THROWING THE BOOK AT THEM:
JUAN DE SEGOVIA’S USE OF THE QUR’ĀN

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Abstract

This essay investigates how Juan de Segovia (d. 1458) used the Qur’ān in his engagement with Islam. The essay has three principal aims. First, it identifies certain distinctive aspects of Segovia’s use of the Qur’ān. Second, it examines his treatment of sacraments and soteriology in the Qur’ān. Third, it considers Segovia’s use of the Qur’ān in light of David Bertaina’s recent analysis of Christians and the Qur’ān. It is argued that, just as Segovia read the Qur’ān in various ways, he also used or cited the Qur’ān in various ways, for various ends and even for various audiences.

Keywords
Juan de Segovia; Qur’ān; interreligious dialogue; medieval Christian-Muslim relations

That Nicholas of Cusa and Juan de Segovia shared a keen interest in Islam and, more specifically, in the Qur’ān is not news. Scholars have long recognized this common interest. As students of medieval Christian-Muslim relations

interaction well know, Cusa and Segovia developed their mutual interest in matters Islamic while at the Council of Basel in the 1430s. In the first prologue to his *Cribratio Alkorani*, Cusa recounts how he lent a copy of the Qur’ān to Segovia prior to departing for Constantinople in 1437. And, in his letter to Cusa dated 2 December 1454, Segovia not only gratefully recalls that loan, he also remembers how the two men had, in their Basel days, often discussed Islamic «rites, observances, and customs, as well as the ways by which Muslims might be converted to Christianity». Although it is noteworthy that Segovia recalls discussing Muslim practices, in addition to doctrines and texts, the focal point of his interest remained the Qur’ān itself.

Thanks to the work of scholars such as José Martínez Gázquez, Davide Scotto, and Ulli Roth, we now know more about Juan de Segovia’s tri-lingual *problema islámico*, Granada, Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2007; Sanz Santacruz, V., «Juan de Segovia y Nicolás de Cusa frente al Islam: su comprensión intelectualista de la fe cristiana», Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia, 16 (2007), pp. 181-194; and Wolf, A. M., *Juan de Segovia and the Fight for Peace: Christians and Muslims in the Fifteenth Century*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 2014.


3 See Sanz Santacruz, «Juan de Segovia y Nicolás de Cusa frente al Islam: su comprensión intelectualista de la fe cristiana», op. cit., p. 182, n. 4. I have not been able to consult D. Scotto’s edition of Segovia’s correspondence. See Scotto, D. «Via pacis et doctrine: le Epistole sull’Islam di Juan de Segovia», Ph. D. diss, Università di Firenze, 2012. The publication of Dr. Scotto’s work is, however, imminent.

Qur’ān, produced in 1455-56 with the help of Iça de Gidelli,⁵ faqīh from Segovia.⁶ These scholars, as well as others, have underscored Juan’s desire for an accurate qur’ānic text and for a more reliable translation than Robert of Ketton’s paraphrase. And thanks to Thomas Burman and Anne Marie Wolf, we now know more about how Segovia read the Qur’ān, about his oscillation between philology and polemic, appreciation and disdain.⁷ My purpose here is to consider how Segovia used the Qur’ān. Of course, how one uses a text is closely related to how one reads it: both actions involve, or at least imply, evaluation and interpretation. Perhaps we can say that using a text — citing or alluding to it — is putting one’s reading to work, making that reading manifest.

For this brief reflection on how Juan de Segovia used the Qur’ān, I will rely mainly on two of his post-conciliar writings, namely the Liber de magna auctoritate episcoporum in concilio generali, an ecclesiological work,⁸ and the De gladio

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⁶ On the term faqih, see ibid. pp. 82-84. See also Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd ed., s.v., «Fakīh».


mittendo in corda sarracenorum, a much-revised and reworked text that defies easy characterization in terms of genre but that represents Segovia’s programmatic statement on how to address the «Islamic question». That these two works now exist in admirable critical editions facilitates my task considerably.

In considering how Segovia used the Qur’ān in his Liber de magna auctoreitate (henceforth: LMA) and in his De gladio, I have three principal aims. First, I will identify certain distinctive (but not necessarily unique) aspects of Segovia’s use of Islam’s holy book. To do so, I will have to compare Segovia, albeit cursorily, with contemporaries such as Cusa and Heymericus de Campo. Second, drawing on suggestions in the work of Santiago Madrigal and Ulli Roth, as well as on my own previous work, I will emphasize the fundamentally soteriological concerns that lie at the heart of Juan’s engagement with Islam. I will do this by addressing his discussion of sacraments. Finally, I will connect Segovia’s use of Quranic texts with David Bertaina’s recent analysis of Christians and the Qur’ān.

