1 Pet 5,9.

10 WA 30,2; 107-148.

11 WA 30,2; 160-197.

12 Among the vast and steadily growing literature on Luther's attitude toward Islam and the Turks, see in particular the following studies that pay closer attention to *Vom Kriege*

Recently the question has arisen whether Erasmus had read Luther's *Vom Kriege wider die Türken*, or if he knew at least about its contents, before he composed his *Consultatio*, given the fact that his own treatise shows close parallels and unmistakable similarities with Luther's tract.¹³ From Erasmus' correspondence with a friend, Bonifacius Amerbach in Basel, we know that he was well aware of Luther's new publication on the subject and that he was eager to read it: He had asked Amerbach early in the year 1530 to send to him »as soon as possible« a copy of Luther's »new booklet« on war against the Turks to nearby Freiburg im Breisgau, his residence at the time, which he received shortly after.¹⁴ Did this give Erasmus enough time to familiarize himself with Luther's »new booklet« before the publication of his own treatise, in the middle of March 1530? The opinions of A. G. Weiler, editor of the *Consultatio* in the Amsterdam Latin edition (ASD) of Erasmus' *Opera Omnia*, and Michael Heath, editor of the new English version of the treatise in the *Collected Works of Erasmus* (CWE), differ slightly in this respect. Weiler leaves the question open,

wider die Türken and *Heerpredigt wider den Türken*: H. LAMPARTER, Luthers Stellung zum Türkenkrieg, 1940; G. W. FORELL, Luther and the War against the Turks (ChH 14, 1945, 256-271); H. BUCHANAN, Luther and the Turks 1519-1529 (ARG 47, 1956, 145-160); K. M. SETTON, Lutheranism and the Turkish Peril (BalS 3, 1962, 133-168); E. GRISLIS, Luther and the Turks (MW 64, 1974, 180-193 and 274-291); R. MAU, Luthers Stellung zu den Türken (in: *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526 bis 1546. Festgabe zu seinem 500. Geburtstag*, ed. by H. JUNGHANS, 1983, 647-662 and 956-966); G. RUPP, Luther against the Turk, the Pope, and the Devil (in: *Seven-Headed Luther. Essays in Commemoration of a Quincentenary, 1483-1983*, ed. by P. NEWMAN BROOKS, 1983, 256-273); J. T. BALDWIN, Luther's Eschatological Appraisal of the Turkish Threat in *Eine Heerpredigt wider den Türken* (AUSS 33, 1995, 185-202); M. BRECHT, Luther und die Türken (in: *Europa und die Türken in der Renaissance*, ed. by B. GUTHMÜLLER and W. KÜHLMANN, 2000, 9-27); G. J. MILLER, Luther on the Turks and Islam (in: *Harvesting Martin Luther's Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church*, ed. by T. J. WENGERT, 2004, 185-203); A. S. FRANCISCO, *Martin Luther and Islam: A study in sixteenth-century polemics and apologetics*, 2007.

¹³ See HEATH, Erasmus and War (s. n. 3), 995: »In fact, Erasmus agrees in the *Consultatio*, presumably without realizing the fact, with many of the arguments of the *Vom Kriege*, particularly on the role of the Church in war and on the question of the divine scourge.« Cf. also HEATH's introduction to Erasmus' *Consultatio*, CWE 64, 207, and E. RUMMEL, Erasmus Reader, 1990, who draws attention to the conclusions of Erasmus' *Consultatio* and Luther's *Vom Kriege* which she finds »strikingly similar« (315).

¹⁴ ALLEN Ep. 2279; cf. Allen's introductory comment to this letter.

yet he ponders the possibility that reading Luther's *Vom Kriege* might have been the decisive prompt that induced Erasmus to finally write his own treatise on the subject while forcing him, at the same time, to dissimulate his basic agreement with Luther on this topic.¹⁵ Heath, on the other hand, maintains that the requested book did not arrive in time to be used by Erasmus¹⁶ but suggests instead that he must have had indirect knowledge of the contents of Luther's *Vom Kriege* from reading an anti-Lutheran satirical tract by Johannes Cochlaeus: The polemical *Dialogus de bello contra Turcas, in antologias Lutheri*, of June 1529, which exploits purported contradictions between opinions imputed to the younger Luther of 1518 and the newest stance of »Palinodus« (= the »recanter«) who is supposed to represent the later Luther of 1528/29, i. e. the author of *Vom Kriege*.¹⁷

Yet regardless whether Erasmus had personally read Luther's new tract on war against the Turks or, as Heath assumes, had only indirect knowledge of it through Cochlaeus' polemical *Dialogus*, the obvious question remains why he intentionally ignores Luther's new detailed publication that unambiguously expressed his views on the subject, and instead tries to tie him down to a position that Luther had allegedly adopted more than a decade earlier – a course of action which in itself raises already some doubt about his academic honesty and plain dealing with the German reformer.

The present study intends to approach this problem of Erasmus' scholarly sincerity and fairness towards Luther in the Turkish question from a different angle, going one step further by moving back in time. Instead of dwelling on his perhaps only simulated ignorance of Luther's *Vom Kriege* of 1529, it will propose that the Dutch humanist, closely familiar with Luther's early output, must have been aware from the very beginning that

15 A. G. WEILER, *La Consultatio de Bello Turcis inferendo: une œuvre de piété politique* (in: Actes du Colloque international Érasme [THR 239], ed. J. CHOMARAT et al., 1990, 99-108), at 102.

16 HEATH, CWE 64, 203; cf. HEATH, Erasmus and War (s. n.3), 995: »But if Erasmus read the book [i. e., Luther's *Vom Kriege*] at all, it was *after* the publication of the *Consultatio*.«

17 HEATH, CWE 64, 205 and 207. Cf. Johannes Cochlaeus, *Dialogus de bello contra Turcas in Antilogias Lutheri* (Leipzig: Valentin Schumann, 1529); microfiche repr. (in: Flugschriften des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts, ed. H.-J. KÖHLER et al., 1981, fiche 757-758, Nr.1933).

what he refers to in his *Consultatio* as the *dogma Lutheri* concerning war against the Turks, as condemned by Rome and the Sorbonne, was in fact not even the earlier Luther's authentic opinion on the issue: That it was rather the result of the manipulation and curtailment of a single short passage – essentially a polemical, ironical aside – in Luther's *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute / Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses concerning the Value of Indulgences*¹⁸ of 1518, which was taken out of context and given a distorting interpretation in order to trim it down to a catchy anti-Lutheran formula.

The argument will proceed in three stages: A first step (I) will determine the function and meaning of this early short statement on fighting the Turks, as intended by Luther, as well as the nature of its misrepresentation in *Exsurge Domine* – and in the respective Parisian censure – by establishing its immediate argumentative context. In doing so, special attention will be given to its sarcasm, hyperbolic nature and polemic thrust, together with its broader referential background: Luther's critical reflections based on his central concern – already voiced in his *Ninety-Five Theses* – with certain developments in the officially adopted doctrine and praxis of the indulgences, and his criticism of the ways they were preached to the faithful. A further step (II) will draw attention to the fact that Erasmus himself was an early and often sarcastic critique of papal warmongering and crusading plans against the Turks, but also of the church-promoted indulgences traffic. It will be argued that back at the time of the promulgation of *Exsurge Domine* Erasmus should have neither had a problem with identifying Luther's similar authentic intention, nor with realizing that the ironical statement in question had been ripped from its defining context and refashioned into an officially sanctioned weapon against the German reformer. The third and final step (III) will try to lay open the main reason why Erasmus, nevertheless, opted in his *Consultatio* to nail Luther down to the respective anti-Lutheran Parisian condemnation formula that repeated the Roman censure of *Exsurge Domine*.

¹⁸ WA I; 525-628; LW 31, 81-252.

Luther's isolated short reference to war against the Turks occurs in *Resolutio* 5 and refers indirectly, in passing, to ongoing preparations for an anti-Turkish military offensive planned by the highest representatives of the church. Its immediate context is part of Luther's critical questioning of the claim that the pope's power to grant pardons and amnesty is not confined to removing church penalties (like excommunication and other punishments decreed by canon law), but that it can also remit divinely imposed punishments for sins committed, and that it even extends, beyond death, into purgatory.¹⁹

The fifth of Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* had already asserted: »The pope neither desires nor is he able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons«. ²⁰ After repeating this statement at the beginning of *Resolutio* 5, Luther lists and discusses the different types of punishments which, in his view, cannot and do not fall under the pope's jurisdiction and authority. Among them are the spiritual penance and self-inflicted »evangelical punishments« which consist in a person's acceptance of suffering and cross in Christ's name, including the exercises of voluntary self-mortification that the Gospel recommends to all Christians in this lifetime. Then, there are the two forms of punishments that divine justice might exact after an individual's death, namely

¹⁹ As it is well-known, this particular understanding of the papal »power of the keys«, a tenet itself derived from the traditional interpretation of Mt 16,19, is based on the medieval scholastic *theologoumenon* (and later official Catholic doctrine) that the pope can freely dispose of the so-called »treasure of the Church«, i. e. the inexhaustible merits of Christ as well as the »surplus« merits of the saints, and that he can apply them at will to the suffering souls in purgatory to make up for their own shortcomings and »speed up« their admittance into heaven. See S.H. HENDRIX, *Luther and the Papacy. Stages in a Reformation Conflict*, 1981, 24-25; B. MOELLER, *Die letzten Ablasskampagnen. Der Widerspruch Luthers gegen den Ablass in seinem geschichtlichen Zusammenhang* (in: *Lebenslehren und Weltentwürfe im Übergang vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit*, ed. H. BOOCKMANN et al., 1989, 539-567), at 542. For more detail see N. PAULUS, *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter vom Ursprunge bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, 1922/23, II, 167-169; III, 380-386.

²⁰ LW 31, 89-97; WA 1; 534-538.

either eternal damnation or temporary penalties in purgatory. As an additional form of divinely imposed punishment, Luther mentions

God's correction and scourging, concerning which Psalm 89 says: »If however, his children shall sin and not keep my law, I will punish their iniquities with the rod and their sins with the scourges of men.« Who would doubt that this punishment is beyond the power of popes?²¹

Not the papal power of the keys, but sometimes the tears and the »prayer of faith« for others may help to remove or relieve such scourges or chastisements that were sent or permitted by God, such as the sickness and fever that has befallen one of the brethren in the church community [cf. Jak 5, 14–16]. Not a papal dispensation, but deep-felt remorse expressed in acts of self-inflicted punishment might assuage God's anger, as we are taught by the biblical example of the people of Niniveh who, according to Jon 3, 5–10, turned to fasting in sackcloth and ashes: They »humbly scourged themselves by their penances and thereby managed to avert the rod of destruction intended for them.«²²

In order to drive home his point that divinely imposed and sanctioned punishments, the acts of »God's correction and scourging«, are beyond any interference by the papal power of the keys, Luther continues on a sarcastic note:

Otherwise, if a priest of the church, whether he be of high or low rank, can remove God's punishment by the power of the keys – may he, then, also drive away plagues, wars, insurrections, earthquakes, fires, murders, thefts, as well as the Turks, Tartars, and other infidels;²³ none but a poor Christian would fail to recognize in these

²¹ LW 31, 91; WA 1, 535.

²² Ibid.

