

# 'Let the Muslim be my Master in Outward Things'. References to Islam in the Promotion of Religious Tolerance in Christian Europe

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## Summary

Islam presents a policy of religious tolerance, rooted in teachings on the universal nature of man, his free relationship to God, and the divine origins of other religions. The prophet Muhammad<sup>sa</sup> separated his authority as a religious leader from his position as a governor, creating a religiously diverse society from the very start. This contrasted to the Christian world, where men were regarded to be born in original sin, only to be redeemed by Christ through the one true Church. Ever since the Byzantine Empire, Christian rulers had governed by the motto 'One State, One Law, One Faith', leading to horrendous persecutions of heretics. Throughout history, persecuted Christians have noticed the contrast to the tolerance within Islam. When, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, persecutions in Europe became unbearable, Christian advocates of tolerance referred to the Ottoman Empire as the model to adopt. The example of the empire was offered in debates on tolerance from Hungary to Germany, France, the Netherlands and Great Britain, up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, by tolerance advocates such as Sebastian Castellio, Francis Junius, John Locke and Voltaire. The Netherlands became a junction, adopting not only the Ottoman model of religious diversity, but also receiving political and military support from Ottoman sultans.

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*Old Ottoman mosque in Pécs, Hungary.*

## Introduction

Religious tolerance may seem self-evident to the modern reader, who is educated to believe that it is one of the basic values upon which Europe was built. However, up until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, religious tolerance was not seen anywhere in the Christian world. Ever since the Byzantine Empire, rulers had governed by the motto 'One Empire, One Law, One Faith'.<sup>2</sup> Christian theology saw Christ as the only way to salvation, and the Church as the only way to Christ. Those with other faiths were regarded to be exempted from salvation, and hence criminals, 'children of Satan'. The Church argued that it was the responsibility of the ruler to cleanse the community of corruption, or he would be held responsible to God. The burning alive of heretics has been pushed into the sphere of Medieval anecdotes, but was very real well into Renaissance times. The Catholic inability to rule tolerantly resulted in the transformation of what was once the paradise of *Al-Andalus* into the site of one the most horrendous events of ethnic and religious cleansing in history.<sup>3</sup>

Among Christians in Western Europe, this policy became the more and more painful as more people joined reformist movements in the 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Despite the horror experienced by the persecutions, it took Christians great effort to understand the possibility of

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire, 324-1453*, vol. 1. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press 1952; p. 148

<sup>3</sup> See Gerrit Willem Drost, *De morisco's in de publicaties van Staat en Kerk; een bijdrage tot het historisch discriminatie onderzoek*. PhD Dissertation, University of Leiden, 1984

a religiously diverse state. Indeed how far off the idea of tolerance was, can be witnessed in the examples of the reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin. Themselves persecuted, they did not defend their case by an appeal to freedom of conscience. Rather, they became more ambitious in proving that indeed theirs was the only true sect. Luther and Calvin themselves supported the execution of heretics.<sup>4</sup> This irony is referred to by one of the few voices for universal tolerance in those days, the Dutch mystic Jan Volkertsz Coornhert, who in 1582 concluded that 'the Catholics do not want freedom of conscience in matters of religion; the Protestants condemn them for it, but they imitate them just the same'.<sup>5</sup>

Another example of how religious diversity was incomprehensible to the Christian mind even in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was the Peace of Augsburg of 1555. In order to save the community from the vast killings that would occur when a new king would adopt Protestantism, the credo 'cuius regio, eius et religio' ('to whom belongs the region, also belongs the religion') gave the king the right to determine the faith of his nation, while giving subjects who did not want to adopt his religion, the 'jus emigrandi', or the 'right to move', circumventing execution.<sup>6</sup> This shows that even if the problems of religious intolerance were experienced, the solution of religious diversity was not within easy reach, and practising the religion of one's choice was far from regarded as a fundamental human right.

In a previous article, I have attempted to point out traces of Islamic influence in various factors contributing to religious tolerance in Europe.<sup>7</sup> Islamic mysticism influenced the development of spiritualist movements in Christianity, which were essential in understanding the exclusive relationship of the conscience to God.<sup>8</sup> The Islamic teaching of all religions containing divine truth likely influenced the 'Docta Ignorantia' movement, with authors like Raymond Lull, John of Segovia, Nicolas Cusanus and Guillome Postel.<sup>9</sup> In the field of scholarship and intellectualism, Islam had brought the movements of Humanism and Scholasticism, including notions of tolerance such as academic freedom.<sup>10</sup> Islamic law,

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin collaborated with the Spanish Inquisition to execute Michael Servet for the denial of the Trinity. Auguste Hollard, *Michel Servet et Jean Calvin*, Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance, (6) 1945, 171-209. For the intolerance of Martin Luther, see Johannes Janssen, *History of the German People From the Close of the Middle Ages*, vol. X. St. Louis: B. Herder, 1910; pp. 222-223.

<sup>5</sup> Dirck Volkertsz Coornhert, *Synode over Gewetensvrijheid*. Amsterdam University Press 2008; p. 237

<sup>6</sup> Henry J. Cohn, *Government in Reformation Europe, 1520-1560*. London: McMillan 1971; p. 155

<sup>7</sup> 'De ingrediënten van godsdienstvrijheid'. *Al-Islaam* (The Hague: Mobarak Mosque) 2007:9, pp. 5-21. The different factors contributing to the development of religious tolerance are summed up in the introduction to Coornhert by Hendrik Bongers, in *De motivering van de godsdienstvrijheid bij Dirck Volkertsz Coornhert*. Van Loghum, Arnhem 1954.

<sup>8</sup> Influences of Islam have been described on St. Francis of Assisi, Meister Eckhart, St. Theresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross and Ignatius of Loyola, all of whom became important in Christian mysticism. On St. Francis, see Idries Shah, *The Sufis*, New York: Doubleday & Co. 1964; pp. 228-230; on St. Theresa: Miguel Asín Palacios, 'El símil de los castillos y moradas del alma en la mística Islamica y en Santa Teresa'. In Idem, *Sadilias y Alumbrados*. Madrid: Ediciones Hiperion 1989, pp. 179-190; on St. John of the Cross: Miguel Asín Palacios, *Saint John of the Cross and Islam*, New York: Vantage 1981; on St. Ignatius: Hermann Mueller, *Les Origines de la Compagnie de Jesus*. Paris: Librairie Fischbacher 1898. A reference to Meister Eckhart's adoption of Islamic mysticism is made in Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: the 4000-year quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. New York: Random House 2004.

<sup>9</sup> The connection of this movement to Islam is recognised (but not fully understood) in Hendrik Bongers, *De motivering van de godsdienstvrijheid bij Dirck Volkertsz Coornhert*. Van Loghum, Arnhem 1954; xx-xxi. For Raymond Lull, Segovia and Cusanus, see Richard Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent: Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation*. Viking/Penguin, New York 2003. For Postel: Marion Kuntz, *Guillaume Postel: Prophet of the Restitution of All Things, His Life and Thought*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1981.

<sup>10</sup> George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West, with Special Reference to Scholasticism*. Edinburgh University Press 1991 (sold out but available on questia.com). Academic freedom is

reaching Europe through Norman Sicily in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, introduced equality of citizens before the law, and offered judicial tools to preserve their rights.<sup>11</sup> Lastly, the Islamic model of religious diversity could be seen to have influenced early writings on tolerance. This last factor of influence, the idea of the religiously diverse state, is further elaborated upon in the present article.