Although the fall of Constantinople in 1453 obviously intensified Latin Christendom’s engagement with Islam, for Juan de Segovia and Nicholas of Cusa, as noted above, interest in Islam predated that momentous event. In Segovia’s case, we know that he was already thinking and writing about Muslims during his teaching days at the University of Salamanca in the 1420s. As Santiago Madrigal, Anne Marie Wolf, and Davide Scotto have shown, Juan’s early university writings, most notably his Repetitio de fide catholica from 1427, address Islam and religious alterity. Importantly for our purposes, however,
these early writings touching upon Islam make little specific reference to the Qur'ān.

Rather, Segovia’s first use of specific Qur’ānic texts seems to stem from his work related to the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the 1430s. To wit, in support of his pro-Immaculist stance in his *Allegationes pro sancta conceptione* from 1436, Segovia cited a passage from Sura 3 that he found in Nicholas of Lyra’s *Libellum contra quemdam Iudaeum*. Importantly, this citation is indirect; it does not derive from Segovia’s own reading of the Qur’ān. However, two

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years later, in the elaboration of his pro-Immaculist position, Segovia returned to that same Qur’ānic passage, but this time did so citing not only Lyra but also a more accurate version of the text *secundum aliam translationem*. What had changed? Between 1436 and 1438, Segovia had obtained two copies of the Qur’ān in Ketton’s translation. His careful study of that work resulted in a new and improved citation—a citation that even included a reference to what we might call «chapter and verse». Interestingly, Segovia used this text to support an *a minori ad maius* argument: if even infidels recognize Mary’s unique status, how much more should believers do so. Segovia thus employs the Qur’ān to shame his fellow Christians.

By the time Segovia composed his LMA sometime between 1449 and 1453, he had gained significant first-hand knowledge of the Qur’ān. He demonstrates this knowledge in that text by including roughly twenty citations—some direct and verbatim; some just allusions—from the Qur’ān itself.

After 1453, when Segovia was working on the *De gladio* and initiating his well-known correspondence with Cusa and Jean Germain, such citations and allusions flow frequently from his pen. The *De gladio* in particular is replete with Qur’ānic references. It is important to emphasize that in all these

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15 See Roth and Scotto, «Auf der Suche nach der Erbsünde im Koran: Die *Allegationes de peccatis primi parentis* des Juan de Segovia», op. cit., p. 190.


17 On this argument, see Roth and Scotto, «Auf der Suche nach der Erbsünde im Koran: Die *Allegationes de peccatis primi parentis* des Juan de Segovia», op. cit., p. 191.


19 On this correspondence, see *ibid.*, p. 145 with n. 1; and especially Scotto, «Via pacis et doctrine», op. cit.
instances the Qur’ān Segovia is citing is Ketton’s translation. After 1455, Segovia apparently began to revise the De gladio, correcting and replacing Ketton’s translation with his own recently completed rendering, but he abandoned that onerous and time-consuming task due to poor health and a heavy workload.\textsuperscript{20}

From the 1430s to the 1450s, then, Segovia’s use of the Qur’ān evolved and deepened. If he began by using the Qur’ān to support and defend a specifically Christian doctrine, namely the Immaculate Conception — thereby showing how the «other’s» sacred text might serve an intra- rather than inter-religious purpose\textsuperscript{21} — his subsequent use of the Qur’ān reflects a greater variety of strategies and aims. In his landmark book on the medieval image of Islam, Norman Daniel observes that Christian use of the Qur’ān in the Middle Ages was highly selective. Daniel writes, «...it is not surprising that the wealth of material in the Qur’ān... should have been ignored except in so far as it could


be brought into service». We turn now to some of the ways Juan de Segovia brought the Qur’ān into service.

Of course, Segovia repeats much of the standard medieval Christian polemical line against the Qur’ān: its demonic inspiration, its errors, distortions and misrepresentations, its internal contradictions. The most frequently cited Qur’ānic passage in the De gladio comes from Sura 33:40, where Muhammed is called the «seal and culmination of the prophets». Not surprisingly, Segovia cites this passage in order to refute it. Like his contemporaries, Segovia used the Qur’ān to denigrate Muhammed and to show how and why the Qur’ān was flawed. «A true seal», Segovia writes, «confirms rather than annuls scripture». Muhammed does not confirm Scripture, ergo...