²³ »[...] may he, then, also drive away [...] (plagues, wars, etc.)«: Corrective translation by C. S., instead of the grammatically faulty »then he also drives away [...]« in LW 31, 91. The Latin text has »pellat ergo pestes, bella [...]«. By mistaking *pellat*, the 3rd person singular present subjunctive of *pellere* [here: »to chase away; to dispel«], for the indicative form *pellet*, the English translation in LW, by CARL W. FOLKEMER, also misses the evident irony of this passage: If the pope or any priest whosoever is indeed able to countermand and cancel divinely decreed punishments by that claimed power of the keys, why doesn't he then freely use it, out of the goodness of his heart, to take away this whole Pandora's box of God-sent evils, including the Turks and other infidels that threaten and beleaguer Christianity?

the lash and rod of God. For Isa 10 says, »Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury. In its hand is my indignation.«²⁴

Here the allegedly limitless power of the keys, said to be even able to reduce or completely nullify God's justly decreed punishments that affect the souls in purgatory, is being ironically questioned in its efficacy to revoke these divinely enforced penalties in the otherworld since it is obviously not even powerful enough – as Luther points out indirectly – to counteract or make disappear the more tangible forms of chastisement through which God's indignation manifests itself in this present world. This sarcastic remark is immediately followed by a kind of afterthought of hardly less subversive irony, in which Luther admits that the same people certainly try their best to make up for this inefficacy of the supernatural power of the keys (when it comes to chasing away the Turks) by resorting to more »worldly« means:

Although, admittedly, quite a few, and exactly the same high-ranking persons in the church, now dream of nothing else but wars against the Turk; that is to say, they are intent on fighting not against iniquities, but against the rod that is punishing iniquity, and thus they are going to resist God who says that he chastises our sinfulness with this rod, since we fail to punish ourselves for it.²⁵

Quite obvious in the center of this provocatively ironical second statement is the direct reference to the then widespread double assumption

24 LW 31, 91-92; cf. Is 10, 5. In its entirety, this important passage reads in the Latin text as follows: »Alioqui si sacerdos ecclesiae sive summus sive infimus potest hanc poenam potestate clavium solvere: pellat ergo pestes, bella, seditiones, terremotus, incendia, caedes, latrocinia, item Turcas et Tartaros aliosque infideles, quos esse flagella et virgam dei nemo nisi parum christianus ignorat. Dicit enim Isa: x. Vae Assur! virga furoris mei et baculus ipse est. In manu eius indignatio mea« (WA 1; 535,30-35).

25 Translation by C. S. In the Latin original, the sentence reads as follows: »Licet plurimi nunc et iidem magni in ecclesia nihil aliud somnient quam bella adversus Turcam, scilicet non contra iniquitates, sed contra virgam iniquitatis bellaturi deoque repugnaturi, qui per eam virgam sese visitare dicit iniquitates nostras, eo quod nos non visitamus eas« (WA 1; 535,35-39). The translation in LW 31, 92 somewhat diminishes the obvious emphasis on the high church leaders: »Many, however, even the 'big wheels' in the church, now dream of nothing else than war against the Turk. They want to fight, not against iniquities, but against the lash of iniquity and thus they would oppose God who says that through that lash he himself punishes us for our iniquities because we do not punish ourselves for them.«

that God was using the Turks as his scourge to punish unrepentant Christendom, similar to the way Isaiah had threatened that God would send Assur/Assyria as the instrument of his fury to chastise unfaithful Israel. And that the indispensable precondition for assuaging God's anger and for regaining his favor, as the only basis for any hope to successfully ward off the Turks, would be the serious effort of all Christians to amend their lives in the face of God through repentance and atonement.²⁶

The whole passage, with its double reference to the Turks and the Turkish war, is tinged with sarcasm and amounts, in the given context, to hardly more than a provocative aside. The ironical discourse used in its first part is reminiscent of the type of pointed arguments and cynical questions about indulgences and clerical greed, including witticisms and »disrespectful« talk about the Holy See and the pope's power of the keys, which at the time of Luther's own public criticism had already emerged as a popular form of critical reaction and indirect protest against the indulgences-traffic in certain parts of Germany. They were among the jokes and wisecracking stories that circulated in inns and taverns [*fabulae in tabernis*],²⁷ as Luther pointed out in his letter to Pope Leo X of May 1518 which accompanied the *Resolutiones* he had sent to Rome. As Wilhelm Winterhager has demonstrated, Luther actually spent more than ten percent of the entire text of his *Ninety-Five Theses*, namely theses 81 through 90,²⁸ on drawing attention to this sort of shrewd questions and sarcastic remarks of the less gullible among the lay people who had turned to that subversive form of ridicule and cynical criticism to vent their indignation over the scandalizing money-making practices of the preachers of the so-called Saint Peter's indulgences.²⁹

26 This was a basic conviction shared by both Luther and Erasmus. See Heath's introduction to Erasmus' *Consultatio*, CWE 64, 207, and passim. Cf. E. RUMMEL, Erasmus, 2004, 65.

27 WA I; 527f.

28 WA I; 237f.

29 W. WINTERHAGER, Ablaßkritik als Indikator historischen Wandels vor 1517. Ein Beitrag zu Voraussetzungen und Einordnung der Reformation (ARG 90, 1999, 6-71), in particular 13-15. In his *Resolutiones*, Luther keeps blaming the indulgences preachers for successfully luring the gullible part of the population with their false promises, while he points out, at the same time, that devout minds were revolted by their shameless exploitation of

One of the favorites among these popular »irreverent« quips and questions went like this: If the pope really has the power to grant the departed souls in purgatory impunity from God's punishments, why, then, doesn't he make the very best use of this great privilege by freeing every single suffering soul from purgatory for nothing else than »for holy mercy's sake,« simply out of the goodness of his heart, instead of stingily limiting his generosity just to the ones for whom somebody was prepared to put a financial contribution for the construction of Saint Peter's cathedral into the money chest?³⁰

While this type of popular »disrespectful« criticism and questioning of the papal power of the keys may have inspired the similarly cynical first part of the above-mentioned double reference to the Turks (i. e. Luther's own sarcastic comment on the obvious inefficiency of the power of the keys when it comes to averting Turks, Tatars and other God-sent punishments experienced in this world), the provocative irony of its second part, concerning the highest church representatives and their obsession with war against the Turks, is of a somewhat different kind. It lies primarily in the hyperbolic nature of the statement and the use of an over-simplifying argument that leads to a paradoxical subversive inference. Luther makes frequent use of the rhetorical device of hyperbolic over-exaggeration in order to drive home his point – usually to expose the inadequacy, absurdity or inherent contradiction of the position he attacks. This is most evident in an example found in *Resolutio* 35 [LW 31, 186-188³¹] which, at the same time, shows clearly that these purposeful exaggerations and intentionally preposterous conclusions are not supposed to be taken literally. Expressing his irritation with the *Instructio Summaria* of Albrecht of Brandenburg, archbishop of both Magdeburg and Mainz,³² which directed the preachers

the people's piety, and other, more cynical observers reacted to the church-authorized wholesale of indulgences by making church and clergy the target of their ridicule and tavern jokes [»alios per tabernas ridere et sanctum sacerdotium Ecclesiae manifesto ludibrio habere.«] (WA 1, 625; LW 31, 247). Cf. WINTERHAGER (s. n.29), 16.

³⁰ See *Thesis* 82 (WA 1, 237) and the corresponding *Resolutio* in WA 1, 625 (LW 31, 32 and 247; cf. also 158 and 166).

³¹ WA 1, 591-592.

³² See E. ISELOH et al., *Reformation and Counter Reformation*, tr. by A. BIGGS and P. W. BECKER (History of the Church V), 1980, 44-46, for a short account of the *Instructio Sum-*

who sold papal letters of indulgences to tell the faithful »that contrition is not necessary on the part of those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessional privileges,«³³ Luther asks: If it was indeed true that the spiritual disposition of the ones who buy indulgences did not matter at all, why, then, »do we not call upon the Turks and Jews to contribute their money with us also«, adding, tongue in cheek, »not, of course, because of our greed, but for the redemption of souls.«³⁴ In further mock-adoption of the attacked argument, Luther then drives it to its absurd extreme by concluding: »I believe that even if a jackass deposited gold, he would also redeem souls (from purgatory).«³⁵ Now, in spite of the fact that this last sentence explicitly starts with the words »I believe that [...]«, nobody in

maria and the well-known »deal« between Albrecht of Brandenburg and Pope Leo X who authorized Albrecht to sell letters of plenary indulgences for the living and the dead in his newly acquired German bishoprics as well as in the Brandenburg area, and who directed him that half of the proceeds of these indulgencies sales should be spent for the rebuilding of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, whereas the other half should be used to repay the immense debt still owed to the Roman curia for his elevation as archbishop of Magdeburg, administrator of the diocese of Halberstadt, and archbishop-elect of Mainz. For the text of the *Instructio Summaria* see W. KÖHLER, ed., *Dokumente zum Ablassstreit von 1517*, 1934, 104-124.

³³ *Thesis 35 / Resolutio 35* (LW 31, 28 and 186); see KÖHLER (s. n.32), 116. Cf. also *Thesis 27 / Resolutio 27*: »They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory« (LW 31, 27 and 175-176).

³⁴ LW 31, 186. A perhaps better known later instance where Luther uses the Turks as a – negatively charged – instance for comparison in an ironical hyperbolic statement occurs in the Twenty-Fifth Article of his »Grund und Ursach aller Artikel D. Martin Luthers, so durch römische Bulle unrechtlich verdammt sind« (March 1521): Quoting John 21, 15-19, where Christ asks Peter three times: »Peter, do you love me?« and Peter answers three times: »Yes Lord, I love you«, which is followed by Christ's double command to tend his lambs and, finally, also to tend his sheep, Luther takes issue with the claim that the pope is the successor of Peter: »Three times Christ demands love from St. Peter before he commends the sheep to his care. This shows clearly that the tending of the sheep does not belong to him who is without love. And since the pope and the papacy are without love, »tending the sheep« cannot refer to [...] the loveless rule and power of the papacy. If we are willing to allow Christ's words to be thus torn to pieces and distorted, I might as well say that the rule of the Turk [– stereotypically decried as savage and cruel by Luther's contemporaries –] means tending the sheep.« (LW 32, 71-72; WA 7; 416; translation and brackets by C. S.).

³⁵ LW 31, 186.

his sober mind, not even among Luther's most narrow-minded opponents, could possibly miss its irony and seriously contend that another condemnable *dogma Lutheri* consisted in his assertion that even animals, and in particular jackasses, are able to free souls from purgatory as long as they put the required sum into the indulgences money chest.

The second part of Luther's above-quoted provocative aside uses the device of sarcastic exaggeration and subversive inference in a similar way, this time by exploiting and over-stressing, or rather over-simplifying, a seemingly logical connection between two disparate assertions concerning the Turks. Again, the objective reader should have no difficulty discerning his sarcasm and realizing that the continued pervasive irony acts like a red flag to indicate that what is said here is intentionally lopsided, spoken in a kind of bitter facetiousness, and should not be taken at its face value. Luther comes back to what he shortly before had referred to as a genuine Christian conviction, namely the generally held idea that God uses the Turks as his »rod of his anger« the same way as in the Old Testament he is said to have used Assur against Israel. But now Luther gives this concept a provocative twist by juxtaposing it with the generalizing statement that the highest church officials »dream of nothing else but war against the Turks«, at the expense of the duty of their pastoral office to battle against and ward off sin. The implicit assumption that God himself is waging a sort of warfare against the sinfulness of Christianity, in which the Turks serve him as a means to reach his purpose, receives an unexpected explosiveness when Luther puts it into this antithetic contrast to the church leaders' alleged factual behavior: By stressing the opposition between the war »against iniquity« which they are indeed supposed to lead but, as a matter of fact, seem to neglect or ignore, and a war which they eagerly strive for, but which – at least in Luther's eyes – is none of their business, or should at least not be their primary concern. One might argue about where exactly the fallacy of his over-simplifying »sophistic« argument lies, but Luther makes only explicit what seems to follow logically from the given premises: If »they have no intention of fighting against iniquities, but instead against the rod that is punishing iniquity«, then they find themselves in diametrical opposition to and on a direct collision course with God's own apparent intention. The paradoxical consequence

of this pointedly simplistic subversive argument is thus that it is exactly the ones that God has chosen as his protagonists in the battle against sin who end up fighting God himself.

