

12-1-1969

Erasmus the Exegete

Marvin Anderson

Bethel Theological Seminary, St. Paul

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Anderson, Marvin (1969) "Erasmus the Exegete," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 40, Article 70.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol40/iss1/70>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Erasmus the Exegete

MARVIN ANDERSON

Erasmus appears everywhere in the theological controversies of the 16th century. Discovery in 1506 of his beloved Lorenzo Valla's *New Testament Notes* encouraged Erasmus to continue the task of editing, annotating, and paraphrasing the New Testament. Whatever can be said about Erasmus, his dedication to this task has earned the gratitude of generations of Christians. His latest encomium is *Erasmus of Christendom*. An analysis of Erasmus' devotion to New Testament study adds depth and breadth to the philosophy of Christ.¹ Heirs of the 16th century should ponder the life work of Erasmus in this 500th anniversary of his birth. In his devotion to the sources of the Christian faith one will find all of Erasmus.²

I. RECEPTION OF ERASMUS' NEW TESTAMENT

Erasmus was both praised and reviled because he, a grammarian, was rash enough

¹ Margaret Mann Phillips, "The Philosophy of Christ," *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 40 to 85. See Roland Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), pp. 129—50.

² See the letter of 1513 (*Epistola 148*) to Henry Boville in *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami Opera omnia*, ed. J. Clericus (Leyden, 1703 to 1706), III, 126—30. Two important recent studies are by Roland Bainton, "The Paraphrases of Erasmus," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 57 (1966), 67—75, and J. Coppens, "Érasme exégète et théologien," *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*, XLIV (1968), 191—204.

The author is professor of ecclesiastical history at Bethel Theological Seminary in Saint Paul, Minn.

to undertake to handle the pure Word of theology. Others might call what he did philological trifling, but it was a necessary exercise in his view, because it overthrew the scepticism of nominalists and terminists.

Why are we so precise as to our food, our clothes, our money-matters and why does this accuracy displease us in divine literature alone? He crawls along the ground, they say, he wearies himself out about words and syllables! Why do we slight any word of Him whom we venerate and worship under the name of the Word? But, be it so! Let whoever wishes imagine that I have not been able to achieve anything better, and out of sluggishness of mind and coldness of heart or lack of erudition have taken this lowest task upon myself; it is still a Christian idea to think all work good that is done with pious zeal. We bring along the bricks, but to build the temple of God.³

Erasmus reminds Bullock that one should not be grieved to see the gospels and apostolic epistles read carefully by many. Sowards calls attention to the textbook in which he finds a summary statement of Christian Humanism, *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum*. From the literature

³ J. Huizinga, *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (London: Phaidon Press, 1952), p. iii. Erasmus excoriates Aristotelians in a letter of August 1516 (*Ep. 456*) to Henry Bullock (P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and H. W. Garrod, eds., *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906—1958], II, *Ep. 456*, 130—39; hereafter this edition of the letters is cited as Allen). The letter bears a general resemblance to the *Apologia* in the *Novum Instrumentum* of 1516.

extant, this text seems to have been generally overlooked.

The "duplici" of the title candidly announces a double book. It is indeed double, but the "sermo" and "res" are more significant than the title suggests, for they represent nothing less than the central duality of Erasmian thought: the reform of language and the reform of men. The illusive concept of *cognitio duplex*, so innocently lifted from Quintilian, becomes the cloak for what is possibly one of the most influential books Erasmus ever wrote.

Written for Colet's "chaste" scholars, certainly its whispers were heard by many above the thunder of the Reformation.⁴

It is well, says Erasmus, to recall divines, those whose entire life is spent in the useless subtleties of *quaestionum*, to the original sources.⁵ Bullock replied that for some months he had lectured on St. Matthew, in which he found more help from the short notes of Erasmus than from the longest commentaries of others.⁶ It is as a Biblical exegete and grammarian that Erasmus finds his vocation.⁷ His *Enchiridion*

was faithful to the ideals of Colet and Vitrier.⁸

Not everyone was pleased with Erasmus, especially not the theological faculty of Louvain. One of its members, Dorp, wrote a reproving letter to Erasmus. It shows the significance of Erasmus' theological study as well as anything he himself might have written. Dorp was a doctor of theology at age 30 who feared what the *Novum Instrumentum* might do to the inspiration of the Vulgate. Bullock and Dorp represent the different receptions Erasmus' 1516 edition was to receive. Dorp heard of the critical method used by Erasmus to restore the *Epistles of St. Jerome*. His argument may be summarized as follows: This was a worthy undertaking, but it became an unworthy one when Erasmus addressed himself to the Mount Sinai of sacred literature and changed it a thousand times. Though Erasmus is superior to Valla and Faber, yet, says Dorp, examination of his method is required. Has the church been deceived all these many years or have the holy fathers and learned men been in error when in general council they solved and illuminated the most difficult questions by means of the Latin text? Either the fathers were rash, or the Vulgate is true and perfect (*veram et integram esse*). The Greek Church has decayed so that all of its copies of Scripture except the Gospel of John are in error.⁹ The Latin Church has been most