In the LMA (10.42.10) Segovia invokes Sura 12:8 according to Ketton’s rendering (he cites chapter and verse explicitly) in order to advance a related point: by asserting that it simultaneously encompasses both preceding

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24 See Wolf, Juan de Segovia and the Fight for Peace, op. cit., pp. 194-95. LMA 10.6.8: «...loquitur (i.e. liber Alchurani) ita equivoco et multipliciter, ut sepissime sibimet contradicit... » (Johannes de Segovia, Liber de magna auctoritate, op. cit., p. 380).

25 See Johannes von Segovia, De gladio, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 937, where editor U. Roth lists five references to this passage. Admittedly, some of these references are allusions rather than direct or verbatim citations.

26 Johannes von Segovia, De gladio, 31.418-19, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 702: «Sigillum namque confirmat potius quam annulat scripturam, cui additur, si verum sigillum est... »
testaments, the Qur’ān misrepresents the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament and between these Scriptures and the Qur’ān itself.27 As Santiago Madrigal has emphasized, in making this claim Segovia endeavors to place Islam within a trajectory of salvation history that moves from natural law to the Mosaic law to the law of grace or Gospel.28 Interestingly, Segovia uses the Qur’ānic text not only to locate Islam in his vision of heilsgeschichte and to criticize the Qur’ān itself, but also to challenge Christian theologians to prepare themselves more adequately for debate with Muslims who misconstrue the relationship between Law and Gospel.29

As is well-known, desire for peaceful interaction with Muslims characterized Segovia’s engagement with Islam. Accordingly, he uses the Qur’ān to support his irenic via pacis et doctrinae. For example, toward the beginning of the De gladio, he writes:

One should not doubt that the Saracens themselves are eager for those things that treat of peace, since their own law enjoins them to seek peace. For it [i.e. the Qur’ān] says: «Do not be despisers, but love peace and invite peace, for in that way you will be worthier and more powerful».30

The reference is to Sura 47:35-36. Segovia includes a nearly identical statement with the very same citation from the Qur’ān in his letter to Cusa in 1454.31 Since this passage is seemingly at odds with the numerous Qur’ānic texts Segovia marshals to illustrate how the Qur’ān encourages violence and aggression,32 this reference to Sura 47 underscores Segovia’s ambivalence

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27 See Johannes de Segovia, Liber de magna auctoritate, 10.42.10, op. cit., p. 496.
29 See Johannes de Segovia, Liber de magna auctoritate, 10.42.10, op. cit., p. 496.
31 Cited in ibid., p. 192.
toward Islam and the Qurʾān. He knows and repeats the commonplace Christian view of the violent Muslim, but his plan for peaceful exchange nonetheless drives him to identify and deploy a peace-loving passage that strengthens his case. Intriguingly, Segovia does not use this text, as Petrus Alfonsi might have done, to emphasize the internal contradictions within the Qurʾān. Rather, as Anne Marie Wolf has rightly argued, Segovia uses this text primarily to persuade Christians of the possibility for pacific interaction with Muslims and perhaps also to remind Muslims themselves of this aspect of their own scriptural tradition.

As an integral part of pacific interaction, Segovia envisions a theological exchange between Christians and Muslims that he occasionally calls contraferentia or sometimes collatio. Here again he uses the Qurʾān to justify and support his vision for interreligious dialogue. Toward this end, Segovia shows a notable fondness for Sura 29:46 — a passage he cites explicitly and verbatim in several different writings. Translated from Ketton’s Latin this

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33 On this ambivalence, see Burman, Reading the Qurʾān, op. cit., p. 193. For examples of similar ambivalence in other medieval authors, see George-Tvrtković, Christians, Muslims, and Mary, op. cit., chap. 4.


35 See Wolf, Juan de Segovia and the Fight for Peace, op. cit., pp. 192-93.

36 In contrast to Cabanelas, Wolf, ibid., pp. 176ff. argues against an «ordered process» in Segovia’s «plan» for such interaction.

37 On Segovia’s occasional and inconsistent use of the term contraferentia, see ibid., pp. 177-78. The term collatio appears, e.g., in Johannes de Segovia, De gladio, 3.76, op. cit., p. 60; and ibid., 7.185, op. cit., p. 144.

