Erasmus and the Book That Changed the World Five Hundred Years Ago

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Abstract

The first published Greek New Testament (NT), *Novum Instrumentum Omne*, appeared on March 1, 1516. It was a diglot—a Latin-Greek NT. The Reformation was born because Luther had Erasmus's Greek NT in his hands. This article looks at the history behind that momentous publication, who Erasmus was, and how his most controversial work became the spark that was fanned into the flames of the Reformation. All Protestant translations of the NT for the past half millennium find their roots in the *Novum Instrumentum*. Ironically, producing a *Greek* NT may have been a "side issue" for Erasmus. Yet this Renaissance man wedded historical and philological scholarship of ancient texts to the study of the Bible and thus initiated the modern era of NT scholarship.

Introduction

What are the most momentous, world-changing events of the last millennium? We would be in good company if we thought that the late nineteenth to twentieth century had most of them—the Industrial Revolution, modern medicine, World War I, the rise of Communism, World War II, a myriad of technological advances and inventions—including the telephone, automobile, airplane, radio, Turing machine (now called

computer), and atomic bomb, manned space travel and the landing on the moon, the Internet—and many more. All of these are indeed world-changing events. And they have come at a dizzying pace.

We might also be forgiven if we were to draw a blank on the nine hundred years or so leading up to the modern era, thinking of them as largely static, with Europe slowly creeping out of the dark ages guided by the light of some flickering candles we call the Renaissance. But there were also five events in Europe that changed the world, especially the West, all happening within sixty-five years of each other—between 1453 and 1517. I will focus on the fourth of these, but I begin with the others.

MAY 29, 1453: After a seven-week siege by the Ottomans, the great city of Constantinople fell. Three days after that "black Tuesday" (as some Greeks still call it), the largest church in the world, Hagia Sophia, became the largest mosque in the world. Constantinople, formerly Byzantium, was the city that Constantine the Great had made the capital of the Roman empire in A.D. 330. For the next 1100 years, Greek-speaking scribes faithfully copied out both classical and biblical literature. When the city fell, many of the scribes and monks fled to Western Europe, bringing with them their manuscripts. At this time, ancient Greek was virtually unknown in the West, and it had been unknown for a millennium. Now the flood of manuscripts coming from Constantinople gave the Renaissance a shot in the arm, and it gave birth to the Reformation.[1]

1454: The very next year was almost as momentous. This is the year that Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press.[2] Up until this invention, *all* books had to be made by hand, with scribes painstakingly writing them out letter by letter. Books had been written the same way for thousands of years.[3] With Gutenberg's invention, now books became

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[1] Technically, the Renaissance began in the late fourteenth century in Florence, with the Greek phase starting when the chancellor of Florence, Coluccio Salutati, invited the Byzantine scholar Manuel Chrysolaras in 1397 to teach ancient Greek in Florence. But the Greek phase received its greatest impetus from the sacking of Constantinople when the scribes fled with their manuscripts. Preserved Smith, *Erasmus: A Study of His Life, Ideals and Place in History* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923; repr., New York: Dover, 1962), 2, argues cogently on the basis of societal shifts, new discoveries and inventions, and the rebirth of antiquity that "the Renaissance and the Reformation were … really one."

[2] The actual date of Gutenberg's invention is disputed, but 1454 is often given as the correct year.

[3] The *shape* of books, however, was relatively new. That shape was the codex—a book with cut pages and bound on one side instead of written on a scroll. This was relatively new, since it had only been invented in the late first century A.D. Christians were the first to popularize it,

affordable. Combined with the deluge of Greek manuscripts into Western Europe, knowledge increased dramatically.[4]

OCTOBER 12, 1492: On this morning the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus, under the sponsorship of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, spotted land—the Bahamas. At this moment, though never realized by Columbus, he had opened the doors of the New World to Europe. As a result, the horizons of knowledge and European imperialism expanded exponentially.

OCTOBER 31, 1517: This is the date on which Martin Luther presumably nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Schlosskirche—or Castle Church—in Wittenberg, Germany.[5] The Reformation was born—with it came the breakdown of the religious-political might of Rome, translation of the Bible from the original languages into modern languages, and the separation of Christendom into three branches.

MARCH 1, 1516: The fifth event (or fourth, chronologically) took place twenty months prior to Luther's historic act of defiance and was arguably the *key* to Luther's gambit. Yet, most people today have never heard of it. I am referring to the publication of Desiderius Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum Omne* on March 1, 1516—500 years ago. It has been famously said that Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched.[6] The egg he laid was his "whole new instrument"—a Greek-Latin diglot of the New Testament.

We will look at who Erasmus was, what this book was, and how it changed the world. Although he published five editions of the New Testament (NT), with quite a bit of controversy especially surrounding the third edition, our

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with the rest of the Western world catching on within five hundred years. See C. H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[4] There was, however, a price to pay for this new invention. When books were handwritten, they were designed in such a way as to make memorization easier. The layout, vivid colors, icons, symbols, and marginalia on the page were all utilized to aid the memory. (For a fascinating study on memory in the Middle Ages, see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008]). Once books were printed, reading for *memory* was no longer such a high priority, since the texts became widely accessible. Books moved increasingly toward black and white printed *texts*, without accompanying aids for readers. The printing press changed Western civilization away from a memorizing culture as much as any other invention.

[5] By "presumably" we mean that Luther may not have actually posted the theses on the church door. Erwin Iserloh, *The Theses Were Not Posted* (Boston: Beacon, 1968). Nevertheless, Luther disseminated the theses by some means, and the Reformation was born because of it.

[6] This was mentioned frequently, even during Erasmus's day.

purpose is to focus on the first edition for its historical significance as the book that sparked the fire of the Reformation.

