

LUTHERANS RESPONDING TO CRISIS: 1529 AND 2001

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the events of The Siege of Vienna in 1529 and the terrorist attack of 9/11/2001. In both situations, Lutheran voices responded to the two crises: Martin Luther in 1529, and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in New York City in 2001. While both attacks share certain features, each one is unique. Likewise, the response of the pastors who were involved was unique. The events and responses of these two situations may give some guidance to pastors and congregations as they seek to serve their own distinct ministry contexts especially in times of crisis.

INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001, Islamic militants from the terrorist group *al-Qaeda* rammed two Boeing 767 planes into the north and south towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. On that day and in the months that followed the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and two of its pastors responded to the crisis and trauma in front of them. 472 years earlier, on September 27, 1529, an Islamic army under the command of one of the greatest Islamic generals of all time threatened outside of the gates of another city, Vienna, Austria. Over the next two weeks this army would surround the city, cut it off from the outside world, and try to storm it multiple times. In the months and years that followed, Martin Luther would have much to say about Islam and the Ottoman Turks. Although the two events occurred more than 400 years apart, when they are described within these parameters the Siege of Vienna in 1529 and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 2001 seem to have a striking number of similarities.

There is some value in pointing out these similarities. They might be cited as one specific example confirming the general truth to which the Teacher of Ecclesiastes observed: “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again” (NIV). But if this passage is pushed too far, especially in conversations about historical events, it can become easy to link certain external factors together and assume they will always lead to the same end.

In this paper I will explore the differences between the Siege of Vienna and 9/11 and the Lutheran responses to each in their unique contexts. First, I will record a brief history of the events leading up to and during the Siege of Vienna. I will then look at three writings of Martin

Luther to see what was on his mind during these “chaotic and fearful times.”¹ I will conclude part one by exploring what contemporary authors say about Luther with a special look at his first original work related to Islam, *Vom Kriege wider die Türken*, “On War against the Turk.”² I will follow a similar pattern in part two of this paper. First, I will provide an overview of the series of events that occurred on 9/11. Then, I will pivot to see how two WELS pastors, Aaron Robinson and Steven Gabb, and their congregation Sure Foundation Lutheran Church in Woodside, Queens, New York, specifically responded to the crisis that day and in the months afterward. I will finish part two by zooming out and seeing how the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod responded as a whole. Finally, to conclude this essay, despite the differences, I will try to make applications for pastors and congregations today.

1. Daniel L. Mattson, “What did Luther Know about Islam and Why Did He Want to Know It?,” in *From Wittenberg to the World: Essays on the Reformation and Its Legacy in Honor of Robert Kolb* (ed. Charles Arand and Erik H. Herrmann and Daniel L. Mattson; Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 151.

2. Martin Luther, “On War against the Turk [1529],” LW 46:155-205. This treatise was the first one produced in 1529. There was a second Luther publication later in 1529. At the end of October, he preached his, “Muster Sermon against the Turk,” WA 30/2:160-197. This work to date, has yet to appear in an English translation. According to the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 83 (2019) (cf. p.62), this will be available in the popular *Luther’s Works* series soon. Unfortunately, it goes beyond the skills of this author to translate the original German. As a result, only his *War against the Turk* will be considered in this paper.

THE 1529 SIEGE OF VIENNA AND LUTHER'S RESPONSES

1520–1529: Historical Context

Especially during the second half of Martin Luther's life two powerful political figures rose above the rest. On June 28, 1519, Emperor Charles V became ruler of the Holy Roman Empire. By this time, he also wore the crown of Spain and the Netherlands. Over the next 10 years (1519–1529) he would square off with Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms (1521), defeat and capture the French King, Francis I, at the Battle of Pavia (1522), and sack the city of Rome (1527).

One year after Charles became the Holy Roman Emperor, in 1520, Suleyman the Magnificent ascended to the sultanate of the Ottoman Empire. Muslim power reached a high point under Suleyman (reigned 1520–1566). The Oxford History of Islam says, "This was the greatest of the Muslim empires. Much of Ottoman history was shaped by their [Suleyman's and his family's] extraordinary commitment to conquest in the name of Islam."³ On more than one occasion Suleyman and his army threatened to sweep through Europe. In 1521 he launched a successful campaign in Belgrade (modern-day Serbia). The following year, in 1522–1523, he conquered the longstanding Christian forces holding out on the island of Rhodes.

3. Ira M. Lapidus, "Sultanates and Gunpowder Empires," *The Oxford History of Islam* 374–75.

In 1526 Suleyman returned to the edges of Eastern Europe fighting and winning a pivotal battle as far north as Mohács and Buda (modern-day Hungary).⁴ At that battle, the King of Hungary, Louis II, died retreating from the Turkish armies, creating a power vacuum. Ferdinand of Austria backed by his brother, Charles V, laid claim to the lands of Hungary. A Hungarian noble named John Zapolya, backed by Suleyman, also laid claim to the throne. The stage was set for conflict.

Suleyman intended to put his army into the field again in 1528 to continue the momentum of his earlier campaigns. But he was unable to do so because of harsh weather. Austrian biographer and historian Karl Schimmer wrote, “[Suleyman’s] stores [of supplies] were destroyed, and his arrangements paralyzed by rains of such extraordinary violence, that the troops, and even his own person, were endangered.”⁵ The Sultan was forced to hold off fighting for a year. This delay gave Charles and Ferdinand time to muster some defenses.

1529: Overview of the Siege of Vienna

In the spring of 1529, Suleyman and his army of considerable size left their capital in Constantinople.⁶ Although he hoped to reach Belgrade (about 300 miles south of Vienna) within a month, rain again posed an issue. Plains and rivers swelled to such a degree that quick

4. Donald Edgar Pitcher, *An Historical Geography of the Ottoman Empire: From the Earliest Times to the End of the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1972), 111.

5. Karl August Schimmer, *The Sieges of Vienna by the Turks*, (trans. Earl of Ellesmere: New ed. London: J. Murray, 1879), 7. The electronic edition of this book was released May 16, 2017.

6. Schimmer, *Sieges of Vienna*, 8. Schimmer specifies the exact month Suleyman’s departure in his work as April 10, 1529, and the size of Suleyman’s army at 200,000 men. However, James Reston Jr. in *Defenders of the Faith* (cf. footnote 11) claims that Suleyman and his army left Constantinople in May at the head of an army consisting of, “at least seventy-five thousand men” (280). More recent histories use the May date (cf. Pitcher, *An Historical Geography of the Ottoman Empire*, footnote 7), 111.

movements were slowed considerably. To move with greater speed Suleyman decided to leave behind his heaviest artillery units. Despite these hinderances to his main force, marching in front of them were the *akinjis*, an advance force of dreaded light calvary units. They were, “Turkish terror incarnate.”⁷ Schimmer notes that the fear inspired by the *akinjis* was so intense and acute that almost two hundred years later mothers in Austria still used their reputation to frighten unruly children.⁸ By mid-September, the *akinjis* forces raided their way through northern Hungary to the outskirts of Vienna.

