

# Identifying the Other:

## Grotius and Erasmus on Bad Christians as Jews and Muslims

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### 1. Introduction, or On Religious Claim and Dissent

Religions, at the very least those of monotheistic nature, deal with the Absolute: God, the human soul, and this world (to name the classic subjects of *metaphysica specialis*)—as well as, in religions of Abrahamic origin, with the respective role that these three entities play in the all-encompassing story from creation to salvation. It is only natural, then, that any one religion's claim must be as absolute as the matters it deals with: it itself must be right, all other religions must be wrong. It might be possible for other religions to contain some truths about God amidst their errors, but even then, they must still be considered inferior to the one true religion whose dogmata are not merely partially but wholly true; and as long as it is inferior, i.e., not completely true, it can only be called wrong nonetheless. This strict distinction between true and false belief—Jan Assmann's *mosaische Unterscheidung*—may for some present readers sound harsh or intolerant, but it is the only ground on which a religion can stand by its claim that belief or unbelief is not merely a question of way of life, but soteriologically significant.

All this entails that unity is of utmost importance to a religion; after all, the strict distinction between the truth and the false Other is only possible as long as that which is proclaimed as the truth is itself consistent. Dissent among one religion might just as well be considered dissent among altogether different religions; the problem is that, far from simply talking past each other, the dissenting parties will claim to be representative of the same religion, thus fundamentally endangering each other's religious identity. If Roman Catholicism is the only truly Christian religion, then Protestantism is not only wrong—it is not even Christian. How, then, can one religious denomination insulate itself against the affront that is the existence of another laying claim to the same name? The obvious answer is: by demonstrating that the rival denomination has no right to bear the same title, in other words, that it is a fundamentally different religion. The easiest way to achieve this is by means of equating the rival with a religion that, despite bearing similarities to one's own in certain respects, is already well established in its alienness. For the Christian religion, Judaism and Islam constitute the most likely candidates for such a procedure.

Bearing in mind these preliminary remarks, it is hardly surprising that, when criticising certain trends and groups within their own religion, Desiderius Erasmus and Hugo Grotius identify them as Jewish or Islamic. Both Erasmus and Grotius are keenly interested in Christian unity, and both of them have a very distinct—and, for a good part, quite similar—notion of what proper Christian unity, a Christianity deserving of its name, should look like. However, it seems to me that these two illustrate how, with changing times and circumstances, the attribution to foreign religions—in other words, the precise nature of the identification of the Other within one's own community—change as well. It is for this reason that, in this paper, I aim to portray their use of interreligious polemics to chide what they would regard as a decline in Christian faith proper. Erasmus and Grotius (famously called the 'second Erasmus') have long been, even in Grotius's own lifetime, regarded as comparable figures, and it may be interesting to see against whom they felt that they needed to defend their mutual goal—a unified and

universal Christianity—against. It may also shed some light upon the question of just how similar Erasmus’s and Grotius’s attitudes really are: bearing in mind our introductory remarks, one way of understanding their respective notion of Christianity is by looking at who is excluded from it.

Given the very limited scope of this paper, I cannot at all hope to do their respective views on adequate piety and on the other Abrahamic religions justice. I can only aim to sketch in very broad strokes some aspects related to our topic, adducing a series of remarks that must remain in danger of being selective. Least of all, I want to deliver a comprehensive description of the position of Islam and Judaism in Erasmus’s and Grotius’s thinking. Rather, I am interested in how Islam and Judaism are referenced in inner-Christian criticism. My goal is accomplished if I can make plausible the claim that there has been a shift of enemy lines; more precisely, it appears to me that while, for Erasmus, Judaism seems to best fit the erroneous ways of contemporary Christianity, for Grotius it rather seems to be Islam that corresponds to his major adversary, that is, Roman Catholicism. To this end, I will first call attention to relevant passages in Grotius’s *De veritate religionis christianae* and in his *Remonstrantie* (section II) before doing the same with Erasmus’s *De bello Turcico* and a selection of other writings (section III). I will then proceed to offer some general (and decidedly preliminary) thoughts on why such a shift might have occurred and in what respects it may or may not reflect a shift in attitude towards their respective enemies within Christendom (section IV).