I. *Erasmus: Monk, Scholar, Humanist, Reformer*

Desiderius Erasmus was born less than fifteen years after Gutenberg's invention, probably in 1467,[7] in Rotterdam, Holland. He was the second illegitimate son of a Catholic priest. Yet he received a decent education, especially in Latin. His parents died in the plague of 1483—when Erasmus was only sixteen years old. By age twenty, he chose to take up residence at a monastery in Steyn, apparently because the convent boasted a modest library of classical works, affording Erasmus opportunity for study. Five years later, he was ordained as a priest in the Augustinian order.[8] But the monastic life did not appeal to him, and he wanted desperately to enroll at a university, though he would not do so until he was almost twenty-nine years old.[9]

Erasmus came to the University of Paris in 1495, but left shortly thereafter because of friction between the medieval scholasticism of his professors and his own humanistic interests.[10] His stay in Paris was perhaps the most difficult time of his life; he was in deep poverty and living in the university housing, which was a frightful squalor.[11]

Erasmus left for England a few years later, and there his interest in theology was piqued by John Colet. At this time the Rotterdammer decided that he needed to acquire Greek if he were to be a serious student of the NT. To do so, he returned to Paris at the beginning of 1500. He was thirty-two. No doubt his late start at learning Greek raised some eyebrows. After all, the average lifespan of a European man at this time was not quite forty

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[7] Some date his birth year to 1466. More recent scholarship has advocated 1467, e.g., Richard J. Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe: The Making of a Humanist, 1467–1500* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), ix, 260–61.

[8] Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 1:84–120. And yet, "Here was a needy foreigner, who had, to be sure, the ordination of a priest, but who from the moment of his ordaining had never done a single clerical act." Ephraim Emerton, *Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam* (New York: Putnam's, 1899), 184.

[9] Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 1:140–42, 272.

[10] Ibid., 1:162–205. There is no record of his having earned even his baccalaureate, but some think he did so in Paris (e.g., Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:122). He would receive his doctorate in September 1506 at the University of Turin, but this was what we would call today an honorary doctorate. Erika Rummel, *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics II, 1523–1536* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1989), 150. Smith (*Erasmus*, 103) notes wryly, "There used to be an old joke in Germany that the train stopped half an hour in Erlangen for the passengers to take degrees, and evidently the standards of Turin were not much more exacting."

[11] Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 1:163; George Faludy, *Erasmus* (New York: Stein & Day, 1970), 51–52; J. Kelly Sowards, *Desiderius Erasmus* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), 13.

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS

ca. 1467–1536

years.[12] Pouring himself into his studies, Erasmus wrote to a friend, "It may be asked why I am … learning Greek at my age. … I am determined that it is better to learn late than to be without knowledge which it is of the utmost importance to possess."[13] A few months into his studies he wrote again, "I have been applying my whole mind to the study of Greek; and as soon as I receive any money I shall first buy Greek authors, and afterwards some clothes."[14] Within two years of initiating this program of intense research Erasmus pens, "I have advanced so far as to be able to write what I want in Greek tolerably well without preparation."[15]

In the summer of 1504 a serendipitous event changed the course of Erasmus's life. He came across a manuscript that was a compilation of philological notes on the Vulgate NT based especially on Greek manuscripts. Produced half a century earlier by the controversial Italian scholar Lorenzo Valla,[16] the *Adnotationes* (*Annotations*) were quickly edited by Erasmus and published the next year. Here, at last, Erasmus found a model for the kind of work he was designed to do.[17] So enthralled was he with the erudition of Valla's *Adnotationes* that he exclaimed, "I am now eager … to approach sacred literature full sail, full gallop; I have an extreme distaste for anything that distracts me from it, or even delays me. … Hereafter I intend to address myself to the Scriptures and to spend all the rest of my life upon them."[18]

His wanderlust and thirst for knowledge took him to Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, Turin, Venice, Rome, Leuven (Louvain), Freiburg, and Basel.[19] This

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[12] That is, counting from birth. If a man reached adulthood, he would be expected to live into his fifties.

[13] Epistle 149 (translation Smith, *Erasmus* 46); cf. also *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 89 vols., ed. R. A. B. Mynors et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–2016), hereafter cited as *CWE*, vol. 2 (1975), 25. In that same epistle (though numbered 143 in *The Epistles of Erasmus*, ed. Francis Morgan Nichols, 3 vols. [1901–1918]; vol. 1 [London: Longmans, 1901], 313, which is here quoted), he expresses his appreciation for Greek: "Latin erudition, however ample, is crippled and imperfect without Greek. We have in Latin at best some small streams and turbid pools, while they have the clearest springs and rivers flowing with gold."

[14] *Epistles*, ed. Nichols, 1:236.

[15] Ibid., 1:353.

[16] For an excellent treatment on Valla, see Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 32–69.

[17] The significance of Valla in shaping Erasmus's thinking, methods, and scholarly focus can hardly be overstated. As Bentley notes (*Humanists and Holy Writ*, 32–33), "Valla was the first westerner since the patristic age to enjoy a thorough knowledge of Greek and to apply it extensively in his study of the New Testament."

[18] Epistle 181, written to John Colet, ca. December, 1504 (*CWE*, 2:86).

[19] Erasmus's travels are easily documented thanks to thousands of his letters that have been published. Thousands of works *about* Erasmus have also been published. Among the most accessible biographies today are Emerton, *Desiderius Erasmus*; Smith, *Erasmus*; Johan Huizinga, *Erasmus and the Age of Reformation*, trans. F. Hopman (New York: Scribner's, 1924; repr., Minneola, NY: Dover, 2001); Albert Hyma, *The Youth of Erasmus* (Ann Arbor: University of

Dutchman spent little time in Holland as an adult. He "was by nature a nomad. Never did he live as long as eight years consecutively in the same place."[20]

In spite of not settling down, and constantly complaining about lack of funds and poor health, he came to be the greatest Latin scholar of the sixteenth century. Erasmus also became the greatest ancient-Greek scholar of his era, despite his late start.[21] His immense learning, coupled with an almost superhuman publishing record, made him the epitomic Renaissance man of letters.[22] In the words of one biographer, Erasmus was "the intellectual leader of Europe."[23] He was courted by kings and popes, even taking up prestigious offices such as the newly established Lady Margaret Chair of Divinity at Cambridge University (1511–1514).[24] But these posts were always

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Michigan Press, 1930); Roland H. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York: Scribner's, 1969); Faludy, *Erasmus*; Albert Rabil Jr., *Erasmus and the New Testament: The Mind of a Christian Humanist* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1972); Sowards, *Desiderius Erasmus*; Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 112–93; Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, vols. 1 and 2; Cornelius Augustijn, *Erasmus: His Life, Works, and Influence*, trans. J. C. Grayson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and A. G. Dickens and W. R. D. Jones, *Erasmus the Reformer* (London: Methuen, 1994).