Meanwhile, Vienna prepared to defend herself. Archduke Ferdinand was in Linz (about 115 miles west of Vienna) trying to muster more support from German princes as the Turkish armies closed in. In his absence, he appointed Pfalzgraf Philip and Nicholas Count of Salm as the leaders of the city’s defenses. The city’s wall was raised to a height of twenty feet. The ditch, behind the wall, was cleared of old debris and deepened. 800 houses and other buildings within firing range of the walls were razed to the ground.⁹ These defensive measures were impressive and resourceful, yet Schimmer says that they were still “Very weak, even according to the engineering science of the time.”¹⁰ The city was cut off by the *akinjis* and the main force on September 27.

Suleyman and his forces were limited in their siege tactics. Discharges of arrows “Which literally darkened the air,” could keep the Viennese defenders from poking their heads out

7. James Reston, Jr., *Defenders of the Faith: Charles V, Suleyman the Magnificent, and the Battle for Europe, 1520-1536* (The Penguin Press: New York, 2009), 283.

8. Schimmer, *The Sieges of Vienna*, 9.

9. Reston, *Defenders*, 282.

10. Schimmer, *The Sieges of Vienna*, 19.

carelessly.¹¹ But without heavy cannons to pound the walls of Vienna, storming the city would prove difficult.¹² Suleyman resorted to the slower process of underground mining operations. These miners would dig to key points along the city's defenses, stock them full of gunpowder, and ignite them in hopes of creating a breach big enough in the wall for forces above ground to rush in and storm the city.

On October 1 a defector from the Turkish army made his way to the walls of Vienna. He informed the defenders of, "Mines to the right and left of the Kärnthener gate, a point of intense interest to the defenders of that post, respecting which nothing had previously been ascertained."¹³ Countermining operations began at once. By October 2, this enemy's mine was destroyed. To alert defenders for future mining operations drums with peas and tubs with water were placed near other suspected points of interest.¹⁴

Even with such preparations in place, other Turkish mining operations weren't altogether unsuccessful. On October 7, October 9, and October 11 the Turks successfully ignited their gunpowder-packed mines, opening holes at various parts of the city's defenses. In this last attack, on October 11, the fighting was especially fierce, and the two armies fought back and forth for up to three hours. By the end of the October 11 attack, 1200 Turks were killed, and the city was no closer to surrendering.¹⁵

¹¹ Schimmer, *The Sieges of Vienna*, 24.

¹² Reston, *Defenders*, 284.

¹³ Schimmer, *The Sieges of Vienna*, 30.

¹⁴ Schimmer, *The Sieges of Vienna*, 30.

¹⁵ Schimmer, *The Sieges of Vienna*, 35.

On October 12, after a special war council with his commanders, Suleyman decided to make one last desperate attempt for the city on October 14. In this final fight, the assaulters tried to blow open three mines simultaneously. Counter miners discovered one before it could be lit. The other two were successful. The result was a hole nearly 150 feet wide in the city's wall. Turkish forces tried to storm this opening many times, but as before, none were successful. The defenders stood firm and Suleyman's forces were repelled. The call to retreat sounded and the siege was lifted.

1529: Significance of the Siege

The importance of Vienna at this time can hardly be overstated. Historian John Patrick Douglas Balfour said that European victory in Vienna meant, "The heart of Christian Europe was delivered from the Turk," and Suleyman's first defeat, "By a force which his own outnumbered by three to one."¹⁶ Though more attempts were made during Suleyman's life to take European territory none would come as close to success as he did in 1529.

Richard W. Bulliet, a professor of History Emeritus at Columbia University, takes an interesting, albeit slightly different approach. He doesn't believe that an Ottoman victory in 1529 inevitably would have led to the fall of all Eastern Europe. But he does hypothesize that if Suleyman had been successful in 1529 then, "The fall of Vienna to the Ottomans would have greatly intensified the political panic in Germany and provoked a clangorous demand among

16. Balfour, John Patrick Douglas *The Ottoman Centuries: Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1977), 192.

Lutherans and Catholics for Christian solidarity against the infidel, possibly forestalling the Thirty Years War.”¹⁷

The casualty numbers too, though not known definitively, speak to the significance of the siege in the minds of those who recorded the events. Suleyman lost anywhere from 14,000 to 80,000 men depending on which sources are to be believed.¹⁸ By contrast, only 1,500 Viennese perished in the siege.¹⁹ Luther reports that he heard the number 26,000 killed Turks to 6,000 Europeans.²⁰ The loss of life and the ramifications real and potential shed light on the significance of this event for years to come.

1529: Luther during the Siege of Vienna

In late July, while Vienna lay under siege Martin Luther was in Marburg, attending a conference to discuss whether Jesus was only symbolically present in the Lord’s Supper. The day after the Marburg Colloquy ended (October 4) Luther wrote a letter to his wife, Katie. In the letter, he summarizes the results of the discussions and writes about the fear of “English fever,” among the people there.²¹ Given the significance of this attack, any comment on the ongoing siege in Vienna is noticeably absent.

17. Richard W. Bulliet, “The Other Siege of Vienna and the Ottoman Threat: An Essay in Counterfactual History” *ReOrient*, Vol 1. No.1 (Autumn 2015), 13.

18. Schimmer, *The Sieges of Vienna*, 43. He reports these figures based other Hungarian historians. As for his opinion on the matter he says, “The truth probably approaches the lower calculation.”

19. Schimmer, *The Sieges of Vienna*, 43. Again he casts doubt on this number saying that it is “manifestly below the truth” and yet he also says that the 1500 number is adopted in “all the narratives.”

20. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: American Edition volume 49*, (trans. Gottfried G. Krodel: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 243. Hereafter cited as *Luther’s Letters*.

21. Luther, *Luther’s Letters*, 234-36.

Sometime after Luther left Marburg, while he was en route to Torgau, he learned of the siege. A few days later he was informed of the details.²² In a letter dated October 27, 1529, addressed to his friend Nicholas von Amsdorf, Luther said, “Yesterday we heard that by a great miracle of God the Turk has...departed from Vienna for Hungary.”²³ Later in the same letter he says, “[In any case] God has obviously fought for us this year.” He concluded his letter by paraphrasing Rom 12:20 and making a biblical application for the legitimacy of an alliance with their enemies if it became necessary.²⁴

Luther’s letter to Amsdorf was not the only word from Luther’s pen about the Turkish threat in 1529. Earlier in the spring of that year (around the same time the Suleyman and his army were leaving Constantinople) roughly three months before Luther left for the Marburg Colloquy, he finally published the pamphlet he began in 1528, *Vom Kriege wider die Türken*, “On War against the Turk.”