⁴ J. K. Sowards, "Erasmus and the Apologetic Textbook: A Study of the *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum*," *Studies in Philology*, 55 (1958), 128. On John 1:1 see C. A. L. Jarrott, "Erasmus' *In principio erat Sermo*: A Controversial Translation," *Studies in Philology*, LXI (1964), 35: "The answer is, I think, more than merely linguistic. It is rooted in an important attitude of Biblical humanists toward the power of the word, which, when directed toward the Word made Flesh, reveals some cultural presuppositions as well as some theological insights."

⁵ Allen, II, *Ep.* 456, lines 239-43 and 248.

⁶ *Ibid.*, *Ep.* 579, lines 22-25 (May 1, 1517).

⁷ John W. Aldridge, *The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1966), is not to be used without extreme caution. I concur with the review by J. B. Payne, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 5 (1968), 176 to 78. The most important study of the prefaces

is still by J. C. L. Coppens, "Les idées réformistes d'Érasme dans les Préfaces aux Paraphrases du Nouveau Testament," *Analecta Lovaniensia Biblica et Orientalia*, Series III, Fasc. 27 (Louvain, 1961).

⁸ Allen, I, *Ep.* 181, lines 46 f.

⁹ Letter is in Allen, II, *Ep.* 304 (Louvain, around September 1514). See lines 81-104, 108-18, and 141-46.

zealous in protecting the Vulgate. Therefore the Vulgate is true and valid. Finally, says Dorp, how does one know Greek copies are accurate? Dorp would like to see the preface longer than the text. If Erasmus were to follow his advice, every place where the meaning should be changed entirely must be described in the preface.¹⁰

It now seems improbable that, as scholars long believed, Erasmus used a single manuscript of the 15th century to establish the text of the gospels. Minuscule 2 in the University Library at Basel, the "printer's copy" of Erasmus, can hardly be later than the 12th century and is possibly earlier than that. Yet Erasmus departed from its itacisms and corrected its homoeoteleuta.¹¹ Erasmus changed "Bethany" in John 1:28 to "Bethabara." The latter was recommended by Origen, who retraced the footsteps of Jesus only to find no Bethany beyond the Jordan.¹² Chrysostom found "Bethabara" in more accurate copies. Codex 1, the other Basel manuscript used by Erasmus, has the same reading. It is probable that Erasmus read both Chrysostom and Origen.¹³ In any event he did not slavishly follow or retranslate from the Vulgate without good evidence. In fact

the 1516 edition was not solely the work of Erasmus nor indeed a mere reproduction of Codex 2. Three additions made by Erasmus, *hoi goneis* ("the parents") at Luke 2:43, *eis aphasin hamartiōn* ("for the forgiveness of sins") at Luke 3:3, and *hypochōrōn* ("withdrawing") at Luke 5:16, are now well attested.¹⁴

Erasmus reveals his purpose in letters from 1501 until the second edition of the *Novum Instrumentum* appeared in 1519. First, however, he must remedy his lack of Greek. (Erasmus often lamented his failure to join the Hieronymians, membership in whose monasteries was voluntary.) Erasmus answered an inquiry from his friend Servatius, the prior of Steyn, with a defense of his study. Not only had he corrected the Epistles of St. Jerome, but he had also revised the entire New Testament and annotated over a thousand passages.¹⁵ He began comment on the epistles of Saint Paul. "Nam mihi decretum est in sacris immori litteris" ("For it has been determined for me to die over the Scriptures").¹⁶ On March 31, 1515, he could write about Jerome to Cardinal Domenico Grimani: Jerome is so far the greatest Latin theologian that one might call him the only one.¹⁷ Thomas More wrote to Erasmus, rejoicing

¹⁰ Dorp's letter is now translated in John C. Olin, *Christian Humanism and the Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 55 to 91.

¹¹ C. C. Tarelli, "Erasmus's Manuscripts of the Gospels," *Journal of Theological Studies*, XLIV (1943), 156—57. See also K. W. Clark, "Observations on the Erasmus Notes in Codex 2," *Texte und Untersuchungen*, 73 (1959), 753—56.

¹² A. E. Brooke, *The Commentary of Origen on St. John's Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1896), I, 158.

