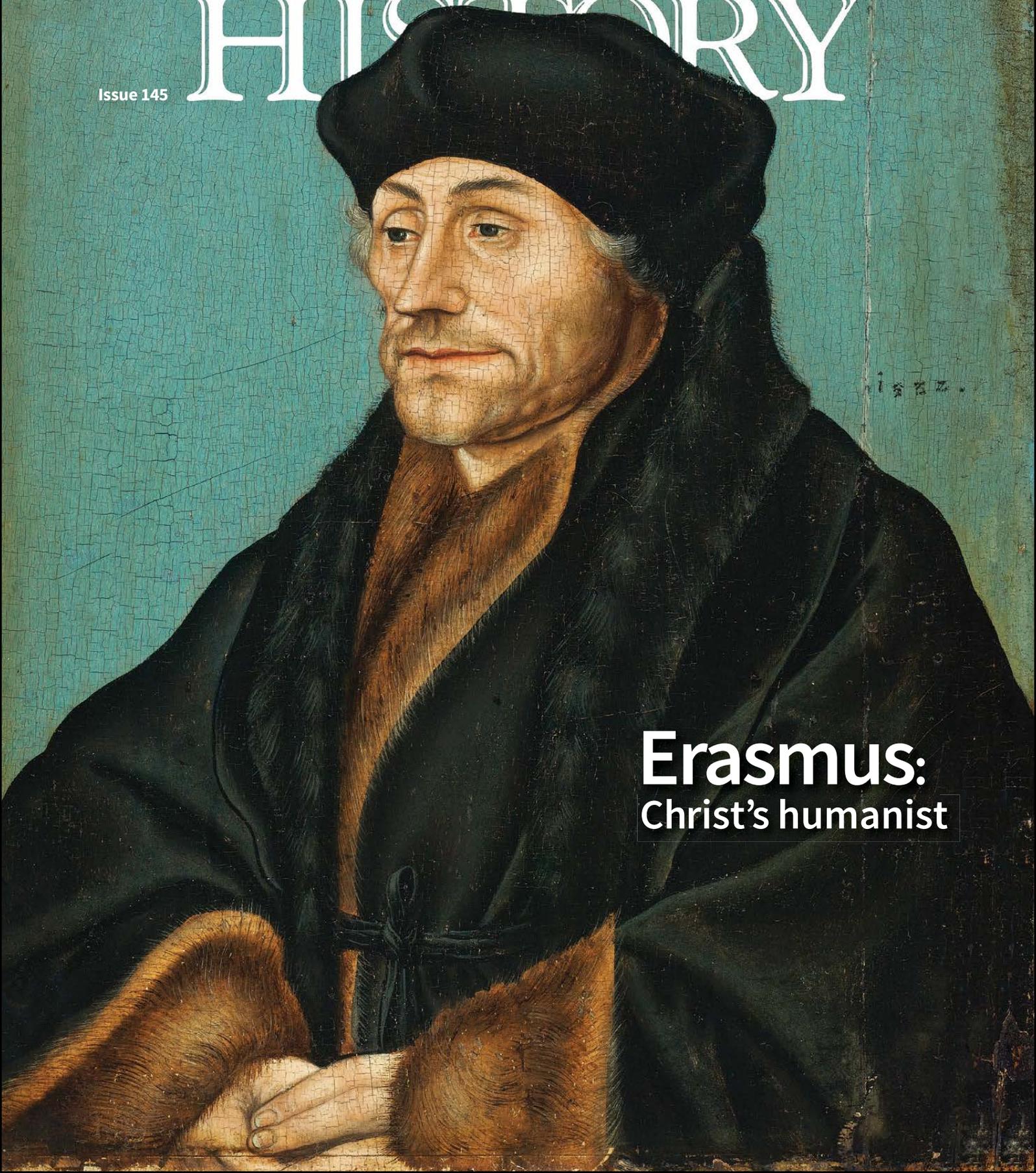
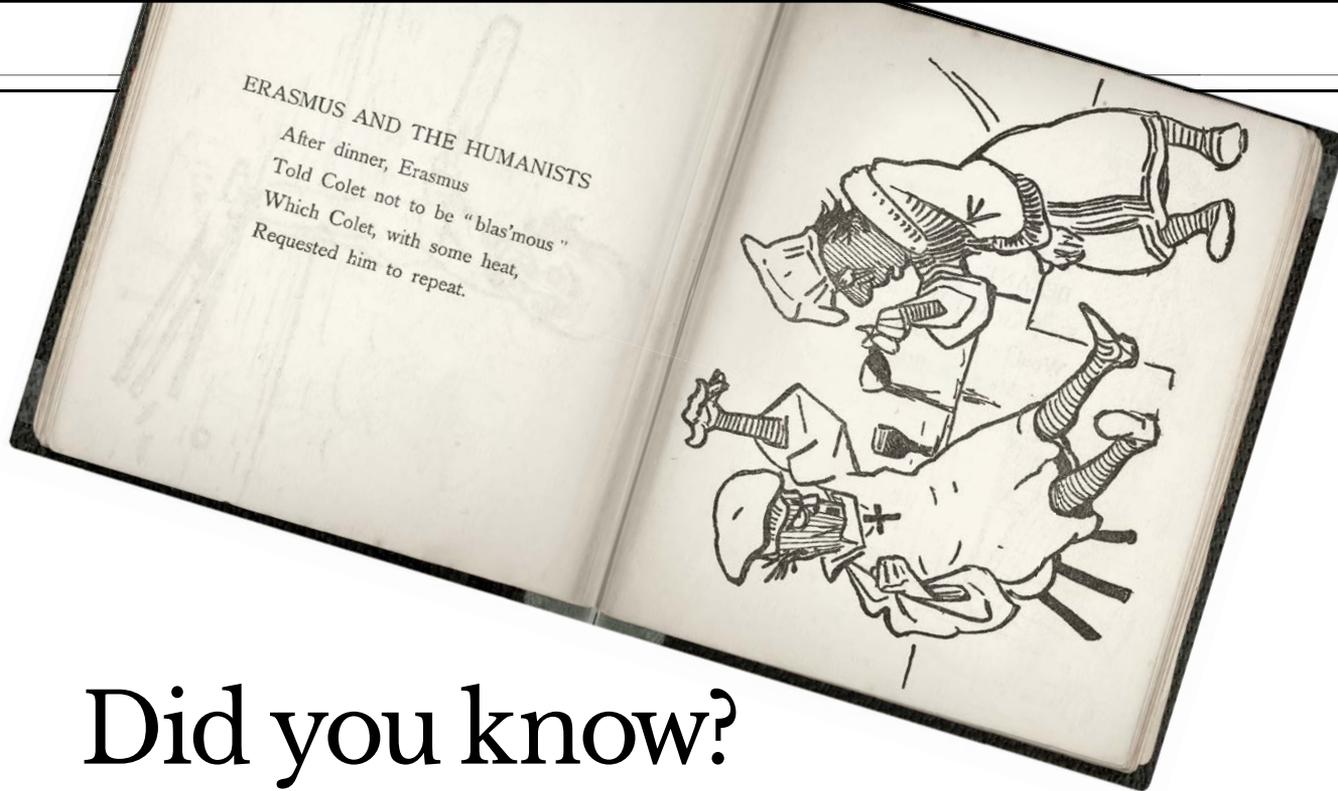


CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 145



Erasmus:
Christ's humanist



Did you know?

WHAT ERASMUS THOUGHT ABOUT PREACHING, PROVERBS, SHOPPING, AND MARTIN LUTHER

SAY THAT AGAIN? E. C. Bentley, with illustrations by none other than G. K. Chesterton, gave 1905 readers a taste of a debate between Erasmus and his friend John Colet.

TOPPING THE BESTSELLER LIST

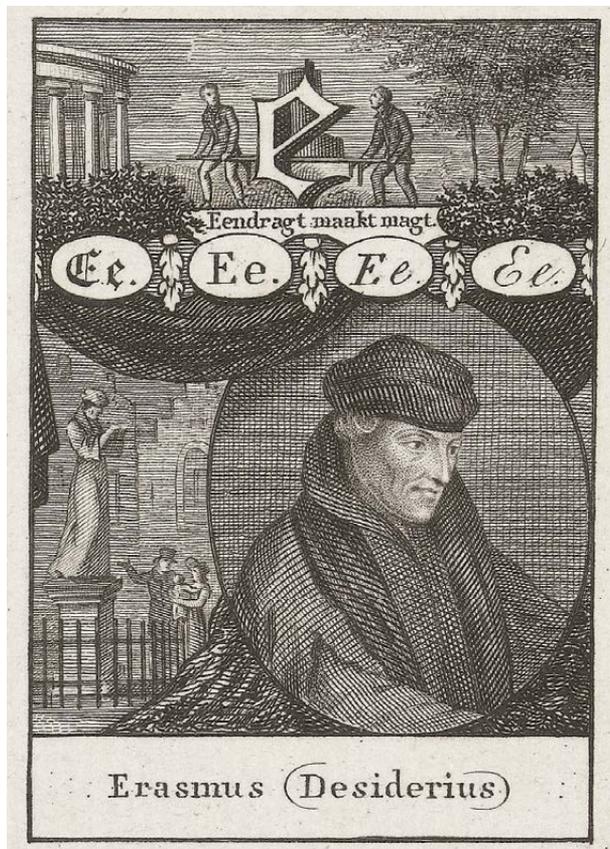
Erasmus had the first “bestseller” of the age of printing; *Praise of Folly* appeared in over 600 editions and the *Colloquies* in over 300. By the 1530s as much as 20 percent of all books published carried Erasmus’s byline. His satirical writings did suffer satire’s common fate: many people took them as serious historical narratives and statements of fact. As a result his fictional accounts of medieval Catholicism, exaggerated for literary effect, deeply influenced the post-Reformation English narrative of the pre-Reformation Catholic world.

DID ERASMUS REALLY SAY...?

The most famous quote attributed to Erasmus is usually rendered—on websites, posters, mugs, totebags, and the like—as “When I get a little money, I buy books; and if any is left, I buy food and clothes.” What he actually said, in an April 1500 letter to his friend and patron Jacob Batt, was, “The first thing I shall do, as soon as the money arrives, is to buy some Greek authors; and after that I shall buy clothes.”

A BAD EGG?

In 1523 Erasmus wrote to a friend that the Franciscans were complaining that he had “laid the egg that Luther hatched.” Erasmus rejected this, writing that he had “laid a hen’s egg: Luther hatched a bird of quite different breed.” Nevertheless the saying took on a life of its own, quoted for generations by those who disapproved of Luther’s reforms and those who welcomed them. In 1534 Nicholas Herborn, head of the German Franciscans, elaborated that “Erasmus is Luther’s father; he laid the eggs and Luther hatched out the chicks.”



E IS FOR ERASMUS This 1812 Dutch school reader used Erasmus’s picture to help teach children to read.



A PROVERB A DAY...

Erasmus's *Adages* was first published in 1500. By 1536 he had collected, edited, and commented on more than 4,100 proverbs and sayings. Here are a few:

- **On friendship:** "Among friends all things should be in common."
- **On war:** "War is a treat for those who have not tried it."
- **On choosing the right parents:** "One ought to be born a king or a fool."
- **On fretting:** "Let not care corrode and gnaw your heart."
- **On helping others:** "Help those who are willing to receive instruction and help those who try but have not strength."
- **On persistence:** "When engaged in a wearying task, persist to the end."
- **On useless argument:** "Arguing against what is clear and self-evident is like denying that the sun shines at mid-day."
- **On knowing one's limits:** "The shoemaker should not go beyond his last."
- **On exceptional perception:** "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king."
- **On effort:** "More haste, less speed" and "God helps those who help themselves."
- **On grief:** "Time tempers grief."

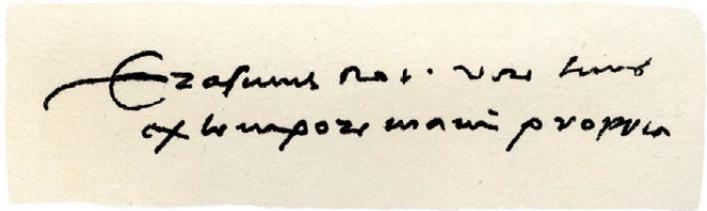
RULES FOR PREACHING

Erasmus did not like jokes in sermons (although in his 1535 handbook *Ecclesiastes: On the Art of Preaching*, he repeated some as examples of what not to do). If preachers insist on telling jokes and stories, he said, they should take them not from bawdy medieval tales but from "ancient" sources; they should use them "sparingly" and apologetically; and they should not simply aim to get a laugh, but to "render most pleasant to [the] audience that which is most wholesome."

A LASTING LEGACY

More things than you might think are named after Erasmus

TREASURE CHEST Erasmus had many friends. He left this chest, among many other personal effects, to one of them, Bonifacius Amerbach (see p. 38).



SIGNS AND SYMBOLS Hans Holbein painted Erasmus (*left*) as Terminus, the Roman god of boundaries, whom Erasmus often identified with; in a 1525 letter to Nicholas Everaerts (*above*), Erasmus signs his name.

today. The Praemium Erasmianum Foundation, a Dutch cultural organization founded in 1958 to strengthen the humanities in Europe, awards a yearly Erasmus Prize. The journal *First Things* has sponsored an annual Erasmus Lecture since 1985. The European Union's Erasmus Mundus program sponsors scholarships and courses for non-European Union residents, and its Erasmus+ Programme supports student exchanges for EU residents to study abroad.

Erasmus University in Erasmus's hometown of Rotterdam opened in 1913 (Rotterdam has also named a bridge and a hospital after him). Finally, Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn—one of the United States' oldest schools—opened in 1786 as a private academy. Founding donors included John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and Aaron Burr.

ERASMUS ON THE BIBLE

"I would to God that the plowman would sing a text of the Scripture at his plow and that the weaver would hum them to the tune of his shuttle. . . . I wish that the traveler would expel the weariness of his journey with this pastime. And, to be brief, I wish that all communication of the Christian would be of the Scriptures."—*Paraclesis* (1516) **GH**

Thanks to Paul Michelson of Huntington University for submitting "Bestseller list," "A proverb a day," and "Erasmus on the Bible." Read his article on Erasmus and Thomas More on p. 32.



Letters to the editor

Readers respond to *Christian History*

MORE STORIES OF HEALING

[In #142] one of the great healers was completely missed—Venerable Paul of Moll. He was a Benedictine monk from Belgium (1824–1896) who had an astonishing healing ministry captured in the unforgettable book *Fr. Paul of Moll*. Hundreds of miracles are captured in this account—barely a frac-



tion of the entire corpus of his ministry—and [it] includes eyewitness accounts not only of healings, but of prophecies, levitations, bilocations and transfigurations.—Craig Turner, Springfield, VA

Even with expanding the healing issue to double the size of our usual CH, we found much more history than we could possibly cover! P.S. We've asked Mr. Turner if he'd like to blog about Paul of Moll for the website.

I have been praying for healing of the sick for over 50 years—with varying degrees of “success.” For various reasons, five years ago I stopped doing so. After recently devouring #142, I am greatly emboldened with renewed confidence to resume praying for the sick. Thank you for such an inspired, comprehensive issue about divine healing!—Bill Boylan, Rapid City, SD

I once . . . [took] a friend who didn't know the Lord to Bible Study Fellowship. Her car door swung shut on my foot—horrible pain, heard bones break. Yet when we got to the church. . . I had no pain, none! Got out of car and we walked inside the church. Still nothing and the Lord saved her for eternity.—Charlotta Decker, Grand Rapids, MI

I plan to give copies of this issue to those who are sick, suffering, and in need of prayer / anointing as a way of providing encouragement and bolstering their faith. I'm very grateful to have made a small contribution to the writing.—John Rogers Knight, Milton, MA, author for #142

CONTESTED TESTAMENT

The issue on healing is interesting, enlightening and well done. I do take issue with Candy Gunther Brown's [use of] the term “The Jewish Scriptures. . .” For Christians this is properly referred to as the Old Testament. I'm sure she knows this Testament belongs not only to the Jews but to God's plan of redemption for Jews and Christians.—Jon Lusheron, digital subscriber

As you know if you've read our issue #133 on Christianity and Judaism, this is a fraught topic. As a magazine publishing mainly for Christians, we frequently use the term Old Testament, but we do not have a problem using the term Hebrew or Jewish Scriptures when referring to the use of this text by and for Jewish worshipers.

RESPECTFUL DIALOGUE

What a delightful, enriching, encouraging and edifying edition you have produced on what I think is, safe to say, the still controversial issue . . . of divine healing. Bill's letter in particular is a reminder of a generalization . . . that a person with an experience is never at the mercy of a person with an argument. Your coverage of healing through the ages was insightful. I would add for those who might conclude that healing began with Jesus in the NT because of your coverage and progression, that God has always been in the healing business as confirmed by numerous examples in the OT. . .

I'm sure you may have heard from others who may not be convinced of divine healing and I hope their criticisms were respectful. Having been a Pentecostal believer since I accepted Christ some 44 years ago, I have been on the receiving end of some very caustic remarks. This always dismays me since I believe we are enjoined by Christ to be one with each other as we are one in Him. (John 17:21)

The day is coming when that unity will be perfected. In the meantime, I guess we may continue to have differing opinions and interpretations, hopefully in a respectful manner.—Tom Edmunds, Washington, NJ

Thanks for your kind and nuanced words and your faithful support, Tom!

MORE POPES, PLEASE

I enjoy your magazine very much. Very impressive research on your part. Pictures from the archives are always a welcome addition to the stories. I would like to see more stories on the Catholic Church and popes, etc. Thanks for your effort!—Barbara Tibbetts, Portage, MI

We hope to soon publish an issue on Vatican II.

BUT MAYBE NOT THIS POPE

Issue 144 is a typically beautiful issue, and I am enjoying it very much. However, it seems strange to me that on p. 67 reference is made to Pope John XXIII without mentioning the fact that he is considered an antipope, or distinguishing him from John XXIII of the 20th century.—Patrick Wadsworth, Lafayette, LA

While we noted that the Council of Constance removed the 15th-c. John XXIII from office, which implied he was an antipope, we didn't actually state this. Thanks!

ABUNDANT LIVING

I want to take the time to thank you for sending me your magazine. I really enjoy reading about the different people who have been instrumental in the church. The one on E. Stanley Jones has been my favorite. I wrote to his organization and they sent me his *Abundant Living* devotional. I share the magazine with other men that want to learn about our past. It has been a blessing.—Matthew George, CCCF, Olney Springs, CO

I am an enthusiastic reader of *Christian History*, having subscribed for many years, and collecting each issue diligently. I was upset when at one stage the printing of the magazine was suspended for a couple of years, and delighted when it was resurrected. India is the land of my birth, and I particularly enjoyed #87, "Faith of many colors," and ... #136 on E. Stanley Jones. He was a powerful witness to Christ who profoundly impacted my faith journey when I met him as a young man still at the university.—Gilchrist McLaren, Mission, BC, Canada

We're glad our issue on Jones was a blessing.

HAPPY FORTIETH TO US

Congratulations on the 40th Anniversary of this excellent resource for the study of the Christian church. I received the first issue in 1982, and every issue since; passing on each one for others to enjoy and benefit from.... May God continue to bless this ministry until the day of the Lord Jesus's return.—Glenn Swygart, Winchester, TN

SHOWING STUDENTS THE HAND OF GOD

I just received "Christian History in Images." Thank you for this terrific edition!! It is beautifully presented, and will be a treasured item in my library. I have been a subscriber since the 1990s. The magazines have been well used. As a teacher, I used many of the articles in my classroom to help my students understand God's hand moving through history. I often loaned issues to students as they did research for an assignment.—Jo Anne Bennett, Midwest City, OK

I appreciate the beautiful issue (144) and certainly want to continue my subscription. What a service—and how often I actually use these in class—especially this past summer teaching in Oxford, England. Church history comes alive for students through the pages of *CHI*!—Betsy Flowers, Waco, TX (advisor for #126)

STILL TOUCHING LIVES

Every issue—and I mean every—is like a devotional. I am constantly learning new spiritual truths, being challenged and encouraged by the experiences and trials of those that have gone before us. . . . #105, *Christianity in Early Africa*, introduced me to the idea that divisiveness in the church is a theological issue—[in] the Editor's Note and in "See how these Christians love one another" and "Breaking the bonds of love." . . . "Become completely as fire" is a much-needed call for the Church to evangelize the unsaved by actually loving them. What a wonderful and rare thought!—Jerry Salvatore, Centereach, NY

MORE ART HERE

After publishing #144, we became aware of the *Art in the Christian Tradition* database, which "offers more than seven thousand images of street art, mosaics, frescoes, manuscripts, sculptures, architecture, and paintings" from church history. We commend it as another source for images to complement those we included in #144.

MEET THE STAFF: SARA CAMPBELL

How long have you been at CHI, and what is your role?

I have been at CHI since 2014, and I am the subscription manager for *Christian History* magazine, providing customer service support for the magazine as well as for Vision Video (DVD distribution) and for Redeem TV (streaming service).



What is your favorite part of the job?

I most enjoy hearing from our readers about how the magazine and the other resources that we offer have touched their lives and have impacted their work and ministry.

What do you most wish readers knew?

Readers should know how profoundly grateful our team is for each and every generous gift of financial support that enables us to keep publishing such a high-quality, award-winning magazine.

