

Desiderius Erasmus: Exploding Myths

(1466-1536)

John 14:21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

John 17:6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.

Desiderius Erasmus was a Dutch scholar of the Renaissance and early Reformation in Europe. In his time, he was praised by Catholic and Protestant alike for his ability and his learning and for the Greek New Testament, which he edited. He was also criticized and opposed by both Catholics and some of the reformers, such as Martin Luther who deeply disagreed with Erasmus' stand on predestination. Today, he is reviled by those who oppose his Greek New Testament (even though they may call him a great man out of the other side of their mouths), and he is praised by those who affirm the worth of his Greek text. Whether praised or reviled, he has had a profound and lasting impact on the entire world. This cannot be denied.



Erasmus¹

The nineteenth century scholars, Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828-1892) helped formulate guidelines for textual criticism. By these they eventually won a place for their edited Greek New Testament, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (1881), in the revision committee for the *English Revised Version* (1881). Among these guidelines were the following: *Manuscripts must be weighed, not counted* (this gave precedence to Codex Vaticanus, which they considered the weightiest of all, and it discounted the vast majority of manuscripts of the Traditional Text), *the older manuscripts are the best manuscripts* (this gave further weight to Vaticanus and the Alexandrian manuscripts, which were dated much older than the more recent copies of the Traditional Text), and others. These two guidelines were used against the Textus Receptus printed Greek text. Westcott, Hort, and others declared that Erasmus only had a few manuscripts to work with as he edited his Greek text in Basil, Switzerland. All of the manuscripts Erasmus found at Basel were Traditional Text and dated from the 11th to the 15th centuries. Therefore, they were very late manuscripts. Since all of them disagreed with the "older and better" manuscripts Vaticanus and Sinaiticus (about 350 AD. according to the scholars), they were inferior. This left only one judgement for Erasmus' Textus Receptus. It, too, was drastically inferior.

In the following pages, we shall examine the final statement in the last paragraph. Is it true? Is it reasonable? We will do this by studying the life of Erasmus and then looking at the wealth of information that was available to him.

The Life of Desiderius Erasmus

Erasmus was born in 1467 in Rotterdam, Netherlands, according to J. A. Froude, Regis Professor of Modern History at Oxford in the 1890's, from whom much of the information in this chapter comes.² However, he only lived in Rotterdam for a maximum of nine years. When he left, he never returned. It is said that his parents were not married, because his father, Gerard, was a Roman Catholic priest, and, therefore, forbidden to marry.³ His mother was Margaret Rutgers, the daughter of a doctor from Sieben Bergen, who also may have been Gerard's housekeeper. On the other hand, the whole story may not be

true or totally true. Erasmus himself said that he was a second child and had a brother, Peter, three years older.⁴ There is no hint of a previous marriage. Both his parents apparently loved him and cared for him.

At the age of nine, Erasmus and his brother were placed in a very prestigious and excellent Latin school, in Deventer, central Netherlands. One of his fellow students was Adrian of Utrecht, who later became tutor to Charles V, Cardinal Regent of Spain, and eventually the Pope. Erasmus was enthusiastic about books and did very well in his studies. However, he did not at all like the school master, though, if he complained to his father, his complaints seemed to result in nothing. While he and Peter were at the School, their mother and father died, apparently from the black plague. Erasmus and Peter now had three guardians, a banker, an unnamed person who soon died from the plague, and the master of another school at Gouda, South Holland. The banker, being a busy man, gave the full guardianship to the school master at Gouda. They were left some money and property, although Erasmus said it was not much. Later, he suggested that the guardians took his property, either by fraud or negligence. So, they were almost entirely drained of their inheritance. The result was that the boys were sent to monastery "to be taken care of."

The circumstances created by the death of the boys' parents and the squandering of their inheritance had a great effect on their future. Before we look into what became of Erasmus in early adulthood, it will be well if we review the general condition of the world at the time.

The Fall of the Byzantine Empire

The Roman Empire had been a stabilizing influence for centuries up to the third century AD. Diocletian took the throne in 284 AD. He completed the restoration of the stability in the Empire, but he divided it into four parts each with its own emperor, a plan called the *Tetrarchy*. There were two top emperors, styled Augusti, and two junior colleagues, the Caesares. Each Augustus ruled half the Empire and divided his half into two parts. The Augustus ruled half, and the Caesar he appointed ruled the other half under the Augustus. At first, Diocletian chose Maximian as Augustus to rule the western provinces of the empire, while he ruled the eastern. Later, in 293, two Caesares, Galerius (with Diocletian in the East), and Constantius (with Maximian in the West) were appointed. In 303, the four of them issued edicts to remove Christians' rights and initiated the tenth great persecution of the Christian church, which lasted for ten years.