There is no denying that Luther uses this ironical paradox as another sarcastic squib at the expense of the pope and the Roman Curia. Instead of preaching and instigating war against the Turks, the leaders of the church should rather stick to preaching the Gospel and its central call for conversion and repentance.³⁶ Stretching the contrast between their obsession with war against the Turks and their neglected duty to lead war against sin to the point where its last and absurd consequences become apparent, he intentionally exaggerates in order to drive home his point, this time to reveal the basic incongruity in the church leadership's flawed understanding of its priorities.³⁷ Yet even as an expression of Luther's sarcasm, the passage

³⁶ The sharp contrast Luther establishes between their eagerness to fight the Turks and their apparent imperviousness to the demands of fighting sinfulness points to an even deeper dimension of factual irony: Since the divinely ordained protagonists in the battle against sin are blamed for being oblivious to this most urgent of their pastoral duties, they also appear as the ones who have forced God in the first place to step in and do the job they are unwilling to do: They leave God no other choice for dealing with sinful Christianity than to use the Turks as his rod of anger and tool of discipline.

³⁷ A similar strategy involving ironical inference and a perplexing conclusion can be found in Luther's provocative argument towards the end of the first half of his long *Resolutio* 58 where, again, he takes issue with the *theologoumenon* of the »treasures of Christ« and the pope's alleged power to apply them when granting indulgences. Exploiting an apparent inconsistency and contradiction between two traditional theological doctrines, namely the position of »St. Thomas and St. Bonaventura and their followers«, on the one hand, who unanimously insist »that good works are better than indulgences« and, on the other hand, an opinion continually maintained »by all teachers«, namely that »the merits of Christ are applied and administered through indulgences«, Luther reaches a subversive conclusion: »Here I conclude with this inference. Unhappy is he who does not put aside his good works and seek the works of Christ alone, that is, indulgences, since it would be the greatest blasphemy of all for one to prefer his own good works over the works of Christ. Therefore either the works of Christ are not the treasury of indulgences or else that person is a most arrogant and wretched individual who does not disregard all the commandments, even the divine commandments, and only purchases indulgences, that is, the merits of Christ.« (LW 31, 218; WA 1; 609). See B. A. FELMBERG, *Die Ablasstheologie Kardinal Cajetans*, 1998, 336-337: Drawing attention to the »sophistic ways« and dialectic subtleties which Luther adopted from the scholastics as a favorite tactic to show them their own incongruities [337], Felmberg observes, with

cannot be isolated from its surrounding textual background. In the given context within the *Resolutiones*, the reproach that the highest church leaders, i.e. pope and bishops, do »not wage war against sin« is directly related to and not separable from Luther's main concern throughout this whole document: Namely his deep-felt conviction that the new emphasis of the official church on proclaiming indulgences as the ultimate pastoral commodity, at the expense of preaching from the pulpits the authentic Word of God with its insistence on life-changing repentance,³⁸ is liable to lead the faithful astray. That it diminishes their fear of God by advertising a seemingly easy means to circumvent his fair and salutary punishments for their sins, and that it lulls them into a false sense of security, as if the mere purchase of indulgences letters could assure them of their salvation. The pope, whom Luther, at the time, was still willing to respect as the Vicar of Christ,³⁹ should lead Christians to the readiness to accept Christ's cross and the suffering that results from their own sinfulness, instead of catering to them loop-holes that promise to let them escape from being disciplined by God's own salutary wisdom.⁴⁰ An additional critical element present in the same ironical passage is, of course, that the highest church leaders, by dreaming of war against the Turks instead of doing their duty of »fighting sin«, have obviously come in conflict with Scripture itself by ignoring that they should be the leaders in the »spiritual fight« not against armies of »flesh and blood«, but against the invisible forces of evil [Eph 6, 12 ff.], a battle to be fought with »the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God« [Eph 6, 17].⁴¹

reference to the quoted passage from *Resolutio* 58: »Die scholastische Argumentationsweise karikierend macht er am Beispiel der Verdienste Christi deutlich, wie durch den Vergleich von Inkommensurablen sich die allgemeinen ›Lehrsätze‹ hinsichtlich des Schatzes der Kirche und der Verdienste Christi bzw. des Ablasses an sich letztlich ad absurdum führen lassen« (336).

³⁸ See, in particular, *Resolutiones* 53 and 54.

³⁹ Cf. WA I; 527. See HENDRIX (s. n.19), 41-42.

⁴⁰ Among several other sections elaborating on the same theme, see especially *Resolutiones* 32, 49, 52, and 72.

⁴¹ For the behavior expected of the religious leaders in this *militia spiritualis*, the warfare for God and against sin, see also 2 Tim 2, 4, on the »good soldier of Jesus Christ« who knows that »no one who fights for God« (»nemo militans Deo«) entangles himself in secular affairs« (»implicat se negotiis secularibus«).

The clear and explicit reference to the church leaders' mixed up priorities and the neglect of their God-given responsibility of fighting sin is essential to do justice to this polemical passage from Luther's pen in *Resolutio* 5. No matter whether Luther's irony, however bitter, is being recognized and taken into account or not, the passage is and remains a direct and explicit criticism of the highest authorities in the church, and as such the statement cannot be pressed into a categorical rejection of war against the Turks in general. Luther does simply not proclaim in these lines, as he has often been accused of later on, that whosoever fights the Turks, including the legitimate secular magistrates in fulfillment of their duty of defending their country against unprovoked Turkish aggression, rebels against God.⁴² He does neither declare that he personally adopts a stance of nonresistance against the Turks, should they attack Europe and Germany, nor does he exhort his followers that they should rather opt to become Turkish subjects than resort to resolute fighting against them if they invade their homeland, nor does he express his own preference of the rule of the Sultan over the rule of the emperor. It was definitely not Luther's objective, at this point, to set forth a theological theory or political manifesto on how to respond to the menacing expansion of the Turkish Empire. Suppressing the critical reference to the church leaders who chose to fight the Turks instead of doing their duty of fighting sin would distort and falsify Luther's statement in its entirety. But this is exactly what happens in the truncated respective Roman condemnation formula in *Exsurge Domine* which, in turn, would condition the judgment and shape the opinion of many of Luther's contemporaries,⁴³ obviously also including his theological opponents at the Sorbonne.

As an ironic expression of Luther's annoyance with what he considers a misguided zeal of the highest church officials to get involved in aggressive military action against »the Infidels«, the passage in question must also be seen against the specific historical background of the Roman Cu-

42 See MAU (s. n.12), 959-960.

43 Cf. FORELL (s. n.12), 257: »In this misleading form, Luther's attitude toward the war against the Turks had been widely publicized. This had given the general impression that Luther considered a war against the Turks sinful and preferred the rule of the Turks to the rule of the emperor.«

ria's anti-Turkish initiatives and activities under Pope Leo X. As to the pope himself, the last non-priest in history to be elected to the highest Catholic church office, a former military commander and army leader of the Holy League in Italy,⁴⁴ Luther's remark that the leaders of the church »dream of nothing else than fighting the Turks« is hardly an exaggeration. Already on 16 August 1514, one year after Leo's election to the papal throne, Baldassare da Pescia, from among the circle of his closer friends, wrote to Lorenzo de' Medici, the pope's nephew:

»[...] our lord [the pope] remains very well, thanks to God, and does nothing else than make plans for the expedition against the Turks, and he says he wants to go in person.«⁴⁵

After the encyclical letter of 3 September 1513 in which he had addressed the kings and people of Poland, Bohemia, Prussia, and Russia in an attempt to incite them to war against the Turks,⁴⁶ Leo X sent, during the following years, numerous similar missives to other European princes, from Emperor Maximilian I and the kings of Spain, England and France to the Grand Masters of the Teutonic Knights and of the Knights of Saint John in Rhodes.⁴⁷ In several sessions of the Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517) preparations for a crusade against the Turks ranked high on the agenda. A major part of the money needed to finance the campaign was expected to come from a special new crusading indulgence which Leo X issued on 11 November 1517 with the bull *Humani generis Redemptor*. At that time, the pope committed a team of eight cardinals to work out a detailed strategic plan for an international European anti-Turkish military expedition. This strategic plan was sent to the emperor and to Francis I of France for their approval. It also contained the request that all Christian princes

44 Before his election to the papal throne, Giovanni de' Medici had served as a commander in the Papal-Spanish army which was meant to drive the French out of Italy. After its defeat in the battle of Ravenna on 11 April 1512, he was held in Milan as a French prisoner before he succeeded in escaping and returning to Rome. Cf. G. SCHWAIGER, Art. Leo X (in: Dictionary of the Reformation, ed. by K. GANZER and B. STEIMER, tr. by B. McNEIL, 2004, 180–181).

45 Quoted after K. M. SETTON, Pope Leo X and the Turkish peril (PAPS 13, 1969, 367–424), at 380.

46 SETTON (s. n.45), 375–376.

47 J. W. ZINKEISEN, Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches in Europa, 7 vols., 1840–1863, II, 579.

should form a sworn alliance with the pope, a »brotherhood of the Holy Crusade« [*fraternitas Sanctae Cruciatæ*], to make sure that the European powers would put their own hostilities aside and unite for a massive assault on the dominion of the Grand Turk: The emperor and the king of France were to lead the army; England, Spain and Portugal were to provide most of the fleet; and their combined forces were to be directed against Constantinople.⁴⁸

All of this was going on while the Ottoman Sultan, Selim »the Grim« (r. 1512-1520), had tied up most of his military forces in the Near East. Averting the threat posed by Shah Ismail Safavi and his Shiite supporters in Anatolia, Selim first occupied Tabriz in north-eastern Persia, in 1514, and annexed the whole of the eastern Anatolian plateau, Kurdistan, and northern Mesopotamia in 1515. Exploiting the weaknesses of the rivaling Mamluk sultanate, he then turned to the south and subjected, in short sequence, Syria and Palestine in 1516, and Egypt with its Arabian provinces, including the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, in 1517.⁴⁹

The Roman Curia under Leo X wanted to take advantage of this particular military situation and surprise Selim, while he was still occupied in the East, by launching a powerful offensive of European armies against the western flank of his empire, in spite of existing Turkish-Hungarian and Turkish-Venetian peace treaties and truce agreements.⁵⁰ Kenneth M. Setton sums up the pope's strategic reasoning in the given circumstances: »Leo X realized that there was the opportunity, now or never, to take offensive action against the Porte.«⁵¹

Luther's *Resolutiones* were sent to Rome in June 1518,⁵² just three months after Leo X, eager to get the anti-Turkish military alliance underway, had appointed four cardinal-legates to force a five-year truce on Christendom.⁵³ These cardinal-legates were dispatched to the principal centers

48 N. HOUSLEY, *The Later Crusades: From Lyons to Alcazar 1274-1580*, 1992, 125-126; SETTON (s. n.45), 401-404.

49 HOUSLEY (s. n.48), 119-123.

50 ZINKEISEN (s. n.47), II, 575; SETTON (s. n.45), 380-381 and 388.

51 SETTON (s. n. 45), 388; but he also notes that »Leo seemed to be the only sovereign in Europe trying to make preparations against the Turk« (ibid., 392).

52 See the introductory notes to the *Resolutiones* by J. R. F. KNAAKE, in WA I; 522.

53 HOUSLEY, *The Later Crusades* (s. n.48), 126.

of European power, the imperial court in Germany and the royal courts of France, England and Spain, in order to speed up and coordinate the campaign's organization. The papal legate to Germany was the same Cardinal Thomas de Vio, better known as Cajetan, who officially interrogated Luther, in October 1518, about his views on indulgences and papal authority at the Diet of Augsburg. Yet his foremost assignment at the imperial diet was to plead for a new tithe to be imposed on the German people in order to finance the Turkish campaign, an appeal which, however, was almost unanimously rejected by the German princes⁵⁴ who, taught by past experience, were suspicious that these »crusading tithes« were just another crude ecclesiastical device to extort more German money that would end up in Roman coffers.⁵⁵

Together with Johannes Eck, Luther's main German theological adversary and challenger at the Leipzig Debate of July 1519, Cardinal Cajetan was then on the last of the three papal commissions in charge of preparing the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*.⁵⁶ Their final version of its text was based on a memorandum of the theologians of Louvain, of November 1519, and was supposed to conform to a request expressed in a letter of Cardinal Adrian of Utrecht, the later Pope Hadrian the VI, which demanded »that Luther's works be quoted literally.«⁵⁷ When the draft was handed over to the Roman cardinals, they discussed it in four consistories, in late May and early June 1520, and decided again »to cite the errors of Luther verbatim from his works.«⁵⁸ Although, as Scott H. Hendrix has pointed out, »all forty-one condemned propositions of Luther except one can in fact

54 With the notable exception of Luther's protector, Prince-Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony. Cf. HENDRIX (s. n.19), 171-172: The pope »was favorably disposed toward Frederick because he alone, of all German princes, supported the papal proposal for a tax on the German estates to finance a campaign against the Turks.« See also P. KALKOFF, *Forschungen zu Luthers römischem Prozess*, 1905, 184f.