1529: “On War against the Turk”

As early as 1520, the Roman Catholic Church labeled Luther as a heretic and implied that he was a pacifist when it came to resisting the Turkish Muslims.²⁵ 9 years later Luther believed their accusation was still causing problems among faithful Christians. Luther directly wrote against Islam or Muslim religious beliefs and practices six times. Three of those six were original works

22. Luther, *Luther’s Letters*, 240–241. (Cf. footnote 3 especially “On October 7, Luther’s party received word from the Elector about the siege, and after their arrival in Torgau on October 17 they learned the details.”)

23. Luther, *Luther’s Letters*, 241.

24. Luther, *Luther’s Letters*, 243. Emphasis added.

25. Pope Leo X, *Exsurge Domine* [Arise o Lord], The Holy See, June 15, 1520, article 34.

in the face of impending Muslim attacks.²⁶ “On War against the Turk” was the first of these original works. It was in part a way for him to clarify his position so that people wouldn’t discredit him or the gospel.²⁷ With this goal in mind, early in the work Luther says:

But what motivated me most of all was this: They [the pope and his court] undertook to fight against the Turk in the name of Christ, and taught and incited men to do this, as though our people were an army of Christians against the Turks, who were enemies of Christ. This is absolutely contrary to Christ’s doctrine and name.²⁸

Luther was opposed to war in the name of Christ. He was not unwilling to fight altogether. A few pages later in the treatise he would explain that only two classes of men have the divine authority to wage war, Christians and governments.²⁹ The tools of a Christian are repentance and prayer, while the tools of Emperor Charles V are swords and armies.³⁰ Luther said, “The emperor’s sword has nothing to do with the faith; it belongs to physical, worldly things, if God is not to become angry with us.”³¹

“On War against the Turk” was not only a way for Luther to clarify his position on fighting the Turks, it also presented him an opportunity to compare the teachings of the Quran

26. David D. Grafton, “Martin Luther’s Sources on the Turk and Islam in the midst of the Fear of Ottoman Imperialism,” *The Muslim World* 107 (October 2017): 665.

27. Luther, *Luther’s Letters*, 162. See the introduction to Philip of Hesse. “But I must write so that innocent consciences may no longer be deceived by these slanderers and made suspicious of me or my doctrine....”

28. Luther, *War against the Turk*, 165.

29. Luther, *War against the Turk*, 170. Luther personifies all Christians under the name Christian and specifies that Emperor Charles V has the duty to wage war if it comes to it.

30. Luther, *War against the Turk*, 170, 172, 184, 186. Luther is not here thinking about Christians serving as soldiers. Just a few years earlier in his book *Whether Soldiers, too, Can be Saved* (1526) (cf. *Luther’s Works vol. 47* “The Christian in Society III”, 90) he affirmed the legitimacy of Christians who enter such work. However, he encourages soldiers to keep in mind that their ultimate responsibility is not to their commander, it’s to God.

31. Luther, *War against the Turk*, 186.

with those of the Roman Catholic Church. In three places Luther stated what he had gathered from his study of the Quran:

In the first place, he [the Turk] greatly praises Christ and Mary as being the only ones without sin, and yet he believes nothing more of Christ than that he is a holy prophet, like Jeremiah or Jonah, and denies that he is God's Son and true God....In the second place, the Turk's Koran or creed teaches him to destroy not only the Christian faith, but also the whole temporal government....The third point is that Mohammed's Koran has no regard for marriage, but permits everyone to take wives as he will.³²

In Luther's analysis, the teachings of the Quran made it a "Foul and shameful book."³³ He was willing to grant that the Muslims faith promoted some good qualities by external standards. He says, "It is said that among themselves the Turks are faithful, friendly, and careful to tell the truth. I believe that and I think that they probably have more fine virtues in them than that."³⁴ And yet, he ultimately concludes, "Everything is done [among the Turks] with the sword instead of with miracles."³⁵ This, he compares to the papacy's exercising of authority based on decretals which he "Enforces with the ban."³⁶ The only real difference between these two powers at that time was that the Turk directly had the sword while the papacy did not. Thus, he concludes, "Both the pope and the Turk are so blind and senseless that they commit the dumb sins shamelessly, as an honorable and praiseworthy thing.... Treat the one like the other and no one is wronged; like sin should receive like punishment."³⁷

32. Luther, *Against the Turk*, 176, 178, 181.

33. Luther, *War against the Turk*, 176.

34. Luther, *War against the Turk*, 182.

35. Luther, *War against the Turk*, 196.

36. Luther, *War against the Turk*. 197. Presumably by "ban" Luther means excommunication and the withholding of the Lord's Supper for those who did not adhere to the pope's ruling.

37. Luther, *War against the Turk*, 198.

“On War Against the Turk” in Scholarship Today

Martin Luther’s Polemic against Islam; Are There Positive Lessons for Christians Today?³⁸

At the beginning of his essay F. Peter Ford writes:

Luther’s polemic [against Islam] was to cast a long shadow, resulting in a negative perception of Muslims among Protestants for several centuries. And so today, I suspect that most church historians and Reformation scholars would consider it to be a hopeless task to find anything positive in Luther’s denigration of Islam. But...I would like to suggest that Luther can be rescued from this quandary—at least to some extent.³⁹

To partially rescue Luther, Ford analyzes him based on his context and his content.

Luther, according to Ford, lived in a culture with a “very limited” and “thoroughly negative” view toward Islam and Muslims. Most information about them at the time came from crusaders or books with an anti-Islamic agenda.⁴⁰ The content of Luther’s writing reflected this context. Ford acknowledges that the primary purpose of “On War against the Turk” was not to systematically attack Islam but to clarify his position on war with the Turks and pastorally encourage Christians.⁴¹ Nonetheless, Luther’s theological views on Islam come through, echoing sentiments of two other medieval works: “A Tract on the Religion and Customs of the Turks” and “A Refutation of the Qur’ān.”⁴² Thus, Ford deems Luther’s assessment of Islam’s external

38. F. Peter Ford, Jr., “Martin Luther’s Polemic against Islam: Are There Positive Lessons for Christians Today?” *Theological Review* 38 (2017): 148–166.