38 Segovia’s plan for such dialogue seems to me to belong to the «culture of disputation» described by Alex J. Novikoff. See Novikoff, A.J., «Toward a Cultural History of Scholastic Disputation», American Historical Review, 117/2 (2012), pp. 331-64; and idem, The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. Novikoff provides a potential precedent for Segovia’s use of the term collatio in the work of Peter the Chanter (d. 1197) who «urged fellow theologians to fashion their debates not into altercations (altercationes) but into more productive conversations (collationes)». See Novikoff, «Toward a Cultural History of Scholastic Disputation», op. cit., p. 349.

39 See Johannes de Segovia, Liber de magna auctoritate, 10.6.5, op. cit., p. 379; De gladio, 3.79-81, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 60; and Replica magne continencie (= Letter to Germain; cited by U. Roth in Johannes de Segovia, De gladio, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 61, n. 29). U. Roth (ibid.) has
passage reads, «You [i.e. the Muslim] should speak with all men of laws [a common Qur’ānic expression for Christians], except for the evil ones, and always debate with them using honest or sincere words». Clearly Segovia saw in this verse Qur’ānic approbation of his plan for interreligious dialogue. When citing Sura 29 in the LMA, Segovia acknowledges that many people (he may have Riccoldo da Montecroce in mind) wrongly think that the Qur’ān prohibits such dialogue. Segovia’s citation disproves this perception — at least to his own satisfaction — such that he must find other reasons, notably fear of being bested, for what he considers the Muslim reluctance to engage in theological disputation. Once again, Segovia cites the Qur’ān to persuade both Christians and Muslims, and in that order.

Like his contemporaries, Segovia could use the Qur’ān to rehearse medieval anti-Islamic commonplaces, but he also invokes Qur’ānic authority to buttress a distinctive approach to Christian-Muslim relations. Thus, while contemporaries such as Heymericus de Campo might use the Qur’ān to support conciliarist ecclesiology, and others such as Nicholas of Cusa employed pia interpretatio to turn the Qur’ān into a source for Christian doctrine, Segovia uses the Qur’ān, admittedly among other uses, to endorse his way of peace and doctrine. Common to all, of course — as Norman Daniel noted — is the assumption that Qur’ānic authority can and should serve Christian ends.

recognized the importance of this passage for Segovia. This is an appropriate place to note that this text is mistranslated in my «Juan de Segovia on the Superiority of Christians», op. cit., p. 155.

40 «Omnes viri/homines legum preter malos honestis verbis disputando semper alloqui ...». Some authors understood viri legum as referring to Jews as well as Christians, see Daniel, Islam and the West, op. cit., p. 347.


42 See Johannes de Segovia, Liber de magna auctoritate, 10.6.5, op. cit., p. 379.


Although Segovia sometimes employs the language of elimination or extermination in relation to Islam, his ultimate goal was to convert Muslims in order to save their souls. Soteriology was thus fundamental to Segovia’s project. While salvation for Segovia meant recognition of and assent to essential doctrines such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, it also involved acceptance of and engagement with practices — practices aimed at remediing sin and communicating grace. In Consideratio 16 of the De gladio, Juan addresses Islam’s lack of sacraments and the corresponding hopelessness resulting from this lack. As he puts it, «it is clear from their law that the Saracens have no sacrament the observing of which would allow them to rejoice as participants in divine grace...».

Segovia’s subsequent discussion of baptism, penance and the Eucharist — Christian sacraments that involve respectively remission of sins, absolution of sins committed after baptism, and spiritual nourishment as support against sin — contrasts the two religions by juxtaposing their sacred texts. Much is traditional here. The contrast takes Christian practice as normative and