In addition to biographies on Erasmus there are several series on his literary efforts. Besides his exquisite letters, all in Latin, he authored hundreds of books. Most notable among the modern publications of Erasmus's output are the three-volume set, *Epistles*, ed. Nichols; *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, 12 vols., ed. P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and H. W. Garrod (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906–1958), hereafter cited as *EE*; *CWE*, 89 vols.; and *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi*, 11 vols., ed. J. H. Waszink et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1969–); hereafter cited, as is customarily done, as *LB* (for "Leiden: Brill").

To gain an appreciation for the vast amount of literature on Erasmus, the works published in just a forty-year span can be found in the prodigious bibliography on Erasmus compiled by Jean-Claude Margolin: *Quatorze années de bibliographie érasmienne, 1936–1949* (Paris: Vrin, 1969); *Douze années de bibliographie érasmienne, 1950–1961* (Paris: Vrin, 1963); *Neuf années de bibliographie érasmienne, 1962–1970* (Paris: Vrin, 1977); *Bibliographie érasmienne IV cinq années de bibliographie érasmienne, 1971–1975* (Paris: Vrin, 1997).

[20] Smith, *Erasmus*, 48. Erasmus left Leuven on his birthday (October 27) in 1521 because it had become "'too Catholic' for him. A few days later he arrived … in Basle, where he would reside for the next eight years until it in turn became 'too Protestant'" (Faludy, *Erasmus*, 194).

[21] Yet, even though Erasmus would later surround himself (in Basel) with scholars who knew Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, because he was "'frightened by the strangeness of the [Hebrew language], and considering the insufficiency of the human mind to master many subjects,' he soon gave it up" (Smith, *Erasmus*, 48, quoting Epistle 181, written ca. December 1504; cf. also *CWE*, 2:87). Still, Colet expressed surprise nearly a dozen years later that Erasmus was "now studying Hebrew" (*CWE*, 3:313 [Epistle 423, ca. June 21, 1516]).

[22] Erasmus did not shy away from letting others bask in his glory. At one point he told a friend, "I write what will live forever … my books will be read in every country in the world … men like me are scarcely found in many centuries" (*Epistles*, 1:300 [Epistle 139]). Remarkably, this letter was penned in 1501, just a few months after Erasmus had begun his Greek studies, and before he had published much of anything!

[23] Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:166.

[24] Ibid., 2:109–125. The chair was established in 1503 by Lady Margaret Beaufort, the grandmother of Henry VIII. It is distinctly possible that William Tyndale was one of Erasmus's students at this time (Smith, *Erasmus*, 66, 185).

short lived. This Augustinian canon was a citizen of the world who preferred independence to stability and writing to teaching.

Accolades were profuse, even unabashedly hyperbolic; he was called "the ornament of the world" and "the prince of humanists." One said that "all Western Christendom resounds with his name."[25] And after his NT appeared, one friend claimed, "You have found the way to immortality,"[26] and another, "The name of Erasmus shall never perish."[27]

Erasmus's NT would indeed become the crowning achievement of his life, appearing in five editions between 1516 and 1535 (the year before he died at age 70). Scores of official and unofficial reprints of these editions appeared during Erasmus's lifetime. It was the natural conclusion for a man who had invested his years of painstaking study in Greek, Latin, and, to a lesser degree, theology, and biblical studies. But it was also his most controversial publication,[28] for it explicitly criticized the Vulgate as an adequate translation of the NT and put Erasmus on a trajectory toward the Protestant Reformation.

II. *Erasmus's Most Notorious Publication:* Novum Instrumentum Omne[29]

1. *The First Published Greek New Testament*

After his stint at Cambridge, Erasmus moved to Basel in August 1514. There he met the famous printer Johann Froben.[30] His initial publishing

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[25] Huizinga, *Erasmus*, 96.

[26] *Epistles*, 2:242 (Epistle 377). There was good reason for such praise: "Probably excepting only Martin Luther, Erasmus was to become the most widely read and widely bought author of his generation" (Sowards, *Desiderius Erasmus*, 15).

[27] *CWE*, 3:312 (Epistle 423, by John Colet, written less than four months after Erasmus's NT appeared).

[28] His second most controversial work was his *Julius Exclusus*, a book published anonymously after Pope Julius II had died. Julius's military campaigns in Europe had caused Erasmus to become a pacifist see Margaret Mann Phillips, *The Adages of Erasmus: A Study with Translations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 104–5. The book, meant apparently only for an inner circle of friends, and one that Erasmus never owned up to authoring, is a narrative of Julius coming to the Pearly Gates and finding himself rebuffed by Saint Peter, excluded from heaven due to the carnage of his reign as the vicar of Christ.

[29] The literature on Erasmus's diglot New Testaments is extensive, with some curious omissions. The most comprehensive treatment, though restricted to the first two editions, remains Aug Bludau, *Die beiden ersten Erasmus-Ausgaben des Neuen Testaments und ihre Gegner* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1902), although it is now over a century old. Cf. also Bo Reicke, "Erasmus und die neutestamentliche Textgeschichte," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 22 (1966): 254–65; Rabil, *Erasmus and the New Testament*, 83–97 and passim; Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:175–93; Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 112–93; Henk Jan de Jonge, "Novum Testamentum a nobis versum: The Essence of Erasmus' Edition of the New Testament," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 35 (1984): 394–413; Henk Jan de Jonge, *Ex ipsis venis, ex ipsis fontibus: On the Importance and Necessity of the Critical Edition of Erasmus' New Testament Works* (Voorhuizen: Florivallis, 2002).

