

Desiderius Erasmus

by
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Erasmus was born in obscurity, and with the assurance that the wedding of silence and time would happily produce veil upon veil, he was content throughout his life to be conspicuously mute about his beginnings. Was it shame, embarrassment, or hellish memories that kept him from reminiscing of his childhood? Biographers have not been reluctant to offer their speculations, and perhaps with these we must be content. We do know, nevertheless, that Erasmus was born at Rotterdam in 1466 or 1467, the second son of an unmarried Dutch couple, Roger Gerard, a priest, and the widowed Margaret. His elder brother was called Pieter. His own name was a Latinized derivation of Gerard, *Desyderius*, which was later Graecized into *Herasmus* and ultimately stabilized as the familiar Desiderius Erasmus.¹ The Dutch is absorbed within a Latinization, which is, in turn, supplemented by a Graecization. Thus, it is a name that both symbolizes and foreshadows the development of the man himself.

Early Education

Gerard was a skilled copyist of manuscripts, a man who, though only a craftsman, had—like so many craftsmen after him—developed a love of knowledge and an admiration for literary talent. He could have kept his sons as unschooled apprentices, but instead, when Pieter was twelve and Erasmus nine, he sent them to a chapter-house of St. Lebwin at Deventer. There they were taught Latin, and Erasmus studied Virgil and had his fateful meeting with Rudolphus Agricola, the German humanist poet who filled his head with romantic visions of travel and scholarship. Already his heart was set upon Italy and the Academy, now under the patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici. But, when Erasmus was thirteen, the plague swept through Rotterdam and

left him an orphan in the charge of his tutors. It was determined that he and Pieter would become monks, and so they were placed in the hands of the disciples of Groote at s'Hertogenbosch.

Geert de Groote (1340-1384), without ever being ordained a priest, had left the monastic life to become a missionary preacher in the diocese of Utrecht. Having been schooled in the *devotio moderna* by Jan van Ruysbroeck, Groote emphasized the religious experience of Christ's indwelling presence and advocated a simple life of Christian piety. He gathered together in his native town of Deventer some friends who shared his views, which—after his death—became the nucleus of the Brethren of the Common Life. It was with the Brethren at Deventer that Nicolas of Cusa (1401-64) deepened in his spiritual meditations and that Groote's biographer, Thomas à Kempis (ca. 1380-1471), had received the training that led to his writing of *The Imitation of Christ*. It was not the sort of training that Erasmus most passionately desired, but neither was it the worst to be had. In fact, the Brethren cultivated more than piety, and it was at s'Hertogenbosch that Erasmus began to study Greek. Moreover, the years that he spent with the Brethren made an unmistakable contribution to his maturity, which merged the piety of Thomas à Kempis with the humanism of Rudolphus Agricola.

At the age of sixteen Erasmus was forced to enter the Augustinian monastery at Steyn. Once again, his hopes for a university education were dashed. Yet, he found at the monastery a decent library, and if his life among the Brethren had prepared him for the physical abstinence of Steyn, it had also nurtured his need for intellectual indulgence, and so he threw himself into the works of the Latin masters. It was here that he first discovered a special interest in the fourth- and early fifth-century Biblical scholar Jerome. He discovered also a friend, Servatius Rogerus, who shared his enthusiasm for Virgil, Ovid, and Cicero, and soon friendship itself became the object of a far more ardent, but unrequited, enthusiasm. To Servatius he wrote,

You yourself are surely aware what it is that I beg of you, inasmuch as it was not for the sake of reward or out of a desire for any favour that I have wooed you both unhappily and relentlessly. What is it then? Why, that you love him who loves you. What is easier, more pleasant, or more suited to a generous heart, than this? I would repeat: only love me, and it is enough for me.²

Some have seen in Erasmus's letters to Servatius indications of homosexual tendencies; others have seen in them mere exercises in style, the imitation of conventions without the accompaniment of emotional sincerity.³ Although the style is undeniably

derivative, the feeling appears sincere, the sort of feeling that Alfred Tennyson had for Arthur Henry Hallam and expressed in *In Memoriam* (1850). It is the feeling that young men in these post-lapsarian days of sexual consciousness are sometimes ashamed to reveal for fear of it being conflated with the *libido arcana*. Even so, Erasmus was not ashamed, but Servatius was indifferent, and Erasmus learned to protect his pride.

The young scholars's great learning and literary talent did not go unnoticed. We need only read Robert Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi"—and perhaps, "The Spanish Cloister"—to assist us in imagining the barriers of conventionality and envy with which the monk who was also a Renaissance man had to contend. He was not of the right cut to adorn the clerical cassock; the *pallium* could not comfortably wear him. Like the young Spinoza and Schleiermacher after him, Erasmus belonged to the new age and, thus, found institutions unaccommodating. His superiors recognized that he might best serve beyond the monastery walls. After his ordination at Utrecht in April of 1492, his bishop had him appeal, through the Bishop of Cambrai, Hendrik of Bergen, for a papal dispensation of non-residence. This was quickly granted and, while Columbus was out sailing the ocean blue, Erasmus was sent forth on a short leash to work for the bishop as his secretary of Latin.

Erasmus had nothing but admiration and respect for his educated and powerful patron. Still, he yearned to advance his learning at the University of Paris, and the bishop, to his great credit, was willing to send him to Montaigu College without much delay. It would seem, however, that Erasmus had yearned for what he knew not, for once there, his practical religion and spirituality revolted against the intellectual subtleties and sterilities of scholastic theology. Nevertheless, he employed to great advantage his social and linguistic faculties and, since the study of Greek was not yet taken quite seriously by the universities, he was able to set himself up as a tutor. Now, the connection between Erasmus and England begins from this period,⁴ for to England's good fortune two of Erasmus's best-paying pupils were William Blount, the future Lord Mountjoy, and Robert Fisher, a kinsman of John Fisher, then Master of Michaelhouse, Cambridge. Apparently, the two enjoyed one another's company well enough, and when Mountjoy extended an invitation to return with him to London, Erasmus very sensibly accepted.

First Visit to England

In this first visit of 1499, Erasmus made the acquaintance of those who were to become England's most esteemed humanists, John Colet and Thomas More, and through More, the nine-year-old prince, the future Henry VIII. Friendships were

made that, in the tumultuous years ahead, would be strained but never broken. His letters from London, written after returning from a three-month's stay at St. Mary's College, Oxford, reveal the excitement of new sympathies. In a letter to Robert Fisher, Erasmus expresses his opinion of the twenty-year-old More: "Nature never formed a sweeter and happier disposition than Thomas More."⁵ Erasmus is equally generous in a letter to Colet: "This England of yours has many charms for me, most of all because it contains so many men of high intelligence, of whom I count yourself to be chief."⁶

Erasmus could be as gracious as any courtier, but his flattery was not a mere fabrication. Although the Greek of Colet was elementary,⁷ this fellow scholar was, like Erasmus, an enthusiast of Plato. Moreover, Colet was at this time engaged at Oxford in the unorthodox task of providing expository lectures on St. Paul's Epistles. This was hardly the sort of theological discourse that Erasmus was accustomed to hearing from academicians. Ever since the mid-thirteenth century, the University of Paris had been dominated by Aristotelian rationalism, and theology had become associated with the ideas of Aquinas, Scotus, and Occam. The simple, practical religion of St. Paul had been lost sight of in the intellectual intricacies of the scholastics. Colet, however, was endeavoring to recover apostolic Christianity, and—under the recent Neo-Platonic influence of the Florentine Academy—to restore the Platonist and Alexandrian interpretation of Pauline theology, while distinguishing the essentials from the accidents of Christian doctrine.⁸ Erasmus, with something of the ardor of hero-worship, recognized the importance of Colet, who was no older than himself, and determined to follow his example.