¹³ John Chrysostom, *In Ioannem Homilia XVII*, *Patrologia Graeca*, LXIX, 107.

¹⁴ Clark pp. 753—54. See Bo Reicke, "Erasmus und die neutestamentliche Textgeschichte," *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 22 (1966), 257—65.

¹⁵ E. J. Devereux, "The Publication of the English Paraphrases of Erasmus," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 51 (1969), 348—67. Colet had a greater impact on Erasmus than Bainton, who follows Hyma, will concede. See the compelling discussion in J. K. Sowards, "The Two Lost Years of Erasmus," *Studies in the Renaissance*, IX (1962), 161—86.

¹⁶ Allen, I, *Ep.* 296, line 159 (July 8, 1514). A papal dispensation freed Erasmus.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *Ep.* 318, lines 99-101. The *Paraphrase on Romans* was dedicated to Grimani.

that Jerome and the New Testament were looked for by everybody.¹⁸

Erasmus could be very careful in a discussion with Bude about Luke 1:1-4. Erasmus disagreed that *parakolouthein* ("accompany") was the same as *assequi* ("overtake"). *Assequi* is proper if one grasps a difficult matter with the mind. If he merely follows the thought he "accompanies." Erasmus translated the aorist *katēchēthēs* ("were instructed") as if it were the pluperfect *katēchēso* ("had been instructed"). An aorist tense may apply to any past time. Therefore Erasmus used the pluperfect to indicate clearly instruction that preceded baptism of the catechumen.¹⁹ Such accuracy underlay his *Paraphrase on Romans*, completed in 1517, and the critical text of the Greek New Testament dedicated to Pope Leo X.²⁰

The effect of the *Novum Instrumentum* can be seen upon two persons, Thomas Bilney and Bishop John Fisher. Hugh Latimer tells in one of his sermons about the impact of Erasmus' work on Bilney and himself:

Here I have occasion to tell you a story which happened at Cambridge. Master Bilney, or rather Saint Bilney, that suf-

¹⁸ Ibid., *Ep.* 396, lines 162-63 (May 1516). See Allen, I, *Ep.* 138 to James Batt, lines 44-48 (Dec. 11, 1500).

¹⁹ Ibid., *Ep.* 441, lines 1-4 and 14-18 (July 14, 1516).

²⁰ See Augustin Renaudet *Études Érasmiennes (1521—1529)* (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1939), pp. 138—81. Renaudet fails to include examples of philological correction of the Vulgate. See p. 168 where reference is made to 1 Cor. 2:13. "Toute autre est rēcusée; comme l'a dit saint Jean Chrysostome, l'Écriture suffit à prouver le dogme chrétien. (Everything else is challenged; as St. John Chrysostom says, 'Scripture is enough to prove the Christian dogma')."

fered death for God's word sake; the same Bilney was the instrument whereby God called me to knowledge; for I may thank him, next to God, for that knowledge that I have in the word of God. For I was as obstinate a papist as any was in England, insomuch that when I should be made Bachelor of Divinity, my whole oration went against Philip Melanchthon and against his opinions. Bilney heard me at the time, and perceived that I was jealous without knowledge: and he came to see me afterward in my study, and desired me, for God's sake to hear his confession. I did so; and, to say the truth, by his confession I learned more than before in many years. So from that time forward I began to smell the word of God, and forsook the school-doctors and such fooleries.²¹

Bilney had been transformed by a reading of Erasmus' Latin New Testament. The higher clergy also welcomed the work. The scholarly bishop of Rochester wore out his copy. Erasmus had written Fisher in June of 1516, describing the reception of his Greek edition.²² Fisher read it avidly.

No sensible person could be offended at

²¹ Latimer, *Sermons*, ed. G. E. Carrie (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1844—1845), I, 334 to 35 (preached in 1552). Thomas Bilney read Erasmus' Latin paraphrase of St. Paul, "It is a true saying and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Bilney described his experience to Bishop Tunstall: "This one sentence, through God's instruction and inward working, which I did not then perceive, did so exhilarate my heart, being before wounded with the guilt of my sins, and being almost in despair, that immediately I felt a marvelous comfort and quietness, insomuch that my bruised bones leaped for joy." John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, ed. Stephen Reed Cattley (London: R. B. Seeley, 1837—1841), IV, 635.