[30] Although intending to travel to Venice to have the Aldine Press publish his work on the

goal in Basel was to offer his own *Annotationes* to the NT text,[31] but the project expanded under the influence of Froben and company. Shortly after his arrival, the Dutch humanist decided to publish a Greek NT.[32] He then intended it to be a diglot with the Vulgate and the Greek text in parallel columns. Sometime afterward, he was persuaded by "certain learned friends—with advice that was unsuitable rather than well conceived,"[33] to replace the Vulgate with his own Latin translation.[34] Prolonged negotiations culminated in the work that began in earnest in the summer of 1515. Froben's sweatshop employed knowledgeable assistants for the Dutchman, and it ran two presses for the production of the book. The volume was being revised even as it was going to the press. After months of intense labor ("I have got through six years work in eight months," wrote Erasmus[35]), the 1027-page diglot with annotations was published on March 1, 1516.

Erasmus called his production *Novum Instrumentum Omne*—"a whole new instrument." He preferred the title *Instrumentum* because it was a written document, while a *testamentum* was a covenant, and not necessarily written. Although novel in his own day, he cited Jerome and Augustine for this usage for the NT.[36] Only after 1633 would this basic Greek text be called the Textus Receptus ("received text").[37]

NT, the scholarly community in Basel was sufficiently to his liking that he stayed there through the winter. Aldus Pius Manutius died in February 1515, and Froben promised Erasmus that he would meet Aldus's offer (Rabil, *Erasmus and the New Testament*, 90; cf. also Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:181–82).

[31] "For when I first came to Basle, I did not given [*sic*] even a thought to the translating of the New Testament; I had just made a number of annotations in few words, and with these I had determined to be content" (*EE* 2758; translation is from Andrew J. Brown, "The Date of Erasmus' Latin Translation of the New Testament," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 8.4 [1984]: 374).

[32] Erasmus's letter to Johann Reuchlin, in August, 1514, indicates his intention to publish a Greek NT (*Epistles*, 2:157 [Epistle 300 in Allen's edition]). See also Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:181.

[33] *EE* 1581; the translation is from Brown, "The Date of Erasmus' Latin Translation," 373. Erasmus first mentions the plan to produce his own translation in September 1514 to his friend Jakob Wimpfeling (*EE* 305:222–24).

[34] *Pace* Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:184. Brown has demonstrated the likelihood that the translation in the 1516 edition, albeit conservative, was not meant to be just a revision of the Vulgate (Brown, "The Date of Erasmus' Latin Translation," 351–80).

[35] Epistle 411 (*CWE*, 3:290). Although Erasmus complained perennially about his working conditions, he nevertheless persisted. "Erasmus was armed with phenomenal powers of concentration and the ability to work fourteen to sixteen hours a day with great speed" (Faludy, *Erasmus*, 158). Schoeck (*Erasmus of Europe*, 2:173) notes Erasmus's overall objectives: "In all these months of being bone-weary in work on the editions, Erasmus evidently had not lost sight of the larger goals: all his labours were towards the end of knowing and loving God, and of leading others to that philosophy of Christ as well."

[36] Epistle 1858 (*EE*, 7:140).

[37] Based on an exaggerated claim in an advertising "blurb" in the preface to the second

The *Novum Instrumentum* thus became the first *published* Greek NT. But it was not the first *printed* Greek NT. That honor belongs to the Complutensian Polyglot. This magisterial work, under the auspices of Cardinal Francis Ximenes de Cisneros, was conceived as early as 1502. Ximenes, who founded the University of Alcalá, Spain, gathered manuscripts and scholars for the Polyglot. The NT was completed on January 10, 1514. But it was not to be published for eight more years. The reasons for the delay are not altogether clear, but in general it seems that the editors wanted to publish the whole Polyglot at one time and the Old Testament would not be finished until 1517. Also, the editors sought the papal *imprimatur*, which they did not secure until March 22, 1520. Still, they inexplicably waited two more years before publication. Altogether, only 606 copies were made, 600 paper, 6 vellum.[38] Erasmus's text had already gone through three editions by the time the six-volume Polyglot appeared. Because his was a single volume, produced more cheaply, with a six-year head start, and with far more copies made (3,300 for the first two editions alone), Erasmus's NT eclipsed any influence that the Complutensian NT might have otherwise had.[39]

2. *Erasmus's Latin Translation*

Erasmus anticipated a reaction to his publication. After all, his Latin translation, even though very conservative in most of its renderings, could shake the foundations of the Catholic faith. His friend Martin Dorp of Louvain had implored the Dutch divine as early as 1514 to drop his plans for a philological critique of the Vulgate because "it is not reasonable that the

edition of the Greek NT by the Elzevirs of Leiden. Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 152. Erasmus's text had formed the basis of a long train of Greek New Testaments. Every such text that is based on Erasmus's has traditionally been called Textus Receptus.

[38] Jorge Luis Valdes, "The First Printed Apocalypse of St. John—The Complutensian Polyglot and Its Influence on Erasmus' Greek New Testament Text" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2001), 61; cf. also Eberhard Nestle, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., trans. William Eadie (London: Williams & Norgate, 1901), 2.

[39] There is no record of the Greek manuscripts used in the Complutensian Polyglot, which has caused much speculation and some reconstruction among scholars. Valdes, "The First Printed Apocalypse," notes that scholars such as Delitzch, Scrivener, Gregory, Hoskier, Schmid, and Metzger all gave attention to this issue, but came up with uncertain results (64). After detailed collations in the Apocalypse, Valdes had to add his name to the list of puzzled scholars (ibid., 104, 156). For a survey of the production and results of the Complutensian Polyglot, see Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 70–111. As for the Polyglot's influence, it "has been followed in the main by only a few later editions." Frederick Henry Ambrose Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 4th ed., ed. Edward Miller (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1894), 2:181; cf. also 2:188; and Frances Luttikhuizen, "The Ximenez Polyglot," *Unio cum Christo* 2.1 (April 2016): 83–98.

whole church, which has always used this edition [the Vulgate] and still both approves and uses it, should for all these centuries have been wrong."[40] But Erasmus felt the need to vigorously defend himself, as always;[41] in regard to his NT, he would become embroiled in this debate with several adversaries for the next two decades.[42]

Foreseeing such criticisms,[43] Erasmus shrewdly dedicated the publication to Pope Leo X, with the hope that this would insulate him from further reactions.[44] The ploy worked, although the response from the pontiff was delayed. Erasmus would proudly incorporate Leo's commendation into the preface of later editions.[45]

What initially caused most of the criticism was not Erasmus's Greek text but rather his Latin translation. Indeed, Erasmus's objective in producing a Greek-Latin diglot of the NT may have been to focus more on providing an updated Latin version than a critical text of the Greek. This seems evident in Erasmus's authorization of editions of his Latin translation alone, while his Greek text was always in tandem with the Latin.[46] It is an overstatement, however, to argue, as one scholar does, that "the primary purpose of Erasmus was to publish his annotations along with his Latin translation. The Greek

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[40] Epistle 304 (*CWE*, 3:21).