What had excited Erasmus and stirred his imagination was, essentially, the Evangelical Humanist movement, of which More and Colet were to become the most recognizable leaders in England. Evangelicalism, which emphasizes "the personal appropriation of salvation and the spiritual importance of the reading of Scripture," began as a Benedictine movement in Italy during the late fifteenth century.⁹ Its development kept pace with humanism, the essence of which, says Walter Pater, is the belief that "nothing which has ever interested living men and women can lose its vitality."¹⁰ Humanism in the fifteenth century manifested itself in a general rebirth or *renaissance* of interest in things classical, particularly classical texts. Although the Greek of the New Testament is not quite the Greek of Plato, the scholars who discovered a passion for classical languages and literature were largely clerics, and so it was no accident that the first evangelicals were often humanists as well.¹¹ It was as an Evangelical Humanist that Erasmus was to advise his students, "I should prefer . . . that you follow the Platonists among the philosophers, because

in most of their ideas and in their very manner of speaking they come nearest to the beauty of the prophets and the gospels.”¹²

Literature and Dogma

In 1504, after hearing that Colet had been appointed Dean of St. Paul’s, Erasmus wrote to congratulate him and remarked, “Three years ago I wrote something on the Epistle to the Romans. I finished four sheets at a burst, and I should have gone on had I been able. Want of knowledge of Greek kept me back, but for all these years I have been working *entirely* at Greek, and have not been playing with it.”¹³ Well, *not* entirely. Upon his return to Paris, Erasmus found time to put together the *Adagia*, a collection of witty observations derived from his common-place books, and in 1502-03 he had written the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, his practical guide to the Christian life. This latter book would be translated into the English *Handbook of the Christian Soldier* in 1520 by William Tyndale.

We find in these works that, for Erasmus, as much as for Matthew Arnold, practice rather than dogma is essential to Christianity. The agreement of these two thinkers is, in part, derived from their common recognition that the Scriptures are to be read as literature and are best understood by those whose minds have been trained to discern the tropes of literature. As Erasmus says in his *Handbook*, “Literature shapes and invigorates the youthful character and prepares one marvelously well for understanding Holy Scripture, to pounce upon which with unscrubbed hands and feet is something akin to sacrilege.”¹⁴ When scripture is read too literally or—what was then the more likely fault of interpretation—when it is read figuratively *as if* the figure were literal, then Scripture seems to make dogmatic assertions, and then the reader errs in emphasizing these alleged dogmas more than the obvious rule of Christian practice. The path to biblical scholarship lies in following the narrow strait between the Scylla and Charybdis of hermeneutics. In having charted this course, Erasmus “deserves unquestionably the full praise of having been the first and most accomplished restorer of sacred literature and criticism.”¹⁵

Such praise would have come as an embarrassment to Erasmus, who, with Socratic humor and grace, recognized that his relation to the scholastic philosophers was not altogether unlike the relation of the twelve-year-old Jesus to the religious teachers of his day. True Christianity, says Erasmus—even more emphatically than Arnold—is sufficiently simple for a child to understand and obey. Thus, Raymond Himelick observes,

For Erasmus, Christianity's center of gravity lay in an area accessible to human understanding and human effort, and perhaps we call attention to the defect of his qualities when we note that the claims Arnold later made for culture differ in almost no essential characteristic from those Erasmus made for the Philosophy of Christ: the perfection of human nature in the balanced serenity of sweetness and light.¹⁶

Himelick's comments, although possibly prejudicial to our later consideration of Arnold, draw attention to another similarity between the two thinkers. For both, Christ is the human Archetype, the Ideal to which human culture aspires. Jeroslav Pelikan remarks, carefully adopting a phrase from Arnold, that for Erasmus, "that harmony with the best that had been thought and known everywhere was what made Jesus the Universal Man."¹⁷

England and Folly

Erasmus made brief returns to England between the latter part of 1505 and mid-1506. During these visits, he became personally known to prince Henry, and he spent some time both with More in London and with Colet at St. Paul's. Possibly, he also spent some time at Cambridge as a guest of John Fisher, now Bishop of Rochester and Chancellor of the University. There is, in the university's Grace Book for the year 1505-06, an entry allowing for Erasmus to fulfill the requirements necessary for the Degree of Doctor of Divinity.¹⁸ No doubt, a proffered degree from the burgeoning, but still somewhat backwoods, Cambridge was not something to incite greed or ambition in the European scholar. He left for France in June of 1506 and captured his lion's skin from the University of Turin in September of that year.

Despite his growing reputation and his love for England, Erasmus could not obtain the prominence of position here that he desired and was certain that his talents deserved. Finally, while at Rome, he received two letters, one from Mountjoy telling him of the accession of Henry VIII, and another from the new king himself. Henry had a proposition for Erasmus:

It has been and is my earnest wish to restore Christ's religion to its primitive purity, and to employ whatever talents and means I have in extinguishing heresy and giving free course to the Word of God. . . . We shall regard your presence among us as the most precious possession that we have. Nowhere in the world will you find safer shelter from anxiety or persecution; and you and we together, with our joint counsels and resources, will build again the Gospel of Christ.¹⁹

This was the offer of a lifetime. He was to be an advisor to the King of England in a reform of the Church. All of his learning and experience had been leading to this great vocation. Providence itself seemed to beckon. Besides, Julius II, who had become Pope in 1503, was turning Europe into one vast battlefield in his efforts to expand the rule of the Roman See, and Erasmus was sickening of the perpetual talk of war and the ubiquitous presence of drunk and licentious soldiers. He joyfully packed his bags in June of 1509, and while crossing the Alps on horseback, began to compose (with the fading ink of memory) his *Encomium Moria* or *Praise of Folly*.²⁰

He arrived in London in July and, while at the home of More, he wrote the first draft of the *Encomium*, which, while deprecating the “wisdom” of the world as actual folly, praises the true wisdom that makes its way in the world in the guise of folly. Erasmus uses the word “folly” (*moria*), moreover, as a pun on the name of his host and dear friend. The work is a satire, and since Erasmus and More had, in 1505, together translated into Latin several of the dialogues of Lucian, a second century Greek satirist, the humor was particularly *apropos*. The work was a success, not only with More, but—after its publication through the Fröben press at Basle—with much of Europe as well, although apologists for the Church, including Colet, had their misgivings. During the next few years this masterpiece of irony passed through a quick series of printings. More eventually responded with *Utopia*. If folly is everywhere, More suggests, then wisdom is nowhere, except, of course, in some distant island called Utopia (a satirical representation of England). Perhaps, More is reminding Erasmus that, although he had come to England in 1509 under the inspiration of Henry’s utopian scheme, *Utopia is*—as William Morris would later say—*Nowhere*.²¹