## Tolerance in Islam

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Islam offered a different starting point. It did not teach a single way to salvation (2:212),<sup>12</sup> nor the persecution of those lacking it. From the moment the Prophet<sup>sa</sup> started preaching, it was clear that 'whoever follows guidance, follows it only for the good of his own soul'. To those going astray, the Muslims were advised to say: 'I am only a warner' (27:93). The Qur'an abounds in verses proscribing compulsion, which need not be spelled out to the full here (2:257, 10:100, 50:46, 109:7, etc).<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the verbal teaching, the practical example of the prophet Muhammad<sup>sa</sup> showed how he, as governor of the city of Medina and later master of Mecca, separated his position as a ruler from his authority as a religious leader. In Medina, Jews and Christians lived side by side with Muslims, and were not obliged to follow Muhammad<sup>sa</sup> in his religious teachings. As they possessed their own jurisdiction, based on their respective religions, they were even allowed to have their own courts. After taking Mecca, idols were removed from the Ka'ba, but idol worshippers were not persecuted.

The early wars waged by the Muslims are explained in the Qur'an to liberate peoples from religious persecution and protect 'Mosques, Churches and Synagoges' from destruction (22:41). The verse 'fight them until ... the religion is only for Allah' (2:194) is often quoted to suggest a war of conversion, but in fact means quite the reverse: the Muslims fought the persecution until people could choose to serve God out of their own free will. As the remaining of the verse points out, 'no hostility is allowed except against the aggressors'.

A more subtle difference in the atmosphere created by Islam with regard to religious diversity, is that all men, irrespective their religion, are regarded to have a 'nature' able to perceive truth (30:31). It can reach to an awareness of God, extend mercy to other creatures (3:314, 5:83), can be forgiven, and can attain salvation (2:63, 3:114-115). Islam claimed to appeal to this nature. Contrary to the Christian teaching, which regards all newborns to be 'children of wrath' (Ephesians 2:3), born in original sin only to be redeemed by faith in Christ – the prophet Muhammad<sup>sa</sup> taught that all children, and consequently all humans, are born sinless. To this universal nature of man, Islam added the teaching that God had sent prophets to all nations on earth (35:25), which all were to be treated equally true (3:85). Followers of

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discussed on pp. 26-28, 177. See also Makdisi's speech *Humanism and Scholasticism in Classical Islam and the Christian West*. Journal of the American Oriental Society, 1989:2, pp. 175-182.

<sup>11</sup> John A. Makdisi, *The Islamic Origins of the Common Law*. North Carolina Law Review, 1999:5, pp. 1635-1739. Jona Lendering concludes the principle of equality before the law was adopted from Islamic Sharia: *Vergeten Erfenis. Oosterse wortels van de westerse cultuur*. Amsterdam: Polak & Van Gennip 2009

<sup>12</sup> I use the Ahmadiyya numbering, which includes the tasmiyah ('In the Name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful') as part of the Surah. As a consequence, my verse 2:212 may be numbered 2:211 in other editions, verse 27:93 as 27:92, etc.

<sup>13</sup> I will not here enter into an apology of the many allegations against Islam. For a pervasive analysis of the teachings of Islam on religious freedom and of the contemporary intolerance of Muslim clergy, see Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *Murder in the Name of Allah*. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press 1989.

other faiths had to be respected in their religious practice (5:49). In contrast to Medieval Christianity, the Qur'an granted no power to Satan without the permission from God (34:22, 17:62-64). People unsensitive to the message of Islam were not seen as essentially Satanic, but primarily as people whom God did not want to guide for the moment (18:18). All these teachings created an acceptance of diversity in religious convictions and practices, so created by God in His eternal wisdom (10:100).

Islam granted Muslims a vision which allowed them to rule, in many ways, secularly<sup>14</sup> over different religions and peoples, maintaining a basic respect for their rights qua human beings. So when after an attack by the Byzantines, the Muslims took Jerusalem, the Caliph Umar<sup>ra</sup> was at pains to secure the rights of the subjected Christian inhabitants.<sup>15</sup> There were no forced conversions, no expropriations, religious places were to be left untouched. Umar<sup>ra</sup> went so far as to pray by the side of the road, in order to prevent Muslims from erroneously turning the church where he visited into a mosque, out of sentiment for their Caliph. Taxes were not to be collected harshly, and when the Muslims were unable to guarantee safety to the people, they returned the taxes.<sup>16</sup> The rights of the Christian inhabitants were laid down in a treaty, which breathes an atmosphere of safety and mercy for the subjected people.

The Byzantines had many years before expelled the Jews from Jerusalem. Some time after taking the city, Umar<sup>ra</sup> invited Jewish families to live in the city once again. Umar<sup>ra</sup> himself took the initiative in the restoration of the Temple of Solomon, which was destroyed by the Romans and had been used by the Christians as a dump ever since. The new legislation of the Muslims caused an upsurge in the building of churches by different communities, which had heretofore been persecuted under Byzantine rule.

The Qur'an laid down the rights of human beings in general, encouraged fair treaties and contracts with others, and so functioned, de facto, as a secular constitution which was upheld by Umar<sup>ra</sup> with all his might. Umar<sup>ra</sup> is thus praised by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as expressing perfectly the spirit of a Constitutional State, when he said:

By God, he that is weakest among you shall be in my eye the strongest, until I have vindicated for him his rights; he that is strongest I will treat as the weakest, until he complies with the law.<sup>17</sup>

Among these fundamental rights was the right to practice the religion of your choice and not to be compelled to accept any faith.

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<sup>14</sup> William Montgomery Watt asks whether in Al-Andalus, 'the Islamic religion [was] merely the framework of a largely secular way of life' (*Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, Edinburgh University Press 1962; p. 133). In this context, we should also consider Mirza Tahir Ahmad's contemporary stress on the necessary secularism of Islamic politics: 'Islam pleads for the secular type of government more than any religion and more than any political system'. Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *Shariah Relationship Between Religion and Politics in Islam*. Tilford: Islam International Publications Ltd. 1992. This should be interpreted as freedom of religion, and not as a repression of it, as in the French *laïcité*.

<sup>15</sup> For the account of Umar's rule here summarised, see Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1996; pp. 228-232

<sup>16</sup> Mirza Bashir Ahmad, *Seerat Khatam-un-Nabiyyeen* (Urdu). Qadian 1920, pp. 654-655

<sup>17</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Cambridge University Press 1910, vol. 5; p. 24

## Christian References to Muslim Policy

### *From Jerusalem to Constantinople*

Christian sects like the Nestorians and Monophysites, which had faced persecution by the Greek Byzantines, experienced the difference of Islamic rule instantly. As wrote the 12<sup>th</sup> century historian Michael the Syrian: '[The Muslims] did not inquire about the profession of faith, nor did they persecute anybody because of his profession, as did the Greeks, a heretical and wicked nation'.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, after the early victories of Islam, the Greeks, in what was left of the Eastern Roman Empire, found themselves between the Muslims on the one side and the Latin Catholics on the other. Now they faced persecution from the Latins, and came to understand very well the value of religious freedom under Islam. Patriarch Michael III of Anchialos expressed the situation in the 12<sup>th</sup> century as follows:

Let the Muslim be my master in outward things rather than the Latin dominate me in matters of the spirit. For if I am subject to the Muslim, at least he will not force me to share his faith. But if I have to be under Frankish rule and united with the Roman Church, I may have to separate myself from my God.<sup>19</sup>

This situation did not change much over the centuries. When, in 1451, the Ottomans advanced to Constantinople, the Orthodox Emperor Constantine XI requested the Pope in Rome for help. However, he received as an answer only a handful of troops and a reproaching letter, stating among other things that 'Outside the Church there is no salvation: he who was not in Noah's ark perished in the flood'. By that time however, the Orthodox were very much aware of the difference between the Turks and the Catholics in their dealings with religion. Not long before, Catholic crusaders had sacked Constantinople on the way to Jerusalem. There had developed in the city a whole party, allegedly including the distinguished secretary Duke Lucas Notaras, who professed that they 'would prefer to see in Constantinople the Turban of the Turk to the Tiara of the Pope'.<sup>20</sup> Muhammad II conquered Constantinople in 1453, making a definitive end to the Eastern Roman Empire, and introducing the Islamic diverse society.