[41] For his initial response to Dorp, see Epistle 337.

[42] See Rummel's two volumes, *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics*; for a more succinct view, see Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:218–26. Although he was able to convince Dorp of the rightness of his actions in due time, other opponents did not embrace Erasmus's arguments. Among the most notable antagonists were Henry Standish, Edward Lee, Jacobus Latomus ("Latomus thought the teaching of Greek and Hebrew dangerous rather than useful" [Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:220]), "Louvain theologians *en bloc*" [ibid., 2:221] (including Jorge Ateca, Jean Briselot, and Nicolaus Baechem ["when the New Testament had appeared, he cried out that I was the Antichrist" (Epistle 1581, translation, ibid., 2:223)]), Jerome Aleander ("Aleander tried to win Erasmus over to the direct and outspoken support of the pope, but Erasmus refused, and he also declined all his invitations to dinner—fearing, as he later declared, that he would be poisoned" [ibid., 2:226]), and especially Diego López Zúniga, or, in Latin, Stunica, one of chief the editors of the Complutensian Polyglot.

[43] He noted in his reminiscences thirteen years after the publication of the *Novum Instrumentum* that his new Latin translation would "arouse a great deal of ill will" (*Responsio ad Juuenem Gerontodidascalum* [*LB* 9:987A]; translation in Brown, "The Date of Erasmus' Latin Translation," 374).

[44] See also Epistle 384.

[45] Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament* (London: Bagster, 1854), 24.

[46] That is, of the editions that Erasmus authorized. Erasmus's assistant Nikolaus Gerbel urged him to publish a stand-alone Greek NT (Epistle 352 [*EE*, 2:140–42]); when Erasmus resisted, Gerbel published the unauthorized edition in 1521 at Hagenoae (see de Jonge, "Novum Testamentum a nobis versum," 401). The famous Venetian publishing house established by Aldus Manutius also produced *unauthorized* stand-alone Greek New Testaments that had been edited by Erasmus (Faludy, *Erasmus*, 165).

text was only there for the purpose of confirming the Latin translation."[47]

The reality seems to be that Erasmus worked very hard on the production of his Greek NT, even though it was hurried.[48] And his Latin translation was apparently conceived shortly after his decision to produce a Greek text, both in 1514.[49]

While the Latin version in *Novum Instrumentum* was a somewhat haphazard and perhaps even mild revision of the Vulgate, still there were a few significant alterations. For example, in some key passages that spoke of repentance, such as Matthew 3:2, Erasmus rendered μετανοεῖτε (*metanoeite*) as *resipiscite* ("repent") or *ad mentem redite* ("change the mind"), rather than *paenitentiam agite* ("do penance"). The force of Erasmus's translation "worked so powerfully in Luther's mind that it became the starting point of the Reformation and thus leavened the whole loaf of Christendom."[50]

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[47] William W. Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (Spring 1996): 44. Similarly, de Jonge, "Novum Testamentum a nobis versum," 394–413; Toan Do, "A Plea for the *Novum Instrumentum*: Erasmus and His Struggle for a New Translation," *Philosophy & Theology* 28.1 (2016): 143–63. De Jonge summarizes the situation: "It was not intended as a textual edition in its own right, but served to give the reader of the Latin version, which was the main point, the opportunity to find out whether the translation was supported by the Greek" (413). What neither de Jonge nor Do notes, however, is that the Latin text of Erasmus's first edition apparently used the Vulgate as a base, though at times differing from it extensively. Beginning in his second edition of 1519, Erasmus provided a truly fresh translation. See also the critique by Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 114, n. 9.

[48] Bentley has treated this issue extensively (*Humanists and Holy Writ*, 112–93).

[49] Until Brown's article, "The Date of Erasmus' Latin Translation," was published in 1984, the consensus was that Erasmus worked on his Latin translation for about ten years (see Brown, ibid., 351–52), but for some reason chose to use a much more conservative translation for his first edition, only bringing out the bolder translation in 1519. As Brown observes, "the first three editions of Erasmus, instead of representing a natural process of development and creative improvement, would be seen as a kind of progressive accommodation towards a pre-existing manuscript original. It was the sheer implausibility of such a view that first opened the eyes of the present writer" (ibid., 369).

[50] Smith, *Erasmus*, 168; see also Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:187, 192. Most likely, Erasmus was influenced by Valla's *Adnotationes* in this regard: in his annotations on 2 Cor 7:10, Valla severely criticized the Vulgate's translation of μετάνοια (*metanoia*) as *poenitentia* on philological grounds. "Valla therefore dealt a severe blow to the complicated Latin theology concerning the sacrament of penance" (Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 64).

It may be asked why Valla's work on the NT text did not have the impact on the Reformation that Erasmus's did. After all, as Bentley articulates, "his efforts to solve problems of New Testament text, translation, and explanation inaugurated the modern tradition of critical, philological scholarship on the New Testament" (34); "Valla found New Testament scholarship [of his day] dominated by commentators who knew no Greek, used an inferior translation as their base text, and recognized broad hermeneutic value in Aristotelian philosophy and scholastic theology. Valla rejected this approach to scriptural studies and effected a sort of paradigm shift in the realm of New Testament scholarship. He insisted that students of the scriptures learn Greek and base their work on the Greek text of the New Testament" (67–68); also, "Erasmus was so deeply influenced by the *Adnotationes* that he devoted much of his career to the task of developing, refining, and extending Valla's methods" (69).