## 2. Grotius: Catholic Muslims and Convertible Jews

Let us begin by looking at the one closer to our own time, Hugo Grotius. In his *De veritate religionis christianae*, it is quite obvious that his critique of Islam is in major respects a rejection of Roman Catholicism. The very origin of Islam lies, for him, in the deterioration of Christendom: the story of Islam is, in its roots, the story of how “that sincere and unfeigned piety, which flourished amongst the Christians, who were most grievously afflicted and tormented, began by degrees to abate”.<sup>1</sup> This abatement is described as follows: “the world [was brought] in[to] the church”, “bishops quarrelled with each other most bitterly about the highest places” and a general “preferring the tree of knowledge to the tree of life . . . , so then nice inquiries were esteemed more than piety, and religion was made an art”<sup>2</sup>—all of them quite typical Reformed polemics against the Catholic church.

So far, one might think that Catholicism constitutes only the cause of the rise of Islam, not the nature of Islam itself. But Grotius makes sure to add:

and when the great slaughter made by these [sc. the migration of the peoples, J.K.], did not suffice to reform those which remained; by the just permission of God, Mahomet planted in Arabia a new religion directly opposite to the Christian religion; yet such as did, in a good measure, express in words, the life of a great part of the Christians . . .<sup>3</sup>

Islam is thus more than just punishment for decaying Christianity, it is the embodiment of, and a proper

<sup>1</sup> Hugo Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*. Corrected, and illustrated with notes, by Mr. Le Clerc. Translated by John Clarke, D.D. New Edition. London 1829. p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 228f.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 231.

name given for, decaying Christianity itself. Muslims are, in essence, crypto-Catholics.<sup>4</sup> Hence Grotius adds more elements to the list of common anti-Catholic polemics, this time as a characterisation of Islam directly:

This religion [sc. Islam, J.K.], which was calculated for bloodshed, delights much in ceremonies, and would be believed, without allowing liberty to enquire into it: for which reason the vulgar are prohibited reading those books which they account sacred; which is a manifest sign of their iniquity ....<sup>5</sup>

It is not difficult to see here not only the complaint about Christian overreliance on external ceremonies but also the topos of the inaccessibility of the Holy Scriptures to the laity.

Concerning the relationship of Islam to pre-Christian religiosity, he states that

it is no wonder, that childish rudiments should precede the most perfect law, such as that of Christ is; but it is very preposterous, after the publication thereof, to return to figures and types. Nor can any reason be given, why any other religion ought to be published, after the Christian religion, which is far the best.<sup>6</sup>

‘Childish’ sounds far less damning in comparison to his characterisation of Islam; and indeed, we will now see how much milder his stance towards Judaism is.

This is already apparent in how he addresses the Jews: “the Jewish religion, which is a part and the beginning of truth, appears to us, much like twilight to a person gradually advancing out of a very dark cave: wherefore I desire the Jews, that they would not look upon us as adversaries. We know very well, that they are the offspring of holy men;”<sup>7</sup> *et cetera*; and, in his 1615 *Remonstrantie*:

They are the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God and the promises. ... When we look for arguments to decide which books in the Old Testament are canonical, we call upon the Jews. ... The pagans have false gods. The Mohammedans have a false Prophet. The Jews at any rate have the true God and the true Prophets. The core of their belief is what we believe, too, and that which we believe in addition to this, we prove on the basis of the writings they believe in.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The Protestant connecting of Islam with Catholicism is not an invention of Grotius’s; for an overview of its history—omitting, however, Erasmus who might also be considered for that list, at least if we substitute ‘Catholicism’ with ‘scholasticism’—, see J. P. Heering, *Hugo Grotius as Apologist for the Christian Religion. A Study of his Work De veritate religionis christianae* (1640). Translated by J. C. Grayson. Leiden & Boston 2004. pp. 156–160.

