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Review of Anne Marie Wolf, Juan de Segovia and the Fight for Peace: Christians and Muslims in the Fifteenth Century

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Anne Marie Wolf, *Juan de Segovia and the Fight for Peace: Christians and Muslims in the Fifteenth Century*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014. 392 pp.

As Anne Marie Wolf writes in her lucid intellectual biography of Juan de Segovia, all of the causes dear to the heart of this Castilian born fifteenth-century theologian failed soon after his death. The conciliar movement (the drive to subject the pope to the authority of an ecclesiastical council), on whose behalf Segovia worked tirelessly at the Council of Basel (1431-1449), and to which he was dedicated until the end of his life, was abandoned and condemned by most of its former supporters. Segovia's arguments for seeking peace with the Islamic world failed to persuade his contemporaries, and crusades against Muslims continued. Even the books bequeathed by Segovia to the University of Salamanca had trouble reaching their intended recipient. Why, then, write about Juan de Segovia, this master of lost causes *par excellence*? By giving us an engaging study of the roads not taken and well-intentioned plans thwarted and ignored, Wolf settles this question once and for all. A figure at the crossroads of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Segovia fully belonged to neither. His modes of thought and writing were medieval, and he made a liberal use of the anti-Islamic discourse produced by his medieval predecessors. Yet, he was also a critic of papal authority and crusading, exhibited a humanist-like interest in the textual study of the Qur'ān, and anticipated later developments in political theory. Wolf presents a complex intellectual portrait of a man who grappled with the burning issues of his day, but was always slightly out of step with the times.

Despite what the book's subtitle might suggest, the study does not dwell on the broader picture of the Christian-Muslim relations in the fifteenth century. The author's primary goal, which she accomplishes admirably, is to show the linkages between Segovia's work on behalf of conciliarism and the plan he devised in the last five years of his life for establishing peace with the Muslims: the two main aspects of his thought and career that are usually studied separately. The book is organized chronologically and follows the major events in Segovia's life from his brilliant beginnings at the University of Salamanca until his retirement at the Benedictine priory in the village of Aiton in the French Alps, where he died in 1458. In keeping with the study's overarching argument, the book's first two chapters aim to demonstrate that the main outlines of Segovia's thought were already apparent during his early years as a student and then professor of theology at Salamanca. Wolf wants to show that already in this early period Segovia was actively thinking and writing about Islam, as evidenced by his 1427 lecture at the university and his 1431 conversation with a Granadan

ambassador about the Muslim critique of Christianity. She also seeks to highlight the continuities in Segovia's thought by arguing that his 1426 treatise, which seemingly extolled unlimited papal authority, was in fact a subtle critique of the interference by the archbishop of Santiago into university affairs. According to Wolf, Segovia sympathized with conciliarism while still at Salamanca, thus parting ways with the majority of his countrymen. In Basel, he became one of the Council's most active members and theorists, arguing in his treatises that the authority of a general council came directly from Christ. The Basel chapter occupies a central place in Wolf's study, as it did also in Segovia's intellectual development, because it was during his fifteen-year career with the Council that his ideas about a proper stance toward Islam began to take shape. In what is arguably the book's most stimulating and dynamic argument, Wolf asserts that Segovia's participation in the negotiations with the heretical Hussites inspired him to devise a plan for a peaceful conversion of Muslims to Christianity (*via pacis et doctrine*).

The news about the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 reached Segovia in Aiton, where he had retired after the dissolution of the Council. The last two chapters detail his efforts to persuade his fellow Christians that establishing a peace with Muslims was the only sensible way forward. Wolf aims to show that Segovia's interest in Islam was a constant throughout his life, but does not adequately explain why he was content to rehash the standard Christian criticisms of the rival faith. Peace – not the conversion of Muslims per se – was his end goal. Wolf explains that Segovia's critique of crusading stemmed from his belief in the primacy of the scripture, which in his interpretation commanded the pursuit of peace. One wishes Wolf had more to say about the mudéjar community of the *faqīh* Yça Gidelli, from whom Segovia commissioned a translation of the Qur'ān. It is striking how little information about Islam was available to Segovia in his native Castile, and a more extensive discussion of the kingdom's Muslim minority could be helpful for understanding his ideas (Kathryn Miller's findings on the *faqīhs* of fifteenth-century Aragon, in *The Guardians of Islam*, 2008, are not mentioned). Overall, this is a stimulating and erudite work, and a welcome contribution to the study of late medieval religion and the history of interfaith relations.

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