²² Allen, II, *Ep.* 413, lines 29-31 (St. Omer, June 5, 1516).

your translation [into Latin] of the New Testament for the common benefit of everyone, since not only have you made many passages clear by your learning, but have indeed provided a full series of comments on the whole work; thus it is now possible for everyone to read and understand it with more gratification and pleasure. . . . I owe it to you, Erasmus, that I can to some extent understand where Greek does not quite agree with the Latin. Would that I could have had you as my tutor for a few months.²³

Fisher utilized the *Annotationes* to defend the papalist faith, not to destroy it. If one says, "Erasmus' critical notes aided the Reformers," one must add, "the papalist Reformers as well as the others." Fisher had written Erasmus in June of 1516 that the *Annotationes* were most acceptable.²⁴ An analysis of them will be necessary to see the full impact of the hermeneutical revolution.

One can refer only in passing to the impact of Erasmus on Spanish Biblical study. It was extensive. The standard account by Bataillon focuses on the importance of the *Enchiridion* for the "illuminati."²⁵ Asensio repeats the charge of subjectivism in a more recent study. The exegetical system of Erasmus becomes a superficial and private distortion of the doctrinal tradition. So Erasmus becomes another Origen, and his positive achieve-

ments are discredited.²⁶ But one cannot dismiss Erasmianism by such a stroke of the pen. Guilt by association with Erasmus before Trent is a charge not capable of proof. One will never understand the impact of Erasmus on the Reformation by neglecting his Biblical study.

Many attacked the *Novum Instrumentum*. John Maier of Eck censured Erasmus from Ingolstadt on Feb. 2, 1518.²⁷ Eck's caustic remarks illustrate the *via antiqua* of the period, as he defends the classical purity of the *koinē* Greek of the New Testament. Erasmus suggested Demosthenes and the apostles did not speak the same Greek dialect. Eck reminds him that every Christian knows the Spirit at Pentecost gave the gift of tongues. Therefore the apostles spoke Greek as the Spirit taught them, ostensibly classical Greek. The apostle Paul described this gift of language. Are Christians really to believe that the Gospel writers erred in composing their message of salvation? "If one staggers in unbelief at the authority of sacred scripture [in Latin] what parts will escape without suspicion of error?"²⁸ Eck was

²⁶ Eugenio Asensio, "El Erasmismo y las corrientes espirituales afines," *Revista de Filología Española*, XXXVI (1952), 35. See p. 39 for *Modus Orandi* addressed to Erasmus. In 1955 appeared a study of the 1559 Index to which the works of Erasmus were attached by Lainez the Jesuit. It shows to what extent Paul IV was alarmed by the *Opera omnia Erasmi*. See Lorenzo Riber, "Erasmus, en el 'Indice Paulino' con Lulio, Sabunde y Savonarola," *Boletín De La Real Academia Española*, XXXVIII (1958), 251—53.

²⁷ Not always cited in this context. Both Mangan and Huizinga omit it, as does Schwarz. See Allen, III, *Ep.* 769, lines 58-71. Francis Morgan Nichols, *Epistles of Erasmus* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), III, 243—44, mentions it but without a translation.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²³ E. E. Reynolds, *St. John Fisher* (London: Burns and Oates, 1955), p. 45. Allen, II, *Ep.* 592, lines 13-25. Cf. June 1517.

²⁴ Allen, II, *Ep.* 432, lines 3-7 (June 30, 1516). Again it seems that Fisher found the notes as useful as the text.

²⁵ Marcel Bataillon, *Érasme et l'Espagne: Recherches sur l'histoire spirituelle du XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1937), pp. 179 to 242.

frank, and not flattering to Erasmus or himself. Did Eck believe the apostles spoke all those languages? Why not then have the Scriptures in many languages, as Erasmus had suggested? Erasmus was expressing a program of lay piety in the *Enchiridion militis Christiani*.²⁹

To be learned falls to the lot of but few, but there is no one who cannot be a Christian, no one who cannot be pious; I may add this boldly: no one who cannot be a theologian.³⁰

The *Annotationes* criticized by Eck mark a revolution in Biblical study. Not all was as Colet might wish, nor did Erasmus avoid negative comment. Erasmus used the notes as a basis for his own program of reform. Study of an expanded edition would reflect the philosophy of Christ more thoroughly than any other writings of Erasmus.³¹ A comparison with the commentaries of Thomas de Vio (Cardinal Cajetan) shows the superior philological nature of Erasmus' notes in conflict with papalist tradition on the eve of Trent.³² These *Annotationes* are the workbench from which Erasmus' theology must be constructed.

Much has been written about Erasmus in

²⁹ W. K. Ferguson, "Renaissance Tendencies in the Religious Thought of Erasmus," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XV (1954), 502. This article is a fine study of the *Enchiridion*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

³¹ I have located no complete study of the *Annotationes*. There is a study of the argument between Faber and Erasmus over Heb. 2:7 by Margaret Mann, *Érasme et les Débuts de la Réforme Française (1517—1536)*, (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1934), pp. 23—46, "Érasme et Lefèvre d'Étaples: Le débat." The analysis here presented is therefore tentative.