No doubt, Henry was disappointed as well, for he soon found, as all government officials do, that the quotidian affairs of business make slight allowances for utopian visions. The campaigns of Julius kept Henry and his councilors busy, as alliances and powers were forever shifting. In 1509 the Papal Army, allied with France, conquered Venice; then, taking Venice as his ally, Julius went to war against France. For two years, Erasmus—often referring to himself by the name of the beggar philosopher Diogenes—was forced to lean upon his friends and political patronage for financial support. It was a distasteful chore, and when it began to grow most wearisome, it suddenly was made intolerable. In the summer of 1511, plague swept through London and carried away More’s wife. Erasmus himself was brought low by the contagion and nearly perished. In August, while still recovering, he managed to leave London, riding a stumbling horse through a cold night rain to Cambridge. Although his health was never again strong, under a physician’s care he made a

recovery, and by October he was holding public lectures on Greek and putting together a short treatise on rhetoric, the *Copia*. Then, in November of 1511, just as Henry joined the “Holy Alliance” and set sail for the Netherlands to fight the French, John Fisher offered Erasmus a professorship, which Fisher had recently procured from Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII.

As the second Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, Erasmus was, finally, earning a decent salary. Moreover, even if Cambridge did seem to the chief wit of Europe like a provincial college, it had an impressive collection of the letters of his beloved Jerome. And so it was here, at Queen’s College, Cambridge, that Erasmus determined to employ himself in academic work, and here he would live, intermittently, until January of 1514. John Aubrey (1626-97) thought he had provided an adequate summary of Erasmus’s connection with Cambridge when, in his *Brief Lives*, he observes in his characteristically terse manner, “He studied sometime in Queens College in Cambridge: his study was over the water. He mentions his being there in one of his *Epistles*, and blames the Beere there.”²² Aubrey might have added that Erasmus—on account of painful kidney stones, for which he blamed the sediment in English wines—imported several casks from France. Our itinerant scholar also suffered from poor circulation, and for the shortage of wood to stoke his furnace he blamed the English heretics, “if only because they have chosen the moment when winter is upon us to send up the price of fuel.”²³ But, even if the English ales and wines and the nearby convent of Black Friars were not to his liking, he was content to remain, for the time being, at Cambridge.

In March of 1512 Chancellor Warham, the Archbishop of Canterbury, acting under the provision of the king, bestowed the ecclesiastical benefice of Aldington, Kent, on Erasmus. It was a practical gesture. After all, if Erasmus was ever to help the king reform the English Church, he could at least have some experience at working in an official capacity within it. But, it could never be said of Erasmus that he was a practical man. Although an ordained priest, he had proven repeatedly that he would rather starve than put on an ecclesiastical harness. He loved the Church, but he also loved his freedom—and freedom at the moment included the prospect of editing and annotating the letters of Jerome. Furthermore, Erasmus’s social circle was, to some extent, defined by his ignorance of the English language. Since he could not expect English parishioners to understand a discourse in Latin or French, the one duty that gave the ministerial office its charm was closed to him. Consequently, he quickly resigned the position.

Nothing is more futile than historical speculation. Yet, in consideration of both Erasmus’s steadfast loyalty to the Church of Rome and the future course of Henry VIII, how can we not doubt whether Erasmus would have lived to a full threescore

and ten if he had become a servant of the English realm? But, we are getting ahead of ourselves. Besides, with the immediate effects of Erasmus's resignation we are on more certain ground. We know that Warham generously allowed Erasmus to keep the pension of the benefice, thus making it possible for him to spend more time in the Cambridge libraries, working not only on Jerome, but also on Seneca and Cato. Even more important, the pension and frequent lack of duties allowed Erasmus to work long hours at his critical edition of the Greek New Testament, along with a new Latin translation. After leaving Cambridge and England in the early part of 1514, he summed up his Cambridge work in a letter to Servatius Rogerus:

In the last two years I have (among many other things) revised St. Jerome's letters; I have slain with daggers the corrupt and interpolated passages, while I have elucidated the obscure parts in my notes. I've revised the whole of the New Testament from a comparison of the old Greek manuscripts and have annotated over a thousand places with some benefit to theologians. I have begun a series of commentaries on Paul's Epistles, which I'll finish when I have published this other work. For I have determined to die in the midst of Holy Writ.²⁴

During the following month, Erasmus was busy with his publisher at Basle. Satisfied that the business was well in hand, our anxious author took a much needed vacation, journeying to Frankfurt to attend a fair.

In March of 1516 Fröben released Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum*, his New Testament in columns of Latin and Greek, with a commentary as a lengthy appendix. The effect of this great work perfectly complemented the *Praise of Folly*. By placing the New Testament into the hands of educated laity, Erasmus facilitated a comparison of the Christian religion, as presented in the Scriptures, with the existing religion of Rome, including its abuses. In the *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus poignantly and with good humor established the simplicity of the practical demands of the religion of Christ, while contrasting it with the teaching of the scholastics and stoics. These two books were hardly the works of a churchman; they quickly became the protest of an informed laity.

The Authority of the Church

I have already noted the basic agreement between Erasmus and Matthew Arnold. James Anthony Froude, Arnold's contemporary, calls attention to another similarity between the two when, in his Oxford lectures on Erasmus (1893-94),²⁵ he borrows what had become a distinctly Arnoldian term and equates the religion of the monks

with “Philistinism” and makes Erasmus into something of a Carlylean champion of the Arnold type—that is, the man of letters as hero.²⁶ Interestingly, Erasmus himself, in *Antibarbari* (1520), called the uncultivated monks and scholastics with whom he had to do battle “Barbarians”—another term upon which Arnold would bestow a particular and altogether different meaning in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). Whether they were Barbarians or Philistines, certainly the monks and the old-school theologians felt themselves badly used by Erasmus, and the Augustinians decided that it was time to reclaim their backsliding member and remove his books and pen. But Erasmus had the most unlikely of friends. Pope Julius’s successor, Leo X, himself a humanist, approved of Erasmus’s work and refused to throw him to the dogs. Instead, he wrote to Henry VIII, recommending Erasmus for an English bishopric. Of course, nothing became of the recommendation, but not because Henry was unwilling.

Erasmus, it must be noted, had not intended to shift the axis of authority from the Church to the Scriptures. In his correspondence he made it emphatically clear that his loyalty would always be to the established Church; yet, the clergy, in their behavior and teachings, too often did not represent the Church. Moreover, Erasmus observes that the danger of influence lay not so much in the uninformed dogmatism of the pulpit, but rather in the more telling sermons delivered before the pulpit—the living testimony of each unfaithful priest. It was the same observation made in the English morality play *Everyman* (written ca. 1485; printed ca. 1509-19), a work noted for its Dutch influence. Knowledge warns Everyman,

Sinful priests have to sinners bad examples been.
 Their children sit by other men’s fires, I have seen;
 And some priests haunt women’s company,
 With unclean life, in lusts of lechery:
 These be with sin made blind.