<sup>5</sup> Grotius, *op. cit.* p. 231f. It is perhaps noteworthy how, after first criticising “nice inquiries”, he now urges the liberty to enquire into religious affairs. However, it should be clear the first instance is part of an anti-scholastic Reformed polemic against an a priori cloud cuckoo land—a form of intellectual *Werkgerechtigkeit*, if you will—whereas the second one enforces the sola scriptura principle and non-hierarchical access to the scriptures.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 239.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 181.

<sup>8</sup> Grotius, *Remonstrantie of 1615*. Facsimile, Transliteration, Modern Translations and Analysis. Ed. by David Kromhout and Adri K. Offenbergh. Translated into English by Cid van Heertum. Leiden & Boston 2019. pp. 202f.

Concerning the question of whether Sephardi immigrants should be allowed to practise their religion, he mentions that “the argument from God’s law might be put forward, that idolatry among God’s people was strictly forbidden”, to which he replies: “The argument relating to the prohibition of idolatry is not valid here. ... [T]he worship of the Jews is not idolatry but worship to God, though adulterated with superstition ...”<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, Catholics cannot be exempt from this accusation: “We know that a large part of Christendom has adulterated religion with idolatry, especially the worship of statues, something expressly forbidden by the inviolable law of God, which the Jews justly adhere to in this respect.”<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, he regards Catholics as much more dangerous to the provinces: “The congregations of the Roman Catholics, who acknowledge the Pope”—“a notorious enemy of this state”—“as their leader and supreme commander ..., are incomparably more dangerous than the congregations of the Jews, whose religion knows neither a leader nor a prince.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, in accordance with our introductory remarks, he states: “We have numerous religions here; and the least danger is from the one that differs most: *Most bitter are the hatreds of brothers, and easy is the fall from nearby.*”<sup>12</sup>

It appears that Catholics and, *a fortiori*, Muslims are more or less to be regarded as a lost cause due to their needless regression from truths already evident, while Jews are more akin to Reformed Christians who are *not yet quite there*—but very well might be, which is why Grotius’s ultimate aim in allowing in the Jews, their conversion to Reformed Christianity, seems to him to be within arm’s reach:

The apostle Paul [in Romans 11:25f., J.K.] ... explicitly says that a full conversion of the Jewish people is to be expected finally ... . It is important, therefore, to follow God’s will, and allow the Jews to live among those Christians who have turned away from idols and idolatry and are therefore rightly called reformed.<sup>13</sup>

The good example of righteous Christians, then, will do enough to eventually convert the Jews; a hope of Grotius’s that he motivates in *De veritate religionis christianae* by arguing that the Jews, by their own way of religious reasoning, have ultimately no reason not to accept the wonders of Jesus of Nazareth and that he is the Christ, i.e., the foretold Messiah. It is noteworthy that, in *De veritate*, there is nowhere even a mention of the prospect of converting Muslims to Christianity.

### 3. Erasmus: Half-Christian Turks and Half-Jewish Christians

We have seen how Grotius identifies his chief enemy, Roman Catholicism, with Islam, portraying the latter as the perfect embodiment of what is wrong with the former, and how, by comparison, the Jews

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 204. The italics denote a Latin citation from Tacitus. Cf. *ibid.*, note 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion* (see above, note 1), book V, c. g. sections XIII and XIV. Cf. Heering, *op. cit.* p. 59.

are treated almost as allies to the common threat of ungodly idolatry.<sup>15</sup>

Let us now take a look at how Erasmus treats them both. Erasmus does not say much about Islam as a whole but rather about the Turks in particular, although he does mention them together with the Saracens,<sup>16</sup> which might indicate that, if he is at all interested in Islam, he takes the Turks as *pars pro toto*. Like Grotius, he invokes the topos of Muslim conquests as punishment for Christian immorality,<sup>17</sup> using the Turks as a mirror image of Christian sins: “If we really want to heave the Turks from our necks, we must first expel from our hearts a more loathsome race of Turks, avarice, ambition, the craving for power, self-satisfaction, impiety, extravagance, the love of pleasure, deceitfulness, anger, hatred, envy”.<sup>18</sup> However, at least to me, it seems that ‘Turkish’, here, is a metaphor for much more general notions of sinfulness than what is meant by Islam in Grotius’s *De veritate*. There, Islam is characterised by more specific errors of religious practice, for example, quasi-Catholic idolatry. Concerning such theological specifics, Erasmus, on the other hand, seems to move the Turks rather close to proper Christians—especially in comparison to the Jews—, even calling them “half-Christian”:<sup>19</sup>