### *Eastern Europe and early writings on tolerance*

As the Ottomans conquered parts of the Balkans, the tolerance they brought to the area made its impression on travelling Christians. Nabil Matar tells how,

Renaissance travelers in the Levant ... reported on the amicable interaction of religious communities and on how Muslims, Jews and Christians shared their festivities with each other. Thomas Coryat observed how often 'Spectators were as well Christians as Turkes', and so did Rycaut who could not but praise Muslim toleration of Christians, including Muslim respect for the Christian clergy. Many accounts by captives in North Africa speak of the respect which priests received from their captors, the permission they were granted to celebrate their religious feasts and the presents they were given to decorate their churches. In Smyrna, Turks 'often dropped in at Christian churches' while others enjoyed listening to children reciting their catechism. At the end of the seventeenth century, the French traveler Jean Dumont, the Sieur du

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<sup>18</sup> *Historia* 3:226, cited in Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1996; p. 232

<sup>19</sup> Donald M. Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium*. New York: Cambridge University Press 1979; pp. 126-127.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *Papacy and the Levant, 1204-1571*, vol. I. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society 1976; p. 105

Mont (1667-1727), noted that Muslims venerated certain Christian saints, and that on a few occasions, 'Turks and Christians [joined] together in some Rites of Devotion'. At a Law Court which he visited in Egypt, Veryard saw copies of the 'Old and New Testament and an Alcoran' that were used 'to swear Jews, Christians, and Mahometans, each according to his Religion'.<sup>21</sup>

The tolerance of the Ottomans provided a shelter for the emerging Protestant movements of Luther and Calvin. In 1548, the Catholic authorities requested the sultan's representative in Tolna (Hungary) to either execute or drive out the Hungarian pastor Imre Szigedi because of his Protestant preaching. The chief intendant of the Pasha of Buda not only denied their request, but issued an edict of toleration, which said that:

Preachers of the faith invented by Luther should be allowed to preach the Gospel everywhere to everybody, whoever wants to hear, freely and without fear, and that all Hungarians and Slavs (who indeed wish to do so) should be able to listen to and receive the word of God without any danger. Because this is the true Christian faith and religion.<sup>22</sup>

According to Susan Ritchie, the Pasha's edict and the lifestyle introduced by the Ottomans became the inspiration for the the Edict of Torda of 1568, the first example of Christians tolerating other Christian sects. The Edict, issued by the Unitarian Church, likely influenced Christian ideas on tolerance as far as John Locke a century later.<sup>23</sup>

The accounts of Protestant travellers and preachers in Ottoman lands were gradually transformed to serve as a political argument abroad. A protestant preacher in the Balkans, Emmerich Zigerius of Tolna, wrote about the Pasha's edict to his friend Matthias Flacius in Germany. Flacius published the letter in 1550 to confront the German rulers with the contrast between Catholic oppression of Protestants and the generosity of the Turk towards 'the true religion'.<sup>24</sup> Philipp Melancthon, Martin Luther's right hand man, cites the tolerance of the Turk to rebuke Cardinal Sadoletto for his intolerant behaviour towards Protestants.<sup>25</sup> The argument is also used by Luther himself.<sup>26</sup> As has been said, the Lutherans did not in fact plea for freedom of conscience, but simply stressed that the Turk had more regard for the 'truth' than the Pope. Erasmus<sup>27</sup> may have been broader in his view, although I believe the scope of his vision should not be overestimated.<sup>28</sup>

An odd case in early 16<sup>th</sup> century literature on tolerance is the work of Erasmus's personal friend Thomas More. In his *Utopia* of 1516, More pictures an ideal society where different

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<sup>21</sup> Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain 1558-1685*, Cambridge University Press, 1998; p. 28-29.

<sup>22</sup> Susan Ritchie, *The Islamic Ottoman Influence on the Development of Religious Toleration in Reformation Transylvania*. Seasons Journal. Berkeley: Zaytuna Institute 2004; 59-70, on p. 67

<sup>23</sup> Susan Ritchie, *The Islamic Ottoman Influence on the Development of Religious Toleration in Reformation Transylvania*; pp. 68-69

<sup>24</sup> 'Epistola cuiusdam pii concionatoris ex Turcica' (A letter from a pious preacher from Turkey). See Thomas Kaufmann. *Das Ende der Reformation*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2003; 291-292

<sup>25</sup> *Corpus Reformatorum*, Bd. V, p. 771. Cited in Carl Göllner, *Türccica III. Die Türkenfrage in der öffentlichen Meinung Europas im 16. Jahrhundert*. Bukarest/Baden: Bibliotheca Bibliographica Aureliana 1978; 25

<sup>26</sup> '... our tyrants capture us, force us, drive us out, haunt us, burn us and drown us, as the Pope is much worse in this regard, than the Turk.' Martin Luther, *Vom Kriege wider die Türken*, 1529.

<sup>27</sup> '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'. Letter to John Fisher, 1519. *The Collected Works of Erasmus*. Toronto / Buffalo: University of Toronto Press 1974. vol 6; p. 291

<sup>28</sup> In this I feel supported by Van Schelven, who states that Erasmus 'cannot possibly be called an advocate of tolerance'. AA van Schelven, *De opkomst van de idee der politieke tolerantie in de 16e eeuwse Nederlanden*. In: Idem, *Uit den strijd der geesten*. Amsterdam: Ten Have 1944; p. 40

religions co-exist. He not only allows the diversity of Islamic society to enter the stage, but also the fact that the wise majority regards God as 'above all our apprehensions':<sup>29</sup>

There are several sorts of religions, not only in different parts of the island, but even in every town; some worshipping the sun, others the moon, or one of the planets. Some worship such men as have been eminent in former times for virtue or glory, not only as ordinary deities, but as the Supreme God; yet the greater and wiser sort of them worship none of these, but adore one eternal invisible, infinite, and incomprehensible Deity, as a being that is far above all our apprehensions, that is spread over the whole universe, not by its bulk, but by its power and virtue; him they call the Father of all.<sup>30</sup>

Utopus, the king of the Utopians, 'made a law so that every man might be of what religion he pleased, and might endeavour to draw others to it by the force of argument'.<sup>31</sup> Islam's teaching on truth shared by different religions shows as Utopus ponders 'whether those different forms of religion might not all come from God, who might inspire men differently, He being possibly pleased with a variety in it'.<sup>32</sup>

The stress on philosophy and argument suggests that More, rather than the Ottoman, had the Moorish Empire in mind; the Medieval center of philosophy and science which had been surrendered to Catholic rule only years before. This viewpoint may be substantiated by the story of the Utopian who converted to Christianity. He commenced preaching 'with more zeal than discretion', crying out against the Utopians 'as impious and sacrilegious persons, that were to be damned to everlasting burnings'. Despite the fact that it was 'one of [the Utopians] ancientest laws, that no man ought be punished for his religion', the Christian is punished, 'not for having disparaged their religion, but for his inflaming the people to sedition'.<sup>33</sup> This reminds of the story of Eulogius and the martyrs of Cordoba,<sup>34</sup> suggesting stories reached Thomas More from that quarter.