Five-Wits responds,

I trust to God no such may we find.
 Therefore let us priesthood honor,
 And follow their doctrine for our soul’s succor.²⁷

Erasmus, secure in the advice of Knowledge and Five-Wits, was on the side of the Church *and* the Scriptures. Pope Leo X and the Cardinals were on the side of Erasmus; Henry VIII, Archbishop Warham, Bishop Fisher, Dean Colet, and Chancellor More were on the side of Erasmus. Even a fellow Augustinian monk, a

German by the name of Martin Luther, was, for the most part, on the side of Erasmus—at least, so it initially appeared to everyone, including Luther himself.

On Reformation

Luther did, however, disagree with Erasmus about the significance of literature. He believed that “there is nothing better adapted for grasping God’s words than weakness of understanding.” After all, he argued, Christ had preached to the illiterate. What prevents understanding is not experience at reading the Greek and Latin classics; rather it is Satan, “who himself resists the Word of God.”²⁸ Thus, Luther, unlike Erasmus, was neither a humanist scholar nor sympathetic to the humanist movement. But, aside from this one difference—which is ultimately, perhaps, the root of all their other differences—the two men were agreed on much that was of great importance to both. As James McConica notes, “Both rejected the supremacy of Aristotle and the system of the Schoolmen, both proclaimed the central place of the Bible in Christian life, emphasized the perils of religious formalism, denounced the abuse of indulgences, and urged the princes to take the reform of the Church in hand.”²⁹ With so much in common, why then did Erasmus refuse to offer Luther his public support?

It wasn’t because Luther disregarded Plato; nor was it out of fear or jealousy, although Erasmus’s detractors have often been quick to offer such an explanation. Erasmus had given the world his reason for dissociating himself from Luther even before he had heard of Luther. We find Erasmus’s position in Folly’s remarks on a particular type of reformer, the “disagreeable wiseacre.” After recounting the various superstitions, or “varieties of silliness,” of which “the ordinary life of Christians everywhere abounds,” Folly notes that these superstitious beliefs and practices “are readily encouraged by priests who are not unaware of the profit to be made thereby.” In other words, Folly regards the moral corruption of priests as largely responsible for the doctrinal and practical corruptions of Christianity. She (that is, Folly) then introduces the reformer:

Meanwhile, if some disagreeable wiseacre were to get up and interrupt with a statement of the true facts: “You won’t do badly when you die if you’ve been good in your lifetime. You’ll redeem your sins only by adding hatred for wrong-doing, tears, vigils, prayers, fasts, and a change in your whole way of living to the small sum you’ve already paid. The saint will protect you if you’ll try to imitate his life”—if, I repeat, your wise man starts blurting out these uncomfortable truths, you can see how

he'll soon destroy the world's peace of mind and plunge it into confusion.³⁰

As in many passages of Erasmus's *Encomium*, there is a tension here between satire and serious commentary. The voice of Folly is satirical in that it, in part, contradicts the usefulness of Erasmus's own agenda, the proclamation of moral living as the path towards Christian redemption. Nevertheless, there is also a note of seriousness in Folly's voice. Erasmus perceived the task of reformation as a slow process. Patience and the love of peace are two crucial virtues for any would-be reformer. Moreover, actual Church reform had to begin in co-operation between princes and the Roman See. If it began with the laity and developed into a protest of the populace, it would result in anarchy and would have to be put down by force. Thus, Folly speaks of the irreparable damage that is done when "your wise man starts blurting out these uncomfortable truths." The key words here are *blurting out*, which suggest a method of proclamation that is neither particularly patient nor especially observant of the love of peace. This reformer is, therefore, a "disagreeable wiseacre" not because he proclaims the truth, however disagreeable, but because he causes dissension.

In a letter of 1520 to Bishop Marlianus, Erasmus, within the context of a discussion about Luther, echoes some of the language from the *Encomium* passage we just considered: "We must bear almost anything rather than throw the world into confusion. There are seasons when we must even conceal the truth. The actual facts of things are not to be blurted out at all times and places, and in all companies."³¹ For Erasmus, the most obvious problem with Luther and other reformers of his sort is that they valued the diffusion of truth more than peace. But the Lutheran dissension resulted not only in division; it severely set back the cause of reform itself. As Thomas Arnold notes, the attack of the Reformation "excited the angry passions to defend what the baser passions had before maintained from interest."³² In the natural course of things, the controversy cast suspicion upon Erasmus and all of his work. The monks could now boast, "Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched," and as Luther's friends increased, the friends of Erasmus steadily decreased, and few were any longer willing to defend Erasmus.

When Luther wrote to Erasmus, asking for his support, the reply he received was not what he had sought: "As to me, my business is with literature. I confine myself to it as far as I can, and keep aloof from other quarrels; but, generally, I think courtesy to opponents is more effective than violence. . . . Old institutions cannot be rooted up in an instant. Quiet argument may do more than wholesale condemnation. . . . Christ give you His spirit, for His own glory and the world's good."³³ Clearly, and regardless of similarities in their ideas, they were altogether dissimilar in their

approach, and as S. T. Coleridge observes, “Such utter unlikes cannot but end in dislikes, and so it proved between Erasmus and Luther.”³⁴ Luther took the position, “He who is not with me is against me,” and his opinion of Erasmus began to change dramatically from this time, until eventually he dismissed him as an unbeliever, a skeptic in matters of faith.

Coleridge suggests that, from a Protestant perspective, Erasmus appears to have “wished no good to the Church of Rome, and still less to our party: it was with him *Rot her and Dam us!*”³⁵ The animosity toward Erasmus from both sides of the division indicates that this was, indeed, the common perspective. However, even if, as Coleridge seems to imply, Erasmus was a sort of anticipatory champion of a *via media*, that ideal middle way, morally narrow and speculatively broad, was never conceived of as an alternative to either Papism or Protestantism. Erasmus was not a sectarian, and as the two sides in the conflict dug their trenches deeper, he bravely maintained his ground in the no-man’s land of moderation. After Rome formally pronounced Luther a heretic, all of Erasmus’s friends begged him to clear himself by writing against Luther, but Erasmus repeatedly refused. In his letter to Bishop Marlianus, he explains, “I feared always that revolution would be the end, and I would have done more had I not been afraid that I might be found fighting against the Spirit of God.”³⁶ For the most part, Erasmus agreed with Luther’s message, and when he disagreed, he refused to conflate his learned opinion with dogma. He had already urged Luther toward moderation, and there was nothing more that he could do except to contradict him—and *this* he would not do, at least not yet.