St Paul shows us good hope that one day the stubborn Jewish race will be gathered into the fold, and with us will acknowledge the one true shepherd, Jesus. There is yet more reason to hope this of the turks and other barbarian nations, none of whom, I hear, worship idols; on the contrary, they are halfway to Christianity.<sup>20</sup>

Erasmus, himself far from being in favour of any sort of idolatry, exempts Muslims from this accusation. He also does not, unlike Grotius, direct his anti-scholastic sentiments towards them, rather implying that the Turks would find scholastic discussions—and the quarrels they cause—, to say the least, peculiar:

What will they [sc. the Turks, J.K.] think, what will their feelings be (for though nothing else, they are at least human beings), when they hear these thorny and impenetrable thickets of argument—instances, formalities, quiddities, relativities—particularly when they see so little agreement on them among those eminent religious teachers that they often fight each other until they are pale with fury and reduced to insults and spitting and sometimes even to fisticuffs?<sup>21</sup>

To make these ‘half-Christians’ complete ones must, for Erasmus, be the express goal of a war against

<sup>15</sup> Of course, this does not at all mean that Grotius harbours no ill sentiments towards Judaism; not only does he regard the Talmud as basically nonsense, he also ascribes to Jews a hatred for Christians and invokes a series of other common anti-Jewish notions. Cf. Marc De Wilde, “Offering Hospitality to Strangers: Hugo Grotius’s Draft Regulations for the Jews.” In: *Tijdschrift voor rechtsgeschiedenis* 85 (2017), pp. 391–433. p. 408.

<sup>16</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, “The Education of a Christian Prince.” In: *Collected Works of Erasmus* (henceforth cited as *CWE*). Vol. 27. Toronto, Buffalo, London 1974ff. pp. 199–288. p. 286.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Erasmus, “On the Turkish War.” In: *CWE* 64:201–266. p. 220.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 242. Incidentally, an exclamation from the same page—, “And yet all the while, like true Christians, we hate the Turks!”—echoes a better-known one from a letter to Jacob of Hoogstraten of the 11th of August 1519: “If it is Christian to detest the Jews, on this count we are all good Christians, and to spare” (letter 1006 in *Erasmus, The Correspondence of Erasmus*, Letters 993 to 1121 (1519–1520) (= *CWE* 7), pp. 44–54. p. 49).

<sup>19</sup> Erasmus, “On the Turkish War” (see above, note 17). p. 233.

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 243.

<sup>21</sup> Erasmus, “The Handbook of the Christian Soldier.” In: *CWE* 66:1–128. p. 10.

them:

Destroy a Turk to make a Christian, fell an infidel to raise up a true believer: such killing is work of piety fully acceptable to God. Let it therefore be our only goal, our principal preoccupation, to extend the kingdom of Christ rather than our own. Otherwise, to slaughter Turks is simply to increase the kingdom of the dead.<sup>22</sup>

As with Grotius and the Jews, the proper way of conversion is by example: “there are probably a good many Turks who are weary of their barbaric tyranny; these last would willingly embrace our faith if they saw a more humane system in the offing”.<sup>23</sup>

Judaism, on the other hand, means to Erasmus a more specific threat to Christian piety; in fact, it becomes the term for what he deems “the common plague of all Christianity”,<sup>24</sup> that is, the reliance on external ceremonies:

I do not disapprove in any way of the external ceremonies of Christians and the devotions of the simple-minded, especially those that have been approved by the authority of the church, for they are often signs or supports of piety. ... But to worship Christ through visible things for the sake of visible things and to think of this as the summit of religious perfection ... – this would be to desert the law of the gospel, which is spiritual, and to sink into a kind of Judaism ...<sup>25</sup>

‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’, then, appear as downright opposite terms: “If the Jewish tongue, proponent of carnal rituals and instructions, does not fall silent ... then the tongue of the Gospels, which proclaims grace, may not speak.”<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, Shimon Markish describes the relationship between humanist Christianity and Judaism as one between norm and antinorm, a battle which, according to Erasmus, “will never end among Christians”.<sup>27</sup>

But if this norm exists (what above is called the ideal ‘antiquity,’ infused with the philosophy of Christ), then there must also be an antinorm, equally ideal, and which equally never existed anywhere, at any time, and also is composed of anachronistic and variegated elements. Following the tradition of the early Christians ..., the name of this norm then becomes ‘Judaism’.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Erasmus, “On the Turkish War” (see above, note 17), p. 242. Cf. A. G. Weiler, “The Turkish Argument and Christian Piety in Desiderius Erasmus’ *Consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo* (1530).” In: *Erasmus of Rotterdam. The Man and the Scholar*. Ed. by J. Serna Weiland and W. Th. M. Frijhoff. Leiden et al. 1988, pp. 30–39, p. 37: “In these words we find the heart of Erasmus’ idea about a war against the Turks: it should be more of a missionary operation!”—That being said, there is also a more decidedly military aspect in Erasmus’s proposals for the war.

<sup>23</sup> Erasmus, “On the Turkish War” (see above, note 17), p. 261. For the argument that Erasmus nevertheless serves as an example of anti-Turkish sentiment by effectively identifying the Turkish as the opposite of humanity altogether, cf. Murad Idris, *War for Peace. Genealogies of a Violent Ideal in Western and Islamic Thought*. New York 2019, pp. 131–177.

<sup>24</sup> Erasmus, “The Handbook of the Christian Soldier” (see above, note 21), p. 73.

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.* pp. 73f.

<sup>26</sup> Quote of Erasmus taken from Shimon Markish, *Erasmus and the Jews*. Translated by Anthony Olcott with an afterword by Arthur A. Cohen. Chicago & London 1986, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Quote of Erasmus taken from *op. cit.* p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 19. It is perhaps noteworthy that Erasmus himself makes clear that “since the Jews attributed a great deal to bodily observances, I use Judaism to mean not the ungodliness of the Jews but prescriptions concerning external things” (Erasmus, “Clarifications Concerning the Censures Published in Paris in the Name of the Parisian Faculty of Theology.” In: *CWE* 82:16–256, p. 179). Be that as it may, it should be clear from the subject of our paper that we are not interested in how Erasmus views actual Jews but rather how he refers to Judaism to criticise Christians.

Since this battle is being fought “among Christians”, it is clear that Judaism constitutes the foreign and damaging element within Christianity itself—that which, for Christianity to be unified and to God’s liking, would need to be eliminated from Christendom (although the remark that this battle “will never end” implies that Erasmus is not very optimistic in this regard). It is, then, no wonder that, while Erasmus could call the Turks ‘half-Christians’, he would not use the same term when engaging in inner-Christian critique: instead, he calls the convert Pfefferkorn a “half-Jew”.<sup>29</sup> Whereas he invites the ‘half-Christian’ Turks in, ‘half-Jews’ like Pfefferkorn should be thrown out.

#### 4. A Shift in Attitude?

We have seen how Grotius virtually equates Roman Catholicism and Islam. (In a way, one could argue, Islam should even be considered less dangerous than Catholicism, seeing as at least the Muslims do not pretend to be Christians, whereas “*easy is the fall from nearby*”.) Roman Catholicism, then, is just as bad, or even worse, than Islam. At Grotius’s time, it is hard to imagine a more decisive exclusion of Catholicism from Christianity; just as Muslims are, in a way, crypto-Catholics, so too can Catholics be called crypto-Muslims, i.e., not Christians at all. The resulting picture is, then, not one of a struggle between dissenting Christians, but of a struggle between Christians and mere pretenders. The Jews, on the other hand, are treated by Grotius as potential Christians; they are relieved of the accusation of idolatry and must be kept close to the Reformed lest they be deterred from their eventual conversion due to the bad example given by the pretenders.