What do you do in your spare time?

Away from the office, I enjoy reading, knitting, kayaking, and, most of all, spending time at the beach with family! **CHI**



Editor's note

When I was 50 years old, I fell in love with Erasmus.

I'd known about him ever since I started studying church history, of course. I would have been able to tell you that he lived in the sixteenth century, that he was a humanist involved in the northern Renaissance, that he disagreed with Luther, and—thanks to a great article about him by David Fink in our issue #115 on the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation—I could tell you a little bit about the famous New Testament that Erasmus edited and published and the critiques he made of the Catholic hierarchy.

But other than the odd quote in an article here and there, and the slightly inaccurate Erasmus quotation that appears on bookish trinkets everywhere (see our “Did you know?” inside front cover), I had never actually *read* any Erasmus until we began this issue.

I'm not sure whether I expected ponderous theology or perfectly balanced sixteenth-century rhetoric or Luther-like passionate denunciations. What I actually got, quite unexpectedly, was humor—not belly laughs, but a light, ironic, witty skewering of the pompous and hypocritical that sent me to Google asking, “Are Erasmus's *Colloquies* supposed to be funny?” (The answer, from both Google and my friends, was “Yes.”) The more I read, the more I came to appreciate both Erasmus's deep and sincere faith and his ability to make the reader smile even as he judged the reader's hypocrisies.

BEYOND A ROAD NOT TAKEN

I realized that there was so much more to Erasmus than simply a reforming road not taken—although, as we discussed in #115, that is part of the story. As this issue demonstrates, you can fruitfully talk about Erasmus the church reformer, but also about Erasmus the biblical humanist and about Erasmus the faithful Catholic. You can follow him on his continued journeys around Europe as he built up a network of friends and patrons; he was a forerunner of today's great troop of “alt-ac” PhDs with academic training but no academic institution to call home.

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You can observe him, with the help of friendly printers, become a one-man publishing operation with a far-reaching audience—a forerunner again, but this time perhaps of today's Instagram influencers. You can see his concern for how we educate the young and how we use our words wisely and well.

In all of these ways, Erasmus has much to say to us today, and it's long past time he headed up a *Christian History* issue. But I was most moved and surprised by something else entirely. I've always lived in the tension found in Mark 9:24 (where a father seeking healing for his son cries out to Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief!”). If a question about faith is to be asked, I'll ask it; if a hypocrisy needs puncturing, I'll puncture it; if those in authority need to be second guessed, I'll second guess them. In Erasmus I see someone who did all that and loved Jesus too.

At the end of *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus makes a statement that's probably intended to be funny (you can read the whole passage on p. 19). But it also made me cry, as I watched a man who made his living by wisdom humble himself before the foolishness of Christ:

And Christ himself, that he might the better relieve this folly, being the wisdom of the Father, yet in some manner became a fool when taking upon him the nature of man, he was found in shape as a man; as in like manner he was made sin that he might heal sinners.

Nor did he work this cure any other way than by the foolishness of the cross and a company of fat apostles, not much better, to whom also he carefully recommended folly but gave them a caution against wisdom and drew them together by the example of little children, lilies, mustard seed, and sparrows. . . .

With Erasmus, I'm going to follow the Christ of lilies and sparrows. How about you? **CH**



Jennifer Woodruff Tait
Managing editor

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JENNIFER WOODRUFF TAIT—CATHERINE TAIT

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DIE ALTE VND ERSTE STADT BASEL



A sixteenth-century influencer

GETTING TO KNOW ERASMUS

Erika Rummel

“I commend to you the thing I hold most dear—my posthumous reputation,” Erasmus (c. 1466–1536) wrote to his friend Conrad Goclenius in 1524. He was in his late fifties and having his first premonitions of death. To assure his place in posterity, he left Goclenius 400 gold florins to publish his *Collected Works*. He also supplied notes for an account of his life to preface the edition. In this tightly managed story, Erasmus construed his life as he wanted it to be perceived after his death—starting by eliminating inconvenient details about his illegitimate birth.

Erasmus claimed that his father, Gerardus Helye, was pressured by family to enter the priesthood but did “what men in despair often do: he ran away,” leaving his pregnant girlfriend behind. Told that she had died, Helye did take vows, only to discover that he had been deceived. She was still alive.

The real story wasn’t so romantic. Erasmus kept silent about his older brother, and parish records suggest his father was already a priest when the older child was born. Being born to unmarried parents had serious consequences in Erasmus’s time. Laws prevented Erasmus from obtaining an academic degree or from entering an ecclesiastical office—unless he

HOME SWEET CITY Large portions of Erasmus’s life centered around Basel (seen here in the 15th c.).

obtained a papal dispensation, which he did in 1506, with the help of friends in high places.

“NO SAVOUR OF CHRIST”

After both his parents died of the plague, Erasmus’s guardians urged the orphaned teenager to enter a monastery at Steyn near Gouda. He did so reluctantly and found the cloistered life not to his taste:

The conversations [were] so cold and inept, with no savour of Christ, the dinners so profane in their spirit, in short, the whole tenor of life was such that, if the ceremonies were removed, I cannot see what would be left that was desirable.

What bothered him most was the abbot’s contempt for secular learning. Erasmus resorted to secret study at night and in a few months “went right through the principal authors in these furtive and nocturnal sessions, to the great peril of his delicate health.” At last he got permission from the bishop of

POPULAR GUY Erasmus on a late 18th-c. plaque (near right), a 1519 coin (far right), and a 1540 wooden relief (below).

Cambrai to go to Paris, the center of theological studies, and attend lectures at the Collège de Montaigu, a hostel for poor students. The conditions were so horrid that many of the students died:

On the ground floor were cubicles with rotten plaster, near stinking latrines. No one ever lived in these without either dying or getting a terrible disease. I omit for the present the astonishingly savage floggings . . . human cruelty corrupting inexperienced and tender youth under the guise of religion.

Erasmus left within a year to make his living tutoring young men. Among them was Lord Mountjoy, who invited his teacher to accompany him to England. There Erasmus met Thomas More (1478–1535) and his circle of learned friends, who inspired him to take up biblical studies. He never graduated from a university, although the University of Turin conferred a doctorate of theology on him *per saltum*, that is, without the usual requirements. Not surprisingly other theologians, who had gone through rigorous examinations, refused to recognize his qualifications. “A hapless university it is for granting a degree to such a pseudo-theologian!” sneered the Carthusian monk and theologian, Pierre Cousturier.

For the rest of his life, Erasmus worked as an independent scholar: traveling in England, France, and Italy, living in Leuven, and then settling down in Basel. He moved once more, to Catholic Freiburg, when Basel turned Protestant in 1529.

As his fame grew, admirers financed him and endowed him with sinecure ecclesiastical offices, which did not require residence. Emperor Charles V made him his councilor but rarely paid the promised stipend. Erasmus’s last will shows that he lived comfortably at the time of his death in 1536. True to his Christian principles, he disposed of his wealth charitably, establishing a fund to supply dowries for poor young women and to finance the education of deserving young men.

BACK TO THE SOURCES

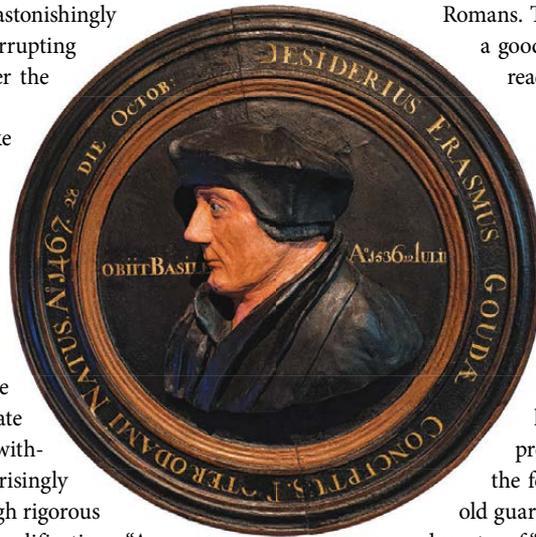
Then and now Erasmus is considered one of the greatest humanists. What did “humanism” mean to sixteenth-century readers? The movement grew out of an

admiration for the accomplishments of antiquity and a desire to emulate them. The battle cry of Renaissance humanists was *Ad fontes*, “back to the sources,” the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The prerequisite to becoming a good humanist was an ability to read classical languages.

The movement emerged first in Italy and became popular north of the Alps at the beginning of the sixteenth century. It received a mixed reception, especially at the universities, where students deserted the traditional curriculum and flocked to humanist lecturers. Since a professor’s salary depended on the fees paid by his students, the old guard was disgruntled with these advocates of “New Learning.”

The advent of humanism also prompted unease among clergy who regarded classical studies as infected with paganism. “Virgil is burning in hell, and is a Christian to recite his poems?,” one of Erasmus’s characters exclaims in *The Antibarbarians* (written between 1489 and 1495). Erasmus did in fact advocate Christianizing classical learning or, as he put it, “despoiling the Egyptians” (Ex 12:36) and adapting pagan rhetoric to advance Christian ideas.

Three areas preoccupied Erasmus as a writer: language arts, education, and biblical studies (see pp. 16–19). His more than 3,000 published letters serve as a running commentary on the social, religious, and political life of his time. He provided practical instruction for aspiring writers in *De copia* (1512), a handbook of style; in *De epistolis conscribendis* (1522), a letter-writing manual; and in his collections of *Parallels* and *Adages* to be used for rhetorical embellishment. Indeed all of his works served as models of style, as handwritten marginal remarks demonstrate; sixteenth-century readers absorbed not only the content of Erasmus’s writings, but also underlined and commented on the phrases he used.



DAVID MULDER, ROUND PLAQUE WITH PORTRAIT IN RELIEF OF DESIDERIUS ERASMI, 1780 TO 1810. CERAMIC, TERRACOTTA, MUSEUM ROTTERDAM—TOESCHRUIVING. / (CC BY-SA 3.0) WIKIMEDIA
 QUENTIN MESSIS, DESIDERIUS ERASMI OF ROTTERDAM, 1519. LEAD, CAST, SAMUEL H. KRESS COLLECTION, NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART / (CC0) WIKIMEDIA
 PORTRAIT OF ERASMIUS, C. 1540. TERRACOTTA—SAILKO / (CC BY 3.0) WIKIMEDIA

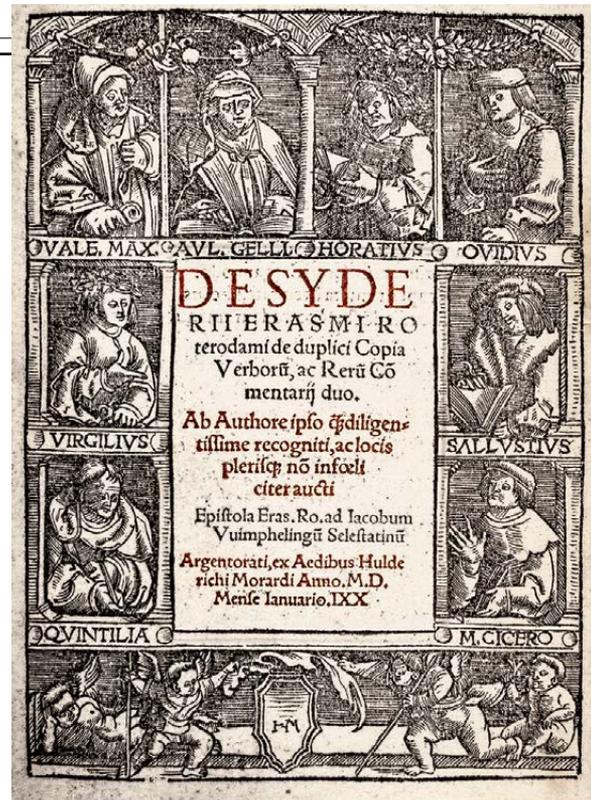


Making the classics available in print was an important humanist endeavor. Erasmus edited Latin manuscripts and produced translations of Greek texts. He translated works of physician Galen (c. 129–c. 216), satirist Lucian (c. 125–after 180), and orator Isocrates (436–338 BC), as well as the writings of Greek church fathers. He played a principal role in editing the works of Jerome (c. 342–420) and published the Greek text of the New Testament—the first printed version sold. In this process he also pioneered the principles of textual criticism, a method fully developed only in the nineteenth century.

MADE NOT BORN

The subject of education figured prominently in Erasmus's work. In *On the Education of Children* (1529) and *The Method of Study* (1511), he emphasized early instruction in Latin—and, for budding theologians, in Greek, “for almost everything worth knowing is set out in these two languages.”

Moreover he pleaded for holistic education: intellectual, moral, and physical. Innovative at the time, his ideas remain valid today. He discouraged rote learning and decried the slavish imitation of models, looking instead for “inward digestion, so that becoming part of your own system, it gives the impression not of something begged from someone else, but of something that springs from your own mental processes.”

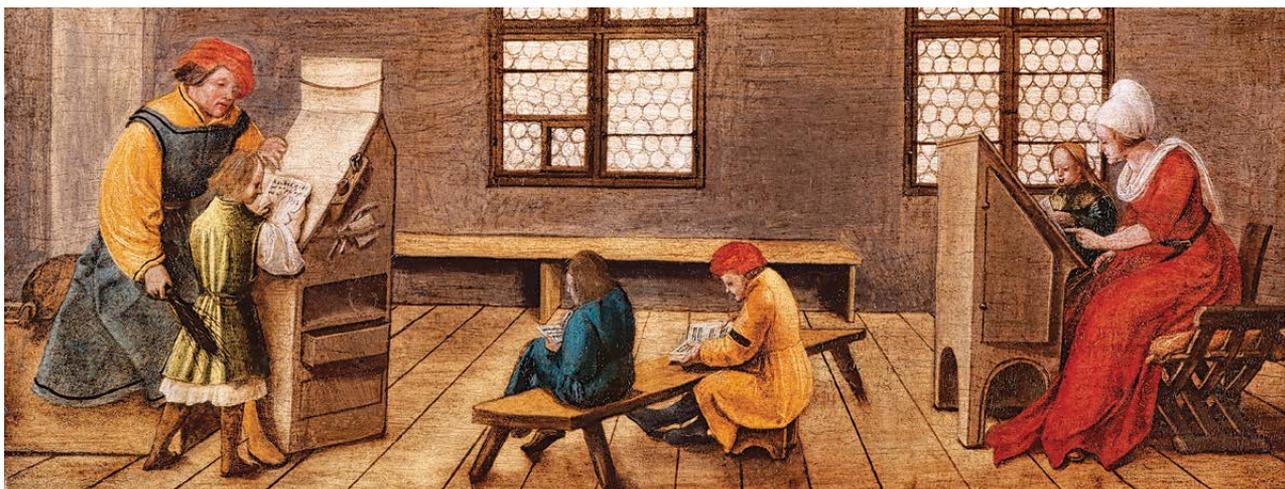


READ YOUR CLASSICS Virgil (*above left*) had been valued in the 5th c.; Erasmus wanted to make him and other classical authors valued in the 16th (*above*).

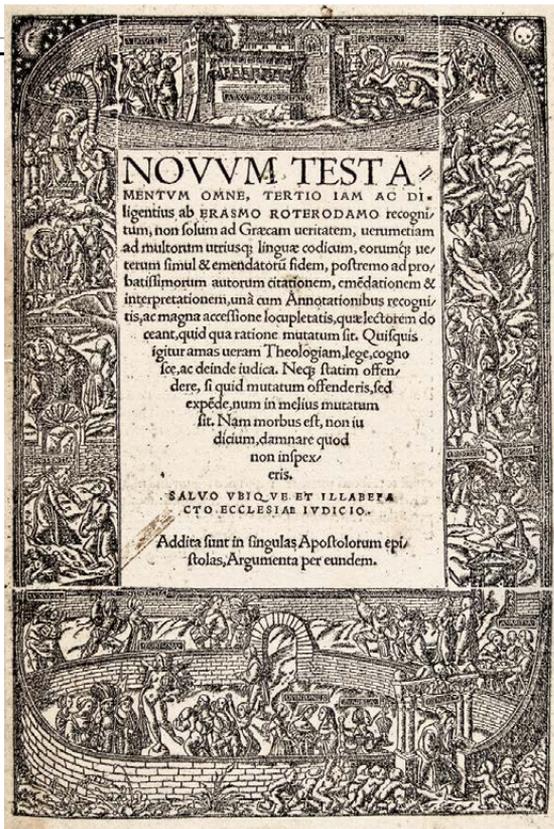
LEARN YOUR LETTERS Hans Holbein's younger brother Ambrosius painted this 1516 educational scene (*below*).

He also emphasized the importance of a good relationship between pupil and teacher, advocating encouragement rather than the beatings commonly dealt out in his time. He noted that parents had the duty to provide for the education of their children, for “man is not born, but made man.”

Erasmus meant his instructions for boys and young men. Later, after he met the learned daughters of Thomas More, he saw the potential of women. In his time few girls received a formal education: “Scarcely any mortal man was not under the conviction that, for the female sex, education had nothing



VERGILIUS MARO, PUBLIUS, 5TH C. VAT. LAT. 3987.14R—VATICAN LIBRARY
ERASMIUS PROVISORE 2, 1500—MEDPRO / PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA
AMBROSIUS HOLBEIN, SCHOOL MASTERS'S SIGNBOARD (CHILDREN'S SIDE), 1516. MIXED MEDIA ON SPRUCE WOOD—PUBLIC DOMAIN, KUNSTMUSEUM BASEL



BESTSELLER The importance of Erasmus's New Testament (above) to 16th-c. European history is difficult to overestimate.

to offer in the way of either virtue or reputation. Nor was I myself in the old days completely free of this opinion."

His change of mind is evident from two dialogues (*The Abbot and the Learned Lady*, 1524, and *The New Mother*, 1526), in which women trump men in debate and even prove, tongue-in-cheek, that women are superior to men.

Although Erasmus's educational thought may seem progressive, the reason he gave for schooling women remained firmly rooted in sixteenth-century ideas: to make them good wives. Husbands need not fear that educated women will be less obedient, for "nothing is more intractable than ignorance." It is better to give a woman "something to occupy her mind, or else her thoughts will turn inevitably toward evil," he says in *The Institution of Christian Matrimony* (1526).

Erasmus not only wrote about children's education, but also instructed princes and indeed all Christians. In *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516), he warned the ruler not to become a tyrant. Unlike Machiavelli's prince, Erasmus's ideal ruler strove to be loved rather than feared by his subjects. He was peaceable and waged war only as a last resort—the kind of pacifism Erasmus embraced throughout his writings. When a dispute arose, he urged, "why not take it to arbitration?" Plenty of bishops, scholars, and magistrates might settle the matter to avoid bloodshed.

In his *Handbook of the Christian Soldier* (1501), Erasmus turned his attention to the education of all Christians. They must progress from "visible to invisible things," from the outward observance of rites to inner piety. He termed these

REMEMBER ME Erasmus left mementos such as this cup (below), as well as his literary legacy, to his friend and executor, Bonifacius Amerbach.



principles the "philosophy of Christ," based on the words of Christ in the Gospels.

A MERE GRAMMARIAN

As long as Erasmus wrote on education and dispensed moral and spiritual advice, he met with widespread approval. Once he applied his language skills to biblical texts, however, academic theologians reacted with alarm to the incursion onto their turf of an unqualified layman, a mere "grammarian." Tensions first arose when Erasmus lampooned theologians in his most popular work, *Praise of Folly* (1511), a satire on human foibles. The quibbles of the theologians were so tortuous, he wrote, that "the apostles themselves would need the help of another Holy Spirit" to understand them.

Grumbling arose about Erasmus's insolence, but theologians took action against him only after he published his magnum opus, his New Testament (1516). It contained the Greek text, based on manuscript evidence, together with a corrected and improved version of the Latin Vulgate. It gave the theologians fodder for complaints, not only because of the changes but because Erasmus offered a wealth of annotations explaining his corrections. The popular work went through four editions during Erasmus's lifetime. In subsequent years he also wrote Paraphrases (paraphrasing the New Testament books) as well as commentaries on selected psalms.

In explaining the psalms, Erasmus followed Latin and Greek exegetes since he had never pursued Hebrew studies. In this matter as in other contexts, he showed the anti-Semitic bias characteristic of his time. Concerned that the study of Hebrew might revive Judaism, he argued, "there is no pestilence more adverse and hostile to the doctrine of Christ."

He questioned the value of Hebrew commentaries: "I see that that race is full of the most inane fables and succeeds only bringing forth a kind of fog... I would rather have Christ tainted by [the scholastic] Scotus than by that nonsense." By contrast he saw Muslims as "half-Christians," presumably because Islam recognizes Christ as a prophet.



LAST RITES Erasmus moved to Freiburg (left, in 1600) when Basel turned Protestant, but he died on a visit to Basel. A 19th-c. artist imagined him on his sickbed (above).

At the time of his writing, the Turks posed an immediate threat to the West, besieging Vienna in 1529, but while Luther already promoted war against them, Erasmus continued to preach pacifism in his commentary on Psalm 28 (1530). He also discouraged strife among Christians in his exegesis of Psalm 83 in 1533, commenting on the disturbances caused by religious wars. He urged that discussions be carried on soberly and “in the spirit of accommodation,” calling for a church council to settle unresolved doctrinal issues.