Laodiceanism

The difference between Luther and Erasmus is often misrepresented as a mere difference of attitude or temperament. Erasmians have sometimes been guilty of referring to Luther derogatorily as a Zealot, while Protestant enthusiasts have disdainfully dismissed Erasmus as a “Laodicean”—that is, as the third chapter of Revelation suggests, *sickeningly lukewarm*. What’s at issue between them, however, is much more than a ratio of passion and reason or enthusiasm and philosophy. It is a fundamental difference of priorities, of whether dogma or unity is to be considered of greater weight in the preservation and nurture of the Church.

Nevertheless, the charge of Laodiceanism is itself deserving of our notice. The rebuke of the Church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation has nothing to do with “hot” passion and “cold” reason. The problem is not temperament, but rather consciousness. The Laodiceans wavered between two rival states of awareness, one that is centered on spirit and one that is centered on matter. They could not make

up their minds whether to be Theists or Materialists. J. A. Froude mistook the issue, and thinking that Laodiceanism signified a mental state in which passion is cooled by reason, made the rather detached and stoic observation, “Men in the fury of religious passion will never follow Laodiceans like Erasmus. The worse for them, perhaps, but such is the nature of things.”³⁷ If we adopt Froude’s understanding of Laodiceanism, then certainly Erasmus is honorably guilty of it. Even so, both Erasmus and Froude would have condemned the sort of Laodiceanism espoused by Samuel Butler in his posthumously published *The Way of All Flesh* (1903):

We should be churchmen, but somewhat lukewarm churchmen, inasmuch as those who care very much about either religion or irreligion are seldom observed to be very well bred or agreeable people. The Church herself should approach as nearly to that of Laodicea as was compatible with her continuing to be a Church at all, and each individual member should only be hot in striving to be as lukewarm as possible.³⁸

If Butler is being at all serious, then he has rented his pew in the Church of Laodicea. But we must wonder when, in the same novel, he defines “loss of money” as “not only the worst pain in itself, but . . . the parent of all others.”³⁹ Clearly, this is the sort of sentiment that is sickening to Christ, and Butler is *trying* to be shocking. Erasmus, however, thought of *true* religion—that is, religion that begins with spiritual regeneration and issues in the *imitatio Christi*—as the most efficient aid toward good breeding and culture, and throughout his life he regarded the need for money as the greatest impertinence.

Of Will and Grace

Erasmus, as I have noted, was reluctant to enter the fray; even so, his patience was severely tried when, in 1520, Luther had been led by the spirit of debate into publishing his *Assertions*. In this work Luther clearly rejected the dogmatism of the scholastics only to defend an older dogmatism, the Augustinian assertion that fallen humanity has no inherent capacity to liberate the will from enslavement to ignorance and moral difficulties and is, thus, entirely dependent on the prevenient grace of God. Augustine, in his dialogue *On Free Choice of the Will*, had argued against the Manichaeian position that evil is co-eternal with God and that, together, evil and God control the behavior of humanity. Augustine answered by asserting that “evil” is not a positive force but is merely the absence of all goodness; moreover, sin originates out of the free will that humanity was originally endowed with and by which they

chose to move away from God, who is alone perfect being and existence. Having forfeited the position of unbroken communion with God, humanity cannot will itself back to its first condition, but is instead dependent upon divine intervention or saving grace:

And it is no wonder that because of our ignorance we lack the free choice of the will to choose to act rightly, or that even when we do see what is right and will to do it, we cannot do it because of the resistance of carnal habit, which develops almost naturally because of the unruliness of our mortal inheritance. It is indeed the most just penalty for sin that we should lose what we were unwilling to use well, since we could have used it well without the slightest difficulty if only we had willed to do so; thus we who knew what was right but did not do it lost the knowledge of what is right, and we who had the power but not the will to act rightly lost the power even when we had the will.⁴⁰

The “we” that Augustine speaks of is humanity as represented in the characters of Adam and Eve. Only *they* were ever in possession of a freedom of the will, and we, their descendants, have inherited the human condition that resulted from their folly.

In the *Assertions*, Luther accepted Augustine’s position regarding the condition of a fallen or corrupted humanity. However, rejecting Augustine’s Neoplatonist presuppositions of plenitude and consubstantiality, Luther was willing to posit evil as a cosmic force, as a positive power at constant work in blinding, hindering, and attacking humanity. Humans lack free will not because they have inherited imperfection of being, but rather because they have become enslaved to a new master, the devil. Although Luther does not go as far as Manichaeus in making evil equipotent with God, he nevertheless must agree with him—as John Wycliff did in the fourteenth century⁴¹—that free will is an illusion. Thus, he writes, “I have expressed it improperly, when I said that the free will, before obtaining grace, is really an empty name. I should have said straightforwardly that the free will is really a fiction and a label without reality, because it is in no man’s power to plan any evil or good.”⁴² Not even grace, although it overcomes evil, can return humanity to the original condition of free will; that has been forever forfeited.

All of Erasmus’s friends, without exception, pleaded with him to write against Luther, but he tarried. Henry VIII took up the task in 1521 and, while Cambridge students gathered around a bonfire of Luther’s books,⁴³ they read aloud by firelight and rejoiced that, by papal proclamation, their king was now “Defender of the Faith.” Luther did not so much as flinch, and his enemies continued to knock loudly on Erasmus’s door. Finally, in 1524, their importunity had effect, and Erasmus got

out of bed to write his *Freedom of the Will*. In this treatise, Erasmus places great stress on the fact that Luther's position is extreme and reactionary. Augustine had, at least, showed moderation. He had not been driven, in his renunciation of the doctrine of the Manichees, to take up sides with Pelagius; but Luther, on the other hand, is a perverse exaggerator, who "seems to enjoy such exaggerations, . . . driving out bad knots with worse wedges."⁴⁴ Much of Erasmus's treatise is devoted to an explication of Scripture. Although the general tone of the work is irenic, intended to appeal to Luther's reason without adding provocation, Erasmus is, himself, irritated and occasionally falls into his waspish mood—as is evident when he lectures Luther in a rather sarcastic vein, "I believe it to be an excellent key to the understanding of Holy Scriptures, if we pay attention to what is meant in each passage."⁴⁵ He demonstrates that there are passages that can be interpreted to support either position, but that the weight of Scripture comes out in favor of free will.⁴⁶

As an evangelical humanist, Erasmus had formed his position on self-determination and intrinsic perfectibility within the context of the Renaissance revival of Platonism and the reaction against medieval scholasticism. The Aristotelian scholastics had argued that, although humanity does have a limited capacity for self-determination and moral improvement, a saving grace is the reward of a "faith" that is defined as right belief, apart from right reason or moral aspiration. Such an argument is, to a Platonist, nonsense. In the Socratic equation, reason equals virtue, and virtue equals happiness. One cannot arrive at right belief apart from reason and virtue. Therefore, in opposition to the scholastics, the Platonist school of humanists argued that reason and morality are mutually supportive and are, in fact, of primary importance in knowing God; moreover, salvation results from the development of both.