39. Ford, “Luther: Are there Positive Lessons for Christians Today,” 149.

40. Ford, “Luther: Are there Positive Lessons for Christians Today,” 151–52.

41. Ford, “Luther: Are there Positive Lessons for Christians Today,” 153–54.

42. Ford, “Luther: Are there Positive Lessons for Christians Today,” 155–56.

practices as “harsh” and his assessment of Muhammad as “especially vitriolic.”⁴³ He encourages his audience to move past Luther’s medieval mindset and, “Embrace a fresh and more humane Christian evaluation of Islam.”⁴⁴ To help accomplish this goal, he concludes his essay with five practical applications for Christians today.⁴⁵

Martin Luther: On the War Against the Turks (1529)⁴⁶

Peter Wassermann contends in his essay that to understand “On War against the Turk” properly it must be read through the lens of Luther’s doctrine on the Two Kingdoms. He writes, “But without the basic understanding of the TKD [Two-Kingdoms Doctrine] in Luther’s studies, one can not properly classify his arguments concerning the Turkish or Islamic question and runs the risk of misjudging Luther.”⁴⁷ The spiritual dimension of fighting the Turks needed to be taken up by Christians. The political dimension (deriving its significance from the spiritual), needed to be taken up by the emperor.⁴⁸ Wassermann says, “[Luther’s] main emphasis was on why Islam is spiritually harmful to Christians and why, politically speaking, survival for Christians under Islam is hardly possible.”⁴⁹

43. Ford, “Luther: Are there Positive Lessons for Christians Today,” 157.

44. Ford, “Luther: Are there Positive Lessons for Christians Today,” 160.

45. Ford, “Luther: Are there Positive Lessons for Christians Today,” 162–66. His five applications under five headings are: 1) don’t mix religion and warfare (Note the two-kingdoms language); 2) Read the Qur’ān; 3) Read the Bible; 4) Be good Christian pastors; 5) Trust God’s Sovereignty.

46. Peter Wassermann, “Martin Luther: On the War Against the Turks (1529),” *STT* 12 (2017): 65–76.

47. Wassermann, “The War against the Turks (1529),” 65.

48. Wassermann, “The War against the Turks (1529),” 66–70.

49. Wassermann, “The War against the Turks,” 70.

In the second half of his essay, Wasserman draws many parallels between Europe in his day (2017–2018) and Europe in Luther’s day. The Islamic threat is growing again, not by force of arms as it was in the days of Luther, but rather more subtly through what Wassermann calls the “biological bomb.”⁵⁰ Morally, he notes that materialism is rising to the exclusion of the family unit; there is prominent sexual promiscuity in various forms.⁵¹ These realities, he says should drive Christians to trust Christ (not political entities), stand in political confrontation with the world, and pray for the success of Christians in government.⁵² In conclusion he writes, “At that [Luther’s] time his [Christian’s] task was to bring about a Christian policy through repentance and prayer; today the spreading out of the Gospel has to be achieved through that same devotion towards Jesus.”⁵³

*Martin Luther’s Sources on the Turk and Islam in the midst of the Fear of Ottoman
Imperialism*⁵⁴

In this article, Grafton tracks the progression of Luther’s view towards Islam throughout the second half of his life. He breaks Luther’s views into three phases. The first phase of his view is pre-1528. During this time Luther was influenced by his culture, especially by aural reports of soldiers and visual woodcuts of artists. Then, in 1528, Luther read three writings about Islamic

50. Wassermann, “The War against the Turks,” 73.

51. Wassermann, “The War against the Turks,” 74–5.

52. Wassermann, “The War against the Turks,” 74–5.

53. Wassermann, “The War against the Turks,” 76.

54. Grafton, “Luther in the midst of Ottoman Imperialism,” 665–83.

culture: George of Hungary's *Tractus de moribus conditionibus et nequicia Turcorum*; Riccolodo of Mote Croce's *Confutatio Alkorani*; and Nicholas of Cusa's *Cribatio Alcorani*. Grafton says that of these three, George's *Tractus*, "Served as the basis of his [Luther's] understanding of Islam for most of his life."⁵⁵ Finally in the final phase, 1542–1546, Luther reacted to Islam not in conjunction with what others said, but based primarily on a Latin translation of the Quran.

While the knowledge of Islam deepened throughout his life. Grafton shows that through all three phases Luther's theological view was consistent.⁵⁶ The Turks serve as an instrument of both God and the devil. Their presence and aggression mark that the world is in the last days. And yet his theology was never intended to push people into a fearful hysteria. Rather Luther's theology was, "Primarily pastoral, to provide encouragement and hope to his German Christians in the midst of a fear of Ottoman Imperialism."⁵⁷

He concludes his article by noting that Lutherans have entered "official" talks with the Jewish community and with the Vatican. In these conversations there has been a desire to push beyond the differences highlighted by Luther in the past. Unfortunately, to date, no such conversation has occurred between the Islamic community and the Lutheran community.

55. Grafton, "Luther in the midst of Ottoman Imperialism," 666.

56. Grafton, "Luther in the midst of Ottoman Imperialism," 682.

57. Grafton, "Luther in the midst of Ottoman Imperialism," 674.

***What Did Luther Know about Islam and Why Did He Want to Know It?*⁵⁸**

In his article, Daniel Mattson views Luther from the perspective of spiritual a leader in a time of crisis. He theorizes that as one of the leading intellectuals of the sixteenth century, Luther, “Perceived that he had an obligation to church and state in the midst of the Ottoman crisis to support the war effort by providing a theological basis for opposition to the *Other* [emphasis his], the outside forces of Islam that Europeans believed were intent on destroying a united Christian Europe.”⁵⁹ Mattson sees “On War against the Turk” as one part encouragement for the war effort and one part defense of the accusations made against him by Pope Leo. Luther highlights the dangers the Turks pose. They wage unjust war. They promote false doctrine. They rule like tyrants. And yet, it was not the role of the believing German to meet the Turk on the battlefield. That job was reserved for Charles V. Thus, “In this pamphlet Luther made clear that he was a faithful son of the Hapsburg kingdom.... What he knew about Islam he used in support of the war effort.”⁶⁰

Assessment of Articles: Similarities and Differences

A few themes consistently showed themselves in these four essays. Luther’s two kingdom doctrine (especially in Wassermann) comes to the forefront in a real-life situation. All four of the

58. Mattson, “What did Luther Know and Why did He Want to Know It” in *Wittenberg to the World* (ed. Charles Arand and Erik H. Herrmann and Daniel L. Mattson), 143–71.

59. Mattson, “What did Luther Know and Why did He Want to Know It” in *Wittenberg to the World* (ed. Charles Arand and Erik H. Herrmann and Daniel L. Mattson), 144.