³² Marvin Anderson, "Thomas De Vio Cajetan (1469—1534): *Scientia Christi*," *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 26 (1970), forthcoming.

connection with other figures, historical and literary, of his time; but much more remains to be done with his own works in his own words, and any final judgments about him and just where he belongs await these further investigations.³³

II. ANNOTATIONES

Erasmus wrote extended philological notes to enable readers properly to assess changes in the Vulgate. An example is the change of *verbum* to *sermo* in John 1:1. The Greek word *logos*, Erasmus showed, signifies a variety of Latin terms. It can mean *verbum*, *oratio*, *sermo*, *ratio*, *modum*, and *supputatio*, all implied in some way by the verb *legō*. Jerome thinks the word means *ratio*, a reference by John to the Son of God.³⁴ Since the term *sermo* refers to the Son of God in sacred volumes, Erasmus would translate the prolog, *In principio erat sermo*. It was an attack of some force on philosophical theologians of the day. For Erasmus would replace logic (implied by *verbum*) with rhetoric (implied by *sermo*). His final authority for the change was Cyprian. One notices an appeal to pre-Scholastic theologians.³⁵

Faber Stapulensis split with Erasmus over the meaning of Heb. 2:7. Erasmus filled a folio volume in defense. There is a 16-column discussion in the *Annotationes*. The phrase in question was a quo-

³³ Jarrott, p. 40.

³⁴ In the second edition of 1519, Erasmus used a Latin text which varied radically from the 1516 copy. The notes used here are the expanded ones of 1540. *Des. Erasmi Rot. In Novum Testamentum Annotationes ab ipso auctore iam postremum sic recognitae ac locupletatae, ut propemodum novum opus videri possit* (Basel: Officina Frobeniana, 1540). Cited as Erasmus, *Annotationes*.

³⁵ Erasmus, *Annotationes*, p. 219.

tation from the psalmist: *Minuisti eum paulominus ab angelis* ("You made him a little less than the angels"). Faber read in Psalm 8: *Minuisti eum paulominus ab deo* ("You made him a little less than God"). Jerome noted that the Hebrew text was *'elohim* ("God"), not *mal'ākim* ("angels"). Aquinas refers in this passage to the human nature of Christ, which was made lower (*minor*) than the angels. Faber disagrees with Thomas, contending that "one should read 'from God,' not 'from the angels.'"³⁶ Here Erasmus in a lengthy philological discussion supports Aquinas.

In the first place, *paulominus*, which in Greek is *brachy ti*, does not refer to a reduction in dignity but to a temporal mode of existence which Christ used (*versatus*) while on earth: "For a short time he was made lower than the angels (*ad breve tempus diminutus est ab angelis*)."³⁷ Because *'elohim* is plural it should be translated "gods" (*deos*), not "God" (*deum*). That is to say, the phrase refers to angels, "or also [to] human beings worthy of admiration (*aut homines etiam admiratione dignos*)."³⁸ Therefore Faber's linguistic argument based on the reading *'elohim* is demolished by the linguistic method! Mann demonstrates how critical this verse is for an understanding of Erasmusian theology. Erasmus proposed *paulisper* ("for a short time") in place of *paulominus* ("a little less"). His argument may be traced back to the 1499 discussion with Colet.³⁹ "We have seen," says Mann, "that this exchange can be compared to two others of infinitely greater importance and

breadth."⁴⁰ Lefèvre accused Erasmus of approaching the sacred text in a rationalistic spirit, without reverence or sufficient thought for the role of grace.⁴¹ This alteration, dealing as it does with philological questions and a continuation of the discussion raised by Colet and others, would be a better starting point to comprehend the theology of Erasmus than his debate with Luther on a free or bound will.

His theological reform rested on a translation of Matt. 3:2. The Vulgate read *poenitentiam agite* ("do penance"). Erasmus changed it to: *Resipiscite, sive ad mentem redite* ("Come to a right mind, or return to reason").⁴² His appeal to the early fathers and Greek is apparent. The Greek *metanoete* ("repent") has a mental quality which Latin theologians have ignored. By teaching public satisfaction from this verse, all of them, even Augustine, have erred in Erasmus' eyes. Tertullian is the best commentator. His book against Marcion correctly explains the term as *ex animi demutatione compositum est* ("it is put together out of a changing of the mind"). An alteration of the mind is the Gospel command for Erasmus, not a parading of pious performances.⁴³

Luke 1:28 taught that Mary was infused with grace, and therefore, according to the common view, she was sinless when the angel announced the birth of the Savior. Mary did not share in the general concupiscence attached to propagation of origi-

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 46. "Nous avons vu que ce débat peut être comparé avec deux autres d'une importance et d'une envergure infiniment plus grandes."