Erasmus agreed with the Platonists that God communicates through reason, and he recognized that not only Socrates, but Christ as well, appealed to reason in his moral teachings. In 1522 Erasmus went so far as to use the term "Saint Socrates" in the colloquy *The Holy Feast*.⁴⁷ But even in as early a text as his *Handbook*, he was arguing that a reasonable exercise of the will is essential to Christianity. At one point, he states, "A large part of the Christian life is to wish wholeheartedly to become a Christian."⁴⁸ At another point, in speaking of the need for discipline, Erasmus gives these instructions:

Some have a rebellious body, an unbroken and refractory horse, so to speak; and the result is that even with the harshest bit, spurs, and club, the sweating driver has trouble taming its wildness.

Now if by chance such is your lot, do not lose heart forthwith, but struggle that much harder. Look at it this way: the path to virtue has not been barred to you; instead, you have been presented with more abundant material for virtue.⁴⁹

For Erasmus, the Christian life is available to all. What it requires is not a belief in dogmas that are, for most, beyond comprehension; rather it calls for the imitation of Christ, struggle and self-discipline toward moral perfection. In Erasmus's metaphor, the body of the Christian is the horse, and the will or soul of the Christian is its driver. Erasmus is not suggesting that Christians can tame the flesh by their own efforts; such is the doctrine of an Iago: "'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. / Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners."⁵⁰ Rather, in language consistent with Thomistic theology, Erasmus tells us, "If you look upon God as your helper, nothing is easier."⁵¹ In other words, divine grace is available to raise up an impaired but not utterly corrupt human nature.

Grace, says Erasmus, is the primary agent in salvation, yet it works in connection with free will rather than apart from it. In an effort to define "free will" in such a way that would placate Luther, he makes this point abundantly clear:

But since all things have three parts, a beginning, a continuation and an end, grace is attributed to the two extremities, and only in continuation does the free will effect something. Two causes meet in this same work, the grace of God and the human will, grace being the principal cause and will a secondary, since it is impotent without the principal cause, while the latter has sufficient strength by itself. . . . Due to this combination, man must ascribe his total salvation to divine grace, since it is very little that the free will can effect, and even that comes from divine grace which has at first created free will and then redeemed and healed it.⁵²

Luther responded to this gesture by making the absurd charge that Erasmus is guilty of "Pelagianism." Pelagius, who was a contemporary of Augustine and also wrote against the errors of Manichaeism, essentially denied the doctrine of inherited corruption and stated that a natural grace was given to humanity in the form of free will, by which each person could take the initial steps toward salvation. According to Pelagius, there was no need for a prevenient grace to overcome the effects of Adam and Eve's fall. Now, Erasmus had very pointedly placed grace before free will, and thus Luther's charge only serves to support the observation that Erasmus had made against him. Luther is, indeed, prone to exaggeration.

Luther was willing to stand with Erasmus in rejecting the scholastics' argument. Orthodoxy can save no one. However, with Erasmus he could go no further. There is no free will, contended Luther, and right action is as weak and ineffectual as right belief. All that people can do is to realize their depravity and helplessness and to surrender themselves to the mercy and grace of God through faith in the redemption

accomplished by Christ. To illustrate this point, Luther takes Erasmus's metaphor of the person as a horse (as provided above) and gives it a new twist:

Man's will is like a beast standing between two riders. If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills. . . . If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, or which it will seek; but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall have and hold it.⁵³

Without the direct intervention or *gratia praeveniens* of God, people are driven by Satan and are incapable of right thinking, right intent, or right action. Good works, therefore, can only be understood as the effects of salvation, never the cause.

Luther perceived this doctrine as fundamental to an understanding of man's relationship to God, and he was willing to split the Church over it. His final attitude toward Erasmus is nicely expressed in the *Table Talk* (1566): "Erasmus of Rotterdam is the vilest miscreant that ever disgraced the earth"; "Whenever I pray, I pray for a curse upon Erasmus."⁵⁴ Erasmus's attitude toward the controversy that Luther insisted upon is altogether different. In fact, in "An Inquiry Concerning Faith," written six months before his treatise on free will, Erasmus created an imaginary dialogue between Aulus (himself) and Barbatius (Luther), which sought to demonstrate that, if the Apostle's Creed was the doctrinal basis for the Church, Luther was an orthodox Christian. After the debate, Erasmus still maintained, "Theologians may argue about free will in the Sarbonne. Laymen need not puzzle themselves with conundrums. Whether works justify or faith justifies matters little, since all allow that faith will not save without works."⁵⁵ It is the obedience of faith, or practical belief, that makes the Christian, not speculative belief.

Erasmus, Luther, and the Broad Church

What stands out in this controversy between theologians is not so much the doctrinal position of the participants. Indeed, we may even agree with John Tulloch, that "the philosophical refinements of Erasmus, and the wild exaggerations of Luther, have become mere historic dust, which would only raise a cloud by being disturbed."⁵⁶ What interests us is, rather, the wide divergence in attitude toward the controversy itself. Here, in Erasmus, we find the approach of the Broad Churchman. As John Dolan observes, "The real significance of [Erasmus's] attitude toward theological issues is his character as a *witness* to the necessity of Christian charity and peace in all things."⁵⁷ The unity and peace of the established Church is not to be broken on

the basis of dogmatic assertions, but Christian fellowship is to be maintained on the foundation of a common discipleship.

But what if the doctrine in dispute threatens the ground of our relationship with God and, thus also, of our common fellowship with one another, and deprives us of the power of God toward salvation? What if the appendages to the system of the established Church essentially pervert its message into something other than that gospel preached by the apostles of Christ? If this had been, in fact, the state of the Roman Catholic Church at the time of Luther, then it would also have been apparent that “the abuses of that system were not excesses; they were essentially evil; they had their root in a great denial and unbelief.” That Luther not only recognized this as the true condition or “captivity” of the Church, but was also directed by the hand of providence to steer the rebellious activity of his age from infidelity to faith, is the perspective of F. D. Maurice, the leading theologian of the nineteenth-century Broad Church.⁵⁸ Taking up the position that Erasmus did not protest “quite as much as was needful against the abominations of his time,” Maurice notes that it is only by reference to the Reformation that the Romish clergy can explain “the extraordinary change which took place in the morality and energy of their own hierarchy in the generation following.”⁵⁹

It is safe to say that, insofar as the Broad Church leaders remained Protestant, at odds with the tenets that distinguish Roman Catholicism from Anglicanism, they tended to be apologists for the historical role of Luther *as a moral agent* in the reform of the Church. There is, however, nothing particularly Lutheran in their emphasis upon practical Christianity. As we have seen, Christianity as the imitation of Christ was the message of Colet and Erasmus, and, as we shall see, the most influential leaders of the Broad Church movement believed that Luther’s doctrine, or the development of that doctrine in succeeding generations, leant toward antinomianism and moral laxity. If some of those same leaders tended to slight Erasmus by cautious detachment or actual ambivalence, we can account for this seeming paradox by considering the circumstances of their own time and place—factors which inclined many to associate Erasmus with that Romeward “dilettantism” of the thousands who forsook Protestantism between 1845 and 1865. Moreover, insofar as the Broad Church movement was a moral movement, it took its cue from Erasmus, but the Socratic ideal of virtue derived from pre-Kantian reason left the Broad Churchmen cold.⁶⁰ As H. Maynard Smith notes, “Erasmus would have agreed with Matthew Arnold that ‘conduct was nine-tenths of religion’; but he would not have agreed with Matthew Arnold that ‘Religion was morality touched with emotion,’ for Erasmus prided himself on being rational and despised emotion.”⁶¹ That said, I must direct attention back to Dolan’s observation and insist that, insofar

as the Broad Church was a catholicizing movement of Christian England, it was *emphatically* Erasmian rather than Lutheran in its approach.⁶²