55 Cf. KALKOFF (s. note 54), 94; R. H. BAINTON, *Here I stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, 1977, 69-71; SETTON (s. n.45), 415-416.

56 Cf. HENDRIX (s. n.19), 107-108: »The second commission, composed of theologians, recommended a mild document in which the works of Luther would be condemned but not Luther's person. After Eck's arrival, affairs took a radically different turn.«

57 P. FABISCH, *Art. Exsurge Domine* (*Dictionary of the Reformation* [s. n.44], 112).

58 HENDRIX (s. n.19), 108.

be matched with a citation from Luther's works⁵⁹, the thirty-fourth of Luther's alleged errors, »Proeliari adversus Turcas est repugnare Deo visitanti iniquitates nostras per illos«⁶⁰ [»To fight against the Turks is to fight against God who, through them, visits our iniquities upon us.«], is by no means a verbatim quote of what Luther actually wrote. While being a reference to Luther's marginal remark on the Turkish war in *Resolutio* 5, it rather amounts, in its shortened and generalizing form, to a distortion of Luther's original text and its authentic meaning by ripping it from its determining contextual setting. As a matter of fact, the intentional omission of Luther's explicit reference to the highest church leaders and their lacking eagerness of »fighting against iniquities« was all that was needed to turn Luther's ironical aside against pope and curia into a potent weapon against his own person: For taking his statement on the Turks as the lash of the sins of Christianity out of its defining context of satirical polemic against the questionable warmongering priorities of the highest church leaders fell nothing short of suggesting that Luther held that any military action against the Turks, including any resistance against Turkish attacks, was tantamount to fighting God himself, and that he was rejecting as sinful even the right and duty of the legitimate secular leaders to defend their country should it become the target of Turkish aggression.⁶¹

In short, while most of the other assertions of *Exsurge Domine* concentrated on branding Luther a heretic because of his criticism of the theological doctrine and practice of the indulgences and for his attack on

59 Ibid.

60 It was qualified as »erroneous, offensive to pious ears, suspect of heresies or even outright heretic since in conflict with Holy Scripture.« See FABISCH/ISERLOH, *Dokumente* (s. n.7), II, 384.

61 This distorted interpretation of Luther's utterance on war against the Turks in *Resolutio* 5, as officially sanctioned in the condemnation formula used in *Exsurge Domine*, seems to be at the basis of Johannes Faber's description of Luther's purported position in his »Address to King Henry of England«, namely that »[...] contra Turcos bellare non liceat, sed Turcis omnes aperire portas Christianum & Evangelicum principem conveniat« / »[...] that it is not allowed to fight against the Turks; rather, a Christian and Evangelical prince has the duty to open all doors for the Turks«. [Johannes Fabri *Oratio de origine, potentia et tyrannide Turcorum ad Henricum Angliae Regem* (Vienna: Singeriener, 1528), C 1^v. Cf. T. KAUFMANN, *Türkenbüchlein. Zur christlichen Wahrnehmung »türkischer Religion« in Spätmittelalter und Reformation*, 2008, 185.

the power of the keys, the extent of papal authority, the pope's apostolic primacy etc., the construction of this alleged thirty-fourth error opened an unexpected additional opportunity for ostracizing the German reformer, but this time in a different way: With their minds set on refuting any attack on papal authority, Luther's Roman adversaries obviously resented that the German monk also dared to call into question the centuries-old papal prerogative of summoning a crusade against the »Infidels«. Whether this was already their original intention or not, they found, with this succinct condemnation formula, an effective device to convince the Catholic community that Luther had also to be considered a potential traitor against the Holy Roman Empire and all Christian nations,⁶² as somebody spreading a dangerous defeatist message⁶³ that would undermine any will to stop the military advances of the Turkish enemy into Europe.⁶⁴

It was by suppressing the ironic reference to the misguided zeal of the highest church officials – eager of fighting the Turks instead of quelling iniquity (i. e. leading the faithful to repentance, in order to mitigate God's

62 Luther's alleged pro-Turkish stance finds its pictorial expression in the title woodcut of Johannes Cochlaeus' polemical pamphlet *Septiceps Lutherus* (Leipzig: Valentin Schumann, 1529) which represents Luther in analogy to the seven-headed monster of the Apocalypse and shows his third head wearing a Turkish turban. Cf. the frontispiece in NEWMAN BROOKS (s. n.12).

63 See BRECHT, Luther und die Türken (s. n.12) 10, concerning early local German reactions to the undeserved stigma of Luther as a »defeatist«: „Early on, when Luther was still an Augustinian monk and in charge of the pastoral care of his parishioners at Wittenberg on the Elbe, he had to deal with the accusation that he was against resisting the military aggression of the Turks. This was in large part due to [...] number 34 of the 41 rejected sentences [...] of [...] the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* of June 15, 1520.“

64 In his Luther biography, *Commentaria de actis et scriptis Martini Lutheri* (1549), Cochlaeus blames Luther even for the disastrous defeat of the battle of Mohács (1526) in Hungary which, he pretends, was due to insufficient help from German support troops, »because Luther had by then made the [German] soldier unwilling to march against the Turk since he wrote that fighting the Turks would be resisting God who visits our iniquity through them.« Quoted after the German translation, *Historia Martini Lutheri: Das ist, Kurtze Beschreibung seiner Handlungen und Geschrifften* [...], tr. by Johann Christoph Hueber (Ingolstadt: David Sartorius, 1582), 328f. Cf. M. KLEIN, Geschichtsdenken und Ständekritik in apokalyptischer Perspektive. Martin Luthers Meinungs- und Wissensbildung zur 'Türkenfrage' auf dem Hintergrund der osmanischen Expansion und im Kontext der reformatorischen Bewegung, Diss. 2004 (Online-Resource), 110.

anger against sinful Christendom) – that the succinct Roman formulation of Luther's alleged 31st error eliminated the element that defines and determines the meaning and polemical thrust of the entire passage. That Luther was keenly aware of this official misrepresentation of what he said and meant with his remarks on war against the Turks in *Resolutio* 5 is obvious from his reaction in *Grund und Ursach aller Artikel D. Martini Lutheri, so durch römische Bulle unrechtlich verdammt sind* (March 1521),⁶⁵ where he takes issue with the respective Roman condemnation formula in *Exsurge Domine*:

Now, I set up this article not meaning to say that we are not to make war against the Turk, as that holy heresy-hunter [»Kettermacher«, literally »heretic-maker«], the Pope [...] charges me, but to say that we should first make ourselves better and cause God to be gracious to us.⁶⁶

II

Judging by the standard of Erasmus' works and letters at the time, it seems highly improbable that back in 1518, the year Luther wrote his *Resolutiones*, he should have found fault with the German reformer's critical attitude toward the unwarranted zeal of pope and Roman curia to start war with the Turks, or that he considered the way Luther expressed this criticism as scandalizing or unorthodox. The contrasting juxtaposition of war against sin and war against the »Infidels« that we find in this passage had, at the time, already been a recurring topic in Erasmus' own writings. In his letter to Pope Leo X of 21 May 1515, he differentiates between two campaigns: One »against wickedness, the most pestilential and perhaps only enemy of our Christian profession«, and the other »against enemies on a narrower front, the impious and barbarian opponents of Christianity and the Roman see.« The first campaign is »by far the more difficult.« Once it is won, winning the second campaign will, with Christ's help, be

65 WA 7; 308-457; LW 32, 3-99. It is the somewhat differing German version of his *Assertio omnium articulorum D. M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum* (WA 7; 94-151) which had appeared in December 1520.

66 WA 7; 443; here quoted after the edition of H. E. JAKOBS and A. SPAETH, *Works of Martin Luther*, with introductions and notes, 6 vols., III, 105-106; brackets by C. S.

easy.⁶⁷ But whereas even »some excellent men disapprove« of the second type of campaign, the first one meets with universal approval:

For to the war against wickedness we are summoned beyond a doubt by Christ and spurred on by Paul; but to fight the Turks we get no instructions from Christ and no encouragement from the apostles.⁶⁸

Luther was aware that he thought like Erasmus in this respect. When asked by Georg Spalatin whether a military expedition against the Turks – obviously in the sense of a traditional crusade summoned by the church »in the name of God« – can be justified and commanded on the grounds of Holy Scripture, he replied, in a letter of 21 December 1518, that he had just issued a sermon where he talked about this subject:

What I asserted there was that a war of that kind should in no way be undertaken. I am still of the same opinion [...] and so is Erasmus in many of his writings [...] My point of view is that if there has to be a fight against the Turks at all, it has to start with ourselves. For in vain do we wage mundane wars [*carnalia bella*] against foreign enemies when at home we are defeated in spiritual wars [*quando domi superamur spiritualibus bellis*].⁶⁹

As has been shown above, even in his *Consultatio* Erasmus still insists that a war against the »flesh-and-blood Turks« would necessarily have to start with a defeat of »the most ugly kind of Turks«, sin and vice, in the heart of the Christians, a battle to be won with the »sword of the spirit.«⁷⁰ As to the compatibility of a war against the Turks with Christian principles, he suggests, towards the end of his letter to Pope Leo X, that the real encouragement Christians should be getting from the New Testament and

67 CWE 3 (Letters, 1514-1516), 105; cf. ALLEN, Ep. 335.

68 Ibid.

69 WAB I, 282; cf. Luther's sermon *Auslegung deutsch des Vater unnser für dye einfeltigen leyen*, WA 2, 96 and 110-III; LW 42, 37-38 and 55-56. When pointing out that he shares Erasmus's opinion in this respect, Luther might also have thought of statements like the following, in Erasmus' adage *Dulce bellum inexpertis*: »To me it does not even seem recommendable that we should now be preparing [an offensive] war against the Turks. The Christian religion is in a bad way, if its safety depends on this kind of defense.« LB II, 966D; quoted after M. MANN PHILIPS, tr. and ed., *The Adages of Erasmus*, 1964, 344; brackets by C. S.

70 ASD V-3, 243; CWE 64, 242.

from the example of the apostles is to make any effort to convert the Turks to Christianity rather than engage them in warfare.⁷¹

By 1516 Erasmus was well aware of Leo's anti-Turkish crusading propaganda and urges the princes in his *Institutio principis Christiani* not to get hastily involved in such a campaign against the Turks, reminding them that at the time of the apostles and the primitive Church the »kingdom of Christ was created, spread, and secured« not by leading wars against the non-Christians but »by very different means. Perhaps it should not be defended by other means than those which created and spread it.«⁷² Then, in an obvious allusion to the inappropriate use, in the past, of money raised by church-imposed crusading tithes, taxes and crusading indulgences, Erasmus goes on: »In addition we can see that wars of this kind have too frequently been made an excuse to fleece the Christian people – and then nothing else has been done.«⁷³ As is well known, Luther dwelled on the same reproach in his programmatic address of August 1520, *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation / To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*,⁷⁴ where he puts it among the principal grievances (*gravamina*) of the German people against Rome. Attacking the Roman practice of using the Turkish threat as a pretense to exploit Germany, he states as a fact that »for more than a hundred years« neither the annates from German ecclesiastical benefices nor the funds raised from crusading indulgences have been used for their original destination of defending Christendom against the Turks.⁷⁵ Then he appeals to the emperor and the whole nation that the ones who abused their privilege should be deprived of it, and that

71 See also Erasmus' letter to Abbot Paul Volz of 14 August 1518 (Ep. 858; CWE 6, 76), where he asserts that true Christians should be concerned with the salvation of the Turks rather than being intent on killing as many as possible. This letter to Paul Volz served, in 1518, as the preface to the second edition of Erasmus' *Enchiridion militis christiani* (CWE 66, 11) and was reprinted in its subsequent editions.