60. Mattson, “What did Luther Know and Why did he Want to Know It” in *Wittenberg to the world* (ed. Charles Arand and Erik H. Herrmann and Daniel L. Mattson), 155.

articles attempt to capture the spirit of Luther's days up to the 1529 Siege of Vienna. All of them were even willing to acknowledge Luther's pastoral heart as he wrestled with the Turkish threat.

But while there are agreements on the themes of the treatise, there seem to be disagreements on the application of this treatise for today. Grafton and Ford use "On War against the Turk" as a steppingstone to promoting cooled conversations between Christians and Muslims. Wasserman uses it as a call to repentance and the spreading of the gospel. Mattson hypothesizes that Luther should be an example for spiritual leaders today dealing with crises.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, AND LUTHERAN RESPONSES

The eighteenth through the first half of the twentieth centuries were a low period in Islamic power, shown especially by the breakup of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I. Islamic hopes for power and prestige reignited in the latter half of the twentieth century. As Roland Cap Ehlke, professor of Islamic Studies at Concordia University, wrote, “Especially within the last half century, Islam has again become a major force in the world. High birth rates and worldwide expansion make Islam the world’s fastest growing religion.... The glories of the past are the dreams of tomorrow.”⁶¹ While it may be dreamy for some, for the United States the situation in the Middle East has become increasingly complicated.⁶²

It goes beyond the scope of this paper to detail all the intricacies and events leading up to September 11, 2001. Between 1980 and 2001 there were 164 international terrorist incidents, suspected incidents, and preventions recorded in the United States.⁶³ 74 incidents were recorded between 1991–2001 alone.⁶⁴ But before 9/11, public opinion by and large still underestimated the

61. Roland Cap Ehlke, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Muslims* (Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 37–8.

62. Ryan Burke and Jahara Matisek, “The Illogical Logic of American Entanglement in the Middle East,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 13, no.1 (2020): 4–5.

63. U.S Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation Counter Terrorism Division, *Terrorism 2000/2001*, (FBI Publication # 0308, 2004), 11. 9/11 figures are included in this statistic and fall under the category of an “international terrorist incident.”

64. Federal Bureau of Investigation Counter Terrorism Division, foreword to *Terrorism 2000/2001*, i.

threat of Islamic militants.⁶⁵ Perhaps, it is easy for a reader with a post-9/11 worldview (with the benefit of hindsight) to wonder why the signs of danger were ignored by so many. In truth, there was some awareness of the threat.⁶⁶ What could never have been predicted, what likely seemed beyond any reality, was the scope, speed, and magnitude of the September 11 attack.

September 11, 2001: Overview

At 5:45 in the morning two men, Mohamed Atta and Abdul Aziz al-Omari cleared a security checkpoint at Portland International Airport in Portland, Maine.⁶⁷ In about two hours they flew to Boston Logan International Airport in Massachusetts and connected with another flight, American Airlines Flight 11. They were not alone when they boarded their second plane; three other men joined them. In total, there were nineteen hijackers (including these five) strategically spread across airports in Newark New Jersey, Washington D.C., and Boston. On this day, September 11, 2001, they would finally complete a mission that required much time and planning: commandeering four United States planes and using them as weapons to cause massive

65. The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (9/11 Report)* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2004), 73.

66. Ayesha Siddiq and Qurat-Ul-Ain, “The Representation of Islam and Muslims in Pre- and Post-9/11 *New York Times* News Articles: A Socio-Cognitive Analysis,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* vol.41, no.2 (2021), 375–90. While not the primary thesis of the paper, awareness of threats pre and post 9/11 is certainly one of its underlying assumptions.

67. The following timeline of events is based primarily on the “9/11 Interactive Timeline for the National September 11 Memorial and Museum.” The times found at this cite were cross-referenced with two other published books: *The 9/11 Terrorist Attacks: A Day that Changed America* by Amy Maranville (North Mankato, Minnesota: Captstone Press, December 2020), 28–9 & *Critical Anthologies of Nonfiction Writing: Critical Perspectives on 9/11* edited by Fletcher Haulley (New York: The Rosenberg Publishing Group, 2005), 164–65. All three timelines agree on the timestamps for the first two planes hitting the Twin Towers. Interestingly, *Critical Perspectives* has the attack on the Pentagon listed one minute later at 9:38 A.M. and the crash of Flight 93 at 10:10 A.M. It’s worth noting that elsewhere in *Critical Perspectives* the timestamp for the crash of Flight 93 is listed as 10:03 A.M. (cf. p. 27). Thus, there seems to be more evidence in favor of the 10:03 time used in this paper.

amounts of destruction. As one author wrote, “In devising and implementing the September 11 terrorist attacks, Al Qaeda was methodical, patient, and devoted. The initial planning began several years before and relied on the successful completion of many complex steps.”⁶⁸ At 7:59 Flight 11 took off. Less than an hour later, at 8:46, it struck its target, the North Tower (Tower 1) of the World Trade Center Complex, killing all those on board the plane as well as hundreds in the tower upon impact.

The first response of those who saw the plane hit the North Tower was shock and confusion. Many were unsure if it was intentional or accidental. Charlie Gibson captured these emotions from the ABC studio at about 9:00 A.M. He said, “Well obviously we don’t know if this was—if it was a plane and I... and I underlined ‘if’ it was... we don’t know if it would have been deliberate or accidental, we know so little now other than what we can see from these pictures.”⁶⁹

Just a few minutes later, at 9:03, the second hijacked flight, United Airlines Flight 175, flew into the South Tower (Tower 2), again killing all those on board as well as hundreds in the tower upon impact. After the second plane hit, Charlie Gibson said on national television, “So this looks like it is some sort of concerted effort to attack the World Trade Center that is underway in downtown New York.”⁷⁰

68. Richard Bernstein, Douglas Frantz, David Johnston, and Don Van Natta Jr, “Threats and Responses: Pieces of a Puzzle; On Plotters’ Path to U.S., a Stop at bin Laden Camp,” in *Critical Anthologies of Nonfiction Writing: Critical Perspectives on 9/11* (ed. Fletcher Haulley: New York: The Rosenberg Publishing Group, 2005), 28–38. See introduction to the article.

69. “9/11 Attacks: ABC News Live Coverage - Sept 11, 2001 (Part One)” (transcript), aired September 11, 2001, on *Special Report* (ABC). Video Source, 8:47–8:55.

70. “9/11 Attacks: ABC,” (transcript). 12:19–12:25.