Erasmus was often regarded as a partisan of the Reformation. To Catholic theologians Erasmus sounded too much like Luther. As a result the theological faculty of Paris condemned his works in his own time, and the church placed them on the Index of Prohibited Books after his death.

In his New Testament annotations, he questioned the status of sacramental marriage and confession, examined the “real presence” in the Eucharist, and challenged the scriptural basis of masses for the dead and the adoration of saints. To some he seemed to subscribe to Luther’s principles of *sola fide*, *sola scriptura*, and *sola gratia*, as well as to his idea of Christian freedom. The phrase “Erasmus laid the egg, and Luther hatched it” became proverbial (see inside front cover).

THE SPIRIT IS NO SKEPTIC

Erasmus agreed with Luther’s criticism of superstitious practices and church abuses, but never advocated doctrinal changes. On the contrary he deplored Luther’s aggressive tone and disparaged all sectarianism. To prove he was no Lutheran, he debated the reformer over the question of free will.

In his *Diatribes or Comparison on Free Will* (1524), he offered proof that the scriptural evidence is ambivalent. He therefore suspended judgment, explaining he would “seek refuge in skepticism” and fall back on consensus and the traditions of the church. In his sharply worded reply, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), Luther insisted on the clarity of Scripture and quipped: “The Holy Spirit is no skeptic.”

Erasmus also feared that humanism would become entangled and submerged in the Reformation debate. His enemies had long resented the New Learning, he wrote, and Luther’s books gave them a handle “to tie up [the Reformation] with the study of the ancient tongues and the humanities.” Although Erasmus could not prevent the conflation and confusion of the two movements, humanism survived, and so did Erasmus’s reputation as its standard-bearer.

Even the Catholic apologist Johann Eck (1486–1543) had to admit that “Erasmian” stood for “all-round learning and copious powers of expression”; according to the Swiss chronicler Johann Kessler (1502–1574), it meant “whatever is skilled, polished, learned, and wise.” Erasmus’s ideas saw a revival in the eighteenth century. German philosopher and sociologist Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) even called him a forerunner of the Enlightenment—“the Voltaire of the sixteenth century” and “founder of religious rationalism.”

What can Erasmus give readers today? He remains an aspirational figure, even if Latin is no longer the common scholarly language and he no longer serves as a model of eloquence and style. His ideas have remained alive, if in some cases abstracted from their original context. The Erasmus University in Rotterdam declares that the man who gave the institution its name stands for “global citizenship, social commitment and an open and critical mind.” No doubt Erasmus remains an influencer, as he was in his own time. **GH**

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Everything old is new again

CHRISTIAN HUMANISM AND ERASMUS

Kirk Essary

“What is learning, if piety is missing?” Erasmus asked in a 1529 letter to Juan de Valdes. His concise rhetorical question gets at the heart of Christian humanism—a conscious combination of humanist learning with what Erasmus called the “gospel philosophy,” or “philosophy of Christ.” He thought it obvious that a humanities education provided a necessary foundation for a true understanding of Christianity. He could have easily asked the question the other way around—“What is piety, if learning is missing?”—as he routinely denounced illiterate monks and stupid priests.

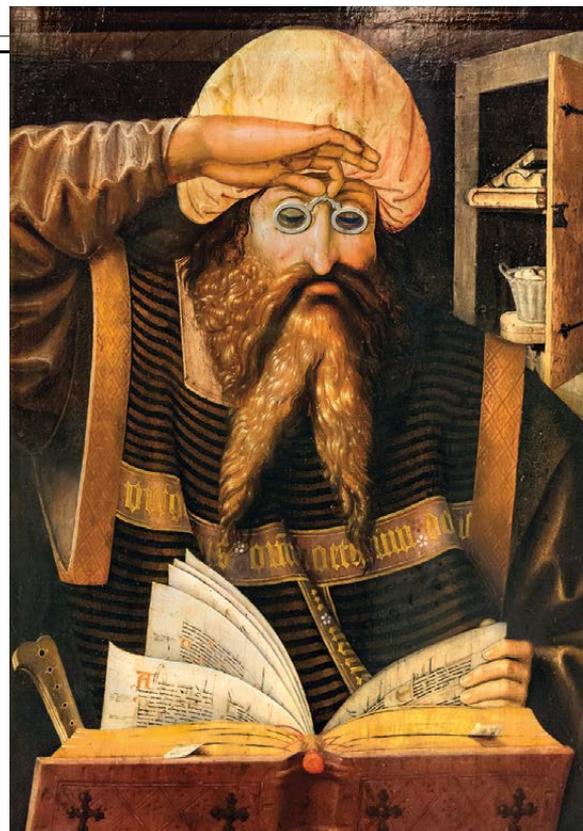
Humanism did not always include such an overt concern for religious matters, however. While humanists from Petrarch (1304–1374) on had certainly argued for the compatibility of Christianity and classical culture, the quintessential feature of the movement was an avowed passion for classical, pagan, Greco-Roman antiquity. Many ancient works had been read through the Middle Ages, but some had not only circulated in digests and excerpts, and others not at all. Italian scholars—Petrarch, Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), and their successors—made

LEARN YOUR LESSONS WELL Students attend school in this 1494 Bible illustration.

a concerted effort to scour monastery libraries for less common Latin works. Soon thereafter the West received an influx of manuscripts of ancient Greek texts from the East. Humanists hastened to read, copy, annotate, and translate these works, arguing that they were reviving lost forms of wisdom and eloquence.

CLASSICAL CONVERSATIONS

The invention of the printing press in the 1450s and the rapid expansion of the printing industry across Europe in the following decades dramatically hastened the publication and dissemination of books to meet an increasing demand from readers. By the end of the fifteenth century, some printshops specialized in the classics. Venerable scholar-printer Aldus Manutius (1449–1515) in Venice, for example, made works widely available for scholars interested in ancient literature and philosophy and also developed some of the earliest high-quality Greek typefaces



AGONY AND ECSTASY The new love for classical learning is captured in this drawing of a famous 3rd-c. BC statue, the *Laocoön Group*, unearthed in Rome in 1506 (left) and in this c. 1538 painting (above) of great 1st-c. BC Roman poet Virgil exulting in his studies.

for printing ancient works. Now more readers had access, often for the first time, to Latin works—Livy, Quintilian, and Lucretius—and Greek ones—Homer, Euripides, and Plato (or Latin translations of those).

From the late fifteenth century, universities began adding humanities curricula. Students could study poetry, rhetoric, history, grammar (broadly conceived), and philology in Greek, Latin, and, often, Hebrew. Humanists indulged in what we today would call interdisciplinarity: they had wide and varied interests, not all literary. Their revival of ancient works had effects in art and architecture, medicine, and law (see *CH* #139).

Eventually scholars—even those with no theological training—began to apply the methods of this “new learning” to ancient Christian texts. By the sixteenth century, it was not uncommon to come across someone like Janus of Cornarius (c. 1500–1558), a trained physician with expertise in ancient Greek medicine, translating and publishing ancient medical works by Hippocrates as well as antihetical works by Epiphanius, the fourth-century Christian bishop of Cyprus.

Typically Christian humanists did not practice these efforts as mere scholarly exercises. They reread texts from the early Christian tradition in an explicit effort to restore that early tradition to a more pristine form and

reform the church and European Christian society. What made Erasmus simultaneously immensely popular and so controversial were his assiduous efforts to render Greco-Roman literature, and the new methods developed for studying it, relevant to Christian concerns.

BATTLE OF WITS

Humanist engagement with the Bible and doctrine led to an adversarial relationship with professional theologians of the universities, often called scholastics. University theology boasted a rich medieval history; luminaries, such as Peter Lombard (1100–1160), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Duns Scotus (c. 1265–1308), and William of Ockham (1285–1347), had advanced the discipline from the eleventh century on. These theologians and their successors often employed a method and style—called dialectic—that humanists argued was overly technical, given to abstract speculation, and stylistically unpleasant. Scholastics argued back that technical philosophical language was necessary for difficult issues; they called humanists mere poets and aesthetes, more concerned with mellifluous language than with truth.

These debates took on a special force in northern Europe. Competing academics vied for positions in university faculties, and professional theologians decried humanist encroachment onto their most coveted territory:



PARADIGM SHIFT Italian poet Petrarch (above) was among the earliest humanists; the movement spread through the new printing press technology (above right) and deeply changed the church (represented at right by a German priest, c. 1530).



one of the first European scholars to practice humanist text-criticism of the Bible.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (see p. 36)—a French humanist with a keen interest in ancient Greek philosophy, and a leading figure in Queen Marguerite de Navarre's reform-minded Circle of Meaux—published two biblical humanist works: first, the *Fivefold Psalter* (1509), an edition of five different Latin versions of the Psalms; and, second, a new Latin translation of Paul's epistles (1512), based on the original Greek. Many Christian humanists wanted the Bible in vernacular languages so that all Christians might read or hear it. To this end, Lefèvre also published editions of the Vulgate translated into French.



the Bible. While the debate encompassed unhealthy and petty squabbles, it was not fought over insubstantial matters. All parties involved thought deeply about the implications of new approaches to sacred texts, as well as the ramifications of examining the Bible in the original Hebrew and Greek when it had been read in Latin for centuries.

MANY LANGUAGES MAKE NEW IDEAS

The first forays into such questions, like so much else in the humanist movement, actually started not north of the Alps, but in Italy. Biblical humanism originated with Lorenzo Valla (c. 1406–1457)—a Roman best known for proving that the *Donation of Constantine*, a purportedly ancient text granting the pope significant temporal power, was a late forgery.

In the middle of the fifteenth century, Valla composed two works comparing the original Greek New Testament with the Latin Vulgate translation. He published neither, but in 1504 Erasmus discovered the second one and published it a year later as *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (*Notes on the New Testament*). Valla had consulted various Greek manuscripts along with other Latin versions that differed from the Vulgate. In carrying out this comparison for the purpose of establishing a sounder version of the text, he was

The Complutensian Polyglot Bible, an extraordinary effort by a group of scholars at the University of Alcalá in Spain, represented another significant achievement of early modern biblical scholarship. Had Erasmus not obtained proprietary rights to publish a Greek New Testament from the emperor and the pope, the Complutensian Polyglot could have been the first Greek New Testament ever published in the modern sense. As it happened it was merely the first ever *printed* when it came off the press in 1514.

This multivolume Bible contains a Greek New Testament alongside the Latin Vulgate, and also an Old Testament containing the Hebrew original, the Greek Septuagint (an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew) with an interlinear Latin translation, the Latin Vulgate, an Aramaic (“Chaldean”) version of the Pentateuch, and a Latin rendering of the Aramaic—all on the same page!

But the crowning achievement of biblical humanism, with far and away the most lasting influence, was Erasmus's 1516 New Testament. Erasmus had several motivations for publishing such a work. He was very interested in technical philological minutiae, establishing the best possible version of the text based on the manuscripts he

GIORGIO VASARI, PORTRAIT OF PETRARCH, 14TH C. OIL ON WOOD, MUSEE FESCH-SAILLOU, (CC BY 3.0) WIKIMEDIA
FRANÇOIS FLAING, SKETCH FOR JEAN GROUËR IN THE HOUSE OF ALGUIS MANUTIUS, 1894, COLLECTION OF THE GROUËR CLUB, NEW YORK / PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA
CHRISTOPH WEIDITZ, FRACHTENBUCH (COSTUME BOOK), A PRIEST, IN ROUSSILLON, 1530 TO 1540, HS 22474, GERMANISCHES NATIONALMUSEUM, PUBLIC DOMAIN



TRUTH AND FOLLY Later Enlightenment figures often claimed a humanist Erasmus as their precursor, as in this c. 1703 engraving, *Erasmus Receives the Book of Truth*.

believed the New Testament's truths should be "sought at the fountainhead and drawn from the actual sources rather than from pools and runnels [i.e., possibly corrupt later translations]." Paralleling earlier humanist efforts to restore society by restoring classical literature, Erasmus sought explicitly to do the same for the Christian church by applying humanist methods to the study of the Bible.

To Erasmus's mind Christianity had suffered a decline not only because it had been coopted by war-mongering princes, lazy monks, and uneducated priests, but because familiarity with the New Testament's original language and context had been lost. He also thought that the language of the text could be brought up to date with current usage and thus composed paraphrases of most books of the New Testament, creating lively reading for his contemporaries who could read Latin.

These paraphrases were quickly translated into vernacular languages, and for a time every parish church in England possessed the English translation of Erasmus's Paraphrases (we might compare the modern popularity of *The Message*). While he continued in the humanist tradition of making available neglected or corrupt ancient classical texts, he also edited and published the works of a dozen early church fathers.

LOST GOLDEN AGE?

Erasmus's ideal for a golden age of learning and a rebuilding of the Christian religion from its foundations, like everything else in Europe at the time, was severely disrupted by the Protestant Reformation. In the minds of scholastic theologians and conservative Catholic critics, humanism aligned with Luther's new movement. This claim was not wholly without reason. Virtually all Protestant Bibles printed in any European language during the Reformation era, and for some time afterward, were based on Erasmus's New Testament.

But simultaneously Protestants distanced themselves from "the old man" when it became clear that he wouldn't be joining their side. Erasmus himself deeply lamented the fracturing of the church and often expressed a fear of the destruction of the humanities as a result of the Reformation. As for what could be done about any of it, he gave a characteristically learned and pious gloss in a 1521 letter to Pierre Barbier, combining classical and biblical references: "Personally, I see no way out, unless Christ himself, like some god from a machine, gives this lamentable play a happy ending." **GI**

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had at hand—he often claimed, trying to deflect criticism, that he was a mere grammarian. But he also clearly had a higher purpose. In one of several prefatory works to his new New Testament, the *Apologia (Defense)*, Erasmus connected this work with his humanist education:

It is principally for theologians that I have labored over this work of mine, particularly those theologians who either did not have time or did not take the opportunity to study the humanities, without which it is not possible to completely understand divine Scripture.

Erasmus claimed a liberal education to be necessary, not just for translating or critically examining the Bible, but for *understanding* it. This sly but profound provocation rested at the heart of his vision for a Christian republic of letters—an international intellectual community. In another prefatory work, the *Methodus*, Erasmus wrote that training only in dialectic and not in the humanities—another jab at university scholastic theologians—results in treating God's word as "flat," "frigid," and "lifeless."

Erasmus issued nothing short of a call for a revolution in theology as a discipline. In his dedicatory letter to Pope Leo X, appended to the first edition of his New Testament, Erasmus explained his chief hope for the work—"the restoration and rebuilding of the Christian religion." He

Erasmus's wisdom and wit

English translation of Erasmus's works happened fairly early, and we present some older translations here as historically interesting and influential in their own right.

Nor is it without ground that fools are so acceptable to God. The reason perhaps may be this, that as princes carry a suspicious eye upon those that are over-wise, and consequently hate them . . . Christ ever abhors and condemns those wise men and such as put confidence in their own wisdom. . . .

Throughout the Gospel you find him ever accusing the Scribes and Pharisees and doctors of the law, but diligently defending the ignorant multitude (for what other is that "Woe to ye Scribes and Pharisees" than woe to you, you wise men?), but seems chiefly delighted in little children, women, and fishers.

Besides, among brute beasts he is best pleased with those that have least in them of the foxes' subtlety. And therefore he chose rather to ride upon an ass when, if he had pleased, he might have bestrode the lion without danger. And the Holy Ghost came down in the shape of a dove, not of an eagle or kite. Add to this that in Scripture there is frequent mention of harts, hinds, and lambs; and such as are destined to eternal life are called sheep, than which creature there is not anything more foolish. . . . And yet Christ professes to be the shepherd of this flock and is himself delighted with the name of a lamb; according to Saint John, "Behold the Lamb of God!" . . .

And Christ himself, that he might the better relieve this folly, being the wisdom of the Father, yet in some manner became a fool when taking upon him the nature of man, he was found in shape as a man; as in like manner he was made sin that he might heal sinners.

Nor did he work this cure any other way than by the foolishness of the cross and a company of fat apostles, not much better, to whom also he carefully recommended folly but gave them a caution against wisdom and drew them together by the example of little children, lilies, mustard seed, and sparrows, things senseless and inconsiderable, living only by the dictates of nature and without either craft or care. —From *Praise of Folly*, translated by John Wilson, 1668

A fair manner of teaching [young children] shall cause that it may seem rather a play than a labor, for here the age must be beguiled with sweet flattering words, which yet cannot tell what fruit, what honor, what pleasure learning shall bring unto them in time to come. And this partly shall be done by the teacher's gentleness and courteous behavior, and partly by his wit and subtle practice, whereby he shall devise diverse pretty means to make learning pleasant to the child. . . . For there is



MAKING A MARK Hans Holbein drew this marginal sketch of a scholar—possibly Erasmus himself—in a copy of *Praise of Folly* owned by Erasmus's friend Myconius. These sketches are the earliest known Holbein works.

nothing worse than when the waywardness of the master causes the children to hate learning before they know wherefore it should be loved. The first degree of learning is the love of the master. In process of time it shall come to pass that the child which first began to love learning for the master's sake afterwards shall love the master because of learning.—From *On the Education of Children*, translated by Richard Sherry, 1550

[From a list of forms of polite salutations intended as Latin exercises for schoolchildren]

To guests: Happy be this Feast. Much good may it do all the Company. I wish all Happiness to you all. God give you a happy Banquet.

To one that sneezes: May it be lucky and happy to you. God keep you. May it be for your health. God bless it to you.

To one that is about to begin any business: May it prove happy and prosperous for the public good. May [what] you are going about be an universal Good. . . . May Christ in Heaven prosper what is under your Hand. May what you have begun end happily. May what you are set about end happily. . . . I wish that this New Year may begin happily, go on more happily, and end most happily to you, and that you may have many of them, and every year happier than another.—From *Colloquies*, translated by N. Bailey, 1725

HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER, MARGINAL DRAWING: "A SCHOLAR AT HIS DESK" IN PRAISE OF FOLLY PRINTED BY JOHANN FROBEN, 1515. FEATHER PEN IN BLACK INK—PUBLIC DOMAIN, KUNSTMUSEUM BASEL



A MAN ALONE Portraits by Matsys (left), Dürer (above), and Holbein (right) show Erasmus as a new St. Jerome, bringing together classical and Christian wisdom. They capture him in the act of writing as a solitary, tranquil figure.

they satirized contemporary religious devotions. By 1524 Erasmus had published the eighth edition (of an eventual 15). Meanwhile an “impostor” published a disfigured version in Paris at the end of 1523. With his deletions, insertions, and other alterations, the counterfeit Erasmus “had no misgivings as he plaited his homespun blossoms into my garland,” the real Erasmus complained to Botzheim.

Through writing Erasmus nurtured the relationships that funded his publications, both socially and financially. He dismissed as “unfair” critics who found fault with editorial blunders; Erasmus compared them to someone “who has a full larder and gives nothing to his starving friends” in contrast to a person “who freely and openly brings out what he has and would gladly give them better cheer if he could.”

FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

Friends and patrons received the bounty of Erasmus’s capacious literary larder—and often provided influence and networking in return. His first collection of proverbs was dedicated to courtier and humanist scholar William Blount, fourth Baron Mountjoy (c. 1478–1534)—signaling that Erasmus held no grudge against his English friends for the confiscation of almost all his money by customs agents at Dover when he sailed from England in January 1500.

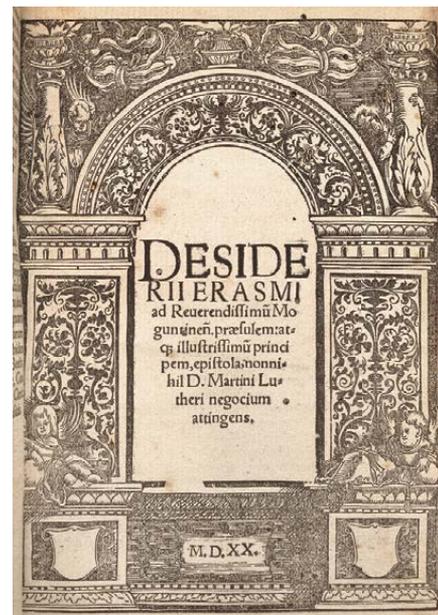
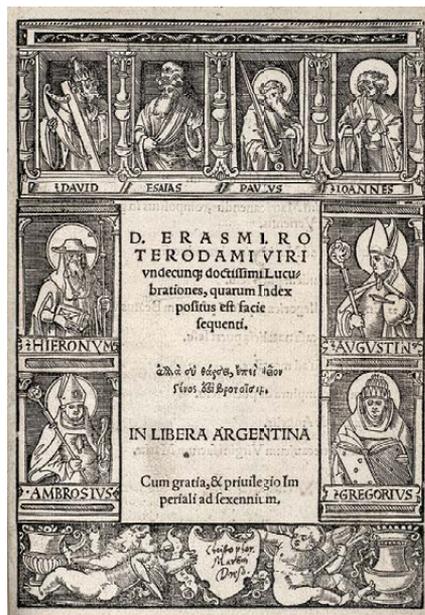
A few years later, the wife of a friend—the friend being a “spendthrift” and an adulterer “but in other respects a pleasant companion in every way”—persuaded Erasmus to “write something that might get a little religion” into her husband. Thus was born the *Handbook of a Christian Soldier* (1503), Erasmus’s first notable book. It promoted a learned Christian piety, detailing moral and spiritual warfare, not military.