Going back a century to Erasmus, however, the accusations seem to be inverted: Judaism is the epitome of impious ritualism and, understood as such a broad term, everything that is wrong with contemporary Christianity; meanwhile, the barbaric Turks are a divine punishment, but nevertheless, they at least do not indulge in idolatry. They are external foes, not internal; they are a result of pseudo-Christian sinfulness, but not quite as definitive of an embodiment of Christianity’s erroneous ways; they are not, like the Jews, the ‘antinorm’. As such, they might even be considered the touchstone of Christian betterment: surely, if one were to succeed in converting the Muslims, that would be the ultimate proof of Christianity having regained its proper piety.

What could be the cause of this shift in frontiers between allies and foes? A reason could be that, by the time of Grotius, the schism of Western Christianity had already taken place; the hope for a quick reunification had long been betrayed. Quite on the contrary, shortly before the outbreak of the Thirty Years’ War, the fronts were as hardened as they could possibly be. In this situation, it is only natural for Grotius to get the Jews on board; after all, it is an established fact that Christianity is the successor to Judaism. Drawing a line from Judaism to Reformed Christianity, then, means establishing Reformed Christianity as the true denomination (especially taking into account the eschatological dimensions of Romans 11—after all, in Grotius’s as in Erasmus’s time, there was plenty occasion to be apocalyptically inclined); on the other hand, moving Catholicism away from Judaism means delegitimising it as a denomination of Christianity, pushing it back to the periphery of false and superfluous monotheistic religions like Islam.

<sup>29</sup> Letter 713 to Johann Reuchlin of the 15th of November 1517 in *Erasmus, The Correspondence of Erasmus*. Letters 594–841 (1517–1518) (= CWE 5). pp. 203f. p. 204.

For Erasmus, however, the schism in Western Christianity cannot have appeared as definitive. Still hoping for Christian unity, there is no need to rid his enemies of any relation to Christianity whatsoever; since, again, the close relationship of Judaism and Christianity is a given, labelling bad Christians ‘Jewish’ creates less of a distance than Grotius’s identifying them as Islamic. It merely denotes rudiments that Erasmus deems past their expiry date, but it does not remove them from the line ‘Judaism—Christianity’ altogether. Just like the hope for a conversion of the Jews, Erasmus could still hope for his Christian enemies to rediscover the true—that is, of course, Erasmus’s—Christianity. Understood in this way, the shift in enemy attributions between Erasmus and Grotius would also reflect a shift in attitude towards other Christians.

There is a counter-argument against this reading of Erasmus as displaying a more reconciliatory attitude than Grotius that I want to discuss. One could argue that, in Erasmus’s time, calling Christians Jews might even be worse than calling them Muslims if one bears the topos of Jewish deicide in mind. In this interpretation, calling them Jews is not merely a call for them to ‘catch up’ to the true Christian faith, that is, a lament of mere regression, but rather the accusation of actively causing the destruction of Christendom as did the Jews with Christ. After all, looking at Pfefferkorn, the “Jewish poison”<sup>30</sup> that he infects Christendom with is the disruption of “the chiefest and best thing in our religion”: “the public unity of the Christian world”.<sup>31</sup> Nowhere, on the other hand, does Erasmus seem to accuse Pfefferkorn of “worship[ing] Christ through visible things for the sake of visible things”.

So there appear to be in fact at least two different ways in which Erasmus uses the term ‘Jewish’: one is the more specific meaning that we have thus far referred to, that is, “prescriptions concerning external things”; the other is a more general notion of disunity, that is, the *diabolical* aspect, understood literally as creating “calumny”, διαβολή<sup>32</sup> (for which the German language offers the literal equivalent *Zerwürfnis*). This second meaning of ‘Judaism’ would match Markish’s description of an ideal antinorm (see above, section III) even better: if unity is the quintessence of what makes Christianity good, then Judaism, as the spreading of discord, is not just un-Christian or not-quite-Christian but decidedly anti-Christian.<sup>33</sup>

Seen from the perspective of this more general meaning of ‘Judaism’, Erasmus’s intentions in calling overly ritualistic Christians ‘Jewish’ would be no less harsh than Grotius’s when equating them with Muslims. Far from an attempt to maintain a close relationship, calling his adversaries Jews instead of Muslims could be regarded as a mere consequence of Erasmus not caring enough about Muslims in and of themselves, simply counting them—or more specifically, in this case, the Turks—among the manifold “barbarian nations”<sup>34</sup> who, in accordance with Romans 11, are already “halfway to Christianity” compared with the notoriously stubborn Jews.