Just 34 minutes later, at 9:37, the third plane, American Airlines Flight 77, crashed into the Pentagon killing the 59 crew and passengers on board as well as 125 military and civilian personnel in the building.⁷¹ Louise Rogers was an accountant working for the U.S. Army at the Pentagon during the impact. Her full story is recounted in the *Collection 9/11 Memorial Museum* (only part is shared below):

And we had heard on the radio, prior to that, about the Twin Towers. Someone in the office had a radio and called our attention to it and we listened. They were talking about the first one, and then about that moment—the impact of the second one. But New York seemed so far away, and never gave it a thought. What it was, who it was, or that'd they'd ever come here. I just looked around [after the impact]. Of course, everything went black. The only noise was the crackling of flames. It was just sheer devastation. And I remember the grit from the soot and everything—of everything burning. I remember the grit in my teeth. I just looked around trying to figure out how to get out. Fortunately, being at the fax machine, I was standing in front of a desk, a worktable that was in front of the window. Then trying to figure out if I could get my feet out of the debris, because I was halfway up my leg in debris. And I just picked up one foot after the other and walked over to the table. And fortunately, that window had been blown out by the impact. And I climbed out the window.⁷²

The final airplane, United Airlines Flight 93, crashed at 10:03, about twenty minutes outside of Washington D.C. near a field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, killing all those on board. It is believed that when the passengers tried to storm the cockpit, the hijackers responded by aggressively flying the plane up and down, and eventually they lost control.

From the time Flight 77 hit the First Tower to the time Flight 93 crashed outside of Washington D.C., only 1 hour and 17 minutes passed. Fifteen of the nineteen hijackers hit their

71. National September 11 Memorial and Museum, “September 11 Attack Timeline,” n.p. *Interactive Timelines*.

72. National September 11 Memorial and Museum, “September 11 Attack Timeline,” *Interactive Timelines*. (Transcript).

targets.⁷³ 2,783 innocent people lost their lives because of the attack on September 11, 2001. Thus, “The September 11 attack represents the most deadly and destructive terrorist attack in history and claimed more lives than all previous acts of terrorism in the United States combined.”⁷⁴

9/11: Two Pastors and a Congregation Respond

The morning of September 11 in New York began slowly for Pastors Aaron Robinson and Steven Gabb; they had the day off. Pastor Gabb was moving to a new apartment. Pastor Robinson and two other members (Jon Meier, [treasurer], and Indelethio Nebeker, [English as a Second Language Coordinator]) of the young WELS church, Sure Foundation, were about to head over to help Pastor Gabb and his wife, Sarah, with the move. Before they left, a cab driver drove by and shouted, “We’re under attack!”⁷⁵ At first Pastor Robinson thought it was a joke. To his shock and horror, he went upstairs and saw Flight 175 hit the South Tower. Pastor Robinson describes his first reaction, “We went into scramble mode a little bit. ‘What do we do?’”⁷⁶

Meanwhile, Pastor Gabb, unaware of what was happening, tried to call Pastor Robinson and the two members with him. Due to the heavy traffic on the phone lines at the time he couldn’t get through to any of them. Finally, Pastor Gabb received a phone call from his sister in

73. Amy Maranville, *The 9/11 Terrorist Attacks: A Day that Changed America* (North Mankato, Minnesota: Capstone Press, 2020), 14. She summarizes, “Most experts believe the attackers [of Flight 93] were targeting the White House or the U.S. Capitol.

74. Federal Bureau of Investigation Counter Terrorism Division, *Terrorism 2000/2001*, 1.

75. Video chat interview with Pastor Aaron Robinson on November 27, 2023. Hereafter cited as “Robinson Interview, 2023.”

76. “Robinson Interview, 2023”

Indiana and she described the situation. Pastor Gabb recalled taking his TV out from a box and seeing the carnage as it was unfolding in the city.⁷⁷ Describing his initial reaction he said, “I mean, it’s just shock, as you can imagine, just absolute shock...almost a sense of disbelief, you know, it’s—can’t even hardly believe something like this could be happening, especially when The Towers fell...you’re just speechless.”⁷⁸

Pastor Robinson, Jon Meier, and Indelethio Nebeker eventually made it to the Gabb’s apartment for the move. Indelethio later recalled, “Needless to say the move went very slow. Pauses for group prayer in the street came in between boxes and couches being carried downstairs.”⁷⁹ Pastor Gabb recalled praying that, “No one died, which obviously was pretty far-fetched.”⁸⁰

As the group moved belongings to the Gabb’s new apartment, their thoughts and prayers drifted to their contacts and members scattered throughout the city, some so close to the 9/11 Ground Zero that they were among those covered in ashes when The Towers fell. Despite the difficulty in communication that day, they did confirm at some point that everyone was okay. No WELS members were killed in any of these attacks.⁸¹

77. Video chat interview with Pastor Steven Gabb on November 22, 2023. Hereafter cited as “Gabb Interview, 2023.”

78. “Gabb Interview, 2023.”

79. Julie K. Wietzke, “In Jesus’ Arms” *Forward in Christ* 88 (November 2001): 18.

80. “Gabb Interview, 2023.”

81. Wietzke, “Jesus’ Arms,” 18. It is worth noting that Idelethio wrote this fact with a specific historical time frame in mind. He was not speaking a truism for all time. At the time he had no way of knowing the health issues that would continue to bombard New Yorkers for years to come from the toxic fumes at Ground Zero. In fact, Pastor Bourman’s article above (cf. footnote 1) describes a situation in which a man named Michael O’Leary became a WELS member and later died from complications connected to inhaling the toxic fumes at and near Ground Zero.

That night as the group hunkered down at one of the members' houses for supper and time together, the conversation turned toward, "Ok. What now? What next?" Pastor Robinson related the thought process of the group, "Everyone, everybody and their grandmother that you know had a prayer vigil going on and so that was kind of the idea that we were going to go with [the next day]." On September 12 Sure Foundation opened their second-story space to the public. Pastor Gabb recalled it as a time to just, "be together" and "lean on each other" and "Shared some thoughts and said some prayers."⁸² Pastor Robinson remembered something similar saying, "If there is someone that has been hurt by it or that is scared, God is where they need to come, God is where we'd like them to come for comfort, for peace and, and, we have that Word and so let's open up our... doors and, and, have that available so that was the idea of the, of the vigil offering: a place and the space for people to be comforted by the Word."⁸³

On Friday, September 14, Pastor Gabb and Indelethio went to an armory on the Lower Eastside serving as a staging area for the public who didn't yet have access to Ground Zero.

Pastor Gabb recalled:

At some point, we were a number of blocks away, and at some point, all of a sudden it was just like one person after the other would come up to us with a like a flyer. 'Have you seen this person? Have you seen this person? Have you...', you know, one after the other looking for their, their missing.... So... these people that would come up to you—and you just—you'd see the fear and the, the agony, the, the sorrow, you know in their eyes and hear their voice. I remember... I remember getting to the Armory and we did—you know, you're surrounded by people who are missing loved ones who pretty much thought they were probably dead. And most of them were.⁸⁴

82. "Gabb Interview, 2023."