In 1512 Erasmus dedicated *On the Abundance of Words and Things*—a humanist textbook on Latin style—to John Colet (1467–1519), dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. In 1514 he published a short verse catechism for the boys of St. Paul’s School, which Colet founded in 1509. In

admiration, and in expectation of Erasmus’s coming works, Colet proclaimed in 1516: “The name of Erasmus shall never perish, but you will win for your name eternal glory, and as you toil in Jesus, you will win for yourself eternal life.”

Erasmus’s dedications show him moving among the movers and shakers of his day, and more than holding his own. The final pages of his *Catalogue* defend any financial gain from dedicating publications to the high and mighty. Princes and prelates did not always open their purses; Erasmus maintained that in some cases his dedications paid a debt of gratitude. He was “not angling for spoils.” Wealthy friends of stature made up the shortfall: “What they give me they say they spend, not on Erasmus, but on the cause of learning in general.”

In 1516 Erasmus dedicated his New Testament to Pope Leo X (1475–1521) and his edition of Jerome to Archbishop William Warham of Canterbury (c. 1450–1532). In 1506 Warham had rewarded the dedication of the translation of Euripides’s tragedy *Hecuba* with a small sum of money, but in 1512 Warham bestowed on him the rectory of Aldington in Kent. Appointed an honorary councilor to future Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Erasmus dedicated to him the *Education of the Christian Prince*. Jean Le Sauvage, Charles’s chancellor, suggested that Erasmus write *The Complaint of Peace* (1517) in support of peace in the Low Countries between the Habsburg dynasty and France. When Erasmus declined a church appointment in return for the dedication, Philip of Burgundy (1464–1524), bishop of Utrecht, gave him “a ring with a sapphire mounted in it.”



However, Erasmus's political and ecclesiastical networks could not shield him from attack. Forbidden by papal decree to publish against Erasmus, Spanish theologian Diego López de Zúñiga (c. 1470–1531) simply waited for Popes Leo X and Adrian VI to die before publicly attacking him in *The Blasphemies and Impieties of Erasmus of Rotterdam* (1522). Zúñiga's writing revealed his character, Erasmus said, as “boastful, shameless, stupid, a great admirer of his own perfections, and a bitter controversialist.” By contrast Erasmus presented himself as reluctant and moderate. Yet he could be as easily provoked and as prickly as his opponents.

THE “LUTHERAN TRAGEDY”

Again and again he responded to Catholic theologians, including Zúñiga, who objected to his philological conclusions and emendations to the text of the New Testament. Eventually he wrote his *Clarifications* (1532) against censures by the faculty of theology at the University of Paris. The first Catholic attacks coincided with the emergence of what Erasmus called the “Lutheran tragedy.”

Erasmus insisted he was not the fount of Martin Luther's ideas or of what he denounced as Luther's paradoxes. He published *A Discussion of Free Will*, reasoning with Luther, in 1524. Luther responded with the impassioned *The Bondage of the Will* (1525). Erasmus listed the *Discussion* in his *New Catalogue* as an apologetic work. It was too early to assess its effect, but he bemoaned an earlier tangle with Protestant controversialist Ulrich von Hutten (1488–1523), whose *Quarrel with Erasmus of Rotterdam* had appeared in 1523, shortly before he succumbed to syphilis. Hutten accused Erasmus of betraying Germany's cause in the battle against papal tyranny.

Erasmus called Hutten “a friend turned all at once into an enemy” and maintained: “No one ever attacked me with more hostility than he.” His *Sponge to Wipe Away Hutten's Aspersions* appeared shortly after Hutten's death. In it he protested to Botzheim about Hutten,



MAKING MANY BOOKS Erasmus works with his secretary, Gilbert Cousin (*above*); at *top (l-r)* are two of his famous books—his *New Testament* and *Handbook of a Christian Soldier*—and a letter to the Archbishop of Mainz.

I never cast in his teeth that lascivious living which not even his pitiful disease could teach him to abandon, nor the gaming and the wenching, the bankruptcy brought on by his extravagance, the massive debts, the disappointed creditors.

The controversy with Hutten opened a new, Protestant polemical front. Erasmus claimed that some “who falsely boast themselves to be champions of the gospel” aimed “to overwhelm me with frenzied pamphlets to stop me making any move against Luther.” Offended by Luther's polemic, Erasmus counterattacked with a two-volume treatise of rebuttal (1526–1527), *A Warrior Shielding a Discussion of Free Will against the Enslaved Will by Martin Luther*.

Almost 40 years earlier, in 1496, Erasmus had inaugurated his literary career as a Parisian university student—with poetry, a favorite genre among humanists. This poetic

HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER, WILLIAM WARHAM, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, 1527, OIL ON WOOD. PHOTO: HERVÉ LEWANDOWSKI, MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS, FRANCE. © RIM-GRAND PALAIS / ART RESOURCE, NY. GUY CO. GETTY IMAGES. GOSPELS OF ST. LUKE AND ST. JOHN, AND EPISTLES. AUTHOR: MEGHEN, PETER, SCRIBE / S. NETHERLANDS; 1506 LANGUAGE: LATIN SOURCE: HELFMARK, ROYAL T. E. V. PART 2, F. 5. © BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES. RAPHAEL, POPE LEO X WITH CARDINALS GIULIO DE' MEDICI AND LUIGI DE' ROSSI, C. 1517, OIL ON WOOD. UFFIZI, FLORENCE, ITALY—SCALAMINISTERO PERI BENI E LE ATTIVITÀ CULTURALI / ART RESOURCE, NY



Erasmus was accompanied by a muse throughout his life. In 1512, on a visit to the Marian shrine in Walsingham, he left a votive gift of verse in Greek. “All hail,” he began, “blessed mother of Jesus, unique among women as the virgin mother of God.” Pilgrims came with costly gifts and pressing demands, he wrote,

But as for me, a poet well disposed though poor, now that I have brought verses—for that is all that I have—in return for this humblest of gifts, I beg you for the greatest boons: a devout heart, completely free for once from sin.

His epitaph for Ulrich Zasius, a humanist law professor at the University of Freiburg, told students: “If you constantly turn [the pages of Zasius’s works] with your hands and read them often with your eyes, in them the best part of the man will always breathe and speak.” Erasmus repeated this belief in the power of the written word in his Jerome edition:

If a man had lived in familiar converse with Cicero (to take him as an example) for several years, he will know less of Cicero than they do who by constant reading of what he wrote converse with his spirit every day.

RESTORING CHRIST TO US

Similarly in his New Testament edition, Erasmus aimed to make Christ come alive for readers. He wondered in the opening “Exhortation” why Christians sought to learn about Christ from human sources instead of from the Gospels, where he “lives even now, breathes and speaks to us, I might almost say more effectively than when he lived among men.” The Gospels show “Christ to us so completely and so vividly that you would see him less clearly should you behold him standing before your very eyes.”

And what image of Erasmus do his books show? They cohere with the portraits of Erasmus as a solitary scholar—always writing, always improving. But the portraits miss the relationships he formed, the cost of toil and harassment, and the diversity of his inventory. The library Erasmus produced fashioned him into the paragon of Christian scholarship:



FRIENDS AND ADMIRERS Erasmus benefited from his friendships with Archbishop of Canterbury William Warham (above left) and John Colet (the priest in the image above) and dedicated his New Testament to Pope Leo X (right).



humanist pedagogue, collector of proverbs, correspondent, translator of the classics and of the Greek church fathers, promoter of piety, philological editor and paraphrast of the New Testament, exegetical and theological controversialist, and editor of the church fathers. By reading Erasmus, you learn to hear him speak as he reveals himself. **GH**

*Hilmar M. Pabel is professor of history at Simon Fraser University, author of *Conversing with God and Herculean Labours*, editor of *Erasmus' Vision of the Church*, and coeditor with Professor Mark Vessey of *Holy Scripture Speaks*. All quotations are from the *Collected Works of Erasmus*.*

Erasmus in context

How he stacked up against other reformers

THE EUCHARIST

[God] wished those whom he redeemed with the body and blood of his Son to be nourished in some ineffable way by that same flesh and blood and to receive as a pledge the comfort of his mysterious presence, till he returns in glory. . . . Hitherto, along with all other Christians, I have always worshipped in the Eucharist the Christ who suffered for me, and I see no reason now to change my views. No human argument could make me abandon what is the universal teaching of Christendom. (Letter to Konrad Pelikan, 1525)



Erasmus

What is the Sacrament of the Altar? . . . The true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in and under the bread and wine which we Christians are commanded by the Word of Christ to eat and to drink. And as we have said of Baptism that it is not simple water, so here also we say the Sacrament is bread and wine, but not mere bread and wine, such as are ordinarily served at the table, but bread and wine comprehended in, and connected with, the Word of God. (*Large Catechism*, 1529)



Luther

I believe that in the holy Eucharist, i.e., the supper of thanksgiving, the true body of Christ is present by the contemplation of faith. This means that they who thank the Lord for the benefits bestowed on us in His Son acknowledge that He assumed true flesh, in it truly suffered, truly washed away our sins by His blood; and thus everything done by Christ becomes as it were present to them by the contemplation of faith. (*An Account of the Faith of Ulrich Zwingli Submitted to the Roman Emperor Charles*, 1530)



Zwingli

By thus eating the bread and drinking the drink in memory of the suffering and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . [we] have had fellowship one with another, and have all become one loaf and one body . . . we should properly become conformed to our Head and as his members follow after him. (Balthasar Hubmaier, *A Form for Christ's Supper*, 1527)



Anabaptists

He has given another sacrament to his Church by the hand of his only begotten Son, viz., a spiritual feast, at which Christ testifies that he himself is living bread, on which our souls feed, for a true and blessed immortality. . . . As God, regenerating us in baptism . . . makes us his by adoption, so we have said that he performs the office of a provident parent, in continually supplying the food by which he may sustain and preserve us in the life to which he has begotten us by his Word. (*Institutes*, 1529, IV.xvii.1)



Calvin

THE CHURCH

Through [the Holy] Spirit you have reconciled heaven with earth, through it you have united so many languages, so many nations, and so many different kinds of people into the one body of the church, which through the same Spirit is joined to you, its head. . . . Set this chaos in order, Lord Jesus, let your Spirit spread out over these waters of doctrine that rage about to our detriment. . . . Bring it about that just as for all who dwell in your house there is one law, one baptism, one God, one hope, and one Spirit, so there also should be a single voice of the people who profess the Catholic truth. (*Prayer to the Lord Jesus for Peace in the Church*, 1532)

Therefore the Church can never be better governed and preserved than if we all live under one head, Christ, and all the bishops equal in office (although they be unequal in gifts), be diligently joined in unity of doctrine, faith, Sacraments, prayer, and works of love, etc., as St. Jerome writes that the priests at Alexandria together and in common governed the churches, as did also the apostles, and afterwards all bishops throughout all Christendom, until the Pope raised his head above all. . . . For, thank God, a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. (*Smalcald Articles*, 1537)

All who dwell in the head [Christ] are members and children of God, forming the church or communion of the saints, which is the bride of Christ, *ecclesia catholica* [church catholic]. (*67 Articles*, 1523)

[To the Zurich assembly, 1523] As to claiming that such matters should be settled by a Christian assembly of all nations, or by a council of bishops, etc., I say that here in this room there is without doubt a Christian assembly. For I hope that the majority of us here desire, by the divine will and love, to hear and know the truth, which Almighty God will not deny us if we desire it to his honor, with right belief and right hearts.

The Church of Christ is a lantern of righteousness, in which the light of grace is borne and held before the whole world, that men may also learn to see and know the way of life. (Peter Riedemann, *Account of Our Religion, Doctrine and Faith*, c. 1540–1541)

Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence, since his promise cannot fail. . . . The Church universal is the multitude collected out of all nations, who, though dispersed and far distant from each other, agree in one truth of divine doctrine, and are bound together by the tie of a common religion. (*Institutes*, IV.i.9)

SUMMER STAMPS (1986). DETAIL: ERASMUS—STATE-OWNED POSTAL TELEGRAPH AND TELEPHONE (NETHERLANDS), HENDRIK SEEGBERS, SEM HAFZ.

MARTIN LUTHER POSTAGE STAMP. C. 1952, GERMANY—PRIME_MZ / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

HILDEBRICH ZWINGLI POSTAGE STAMP. C. 1969, SWITZERLAND—SERGEY NEZHINKIY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

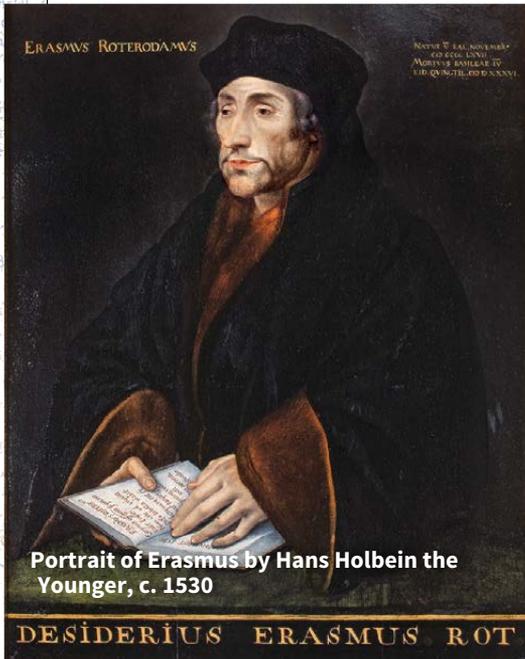
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PORTRAIT OF JOHN CALVIN ON GERMAN POSTAGE STAMP—PEREGRINE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

	THE STATE	WAR AND PEACE	
E. REITSMA-VALENÇA AND R. STEINHAUSEN / PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA	<p>It is the part of a true Christian to shun carefully all vulgarity. It is the province of a prince to surpass all in stainless character and wisdom. You compel your subjects to know and obey your laws. With far more energy you should exact of yourself knowledge and obedience to the laws of Christ, your king! . . . The best laws under the best princes make a city or a kingdom most fortunate. The most felicitous condition exists when the prince is obeyed by everyone, the prince himself obeys the laws, and the laws go back to the fundamental principles of equity and honesty, with no other aim than the advancement of the commonwealth. (<i>The Education of a Christian Prince</i>, 1516)</p>	<p>I appeal to all who call themselves Christians! I urge them, as they would manifest their sincerity, and preserve their consistency, to unite with one heart and one soul, in the abolition of war, and the establishment of perpetual and universal peace. (<i>The Complaint of Peace</i>, 1521)</p>	
	<p>The temporal government has laws which extend no further than to life and property and external affairs on earth, for God cannot and will not permit anyone but himself to rule over the soul. . . . A [ruler's] duty is fourfold: First, toward God there must be true confidence and earnest prayer; second, toward his subjects there must be love and Christian service; third, with respect to his counselors and officials he must maintain an untrammelled reason and unfettered judgment; fourth, with respect to evildoers he must manifest a restrained severity and firmness. (<i>Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Ought to Be Obeyed</i>, 1523)</p>	<p>When I think of the office of soldier, how it punishes the wicked, slays the unjust, and creates so much misery, it seems an unchristian work and entirely contrary to Christian love; but if I think of how it protects the good and keeps and preserves house and home, wife and child, property and honor and peace, then it appears how precious and godly this work is. . . . For if the sword were not on guard to preserve peace, everything in the world must go to ruin because of lack of peace. . . . When men write about war, then, and say that it is a great plague, that is all true; but they should also see how great the plague is that it prevents. (<i>Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved</i>, 1526)</p>	
	<p>I venture to assert that no man is even capable of administering a magistracy properly unless he is a Christian. How, pray, does the state differ from the church? I mean in regard to the external habits and associations of life; for as far as the heart is concerned, I am well aware that the only church of Christ is that which trusts in Christ, while the state can be content if you show yourself a faithful citizen, even if you do not trust in Christ. (<i>Commentary on True and False Religion</i>, 1525)</p>	<p>How does it happen that we Christians who are united by such powerful agencies have much greater quarrels than unbelievers? And how does it happen that in a Confederacy in which until now a fraternal love prevailed, for the sake of foreign lords violent quarrel has arisen? Answer: Real piety, by which is meant true worship and prayer to God, has disappeared among us. (<i>A Solemn Warning</i>, 1522)</p>	
	<p>It does not befit a Christian to be a magistrate: the rule of the government is according to the flesh, that of the Christians according to the Spirit. Their houses and dwelling remain in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven. Their citizenship is in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven. The weapons of their battle and warfare are carnal and only against the flesh, but the weapons of Christians are spiritual, against the fortification of the devil. The worldly are armed with steel and iron, but Christians are armed with the armor of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and with the Word of God. (<i>Schleitheim Confession</i>, 1527)</p>	<p>The regenerated . . . are the children of peace who have beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and know of no war. They give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Their sword is the word of the Spirit which they wield with a good conscience through the Holy Ghost. (Menno Simons, <i>The New Birth</i>, 1550)</p>	
	<p>[The object of civil government] is, that no idolatry, no blasphemy against the name of God, no calumnies against his truth, nor other offences to religion, break out and be disseminated among the people; that the public quiet be not disturbed, that every man's property be kept secure, that men may carry on innocent commerce with each other, that honesty and modesty be cultivated; in short, that a public form of religion may exist among Christians, and humanity among men. . . . Civil authority is, in the sight of God, not only sacred and lawful, but the most sacred, and by far the most honorable, of all stations in mortal life. (<i>Institutes</i> IV.xx.4)</p>	<p>If it is objected, that in the New Testament there is no passage or example teaching that war is lawful for Christians, I answer, first, that the reason for carrying on war, which anciently existed, still exists in the present day, and that, on the other hand, there is no ground for debarring magistrates from the defense of those under them; and, secondly, that in the Apostolical writings we are not to look for a distinct exposition of those matters, their object being not to form a civil polity, but to establish the spiritual kingdom of Christ; lastly, that there also it is indicated, in passing, that our Savior, by his advent, made no change in this respect. (<i>Institutes</i> iv.xx.12)</p>	
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Erasmus the traveling humanist

Where he went, who his friends were, who argued with him, who read his books

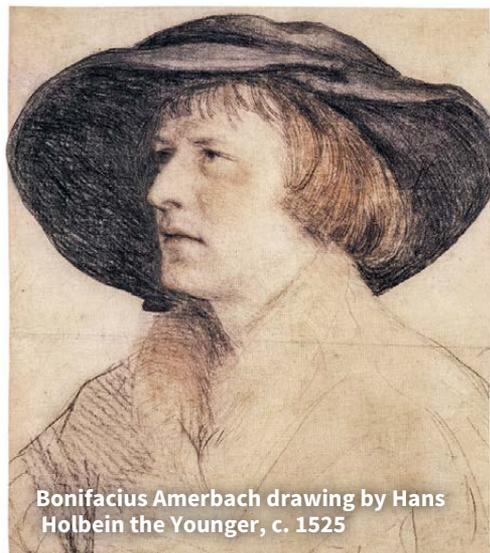


Portrait of Erasmus by Hans Holbein the Younger, c. 1530

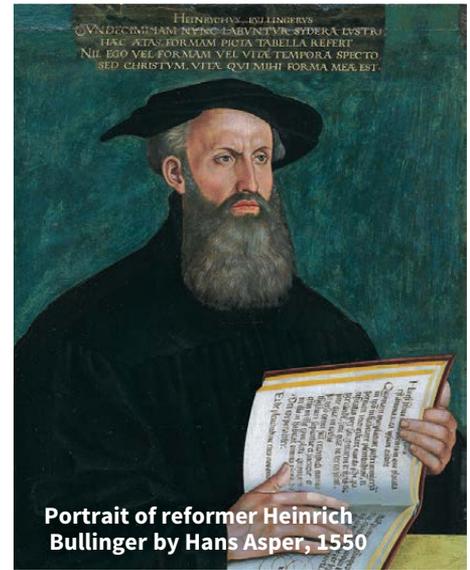
DESIDERIUS ERASMUS ROT

- 1456 Gutenberg produces the first printed Bible.
- 1457 Lorenzo Valla, one of the most famous Italian humanists, dies.
- 1466 Erasmus is born in ROTTERDAM.
- 1483 Erasmus's parents die of the plague.
- 1488 Erasmus enters the Augustinian monastery at STEYN.
- c. 1489–1495 Erasmus writes *The Antibarbarians*.
- 1492 Erasmus is ordained a priest.
- 1495 Erasmus begins study at the University of PARIS.
- 1496 Erasmus publishes a book of poetry.
- 1499 William Blunt invites Erasmus to ENGLAND for his first visit. There he becomes friends with Thomas More and John Colet.

- 1500 Erasmus publishes *Adages*. That same year he writes his often-misquoted letter about buying books before clothes (see p. 1).
- 1501–1503 Erasmus lives in FRANCE.
- 1503 Erasmus publishes *Handbook of the Christian Soldier*.
- 1504–1506 Erasmus lives in the Low Countries in LEUVEN (in modern BELGIUM).
- 1504 Erasmus publishes an edition of Valla's *Notes on the New Testament*.
- 1506–1509 Erasmus lives in ITALY.
- 1507 Johann Froben purchases the printing house of Johann Amerbach.
- 1509–1514 Erasmus lives in ENGLAND.
- 1509 Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples publishes the *Fivefold Psalter*, a biblical humanist work.
- 1511 Erasmus publishes *Praise of Folly*. From 1511 to 1515, he serves as Lady Margaret's professor of divinity at Cambridge.