72 ASD IV-1, 218; CWE 27, 287. The argument for peaceful evangelization of the Turks was also made in Erasmus' *Querela Pacis* (ASD IV-2, 96; CWE 27, 319), and the call to »join them to us in a fellowship of worship and faith«, rather than slaughtering them, reoccurs again in his *Consultatio*, ASD V-3, 62; CWE 64, 242 f.

73 ASD IV-1, 218; CWE 27, 28.

74 WA 6; 404-469; LW 44, 115-217.

75 LW 44, 142-144.

the misappropriated funds should in the future be kept at home instead of being sent to Rome – where they served »to provide salaries« for the Roman Curia and the many employees of the papal household⁷⁶ – or else be abolished.⁷⁷ That Luther, even before the bull *Exsurge Domine* was presented to him on 10 October 1520,⁷⁸ had nothing against a timely German military defense against the Turks whenever it should become necessary, is evident from the following passage in the same document *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*:

Even if it were ever desirable to raise such funds for fighting the Turk, we ought to have enough sense at least to see that the German nation could be a better custodian of these funds than the pope. The German nation itself has enough people to wage the war if the money is available.⁷⁹

To come back to Erasmus, he disapproved hardly any less than Luther himself of Pope Leo's plans for a preemptory military strike against the Turks and, like him, had not only become skeptical but sarcastic about the »crusading« indulgencies campaigns organized and orchestrated by Rome. In a series of letters of 1518, Erasmus goes certainly far beyond Luther's own sarcastic criticism of the highest Church leaders and their obsession with making war against the Turks when he cynically suspects ulterior motives behind Leo's crusading projects of 1517-1518, attributing them to »ruthless political ambitions«⁸⁰ and denouncing them as a ploy of papal power machinations.⁸¹ In a letter to Johannes Sixtinus, of 22 February 1518, he writes:

The pope and the emperor have a new game on foot: they now use war against the Turks as an excuse, though they have something very different in mind. We have reached the limits of despotism and effrontery.⁸²

76 LW 44, 144.

77 LW 44, 145-146.

78 Cf. CWE 76, Introduction, xxxvii.

79 LW 44, 145.

80 D. S. CHAMBERS, Art. Pope Leo X (COE 2, 321).

81 Cf. K. SCHÄTTL, Erasmus von Rotterdam und die Römische Kurie, 1954, 63-64; R. P. ADAMS, The Better Part of Valor: More, Erasmus, Colet, and Vives on Humanism, War and Peace 1496-1535, 1962, 171.

82 ALLEN, Ep. 775; quoted after HOUSLEY, A necessary Evil? (s. n.3), 262.

Erasmus suspects that the preparations to mobilize for a Turkish campaign were being used by Rome »to disguise alliances formed against other Christian powers«, citing rumors of a new »Franco-papal plan to expel the Spanish from Naples under cover of the crusade.«⁸³ A passage from Erasmus' letter to his English friend John Colet, written on or around 5 March 1518, links his disgust with the exploitation of the simple faithful through the indulgences with his outrage about the pope's political intrigues under the guise of promoting a war against the »Infidel«:

The Roman curia has abandoned any sense of shame. What could be more shameless than these constant indulgences? And now they put up war against the Turks as a pretext, when their real aim is to drive the Spaniards from Naples. For Lorenzo, the [pope's] nephew, is trying to claim Campania, having married a daughter of the king of Navarre. If this turmoil goes any further, the rule of the Turks will be more tolerable than the rule of Christians like them.⁸⁴

In a letter to Thomas More that was also sent from Louvain on 5 March 1518,⁸⁵ Erasmus points out that »the pope and the princes have several new plays in rehearsal, using as a pretext a frightening war against the Turks.« Poking fun at Leo's crusading plan, he jokingly alerts his happily married English friend that, in order to ensure its success, it was the pope's will that all married men up to the age of fifty were to be conscripted, and »that the wives of those who were away fighting the Turks should fast every other day and dress and behave in an abstemious manner.« Men who stayed at home had to abstain from making love with their wives: »Nor may they exchange kisses until by the mercy of Christ this terrible war is successfully concluded.«⁸⁶

With this same letter to Thomas More, Erasmus dispatched two published prints that had just recently appeared in Germany: »I send you [...] the Conclusions on Papal pardons, and the Proposals for a Crusade

83 HOUSLEY, *ibid.*, with reference to a letter of 5 March 1518 to an unidentified correspondent, where Erasmus comments on this rumor by saying: »If I mistake not, the pretext is one thing, and the purpose another.« See ALLEN, Ep. 781.

84 CWE 5, 330; ALLEN, Ep. 786. For the background of Leo's ambiguous scheming to promote Medici and papal politics in Italy, in particular his »unparalleled double-dealing« in secret treaties with France vs. Spain and with Spain vs. France, see L. PASTOR, *The History of the Popes*, VIII, 1950, 269-271.

85 CWE 5, 320-327; ALLEN, Ep. 785.

86 Quotations after HOUSLEY, *A necessary Evil?* (s. n.3), 264.

against the Turks, as I suspect they may not yet have reached your part of the world.«⁸⁷ There can be little doubt that the »Conclusions on Papal pardons« were Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*,⁸⁸ which were first printed in Basel in late 1517, and that the »Proposals for a Crusade against the Turks« are Leo X's *Consultationes pro expeditione contra Turcas*, which had just appeared in publishing houses in Strassburg and Augsburg.⁸⁹

Correctly deeming Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* at least as consequential as Pope Leo's memorandum on the Turkish war, Erasmus was obviously from the very beginning aware of the sensational impact of the fact that a German monk and theology professor had dared not only to publicly criticize the excesses of the sales of indulgences, but also to question the very doctrine of the »power of the keys«, inasmuch as this doctrine was considered the basis of the papal claim to remit divine punishments, including those for the souls in purgatory. That Erasmus was closely following Luther's cause is apparent from his letter to Johannes Lang of 17 October 1518 where he writes:

Eleutherius⁹⁰, I hear, is approved of by all the leading people [...]. I imagine that his *Conclusions* satisfied everyone, except for a few of them on purgatory, which that school of thought⁹¹ are loath to lose because of its effect on their daily bread.«⁹²

Given his interest in Luther's *Conclusiones* (i. e. his *Ninety-Five Theses*) and the anticipated Roman reaction they would be met with – he mentions in the same letter that he has read the »insipid response« of Sylvester Prierias (Mazzolini),⁹³ Luther's official Roman censor – it is safe to assume

⁸⁷ CWE 5, 327; cf. ALLEN, Ep. 785.

⁸⁸ See ALLEN's introductory remarks to Ep. 757.

⁸⁹ *Sanctissimi Domini Nostri Papae Leonis Decimi [...] consultationes pro expeditione contra Thurcum* [with an introduction by papal legate Antonio Pucci] (Strassburg: Johann Knobloch; Augsburg: Johann Miller, 1518; microform repr. 1990, fiche E2127: 42x).

⁹⁰ Luther's grecized nom de plume, »the free[d] one«, as used by himself between 1517–1519 in letters to some of his Humanist friends like Georg Spalatin (WAB 1; 118, and more often) and Johannes Lang (WAB 1; 130, and more often).

⁹¹ Namely the scholastic theologians of the mendicant friars, in particular the Dominicans whose preachers – among them Johannes Tetzel – were entrusted with and benefited financially from the sales of indulgences.

⁹² ALLEN, Ep. 872; CWE 6, 137; brackets by C. S.

⁹³ *R. P. Fratris Siluestri Prieratis ordinis predicatorum [...] in presumptuosas Martini Lutheri conclusiones de potestate pape dialogus* (Leipzig: Melchior Lotter d. Ä., 1518). For

that Erasmus was no less eager to read Luther's more detailed elaboration on the by now highly explosive subject of the indulgences, i.e. his *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute*. Submitted to Rome, with an accompanying letter to Pope Leo X, in June 1518, they were published in October 1518 in a collection of Luther's early Latin writings by Erasmus' printer Hieronymus Froben in Basel,⁹⁴ of which a copy was sent to him by Froben in early December 1518.⁹⁵

In Spring 1519, Justus Jonas came from Wittenberg to visit Erasmus in Louvain and to bring him some recent works of Luther. Erasmus was particularly impressed by his *Operationes in psalmos* which made him think of Luther as a »mighty trumpet of Gospel truth«⁹⁶ and, according to James D. Tracy, »convinced him more than ever before that Luther had to be defended.«⁹⁷ On the other hand, he was concerned that his own humanist preoccupation with the *bonae litterae* and his philological approach to biblical studies would be lumped together with the agenda of the German reformer. Careful from the very beginning of not committing himself publicly to Luther's cause, Erasmus had, at the same time – even before the bull *Exsurge Domine* appeared – serious forebodings that Luther would not be dealt with fairly by his Roman adversaries,⁹⁸ and this even more so because of his repeatedly expressed concerns about Luther's provocative attitude, confrontational style and unvarnished language.⁹⁹

At this juncture, the following question seems in place: Was Erasmus, back then, around 1519/20, in a position to adequately assess the nature of Luther's short observation on war against the Turks in *Resolutio* 5, and to

Erasmus' »scathing judgment« of Prierias' book against Luther see J. D. TRACY, Erasmus: The Growth of a Mind, 1972, 194.

94 See J. K. SOWARDS' introduction to CWE 71, xxxvi. This collection also contained a print of Prierias' *Dialogus* [...] in *presumptuosas Martini Lutheri conclusiones*.

95 Cf. ALLEN, Ep. 904.

96 Quoted after J. D. TRACY, The Politics of Erasmus: A Pacifist Intellectual and His Political Milieu, 1978, 116.

97 Ibid.; for Justus Jonas' visit and its impact on Erasmus, see also TRACY, Growth of a Mind (s. n.93), 181f.

98 See J. K. SOWARDS, in his introduction to CWE 71, xxxix.

99 See Erasmus' appeal for moderation in his letter to Martin Luther (of 30 May 1519), ALLEN Ep. 933; cf. Ep. 947 (to Melanchthon), and Ep. 1033 (to Albrecht of Brandenburg).

recognize that the respective condemnation formula used in *Exsurge Domine* (and, subsequently, in the verdict of the Parisian theological faculty) unduly pressed and distorted its meaning? During the many controversies with his own critics and theological opponents, Erasmus saw himself frequently forced to insist on due procedure and adherence to the rules of fairness and objectiveness, including the duty of the critical evaluator to quote correctly and to paraphrase without obscuring an author's point or altering his authentic meaning. He deemed it indispensable that a fair critique had to pay due attention, among other things, to the context and genre of an author's statements, that he had to ascertain »whether [they were] spoken in jest or earnest«, »whether they have been proposals rather than firm pronouncements«¹⁰⁰, etc. With his well-trained scholarly eye as an experienced philologist, his personal share of unfair attacks and the resulting heightened awareness of and sensibility for the basic standards and principles of correct method and procedure, Erasmus can certainly be expected to have been able to realize that Luther's provocative aside about the Turks in *Resolutio* 5 was just that: an aside, a marginal remark. It must have been obvious to him that, as such, due to its peripheral nature and low relative significance in the whole of *Resolutio* 5, it was not a theme systematically developed in the given context, and that it cannot be objectively qualified as a consolidated doctrinal opinion, let alone a serious theological conviction and dogmatic statement that could be rightfully called the *dogma Lutheri* on the subject of the Turkish war. Luther's topic, in his *Resolutiones*, was, after all, the papal indulgences and – in the particular context of *Resolutio* 5 – his questioning of the efficiency of the pope's power when it comes to grant impunity from divine punishments. In short, the Turks and the Turkish war were not the theological focus of *Resolutio* 5, and Erasmus must have realized that Luther's short critical observation concerning high-ranking churchmen who dream of nothing

100 See E. RUMMEL, Erasmus and the Valladolid Articles: Intrigue, Innuendo, and Strategic Defense (in: SPERNA WEILAND / FRIJHOFF [s. n.3], 69-78), at 71f.; cf. E. RUMMEL, Erasmus and his Catholic critics (BHRef 45), passim, in particular I, 172, on Erasmus defense against Stunica (Diego López de Zúñica) whom he accuses of deliberately misinterpreting certain phrases, quoting his words out of context and sometimes inaccurately, cutting them short and thereby omitting important qualifiers.

else than warfare against the Turks was carrying any doctrinal weight, but was, by its very nature, hardly more than a passing shot at Pope Leo X himself and the cardinals of the Roman Curia who were behind the plan to form an anti-Turkish confederacy of the European princes.