45 For this extermination language, see, e.g., Segovia’s letter to Cusa (cited in ibid., p. 191 n. 18).
46 See Mann, «Juan de Segovia on the Superiority of Christians», op. cit., p. 152.
47 On the growing importance of sin and salvation in Segovia’s thought as a result of his qur’ānic studies, see Roth and Scotto, «Auf der Suche nach der Erbsünde im Koran: Die Allegationes de peccatis primi parentis des Juan de Segovia», op. cit., p. 202. On the particular focus of Spaniards on Islamic practices, see Bunes Ibarra, M.A. de, «La evolución de la polémica anti-islámica en los teólogos españoles del primer Renacimiento», in H. Santiago-Otero (ed.), Diálogo filosófico-religioso entre el Cristianismo, Judaísmo e Islamismo durante la Edad Media en la Península Ibérica, Brussels, Brepols, 1994, pp. 414-415. Daniel, Islam and the West, op. cit., p. 253, suggests that the Christians who cared about Muslim practices were those who had actual contact with Muslims. On Segovia’s experience with Muslims, see Álvarez-Gómez, Über die Bedingungen des Friedens im Glauben, op. cit., pp. 15-16; and Wolf, Juan de Segovia and the Fight for Peace, op. cit. For further background on medieval religious practices from an interreligious perspective, see Martínez Gázquez, J. and Tolan, J.V. (eds.), Ritus infidelium: Miradas interconfesionales sobre las prácticas religiosas en la Edad Media, Collection de la Casa de Velázquez 138, Madrid, Casa de Velázquez, 2013, especially the essay by Antoni Biosca i Bas (pp. 29-44).
48 Johannes de Segovia, De gladio, 16.7-8, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 328: «[Sarraceni]..., quantum apparat ex lege eorum, nullum habent sacramentum, quod observantes Gloriari possint divinae gratiae fieri participes... ». Bobzin, H. «A Treasury of Heresies: Christian Polemics against the Koran», op. cit., p. 168, notes the conviction, present in Luther and more recent Christian commentators, that «Islam is barely anything other than ritual, but a ritual without mysteries and sacraments».
49 On the traditional Christian polemic against Islam’s pseudo-sacraments or lack of sacraments, see Daniel, Islam and the West, op. cit., pp. 220-254.
assumes its superiority. Segovia thus cites the Qur’ān in this context in order to reveal Islam’s inadequacies.

Of course, practice implies or perhaps provokes a theology. Not surprisingly, Segovia begins his examination of sacrament by invoking a classic medieval definition from Augustine by way of Peter Lombard: «a sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace». When Segovia then cites Sura 4:43 and 5:6 verbatim, he does so to conclude that the Islamic ablutions described in these suras do not move beyond common external washing and thus do not rise to the level of sacrament.

Relatively, according to Segovia, the Qur’ānic text demonstrates that Muhammed neither employed the proper form nor displayed a proper sacramental intent when he enjoined such washing. In contrast, Jesus’ institution of baptism in John 3:5 («unless a man be born again of water... ») includes proper form, intent, and salvific purpose.

Similarly, in the case of penance, Segovia contrasts John 20:23 (in a conciliarist or at least non-Petrine interpretation) with Sura 5:39-40 to show that while Muhammed only gave general advice about forgiveness in his law, Jesus established the specific authority to forgive sins. Moreover, citing Sura 5:7-8 and Sura 9:102-105, Segovia criticizes the Qur’ānic notion of confession as fundamentally different from and inferior to Christian confession, as exclusively internal not oral, and as altogether too easy.

In turning to the Eucharist, that sacrament of most singular grace, Segovia notes that Islam has nothing similar and, in fact, he recalls from personal experience that Muslims mock Christians for eating their God. Because the Eucharist is a sacrifice as well as a sacrament, Segovia here uses the Qur’ān, notably Sura 22:26-30, to discuss Muslim sacrifices. These he connects with the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law. Particularly noteworthy is Segovia’s interest in Muslim practice around animal sacrifice. Citing a certain

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53 Johannes von Segovia, De gladio, 1648ff., op. cit., vol. 1, p. 332. For background, see also Wei, J.C., Gratian the Theologian, Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Canon Law 13, Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press, 2016, p. 71 with n. 2.

54 Johannes von Segovia, De gladio, 16, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 332-34.

55 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 334-36.
gloss to Sura 22, he observes that Islam sometimes permits camel sacrifice even while the Mosaic Law (Lev 11:4) views camels as unclean. He writes that, «from the beginning of my Qurʾānic studies and in all the intervening years, I could not find any Muslim or anyone knowledgeable about Islamic ceremonies who could tell me whether and how this camel sacrifice occurred». That he even sought such an interlocutor is itself telling.