Nevertheless, the *Novum Instrumentum* was far from perfect. The typographical errors in the first edition, especially of the Greek text, were so numerous that F. H. A. Scrivener, the meticulous nineteenth-century textual critic who logged considerable time in the Rotterdammer's NT, complained that "Erasmus' first edition is in that respect the most faulty book I know."[51] Erasmus knew its shortcomings well. He famously declared that it was "precipitated [that is, 'thrown together'] rather than edited" (*praecipitatum est verius quam aeditum*).[52] It has been suggested that the reason for this rush was most likely pressure from Froben, who would have gotten wind of the Complutensian Polyglot and wanted to be the first to publish a Greek NT.

3. *The Manuscript Basis*

The number of Greek manuscripts that Erasmus used for the production of his *Novum Instrumentum* has been listed as anywhere between three and ten, all minuscules.[53] Several scholars claimed the number was ten, though not all the manuscripts are listed.[54] The most commonly cited number today is half a dozen, influenced especially by Metzger's *Text of the New Testament*.[55] Erasmus himself said that he used four Greek manuscripts for his first edition, but this apparently did not include codices with commentary on the biblical text.[56] It also did not include manuscripts he may have (partially) collated while in England which had at least some role in his editions. The number of these Greek manuscripts has typically been listed as

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The reasons for this lack of direct influence seem to be due to timing. Valla wrote in the 1450s, just when the printing press was invented. Indeed, the name of Valla would be all but forgotten if it were not for Erasmus's fortuitous discovery of the Valla manuscript in 1504 and his subsequent publication of *Adnotationes* in 1505.

[51] Scrivener, *Plain Introduction*, 2:185.

[52] Epistle 402, written in April 1516. A year later he reiterated this self-criticism: *Novum Testamentum quod pridem Basilae praecipitatum* (Epistle 694). It is interesting that Erasmus was already calling his work *Novum Testamentum* within two months of its publication. In a 1518 printing of the first edition Erasmus changed the title to *Novum Testamentum*, most likely due to reactions to his original novel title; all subsequent printings and editions had the title *Novum Testamentum* as well.

[53] C. C. Tarelli, "Erasmus's Manuscripts of the Gospels," *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1943): 155–62, argues that Erasmus also used two majuscule manuscripts, Codices E (or 07 [eighth century]) and Δ (037 [ninth century]), but this is unlikely (Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 129–32).

[54] The suggestion that ten were used includes four that Erasmus allegedly collated in England and six that he utilized in Basel. Cf., e.g., Bludau, *Erasmus-Ausgaben*, 12–23; Smith, *Erasmus*, 163; Sowards, *Desiderius Erasmus*, 70, 74; Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:183.

[55] Now in its fourth iteration, this has been the principal handbook for NT textual criticism in the English-speaking world since 1964. See Metzger-Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 148. Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," 45, lists seven manuscripts.

[56] Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 125. Erasmus speaks of four codices used in the first edition and five in the second in the *Apologia* to later editions.

four,[57] but Henk de Jonge, a leading Erasmian scholar, has recently shown that Erasmus most likely was speaking of Latin codices.[58] The number of Greek manuscripts that he had seen and utilized while in England is unknown.[59]

One way to cut through the Gordian knot of how many manuscripts Erasmus used is to place Erasmus's Greek codices in three categories: (I) those that formed the basis of his NT, (II) those that emended that basis and which Erasmus used with approbation, and (III) those he consulted, directly or indirectly, but only rarely agreed with. These three groups are listed in the table below.

Category	*Old Numbering*	*New Numbering*[60]	*Date*	*Content*	*Present Location*
I	2_{e}	2	XI/XII	Gospels	University of Basel
I	2_{ap}	2815	XII	Acts, Epistles	University of Basel
I	1_{r}	2814	XII	Revelation (lacking 22:16–21)	Augsburg University
II	7_{p}	2817	XI	Paul's Epistles	University of Basel
II	817	817	XV	Gospels	University of Basel
II	4_{ap}	2816	XV	Acts, Epistles	University of Basel
III	69	69	XV	whole NT	Leicestershire Record Office, Leicester, England
III	1_{eap}	1	XII	Gospels, Acts, Epistles	University of Basel

[57] *EE*, 2:164, 182; Allen's assumption that Greek manuscripts were in view has been repeated by many authors (e.g., Smith, *Erasmus*, 163; Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:183).

[58] De Jonge, "Novum Testamentum a nobis versum," 403–4.

[59] Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 126. But codex 69 was almost certainly among them.

[60] Beginning with the second edition of the *Kurzgefasste Liste der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments*, ed. Kurt Aland et al.; ANTF 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), each minuscule receives a unique Gregory-Aland number. The old system allowed for identical numbering (akin to the identical letters for many majuscules) for minuscules that had no overlap in content.

This comes to eight manuscripts for his first edition. Erasmus relied most heavily on three that he found after he came to Basel—codices 2, 2815, and 2814. The first two he borrowed from the Dominican monastery in Basel; these, along with other NT manuscripts, had been bequeathed by John of Ragusa after he presided over the Council of Basel (1431–39).[61] These became the basis for the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles, and Erasmus *marked them up* as printer's copy![62] The best by far that he had access to, codex 1, Erasmus thought was particularly defective.[63] He also used as his only manuscript of the Apocalypse a transcription of codex 2814, another manuscript from the Dominicans that his friend Johann Reuchlin had borrowed. The Dutch scholar employed codices 2816 (Acts and Epistles), 2817 (Paul), and especially 817 (Gospels) for corrections to the base text.[64] He had little respect for codices 1 and 69, rarely correcting his text in light of them and only citing their readings occasionally in the *Annotationes*.[65] In sum, his publication essentially reflected the text of three late manuscripts, corrected by three others, and altered only sparingly by two other minuscules.

The manuscripts that he claimed in his letter to the pope to be "very old and very correct"[66] were just the opposite. "All these," writes Scrivener, "were neither ancient nor particularly valuable."[67] Codex 2 was especially sloppily written, requiring the editors to make several corrections in the service of publication. In any event, the *oldest* manuscript that Erasmus used was from the eleventh century, hardly "very old"; dating manuscripts paleographically was a science that would not be born for almost two more centuries.