Arguably the most brilliant humanist writer north of the Alps and unsurpassed as a judge in questions of Latin style and diction, Erasmus was an accomplished expert in the use of the various literary modes, genres and rhetorical techniques. As such he can furthermore be expected to have been immediately aware of the dimension of irony and the attitude of sarcasm that imbues Luther's short mention of the Turks and the Turkish war in his polemical aside at the expense of the church leadership. After all, Erasmus was and is still regarded, in content and form, as the uncontested master of humanist wit and satire. As Geraldine Thomson has shown, his »ironic ingenuity« has at its easy disposal the complete tool-set of satirical discourse and its rhetorical devices¹⁰¹ which, in *Praise of Folly*, he delegates to Lady Folly who uses the full gamut of pointed arguments and puns, of hyperbole, incongruity and related *topoi*, including the »tricks of witty paradox to set up a false syllogism.«¹⁰² In *Praise of Folly*, in his *Complaint of Peace*, and in many of his *Adagia* and other writings Erasmus has, notoriously, poured his ridicule and scorn on the inadequacies of the contemporary society and on whatever appeared to him as questionable religious institutions and abusive church practices in need of reform. It hardly needs to be pointed out that biting mockery directed at theologians and monks, prelates and popes, was so typical for his satirist pen that not only most of his contemporaries, Martin Luther included, but also the majority of modern Erasmus scholars were – or still are – convinced that the caustic sarcasm poked at the »warrior-pope« Julius II in the anonymously published dialogue *Julius exclusus e coelis* (1514) must also have been his doing.¹⁰³

101 G. THOMPSON, Under the Pretext of Praise: Satiric Mode in Erasmus' Fiction, 1973, 7.

102 Ibid., 63f.; cf. 45-50, 65-71, and passim.

103 For a new discussion of Erasmus' authorship and a possible alternative see P. FABISCH, *Julius exclusus e coelis: Motive und Tendenzen gallikanischer und bibelhumanistischer Papstkritik im Umfeld des Erasmus* (RST 152), 2008; for Erasmus' satirical style and its influence on some of his contemporaries, see in particular 282-300.

With his own penchant for sarcasm and for the use of paradox and hyperbolic exaggerations as regular tools of his irony – including also the occasional »sophistic« argument – Erasmus was hardly likely to experience any difficulty realizing that Luther was using the same rhetorical devices in the passage at issue: In other words, for Erasmus, of all people, it must have been obvious that Luther was making an oversimplifying and intentionally perplexing sarcastic inference when he pointed out that the highest church officials, eager on battling not sin but the Turks, were as a matter of fact fighting God himself – provided that it was true that God, in accordance with the prevailing opinion of the time, had chosen the Turks as his new »infidel« rod to punish sinful Christianity. That Erasmus, consequently, must also have been aware that this ironical aside concerning war about the Turks had, like any rhetorical over-statement for emphasis' sake, to be taken with a grain of salt and not simply at face value, seems beyond question – all the more so since he himself had long been accustomed to referring to the Turks and war against them in sarcastic allusions and hyperbolic comparisons. So he complained, e.g., of »certain Dominicans and Carmelites who were so censorious that he 'would rather be subject to the Turk than bear their tyranny'.«¹⁰⁴ Already in his *Praise of Folly*, Lady Folly had recommended to enlist the aggressive mindset and the passionately combative spirit of the different factions of scholastic theologians in order to ensure victory in a war against the Turks: Instead of watching them attack each other incessantly

Christians would show sense if they dispatched these argumentative Scotists and pigheaded Ockhamists and undefeated Albertists along with the whole regiment of sophists to fight the Turks and Saracens instead of sending those armies of dull-witted soldiers with whom they've long been carrying on war with no result. Then, I think, they'd witness a really keen battle and a victory such as never before.¹⁰⁵

And he certainly had no qualms directing his sarcasm against the latest papal summons to start war against the Turks, by poking fun at it, as we have already seen, in his letter to Thomas More of 5 March 1518, with its jokes about the special contributions of husbands and wives necessary to ensure the success of Pope Leo's planned crusading expedition.

¹⁰⁴ RUMMEL, Erasmus and his Catholic critics (s. n. 100), I, 121, with reference to ALLEN, Ep. 1192, 75 f.

¹⁰⁵ CWE 27, 129.

Cast in a similar ironic mold are many of Erasmus' own critical and skeptical remarks on what he, like Luther, considers excessive claims for the papal power of the keys and its »extension into purgatory«. There is therefore certainly no reason to assume that Erasmus might have been scandalized about Luther's sarcastic quip, in *Resolutio* 5, why the pope, if he was indeed that well able to remit divine punishments as some theologians claimed, did not start to prove it by doing away with all the God-sent calamities experienced already in this world, and, in the process, simply »lift« the Turkish threat off the map. Already in the *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus has Lady Folly gibe at some people's fixation on indulgences as a means to reduce their punishments in the afterlife:

Now what am I to say about those who enjoy deluding themselves with imaginary pardons [= indulgences] for their sins? They measure the length of their time in Purgatory as if by water-clock, counting centuries, years, months, days, and hours as though there were a mathematical table to calculate them accurately.¹⁰⁶

And in the 1522 edition of his *Ratio ad veram theologiam perveniendi* / *A systematic approach to true Theology*, conceived as a guide for theology students, Erasmus wistfully sighs, with regard to the claims made for the pope's power of the keys: »If only [*utinam*] he could indeed remove souls from the punishments of purgatory!«¹⁰⁷ – leaving little doubt that he considers this to be wishful thinking. This irony is still obvious even in his *Consultatio* of 1530, in a passage referring to the escalation of papal indulgences and the widespread view that they basically served as nothing else than a means to extract ever more money from the people, no matter under what label they were promoted, including the plenary indulgences for the dead due to which now »purgatory was in danger to lose all its inmates.«¹⁰⁸

In short, Erasmus' basic critical stance concerning indulgences, the extent of the papal power of the keys, and war against the Turks as instigated at the behest of the Pope, but also his general tendency to resort to irony and sarcasm when expressing this criticism, were features he had

¹⁰⁶ CWE 27, 114.

¹⁰⁷ *Ratio ad veram theologiam perveniendi*, 1522 edition (in: Holborn, 1933; repr. 1964), at 207; LB, V, 91A.

¹⁰⁸ CWE 64, 247; ASD V-3, 66.

in common with Luther. And even though Luther's Roman (and Parisian) censors did not keep up with the fair standards of quoting and objectively assessing Luther's text passage that served them as the basis for constructing his so-called »34th error«, it seems reasonable to conclude that Erasmus was able to read the same passage in *Resolutio* 5 in a way that did it more justice by taking into account its marginal status within the document and by having due regard to its ironical nature. He was doubtlessly in a position to realize that this alleged »error« of Luther's was in fact a misconstruction that should rather be blamed on his censors, for misunderstanding or intentionally manipulating what Luther had actually said. And this irrespective of the fact that by the time of the issuance of the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*, Erasmus' attitude towards Luther was still predominantly one of basic sympathy and of concern over hateful reactions against him, to the point that he was willing to take active measures to ensure a fair process for him.

III

After the promulgation of *Exsurge Domine*, in September 1520, Erasmus issued three brief documents that were highly critical of the bull, its origins and procedural methods. As is well known, one of them, the *Axiomata Erasmi R. pro causa Martini Lutheri theologi* / Brief Notes of Erasmus of Rotterdam for the Cause of the Theologian Martin Luther,¹⁰⁹ written at the request of Luther's prince, Frederick the Wise, was probably of immediate consequence for Luther at a moment when he was most vulnerable, since it provided the Elector with convincing arguments against extraditing his subject to Rome. Published against Erasmus' expressly stated will, these *Axiomata* would, however, confirm his own opponents in their suspicion that he was siding with Luther.¹¹⁰ Listed among the *Axiomata* are some who question the »tainted source« from which the bull has sprung, including »the hatred of literature and the claim for spiritual domination.«

¹⁰⁹ CWE 71, 106f.

¹¹⁰ Cf. M. LOWRY's »Introductory Notes« to his translation of the three short documents in CWE 71, 98-100, at 99.

Branding the persons by whom the action against Luther has been pursued as »suspect«, Erasmus insists that, by contrast,

the best authorities and those closest to the doctrine of the Gospels are least offended by Luther [...] The world is thirsting for the gospel truth, and it seems to be borne on its way by some supernatural desire

that should rather »not be resisted by such hateful means.«^{III} The two other documents, namely the *Minute composed by a person who seriously wishes provisions to be made for the reputation of the Roman Pontiff and the peace of the church*,^{II2} and the *Acts of the University of Louvain against Luther*^{II3} were both published anonymously. The *Minute* was a plea for moderation, proposing ways for unbiased arbitration between Rome and Luther, whose integrity of intent and whose fighting for a deserving cause is not being put into question. On the contrary, Erasmus insists that

as far as the case of Luther is concerned, by far the greatest part of this trouble should be blamed on those who, both in sermons and pamphlets, made claims about the nature of indulgences and the power of the pope which no educated and religious audience could tolerate. So, if we look at the beginning of the trouble, Luther seems to have been stirred by righteous indignation and zeal for the Christian faith.«^{II4}

The *Minute* also casts doubts on whether *Exsurge Domine* was really issued at the behest of and with the full support of Pope Leo X:

The bull against Luther is being published in a form that lacks all mercy and is viewed with displeasure even by those who support the claims of papal power. It smacks more of the uncontrollable hatred of a few monks than the peaceful character of the person who now fills the role of our most gentle Saviour, and has none of the sharp intelligence of our Lord Leo, who so far has appeared as the most mild and approachable of men.^{II5}

The *Acts of the University of Louvain*, in turn, are a sarcastic attack on the circumstances of the promulgation of the bull in Louvain which, ac-

III Ibid.

II2 CWE 7I, 108-III.

II3 CWE 7I, 101-105.

II4 CWE 7I, 108f.

