

LutherFacts #29

During the 1530s, as Martin Luther sought to expand the Reformation, a new concern emerged. The spread of the Ottoman Empire into the Balkans and Hungary brought the religion of Islam to the doorstep of Europe. Led by Sultan Suleiman, the Turks lay siege to Vienna in 1529. For Luther, the prospect of an Islamic conquest of western Europe seemed very real. This development forced him to examine Islam carefully and write a series of publications harshly criticizing the religion. He especially condemned Islam for denying the centrality of Christ and, while impressed with Muslim religious devotion, he rejected the basic beliefs. And because Islam, in his words, "commands that ruling is to be done by the sword," Luther called for an army to resist the invasion. Unlike other leaders of the time, however, Luther did not want to launch another Christian crusade. Instead, he urged Europeans to fight as a coalition of nations against a common foe. By 1530, the siege was broken, and in the coming decades, the Ottoman armies were steadily forced back toward Turkey. Thus, once again, Martin Luther stepped forth to help shape yet another critical moment in history.