Bonifacius Amerbach drawing by Hans Holbein the Younger, c. 1525



Portrait of reformer Heinrich Bullinger by Hans Asper, 1550

- 1512 Erasmus publishes a handbook of style, *De Copia or On the Abundance of Words and Things*.
- 1514 Erasmus returns to the LOW COUNTRIES.
- 1514 Scholars at the University of Alcalá print the Complutensian Polyglot Bible. Erasmus meets Froben, who becomes a good friend.
- 1515–1516 Erasmus travels frequently to BASEL, preparing his New Testament.
- 1515 Oecolampadius becomes Erasmus's assistant in the preparation of his New Testament. Erasmus also befriends other future Reformation leaders including Capito and Pellikan.
- 1516 Erasmus publishes *Paraclesis* and *The Education of a Christian Prince* and releases his edition of the New Testament. Influenced by Erasmus, Thomas More publishes *Utopia*. Martin Luther writes to Erasmus about their disagreements for the first time.
- 1517 Erasmus becomes a member of the theology faculty at the University of LEUVEN.

HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER, PORTRAIT OF ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM, c. 1530. OIL ON LINDEN PANEL, ROBERT LEHMAN COLLECTION, 1975—METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART / (CC0) WIKIMEDIA
 HANS ASPER, HEINRICH BULLINGER, 1550—PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA
 HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER, PORTRAIT OF BONIFACIUS AMERBACH, c. 1525. BLACK AND COLOURED CHALK, METALPOINT ON THE HAT AND HAIR—KUNSTMUSEUM BASEL / PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA

1517 Luther publishes the 95 Theses.

1518 Erasmus publishes the first edition of his *Colloquies*.

1519 Erasmus's friend John Colet dies.

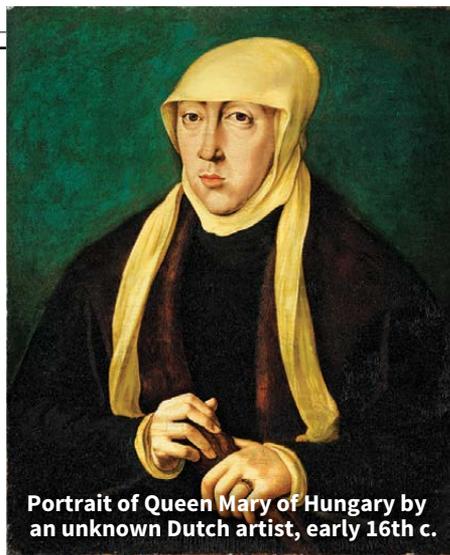
1520 Erasmus publishes *System and Method of True Theology*. A group of young humanists gathers around Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich; many will later break away and begin the Radical Reformation.

1521 Luther appears at the Diet of Worms.

1521–1529 Erasmus lives in BASEL.

1522 Diego López Zúñiga attacks Erasmus in *The Blasphemies and Impieties of Erasmus of Rotterdam*.

1523 Erasmus writes the *Catalogue of All the Works of Erasmus of Rotterdam*. He breaks off contact with Ulrich Zwingli. Ulrich von Hutten attacks him in *Quarrel with Erasmus of Rotterdam*, and Erasmus responds with *The Sponge of Erasmus against the Aspersions of Hutten*. Some Franciscan theologians first accuse him of "laying the egg that Luther hatched."



Portrait of Queen Mary of Hungary by an unknown Dutch artist, early 16th c.

1524 Erasmus publishes *Diatribes or Comparison on Free Will*. He attacks Zwingli and Oecolampadius regarding their agreement with reformer Andreas Karlstadt.

1525 Zurich radicals, soon called Anabaptists, baptize each other as adults. Luther responds to the *Diatribes* by issuing *The Bondage of the Will*. Around this time Erasmus becomes friends with Bonifacius Amerbach.

1526 Erasmus publishes *The Institution of Christian Matrimony*. He also responds to *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther by issuing *A Warrior Shielding a Discussion of Free Will against the Enslaved Will*.

1528 The first Hutterite communities form; they study Erasmus's writings.

1529 Because Basel becomes Protestant, Erasmus moves to FREIBURG.

1529 Protestant leaders, including Luther, debate at the Colloquy of Marburg. Erasmus writes *Epistle Against the False Evangelicals*.

1530 Erasmus writes *A Christian Widow* for Mary of Hungary. Lutherans present the *Augsburg Confession*, a statement of their faith, to the Diet of Augsburg summoned by Emperor Charles V.



Dutch relief of Erasmus, 1936

1531 Zwingli is involved in a translation of the Bible based in part on the work of Erasmus.

1532 Erasmus writes *Clarifications* to defend himself against censures from the University of Paris.

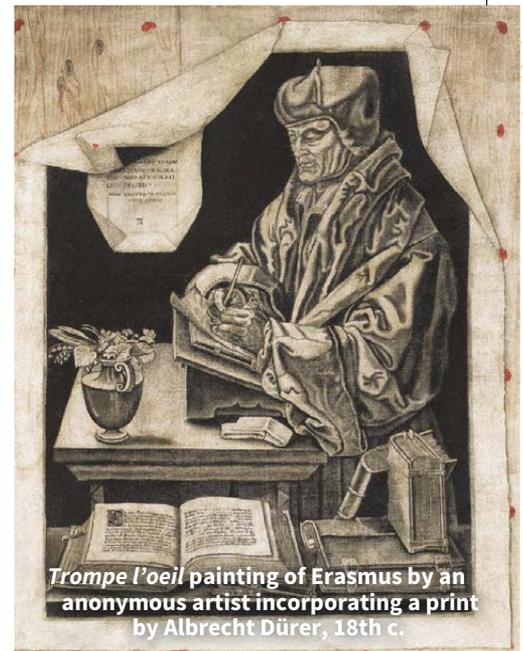
1533 Erasmus writes *On Restoring the Unity of the Church*.

1534 Erasmus publishes *On the Writing of Letters*. Luther accuses him of questioning the concept of the Trinity.

1535 Erasmus publishes *Ecclesiastes: On the Art of Preaching*. Henry VIII executes his friend Thomas More.

1536 Erasmus dies while on a long-term visit to BASEL. He had made Amerbach his heir and executor.

1540 Erasmus's complete works are first published.



Trompe l'oeil painting of Erasmus by an anonymous artist incorporating a print by Albrecht Dürer, 18th c.



Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will* (1525)

AFTER JAN CORNELISZ VERMEYEN, 1600 TO 1560, OIL ON PANEL, NETHERLANDS—METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART / PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA
LEONARDI, 1515, OIL ON PANEL, ITALY—METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART / PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA
MARTIN LUTHER ON THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL, 1525, BENZ LUTHER 2201—KÖHLER 12430 / PUBLIC DOMAIN, MUNSTER UNIVERSITY AND STATE LIBRARY
AFTER ALBRECHT DÜRER, TROMPE L'OEIL, 18TH C. OIL ON CANVAS—NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WARSAW / PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA



Debating over the Promised Land

ERASMUS AS A REFORMING LEADER

Amy Nelson Burnett

Erasmus befriended many future reformers. His biblical humanism struck a chord that resonated with their hunger for reform. As he produced his New Testament in Basel in 1514–1516, many gathered around him before becoming Reformation leaders in places like Strasbourg, Basel, and Zurich: Wolfgang Capito (c. 1478–1541), Johann Oecolampadius (see pp. 36–39), and Konrad Pellikan (1478–1556). Others such as Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) and Martin Bucer (1491–1551) were committed Erasmians before Luther’s rise to fame.

Erasmus would never escape association with, and even blame for, some of what followed. According to Luther, Erasmus would always be like Moses: able to see the Promised Land from afar, but never able to enter it himself.

TEACHER OR REDEEMER?

Erasmus never met Martin Luther personally, and by the mid-1520s, it was clear that the two men had fundamentally different approaches to the study of Scripture. Erasmus’s connections with the Swiss and south German reformers were much stronger and more personal. His biblical humanist approach, characterized by careful study of the original languages as part of the exegesis of Scripture, combined with

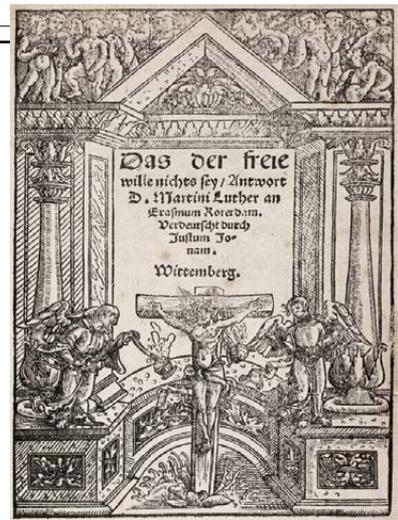
HATS OFF Later generations often associated Luther and Erasmus, as in this 1604 cartoon that includes (at back) the two of them exposing corrupt priests.

a concerted effort to reform church and society, paralleled the reforms these men desired.

In his pedagogical and devotional works, Erasmus criticized the abstract and irrelevant theology of medieval scholastic theologians, the moral failings and fiscal abuses of the clergy, and the superstition and ignorance of the laity. Rejecting too great a reliance on ceremonies and sacramental actions, he advocated an internalized and Christ-centered piety, “the philosophy of Christ,” shaping one’s daily conduct.

He argued that laypeople should be able to read the Bible, and, when he published an expanded version of his *System and Method of True Theology* as a separate treatise in 1520, it became one of his most influential works.

Conservative theologians who felt that knowledge of Greek and Hebrew was not necessary for the study of Scripture challenged this. They were concerned that his textual work undermined the authority of the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible used to formulate doctrine.



ONE OF THESE THINGS IS . . . Erasmus appears with Protestant leaders such as Luther and Melancthon in this replica of a 1550 German image (above left).

. . . NOT LIKE THE OTHER? Luther (seen at left bringing the light of the gospel) criticized Erasmus sharply in *Bondage of the Will* (above right).

be heard but avoiding any public endorsement of Luther's teachings. Erasmus's friends in Basel did not share his caution, however. They oversaw the reprinting of Luther's treatises in that city, working with other printers after Erasmus forbade his publisher, Johann Froben (see pp. 36–39), from taking part in this profitable venture.

Through the early Reformation, Erasmus lived in the Netherlands, but persecution of Luther's supporters there steadily increased, and he moved to Basel in 1521. Support for the evangelical movement—as the new reforms were known—in Basel grew rapidly, and Erasmus's former editorial assistant, Oecolampadius, became its most prominent spokesman when he too returned to Basel in 1522.

The two remained on friendly terms, but as the evangelicals moved from preaching into liturgical and institutional reform, Erasmus began to distance himself from his earlier colleagues. He would not allow Oecolampadius to claim him as “our Erasmus” in the preface of an Isaiah commentary, and he warned Zwingli to act with greater moderation and prudence. By the end of 1523, he had broken off correspondence with Zwingli.

A POOR THEOLOGIAN?

Erasmus publicly rejected Luther in *Diatribes on Free Will* (1524). Asserting that Scripture could be difficult to understand and that theological controversy does more harm than good, Erasmus argued that most interpreters gave some role to the human will in salvation. Luther responded with *Bondage of the Will* (1525) in which he famously compared the human will to a beast ridden either by God or by Satan. Erasmus published a lengthy response, but Luther refused further debate. Over the next decade, Luther continued to read Erasmus's works but criticized him in private as a skeptic and a poor theologian concerned only with morality.

When Luther first came to public attention with his criticism of indulgences, many saw him as a proponent of the same biblical humanism Erasmus was championing and associated the early “Luther affair” with the conflict between scholasticism and humanism (see pp. 11–14). Many of Erasmus's defenders became early supporters of Luther.

In 1516 Luther criticized Erasmus for not understanding Paul's discussion of the law in the Epistle to the Romans. Erasmus did not share Luther's deep awareness of the gulf separating sinful humans from a righteous God. For Luther the essential distinction between law—teaching humankind's complete inability to please God—and gospel—God's gracious offer of forgiveness through Christ—was key to interpreting Scripture. In Luther's eyes Erasmus's emphasis on Christian conduct detracted from Christ's role as redeemer and downgraded him to merely a teacher.

In the early years of the Reformation, however, many did not perceive this fundamental difference between the two men. Erasmus himself tried to walk a fine line between Luther and the Catholic Church, defending Luther's right to

COPY OF THE MEINBURG EPITAPH BY LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER, 1560. LUTHERHAUS - AKG IMAGES / PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA
 MARTIN LUTHER, DAS DER FREIE WILLE, WILHELMUS SEY, 1528. TRANSLATED TO GERMAN BY JUSTUS LONAS - PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA
 HANS MOSER, D. MARTIN LUTHER, 1546 TO 1560. WOODCUT, GERMANY. PHOTO: JOHANN JACOB WICK - PUBLIC DOMAIN, ZÜRICH CENTRAL LIBRARY



The disagreement became public again a decade later. In 1534 Luther published a harsh attack on Erasmus, accusing him of questioning the doctrine of the Trinity. In his view Erasmus's skepticism made him incapable of teaching sure doctrine. Erasmus quickly published a response, defending himself and calling Luther to task for abusive language. The public quarrel ended there; Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) and others prevailed upon Luther not to respond. As his older colleague did, Melanchthon rejected Erasmus's approach to interpreting Scripture, but he expressed his criticisms in a more subtle way and was able to maintain an occasional correspondence with Erasmus despite their disagreements.

“FALSE EVANGELICALS”

Erasmus's relationship with Swiss and south German reformers soured in different ways than that with Luther and Melanchthon. Both Zwingli and Oecolampadius agreed with Luther, not Erasmus, about the powerlessness of the human will in salvation, but a more significant source of disagreement between Erasmus and his former disciples was



TAKE AND EAT One huge source of 16th-c. debate was the Eucharist, evoked in this Northern Renaissance painting (above) of the Last Supper.

AGREE TO DISAGREE? Oecolampadius (far left) and Pellikan (left) remained admirers of Erasmus despite theological differences.

the Eucharist. In the fall of 1524, Andreas Karlstadt (1486–1541) published several pamphlets in Basel in which he argued that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are not transformed into Christ's actual body and blood during the Mass.

Both Zwingli and Oecolampadius sided with Karlstadt, and they cited Erasmus's annotations on several key New Testament verses to support their position.

Making matters even worse for Erasmus, reports circulated that Erasmus agreed with Zwingli about the sacrament.

Enraged, Erasmus attacked his former colleagues both in private letters and in print. He rejected the claim that the elements remain mere bread and wine and asserted that he held to the consensus of the church concerning the Eucharist (see pp. 20–21). He did not specify what that “consensus” was, though, nor did he explicitly endorse the doctrine of transubstantiation. Oecolampadius later complained bitterly about those who swore they believed what the church prescribed but privately told their friends they would believe otherwise if the church permitted it.

Despite these disagreements Erasmus remained in Basel, which allowed both Catholic and Protestant worship, until 1529 when the city officially adopted the Reformation and abolished the Mass. To avoid the appearance of approving, Erasmus moved to the Catholic city of Freiburg. There he wrote *Epistle Against the False Evangelicals* (1529) in



which he called the fruits of the Reformation licentiousness and the undermining of all authority.

The pure church that the reformers sought had never existed, he said, and in rejecting the Roman church, the evangelicals had thrown the baby out with the bathwater. Strasbourg reformer Bucer responded with a defense of the evangelical movement, but this only prompted Erasmus to publish a bitter response in which he repeated his accusation that evangelical innovations had harmed Christendom.

Erasmus's publications against the "false evangelicals" not only expressed disagreement with them but also tried to counter the accusations of some Catholic theologians that he had "laid the egg that Luther hatched" (see p. 1). Other moderate Catholics, however, continued to esteem Erasmus and hoped to heal the schism dividing the church. During the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, they asked him to attend in person, in the hope that he could aid reconciliation. (He did not go.)

PLEADING FOR UNITY

With the threat of war increasing, Erasmus published *On Restoring the Unity of the Church* (1533), arguing that agreement was necessary only on a relatively small number of points; differences concerning ceremonies and other practices were allowable. Lutherans and Catholics alike rejected Erasmus's approach, but he found support from moderates on both sides. His suggestion that learned and pious men come together to establish doctrinal consensus proved unworkable between Protestants and Catholics in the 1540s, but, in a more limited way, it would bear fruit in the second half of the century, as Reformed and Lutheran theologians separately formulated confessions defining their positions.

Unlike Luther, who had no interest in maintaining any contact with Erasmus, all of the Swiss and south German reformers he had mentored continued to esteem him. From the beginning of the Reformation, they had wholeheartedly embraced his approach to the interpretation of Scripture, and Erasmus's repudiation of his former colleagues did little to damage their admiration for him.

Oecolampadius's discussions of biblical exegesis in his commentaries and treatises on the Lord's Supper echoed

CONTESTED FRIENDSHIPS Erasmus broke off his correspondence with Zwingli (left) but remained close to Capito (middle) and acquainted with Bucer (right).

Erasmus's guidelines in the *System and Method*. In his study plan for theology students, young Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) recommended Erasmus as the best commentator on the New Testament. The 1531 Zurich translation of the Bible, to which Zwingli contributed, listed Erasmus and Augustine as chief authorities, and Hebrew professor Pellikan relied extensively on Erasmus's New Testament paraphrases in his own New Testament commentary.

Zurich pastor Leo Jud (1482–1542) translated several of Erasmus's works into German, and Capito translated Erasmus's proposal for reuniting the church. These men valued not just Erasmus's scholarship but also their personal relationships with him. After the aging and ailing Erasmus returned to Basel in 1535, Capito and Pellikan visited him.

Although Erasmus rejected the innovations of these reformers, they continued to claim him after death. He was buried in Basel's cathedral with full honors, and Oswald Myconius (1488–1552), the leader of the city's Protestant church, preached the funeral sermon. In 1540 the first complete edition of his writings was published in Basel.

Reacting to Protestant adulation of Erasmus, the church to which he gave his loyalty turned against him at the Council of Trent and placed his works on the Index of Prohibited Books. This prohibition was later relaxed, and Catholics circulated expurgated versions of his works. Only in the twentieth century, especially in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, have Catholic views of Erasmus become more positive. Perhaps Erasmus never entered the Promised Land, but he stood on the bridge between reformers and Catholics that Luther instead chose to burn. **GH**

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Living the simple life

“WHAT ELSE IS A CITY,” ERASMUS WROTE, “BUT A GREAT MONASTERY?”

Edwin Woodruff Tait

Among the many paradoxes of Erasmus’s life and career is the fact that this staunch critic of late medieval monasticism was himself a monk who never renounced his vows or ceased to identify, in some sense, with the monastic vocation.

Placed in the Augustinian house at Steyn (a different Augustinian order than Luther’s) in 1487 by his guardians after his parents died, Erasmus took solemn vows in 1488. In 1493 he left, never to return, and in 1517 he obtained final and definitive sanction from the pope to live the life of an independent scholar. He repeatedly expressed distaste for the monastic life and claimed he had been pressured to join the convent and never had a genuine vocation. And yet he continued to refer to himself as an Augustinian.

THE WORLD AS ONE MONASTERY

Erasmus distinguished between contemporary monasticism and the original monastic ideal—embodied above all in Jerome—in his youthful work *De Contemptu Mundi* or *On Despising the World* (1521), written while still in the monastery. He followed this with the *Antibarbarians*, a savage attack on the anti-intellectualism he found in actual contemporary monasticism. Erasmus compared ideal monasticism to the thought of often misunderstood pagan philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BC), who taught that the ideal life was quiet seclusion and contemplation with moderate enjoyment of physical pleasures. For Erasmus true monasticism allowed

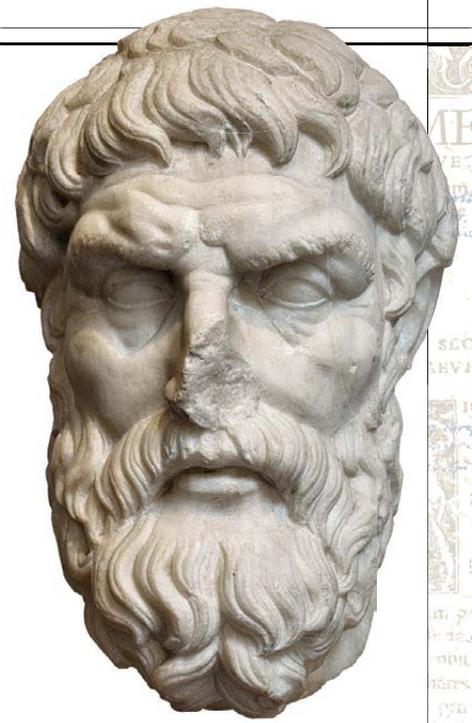
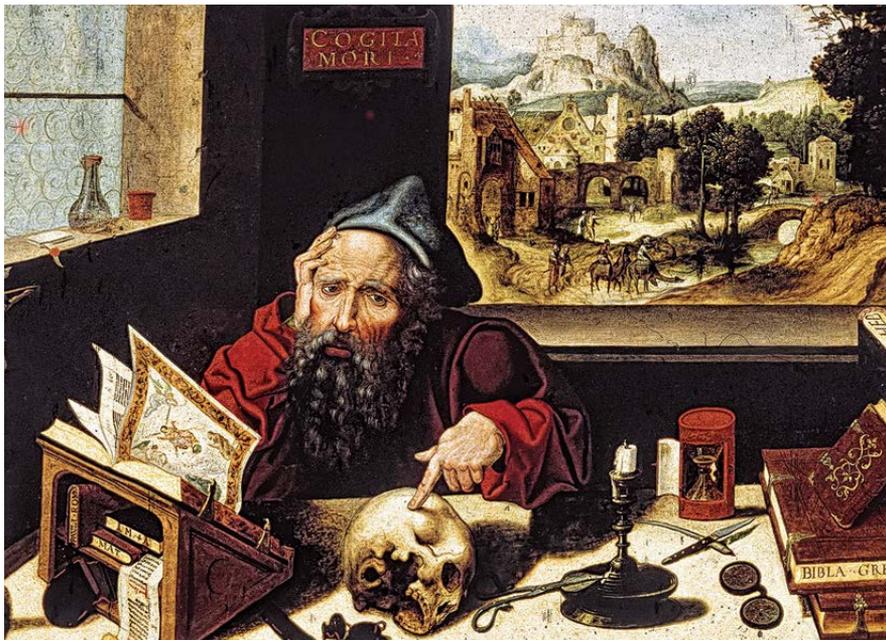
SHOW OF FORCE Henry VIII of England allies with Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I c. 1513, showing the sort of military display that bothered Erasmus.

the monk to live in seclusion from the world—the domain of violence, competition, material acquisition, and sensual pleasure—and to pursue the only pleasures that truly mattered, contemplation and study.