II5 CWE 7I, 109.

cording to R. Crahay, are presented as »a sinister comedy played between the theologians of the university« who had been involved in its preparation »and contriving representatives of the Roman curia.«¹¹⁶ Erasmus charges that the bull »was hatched at Cologne and Louvain« and »that the matter was handled in Rome without proper procedure.«¹¹⁷ In response to the public burnings of Luther's works, enforced in the Netherlands and at the imperial court by papal nuncio Hieronymus Aleander, Erasmus declares that

»it is easy enough to remove Luther from libraries. It's not going to be nearly so easy to remove him from men's hearts [...] Truth will not be crushed even if Luther is.«¹¹⁸

As in the other two documents, he makes a point to contest the bull's authenticity and to discredit its validity: »Experts by whom the bull has been read confirm that many of its clauses rouse suspicion of forgery.«¹¹⁹ Obviously he is counting himself among these experts who have critically read and studied *Exsurge Domine*. That he was closely aware of the particulars of the bull's content and wording seems evident from his denunciation of its pedestrian style and faultiness of procedure:

The style is that of the friars, which is poles away from that of the Roman court, and it contains a great many vulgarisms. No one accepts it as authentic, except the theologians. It has never been examined. Nor does it specify the errors which it mentions.¹²⁰

This allegation that the bull's assertions have never been »examined,« i. e. critically compared with what Luther actually said and wrote, suggests, at the same time, that the writer of these lines, i. e. Erasmus himself, wanted to be taken as a more competent judge able to ascertain whether the accusations made in the bull had indeed a justified basis in the writings Luther's censors took issue with, in particular his *Resolutiones* which,

116 R. CRAHAY, Les Censeurs Louvanistes d'Érasme (in: *Scrinium Erasmianum: Mélanges historiques publiés sous le patronage de l'Université de Louvain à l'occasion du cinquième centenaire de la naissance d'Érasme*, ed. J. COPPENS, I, 221-249), at 127.

117 CWE 71, 103.

118 CWE 71, 105.

119 CWE 71, 103.

120 Ibid.

together with his *Ninety-Five Theses*, had obviously served as the main quarry for the forty-one officially proclaimed errors rejected in *Exsurge Domine*.

At any rate, even in the improbable event that Erasmus had not already previously read the *Resolutiones*, the very promulgation of the bull that threatened the German theology professor with excommunication must have given him enough incentive to scrutinize, by personal inspection, which of the tenets of this specific document had been singled out, justifiably or not, for condemnation. It is naturally difficult to furnish conclusive proof that someone must have read something, without himself telling us so explicitly. But even supposing that Erasmus had only a general knowledge of the contents of the *Resolutiones* and had not bothered to read every one of them in detail, there are several reasons why Luther's alleged »thirty-fourth error« [»To fight against the Turks is to fight against God who, through them, visits our iniquities upon us«] was certain to arouse enough of his curiosity, if not suspicion, to make him want to see for himself in what precise context Luther had actually criticized the war against the Turks, and what exactly he had to say about it. The first reason for that is the mere oddity and seeming heterogeneity of the inclusion of this isolated »topical error« relating to the actual political and military circumstances, in a bull which otherwise concentrates on branding Luther as a heretic for his different views on rather »timeless« and strictly theological and ecclesiastical issues such as the sacrament of penance and the indulgences, or the question of the extent of papal authority.¹²¹ Secondly, Erasmus' must have been instantly aware that what was targeted here had obviously to do with the wide-spread conviction that God was using the Turks as his rod of anger for chastising sinful Christendom. He must have been intrigued to find out how Luther managed to adopt or reformulate this generally held opinion in such a way that his censors, justifiably or not, were able to turn it into an explosive political weapon that could prove extremely harmful for Luther himself. Did he really bluntly say: »To fight the Turks is to resist God«, or did it take some deliberate obfuscation and manipulation on the part of his adversaries to arrive to this concise condemnation formula?

121 Cf. HENDRIX (s. n.19), 108.

Finally, and most importantly, there were personal reasons. For Erasmus, it was not just a scholarly question of whether quoting, genre evaluation and assessment of the relative significance of the text section were done in an objective and adequate or in an arbitrary and misleading manner – in other words, it was not just a question likely to attract his attention merely qua academic and expert textual critique, nor was it simply a matter of his solicitude about a fair procedure for Luther, given his general doubts about the correctness of the accusations leveled against the German Augustinian. Rather, it was for Erasmus obviously also an issue of major personal concern and uneasiness: For he himself, as has been pointed out above, had written – and not just in asides – about the Turkish War, and about war in general, in a plainly critical fashion that could easily arouse similar suspicions and make him vulnerable for similar strictures and sanctions as they were pronounced here against Luther.

Erasmus had, indeed, exposed himself early on to the accusation of advocating a subversive form of pacifism. In fact, in his famous adage *Dulce bellum inexpertis*, he seems to anticipate a central pacifist tenet of the non-violent Anabaptists when he uses Mt 5, 39-40: *Non resistere malo*/ »Do not resist the evildoer« as the basis for the assertion »that the right to make war is strictly denied to Christians.«¹²² As Norman Housley has accurately observed,

Erasmus was concerned to demonstrate how firmly his obsession with peace was based on essential Christian principles, and to discredit any association between religion and war. This provoked the concentrated assaults on the scholastic theory of the just war which makes it possible to understand how he came to be accused of pacifism.¹²³

Conservative theologians who had found fault with Erasmus' editions of the Greek New Testament and his *Annotations* to the Gospels were indeed quick, after the appearance of *Exsurge Domine*, to charge that »by tampering with interpretations long hallowed« he had »opened the way

¹²² Quoted after L-E. HALKIN, *Érasme, la guerre et la paix* (in: *Krieg und Frieden im Horizont des Renaissancehumanismus* [Kommission für Humanismusforschung 13], hg. von F.J. WORSTBROCK, 1986, 13-44), at 23.

¹²³ HOUSLEY, *A necessary Evil?* (s. n.3), 271.

for the heresies of Martin Luther.¹²⁴ Among them were the Spaniard Iacobus Stunica (Jaime López Zúñiga). In a sequence of four letters to Leo X, Stunica had tried, in 1520, to obtain the pope's patronage for his *Erasmi Roterodami blasphemiae et impietates*, a collection of excerpts from Erasmus' *Annotations* to the New Testament that he found suspicious, unorthodox and dangerous for the Christian faith. He urged the pope to take steps against Erasmus whom he denounces as the »origin of evils [...]; from him as from a fountain head flowed all Lutheran impieties.«¹²⁵ Items specified by Stunica as »blasphemous« and »impious« included Erasmus' pronouncements on papal authority, patristic exegesis, religious orders, matrimony, the veneration of saints, miracles, ceremonies and the observance of feast days, but also the fact that »everywhere he criticizes every type of warfare indiscriminately.«¹²⁶ While Stunica was not successful in obtaining Leo's permission for the publication of his booklet, he took advantage of the interregnum following the pope's death, in December 1521, and had it printed in late April or early May 1522.¹²⁷

In his hastily composed *Apologia*¹²⁸, Erasmus took exception to the general allegation that he was »not only a Lutheran but a standard bearer and leader of the Lutherans.«¹²⁹ Disproving Stunica's individual accusations one after the other, he also defends himself against the imputation that his own criticism of warfare and his stance on war against the Turks did not differ from the respective position of Luther:

I speak out in many places against war and as vehemently as I can, yet nowhere do I lay down the law that no war is permitted among Christians. I find it difficult, however, to agree that there should be any war between the children of peace – Luther

124 TRACY, *Politics* (s. n.96), 113.

125 RUMMEL, *Erasmus and his Catholic critics* (s. n.100), I, 166, with reference to H.J. DE JONGE, *Four unpublished letters on Erasmus from J.L. Stunica to pope Leo X (1520)* (in: *Colloque Erasmi de Liège* [1987], ed. by J-P. MASSAUT, 1988, 147–160), at 153.

126 RUMMEL, *Erasmus and his Catholic critics* (s. n.100), I, 165; cf., *ibid.*, 166–167, and DE JONGE (s. n.124), 155.

127 According to RUMMEL, *Erasmus and his Catholic critics* (s. n.100), I, 165, it »was distributed in spite of a resolution by the cardinals to block its sale in Rome.«

128 *Erasmi Roterodami in Iacobum Stunicam non admodum circumspectum calumniatorem Apologia* [...] (Argentorati: H. Morhard, 1522).

129 RUMMEL, *Erasmus and his Catholic critics* (s. n.100), I, 166.

perhaps condemns all warfare completely. I do not approve of those who invade the Turks merely for the sake of booty and make no attempts to induce them to believe in the gospel by using Christian arguments rather than compulsion alone – Luther, I hear, writes that those who resist the Turks resist God.¹³⁰

It is obvious that in this response to Stunica Erasmus wants to disassociate himself from Luther. In the defensive situation of an »apologia« which, as such, serves the purpose of refuting the charges of unorthodoxy leveled against his own person, he would naturally stress what separates him from the officially condemned heretic, and therefore intentionally omit anything that could be interpreted as indicating that he might have sympathized or agreed with him. Accordingly he would, of course, also refrain from the impulse to point out that, to his understanding, Luther's alleged »thirty-fourth error«, seemingly based on his *Resolutio* 5, was actually rather something construed by his censors and was not warranted by an adequate reading of Luther's text itself.

Admittedly, by that time, in 1522, Erasmus had already become increasingly alarmed with and alienated by what he perceived as Luther's escalating radicalism and open defiance, as expressed in the Wittenberg burning of the Church Law decretals, the publication of his *Assertationes* and, in particular, his *Babylonian Captivity* of 1521 which for Erasmus marked the reformer's definite break with the Catholic church, beyond repair or chance of reconciliation, so that now he »looked back with some bitterness on his original hope for Luther.«¹³¹ Yet there is no reason to assume that this disappointment with and alienation from Luther retroactively changed Erasmus' former basic attitude and insights gained from reading Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* and his *Resolutiones*, or that he had given up his previous conviction that Luther, at the time of the promulgation of *Exsurge Domine*, needed to be protected against the »hatred« and hostile censoriousness of his Roman opponents.

Erasmus' *Apologia* is, however, concerned with self-protection and the vindication of his own orthodoxy. For this reason, he resorts to the defensive

¹³⁰ Quoted after RUMMEL, Erasmus and his Catholic critics (s. n.100), I, 171.

¹³¹ TRACY, Growth of a Mind (s. n.93) 186; cf. *ibid.*, 188: »In 1520, Erasmus may have excused Luther's anger. In 1521 he began to reflect that Luther's *spiritus* was very different from the gentleness of Christ.«

strategy of pretending that he has no direct knowledge of what Luther actually said and wrote, leaving the impression of being dependant on hear-say and second-hand, indirect information. Thus, in the particular question at issue, he claims a lack of precise knowledge that would not allow him to either verify or deny that »Luther condemned war as such«, while insinuating at the same time that it might well be true that he actually did. Accordingly, while his remark: »Luther, I hear, writes that those who resist the Turks resist God«, obviously refers to the respective anti-Lutheran censure in the bull *Exsurge Domine*, it seems at the same time to imply that he has not read any statements in Luther's works that would allow him to judge whether this censure was justified or not. Protesting his personal unfamiliarity with Luther's respective views helps, in turn, create an additional dimension of distance between him and the reformer, thus serving the attempt to avert the allegation that he and Luther colluded in the question of the Turkish war.

This defensive strategy of disassociating himself from Luther by pretending ignorance of his works was already used by Erasmus when he came under attack as a hidden Lutheran by his enemies in Louvain. Even when reporting about these charges in a letter to a friend, he writes:

They have got it into their heads that I am the champion and mainstay of Luther's ideas, although I do not know the man and have never read anything of his.¹³²

Already when writing to Martin Luther himself, on 30 May 1519, he mentions that he had assured the theologians in Louvain of not knowing Luther's works, in order to make sure that they would not draw himself and his preoccupation with the *bonae litterae* and humanistic and biblical philology into their attacks on Luther's strictly theological reformation program.¹³³ Similar pleas affirming his lack of familiarity with Luther's works – initially intended to sustain his image as an uninvolved and neutral observer between the Lutheran and anti-Lutheran camps – occur frequently in Erasmus' correspondence,¹³⁴ although one may doubt

¹³² ALLEN, Ep., 993: Letter to Leonardus Priccardus, canon of Aachen, written from Louvain on 1 July 1519; quoted after CWE 7, 3.

¹³³ ALLEN, Ep. 933.