Diocletian and Maximian retired in 305. Galerius and Constantius were raised to Augusti, and their positions as Caesars were assumed by Valerius Severus and Maximinus Daza. That same year, Constantius (Western Augustus) died precipitating a crisis. His son, Constantine, was immediately proclaimed Augustus by the army. A series of events ended with Constantine as Augustus in the west struggling for his position with Maximian's son, Maxentius. Constantine and Maxentius were both proclaimed Augusti in 307. This made two Augusti in the West. Constantine fought a battle with Maxentius at Milvian bridge in 312. Maxentius was defeated, and, when the dust settled, Constantine was in control of the western provinces.

However, in the East, Galerius had stepped down and appointed Licinius as Augustus for the East in 308. Wars ensued and finally Licinius resigned as Eastern Augustus in 324, leaving Constantine as sole emperor, and the tetrarchy fully collapsed.

However, history was about to change again. Constantine appointed his son, Constantius II, as another Caesar in 324. Other sons and relatives of Constantine followed in various positions, and finally, the empire was once again split between east and west. This split prevailed until the fall of the Western Roman Empire, which happened due to the failure of weak rulers and the devastation brought on by the onslaught of invading barbarian armies such as the Goths, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vandals, Franks, Huns,

Saxons, etc. By 476, the Western Empire was on the verge of complete collapse militarily, politically, and financially. Europe was breaking into parts ruled by the barbarian tribes. ⁵

One power remained constant in the west. The Bishop of Rome had only grown in power and prestige over the years. Eventually, his position was generally considered to be dominant over all the churches of the west. How did the Bishop of Rome gain such power? After the Diocletian persecution, Christianity became legal with Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 AD, and the persecution ceased. During the reign of Emperor Theodosius I (379-395), Christianity was made the official state religion of the Empire. In the first century, each church was independent, and there were two offices in the churches: deacon and bishop (which was also called pastor or elder). The Greek for elder was *presbyter*. In the second century, the bishop and *presbyter* became two separate offices. The term *presbyter* was corrupted into *priest*. This corruption was probably helped by the pagans among whom the Christians lived. Priests were over the local churches, and several churches were overseen by a bishop. The jurisdiction of the bishop became known as a diocese, and several dioceses made up a province. During the second and third centuries, the word *catholic* started to be used to designate all the churches together, since *catholic* meant *universal*. Provinces were grouped into yet larger divisions called patriarchates. The leader of the patriarchate became known as a Patriarch. The title was applied to the bishops of the great cities Rome, Constantinople, and Alexandria. ⁶

Originally, the bishop of Rome was recognized as one of several patriarchs. Eventually, the bishop of Rome gained so much prestige that he was recognized as the head of all the churches in the west, but not the east. A number of factors helped to produce this. One was the position and power of Rome itself as the capital of the entire empire and especially of the Western Roman Empire. To a large extent that power and prestige transferred to the bishop of Rome. Also, the doctrines that Peter was the rock of Matthew 16:18, that the church was built on Peter, that Peter started the church at Rome, and that he was the first bishop of Rome, transferred to the bishop of Rome the perceived authority of the Apostle Peter. The bishop of Rome began to be called Pope, Vicar of Christ on earth, and the head of the church. Finally, Attila the Hun invaded Italy in 451 and the appeal of Leo I, Pope and bishop of Rome, helped to persuade him to leave Rome alone. This placed Leo and subsequent Popes in a position of great authority and power, both civil and religious.

While Constantine was still Emperor, a controversy arose among the churches about the Deity of Christ. A bishop of Alexandria by the name of Arius taught that Christ was less than divine. This doctrine of Arianism caused great conflict among the churches. This conflict was so widespread and serious that it came to the attention the Emperor. In 325, a general council was convened in Nicaea to resolve this issue. Constantine himself presided at the council, further enhancing the prestige and authority of Rome among the churches. The issue was resolved in favor of the deity of Christ. After the council, anyone who was considered to be an Arian or was accused of Arianism stood in danger of severe persecution. This set the pace for future persecution and civil punishment of perceived heretics.

Other churches rejected the doctrine of the primacy of the Pope at Rome. The churches in the Eastern Roman Empire believed that all the Apostles were equal and rejected the idea that Peter was supreme. Therefore, there was not only a political separation of west from east, but there was also a religious separation as well. So, Eastern Orthodoxy was born. Other individual churches stood firm on the independence of the local church and would not submit to the Roman hierarchy or to the patriarchs of Eastern Orthodoxy. Many of these churches were declared by the religious authorities in the west and east to be heretics. Eventually they were persecuted.