At his core, though, Erasmus called *all* Christians to embrace this way of life in their particular circumstances. In a 1514 letter to the prior of Steyn, his friend Servatius Rogerus, he defended his refusal to return to the monastery:

How much more in accordance with the sentiment of Christ, to regard the whole world as one household, or as it were one monastery, to think of all mankind as our brethren or fellow canons, to hold the sacrament of baptism as the highest order of religion, and not to look where a man lives but how well he lives.

In 1518 Erasmus reprinted his influential guide to holiness for lay Christians, the *Handbook of a Christian Soldier*. He bemoaned the separation between monastic and lay Christian life in a long prefatory letter to Benedictine abbot and humanist Paul Volz (1480–1544): “Why do we so limit the profession of Christ, which he wished to extend most widely? . . . I beseech you, what else is a city but a great



monastery?” In the *Handbook* itself, Erasmus exhorted his lay aristocratic audience to be true soldiers of Christ:

There is no third way. . . . If you are in the world, you are not in Christ. If you mean by the world the earth, the sea, and this common air, and heaven, then everyone is in the world; but if you identify the world with ambition, delights, desire, lust—indeed, if you are a dweller in the world in this sense of the word, you are not a Christian.

Since the eleventh century, Western Christian movements had sought to bring the gospel into a more transformative relationship to lay life (see *CH* issue #110). The mendicant orders, with whose members Erasmus frequently tangled, had played an important role in this, as had his own order of Augustinian canons. So had the Brethren of the Common Life (see issue #141), a group of laypeople and monks originating in the Netherlands. They promoted holy living in “the world,” and their most famous text was *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. Erasmus criticized his education by them as harsh and narrow but continued to be committed to their vision in his own way.

THE VIRTUOUS PRINCE

Erasmus’s own way led him to humanism (see pp. 11–14). Humanists were fundamentally literary scholars; they believed that studying and imitating proper models for speech and writing would improve one’s character and create a class of leaders nurturing a free and virtuous community. One early humanist, the poet Petrarch (1304–1374), summed up the difference of approach between humanism and scholastic philosophy by arguing that for humanists *it was more important to will the good than to know the truth*.

“Civic humanists” of the Italian city-states, while mostly devout Christians, drew on classical pagan models of virtue, emphasizing human free will and taking an optimistic view

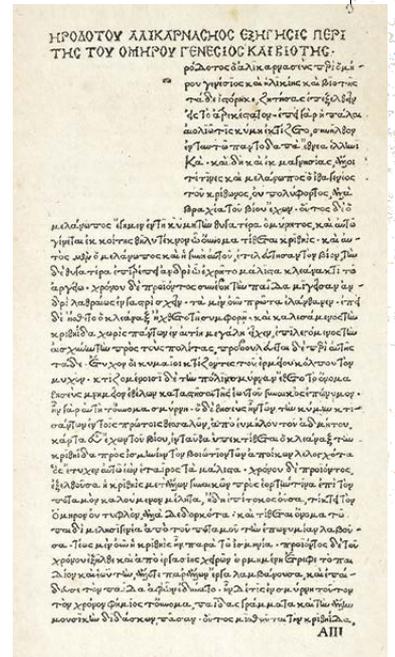
STRANGE BEDFELLOWS Erasmus saw both church father Jerome (above, 16th-c. painting) and philosopher Epicurus (above right, 3rd-c. marble bust) as advocates of study and contemplation, though the latter was often misunderstood as a promoter of sensual indulgence.

COME SAIL AWAY Humanists sought to recover pagan as well as Christian classics—as with this 1488 printing (right) of Homer’s *Odyssey*.

of human potential for virtue. They tended to see impulses toward glory as praiseworthy if the glory sought was honor from wise and good people for genuine accomplishments that served the common good.

By Erasmus’s time, however, these Italian city-states had largely lost their republican governments. First they came one by one under the sway of military strongmen or wealthy bankers. Humanists focused their efforts on teaching these “princes” to pursue power and glory through moral means. Then in 1494, just as Erasmus was beginning his career as a traveling intellectual, the king of France invaded Italy. This sparked a series of wars, lasting until 1559, during which Italy formed the primary battleground for extended conflict among the great powers of Europe—especially the French and the Habsburgs, rulers of Austria and the Netherlands. Eventually the Habsburgs gained control of Spain as well, making them a superpower, if a rather cumbersome one.

The papacy, which ruled much of central Italy, served as a power broker, even though in strictly military terms it did





MONASTERY AND CITY Trained among Dutch Augustinians (a sample of whom are at left, c. 1500), Erasmus at one point found a spiritual home of sorts in the free imperial city of Basel (below, late 16th-c.)

the era, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), represented one possible response. His treatise *The Prince* (1532, though written earlier) called for realism and an analysis of how power actually works rather than how it ought to work.

EXCUSES FOR WAR

In contrast to Machiavelli’s ruthless realism, Erasmus offered an uncompromisingly idealistic, deeply Christian political vision. Many of his positions, seeming naïve and idealistic in his own time, look remarkably farsighted today. While not rejecting monarchy, he argued for a constitutional monarch with royal power limited by councils representing the interests of the people.

He thought the medieval just war tradition had become little more than an excuse for monarchs to justify waging offensive war, and he hated mercenary soldiers, the backbone of sixteenth-century armies and often as much of a menace to civilians as to the enemy. Erasmus suspected monarchs of colluding to wage war on each other to increase their power over their own subjects and criticized the principal peaceful alternative, dynastic marriage—the primary means by which the Habsburgs had amassed their massive multinational empire.

Like most Renaissance humanists, Erasmus believed in the power of education to shape character. He thought one root of monarchs’ irresponsible behavior was the chivalric education they received—instruction in physical skills such as riding and fighting, combined with ancient and medieval heroic stories, such as the Arthurian legends, which glorified war and adulterous love. He thought a virtuous young prince should study classical history and philosophy and above all read the Gospels. All this would teach the prince to promote peace and the welfare of his subjects rather than personal glory.

Erasmus broke with most humanists in rejecting ambition as an inherently legitimate motivation needing to be directed into constructive channels. He held a more radical stance: he saw ambition as an inherently sinful impulse at odds with Christian discipleship. A truly Christian monarch, Erasmus believed, would accept military defeat or the loss of his power altogether rather than commit cruelty or injustice or break his word.

The monarchs of Renaissance Europe showed little disposition to listen to him. Erasmus was nominally an advisor to Charles (1500–1558), future Holy Roman Emperor, and dedicated his 1515 *Instruction for a Christian Prince* to him, but Charles’s own education was primarily chivalric. Erasmus and Thomas More (see p. 32) also had high hopes



not equal the great powers. But the popes of the early sixteenth century did not neglect military power. Alexander VI (1431–1503) carved out a state in north central Italy for his illegitimate son Cesare Borgia; Julius II (1443–1513) led armies and adroitly switched sides, striving to drive out “barbarian” invaders and establish papal dominance in Italy.

During Julius’s pontificate Erasmus arrived in Italy for the first time, in 1506. The pope’s triumphal entry into Bologna was one of the first things he saw, and his disgust at the spectacle reverberated through his writings for years to come. Nothing was more fundamentally contrary to Erasmus’s vision of Christianity than a pope leading armies.

Already weakened by homegrown despots, Italians found it hard to maintain ideals of republican liberty among clashing superpowers. The most famous Italian humanist of



LOST GENERATION Erasmus had unrealized hopes that the education of Charles V (*far left*) and Henry VIII (*left*) would make them ideal Christian princes.

ONCE IN CAMELOT The focus on military glory and adulterous love in Arthurian legends (*below, c. 1475 painting*) disturbed Erasmus.



institutions withering in Italy still held sway. Groups of educated laity, with a sense of agency in community political life, earnestly debated the meaning of Scripture and its relevance for everyday life. Here, if anywhere, existed a chance for turning cities into “great monasteries,” communities of Christians dedicated to following the principles of Jesus in all aspects of their lives.

Yet Erasmus was doomed to disappointment. The younger intellectuals who absorbed his scholarship and his challenge to conventional late medieval religion took his ideas further than he liked. One by one most of them fell under the sway of the Protestant movement (see pp. 24–28).

Critics already blamed Erasmus for “laying the egg that Luther hatched” (see p. 1), but he was much more guilty of laying the egg that Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and the eventual Reformed tradition hatched. And he thought it was a rotten egg—seeing it as a rejection of the “philosophy of Christ” in favor of a new dogmatism and yet another excuse for Christians to fight each other.

In 1529 Erasmus left Basel for nearby Catholic Freiburg. Freiburg lacked the lively intellectual life of Basel, though, and after two years, Erasmus journeyed back *again*. He died in Basel in 1536. In that same year, a young French humanist exile in

for the future Henry VIII (1491–1547), one of the few rulers of his time whose education had been guided largely by Christian humanist principles. Yet within a few years of his 1509 accession, Henry was waging war in France (p. 30) drawn by the lure of martial glory.

SEEKING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

After 1515 Erasmus had few dealings with international politics. From 1514 to 1516, he worked on his edition of the New Testament in the city-state of Basel, on the edge of Switzerland—one of several independent “free imperial cities” in the Holy Roman Empire. There he found a flourishing printing industry, an atmosphere of intellectual freedom, and a circle of intellectuals interested in biblical scholarship and the reform of church and society. In 1521 he moved back.

In imperial cities such as Basel and Strasbourg, as well as in the nearby cantons of Switzerland, the republican

Basel, John Calvin (1509–1564), published the first edition of his own *Institutes* not of a Christian prince but of the entire Christian religion.

Calvin had also been educated in circles influenced by the Brethren of the Common Life and had also studied at the University of Paris. Eventually he would find in Geneva a welcoming environment for his radical refashioning of Christian faith and life. Erasmus would have found much to disapprove of in Calvin, as he had in his predecessors. And yet arguably Calvin’s Geneva gave Erasmus’s ideal of the city as a “great monastery” its fullest actualization. The Reformed tradition was permanently stamped by Erasmus’s commitment to fostering an earnest and thoughtful spiritual life among all Christians. **GA**

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EMPEROR CHARLES V AS A CHILD, C. 1510, FLEMISH SCHOOL, OIL ON WOOD, ROYAL COLLECTION, TRUST / © HER MAJESTY, QUEEN ELIZABETH II, 2022. ATTRIBUTED TO MEYNAERT WENYCK, HENRY VIII, ABOUT 1509, GIFT OF THE BERGER COLLECTION EDUCATIONAL TRUST, 2021.29. PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF THE DENVER ART MUSEUM. ROBERT DE BORDON, LANGELOT IN PROSE, FRENCH 116—GALLICA / PUBLIC DOMAIN, NATIONAL LIBRARY OF FRANCE

Brethren of the Christian humanist life

THOMAS MORE, ERASMUS'S FRIEND



DISAPPOINTED MENTORS More (left) and Erasmus originally aimed to influence King Henry VIII; they are shown (far left) presenting a poem to the young Prince Henry, age eight.

shared an interest in exposing the follies and abuses of contemporary life, especially religious practice. Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (1511) was dedicated to More, and its latinized Greek title, *Moriae encomium*, was a pun. Erasmus wrote the book while staying in More's home and asserted that More both came up with the title and motivated him to publish it.

More is a man of an angel's wit and singular learning. I know not his fellow... a man of marvelous mirth and pastimes, and sometime of as sad gravity. A man for all seasons.— Robert Whittington, 1520

Thomas More (1478–1535) was a leading English lawyer, judge, author, statesman, and politician, sometime historian and philosopher, and well-known Christian humanist. When he was a young page in the household of the archbishop of Canterbury, John Morton (c. 1420–1500), his employer noted that the intelligent, promising boy would be a “marvelous man.”

More's close friendship with Erasmus began in 1499 when More was a student and lasted until his death. In 1519 Erasmus wrote of his friend: “Friendship he seems born and designed for; no one is more open-hearted in making friends or more tenacious in keeping them.”

Erasmus's zeal for reviving and promoting classical Greek played a role in their friendship; More championed the teaching of Greek in England. Through Erasmus, More made important connections with northern Christian humanists. At the same time, More influenced his older colleague through his distinctive personality, ironic wit, political acumen, and humanist commitment.

More remained one of the earliest public supporters of Erasmus, consistently denying that the Protestant Reformation developed out of Erasmus's writings. For his part Erasmus defended his friend after his death as having a character “more pure than any snow” and wrote that More's genius was “such as England never had and never again will.”

FOLLY AND A NOWHERE MAN

In the early years of their friendship, More and Erasmus

shared an interest in exposing the follies and abuses of contemporary life, especially religious practice. Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (1511) was dedicated to More, and its latinized Greek title, *Moriae encomium*, was a pun. Erasmus wrote the book while staying in More's home and asserted that More both came up with the title and motivated him to publish it.

In turn Erasmus influenced More to write his most enduring work, *Utopia* (1516). Though the title is usually translated literally as “No-Where,” More later clarified that he meant “a place of felicity.” Erasmus saw *Utopia* through its first publication in 1516; an early example of utopian/dystopian fiction, it influenced Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1623), Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1626), and Voltaire's *Candide* (1759). More left unfinished *History of King Richard III*, an attack on royal tyranny and an influence on Shakespeare's *Richard III*. He also wrote treatises on the passion of Christ and, as he awaited execution, the agony of Christ.

More's inflexible defense of Roman Catholicism eventually placed him in an untenable position. More believed that the ongoing reformations were dangerous both to the faith and to social stability. When Henry VIII positioned himself as the champion of Catholic faith, More served him as lord chancellor from 1529 to 1532.

But when Henry made greater claims of personal spiritual authority, matters came to a tragic turning point. More's opposition to the annulment of Henry's marriage and subsequent remarriage enraged the king; when More refused to take the Oath of Supremacy, the king declared him guilty of treason and had him executed in 1535. At his death More reportedly said, “I die the King's good servant, and God's first.” Erasmus is said to have felt the loss deeply. Grief may have even contributed to his surprising death less than a year later.

Roman Catholics canonized More as a martyr in 1935, and Anglicans listed him as a martyr of the Reformation in 1980. He gained further fame in the 1960s with the appearance of Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons* (1960) and the 1966 Oscar-winning movie version.—Paul E. Michelson, distinguished professor of history emeritus at Huntington University

Spiritual father or rejected scholar?

ERASMUS AND THE ANABAPTISTS

Astrid von Schlachta

John Choler, a friend of Erasmus from Augsburg, told him in 1534 that Martin Luther had called Erasmus a “double-tongued impostor, a satanic schemer . . . an Anabaptist, a Sacramentarian, an Arian, a Donatist, a triply-great heretic and a crafty mocker of Christ, and six hundred others of this kind.” While in some writings Erasmus had occasionally praised Anabaptist religious devotion, he also realized that being accused of Anabaptist sympathies was dangerous. He rejected any connection to the quickly stigmatized and criminalized reform movement. In a 1534 letter to Guido Morillon, he wrote:

The Anabaptists have flooded the Low Countries just as the frogs and locusts flooded Egypt: a mad generation, doomed to die. They slipped in under the appearance of piety, but their end will be public robbery. . . . Although they teach absurdities, not to say impossibilities, and although they spread unlovely things, the populace is attracted as if by a fateful mood or rather the impulse of an evil spirit in this sect.

Yet in the preface to his 1524 Paraphrases, Erasmus had stated that it made sense to baptize young people again after they had been instructed in the faith; in *Complaint of Peace* (1517), he had written critically about warfare; and he criticized excesses of the clergy and lack of authentic faith within the Catholic Church—as did the Anabaptists. His contemporaries—and critics—noticed. Such accusations tied Erasmus to the Anabaptist movement, no matter how much he protested. But how much of Erasmus’s work preceded Anabaptist ideas? Was he really their spiritual father?

A THIRD WAY

Anabaptists came into the public eye in late January 1525 with their first baptism in Zurich. Some believers from the circle of reformer Ulrich Zwingli had already expressed reservations about infant baptism and about Zwingli’s views on the close connection between faith and political authorities (see pp. 20–21). The Anabaptists formed a third way or third wing of the Reformation—identifying as neither Catholic nor Protestant. Other baptisms followed; the new movement quickly gained adherents.

The Anabaptists’ teachings challenged centuries-old premises of Christian life in the Holy Roman Empire. They rejected military service and oath swearing, they refused to submit to territorial churches, and they practiced communal Bible study with interpretation by the community of believers rather than the clergy. Secular and ecclesiastical



“FROGS AND LOCUSTS” This Swiss manuscript, an early 17th-c. history of Zurich, shows Anabaptists hiding in the woods and being arrested.

authorities fought them from the beginning through persecution, forced migration, imprisonment, and the death penalty. Despite these hardships they survived; today the Mennonites, the Hutterites, various Brethren groups, and the Amish trace their roots back to them.

The question of the relationship between Erasmus and the Anabaptists, however, revolves around defining humanism. Did humanism only unite those, like Erasmus and Thomas More (see p. 32), well versed in ancient languages and literature and sharing a common ethic? Or was humanism a broader community in which any intellectuals who saw themselves as *avant-garde* could come together through letter-writing friendships, discourse, and debate? Was this

a community into which Anabaptists could have made inroads?

Such intellectual Christian communities were forming all over Europe, including in Zurich, where humanistic reading circles gathered around Zwingli and interacted with his ideas. These were comparable to the *Sodalitäten*—circles in university towns in which a scholar gathered students around him. Beginning in 1520 the group included Conrad Grebel (c. 1498–1526), Felix Mantz (c. 1498–1527), and Simon Stumpf (dates unknown).

These men were part of a humanistically educated middle (burgher) class—a class that often served as the driving force for religious renewal in cities. They endeavored to provide “religious food” for themselves through small gatherings, thus remedying a shortfall they blamed on the Catholic Church. The means for hiring Reformation-minded preachers came from burgher-funded foundations.

Thus the men around Zwingli, who later became Anabaptist leaders, met to discuss theological issues and to read the Bible together. In doing so they gradually developed explicit disagreement with Zwingli’s aims.

Important Anabaptist preachers of the first generation, such as Grebel, Mantz, and Balthasar Hubmaier (1480–1528), also had humanist university educations and exchanged letters in educated circles. Hans Denck (c. 1495–1527) and Ludwig Hätzer (1500–1529) were versed in ancient languages, as evidenced by their German translation of the Old Testament’s prophetic books (1527).

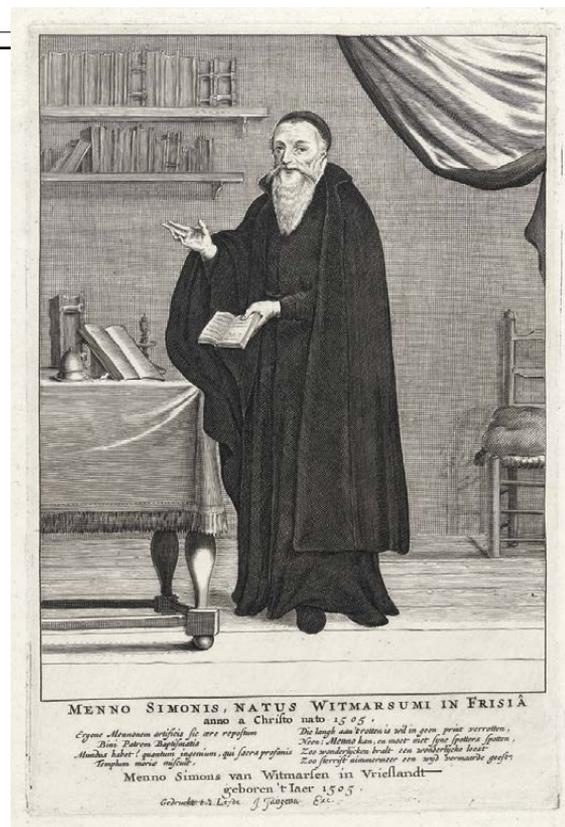
BAPTISM AND OATH-SWEARING

Erasmus’s influence can also be seen in the work of Menno Simons (1496–1561), who referenced Erasmus’s writings in his own work. He cited the humanist’s critical inquiry into infant baptism as an apostolic institution and referred to Erasmus’s remark (in his New Testament edition) that Jesus had forbidden swearing oaths. Historians assume that Menno at least possessed Erasmus’s Latin translation of the New Testament; whether he also owned Erasmus’s Paraphrases is not certain.