Illustrative the fact that early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the ideas imported from Islam were only appreciated as experiments, is that despite the apparent comprehensiveness of the teachings on tolerance in *Utopia*, Thomas More would only 15 years later forget about his own book and vehemently persecute heretics as Chancellor under king Henry.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Tom Gage, professor of English literature at Humboldt University, California, confirmed to me in a personal letter that Thomas More 'evidently had in mind a Muslim Other State when writing his *Utopia*'.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia: or the happy republic, a philosophical romance*. London: Rickerby 1852; p. 170-171

<sup>31</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia*, p. 174

<sup>32</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia*, p. 174

<sup>33</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia*, p. 173

<sup>34</sup> Between 850 and 859 AD, a group of Christians sought martyrdom in Cordoba by insulting the prophet Muhammad<sup>sa</sup> in public. Richard Hitchcock comments on what he calls the 'so-called martyrs': 'The actions and words of those who became martyrs broke the terms of the *dhimma*, but they were also acted upon because of the potential political repercussions'. There was '... the need to uphold the law in face of flagrant breaches of the conventions which enabled adherents of the three religions to co-exist in an ambience of mutual tolerance'. Richard Hitchcock, *Christian-Muslim Understanding(s) in Medieval Spain*. *Hispanic Research Journal*, 2008:4; 314-325, on p. 317.

<sup>35</sup> John Edward Fahey, *Thomas More and Heresy. Saint More as a Persecutor of Protestants*. Suite 101. July 22, 2008.



### France

Meanwhile in France, king Francis I had become disenchanted with the Catholic Emperor, Charles V. Francis desired to become independent and in 1528 sought an alliance with the famous Ottoman sultan, Süleyman I 'the Magnificent' (1494-1566). This resulted in an enduring military cooperation with an intensive exchange of letters. In his correspondence with Francis, Süleyman presented his tolerant policy towards Christians as a matter of imperial pride. The sultan wrote: 'Places other than the Mosques stay in the hands of Christians, and no-one molests those who go there. They all live peacefully under the wings of our protection'.<sup>36</sup> Again, the example of Islam did not have practical effect. Francis would later in his life persecute Protestants mercilessly, destroying whole villages and driving tens of thousands from their homes, forcing John Calvin into exile to Switzerland.<sup>37</sup>

In 1559, the Huguenots in France appealed for toleration to queen Catherine, setting off a fierce debate on the perceived pros and cons of religious tolerance. Catherine asks her Private Council to look into the request. Several pamphlet-like letters, called 'Remonstrances' or 'Exhortations' are sent to the Council to influence her on the matter. In these letters, arguments can be recognised which can later be found in debates on tolerance throughout Europe.

The opponents of tolerance argued that tolerating different religions would create social and political chaos. A country should be perceived as a grand family, they said. What would the result be if beside the lawful wife, concubines would be allowed to have rights? Also, when one would grant liberty to one sect, others will quickly follow suit. It would not be possible to give a salary to all the different preachers. Citizens would no longer obey a ruler with a different faith. A soldier would not be able to function next to his fellow in arms. Without unity, the military would not be able to achieve anything. When the country is struck by a natural disaster, people would blame each other for it. A mayor would not be able to take the oath, because it is based on a faith not his own. And when a man and his wife will have different religions, he may start using his fists in the quarrels that will arise.<sup>38</sup>

The advocates of tolerance reply by offering examples in which well-recognised authorities allow the coexistence of different faiths. Typically, three examples are mentioned: the Roman emperors who tolerated other faiths, the Pope who tolerates Jews at the Vatican, and the Ottoman sultan who allows several faiths to live in his dominions, whilst being the most powerful ruler in the world:

Did the Great Turk, at present emperor of Constantinople and fifteen or sixteen countries as large as our France, detract from his status, his or that of his predecessors, by allowing three different religions in one city? No, no! My gentlemen, to the contrary, he added to his grandeur!<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> E. Charrière, *Négociations*, vol I, p. 129-131; Cl. D. Rouilliard, *The Turk in French History*, p. 106-107. Cited in Göllner *Türccica III*, p. 221

<sup>37</sup> Alexandre Ganoczy, 'Calvin's life', in McKim & Donald (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, Cambridge University Press 2004; pp. 7-8

<sup>38</sup> AA van Schelven, *De opkomst van de idee der politieke tolerantie in de 16e eeuwse Nederlanden*. In: Idem, *Uit den strijd der geesten*. Amsterdam: Ten Have 1944; pp. 13-16

<sup>39</sup> Exhortation aux Princes et Seigneurs du Conseil Privé du Roy (1561). In *Memoires de Condé*, London/The Hague: Claude du Bosc & Guillome Darrés; vol. II, p. 625. The *Memoires* are accessible online through Eighteenth Century Collections.

This was an affront to the believers of the Catholic ideal of the purity of the Church being preserved by the ruler. In their reply, they said the others had been 'most dishonorable ... by setting an infidel and barbarous tyrant as an example for a most Christian and French King'.<sup>40</sup> Arguing that freedom is indeed tyranny, they said that tolerating different sects would result in the ultimate destruction of the Church:

[The rule of the Turk] is the tyrannical way of Julian the Apostate,<sup>41</sup> who was the greatest enemy of our religion, and who once declared in his writings to his most intimate friends, that it is of no benefit to kill the Christians, or to punish them for their faith, because (he said) martyring Christians turns above who were below. And there is nothing to gain from this, except distracting the honour from those who honour God. (...) Let us remember what St. Augustine wrote to the Donatists about the view of Julian concerning the freedom he seemed to grant to all religions in his nation: Does he not testify, having discussed the matter, that the end will only be the staining and ruining of the Unity of the Church and consequently the whole of Christianity? How then can they give you such an advice, whose purpose it is first and foremost to add to the Glory of God and to maintain His Church?<sup>42</sup>

The debate in France did not result in any change of view within governing circles. There were moments where the ruler had to grant some space to the Huguenots because the latter became militarily stronger; as had more often been the case in Europe, it was tolerance 'by the rules of war'.<sup>43</sup>

In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the advocates for tolerance gain momentum. An important figure was Sebastian Castellio, who lived in Geneva and Basel. He became well renowned for his reproach of John Calvin, who had Michael Servet executed for the denial of the Trinity. In Castellio's writings, we see the arguments for tolerance being systematised. In Castellio also, the Ottoman Empire is the most prominent example of a nation where the diversity of religions proves to be successful:

Wherever there are persecutions everything is full of disturbance. On the contrary where there are no persecutions, everything is tranquil in spite of diversity of religion. I know some cities in which there are almost as many opinions as heads, but because there is no persecution, there is no sedition, and should persecution commence all would be in disturbance. At Constantinople there are Turks, there are Christians, and there are also Jews, three peoples widely differing from one another in religion. Nevertheless they live in peace, which certainly they could not do if there were persecution. A careful investigation will reveal that persecutors have always been the cause of great troubles. Wherefore, Princes and Magistrates, if you desire peace and tranquillity, do not listen to those who incite you to persecution, for they are seditious, however much they accuse others of sedition, as the Jews accused Christ, though they were themselves responsible. The dwelling of Christ must be built by love. The persecutors wish to build it by hate and blood.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, Castellio mentions Ottoman Constantinople as the only example of the 'cities' he knows of, and likens it to the 'dwelling of Christ, built by love'.

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<sup>40</sup> Remonstrances faictes au Roy de France, par les Députez des Trois Estats du Pays et Duché de Bourgogne, sur l'edit de la Pacification (1563). *Memoires de Condé*, vol. IV pp. 356-412, on p. 372-373. 'King' (Fr. 'Roy') was directed at the official ruler, Charles IX, then only 10 years old.

<sup>41</sup> 331-363 AD; the last non-Christian Roman Emperor.