The Eastern Roman Empire continued for several centuries. Today we know it as the Byzantine Empire. During those centuries, the Byzantine Empire was a buffer between Roman Catholic Western Europe and the Islamic armies of the east. They fought many battles with the Muslims. Little by little the Byzantine empire was reduced in size by these attacks. Eventually, the relentless advance of the

Ottoman Turks led to the walls of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. In 1453, the city fell, and the Empire was no more.⁷ The Turks renamed Constantinople to *Istanbul*.

For our purpose here, to trace the movement of God in and through the life of Desiderius Erasmus, the most important result of the foregoing is the effect the Byzantine Empire had on the text of the Bible. In the time of the Lord Jesus Christ, the entire Roman world spoke Greek. The New Testament was inspired in Greek so that it would be able to communicate over the entire Empire. After the division of the Empire into East and West, the Western Roman Empire began to lose sight of Greek in favor of Latin. One of the major influences that caused this was the Roman Catholic Church. All of its services used Latin. As the Catholic Church's influence and control extended over more and more of Western Europe, the tribes were also brought under that influence. They too became part of a church that used Latin rather than Greek. The Roman Catholic Church's official Bible was a Latin Bible commissioned in 382 by Pope Damasus. This official Bible became known as the *Latin Vulgate*. The situation was different in the Byzantine Empire. Greek was used there as the official language and the everyday language of the people. At first, it was the same Greek spoken in the days of Paul, and it changed very little over the years. While the west was clashing with a myriad of mother tongues and imposing Latin as the trade language throughout the Middle Ages, the everyday language of the east was the same language Paul spoke. What better place for God to preserve the words He inspired in the New Testament?

God has promised in His Word that He will preserve all His words (Ps. 12:6-7). So, Latin was not God's focus in the preservation of the New Testament. Greek was. The text embraced in the Byzantine empire was the Traditional Text. The God of history, who sees the end from the beginning and says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Is. 46:10), created a womb in the Byzantine Empire that preserved His words and multiplied good copies. One person I know said words to this affect, "Of course the Traditional text is the majority text. They were copied in the Byzantine Empire and that's what they used there! No other place in the world used Greek, only them." This is said to imply that the number of Traditional Text copies was a result of *purely human causes, as if God had nothing to do with it*. Those who say this actually imply that they do not believe in the sovereignty of God in history. God believes in it. Why don't you? God created and preserved the Byzantine Empire for 1,000 years, until the invention of the printing press, so that His word would be preserved. He then submitted it to the press, and it spread all over the world. If the Alexandrian text is the true text, why didn't God preserve that text and multiply copies in Egypt or Rome? He could have. **But, He did not do it!** Instead, He left the premier Alexandrian Greek manuscript, Vaticanus, to lie dead in the library at Rome for that whole 1,000 years (assuming Vaticanus is dated 350 AD., which is controversial at best). Then, He left it lying dormant in the library for another four hundred years until Westcott and Hort, two liberal preachers, dug it out of its grave.

Perhaps almost as important is the effect of the fall of the Byzantine Empire on the Renaissance and Reformation in Western Europe. For 1,000 years Europe had lost the knowledge and literature that existed in the first century Greek classics and New Testament originals. However, that was maintained in the Byzantine Empire. Both the Muslims and the Europeans benefitted from that. By the fourteenth century, Europe was primed and ready for something to happen. Feudalism was waning, the invention of gunpowder was revolutionizing warfare, the Catholic Church was losing its hold on many hearts because of the preaching of salvation by faith alone by so-called "heretical" groups, centuries of clergy corruption and abuse left many disgusted, asceticism did not appeal to the average person. Many began to long for the freedom to think for themselves, and to express themselves in speech, writing, and art; in other words, the freedom to be who they are. This became known as humanism. However, humanism then did not necessarily mean a rejection of faith in God, in contrast to the humanism of today, which is atheistic. Rather, it included the freedom to believe in God as He reveals Himself in the Bible, without fear of being judged a heretic and being punished for it.

As the Turks marched closer and closer to the gates of Constantinople, many teachers and scholars in the Byzantine Empire saw “the handwriting on the wall.” As a result, many fled the Byzantine Empire and emigrated to Western Europe. At first, this flood of immigrants came to Italy. Wikipedia says, “The Encyclopædia Britannica claims: ‘Many modern scholars also agree that the exodus of Greeks to Italy as a result of this event marked the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance’, although few scholars date the start of the Italian Renaissance this late.”⁸ This is true about when the beginning of the Renaissance is dated, but many of the scholars from the east came in the fourteenth century, before the fall of the Empire. Others emigrated in the fifteenth century. Their presence helped revive education, philosophy, and Greek language learning.

