

Martin Luther vs Desiderius Erasmus: The War Against the Turk

This is a comparison of a Lutheran Protestant's views on the threat of war against the Turks versus a Catholic humanist's point of view not long after the Reformation, deeply analyzing two works with similar titles: Luther's "On the War Against the Turk" and Erasmus' "On the War Against the Turks." How similar were Luther's and Erasmus' views on this topic and how does this show the ultimate differences in Catholic and Protestant core thinking?

One debated issue during the mid-1500s was what to do about the war against the Turks advancing on Europe. Scholars in the past have written both books and journal articles about either Luther or Erasmus, but nothing specific on how their views on the Turks compared. There have been other scholars who have written about what humanists in general thought in general about the advancing Turks. Luther's opinion came before the attempted Turkish siege of Vienna in 1528, and Erasmus's came in response to the siege in 1530. It may seem that Luther and Erasmus' views on the War Against the Turks are similar, but close analysis of primary source and secondary source texts reveals there were differences in their fundamental way of thinking. The main differences come through the concepts of free will and works righteousness—major areas addressed in the Reformation. Protestant, specifically Lutheran, belief on free will was that completing good works could not be used to attain salvation. Erasmus, following the typical Catholic belief, thought that free will could be attained by gaining God's favor through doing good works. This difference in opinion is demonstrated when comparing their essays on the war against the Turks.