Erasmus and the Church of England

Erasmus, we observed, wanted King Henry VIII to take the reform of England's Church in hand. If Pope Leo X had lived, or if his successor had wider sympathies, things may have been different between Henry and the Roman See. But, with the spread of the Protestant movement and with all of Europe at war, the Cardinals had elected from their number a series of strong and conservative men to lead them through these troubled times. Moreover, with the power of France diminished, Spain was able to sack Rome in 1527. Clement VII was reduced to a mere puppet pope, with his strings placed in the strong, imperial hands of Charles V. Under these conditions, continued political allegiance to Rome might be no less than a humiliating submission to Spain.

For five years, beginning in early 1528, Henry put two essential aspects of his political situation to the test: the power with which he had to negotiate with Rome and the support that the English Church was willing to extend to him in opposition to Rome. The trial case was, of course, Henry's desire to obtain a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, the aunt of Charles V. Rome steadfastly refused, despite the growing support that Henry was able to receive from theologians outside of Spain's dominion. Therefore, upon the death of Archbishop Warham, Henry sought out a successor who would recognize the will of England's king above the alleged will of Rome. He found his man at Cambridge, a Fellow of Jesus College. Skillfully, Henry succeeded in obtaining papal permission for the consecration of Thomas Cranmer in April of 1533. The following month Cranmer gave judgment that the marriage of Henry and Catherine was invalid and, then, pronounced that Henry was lawfully wed to Anne Boleyn. Clement responded by excommunicating Henry, and in 1534 Parliament passed the Acts for the Submission of the Clergy in recognition of the King of England as Supreme Head of the Church of England.

Granted, it was a messy business. Thomas More and John Fisher, unable to quit their devotion to the ideal of the one visible and united church, were, in 1535, executed. Erasmus had lived long enough to see two of his dearest English friends put to death. If he had, years before, accepted an English bishopric, he too might now have been martyred. But Erasmus never had to decide between "that crowned Philistine" (as Matthew Arnold once referred to Henry⁶³) and Rome, and so the memory of Erasmus, who died in Basle in 1536, was allowed to remain untainted in the hearts of English Christians, both Protestant and Catholic.

Not only Henry, but other persons of political prominence, such as Archbishop Cranmer and Vicar General Thomas Cromwell, remained admirers of Erasmus. Both of these men had been in positions of influence at Cambridge when, in the wake of Erasmus's visitation, that university became the intellectual center of the English Reformation.⁶⁴ Both labored to steer Cambridge from Lutheranism toward the more moderate reforms of the Henrician church, and if their efforts succeeded only in driving underground the sentiments that would, in the following generation, rise up as Puritanism, yet it is by means of the Henricians that the Erasmian ideals of moderation and toleration helped to give form to the Church of England. In 1547, when Edward VI succeeded Henry to the throne, the order went forth that there should be a copy of Erasmus's Paraphrases on the Gospels in every church.⁶⁵ A. G. Dickens and Whitney R. D. Jones convincingly argue, "From the time of its first impact right up to the Elizabethan Church Settlement, Erasmian moderation and irenicism were fundamental though perhaps not always dominant elements in the direction of development taken by the English Church."⁶⁶

Notes

1. James Anthony Froude, *Life and Letters of Erasmus: Lectures Delivered at Oxford, 1893-94* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), 2; F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingston, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 466.

2. Léon-E. Halkin, *Erasmus: A Critical Biography*, 1987, trans. John Tonkin (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 7-8.

3. *Ibid.*, 302n., 9.

4. Lisa Jardine justly observes that, although "it is an easy matter for English Erasmus scholars implicitly to claim for him life-long Englishness," Erasmus's primary geographic affiliation was, during his middle years, with the intellectual life and print culture of Louvain (*Erasmus: Man of Letters* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993], 12-14). In this work, however, I am primarily concerned with Erasmus in relation to the Church of England.

5. Froude, 39. P. S. Allen has provided English Erasmian scholarship with an invaluable source of research in his twelve-volume *Opus epistolarum Erasmi* (London: Oxford University Press, 1906-58). Nevertheless, I have chosen to use, whenever possible, Froude's translation of the letters for its easy accessibility and historical interest. Allen himself declared that, "for a vivid and penetrating sketch of Erasmus' attractive personality you cannot do better than turn to the pages of Froude" (qtd. in Waldo Hillary Dunn, *James Anthony Froude: A Biography: 1818-1856* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961], 8). Froude's interest in Erasmus is both a reflection and contribution to Broad Church culture.

6. Froude, 44.

7. According to Charles Edward Mallet, Colet still struggled with Greek “as a beginner in the last years of his life” (*A History of the University of Oxford*, 3 vols. [New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1924-27], 1: 420).

8. Although Colet’s influence was not as widespread or as lasting as Erasmus’s, he had sympathies which might be recognized as “broad church.” As one of his biographers noted, “It is impossible to doubt that he would have welcomed the evolution of a Church which could embrace in its ample bosom men not only like Hooker and Laud, but Chillingworth, Hales and Falkland; not Charles Simeon only, but Dr. Arnold and Dr. Pusey. He would have recognized them all as good Christians, despite wide differences in dogmatic belief” (J. A. R. Marriott, *The Life of John Colet* [London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1933], 192).

9. Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 19.

10. Walter Pater, “Pico della Mirandola,” *The Renaissance* (1873; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 20-32, 32.

11. The juxtaposition of the two words “Catholic” and “evangelical” was to remain possible for less than a century, for the early Reformation seemed itself to spring out of evangelicalism, and so the term “evangelical” was soon conceived as synonymous with Protestant. As such, the word fell out of use until the Evangelical Revival in mid-eighteenth century Great Britain, at which time it came to signify a spirit clearly distinct from and even antagonistic to the spirit of Renaissance humanism. See McGrath, 19-26 and Ian C. Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1976), 15-18.

12. Erasmus, *Enchiridion*, trans. Raymond Himelick (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1870), 51.

13. Froude, 87; my italics.

14. Erasmus, *op cit.* Pico della Mirandola had argued, in his 1487 *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, that the would-be student of theology must prepare by studying, first, moral philosophy and, next, dialectic.

15. J. J. Conybeare, *An Attempt To Trace the History and To Ascertain the Limits of the Secondary and Spiritual Interpretation of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1824), 220.

16. Raymond Himelick, Introduction to *Enchiridion* by Erasmus, 29.

17. Jeroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 156.

18. H. C. Porter, Introduction to *Erasmus and Cambridge: The Cambridge Letters of Erasmus*, trans. D. F. S. Thomson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 25.

