PART TWO

MARTIN LUTHER’S ENGAGEMENT
WITH ISLAM, 1529–1546
CHAPTER FIVE

LUTHER’S INITIAL CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

Luther’s initial response to Islam was located in *Vom kriege widder die Türcken* (1529). The treatise’s central concern was to provide conceptual clarification to the war so that it was, without exception, conceived of as a just war to be waged by secular officials, and not a crusade or holy war. This motif notwithstanding, *Vom kriege* also included a brief digression into Turkish Muslim ideology. Luther added this polemical excursus specifically to educate his readers on the malignant nature of Islam. By analysing what he understood to be religious, political, and domestic injunctions enjoined upon human beings in the Qurʾān, he hoped to convince his readers that one could not remain indifferent to the encroachment of the Ottoman Empire into Europe. To this end, it also acted as an apologetic of sorts for the preservation of what he considered the proper ordering of a civilization built upon general Christian principles by demonstrating that Islam posed more than a military problem to Christian Europe. Rather, he argued that it threatened the very existence of Christendom by imposing and perpetuating lies, murder, and unjust marital laws upon the world.

Die Dreiständelehre: *The Theological Worldview behind Luther’s Critique*

Because Luther was convinced that the Devil was always at work in the world he inferred that the Qurʾān was the product of Muḥammad being possessed by Satan, and the Turks, by following the prophet and his ‘blasphemous book’, were servants in the army of the Devil.1 A summary drawn from the end of his analysis of Islam illustrates the premises from which he drew this rather striking conclusion.

What good can be in the government and whole Turkish way of life since according to their Qurʾān these three things reign freely among them:

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1 *Vom kriege*, WA 30/2:123.19–20; 124.12–14; 126.1–2, 6–20; 129.8–9 (LW 46:178, 179, 181, 184).