Segovia’s treatment of these three salvific sacraments provides a fine illustration of his polemical purpose as well as his underlying soteriological concerns. He concludes his discussion by saying that Muslims have no hope of salvation in part because they haven’t a single sacrament «by which they can be certain to receive forgiveness of their sins». Although not exactly presented in dialogue form, Segovia’s use of the Qurʾān in this discussion and his very juxtapositioning of Qurʾānic and biblical texts may also be seen as rather unexpected examples of interreligious dialogue. In this case, the dialogue partners are simply texts, not people. As Averil Cameron has argued, commentary and exegesis are themselves forms of dialogue, and Segovia’s use of the Qurʾān in the De gladio may rightly be considered scriptural commentary or exegesis.

This reliance upon scripture, be it Qurʾānic or biblical, should remind us that, despite his well-known confidence in natural reason’s role, Segovia also

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56 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 336: «Sed utrum hoc et quomodo fiat, non affirmatur. Nusquam enim post coeptum studium huius libri nec a pluribus citra annis horum scriptorii avisamentorum opportunum se obtulit de materia sectae huius conferre cum aliquo ex Sarracenis vel alio sciente caeremonias eorum».


58 Cameron, A. «Can Christians Do Dialogue?», Studia Patristica, 63 (2012), p. 107. For contemporary examples of a somewhat similar side-by-side presentation and examination of Qurʾānic and biblical texts, see Lodahl, M., Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qurʾān Side by Side, Grand Rapids, MI, Brazos, 2010; and Ipgrave, M. (ed.), Scriptures in Dialogue: Christians and Muslims Studying the Bible and the Qurʾān Together, London, Church House Publishing, 2004. Of course, the assumptions and attitudes of these modern efforts at dialogic reading differ significantly from those of Segovia and all other medievals.
recognized the value of scriptural authority in interreligious dialogue. Of course, the twist that Segovia’s use of the Qur’ān introduces is that the scriptural authority he invokes is the scripture of the other. Cusa similarly recognized the authority of the Qur’ān among Muslims. As he wrote to Segovia, «thus it seems that we should always strive to invoke this book [i.e., the Qur’ān], that has such authority for them, in ways favorable to us». I’d suggest that in recognizing and invoking the authority of the Qur’ān, Segovia (and perhaps Cusa too) is simply following the rules of academic theological debate as he knew them. According to Thomas Aquinas, for example, «in such theological disputation one must most especially make use of authorities that one’s interlocutors accept», particularly when one’s aim is to remove doubt about the matter in question. We can thus attribute a pedagogical purpose to Segovia’s use of the Qur’ān. However, we might rightly ask just who his students should be.

In the *Summa contra Gentiles* — a work Segovia sometimes drew upon but apparently did not own — Aquinas asserts that when presenting supra-


60 Nicolaus de Cusa, *De pace fidei cum epistula ad Ioannem de Segobia*, op. Cit., p. 99: «Unde videtur quod semper ad hoc conandum sit quod liber iste, qui apud eos est in auctoritate, pro nobis allegetur».

rational truths one might adduce certain arguments that are not intended to convince one’s adversaries but rather «to exercise and console the faithful».

Although the specific context may differ, Segovia’s pedagogical purpose clearly shares this aim and audience. That is, in his use of the Qurʾān, Segovia seeks above all to instruct Christians and to prepare them for disputational engagement with Muslims. Mark Jordan’s comment on the passage from Aquinas is relevant here: «Resolving doubts by disputation not only strengthens conviction, it stretches memory and builds capacity for recognizing truth across topics and language... Disputation through authorities must also count as consoling meditation on divine truth...».

Segovia’s use of the Qurʾān serves both to stretch and console his co-religionists. Whether his invocation and application of Qurʾānic authority should prove convincing to Muslims is obviously a different matter, even assuming that Juan thought it would be convincing to them. Of course, defining the self requires encounter with the «other».

According to David Bertaina, in his recent discussion of Christians and the Qurʾān, «Christians have appropriated Qurʾānic authority for a variety of usages including apologetics, polemics, translation, theological reflection, evangelization, and academic purposes». Given his aim, Bertaina understandably presents these as discrete usages or approaches. Interestingly, however, Segovia’s engagement with the Qurʾān — even within a single text, the De gladio — includes almost all of these strategies, though admittedly not all to the same extent. Like an apologist, he «cites the Qurʾān as an authority

62 Thomas Aquinas, Summa contra gentiles 1.9, ed. Fratres praedicatorum, in Thomas Aquinas, Opera omnia, vol. 13, Roma, Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1918, p. 22: «Sunt tamen ad huiusmodi veritatem manifestandam rationes aliquae verisimiles inducendae, ad fidelium quidem exercitium et solatium, non autem ad adversarios convincendos». On Segovia’s use of this Summa, see Scotto, «Inseguire l’Islām tra memoria e teologia spigolature su Juan de Segovia intorno al 1427», op. cit., pp 117-18. This work is not included in Segovia’s library; see Hernández Montes, B., Biblioteca de Juan de Segovia: Edición y comentario de su escritura de donación, Bibliotheca theologica hispana. Serie 2a, Textos 3, Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Francisco Suárez, 1984.