Some scholars argue that Menno not only knew Erasmus’s theological works well, but that key statements of his theology can be traced back to Erasmus. Menno’s knowledge of Latin, his ability to participate in intellectual discussions, and some of his theological wording, terminology, and arguments indicate that he was educated in humanistic thought and influenced by Erasmus in particular. Three aspects of his theology seem particularly Erasmian—his emphasis on the way of salvation, his basic thoughts about the material-spiritual contrast, and his criticism of the medieval church as being the religion of the material.

The Hutterites, an Anabaptist community that led a well-organized and prosperous life while holding goods in community on their farms in Moravia, also read the works

LEARNÉD LEADER Menno Simons (*above*), organizer of Dutch Anabaptism, certainly read Erasmus and probably had a humanist education.



of famous humanists. The tolerant environment of Moravia enabled the Hutterites to write extensively. The works of Erasmus circulated in their community, and Hutterite preachers used them for exegesis and to prepare their own spiritual writings. Some biblical paraphrases handed down by the Hutterites seem to show Erasmus’s influence. These may go back to early leader and elder Peter Riedemann (c. 1506–1556), author of the Hutterites’ basic “Account of Our Faith.”

But looking at Anabaptists outside these leaders, as well as at developing Anabaptist communities that promoted



FRANÇOIS STUERHELT, PORTRAIT OF MENNO SIMONS, 17TH C. ENGRAVING, LEIDEN, RIJKSMUSEUM / (CCO) WIKIMEDIA ANONYMOUS, MAP OF ZÜRICH, C. 1540—ZÜRICH CENTRAL LIBRARY / PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA

BOOK CLUB MEETING The same history of Zurich that you can see on p. 33 depicts the beginning of humanist reading circles (right) in the town (below in 1540).

ACADEMIC WORK Whether you connect the Anabaptists to Erasmus (far right) depends to some degree on whether you emphasize their scholarship or their simplicity.

the priesthood of all believers, provides a different answer. Here a clear bias prevailed against university education and humanistic ideas. A famous Anabaptist saying ran: *Die Gelehrten, die Verkehrten* (The learned, the incorrect).

DISCIPLESHIP AND PEACE

Later historians have never come to a consensus. Ludwig Keller (1849–1915) in *The Reformation and the Older Reform Parties* (1885) saw the Anabaptists in the tradition of the Waldenses, the Bohemian Brethren, and Erasmus—focused on discipleship, turning away from the world, and peace. Walther Köhler (1870–1946), a church historian in Zurich, also argued that Erasmus was the “spiritual father of the Anabaptists.” In contrast influential North American Mennonite theologian and historian Harold Bender (1897–1962) was critical of the thesis that Erasmus and humanism significantly influenced the Anabaptists. Bender believed that Zurich leaders such as Grebel, Mantz, and Sturm had turned away from humanism to give priority to the restoration of the early church.

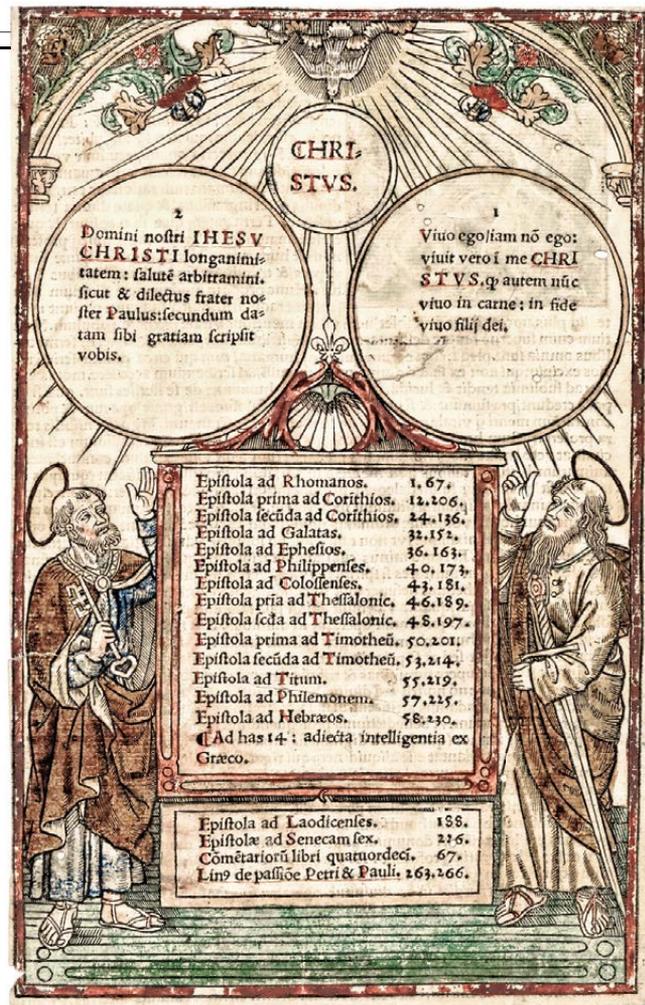
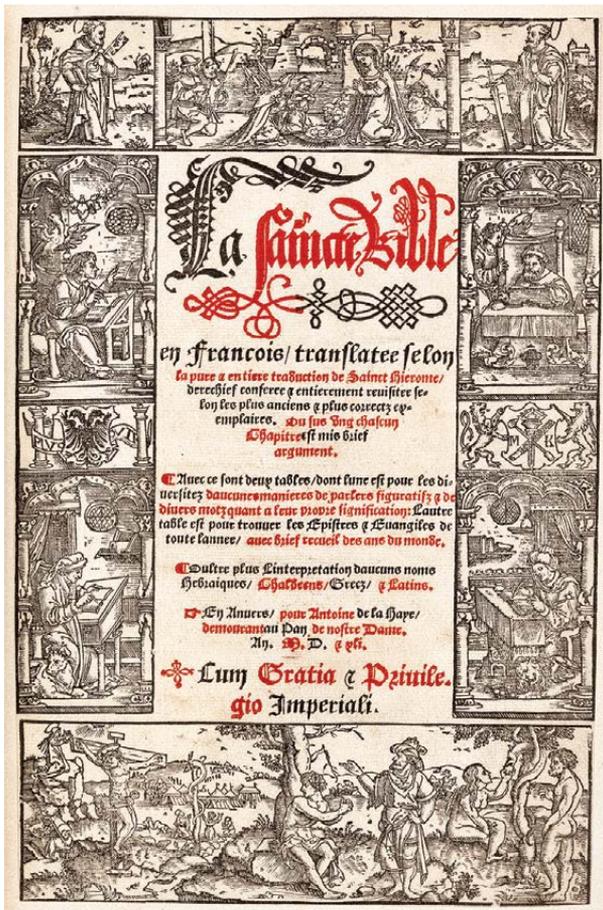
Ultimately those who see Erasmus as an intellectual, deeply steeped in learned languages and connected to networks of scholars, will emphasize the contrast with the Anabaptists. Whoever classifies him as a biblical humanist



writing against medieval scholastic theology and ecclesiastical corruption will find in him connections to the Anabaptists—no matter how much he may have compared them to frogs and locusts in his own day. **GH**

Astrid von Schlachta is director of the Mennonite Research Center in Weierhof, Germany, and lecturer in early modern history at the Universities of Hamburg and Regensburg. She is the author or editor of numerous German-language books on early Anabaptist history.





Colleagues and critics

ERASMUS AND HIS COMPLEX RELATIONSHIPS WITH HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Jennifer A. Boardman

JACQUES LEFÈVRE D'ÉTAPLES (c. 1450–1536)

Little information about Jacques Lefèvre's early life is known apart from his birthplace of Étaples, France (hence the addition to his surname to differentiate him from a contemporary). By the time he entered the University of Paris to study for the bachelor of arts degree in the late 1470s, he was an ordained priest.

Around the age of 30, Lefèvre traveled to Italy and familiarized himself with Aristotle, Plato, and other classical thinkers. He became a devoted humanist and returned to the University of Paris to utilize classical teaching styles as a professor.

He later moved to the Benedictine Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, where his former student Guillaume Briçonnet (c. 1472–1534) was abbot. There Lefèvre delved into deep study of the Bible. In his *De Maria Magdalena et Triduo Christi Disceptatio* (1517), Lefèvre contended

HOT OFF THE PRESSES Lefèvre contributed to biblical scholarship; above are his 1541 Bible translation (left) and c. 1515–1517 commentary (right).

against some medieval thinkers that Lazarus's sister Mary, Mary Magdalene, and the woman who anointed Jesus's feet were all different women. Extreme controversy ensued, but he continued working and writing. Erasmus was also critical of Lefèvre, particularly around the latter's knowledge of Greek in his commentary on Paul's epistles.

By 1523 Lefèvre was vicar general of now-Bishop Briçonnet's church in Meaux. Within two years Franciscan friars suspected the clergy there of holding Protestant views—their diocesan reform had hints of "Lutheranism." The resulting suppression of his works by the Parlement of Paris forced Lefèvre to flee France. He was only able to return under King Francis I's protection. Later Lefèvre

LEFÈVRE D'ÉTAPLES, LA SAINTE BIBLE EN FRANÇOIS, 1541. WOODCUT. ANTIWEPP—PUBLIC DOMAIN. HERITAGE AUCTIONS. ANONYMOUS, ST. PAUL AND ST. PETER FLANKING A TABLE OF CONTENTS FOR THE EPISTLES OF PAUL. ILLUSTRATION TO JACQUES LEFÈVRE D'ÉTAPLES, c. 1515. HAND-COLORED METALCUT. FRANCE © THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

SUPERSTAR PRINTER Froben (right, with his printer's mark designed by Holbein, far right) made Basel a Reformation center.

received the shelter of the king's sister Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549); he served as court chaplain and tutored her children and other young royals, living at court until his death.

Although he often courted controversy, Lefèvre always seemed more interested in teaching and learning than in theological debates. His piety astounded his contemporaries, with Martin Luther writing in 1517, "I am afraid Erasmus does not exalt Christ and God's grace enough and in this he is much more ignorant than Lefèvre."

Like Erasmus, Lefèvre remained a Roman Catholic dedicated to reform from within. One of those reforms included the availability of the Bible in the people's own language, which he boldly declared in the introduction to his 1523 French translation of the four Gospels: "The Gospels are made available to you in the vernacular tongue from the Latin version that is read everywhere, without adding or removing anything, so that the simple members of Christ's body may be as certain of the evangelical truth as those who have it in Latin."

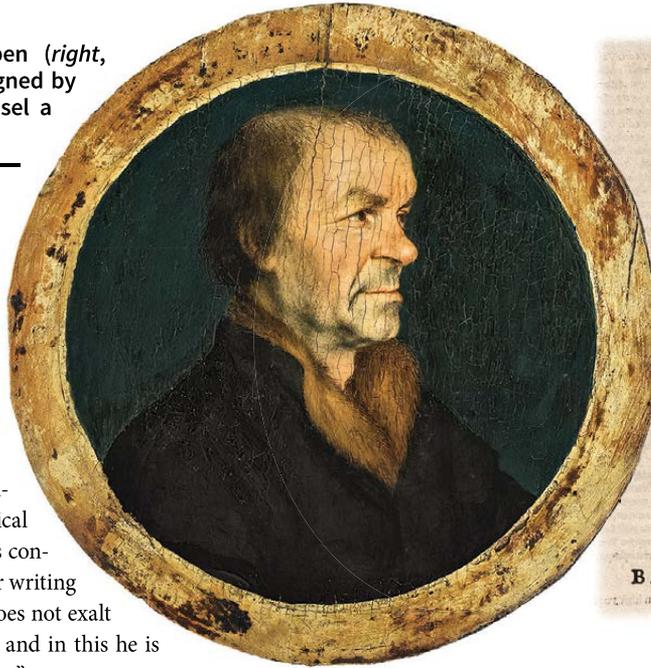
JOHANN FROBEN (c. 1460–1527)

Born in Hammelburg, Germany, Johann Froben went to university in Basel, after which he established a printing business in the city. Basel was quickly becoming a center of European printing through the established work of Johann Gutenberg's former apprentices.

Froben developed a professional friendship with famous printer Johann Amerbach (1444–1514), whose son Bonifacius Amerbach was a professor in Basel; Froben eventually purchased Amerbach's printing house in 1507. Froben desired to use his printing acumen to publish the works of the Greek fathers and joined with the older Amerbach and Johann Petri to print the collected works of Augustine.

Froben and Erasmus had both a deep friendship and a successful working relationship. Erasmus would stay with Froben's family whenever in Basel, and Froben published many of Erasmus's works. Between Froben and his son, the pair printed more than 200 of Erasmus's writings and revisions.

Froben's most famous printing was *Novum Instrumentum Omne*, Erasmus's New Testament in Greek. Martin Luther consulted the second edition of the work in his own translation of the New Testament into colloquial German.



"MORE IGNORANT" Luther said in 1517 that he preferred the piety of Lefèvre (right) to that of Erasmus.

Froben also hired famous artist Hans Holbein the Younger (c. 1497–1543) to illustrate many of his texts, and the artist created Froben's printer's mark and painted a portrait of him circa 1522. Froben innovated Basel's printing industry by using roman type, italics, and Greek fonts.

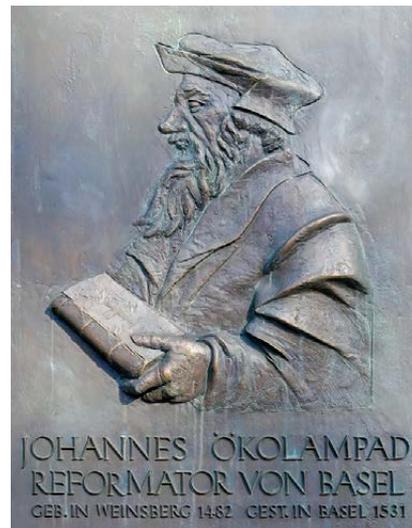
In 1527 Erasmus wrote a letter describing his grief over his great friend Froben's death, arguing, "all the apostles of science ought to wear mourning." In large part because of Froben's skill, dedication, and innovation as a printer, Basel became the sixteenth-century center of the Swiss printing world, spreading ideas that would contribute to the Reformation.

JOHN COLET (1467–1519)

Born the oldest son of Sir Henry Colet, who served twice as the lord mayor of London, John Colet graduated from Oxford in 1490. After becoming a rector, he traveled to France and Italy in 1493 to study law, patrology, and Greek for three years. Colet returned to England in 1496, was ordained two years later, and began lecturing at Oxford on the epistles of Paul. While a lecturer Colet invited fellow humanist Erasmus to visit him in England, where Erasmus watched Colet deftly shift from the old scholastic method of teaching to one that incorporated classical methods of instruction.



HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER, JOHANN FROBEN, 1528, TO 1532, OIL AND TEMPERA ON PANEL, PRIVATE COLLECTION / THE MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
 JOHANNES FROBENIUS, PRINTERS MARK, AUGUSTINE'S WORKS, 1556, PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA
 HENDRIK HONDIUS I, JACOBUS FABER STAPULENSIS, 1599, ENGRAVING, THE HAGUE © THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM



By 1504 Colet was appointed dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, and five years later, after inheriting a great deal of money from his father, he founded St. Paul's School—where boys could receive a Christian education. Colet later became chaplain to Henry VIII and preached at Thomas Wolsey's ordination as cardinal.

Though some portrayed Colet as a closet or emerging Protestant, he remained a devoted priest who wanted to reform the Catholic Church from within. He believed that only by reading the Bible could one gain holiness, and he also attacked idolatry and abuses within the church. The bishop of London even accused Colet of heresy in 1512, although the charges were later dropped.

Colet wrote commentaries on Romans and Corinthians as well as treatises on the church and the sacraments. He also wrote a popular Latin grammar book with William Lilly (c. 1468–1522) and Erasmus. Erasmus wrote of his friend, “When I listen to Colet it seems to me that I am listening to Plato himself”—great praise from a fellow admirer of the classical philosophers.

Colet died in 1519 of the sweating sickness in London.

JOHANNES OECOLAMPADIUS (1482–1531)

Born in Germany into a well-off family, Oecolampadius went to Heidelberg University to study theology. He soon became a humanist interested in classical learning, Greek, and Hebrew. By 1515 he was cathedral preacher in Basel, and because of Oecolampadius's deep knowledge of Greek, he became Erasmus's assistant on the latter's Greek translation of the New Testament. Oecolampadius continued his love for languages and theology by translating many Greek church fathers' works.

Oecolampadius had an interest in the monastic life and joined the Brigittine monastery at Altomünster in 1520. He found his position there uncomfortable after his rejection of transubstantiation and his emphasis on the study of the Bible were revealed, and he left in 1522. Oecolampadius returned to Basel to teach at the

FRIEND AND MENTOR Bonifacius Amerbach (*left*) is pictured here by Hans Holbein, whom he encouraged.

“PLATO HIMSELF” John Colet (*middle*), like Erasmus, remained within Catholicism while critiquing it.

REIGNING IN BASEL Oecolampadius (*above*) assisted Erasmus in preparing his New Testament, but their views later diverged.

university and preach at St. Martin's Church. Not only did he depart from Catholic views of transubstantiation but also went so far as to join Zwingli in disagreeing with Luther's view that the Eucharist contains Christ's real presence.

Instead Oecolampadius advocated for a humanist understanding of the Greek New Testament: Jesus's body and blood could be nothing more than symbolic. Luther and Oecolampadius debated one another on the meaning of the Eucharist in 1529 at the Colloquy of Marburg. The two camps divided their allegiance to either Luther's side or Zwingli's.

After Oecolampadius became Basel's most celebrated preacher, speaking against Roman Catholic abuses and a literal interpretation of the Eucharist, the city of Basel officially adopted the views of the Protestant Reformation in 1529. Erasmus complained, “Oecolampadius is reigning here.”

Oecolampadius was relieved that the transfer was peaceful and involved no violence. Conflicts continued elsewhere as the Reformation spread, however, and Zwingli was killed during the Battle of Kappel in 1531. Oecolampadius, already struggling with his health, joined his friend and colleague in death one month later.

BONIFACIUS AMERBACH (1495–1562)

The son of a Swiss printer (see p. 37), Bonifacius Amerbach studied law and classical antiquities in Basel and Freiburg. He then moved to Avignon, France, to study

HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER, PORTRAIT OF BONIFACIUS AMERBACH, 1519, MIXED MEDIA ON FIR WOOD, AMERBACH CABINET 1662, INVENTORY 914—PUBLIC DOMAIN, KUNSTMUSEUM BASEL
HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER, PORTRAIT OF JOHN COLET, 1518, OIL ON PANEL, CHAMBER AND KUNSTHAUS, VERPOINT ON PINK-PRIMED PAPER—ROYAL COLLECTION / PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA
MEMORIAL PLAQUE FOR JOHANNES OECOLAMPADIUS, ALESCHWILERPLATZ, BASEL—EINDAOP / (CC BY-SA 4.0) WIKIMEDIA

FIGHTING WIDOW Mary of Hungary, posed as an Amazon, is dressed in black and white to represent her widowhood in this print (right).

under Andreas Alciatus (1492–1550), or Alciat, a renowned Italian writer and lawyer. Amerbach received his doctorate in Avignon in 1525, thereafter teaching at the University of Basel.

As a student in Basel, Amerbach struck up a friendship with Hans Holbein the Younger, who painted a portrait of Amerbach in 1519; Holbein would go on to become a famed court painter to Henry VIII in 1535. During Reformation outbreaks of *Bildersturm* (image-storm, or iconoclasm) when Protestants destroyed religious art, Amerbach saved numerous Holbein paintings.

While in Freiburg, Amerbach befriended Erasmus, with whom he initially shared opposition to the views of the reformers. Amerbach was especially reluctant to accept Johannes Oecolampadius's view on the Lord's Supper—that Christ's body is metaphorically, not literally, present with the bread. To maintain Amerbach's professoriate, the University of Basel agreed that the professor could abstain from partaking in the Lord's Supper.

In 1534 the city of Basel released a new confession for those who lived there to sign; this confession's language on the Eucharist was vaguer, and the city council agreed with Amerbach that his views were not contrary to it. He became rector of the university in 1535, and immediately went to Freiburg to fetch Erasmus to help him. After Erasmus died in Basel in 1536, Amerbach became the heir of his estate, demonstrating how close their friendship had been.

Amerbach had tried to outrun the plague at various times in his life—first in 1521 and again in 1539—but his wife, Martha, and youngest daughter, Esther, died of the disease in 1541 and 1542. Amerbach lived another 20 years, retiring from teaching at the university in 1548.