<sup>42</sup> Remonstrances faictes au Roy de France, par les Députez des Trois Estats du Pays et Duché de Bourgogne, sur l'edit de la Pacification (1563). *Memoires de Condé*, vol. IV pp. 356-412, on p. 372-373

<sup>43</sup> AA van Schelven, *De opkomst van de idee der politieke tolerantie in de 16e eeuwse Nederlanden*. In: *Uit den strijd der geesten*. Amsterdam: Ten Have 1944; p. 11

<sup>44</sup> Sebastian Castellio, *On heretics; whether they are to be persecuted and how they are to be treated (1554)*, transl. R. Bainton. New York: Columbia University Press 1935, p. 225. The passage is included under Castellio's pseudonym George Kleinberg; as elucidated by Roland Bainton on p. 10

### *The Netherlands*

We move now to the Netherlands, where the Protestant movement endured persecution under the successor to Charles V, king Philip II of Spain. Prince William of Orange ruled the Netherlands in name of the Spanish king, but experienced moral difficulty in the execution of the persecution laws. Orange appealed many a time to Philip to moderate the persecution bills, but when this proved unsuccessful, he allied with the Protestants in a war of independence against the Spanish Empire. The Prince was persistent in appealing to the Calvinists for religious tolerance when trying to unite the Dutch provinces against Spain.

The arguments for the possibility of religious tolerance had reached him in letters reporting on the discussions in France. The debate was identified just by the reference to the Ottoman Empire. The Catholic humanist Viglius wrote to the Prince in 1564, that 'some desire to moderate the persecution bills, others want to allow liberty of conscience, and at least live like the Christians do under the Turk'. And the Flemish noble d'Esquerdes wrote that 'it is better to be tributary to the Turk than to live contrary to one's conscience and to be treated according to these [persecution] bills'.<sup>45</sup> In due course, the Ottoman example was frequented by the direct advisors of the Prince. Dirck Volkertsz Coornhert, one of Europe's unique authors on tolerance,<sup>46</sup> was aware of the example of the Turks, which was employed in the writings of his brother Frans.<sup>47</sup> Councillor to the Prince of Orange, Phillipe de Mornay, also used the argument.<sup>48</sup> And when in 1574 the Prince himself was asked about his thoughts on tolerance, he replied '... that the Turk, scrupulous as he is to the point of sectarianism, permits all kinds of religion, and the Pope himself tolerates the Jews'.<sup>49</sup>

The example of the Ottoman Empire would enjoy an interesting context in the Netherlands, as the Prince received assistance from sultan Süleyman I in his struggle for independence. In december 1565, tolerance advocate Francis Junius and the brother of the Prince of Orange, Louis of Nassau, composed a letter to Philip II, asking for toleration. The *Brief discours envoyé au Roy Philippe* rather daringly contrasts the 'powerful' Turk to the 'ignorant' strategy of Philip, who was under great pressure from the Ottomans in the Mediterranean:

And who has not nowadays noticed a very large diversity of religions under the Great Turk? Only among the Christians, there are fifteen to twenty diverse sects and religions. And then there are the Jews, the Persians and the Muhammedans, all subjects in his Empire, more opposed to each other in the matter of religion than water is opposed to fire. Verily, if such a diversity would be the true cause of chaos and sedition ('*tumult et sedition*'), it would have been impossible for the Turk to have become so powerful. It is a matter of great ignorance to think that one cannot maintain peace among subjects when they possess different religions. Who considers the cause

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<sup>45</sup> Both references: Marianne Mout, *Calvinoturcisme in de zeventiende eeuw*. Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis 1978:4; 576-607; p. 579

<sup>46</sup> 'The occasional visionary thinker such as Dirck Coornhert'. Andrew Pattegree, 'The politics of toleration in the Free Netherlands, 1572-1620'. In: Grell & Scribner (ed.) *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996; p. 198

<sup>47</sup> '... the Saracens and Turks, who fight Christians, (...) are at least reasonable in that they allow the Christians whom they have defeated to stay with their religion and justice, if they only pay them a small tax, being one crown per head every year.' Frans Coornhert, *Cort onderwijs eens liefhebbers des welstandts deser Nederlanden*, 1586. Queen Beatrix referred to Coornhert, religious tolerance and the alliance between the Netherlands and the Ottoman Empire in her speech before the president of Turkey, on the occasion of the latter's visit to The Hague, April 3, 2001. Her speech appears to confuse Frans and Dirck.

<sup>48</sup> Mornay, *Remonstrance aux Etats de Blois*, 1576. Referred to by Van Schelven, *De opkomst van de idee der politieke tolerantie*; p. 52

<sup>49</sup> '...que le Turk, tout scrupuleux qu'il fut sur le point de la secté, permettait toute espèce de religion, et que le pape lui-même tolérait les Juifs'. AA van Schelven, *Willem van Oranje*. Amsterdam: Ten Have 1943; p. 231

of chaos and sedition at their source, will find that it does not originate at all in diversity of religion, but in certain passions such as avarice, jealousy, arrogance, vengeance and others of the like, which can ignite the smallest differences, and when the Magistrate does not put them in their place, they inflame little by little and go on to cause public disorder and sedition.<sup>50</sup>

Having in mind that the Dutch would only a few months later receive support from Süleyman against Philip, their arguments read almost as a provocation:

The joy of being able to live and serve God in liberty of conscience is such a great force which makes one forget all other joys and desires (...) That is why it is no wonder that without any doubt, many from the Provence, during the persecutions in France, for the sake of religion have become tributary to the Turk, hoping that at least they let them live in the liberty which they desire most of all.<sup>51</sup>

In August 1566, during a famous protest against Spanish-Catholic rule in Antwerp known as the 'Beeldenstorm' ('Storm against idols'), a crowd of Calvinist Christians chanted a song which advised to put 'Half moons on your sleeves, rather Turk than Pope!'<sup>52</sup> They were referring to silver medallions in the shape of a crescent moon, with the inscription 'In spite of the Mass – Rather Turk than Pope'.<sup>53</sup> The medallions were again seen on the clothes of Dutch corsairs at the capture of the city of Leiden in 1574.<sup>54</sup> Popular history has interpreted this to mean that the Dutch would 'rather be dead' than to live under Catholic rule any longer. But historical records clearly reveal that the phrase referred to the contrast between the sultan and the Pope in the matter of tolerance.<sup>55</sup> The preference for Turkish rule is found in several songs in use by the Dutch, for example:

The Prince of Orange triumphant  
God will make him wise and understand  
That Gods Word from this moment  
May be preached to every corner  
Rather Turk than Pope he has become  
Although the Turk is not called Christian  
He did not burn anyone for the faith  
As the Papists do, every single day.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Brief discours envoyé au Roy Philippe (dec. 1565). *Memoires de Condé*, vol. V, p. 400

<sup>51</sup> Brief discours envoyé au Roy Philippe (dec. 1565). *Memoires de Condé*, vol. V, p. 389

<sup>52</sup> 'Halve manen op de mouw, liever Turks dan Papauw!'. GJ Brutel de la Rivière, *Het leven van Hermannus Moded*, Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn 1879; pp. 32-33.

<sup>53</sup> 'En despit de la mes – Liver Turcx dan Paus'. (See image) The crescents are preserved in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which sells replicas. The phrase is also translated as 'Rather Turk than Papist', but 'Pope' in my view makes it clear that the choice is between being either subjects to the Turk or to the Pope. (In Dutch: *Liever des Turks dan des Paus*). In contemporary Dutch, the phrase is translated as 'Liever Turks dan Paaps'.

<sup>54</sup> Jan Fruytiers, *Corte beschrijvinghe van de strenghe belegheringhe ende wonderbaerlijcke verlossinghe der stadt Leyden in Hollandt*. Delft, 1577; p. 96

<sup>55</sup> This is confirmed by Marianne Mout in *Turken in het nieuws. Beeldvorming en opinie in de zestiende eeuwse Nederlanden*. Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis 1984; 362-381, on p. 379: "'Liever Turks dan Paaps' luidde de leuze die voortkwam uit de discussie over de vraag of tolerantie het staatsgezag wel of niet aantast.'