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Erasmus, *Annotationes*, p. 18.

⁴³ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 706.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 707.

³⁹ Mann, p. 25.

nal sin through childbirth. With a few strokes of his pen Erasmus demolished the argument. Mary is only favored of God, not sinless nor full of grace.

Ave gratia plena ("Hail, full of grace")/
chaire kecharitōmenē ("Hail, favored one"). The single verb *chairein* in Greek has three meanings, "to rejoice," "to hail," and "to be well." For that reason it could be rendered indifferently as *salve* ("good day") or *ave* ("hail"). Nor is it *gratia plena* ("full of grace"), but *gratificata* ("endowed with grace") as I would like to translate the word.⁴⁴

By noting such corrections, Renaudet can assess the significance of Erasmus' work:

It was not before February 1516 in the edition of the New Testament published in Basel by John Froben that Erasmus' reformative way of thinking found its definitive shape. He transmitted to the moderns the Greek text of the Gospels, the Epistles and the Apocalypse which he did not like very much himself; he taught the art of interpretation by the means of philology and history. Without both these disciplines he found it impossible for anyone to find the truth. He exhorted Christians to renew, on the scientific base of firmly established doctrine, the learning and *praxis* of the Churches.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 154.

⁴⁵ Augustin Renaudet, *Érasme et l'Italie* (Genève: Librairie E. Droz, 1954), p. 2, "Ce fut seulement en février 1516 que, dans l'édition du Nouveau Testament publiée à Bâle chez Jean Froben, la pensée réformatrice d'Érasme se définit tout entière. Il rendait aux modernes le texte grec des Évangiles, des Épîtres et de cette Apocalypse qu'il n'aimait guère; il enseignait l'art d'interpréter, à l'aide de la philologie et de l'histoire, ces documents hors desquels il ne pensait pas que l'on dût chercher la vérité. Il

In his notes on Romans Erasmus revealed a program of reform in the area of textual analysis. Erasmus sought to purify the Biblical source of revelation; tradition was to react at Trent and destroy his efforts, though not without a struggle. Seripando and Pole in particular were in complete agreement with the attempts of Contarini to adopt a Pauline concept of faith to replace scholastic subtilty.⁴⁶ That his notes made an impact on a variety of reformers is seen from a glance at Rom. 14:14, *oida kai pepeismai* ("I have seen [that is, I know] and have been persuaded"). *Scio et confido* ("I know and I trust") was translated in 1516 as *novi siquidem et persuasum habeo* ("I have come to know because I have been persuaded"). Luther in an interlinear gloss says *certus sum* ("I am certain"). Tyndale in 1534 had translated the phrase, "For I knowe and am full certified."⁴⁷

exhortait les chrétiens à renover, sur la base scientifique d'une doctrine exactement fondée, les leçons et la pratique des Églises."

⁴⁶ Marvin Anderson, "Trent and Justification (1546): A Protestant Reflection," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 21 (1968), 385—406.

⁴⁷ W. Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation* (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), p. 188. Schwarz says in the *Annotationes* it became "Scio et certus sum sive persuasum habeo (I know and am certain, or I have been persuaded)." However, a check of the 1518 *Paraphrase* shows a more positive statement. There it reads "Nunc scio ac persuasissimus habeo (Now I know and have been most fully persuaded)." This is more likely the source of Tyndale's translation. Schwarz's citation from the *Annotationes* (*persuasum habeo*) does not reflect the force of the Greek perfect tense as does the *Paraphrase on Romans* (*persuasissimus habeo*). See Erasmus, *In Epistolam Pauli Apostoli ad Romanos paraphrasis, quae commentarii vice possit esse* (Basel: Ioannes Froben, 1518), p. 126. Cited as Erasmus, *Paraphrase on Romans*. One notices Schwarz's hesi-

Romans 1:17 provokes a detailed note from Erasmus:

Ex fide vivit ("he lives out of faith"). One ought to read "he shall live," with a verb in the future tense. *Ex pisteōs zēsētai* ("he shall live out of faith"). And so it is cited in the letter to the Galatians and in the letter of St. James. Chrysostom so explains it, interpreting it as referring to the future life, since in the meantime he is here afflicted and killed. Therefore it is said, "he shall live," not "he lives." But the passage that St. Paul cites is in the second chapter of Habakkuk, which the Septuagint interprets in this way: "But the just shall live through my faithfulness." One Symmachus expresses it more meaningfully: *Ho de dikaios tē beautou pistei zēsētai*, that is, "But the righteous person shall live, or be victorious, through his own faith." Jerome thinks that the Septuagint erred on account of the similarity of the Hebrew characters, which differ from one another only in length (*mensura*). In Hebrew it sounds this way: *be'emūnāthō* ("in his faith"), because the letter *waw* which is at the end of the word has the force of the pronoun "his" or "of him." Again, an added *yodb* [which looks like a *waw* with a shorter down stroke] has the force of the pronoun "my," *be'emūnāthī*, that is, "in my faithfulness."⁴⁸

Erasmus first notices the wrong tense of the Vulgate verb. He corrects it by a linguistic reference which becomes eschato-

tation to analyze Erasmus' philological work in any detail, yet his eagerness to judge it as a hermeneutical system. Tyndale's knowledge of Greek was thorough.

⁴⁸ The reference is to Hab. 2:4. Erasmus, *Annotationes*, p. 346. In the Paraphrase of 1518 Erasmus wrote, "Quemadmodum et Abacuk praedixit, Iustus, inquires, meus ex fide victurus est (As Habakkuk foretold, saying: 'My righteous one shall live by faith')," (pp. 22—23).

logical, not anagogical. Aquinas and Lombard both refer to the new law. Erasmus' evidence is impressive. Chrysostom, Symmachus, the Septuagint, Hebrew suffixes, and Greek grammar are all used to justify a change.

Rom. 5:12 is important in medieval Scholastic theology; Erasmus' comment was radical. He demolishes in 6½ folio pages the mistakes which Colet followed and Valla passed over. *In quo* ("in whom") has been equated with Adam, in whom the mass of posterity lay and in whom all thereby sinned. Augustine interpreted the phrase to mean actual sin. By the one sin of Adam all have sinned in fact, not only legally. But Erasmus objects that Augustine was mistaken. The apostle did not say *ep̄ hē* ("in whom" [feminine]), referring to *hamartia* ("sin") or Eve. *Eph' hō* ("in whom" [masculine]) is to be taken as an absolute act, neither the lapse of Eve nor the sin of Adam. One cannot escape the figure of speech (*tropus*) used by the apostle. For the phrase does not refer to the actual sin of Adam, nor to the death of the body, nor to the transfer of this sin to all, including infants. "For the manner of the theologians of our time is to believe that regeneration comes in the baptismal font." These consequences are absurd. The preposition is *epi* ("through"), not *en* ("in").⁴⁹ Erasmus then builds his grammar inductively from New Testament examples. Several passages are listed. In Acts 26:2 the phrase is *mellōn apologēsthai epi sou*. Heb. 7:10 is further evidence.⁵⁰

The discussion centered in the distinc-

⁴⁹ Erasmus, *Annotationes*, p. 366.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

tion between the Latin and the Greek fathers. Chrysostom is a final authority for Erasmus.⁵¹ Why should Erasmus be silent about a matter which to investigate is not heretical, and which has not been clearly understood for a thousand years? This question provoked volumes of comment from theologians, especially the Scotists. Theologians discuss the matter, not grammarians.⁵² It is sufficient to accept the uniform testimony of Scripture, and on occasion to forgo the written authority of the church. In the *Paraphrase* Erasmus says simply that death began through Adam and has become sovereign of all who have sinned against the command of God. This argument Erasmus was to employ against the sacramentalism of Luther.⁵³ No wonder Huizinga can say there was no Tarsus (that is, "Damascus Road") in the life of Erasmus. Erasmus builds an inductive grammar of *koinē* usage in these notes.

Erasmus undertakes to correct the text at Rom. 6:5. Latin texts which read *simul et resurrectionis* ("at the same time also of [His] resurrection") give the wrong sense. The text should read *igitur et resurrectionis* ("therefore also of [His] resurrection"). *Alla kai* ("but also") is not the same as *hama* ("at the same time with"), which would be the Greek equivalent of *simul*. Erasmus wants to resolve the problem by changing the doctrine of Baptism. Where one might teach that Baptism plants one together with Christ and raises him now to newness of life, Erasmus objects. The new life is not simultaneous with Baptism, but

is eschatological. By altering the sense of *alla* to *hama*, doubtless the understanding of the passage has been altered. By restoring the Greek sense, the truth of this baptismal passage is recovered. Baptism is now only in hope, but real in the resurrection at the last day.⁵⁴

