Luther’s initial assessment of the ‘whole Turkish way of life’ made evident what he thought were the fundamental ideological problems with Islam and the threat it posed to the sociological fabric woven into human communities. In late 1529, after Süleyman laid siege to Vienna, the level of the threat was raised as Luther began to fear that those who had been taken captive would be tempted to embrace the religion of the Turks. From his earlier analysis as well as his understanding of the Turks as Gog and Magog and now, in Eine Heerpredigt widder den Türcken, the eschatological antagonists of the church, he was convinced that ‘the Devil was seeking through his army of Turks clearly not only worldly authority but also to push the Kingdom of Christ and its saints and members out of the faith.’ ¹ He therefore felt compelled to offer pastoral advice to Christians either in danger of becoming captives or those already imprisoned or enslaved in Turkey. An analysis of Luther’s advice in a hitherto unexamined portion of Luther’s Heerpredigt reveals his early thoughts on how a Christian should deal with the temptations one might experience under the Ottomans, and, especially, how one might respond to the Anfechtung caused by the allure of Islam.

Anfechtung and the Christian Predicament

Luther was no stranger to temptations and doubts over the veracity and legitimacy of his own faith. He often referred to such episodes of spiritual Angst as Anfechtung, which, although it literally translates ‘temptation’, implies an assault of doubt and despair upon a human being. These attacks were conceived by Luther to be both objective and subjective. Alister McGrath writes, ‘It must be emphasised that Luther

¹ Heerpredigt, WA 30/2:160.11–14, 161.27–29: ‘Der teuffel sucht durch seinen zeug den Tuercken, freilich nicht allein die weltliche herschaft, Sondern auch das reich Christi und seine heiligen und glieder vom glauben zu stossen.’
does not regard *Anfechtung* as a purely subjective state of the individual. Two aspects of the concept can be distinguished, although they are inseparable: the *objective* assault of spiritual forces upon the believer, and the *subjective* anxiety and doubt which arise within him as a consequence of these assaults.\(^2\) Also important to grasping the nature of *Anfechtung* in Luther’s thought is the distinction he made between ‘satanic’ and ‘divine *Anfechtung*.’ The former aroused doubts over fundamental matters of faith such as the certainty of one’s salvation and even the veracity of one’s religion whereas the latter, by imposing the burden of God’s law and thereby making a person aware of their wretched sinful condition, caused one to dread the future retribution of God at death and the Second Coming.\(^3\) Both were ultimately mediums through which God worked as *Deus absconditus* in order to lead one to the crucified Christ,\(^4\) but satanic *Anfechtung*, which God permitted rather than immediately directed, was certainly more dangerous for if the one experiencing it permitted it to prevail they would be led away from Christ.

In any case, Luther thought and taught that every Christian was susceptible to and should expect to be subject to these spiritual crises throughout their life.\(^5\) He wrote, ‘every Christian has his temptations. He who would believe, let him reconcile himself to the fact that his faith will not stay untempted. The Devil will do all he can to quench the spark of faith before it comes to a flame.’\(^6\) In 1527, along with external troubles such as the arrival of the plague in Wittenberg and ill health, Luther himself experienced turbulent bouts of *Anfechtung*, so much so that he began to experience doubt over his theological convictions. ‘He was repeatedly tortured by questions as to whether or not he really was in the right and the world of enemies that confronted him in the wrong.’\(^7\) In short, the question that plagued him since at least as far back as the Diet of Worms (1521) was: ‘Are you alone wise, righteous, and blessed?’ Amidst the diversity of human opinion presently and historically was he, Luther, right and everyone else in

\(^2\) McGrath, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, 170.

\(^3\) In addition to McGrath’s invaluable analysis (*Theology of the Cross*, 172–174), see Horst Beintker, *Die Überwindung der Anfechtung bei Luther: Eine Studie zu seiner Theologie nach den Operationes in Psalmos 1519–1521* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1954), 80–82.


\(^7\) Lohse, *Martin Luther*, 25.