64 See Valkenberg, «Polemics, Apologetics, and Dialogue as Forms of Interreligious Communication between Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages», op. cit., p. 383: «......the formation of the self requires the presence of the others». Wolf, Juan de Segovia and the Fight for Peace, op. cit., pp. 206-207, argues that Segovia was genuinely interested in conversion and not merely in the fortification of Christians’ confidence or pride.

65 Bertaina, «Christians and the Qurʾān», op. cit., p. 279.
to demonstrate that Christian faith and practice agree with Qur’ānic interpretation». As we have seen, and like a polemicist, Segovia claims that «the Qur’ān is flawed» in various ways. In keeping with the work of other Christian translators, Segovia produces a tri-lingual translation «in order to understand the Qur’ān properly and to refute its content». His is certainly «an attempt to be as accurate as possible in its renderings of lexical and linguistic meanings of the Arabic». Segovia’s use of the Qur’ān also involves theological reflection — on the nature of religious practices for example. But unlike the modern theological investigation Bertaina refers to, Segovia’s theological investigation of the Qur’ān does not «seek to understand the text fully on its own terms». Although famously skeptical about the efficacy of missions, Segovia envisions an intellectual mission or mission of intellectuals ultimately aimed at learned Muslims, and his use of the Qur’ān, notably the frequent juxtaposition of qur’ānic and biblical texts, serves as preparation for that mission. As regards academic purpose, one cannot attribute to Segovia the supposed academic objectivity of subsequent centuries, but one can see how his criticism of the Qur’ān’s inconsistencies and his desire for philological accuracy could contribute to the so-called «higher criticism» of sacred texts.

In sum, Juan de Segovia’s use of the Qur’ān suggests or exemplifies each of Bertaina’s several strategies for Christian engagement with the Qur’ān. Not surprisingly, just as he read the Qur’ān in various ways, Segovia also used or cited the Qur’ān in various ways, for various ends and even, at least potentially, for various audiences. We end, then, with three summary conclusions. First, Segovia saw in the Qur’ān some justification for his distinctive approach to Muslim-Christian relations, and he cites the pertinent qur’ānic passages to support his position. Second, as he became increasingly concerned with sin and soteriology in connection with Islam, Segovia used a comparison of qur’ānic and biblical texts about practices or sacraments to underscore

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66 Ibid., p. 283. See the title of Johannes von Segovia, De gladio, 7, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 130: «Septima consideratio de spe multitudinis convertendae Sarracenorum eorum lege plurimas, quae inseruntur, affirmante veritates catholicae fidei, quantum vero ad mores virtutes quam plurimas in evangelio contentas persuadente».


68 Ibid. See Burman, Reading the Qur’ān, op. cit., pp. 178-197. Interestingly, Bertaina does not include Segovia’s work is his list of Christian translations, perhaps because the text has not survived.


70 Ibid., p. 284. This is not to deny that Segovia occasionally showed significant interest in, and appreciation for, Muslim interpretation of the Qur’ān.

71 See, e.g., Wolf, Juan de Segovia and the Fight for Peace, op. cit., pp. 153-54.

what he perceived to be Islam’s inadequacy around forgiveness of sins. Third, Segovia recognized the importance of Scriptural authority as well as reason in interreligious dialogue. His invocation of Qur’ānic authority was intended at least as much to educate and prepare Christians for that dialogue as it was to persuade possible Muslim dialogue partners.

The title of a key source for this brief paper, De gladio, may rightly remind some (especially those who cannot quote Ephesians 6:17 or Hebrews 4:12 from memory) that «the pen can be mightier than the sword». In keeping with this adage and its biblical precedents, Juan de Segovia’s varied use of the Qur’ān illustrates how texts, above all sacred texts, can indeed be weaponized, even for peaceful purposes.

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73 This phrase may be traced to Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s 1839 play Richelieu, Or the Conspiracy, but its roots lie even earlier. See https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/the-pen-is-mightier-than-the-sword.html.