Erasmus accepted Valla's interpretation of Rom. 7:22 that *gratia Dei* ("the grace of God") is false. The text should read *gratias ago deo* ("I thank God").⁵⁵ Erasmus at Romans 8 appeals both to grammar and the ancient church fathers. *Charisetai* ("he will give") is a future tense, therefore *omnia nobis donavit* ("he gave everything to us") should be *omnia nobis donabit* ("he will give everything to us"). Ambrose and Chrysostom interpreted it in this way. Erasmus suspects variants which read *echarisato* (aorist: "he gave"), as well as the phrase *omnia nobis uideantur donata a deo* ("all things seem to be given to us by God").⁵⁶ Not only does Erasmus collate manuscripts, but he also uses them independently according to their source. If it can be demonstrated that faith is a gift and is not mixed with a prior inherent *charitas* ("love"), then Erasmus is on this fundamental issue at one with the Lutherans. *Sola fide* ("by faith alone") is true Catholic tradition.

A doctrinal change ensues if Erasmus' translations at Rom. 12:2 and 15:30 remain. Infused charity enabled one to perform condignous merit, which became

51 Ibid., p. 370. See P. G. 60, col. 474.

52 Ibid., p. 372.

53 Erasmus, *Paraphrase on Romans*, p. 51.

54 Erasmus, *Annotationes*, p. 376. This seems to be the intent of his comments on the entire section, verses 1-14. See also Bainton, "The Paraphrases of Erasmus," pp. 73-74.

55 Ibid., p. 380.

56 Ibid., p. 388.

acceptable to God. Faith without charity was unformed faith and not acceptable to God. Faith formed by love (*fides formata charitate*) was valid. Erasmus makes the same distinction here as he did at Matt. 3:2. *Metamorphousthe* ("be transformed") means not just *reformamini* ("be reformed"), but *transformamini* ("be transformed"). Works alone will not suffice unless one's mind is first changed.⁵⁷ Erasmus breaks with the exegesis of Aquinas and the Scholastics. In 15:30 Erasmus contradicts the Scholastic view of *charitas*. Rather than reading *per charitatem sancti spiritus* ("through the 'charity' of the Holy Spirit"), he insists that one should read *per dilectionem spiritus* ("through the Spirit's love"). The Greek text uses the word *agapē*. Paul urged the Romans to toil with him in love of the Spirit, says Erasmus, not to chatter about infused grace.⁵⁸

In September of 1517 his edition of Jerome was ready in nine great folio volumes. In 1519 Erasmus turned to edit Cyprian, then in 1525 to a gigantic task, a Latin edition of Chrysostom. Erasmus' health failed him as he did all the copying and collating that was involved. Irenaeus was next in the 1527 Froben edition.⁵⁹ Ambrose followed. The editor of Erasmus' letters gives a trenchant insight:

The serious character of his life-work has been misunderstood partly through the variety of his genius, and partly because of the words in which he describes over and over again the aim of his great quest-words

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 410.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 433.

⁵⁹ P. S. Allen, *Erasmus; Lectures and Way-faring Sketches* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), pp. 48—55.

which to modern ears are misleading. "Linguae et bonae literae," "politior literatura" have a dilettante sound to us, as though elegance and grace and finished beauty of style were the end, with the ornament given by command of many tongues. Erasmus writes with conviction: "without languages and polite learning all branches of study are numb, speechless, almost blind; states languish, and life loses its value; man is hardly man at all." The languages he sought were those three which to Jerome enshrined the Bible, which Augustine would master in order to understand Scripture; the good learning was that which to us accompanies godliness. Languages alone without learning did not exhaust the requirements of education; and the learning must be decisively Christian, not, as in Italy, tinged with paganism.⁶⁰

The ancient world of the apostles was no longer to be veiled through Latin; it was revealed in the simple Greek of the gospels. Here the philology of Valla, the tropology of Colet, and the piety of Erasmus met St. Paul. Their contribution to Biblical scholarship and patristics made commentaries on St. Paul "rival the popularity of a romance of chivalry." Its impact on papalist exegesis before Trent was phenomenal. The extent to which such exegesis reflects both the humanist standards of philology in the Renaissance and the *sola fide* controversy of the Reformation remains to be investigated.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 57—58.

⁶¹ Marvin Anderson, "Luther's Sola Fide in Italy: 1542—1551," *Church History*, XXXVIII (1969), 25—42. See the references in Gordon Rupp, "Patterns of Salvation in the First Age of the Reformation," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 57 (1966), 52.

Bainton tells us of Thomas Linacre, the scholarly physician who in his last years gave up medicine for the church and then for the first time read the gospels, only to remark, "Either this is not the gospel or

we are not Christians."⁶² Erasmus knew what the Gospel was.

St. Paul, Minn.

⁶² Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*, p. 58.