19. Froude, 91-2.

20. H. Maynard Smith notes that J. A. Froude—who thought the *Encomium* “was composed at More’s instigation, first sketched at Chelsea, then talked over at Rochester,” and finally written at Brussels—“is altogether wrong” (*Pre-Reformation England* [London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1963], fn., 447; cf. Froude, 136).

21. William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, serialized in the *Commonweal* (London, 1890).

22. *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick (Boston: David R. Godine, 1999), p. 102. As Aubrey indicates, his source was Thomas Fuller's 1655 *History of the University of Cambridge*. Fuller states the Erasmus "often complained of the college ale . . . as raw, small, and windy," a complaint that appears to have been common among scholars for at least a century after his departure (Eds. Marmaduke Prickett and Thomas Wright [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1840], 175-76).

23. Letter of Erasmus to Andrea Ammonio; Cambridge, 11 November 1511, *The Correspondence of Erasmus, 1501 to 1514*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson, in *The Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 2: 192. Robert Southey regrets that Erasmus "expresses nothing like pity" for the burnt heretics in this complaint (*The Book of the Church*, 4th ed. [London: John Murray, 1837], 235).

24. Letter of Erasmus to Servatius Rogerus; Hamme, July 1514, trans. D. F. S. Thomson, *Erasmus and Cambridge*, 181-86, 184.

25. As Regius Professor of Modern History, Froude began his public lectures at Oxford in November 1892 with a series on the Council of Trent. He soon followed this, in the early part of 1893, with a series on English Seamen of the Sixteenth Century. In the fall of the same year, at the age of seventy-five, he began his twenty lectures to undergraduates on the subject of Erasmus. These last lectures were delivered at the professor's home and were published in September of 1894, a month before his death. *The Life and Letters of Erasmus* was hugely successful and reprinted six times within the first year of circulation.

26. Froude, 70. Thomas Carlyle had chosen Luther over Erasmus as the Hero as Priest; however, he identifies the heroic Man-of-Letters as "our most important modern person" (*On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, 1841 [Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1966], 155). Mark Pattison also identifies Erasmus as "the man of letters," who studied antiquity not for its own sake but "as an instrument of culture" (qtd. in John Morley's "On Pattison's Memoirs," *Macmillan's Magazine* 51 (April 1885): 446-61; rpt. in John Morley, *Nineteenth Century Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 320-46, 321. Lisa Jardine's *Erasmus: Man of Letters* argues persuasively that the literary (self-)portraiture of Erasmus as a hero of the Renaissance was the intentional result of carefully crafted letters, along with the constant management, editing, and revision of his works.

27. *Everyman* 759-66, modernized by John Gassner, *Medieval and Tudor Drama* (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1963), 207-30.

28. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. James I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), 133.

29. James McConica, *Erasmus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 66. S. T. Coleridge identifies Erasmus as "the pioneer of the reformation" and observes that, "by his wit, added to the vast variety of knowledge communicated in his works, he had won over by anticipation so large a part of the polite and lettered world to the Protestant party" (*The Friend*, 2 vols., ed. Barbara E. Rooke, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 4 [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969], 1: 131).

30. Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, trans. Betty Radice (New York: Penguin, 1993), 66-7.

31. Froude, 255.

32. Thomas Arnold, "The Duty of Conceding to the Roman Catholic Claims," 1829, in *The Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Arnold, D.D.*, ed. A. P. Stanley (London: B. Fellowes, 1845), 53.
33. Froude, 234.
34. Henry Nelson Coleridge, ed., *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 4 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1839), 4: 57.
35. *Ibid.*, 4: 57.
36. Froude, 255.
37. *Ibid.*, 262.
38. Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh* (New York: Penguin, 1947), 415.
39. *Ibid.*, 312.
40. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, 3.18, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 106.
41. That Wycliff was a forerunner to Luther did not go unnoticed by Milton. In 1644, he noted with, perhaps, more sour grapes than patriotic fervor, "Had it not been for the obstinate perverseness of our prelates against the divine and admirable spirit of Wycliffe to suppress him as a schismatic and innovator, perhaps neither the Bohemian Huss nor Jerome, no, nor the name of Luther, or of Calvin, had been ever known; the glory of reforming all our neighbors had been completely ours" (John Milton, *Areopagitica*, in *Complete Poems and Major Prose Works*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes [New York: Macmillan, 1957], 716-49, 743).
42. Martin Luther, *Assertio*, Article 36, qtd. in Erasmus, *Discourse on Free Will*, §29, trans. Ernst F. Winter (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1997), 44-5.
43. Porter, p. 93.
44. Erasmus, *Discourse*, §60, 91.
45. *Ibid.*, §49, 74.
46. *Ibid.*, §62, 93-4.
47. A. H. T. Levi, introduction to *Praise of Folly*, by Erasmus, xxxii.
48. Erasmus, *Enchiridion*, 71.
49. *Ibid.*, 69.
50. William Shakespeare, *Othello* I.iii.316-17.
51. Erasmus, *Enchiridion*, 71.
52. Erasmus, *Discourse*, §57, 85-6.
53. Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 103-04.
54. Luther, *Table Talk*, §671, §672, trans. William Hazlitt (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1995), 314-15.
55. Froude, 336.
56. John Tulloch, *Leaders of the Reformation: Luther, Calvin, Latimer, Knox* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1859), 52-3.
57. John P. Dolan, *The Essential Erasmus* (New York: Meridian, 1983), 12.
58. Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ; Or, Hints to a Quaker Respecting the Principles, Constitution and Ordinances of the Catholic Church*, ed. Alec R. Vidler, 2 vols. (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1958), 1: 79-80.
59. *Ibid.*, 1: 213, 110.

60. Christian Karl Josias Bunsen observes, in his essay on Luther, that “the rationalism of Erasmus and the Jesuits is condemned” by the Kantian philosophy (*Life of Martin Luther* [Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1859], 126). Christian theology, particularly since Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith* (1821-22) and the shift from a theological epistemology grounded on “pure reason” to that based on reason coupled with experience, has tended to give considerable weight to Luther’s conception of Deity—or of that which is entirely *other*—both in regard to holiness and freedom. This conception of otherness Rudolf Otto, in *The Idea of the Holy* (1917), intimately associated with the religious sense of “the numinous.” Thus, Otto represents the Luther of the *Bondage of the Will* as a champion of the *mysterium tremendum* against the “rationalism” of Erasmus (*Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey [New York: Oxford University Press, 1923], 23-4).

61. Smith, 490.

62. H. Maynard Smith declares, “Colet was a typical Evangelical; More we should now call a Liberal Catholic; Erasmus was a Broad Churchman insisting on conduct” (451).

63. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: Univ. Michigan Press, 1965), 5: 206.

64. See V. H. H. Green, *Religion at Oxford and Cambridge* (London: SCM Press, 1964), Ch. 3, “Cambridge and the Reformation,” 79-98.

65. Porter, 94.

66. A. G. Dickens and Whitney R. D. Jones, *Erasmus the Reformer* (London: Reed Books, 1994), 214.