<sup>56</sup> 'Den Prince van Oraengien triumphant / Godt sal hem gheven wijsheyt en verstant, / Op dat Gods Woort tot desen stonden, / Mach gepreect worden aen elcken cant, / Liever Turcks dan paus bevonden. / Al is den Turk gheen Christen genaemt, / Hy en heeft niemant om tgelooove gebrant, / Als die papisten doen alle dage'. P. Leendertz jr. (ed.), *Het geuzenliedboek*; Zutphen 1924-1925, p. 245. Cited in Mout, *Calvinoturcisme*; 380. See also C.C. van de Graft. *Middel nederlandse historieliedereren*, Arnhem 1968; A. van Elslander, *Het refrain in de Nederlanden tot 1600*, Gent 1953.



*Silver crescents worn by the Dutch from 1566 to 1574, reading 'Rather Turk than Pope' (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam).*

Historian Jan Fruytiers adds the trustworthiness of the Turk as a legitimization of the slogan on the medallions:

... some wore silver half moons on their hats with these words written on them: Rather Turk than Pope. They estimated the tyranny of the Pope worse than that of the Turk, who would at least not bother a man's conscience when he pays taxes, and who also keeps his promises better than the Pope.<sup>57</sup>

Just after the 'Beeldenstorm',<sup>58</sup> in October, Joseph Nasi, a Jewish friend of Orange from Antwerp who had fled from the Inquisition and now worked for the sultan, arranged for a letter from Süleyman I promising the Netherlands financial and military support. After the demise of Süleyman I, diplomacy continued with sultan Selim II until coöperation was established in 1574.<sup>59</sup> What exactly is written and discussed between the sultans and the

<sup>57</sup> Jan Fruytiers, *Corte beschrijvinghe van de strenghe belegheringhe ende wonderbaerlijcke verlossinghe der stadt Leyden in Hollandt*. Delft, 1577; p. 96. This explanation is repeated in P.C. Hooft, *Neederlandsche Histoorien*. Amsterdam: Louis Elzevier 1642; p. 374

<sup>58</sup> A possible ideological connection between the 'Beeldenstorm' and the subsequent support from Süleyman I is still to be investigated. A relation between Protestant and Islamic iconoclasm is at least made in the letters of queen Elizabeth I, who sent the sultan 'fragments of broken images' to prove that she did not worship idols. (Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain 1558-1685*, Cambridge University Press, 1998; 124)

<sup>59</sup> See Geoffrey Parker, *Spain and the Netherlands 1559-1659*. Glasgow: Fontana/Collins 1979; pp. 68-70. Due to the demise of Süleyman I at the end of the same year, and the attack on the Ottoman Empire by the Ivan the Terrible in 1568, the aid had to wait until 1574. In that year, Sultan Selim II sent a special agent to establish communication between the Dutch, the Moriscos of Spain, and the Turkish corsairs in Algiers. In October, the Dutch attacked the Spanish in Leiden, wearing the crescent medallions and flying Ottoman flags on their ships, to terrify the Spanish into thinking the Turks had come all the way North. At exactly the same time, Selim II attacked Tunis, leaving Philip in the panic of a war on two fronts. The collaboration was succesful, as both battles were won. Later that year, Selim II was attacked by the Persians, and had to establish an agreement with Philip II which lasted until 1590. Despite this, Queen Elisabeth of England urged Sultan Murat III to attack Philip's giant Armada in 1588 (Edwin Pears, *The Armada and the Ottoman Porte*. The English Historical Review 1893 VIII (XXXI): 439-466), but Jerry Brotton has in my view still to supply evidence for his tempting assertion recorded in *The Guardian*, June 1st, 2004, that 'Ottoman fleet movements in the eastern Mediterranean

Dutch I currently do not know. But as Süleyman had mentioned his tolerance of Protestants in his correspondence to Francis I in 1528, he is sure to have done so again with the Dutch, especially since he was aware that the Dutch were fighting to achieve the toleration he already granted in his Empire.

It could have been for the support and correspondence of the sultans, or for the fact that European advocates of tolerance had completed their argument sufficiently, or a combination of both. But by 1579, William of Orange succeeded in establishing the first declaration of universal tolerance in Europe, extending freedom of religion not only to other Christians (as in the Hungarian Edict of Torda of 1568), but also to Jews and even Muslims. The 'Union of Utrecht' stated that 'every individual is allowed liberty in his religion and no one is to be persecuted or questioned for his faith'.<sup>60</sup>

The Union of Utrecht did not prevent especially Catholics from experiencing discrimination every now and then, having to keep their churches out of sight by setting them up in the atticks of private houses.<sup>61</sup> But still, the campaign for tolerance had succeeded in establishing tolerance as an ideal in the minds of Dutch intellectuals, who on occasion took pride in the toleration even of Muslims in the Netherlands.<sup>62</sup> In Dutch paintings, Muslims are depicted as symbols both of the idea of tolerance, as of the tolerance and mundanity of the Dutch Republic.<sup>63</sup>

### *Great Britain*

Of course, the issue of tolerance did not pass by Britain unnoticed. Although the Anglican church had separated itself from the Pope, it did not adopt a policy of tolerance until the discussions like those on the Huguenots in France and the Calvinists in the Netherlands were held with regard to the Nonconformists in Britain. In these discussions, the example of the Ottoman Empire was employed by such authors as Walter Raleigh, Henry Burton, Roger Williams, Charles Blackwood and Quakers like George Fox.<sup>64</sup> Nonconformist Edward Bagshaw presented the Ottoman example to appeal for tolerance of his community, whereupon John Locke, who was to become an inspiration for the American Constitution, wrote against Bagshaw and denied the right of nonconformists to be tolerated while at the same time accepting that Muslims and Jews should be allowed. Later however, Locke would change his position and affirmed Bagshaw by allowing the Nonconformists to be tolerated like in Islam.<sup>65</sup>

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fatally split Philip II's Armada'. In any case, the Armada was defeated by the breath of the Almighty: a fierce storm wrecked the entire fleet on the coasts of Northern Europe. The Dutch were in 1610 again negotiating with Morocco for a joint attack on Spain by Morocco, the Netherlands, and the Ottoman Sultan. Philip III refers to the contacts between the Morisco's and his 'enemies in the North' in the Edict of the Expulsion of the Moors, of 1609. (See Nabil Matar, ed. and tr. *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century*. New York / London: Routledge 2003; p. 5-43)

<sup>60</sup> Unie van Utrecht, 1579, article XIII. Pieter Lodewijk Muller, *De Unie van Utrecht; met facs. van de onderteekening der Unie*. Utrecht: Beijers 1878.

<sup>61</sup> The 'Schuilkerken' ('Shelter Churches'); see Wim Tepen: *Paepsche vergaderplaatsen. Schuilkerken in Amsterdam*. Amstelveen: Luyten 1984. A Schuilkerk can still be visited in Amsterdam to this day.

<sup>62</sup> Benjamin Kaplan, *Muslims in the Dutch Golden Age: Representations and realities of religious toleration*. Brochure, University of Amsterdam 2006

<sup>63</sup> Benjamin Kaplan, *Muslims in the Dutch Golden Age*.