83. "Robinson Interview, 2023."

84. "Gabb Interview, 2023."

9/11: A Synod Responds

The Wisconsin Synod response began early in the morning on the day after the attack. On September 12, while Pastor Gabb was returning the moving van, he received a phone call from Pastor Phil Schupmann, the administrator of the WELS Committee on Relief (COR). “What can we do?” Pastor Schupmann asked. “I—I don’t know,” Pastor Gabb replied.⁸⁵

Two longer-range resources were generated soon after that phone call. The first resource was financial. The COR wired generous donations from members across The Synod to Sure Foundation. The second resource was the creation of a local chapter in the COR called the Tri-State (Tri-State referring to New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut) Committee on Relief (also known as the New York Spiritual Relief Team). The purpose of this committee was to focus the monetary gifts where they were needed and provide other helpful services in the area, especially counseling. In total, the monetary gifts amounted to just over \$380,000 and were dispersed to 51 recipients.⁸⁶ On three of the four trips sponsored by WELS Kingdom Workers (WKW) between 2001–2002 many counselors, psychiatrists, nurses, musicians, and other volunteers answered the call to be caring neighbors and at times share the comforting Gospel.⁸⁷

As the first anniversary of the Attack on the World Trade Center approached, there was a deliberate push to connect people of the Tri-State area to one of the Tri-State WELS churches.

85. “Gabb Interview, 2023.”

86. John Stelljes, “A Short History of Sure Foundation Lutheran Church,” (paper submitted to the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Divinity, Mequon, WI. 12 December 2005), 12. For a full breakdown of the gifts that were dispersed to victims of 9/11 see “Addenda 1: Statistics 2000–2005” on page 25 of Stelljes’ paper.

87. Mark Luetzow, “WKW & 9/11/01: The WELS Kingdom Workers Relief Efforts after September 11th, 2001,” (paper submitted to the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Divinity, Mequon, WI. 16 April 2003), 6–16. Not all of the efforts of the WKW were met with success. In his paper, Luetzow, shares an experience from the third trip (December 17–23, 2001) in which the counselors invited victims via postcard to the Marriott Marquis in Times Square for three days of free trauma/grief counseling. Not many showed up for what can only be speculative reasons.

Working under the title, “Operation: He is Here,” 60 different participants handed out 7,000 copies of “God is Our Refuge”, a book originally printed in 1951 to support those who serve in the military.⁸⁸ Additionally, the distributors were accompanied by one of two musical groups, one known as “Revelation” from Wisconsin Lutheran College, and the other known as “Deo.”

9/11: Significance Today

Many institutions were affected after September 11, 2001. Ayesha Siddiqa and Qurat-Ul-Ain contend that bias against Muslims has *increased* (emphasis mine) in the news in the post-9/11 era.⁸⁹ John Markert analyzed trends in cinema after 9/11 through 2010 as a case study to suggest filmography’s relationship with individual perception.⁹⁰ Eleni Towns credits education favoring civic engagement, fear and its impact on civil liberties, global thinking, and tolerance of diversity among millennials (she dates as being born between 1978 and 2000) to the post-9/11 educational system.⁹¹ The United States government created the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) as a direct response to the attack. The military became involved more directly in the Middle East. There continue to be health complications for some who were in close proximity to

88. Luetzow, “WELS Kingdom Workers,” (2003): 14. *God our Refuge* has Bible readings, devotions, hymns, and prayers.

89. Ayesha Siddiqa and Qurat-Ul-Ain, “The Representation of Islam and Muslims in Pre- and Post-9/11” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 386. Emphasis should be noted on the word *increased*. They contend it was present both pre and post 9/11.

90. John Markert, introduction to *Post 9/11 Cinema: Through a Lens Darkly* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2011), xx.

91. Eleni Towns, “What Social Factors Have Shaped the Millennial Generation” in *The Millennial Generation: Opposing Viewpoints Series* (ed. David Haugen and Susan Musser: New York: Greenhaven Press, 2013), 138–46.

the Twin Towers.⁹² Many of these items are indirectly important to what is highest on a pastor and congregation's list. How did 9/11 affect people spiritually? One recent 2019 study concluded that:

The experience of disaster appeared to have only modest effects on strength of religious/spiritual beliefs and importance of religion/spirituality, or in associated behaviors including attendance at religious service, and use of religious/spiritual coping....Even though disasters are life-changing experiences, for most respondents and across the various religious affiliations, religiosity/spirituality remained consistent in their lives and was not reported to be an overwhelming means of coping with disaster.⁹³

92. "A Message from the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene," NYC 9/11 Health, last updated 2024. Thousands of civilians (especially those in the closest proximity the Twin Towers) and first responders still suffer from physical and mental issues today.

93. Barry A. Hong et al, "Religious and Spiritual Aspects of Disaster Experience Among Survivors of the 9/11 Attacks on New York City's World Trade Center," *Journal of Religion and Health* 58 (March 2019): 1626.

DIFFERENCES AND APPLICATIONS FOR THE PASTOR AND CONGREGATION

TODAY

Before exploring some of the applications that pastors and congregations could make for 2023, it is necessary to highlight some clear differences in the attacks and responses. Most obviously, the Siege of Vienna resulted in a victory for Europe, while 9/11 was a victory for *al Qaeda*. The nature of the two attacks was also different. 9/11 was a surprise terrorist attack. The Siege of Vienna, by contrast, was the culmination of a summer-long campaign. It is also worth noting that for Luther Vienna was still a few hundred miles away from Wittenberg, while Pastors Robinson and Gabb were confronted with an attack just a few miles away. It should come as no surprise, that Luther's "On War Against the Turk" and the responses of the New York pastors were coming at the attacks in their times from different perspectives. Luther seems to offer his audience theological-pastoral care while Gabb and Robinson offered the people of New York pastoral-theological care.

Given these differences, it would be most difficult to make substantial applications without something timeless to speak across the ages and to shape a worldview. The writer of Hebrews wrote, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 6:19–20). A Christian worldview is never isolated from its faith and Christian faith is never isolated from its object. Because the risen Christ stands as a high priest forever and because his words stand until the end

of time (Mt 24:35), Christians know with firm security that every word from God applies to their contexts.

Many correct Biblical applications were drawn from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the Siege of Vienna in September 1529. Yet not every application can or should be applied “one to one” in today’s context. 1529 is not 2001; 2001 is not 2023. Rather than trying to cram Biblical applications that were proper in those contexts into today’s situation, it’s best to let the Scriptures speak. What issues do Christians in America wrestle with in 2023? And then, what passages speak to these issues?