4. *The* Annotationes

In the first edition, the *Annotationes* comprised 294 pages. By the fifth edition (1535) they had expanded to 783.[68] As rich as these philological, textual,

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[61] Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 126–27; Smith, *Erasmus*, 163.

[62] K. W. Clark, "Observations on the Erasmian Notes in Codex 2," *Studia Evangelica*, TUGAL 73 (1959): 749–56.

[63] Bentley (*Humanists and Holy Writ*, 132) comments, "Erasmus did not think highly of MS. 1, did not closely examine it, and did not use it extensively in correcting MS. 2." He cites only four places in which Erasmus followed codex 1 exclusively (Matt 27:35; Mark 11:8; Luke 2:43; 14:27; ibid., 131). Scrivener had earlier claimed that Erasmus "could have followed none other than Cod. 1" in twenty-two places (Scrivener, *Plain Introduction*, 2:183, n. 2); although Bentley does not comment on this, Clark demonstrates that Scrivener's numbers are exaggerated (Clark, "Observations," 754–55).

[64] Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 129, 131–33.

[65] Ibid., 126, 137.

[66] *CWE*, 3:223–23 (Epistle 384); also, published in his preface to *Novum Instrumentum*.

[67] Scrivener, *Plain Introduction*, 183.

[68] Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 123.

and theological comments are, they have hardly been studied until fairly recently.[69] Among other things, they give us a glimpse into Erasmus's thinking about certain passages. For example, he argues against the reading εἰκῇ (eikē ["without cause"]) in Matthew 5:22 ("everyone who is angry with his brother *without cause* will be liable to judgment"), even though he printed it as his text. He also seriously questioned the authenticity of the blessing at the end of Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer ("for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" [Matt 6:13b]) because it was lacking in (virtually) all Latin witnesses. But again, he printed the text since it was found in his Greek manuscripts.[70]

In two other places Erasmus's *Annotationes* deserve special comment—Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53–8:11. The first text, known as the "longer ending of Mark," though found in almost all Greek manuscripts extant today, was questioned by Erasmus because Jerome had said that just about every Greek manuscript he had access to ended Mark's Gospel at 16:8.[71] Likewise, Erasmus questioned the authenticity of the *pericope adulterae*—the story of the woman caught in adultery—because it was not found in the oldest Greek witnesses, nor commented on by the oldest church fathers. And even though the credentials for the *pericope adulterae* are significantly worse than those for the longer ending of Mark, Erasmus "liked the story! … and he badly wanted to consider it genuine."[72]

Yet in some respects Erasmus demonstrated textual acuity well beyond that of his contemporaries. Not only did he suggest conjectures based, at times, on philological and exegetical grounds,[73] but he apparently was the first scholar "to develop the principle of the harder reading and to employ it regularly in his criticism of the Greek New Testament."[74] His rationale for much of this was not sound (e.g., he rejected the better codices because of the Vulgate's presumed influence on them), but he was a maverick in his own age. And on more than a few occasions his *Annotationes* revealed views on the Greek text that went counter to the NT text that he actually published.[75]

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[69] Ibid., 139.

[70] Augustijn, *Erasmus*, 95, claims that Erasmus put the (Latin) text in smaller print, presumably to indicate his doubts over its authenticity. But this did not happen until the second edition of 1519.

[71] Jerome, *Epistola* 120, *PL* 22:980–1006.

[72] Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 147.

[73] Smith, *Erasmus*, 164. For a detailed study on Erasmus's conjectures, see Jan Krans, *Beyond What Is Written: Erasmus and Beza as Conjectural Critics of the New Testament*, NTTS 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

[74] Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 154. Cf. Jerry H. Bentley, "Erasmus, Jean Le Clerc, and the Principle of the Harder Reading," *Rennaissance Quarterly* 31 (1978): 309–21.

[75] Those who claim that the TR duplicates the autographic wording (some even going so far

5. *Curiosities in the Greek Text*

One passage in *Novum Instrumentum* that scandalized many clerics was 1 John 5:7, which, in the KJV and the Greek text on which it is based, is the only *explicit* affirmation of the Trinity in the NT ("For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one" [NKJV]). These words were not found in the Greek manuscripts that Erasmus consulted, even though they existed in several late, corrupted copies of the Latin Vulgate. The Dutchman defended his position by arguing that he did not print the verse because he could not find it in any Greek manuscripts. By 1520 a manuscript was apparently "made to order" by an Oxford scribe who *translated* from the Latin *to* the Greek text here.[76] To save his reputation and legacy, Erasmus put this verse into his 1522 edition because this manuscript (codex 61 or Montfortianus) came to his attention, though he expressed his protests about the genuineness of the reading in a lengthy note in the *Annotationes* of that edition.[77]

Erasmus was a bit disingenuous about the whole matter, however, because he too back-translated from Latin to Greek on occasion, most notoriously in the last section of Revelation. He had access to only one manuscript of the Apocalypse. But it was lacking the last leaf of text (Rev 22:16–21), so he translated the Latin Vulgate back into Greek at this point.[78] As a result he created twenty textual variants[79] that were not in any Greek manuscripts (until a few were later produced that were *based* on Erasmus's printed text![80]). The Dutch scholar only partially owned up to the back translation: he said that he "added some words from the Latin" for these six verses, but he also claimed that all Greek manuscripts were defective here,

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as to claim that Erasmus was virtually inspired, even when he changed the Greek text to conform it to his Latin witnesses!) do not reckon with the Dutch scholar's own *opinions* about the text that he produced. For a cataloging of statements by TR advocates, see Daniel B. Wallace, "Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism," *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (1992): 21–51. This is akin to KJV Only advocates who ignore the original preface to the King James Version and the eight thousand marginal notes in the earlier publications of the Authorized Version.

[76] Metzger-Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament,* 146. Full discussion on 146–48.

[77] It is in the third edition that Tyndale translated for the first printed English translation of the NT. Luther based his German translation on Erasmus's second edition.