<sup>64</sup> Nabil Matar, *The Tolerance of Muslims in Renaissance England*. In: John Christian Laursen (ed.) *Religious toleration: 'the variety of rites' from Cyrus to Defoe*; New York: St. Martin's, 1999; pp. 127-146

<sup>65</sup> Nabil Matar in Kenneth Parker: *Early modern tales of Orient: a critical anthology*, London/New York: Routledge 1999; p. 6. Also Nabil Matar, *John Locke and the 'Turbanned Nations'*. *Journal of Islamic Studies*

In the discussions in Britain, specific derogatives came to be in use to refer to the constant alliances made between dissenting Christians and the Turks, both in the military and in the ideological sense. Indeed, 'Mahometan' became the abusive for those who committed the 'tyranny' of tolerating other religions. Nabil Matar writes:

Anglican writers reviled the Non-conformists as 'Protestant Mahometans' who 'according to the Law of the Alchoran, (which for propagating Religions was in the late times translated into English) [are] so zealous for Toleration of all Jews, Pagans, Turks, and Infidels; if they have but a Conscience, it is no matter of what colour or size it is, it must have a Liberty'.<sup>66</sup>

John Locke was one of those who were accused of having adopted ideas from 'the Alchoran'.<sup>67</sup> William Rainolds and William Gifford, two English Catholics in exile in Antwerp, in 1597 first coined the term 'Calvinoturcism' to refer to the coöperation between the Turks and Christian reformists all over Europe.<sup>68</sup>

### *Towards the Enlightenment*

As we move closer to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the political revolution of the Enlightenment is underway. It is only recently that historians come to recognise that, as Muslim Spain and Sicily were the source of the developments later appropriated as the 'Renaissance',<sup>69</sup> the Ottoman Empire played an important role in the years leading up to the Enlightenment. Up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire still positively contrasts the Christian nations in the matter of tolerance, and is referred to as the example to emulate. Donna Landry, in a fascinating paper combining metaphor, history and political philosophy, explains that the English looked at the Ottomans as the model for their imperial ambitions; not only in quantitative matters, but also in matters of civilisation. Landry mentions a 16<sup>th</sup> century text by the Dutch ambassador to the Ottoman Porte, Ogier de Busbecq, which describes the positive results of ruling by love and kind persuasion as a beautiful and gentle horse, which contrasts to the ugly horses of the Christians, who are ruled by brute force:

There is no Creature so gentle as a Turkish Horse; nor more respectful to his Master, or the Groom that dresses him. The reason is, because they treat their Horses with great Lenity. I my self saw when I was in Pontus, passing through a part of Bithynia, called Axilos, towards Cappadocia, how indulgent the Country-men were to young Colts, and how kindly they used them soon after they were foled; they would stroke them, bring them into their Parlours, and almost to their Tables, and use them even like Children ... [A]nd the Grooms, that are to dress them, are as indulgent as their Masters; they frequently sleek them down with their Hands, and never use any Cudgel to bang their Sides, but in case of great Necessity. This makes their Horses great Lovers of Mankind; and they are so far from kicking, wincing, or growing untractable by this gentle usage, that you shall hardly find a masterless Horse among them. But, alas! our Christian Grooms treat Horses at quite another rate; they never think them rightly carried, till they thunder at them with their Voice, and let their Club or Horse-whip, dwell, as it were, on their Sides. This makes some Horses even to tremble when their Keepers come into the

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<sup>66</sup> Nabil Matar, *The Tolerance of Muslims in Renaissance England*. p. 137. Matar quotes Heraclitus Ridens, *At a Dialogue between Jest and Earnest*, 16 August 1681

<sup>67</sup> See his defence in John Locke, *A Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity*, vol. vi, London 1824, p. 282

<sup>68</sup> William Rainolds and William Gifford, *Calvino-Turcismus, id est, Calvinisticae perfidiae cum Mahometana collation et dilucida utriusque sectae confutation*, Antwerp 1597. See Mout, *Calvinoturcisme in de zeventiende eeuw*, p. 577

<sup>69</sup> See George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West*. Edinburgh University Press 1991; pp. 294-348

Stable, so that they hate and fear them too: But the Turks love to have their Horses very gentle, that, at a word of Command, they may fall down on their Knees, and in this Posture receive their Riders.<sup>70</sup>

Landry argues that the writings of De Busbecq on the Turks were widely read in 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century Britain, and are an example of the English fascination with Ottoman civilisation. The English were jealous of the Turk's strange combination of self-esteem and love for minor creatures. When, for example, the plague broke out in Istanbul and it was feared that dogs would spread the disease through the city, the grand Mufti forbade the killing of the dogs, arguing that dogs also had souls. This was incomprehensible to Thomas Smith in the 1670s, who called this extravagant kindness 'barbaric'.<sup>71</sup> Landry adds the English preoccupation with Ottoman love for creatures to Steven Shapin's observation that, following the philosopher Habermas's ideas, the origins of the Enlightenment should be looked for in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>72</sup> Habermas saw the coffee house as the basis for the political revolutions of the Enlightenment, whereas these were imported from the Ottoman lands.

Although the 18<sup>th</sup> century calls for a more elaborate study,<sup>73</sup> there is one name I wish to mention to conclude the present paper: the French author Voltaire, well known for his appeals to tolerance just before the French Revolution. His 'Treatise on Tolerance' shows how little indeed France had progressed since the Huguenots had requested tolerance back in the 1560s. Two hundred years later, in 1763, Voltaire has to argue again that Christ never ordered persecution and has to devote a whole chapter to the question 'Whether tolerance can be dangerous, and in which countries it is permitted'. Voltaire first mentions some meagre examples from the sphere of Europe itself, such as a bishop in Poland tolerating an Anabaptist farmer and a Socinian tax-collector, whilst saying that 'though they would both surely be damned to eternity in the next world, in this one they were still very useful'. Voltaire then continues to look abroad, and the first stop he takes is, as expected, the Ottoman Empire and other Muslim dominions:

Let us reach out from our narrow little sphere for a moment, and examine what goes on in the rest of the globe. The Turkish prince, for example, rules peacefully over twenty races of different religious conviction; two hundred thousand Greeks live in Constantinople in perfect safety, and the Mufti himself nominates and presents the Greek patriarch to his emperor; there is even a Roman Catholic patriarch living there. The Sultan nominates Catholic bishops to some of the Greek islands, with the following words: 'I commend him to go and reside as bishop on the isle of Chios in accordance with its ancient customs and vain ceremonies'. This empire is stuffed with Jacobites, Nestorians, Monothelites, Coptics, Christians of St John, Jews, Gebers and Banians. The annals of Turkey bear no record of a revolt raised by any of these religious communities. Go to India, to Persia, to Tartary, and you will find the same evidence of tolerance and mutual respect.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Donna Landry, *English Brutes, Eastern Enlightenment*. Paper presented at the conference 'Britain and the Muslim World', Exeter University, 17-19 april 2009. The handout cites Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *Travels into Turkey: Containing the most accurate Account of the Turks, ...* London: Printed for J. Robinson; and W. Payne, 1744, 131-32. Also referring to Edward Seymour Forster, ed., *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, Imperial Ambassador at Constantinople 1554-1562*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927.

<sup>71</sup> Donna Landry, *English Brutes, Eastern Enlightenment*, p 10.

<sup>72</sup> "The Ottoman Origins of Modernity" might make Habermas swallow hard, but, follow his arguments about the London coffee house, and that's one place they lead". Steven Shapin, 'At the Amsterdam', *London Review of Books* 2006:8; 12-14; on p. 14.