Issue #1: Trust

In recent years including 2023, the relationship between many Americans and the government in the United States has fallen on hard times. Many Americans have little or no trust in the future of the political system; only 4% say that the government is working “extremely well”; issues over the rights of individuals and the reach of government continue to divide along partisan lines.⁹⁴

The government is not the only institution under attack from a wave of distrust. Abe Greenman, an executive editor for *Commentary* includes some of the other symptoms that Americans commonly hear about; the loss of “American values,” and people becoming “too isolated.”⁹⁵ Then he goes on to say, “These are all more or less true. But they are only pieces of the puzzle.... And there is a greater national affliction that runs through all these partial

94. “Views of the U.S. Political System, the Federal Government and Federal-state Relations,” Pew Research Center, September 19, 2023.

95. Abe Greenwald, “The Trust Crisis,” *Commentary* (July/August 2023): n.p.. According to the magazine’s website, *Commentary* “is America’s premier monthly magazine of opinion and a pivotal voice in American intellectual life” (cf. *Commentary* “About Us” page).

explanations and connects them to a still wider range of current misfortunes: American *society* [emphasis mine] is losing its capacity for trust.”⁹⁶

It would be naïve of a pastor and congregation to think that these trust issues don’t affect their immediate community in some way and perhaps even hinder interactions with one another in the church at times.

Jesus interacted with people who had trust issues. This was his encouragement for them, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.... For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:25, 32–33). What does it mean to seek first God’s kingdom? In the context of this parable Jesus counterparts God’s kingdom with the things the pagans run after, food, drink, and clothes. These are just some examples, but the list could go on: money, material possessions, pleasure, glory, fame, success, ease all could also be things that the pagans run after.

In contrast with the way of the pagan world, Jesus says Christians seek the kingdom of God. Jesus intimately then connects God’s kingdom with the phrase, “and his [God’s] righteousness” (Mt 6:33). God’s righteousness is impossible for people to have all on their own — it must be given to them. Likewise, the kingdom of God is not something someone might luckily stumble upon. It is something that must be shown to them. With these words, Jesus is calling us to himself (Ro 3:21–22) and everything that God stands for.

At the end of his article, Greenwald couldn’t help but try to end on a less bleak note. He says that there still is some hope for America to recover from its trust issues. This he says is

96. Greenwald, “Trust Crisis,” *Commentary*.

possible based on the evidence of a large pool of Americans still turning out for the 2020 election despite their distrust of the system. “Despite what the left says about threats to democracy and what the new right says about rigged elections, the United States remains a rugged democratic republic. Perhaps Americans trust in that more than they care to admit these days. They should. It’s always been everything to us: our voluntary association, our familial bond, and our faith.”⁹⁷ Unfortunately, a day may come when even the American democratic republic system itself can no longer function and it ceases to exist.

A pastor, his congregation, and the whole Christian Church build with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone (Acts 4:11). Even when the enemies are at the gates of the city, even when the towers are falling to the ground, and long after governments fail, the pastor and the congregation cling to Christ as the basis of all they do. Christ will never let his Church down. If he can take care of the world's greatest problem, a righteousness-with-God problem, then there is nothing he can't do; He is trustworthy.

Issue #2: Sincere Sensitivity

In 2023 Nicholas Riccardi wrote an article for the *Associated Press*.⁹⁸ He followed the journey of the Kohl family, a husband and wife who had recently moved from California to Idaho. He also followed Leah Dean who moved from Texas to Colorado. Riccardi was detailing the phenomenon among Americans today to move to states that are more in line with their politics. He wrote, “Americans are segregating by their politics at a rapid clip, helping fuel the greatest

97. Greenwald, “Trust Crisis,” *Commentary*.

98. “Conservatives Go to Red States and Liberals Go to Blue as the Country Grows More Polarized” *Associated Press*, July 4, 2023.”

divide between states in modern history.” It’s no secret that in 2023 America the situation is increasingly polarizing. This polarization affects not only where people live, but even how they respond to crises. The recent Israel–Palestine conflict is just the latest evidence.⁹⁹

The pastor and congregation in America stand in the middle of these polarizing times. And yet the final call to action still rings out from the Savior, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). Go. Make disciples. Baptize. Teach. Four imperative commands are all geared toward one goal: bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

Christ is polarizing (Mt 12:30; Jn 15:18). His mission, the mission he has called his church to carry out, is also polarizing (Jn 15:19). Jesus summed it up well for his disciples in the upper room on Thursday of Holy Week: “Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (Jn 15:20). But this polarization is not meant to be along political, but spiritual lines. What an individual’s relationship with Christ is like is truly divisive.

The loss of life from crises like 9/11 or the Siege of Vienna is jarring. Considering the deaths of unbelievers in these two tragedies can only evoke a response like that of Jesus as he stirred over Jerusalem (Mt 23:37). As long as crises take the lives of unbelievers, there is a need for a pastor and congregation to fulfill Jesus’ great commission.

How will a pastor and his congregation interact with the unbelieving world? With a spirit of arrogance? Or, on the other end of the spectrum, with a spirit of timidity? No. Paul summarizes the mindset of those in the church as they deal with the outside world and with one

99. “A Partisan Divide Remains on Israel/Palestine Despite War,” Maryland Today, November 3, 2023.

another, “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Eph. 4:14–15).

With Paul’s words in mind pastors and congregations connect to their communities. Not just to fill a pew or an offering plate on Sunday, but with a sincere desire to connect people to their Savior. The pastor and congregation consistently connect so that when the crises of this world do come, they are able to witness to their faith and to point people to the Savior.

CONCLUSION

The Siege of Vienna in 1529 and the Terrorist attacks of 2001 were both chaotic and fearful moments for the people who lived through them. While the Vienna Siege ended with a European victory and the events of September 11 resulted in an extremist Islamic victory, both were viewed as crises in their distinct contexts. Thus, the reactions of pastors and people to each of the events offer a unique insight into how Lutherans have responded both theologically and pastorally to crises historically. Crisis is an unavoidable part of life in a world that is damaged by sin. Just as unavoidable is the reality of the Biblical message. Christ took on human flesh and came into this world to combat the crisis, indeed every crisis, that may be caused by sin. His victory over the greatest enemies of mankind including sin, death, and the devil on Good Friday and Easter Sunday fills every Christian with deep-seated trust in his promises and the ability to speak to others, even those of a different religious background, with a sincere sensitivity. The words of Psalm 46 are most certainly true. “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help

in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging” (Ps 46:1-3).

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