[78] Faludy claims that Erasmus had the Greek text of v. 20 from Valla's *Adnotationes* (*Erasmus*, 159), but no documentation is given.

[79] See Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," 47, n. 56, for a list of the variants.

[80] Darius Müller, "Manuscript Copies of the Textus Receptus as a Problem in the Textual Criticism of John's Apocalypse" (paper read at the annual Society of Biblical Literature conference, November 2013), notes the following manuscripts as being copies of the TR for Rev 22:16–21: 296, 1775, 1776, 1777, 2049, 2066, 2072, 2619, 2669, and 2909.

none having Rev 22:16–21.[81] In all five of his diglots, Erasmus printed the same made-up Greek text for this passage.[82]

The most egregious of these is a reading that occurs in v. 19: "book" instead of "tree": "If anyone removes any of the words of the book of this prophecy, God will remove his share from the *book* of life and from the holy city which are written in this book." It is decidedly inauthentic, while "the tree" of life, found in the rest of the Greek manuscripts (except those based on Erasmus's text), is clearly authentic. The confusion was most likely due to an intra-Latin switch: The form of the word for "tree" in Latin in this passage is *ligno*; the word for "book" is *libro* (the Textus Receptus, on which the KJV rests, reads "the book" [ἀπὸ βίβλου, *apo biblou*] of life instead of "the tree" [ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου, *apo tou xylou*] of life). The two-letter difference accounts for an accidental alteration in some Latin manuscripts.

The last few verses of the NT were not the only ones that Erasmus took Latin liberties with. He also changed the Greek text on the basis of the Vulgate in several other places, even adding a complete sentence to a verse (Acts 9:6a in the KJV) that to this day has not been found in any Greek manuscripts.[83] Thus, Erasmus also did what the Oxford scribe did—put words in the Greek text that had no support from any Greek manuscripts.

Conclusion

"According to most conservative estimates more than three hundred thousand copies [of his NT editions] were in circulation" during Erasmus's lifetime.[84] That is five hundred times the number of Complutensian Polyglot copies! Combining his abiding interests in classical and biblical literature, and

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[81] See the *Annotationes* of the *Novum Instrumentum*, 675.

[82] Some Erasmian scholars have mistakenly stated that the fourth edition was corrected to the wording of the Complutensian Polyglot (cf., e.g., Augustijn, *Erasmus*, 93; Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 128, 134). Although Erasmus did change his Greek text of the Apocalypse in 110 places for the fourth edition to conform it to the Complutensian Polyglot (Valdes, "The First Printed Apocalypse," 149), the last few verses were not among them.

[83] See Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," 46–47, for discussion of the most notable texts (Acts 9:6; Rev 17:4, 8). Further, because 2814 was a minuscule intermixed with a commentary by Andreas, it was often difficult to tell where the text stopped and the commentary began. Inevitably, a few extraneous readings found their way into Erasmus's text. For Acts 8:37, Erasmus used the *marginal* reading of codex 4 because he believed the verse had been accidentally overlooked by sloppy scribes (see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994], 316).

[84] Faludy, *Erasmus*, 166. Faludy (165) mentions that Erasmus's diglot NT "was reprinted at least sixty-nine times between 1516 and 1536, not including four editions of the Latin text by itself, and two of the Greek texts printed by Aldus's successor, Asolani."

executing such devotion with a critical philological, historical, and literary method, Erasmus initiated the modern era of NT scholarship.[85]

Protestants quickly latched on to this new tool. "The *sola scriptura* of Martin Luther was inconceivable without Erasmus' *Novum Instrumentum* of 1516 and subsequent editions."[86] Erasmus's Greek text stood behind Tyndale's and Luther's translations of the NT and essentially every Protestant translation until 1881. But it was soon banned at Cambridge and Oxford, universities that were still held captive to Catholicism. On April 8, 1546, the Council of Trent authorized the Vulgate as the Church's only official Bible, condemning Erasmus's work in the process.[87]

History was repeating itself: "The outcry with which Jerome had once been assailed was now renewed against Erasmus."[88] And history repeats itself again today, as modern translations, based on far older and more accurate manuscripts, are condemned by those who claim that the King James Version is the final word on the Word. The very architect of the Greek text behind the KJV NT would reject such foolishness in the most vehement terms.

Ironically, since Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum/Testamentum* always included the Latin (and in at least four editions authorized by him, without the Greek), he may have viewed his major accomplishment as that of a new *Latin* translation. But the history of the Reformation, with its battle cry of *ad fontes*,[89] has justifiably focused more on the Greek text; thus "the side issue [for Erasmus] became the main one and vice versa."[90] It was this "side issue" that became the book that changed the world five hundred years ago.

Devoting much of his adult life to the study of the NT, especially to the establishment of the text, this Rotterdammer felt that "from this massive scholarly effort … there would be a reforming of the individual and of Christendom."[91] Although hindsight has shown that Erasmus's publication was deeply flawed and based on inferior Greek manuscripts, it became the instrument that Luther used to find grace and the material catalyst for the Reformation; further, it burst forth the dawn of a new era of detailed, scientific biblical studies. Indeed, although it was tweaked from time to time, this

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[85] Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 193; Sowards, *Desiderius Erasmus*, 82.

[86] Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:369.

[87] Smith, *Erasmus*, 159, n. 2, 174–75; Faludy, *Erasmus*, 162; Metzger-Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 146.

[88] Tregelles, *Printed Text*, 21.

[89] This Latin phrase, "back to the sources," apparently was coined by Erasmus himself in *De ratione studii ac legendi interpretandique auctores* (Paris: Biermont, 1511) unnumbered page; reprinted in *LB*, 2:120.11.

[90] De Jonge, "Novum Testamentum a nobis versum," 411.

[91] Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe*, 2:175.

Greek text was essentially the only one published for the next three hundred years. To Erasmus we owe a great debt, and all of us who are students of the NT stand firmly on the shoulders of this giant. *Semper reformanda* ("always being reformed")![92]

[92] Regrettably, the publication of *Basel 1516: Erasmus' Edition of the New Testament*, ed. Martin Wallraff, Silvana Seidel Menchi, and Kaspar von Greyerz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016) appeared too late to be consulted for this article.