<sup>73</sup> Ziad Elmarsafy devoted a work tracing influences of Islam on Enlightenment figures such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Goethe and Napoleon, which I will leave for a later article. Ziad Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Quran*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications 2009

<sup>74</sup> Voltaire, *Treatise on Tolerance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000; p. 20-21



## Conclusions

Islam has a unique vision on the possibility of religious tolerance within society, which is rooted in teachings on the universal nature of man, his free relationship to God, and divine truth being shared by other religions. From the time of the Prophet<sup>sa</sup>, Islam had created a diverse and multicultural society. The tolerance of Islam is thus exceptional in that it follows from its religious principles, and is not just granted as a political necessity. This contrasted to the Christian world, where exclusive claims to salvation combined with political power resulted in persecutions. Throughout the history of Muslim rule, at least from the Caliphate of Umar<sup>ra</sup> to the final years of the Ottoman Empire, Christian advocates of tolerance referred explicitly to Islam as the example of a tolerant and diverse society. In this study, most attention has been given to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Until recently, Christian affirmation of the tolerance of Islam was described in terms of the 'Christian perception of Islam', or 'the image of the Turk in Europe', etc. Within these histories, authors have drawn attention to the fact that, for example, Sebastian Castellio referred to Ottoman tolerance,<sup>75</sup> or that the Ottoman example was employed in discussions about state and church authority.<sup>76</sup> Some contemporary historians do mention tolerance as being imported from the East, but do not explain exactly how.<sup>77</sup> The greater histories of tolerance have so far not allowed a role for Islam in the development of the idea in Europe. This is especially disappointing since recent histories offer confusing and unsatisfactory explanations, focusing on events rather than ideas.<sup>78</sup> Benjamin Kaplan, despite his method of merely studying 'practices' (and not ideas) of tolerance, believes he can classify Islamic and European tolerance as two opposing ideological models. The Ottoman model is limited to the tolerance of religious communities, he argues, and is entirely different from the European tolerance founded in individualism.<sup>79</sup> Had Kaplan taken the trouble of studying the debates themselves, he would surely have come to a more nuanced understanding.

Studies of tolerance tend to assume that war and persecution forced Christians to develop their ideas on toleration. The bulk of 16<sup>th</sup> century literature consists of attempts to re-interpret the Bible to make tolerance a theological option, making the references to the Ottoman model seem brief in comparison. However, the brevity of the references does not have to measure their importance. Where concrete examples had to be offered to prove religious diversity produces prosperity rather than 'tumult and sedition', the Ottoman Empire is the first, and often the only, example offered. For instance, Sebastian Castellio offers cases of tolerance practised by Roman emperors, but he does not mention them with the same praise as he does

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<sup>75</sup> Göllner, *Türccica III*, p. 225

<sup>76</sup> Mout, *Turken in het nieuws*, p. 379 and Idem, *Calvinoturcisme in de zeventiende eeuw*. Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis 1978; p. 579

<sup>77</sup> Donna Landry states that 'the legislating of religious toleration ... had origins in which Britain's relationship with the East ... could be traced' (*Eastern Brutes, Eastern Enlightenment*, p. 5), but does not offer very specific references. Susan Ritchie does offer a substantiated argument in *The Islamic Ottoman Influence on the Development of Religious Toleration in Reformation Transylvania*.

<sup>78</sup> Examples are Grell and Scribner, *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge University Press 1996) and Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by faith: religious conflict and the practice of toleration in early modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2007). Not even *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic* (Leiden: Brill 1997) pays attention to the Ottoman example, although Marianne Mout contributed to the work. Van Schelven's *De opkomst van de idee der politieke tolerantie* of 1944 is still the most useful in understanding the development of ideas. It mentions the fact that the Ottoman example was used in the discussions on tolerance, but does not ask the question to what extent Islam should be credited for being the source of the model adopted.

<sup>79</sup> Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by faith*, pp. 239-245

the Ottoman Empire. The Roman emperors are mentioned because 'the [16th century] persecutors adduce also the examples and decrees of the emperors for the punishment of heretics' and 'if [these emperors] granted freedom of religion, their examples and decrees may be cited against the cruelty of those who do the contrary'.<sup>80</sup> The example of the Pope who tolerates Jews at the Vatican may have served to illustrate the hypocrisy of Catholic rule, but by itself would never have created confidence in tolerance on a large, nation wide scale. We may therefore say that the only evidence tolerance *would work*, was the Ottoman Empire.

Next to being the only valid example of a diverse society, the Ottoman Empire was 'admired without restraint'<sup>81</sup> for its power and prosperity. It was the feared rival of all Christian kings, who felt that 'our might and force against the Turks is like a fly against a camel'.<sup>82</sup> The authority of the sultan was admired by such people as Machiavelli and Sansovino, who 'always thought the Turkish seigneur worthy of admiration, because of his grandeur, the great obedience of the people to him, and the happiness of the Turkish nation as a whole'.<sup>83</sup> Offering the sultan as an example was indeed not something to pass by easily, especially when done so to his enemies like Philip II, with the real threat that if they would not tolerate as the sultan did, their subjects would become 'tributory to the Turk'. The fact that, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Christian advocates of tolerance were ridiculed as 'Mahometans' and their affiliation with Muslims termed 'Calvinoturcism', shows that there was a general awareness of Muslim tolerance to the extent that jokes could be played about it. All of this suggests the references to the Ottoman state model were invested with some force. Also considering that diversity of religions under a secular type of government would not easily have evolved from Christianity, but was rather a logical consequence of Islamic principles, it would be fair to credit the allusions to the Islamic model for what they are: powerful references to a type of society which did not exist in the Christian mind, very much answering a need for ideas on the relationship between religion and government.

The Netherlands became an interesting junction in the adoption of the Ottoman example of religious diversity. First, it reached the Netherlands in the arguments for tolerance emanating from France and in the writings of Sebastian Castellio. Second, the religious intolerance of Spain was the reason for the Dutch to revolt and seek collaboration with the Ottomans. There can be no doubt about it that the contrast of Ottoman policy to Spanish intolerance, experienced by Joseph Nasi in his own life, played a key role in the understanding he established between Süleyman I and the Dutch. Prince William of Orange has been pictured as tirelessly attempting to unify the Dutch provinces under the condition of universal tolerance of religions. What made the Prince so confident and persistent in his appeals to tolerance has always remained something of a mystery.<sup>84</sup> Although his personal dissatisfaction with the persecutions must have been an important factor, as has been suggested, I believe the Ottoman example and Ottoman support supplied him with confidence to strive not just for tolerance of some sects, but to envision a religiously diverse society. Indeed, when asked after his ideas on tolerance, the Prince himself answered that the Turk '... permits *every kind of religion*'.

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<sup>80</sup> Göllner, *Türccica III*, p. 236

<sup>81</sup> Göllner, *Türccica III*, p. 251

<sup>82</sup> Göllner, *Türccica III*, p. 280

<sup>83</sup> Göllner, *Türccica III*, p. 252

<sup>84</sup> Van Schelven compares the Prince in this regard to the Hungarian Bethlen Gábor – who happens also to have been in alliance with the Ottomans. AA van Schelven, *De generale staf van het politieke Calvinisme in midden-Europa bij het begin van den 30-jarigen oorlog*. In: Idem, *Uit den strijd der geesten*. Amsterdam: Ten Have 1944; p. 92

Coming to the present age, we are confronted with the West rebutting the Muslim world for its alleged inability to separate the state from the church and the secular from the sacred. Although an analysis of this situation lies outside the scope of this article, some remarks can be offered. Firstly, it seems ironic that Europe should accuse Muslims of not separating state and church authority, when in fact this separation was taught in part by the Muslim example. Secondly, although the Islamic model of diversity was ultimately adopted in Europe, we have to observe that Europe was throughout unable to prevent violent outbreaks of religious persecution and ethnic cleansing. The horrors of Nazi Germany were not enough to prevent the ethnic cleansing of Bosnia only recently. Nor has Europe proved sufficiently equipped to counter the present upsurge of racism and right wing bigotry all over the Continent. Judging from history, Islam as a culture has been more successful in safeguarding peace and security in multicultural societies. We may look more carefully at the preconditions of Islamic tolerance, which consist not just of secular rule, but also of a deeply felt sanctity of human life, and an acceptance of diversity in rites and beliefs. Perhaps beneath the condescending references by Westerners to the 'hospitality' of Muslims lies subconscious awareness of the Muslim's greater ability in dealing with difference. Unfortunately, in the political sphere, the Muslims have nowadays taken to the Medieval way of using religion as a means to wield power, thereby falling into the hellish pit of 'tumult and sedition', leaving communities and nations to misery and destruction. It remains to be seen therefore, where the sun of tolerance and diversity will rise next, and where it will set.