MARY OF HUNGARY (1505–1558)

Mary was the fifth child born to King Philip I and Queen Joanna of Castile. Mary's mother, Joanna, was the sister of Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, and her grandfather was Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I. Married in 1515 to King Louis II of Hungary and Bohemia, she was crowned queen of Hungary six years later.

Her marriage was happy, and she mourned her husband's death when he drowned during the Battle of Mohács against invading Ottomans. A Hungarian courtier wrote to Erasmus at the time that if Queen Mary "could only be changed into a king, our affairs would be in better shape." Because she had no children, Mary's reign as queen of Hungary ended at Louis II's death; she vowed never to marry again.



Mary was interested in the writings of Luther and Erasmus. Both men wrote treatises for the young widow: Luther dedicated to her *Four Comforting Psalms* in 1526, and Erasmus wrote *A Christian Widow* to Mary in 1530. Regardless of her personal humanist and perhaps Protestant-leaning views, Mary acquiesced to the advocacy of Catholicism as the only true faith by her brother, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.

After Mary served a short regency in Hungary, Charles V appointed her regent of the Netherlands; he needed trusted family members to help rule the many territories in his kingdom. An ardent opponent of Protestantism, Charles V forced Mary to discourage its spread throughout the Netherlands. She did not rule with a heavy hand toward Protestants, however, perhaps betraying her sympathies.

After Charles renounced his throne in favor of his son Philip, Mary also resigned after 27 years of service and moved to Castile. In a letter to her brother outlining her reasons for wishing to resign, she wrote, "a woman is never so much respected and feared as a man, whatever her position." She died in Castile at age 53. **CH**

Jennifer A. Boardman is a freelance writer and editor. She holds a master of theological studies from Bethel Seminary with a concentration in Christian history.

“Wherever truth can be found”

Ronald K. Rittgers is professor of the history of Christianity at Duke Divinity School. He is the author or editor of numerous books on the Reformation including *A Widower's Lament*, *The Reformation of the Keys*, and *The Reformation of Suffering*. He spoke to us about the continuing relevance of Erasmus.

CH: What do you most want people to understand about Erasmus as a humanist?

RONALD K. RITTGERS: I teach a class called *Faith and Folly: Christian Humanism in the Renaissance*. We treat Erasmus as arguably the most famous Christian intellectual north of the Alps during his lifetime. I think what's most important about Erasmus—and this is true of all the Christian humanists—is that he believed the gospel and was earnest about his life with Christ, and at the same time, he welcomed truth, goodness, beauty, justice, and virtue wherever they can be found—even outside of specifically Christian sources.

Most of the Protestant reformers were trained as humanists. After plague, war, and schism, the humanists wanted Europe and its church to be reborn. They wanted better editions of the church fathers' writings and better editions of Scripture, but also better editions of non-Christian sources. Erasmus famously wrote in the *Handbook of a Christian Soldier*—when he's talking about the necessity of reading ancient philosophy, especially Plato, to understand the Bible—“But let everything be related to Christ.”

Ancient Christian *logos* theologians (*logos* is the Greek word for “word” used in John 1 for Jesus) believed that Christians have a leg up on every other ancient philosophy because we have reason himself. We have the Word himself.

Erasmus was very consciously reappropriating that. There was this spirit of generosity that wherever there is truth, wherever there is wisdom, wherever there is virtue, it's related to Christ. Therefore it is a gift for the Christian. There were tensions there, to be sure. Erasmus got into trouble for saying Socrates will probably be in heaven.



ON THE ROAD AGAIN This 1954 mosaic in Rotterdam on a house named for Erasmus's friend Holbein shows Erasmus riding between Rotterdam and Basel.

Erasmus was very influenced by the late medieval movement of spiritual renewal called *devotio moderna*: deeply heartfelt inward piety that produces the imitation of Christ. But he also wanted to read all kinds of people outside the Christian fold because he believed he could find wisdom there too. I think that's a really interesting tension for a modern Christian to live in: being rooted in Christ, but being open to wherever God has placed goodness, truth, and wisdom for us to find.

HE'S EVERYWHERE Erasmus also shows up in this c. 1870 statue at Canterbury Cathedral in England (*right*) and on this 2016 marker noting his birthplace in Rotterdam (*far right*).

CH: Erasmus traveled a lot. What was his role as a friend, networker, and influencer?

RKR: Erasmus was uniquely cosmopolitan in outlook among the humanists. Most of them were ardent nationalists, and Erasmus refused to be roped into any one national tradition—Dutch or otherwise. He had invitations to take up residence with all of the movers and shakers of his age; he'd visit for a while, but then he'd move on.

Wherever he could find worthy intellectual interlocutors who were deeply committed to spiritual renewal, that's where he wanted to be—not just because he wanted to be with smart people, but because he wanted to transcend differences that separated people. He was not intimidated by the boundaries that other people set up.

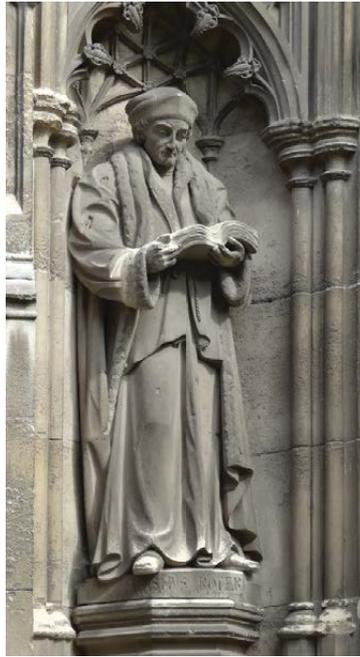
On the other hand, Luther was frustrated with him because Erasmus wouldn't take a position in their debate (see pp. 24–27). Luther referred to him as a slippery eel. Erasmus didn't quite understand what was at stake pastorally in that whole debate. Luther's existential pastoral sensibilities come through. Erasmus as pastor, I'm not so keen on; but Erasmus as a generous orthodox Christian theologian and intellectual—there's a lot there. (To be fair Erasmus did author works of a pastoral nature, but they were not nearly as popular as Luther's.)

CH: What about his ideas on education?

RKR: Some people criticize Erasmus as being too idealistic about education. He developed a whole curriculum for how everyone should be introduced to the “philosophy of Christ.” Given the literacy rates of the day (under 10 percent), which he knew full well, maybe he was a little out of touch with reality. But he did inspire a Protestant school in Nuremberg in 1526 that became a forerunner of the German gymnasium school system.

Was he out of touch or was he just ahead of his time? I think the final line of my lecture on Erasmus is that nobody followed the letter of his prescriptions, but his spirit lived on, which was entirely appropriate given his Neoplatonic leanings.

When my wife and I discussed sending our kids to college, I said I wanted them to have an education in Christian humanism. I want them to be able to encounter truth wherever it is. But I want them to be rooted in biblical theology. And that's basically what Erasmus wanted, beginning with the Bible itself.



CH: Are there some areas where we shouldn't listen to Erasmus?

RKR: The Neoplatonism thing can cut both ways. When there's been a strict division between mind and body, as can happen in Neoplatonism, misogyny has often followed. We can question what role women played in Erasmus's program for reform and what vision he had for the education of women.

Also the debate with Luther was an interesting intellectual question for him. He laid out the different views and asked: *Why do we have to nail it down to one thing?* For Luther people need to know what's expected of them, if anything, in the life of salvation, because the peace of their conscience is at stake.

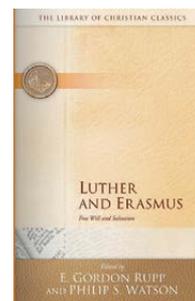
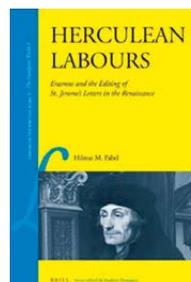
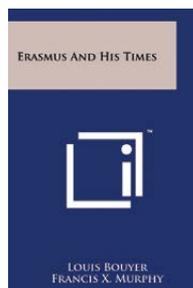
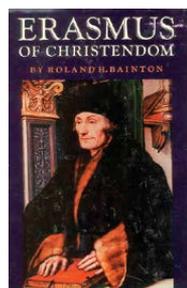
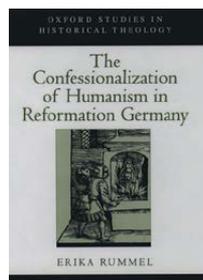
I think Erasmus was orthodox in his theology. But you can criticize his Christology for being too low and his human anthropology as being too high. He affirmed the necessity of grace in salvation, but sometimes he presented Christ primarily as a teacher of Christian virtue whom we can follow by the exercise of our (somewhat) free will.

He was so deeply concerned about the materialism and the superstition of a lot of late medieval piety that he was constantly trying to get people to look beyond it. But Christianity has a lot at stake in affirming the goodness of the material world—provisionally in this age, but still good.

When push came to shove, Erasmus said he agreed with the historical church about the Eucharist (see pp. 20–21), and he got upset when reforming Protestants saw him as advocating for a spiritual presence in the Eucharist rather than Jesus's physical presence in the elements. He would say he'd never said that. But you can see why they concluded that he believed in a spiritual presence from his theology. **CH**

Recommended resources

READ MORE ABOUT THE LIFE OF ERASMUS AND HIS ROLE IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY HUMANISM AND REFORM IN THESE RESOURCES RECOMMENDED BY OUR AUTHORS AND CH STAFF.



BOOKS

To learn more about **humanism**, particularly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (1999) and *The Confessionalization of Humanism in Reformation Germany* (2000); and Stephen Ryle, ed., *Erasmus and the Renaissance Republic of Letters* (2014).

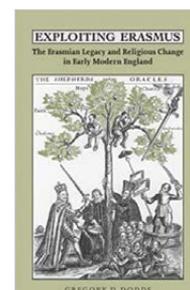
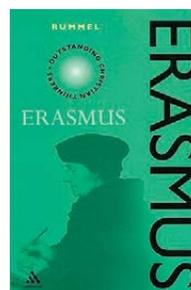
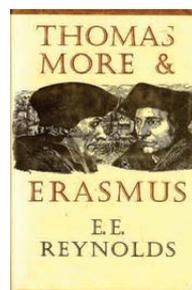
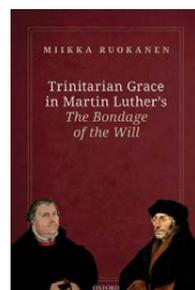
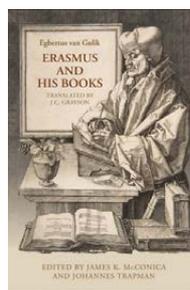
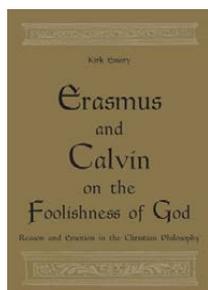
For more on the **life of Erasmus and his thought**, consult Louis Bouyer, *Erasmus and His Times* (1959); Roland Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (1969); Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology* (1977), *Christening Pagan Mysteries* (1981), and *Rhetoric and Reform* (1983); Cornelis Augustijn, *Erasmus* (1991); Hilmar Pabel, *Erasmus's Vision of the Church* (1995) and *Conversing with God* (1997); James Tracy, *Erasmus of the Low Countries* (1997); Erika Rummel, *Erasmus* (2004); Greta Grace Kroeker, *Erasmus in the Footsteps of Paul* (2011); Christine Christ-von Wedel, *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (2013); and William Barker, *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (2021). The University of Toronto Press is publishing Erasmus's works in an academic edition.

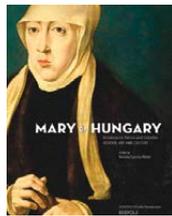
To understand **Erasmus as writer and publisher**, read Erika Rummel, *Erasmus as a Translator of the Classics* (1985); Hilmar Pabel, *Holy Scripture Speaks* (2002) and

Herculean Labours (2008); and Robert Sider, *Erasmus on the New Testament* (2020). For a look at Erasmus's own library, see Egbertus Van Gulik, *Erasmus and His Books* (2018).

Some considerations of Erasmus's thought in direct connection to the **Reformation** include *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, compiled by E. Gordon Rupp and Philip Watson (1969); Constance Furey, *Erasmus, Contarini, and the Religious Republic of Letters* (2006); Kirk Essary, *Erasmus and Calvin on the Foolishness of God* (2017); and Miikka Ruokanen, *Trinitarian Grace in Martin Luther's The Bondage of the Will* (2021).

To learn about **Erasmus and More**, look at E. E. Reynolds, *Thomas More and Erasmus* (1965); Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More* (1999); and Ross Dealy, *Before Utopia* (2020). For Erasmus's influence on the **Anabaptist** movement, see Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (1998) and Peter Bietenholz, *Encounters with a Radical Erasmus* (2009). For more on Erasmus's **civic vision** and its later influence in general, look at James Tracy, *The Politics of Erasmus* (1978); Douglas Shantz, *Crautwald and Erasmus* (1992); and Gregory Dodds, *Exploiting Erasmus* (2009).

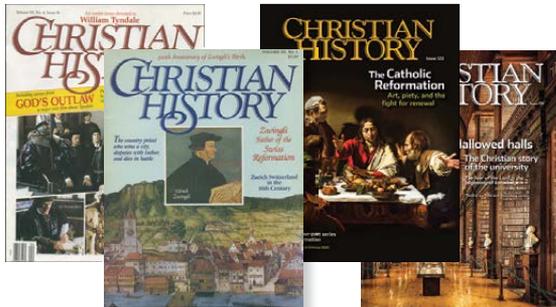




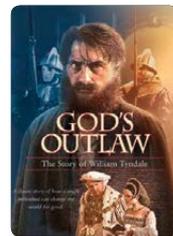
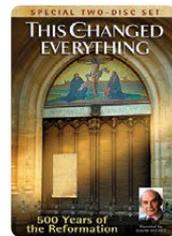
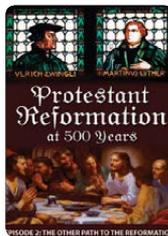
Finally, to read some more about **colleagues** of Erasmus who appear in our gallery (pp. 36–39), check out Diane Poythress, *Reformer of Basel: The Life, Thought, and Influence of Johannes Oecolampadius* (2011); Valentina Sebastiani, *Johann Froben, Printer of Basel* (2018); and Noelia García Pérez, *Mary of Hungary, Renaissance Patron and Collector* (2020).

CHRISTIAN HISTORY ISSUES

Read these past issues on our website—some are still available for purchase:



- 4 *Zwingli*
- 5 *Radical Reformation*
- 16 *William Tyndale*
- 34 *Luther: The Early Years*
- 115 *Luther Leads the Way*
- 118 *The People's Reformation*
- 120 *Calvin, Councils, and Confessions*
- 122 *The Catholic Reformation*
- 131 *Women of the Reformation*
- 139 *Faith and Flourishing: Education*
- 141 *Faith and Flourishing: Civic Engagement*



VIDEOS FROM VISION VIDEO

Videos on this issue's topic from Vision Video and Redeem TV include *500*, *God's Outlaw*, *Protestant Reformation at 500 Years*, *Reformation Overview*, and *This Changed Everything*.

WEBSITES

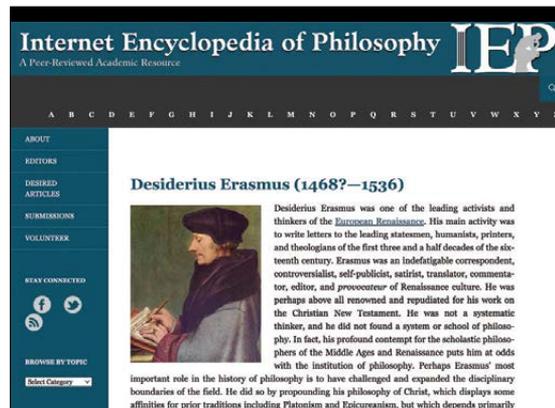
English translations of many of Erasmus's works, as well as those of his friends and antagonists, can be found at [Project Gutenberg](#) (which also has older secondary sources about him), the [Internet Medieval Sourcebook](#), and [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#).



The [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) and [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) have brief introductions to Erasmus as a thinker, and one good introductory biography, *Erasmus of the Low Countries*, has been made open access by the University of California Press.



Rotterdam has a [tourism website](#) about Erasmus sites in the city with many links to additional resources, and the [Erasmus Society](#) promotes study of his life and works, especially through its academic journal, *Erasmus Studies*. **CH**



Questions for reflection:

Erasmus: Christ's humanist

Use these questions on your own or in a group to reflect on the story of Erasmus's life and its lessons for today.

1. Before you read this issue, what did you know about Erasmus (if anything)?

2. Our lead article (pp. 6–10) says that Erasmus's ideas have "remained alive." Do you agree? If so, where do you see these ideas at work in the world today?

3. As a humanist (pp. 11–14), Erasmus thought that returning to early classical and Christian sources would improve both learning and piety. Do you agree? Why or why not? If you've read our issue #129, *Recovery from Modern Amnesia*, what similarities and differences do you see between Erasmus's humanism and those twentieth-century thinkers?

4. How would you summarize Erasmus's argument about wisdom and foolishness in Christianity in our excerpt from *Praise of Folly* (p. 15)? Do you agree? Why or why not? What applications do you see to your own life and that of your church?

5. What do Erasmus's different writings (pp. 16–19) reveal about him? Did any genres surprise you? If so, why? Which genres do you generally most appreciate for intellectual and devotional inspiration?

6. With which column on our chart of reforming thinkers (pp. 20–21) do you agree most (Erasmus, Luther, Zwingli, the Anabaptists, or Calvin)? Why? With which column would your local church or denomination agree most?

7. How did Erasmus's relationships with Luther and his followers differ from his relationships with the



STILL LIFE WITH WALLPAPER Erasmus has remained a popular subject for portraits for centuries. This image is from the Arts and Crafts movement, probably c. 1900.

Swiss and German reformers he had mentored (pp. 24–27)? Have you ever broken relationships over doctrinal issues or preserved them despite differences?

8. What did Erasmus mean by saying that a city should be a great monas-

tory (pp. 28–31)? Do you agree? Why or why not? How would you go about educating a Christian political leader? How would you educate Christian citizens?

9. How did Erasmus and Thomas More affect and influence each other (p. 32)? Have you ever had a similar Christian friendship, and if so, how did it affect your life?

10. Erasmus and many Anabaptists downplayed the extent of his influence on them (pp. 33–35). Do you think they were right? Why or why not?

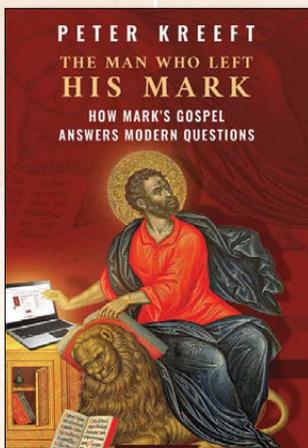
11. What similarities did you see among the figures on pp. 36–39? What differences? Which ones inspired you the most? Puzzled you the most?

12. Can Erasmus serve as a model to us today, and if so, how (pp. 40–41)? Do you see dangers or cautions in any aspects of his thinking? If so, what?

13. What's one thing you learned from this issue that surprised you?

14. With which aspect of Erasmus do you most identify—the church reformer, the Renaissance humanist, or the faithful Catholic? Why?

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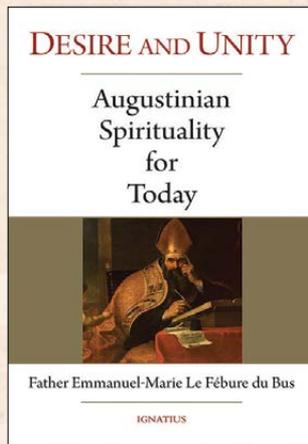
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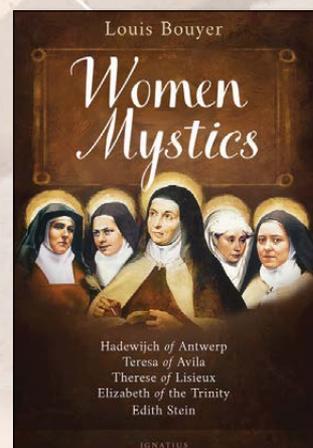
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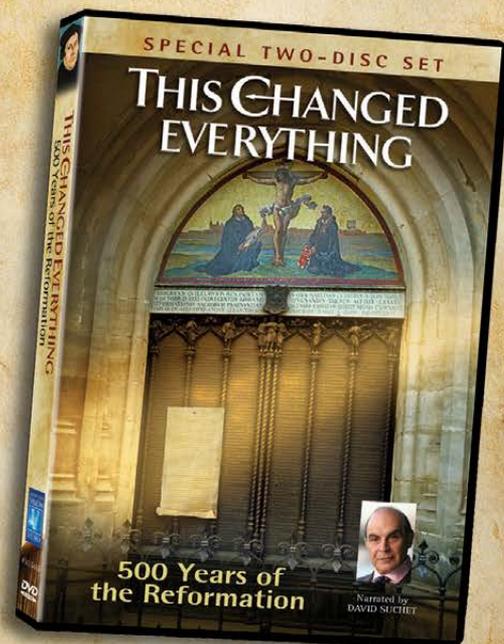
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