Even so, I cannot imagine that any Christian who is, in Erasmus’s view, a bit too interested in figurines would instil the same hatred in him as Pfefferkorn’s (supposedly) obvious malevolence, not to

<sup>30</sup> Letter 694 to Willibald Pirckheimer on the 2nd of November 1517 in Erasmus, *op. cit.* pp. 164–171. p. 169.

<sup>31</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 167.

<sup>32</sup> Erasmus himself invokes this etymology when seeing the devil at work in Pfefferkorn. Cf. *op. cit.* p. 169.

<sup>33</sup> If that is the case, then it would not surprise me if Erasmus had 2 Thessalonians 2:3f. in mind when thinking about those like Pfefferkorn who were, in his view, responsible for Christian discord: that is, the passages about the Antichrist (actually, the *ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας*, the man of lawlessness) sitting in God’s temple and pretending to act in God’s (Christ’s) name or even as God himself while in fact bringing about the exact opposite.

<sup>34</sup> Erasmus, On the Turkish War (see above, note 17). p. 243.



mention justify a call for the “hangman”.<sup>35</sup> After all, it was Erasmus who summons us to extend the kingdom of Christ rather than the kingdom of the dead. In the end, he seems to be more interested in reconciling Christendom than in fortifying enemy lines. Meanwhile, Grotius’s describing the “dangerous” Roman Catholics as led by “a notorious enemy of this state” suggests a much less reconciliatory approach.

Thus the point remains that the shift from identifying bad Christians as Jews to identifying them as Muslims is not merely a shift in terminology but also a shift in attitude towards their inner-Christian enemies. With regards to this attitude, the fact that already by Grotius’s time the schism in Western Christianity has proven to be much longer-lasting than anticipated by Erasmus and his contemporaries might play a central role.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to outline Desiderius Erasmus’s and Hugo Grotius’s references to Islam and Judaism when criticising trends in contemporary Christianity, arguing that there has been a shift in enemy lines. I have tried to show how Grotius virtually identifies his major adversaries—that is, Roman Catholics—with Muslims, all the while taking a relatively friendly stance towards Jews, inviting them to accept the truth of Reformed Christianity and hoping to convert them (and to keep them away from the Catholics) by good example. For Erasmus, conversely, ‘Judaism’ seems to serve as a name for the epitome of ritualism and idolatry, “the common plague of all Christianity” consisting in preferring “carnal rituals and instructions” over spiritual devotion; whereas the Turks (here taken, for want of a more direct treatment of the subject, as *pars pro toto* for Muslims) are portrayed as “half-Christians” free from idolatry, happily ready to convert when presented with the example of a good Christian and just as baffled by contemporary inner-Christian quarrels as Erasmus himself. Finally, I have tried to argue for the possibility that this shift in attributions reflects a shift in attitude towards intrareligious enemies: While Erasmus—regardless of exactly how damning the label ‘Jewish’ is for him in a specific case—still put the unity of Christendom before all else, Grotius seemed to show little leniency for Christians who dared to be Catholic. One possible reason for this might be that, by the time of Grotius’s writing, the schism in Western Christianity had only become sharper and sharper with no reconciliation in sight; in particular, shortly before the outbreak of the Thirty Years’ War, there seemed to be little inclination to show the other side any particular kindness, whereas getting the Jews on board could further help legitimising Reformed Christianity in its claim to be the only truly Christian denomination.

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<sup>35</sup> Letter 694 to Willibald Pirckheimer on the 2nd of November 1517 (see above, note 30). p. 170.

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