¹³⁴ Starting with his letter to Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony, of 14 April 1519, followed by the one to Melancthon, of 22 April 1519 (ALLEN, Ep. 939 and 947; CWE 6, 297 and 309), and to Cardinal Thomas Wolsley of 18 May 1519 (ALLEN, Ep. 967; CWE 6, 967).

if they were ever successful in »fooling« anybody. Erika Rummel aptly remarks that Erasmus »strained the credulity of his readers by maintaining for years [...] that he had no time to peruse Luther's writings, except in snatches«¹³⁵, whereas Uwe Schultz regards these routine protestations that Luther's books were basically unknown to him as an »ignoble hiding game« (»unwürdiges Versteckspiel«) that was liable to affect and ruin Erasmus' credibility in general.¹³⁶

In his *Consultatio* of 1530, Erasmus goes obviously one step further than in the *Apologia* against Stunica, now speaking of »Luther's doctrinal tenet [*Lutheri dogma*] in which he holds that those who wage war against the Turks rebel against God who chastises our wickedness through them.« With this Erasmus seems to leave no doubt that he agrees that Luther has indeed pronounced the erroneous view of which he was accused in the condemnation formula used by the Parisian Theologians of the Sorbonne. Any possible ambiguity, as it was still present in the rather vague statement of the *Apologia* against Stunica (»Luther, I hear, writes that those who resist the Turks resist God«), is now gone. Still, the question arises why Erasmus, in his *Consultatio*, quoted the censure of the Parisian Theologians rather than the earlier identical condemnation formula contained in the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*. Was he hesitant to simply hide behind the traditional maxim *Roma locuta, causa finita* [»Once Rome has spoken, the case is closed«], i. e., in this case, behind what the official church document declared as Luther's error concerning the question of War against the Turks – no matter whether the formula rendered correctly what Luther actually said? Was he reluctant to do so because back in 1521, when *Exsurge Domine* was promulgated, he had discredited it as the result of the hostility of certain monks rather than reflecting the authentic opinion of the pope himself? Did he not mention Rome's condemnation and instead refer to the verdict of the Sorbonne because a decision by the Parisian theologians had a comparatively less binding character, or also perhaps because they seemed to have left some leeway for interpretation by adding, as mentioned above, the qualifying statement: »This proposi-

¹³⁵ RUMMEL, Erasmus (s. n.26), 92.

¹³⁶ U. SCHULTZ, Erasmus von Rotterdam, der Fürst der Humanisten. Ein biographisches Lesebuch, 1998, 190-192.

tion (namely *Praeliari adversus Turcas est repugnare Deo visitanti iniquitates nostras*), when understood universally [i. e. without any modifying restrictions], is false and not in conformity with the Holy Scriptures«?

Valid as some of these considerations may be, the fact that Erasmus chose to refer to the Parisian verdict against Luther rather than to the papal bull had certainly also to do, and most probably mainly so, with his own ongoing conflict with the Parisian theologians and with the attempt of fending off their accusations against his own person.¹³⁷ By pointing out that the *dogma Lutheri* in the Turkish question had been condemned by the Parisian theological faculty, and by apparently identifying with and subscribing to this condemnation, he obviously also intended to use his *Consultatio* on war against the Turks to publicly disassociate himself from Luther, one of his major concerns at the time.

Already since 1525, Erasmus had been anxious to prevent an official censure of his own works through the Sorbonne. In vain had he sought to avert this threat by trying to convince the Parisian theologians that their doubts about his orthodoxy were unfounded. As James K. Farge has pointed out, they firmly believed

that Erasmus' critical methodology in scriptural exegesis, his attitudes to reform of Church institutions, and his ideas on the development of doctrine had created the negative climate of criticism which Luther and others tragically exploited to propagate heretical doctrines and to implement their schismatic designs.¹³⁸

In 1529, the year before the publication of Erasmus' *Consultatio*, he was publicly denounced as a »hidden Lutheran« by Noël Bédà, the syndic of the Parisian theological faculty. In his *Declaration against the clandestine Lutherans*,¹³⁹ Bédà left no doubt that, to his mind, »either Erasmus lutheranizes or Luther erasmianizes.«¹⁴⁰ He dismissed Erasmus' most prominent initiative to clear his name from the charge of colluding with

¹³⁷ For the general history of this conflict, from about 1526 onward, see J. K. FARGE, *Orthodoxy and Reform* (in: *Early Reformation France: The Faculty of Theology of Paris, 1500-1553* [SMRT 32], 1985), 186-197.

¹³⁸ FARGE (s. n.136), 187.

¹³⁹ NOËL BÉDÀ, *Declaratio [...] contra clandestinos Luteranos* (Paris: Josse Bade, 1529).

¹⁴⁰ Quoted after RUMMEL, *Erasmus and his Catholic critics* (s. n.100), II, 44-45. For the same longstanding accusations leveled against Erasmus in Italy, especially in the circles of the Roman Academy, see S. SEIDEL MENCHI, *Erasmus als Ketzer: Reformation und In-*

Luther, his controversy with the German reformer on the »Freedom of Human Will« (1524-1527), as nothing but a sham to make Luther look as innocuous as possible, instead of truly defending the Roman church against Luther's attacks on the sacraments, on monasticism, on papal authority and similar topics which, in Bédà's eyes, were incomparably more weighty and crucial.¹⁴¹ More importantly in our context, the syndic of the Parisian faculty of theology also assaulted Erasmus as a radical pacifist:

According to Erasmus' teaching, [war] is forbidden by divine decree. This is greeted with surprise by those who are loyal to their princes, by scholars, and by those who excel in sound knowledge and counsel.¹⁴²

Eventually the Theological Faculty of Paris as a whole reacted very sharply against the Dutch humanist's alleged position of extreme pacifism. When, in May 1525, a French version of *Quaerimonia Pacis*¹⁴³ / *The Complaint of Peace* – Erasmus' most elaborate plea against the inhumanity of war as such – was submitted to the Procurator at the Royal Court to see whether it »could be printed without danger,« the latter did not dare to make this decision on his own and forwarded the book to the theologians of the Sorbonne. They sent it back with the verdict that because of the errors and »perverse articles« contained in it, it »should in no way be printed« and »that the Faculty condemns the book and judges it worthy of being burnt« (*Facultas damnat libellum & dignum flammis judicat*).¹⁴⁴ When the same Parisian theological faculty compiled its official list of thirty-two anti-Erasmian censures,¹⁴⁵ the fifth proposition, *De reparatione injuriæ*,¹⁴⁶ concentrated on Erasmus' interpretation of Lk 22, 49-51¹⁴⁷ and his conclusion that Christ explicitly prohibited his followers to resort to armed violence against unjust aggressors. With that

quisition im Italien des 16. Jahrhunderts, 1993, in particular the 2. chapter with the title »Erasmus Lutheranus. Ein Konstrukt der italienischen Theologie 1520–1535«, 33–66.

141 Cf. RUMMEL, Erasmus and his Catholic critics (s. n.100), II, 45.

142 Quoted after RUMMEL, Erasmus and his Catholic critics (s. n.100), ibid.

143 Now generally known as the *Querela Pacis*.

144 CH. DU PLESSIS D'ARGENTÉ, *Collectio Judiciorum de Novis Erroribus* [...], 1738; repr. 1963, II, 42.

145 D'ARGENTÉ, *Collectio Judiciorum*, II, 53–77.

146 Ibid., 56.

147 It is the account of Jesus' arrest on the Mount of Olives, where he rebukes one of his disciples (Peter) who had struck the High Priest's servant with his sword and cut off his right ear.

Erasmus asserted, according to the explanation given in the respective Parisian *censura*, that Christians are not allowed »to lead war against the impious, as if there were never, if the legitimate course of the law is maintained, a just cause for a war of self-defense.« This proposition is then condemned because it »enervates any reasonable political action and is in discrepancy with natural and divine law«¹⁴⁸, clearly contradicting the evidence of the Old Testament according to which, from Joshua to the Maccabees, many wars have been wielded on explicit divine order. The proposition is also deemed »consentaneous with Luther's heresy« (*consentanea hæresi Lutheri*)¹⁴⁹ – obviously a reference to the Roman and Parisian earlier condemnation of Luther's alleged position on war against the Turks. A similar anti-Erasmian list of censures in a Brussels manuscript, most probably dependant on the Parisian compilation, explicitly rejects Erasmus' alleged views on war against the Turks as unorthodox, under the heading: *Contra bellum et de vim vi non repellenda et de bello contra Turcas* [»Against War, and that violence should not be repelled by violence, and on war against the Turks«].¹⁵⁰

The official Parisian list with the censures of Erasmus' »errors« was compiled in 1526 and the following year, and was voted on by the theological faculty on 16 December 1527, although – perhaps due to royal intervention¹⁵¹ – it was only published in 1531.¹⁵² Judging from his letters written to Paris during the fall of 1527, Erasmus »sensed that the condemnation he had tried to avoid so long was imminent.«¹⁵³ Thus one can infer that he wrote his *Consultatio*, of Spring 1530, also with an eye on this pending verdict against himself, to serve as a precautionary measure to establish the largest possible discrepancy between his own stance on war against the Turks and the opinion that had been officially attributed to Luther in the Parisian condemnation formula.

¹⁴⁸ D'ARGENTÉ, *Collectio Judiciorum*, II, 56.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ See CRAHAY (s. n.115), 242.

¹⁵¹ Cf. RUMMEL, Erasmus and his Catholic critics (s. n.100), II, 29: »Official criticism of Erasmus by the faculty of theology at Paris was held in abeyance for some time because Erasmus enjoyed royal favor.« Francis I. had even invited him, in 1525, to become one of the founding fathers of the Collège de France (cf. *ibid.*, n.104).

¹⁵² FARGE (s. n.136), 195 f.

¹⁵³ FARGE (s. n.136), 195; cf. 187-195.

There can be little doubt that Erasmus, back in 1520, had not found any more fault with Luther's ironical aside about war against the Turks in *Resolutio* 5 than with some of the sarcastic and hyperbolic remarks on Turks and Turkish rule in his own letters, e.g., when he pointed out that certain European princes, the pope included, made common action with the Turks as far as their despotic oppression of the people was concerned.¹⁵⁴ And he had repeatedly mused that the yoke of the Turks might, in the long run, be more bearable than the constant tyranny inflicted by some »Christian« rulers on their subjects, as in his letter to John Fisher of 2 April 1519:

O that Christ would at long last arise and liberate his people from tyrants of so many kinds! For the end seems likely to be, unless steps are taken, that it would be more tolerable to live under the tyranny of the Turks.¹⁵⁵

Had comments like this one reached the public forum, they would have been at least as »sensitive« and susceptible to misinterpretation and could have been as easily forged into a charge that Erasmus was trying to surreptitiously undermine the resolve to resist any Turkish attempts to further advance into Europe. For this reason, resorting to what he calls the *dogma Lutheri* in order to pretend, against his better insight, that there existed an enormous difference between his own and Luther's stance in the question of the Turkish War seems disingenuous, to say the least, if not hypocritical. And this even more so if it also served the purpose to dissimulate the close parallels and similarities which, as a matter of fact, existed between *On War against the Turks*, Luther's new detailed and elaborate tract of 1529, and Erasmus' own *Consultatio* of 1530. Upholding the hailed standards of academic fairness, honesty and scholarly integrity did not seem to have been among the foremost priorities, even for the Prince of the Humanists, when it came to fending off the attacks of overzealous »inquisitors« who scrutinized his own orthodoxy.

¹⁵⁴ Letter to John Colet, of 23 Oct 1518. ALLEN, Ep. 891; CWE 6, 168: »The princes, together with the pope, and I dare say the Grand Turk as well, are in league against the well-being of the common people.« Quoted after HOUSLEY, *A necessary evil?* (s. n.3), 265.

¹⁵⁵ ALLEN, Ep. 936; CWE 6, 291. See also the already mentioned passage in the letter to John Colet of early March 1518, ALLEN Ep. 786; CWE 6, 330. HOUSLEY, *A necessary evil?* (s. note 3), refers to several other similar statements in Erasmus' letters about Christian rulers being »so tyrannical that the rule of the sultan could hardly be worse« (278; cf. 273).