The fall of the Empire helped the Reformers, because it flooded western Europe with a new knowledge of Greek and brought into it many Greek New Testament manuscripts. When writing of why the Greek New Testament was so long in being printed, Samuel Tregelles, nineteenth century textual scholar, happened to mention “although the dispersion of the Greeks led to the knowledge of their language and literature being acquired by many in Western Europe ...”⁹

With increasing Western presence in the East due to the Crusades, and the gradual collapse of the Byzantine Empire during the Late Middle Ages, many Byzantine Greek scholars fled to Western Europe, bringing with them many original Greek manuscripts, and providing impetus for Greek-language education in the West and further translation efforts of Greek scholarship into Latin.¹⁰

The main role of Byzantine scholars within Renaissance humanism was the teaching of the Greek language to their western counterparts in universities or privately together with the spread of ancient texts. Their forerunners were Barlaam of Calabria (Bernardo Massari) and Leonzio Pilato, two translators who were both born in Calabria in southern Italy and who were both educated in the Greek language. The impact of these two scholars on the humanists was indisputable.¹¹

By 1500 there was a Greek-speaking community of about 5,000 in Venice. The Venetians also ruled Crete, Dalmatia, and scattered islands and port cities of the former empire, the populations of which were augmented by refugees from other Byzantine provinces who preferred Venetian to Ottoman governance.¹²

The Reformation was the period of time when God led His people to rebel against and to leave the Roman Catholic Church. The institution had become as corrupt and heretical as any heretic it had ever burned at the stake. Erasmus’ evaluation of monastery Monks was this: “those hooded whoremasters the monks, vile rascals as they are ...”¹³ His view of the Roman Catholic Church has been summarized in this way.

If we are to believe the account of his intellectual history which he gives in his later writings, the Christian religion appeared to him to have been superseded by a system which differed only in name from the paganism of the old world. The saints had taken the place of the gods. Their biographies were as full of lies and as childish and absurd as the old theogonies. The Gospels were out of sight. Instead of praying to Christ, the faithful were taught to pray to miracle-working images and relics. The Virgin, multiplied into a thousand personalities — our Lady of Loretto, our Lady of Saragossa, our Lady of Walsingham, and as many more as there were shrines devoted to her was at once Queen of Heaven and a local goddess. Pious pilgrimages and indulgences had taken the place of moral duty. The service of God was the repeating of masses by priests, who sold them for so much a dozen. In the exuberance of their power the clergy seemed to

exult in showing contempt of God and man by the licentiousness of their lives and the insolence of their dominion. They ruled with their self-made laws over soul and body. Their pope might be an Alexander VI; their cardinals were princes, with revenues piled up out of accumulated benefices; their bishops were magnificent nobles; and one and all, from his Holiness at Rome to the lowest acolyte, were amenable to no justice save that of their own courts. This extraordinary system rested on the belief in the supernatural powers which they pretended to have received in the laying on of hands. As successors of the Apostles they held the keys of heaven and hell; their excommunications were registered by the Almighty; their absolutions could open the gates of Paradise. The spiritual food provided in school or parish church was some preposterous legend or childish superstition, varied with the unintelligible speculations of scholastic theology. An army of friars, released from residence by dispensation, were spread over Europe, taking the churches out of the hands of the secular priests, teaching what they pleased, and watching through the confessional the secret thoughts of man and woman. These friars thrust themselves into private families, working on the weakness of wife or daughter, dreaded and detested by husbands and fathers; and Erasmus, as well as the loudest of the Protestant reformers, declared that they abused the women's confidence for the vilest purposes. Complaint was useless. Resistance was heresy, and a charge of heresy, unless a friendly hand interposed, meant submission or death. Unhappy men, unconscious of offence, were visited by a bolt out of the blue in the shape of a summons before a Church court, where their accusers were their judges.¹⁴

Erasmus himself further stated:

Men are threatened or tempted into vows of celibacy. They can have license to go with harlots, but they must not marry wives. They may keep concubines and remain priests. If they take wives they are thrown to the flames. Parents who design their children for a celibate priesthood should emasculate them in their infancy, instead of forcing them, reluctant or ignorant, into a furnace of licentiousness.

You may find a bishop here and there who teaches the Gospel, though life and teaching have small agreement. But what shall we say of those who destroy the Gospel itself, make laws at their will, tyrannise over the laity, and measure right and wrong with rules constructed by themselves? Of those who entangle their flocks in the meshes of crafty canons, who sit not in the seat of the Gospel, but in the seat of Caiaphas and Simon Magus - prelates of evil, who bring disgrace and discredit on their worthier brethren?

What would Jerome say could he see the Virgin's milk exhibited for money, with as much honour paid to it as to the consecrated body of Christ; the miraculous oil; the portions of the true cross, enough if they were collected to freight a large ship? Here we have the hood of St. Francis, there Our Lady's petticoat or St. Anne's comb, or St. Thomas of Canterbury's shoes; not presented as innocent aids to religion, but as the substance of religion itself - and all through the avarice of priests and the hypocrisy of monks playing on the credulity of the people. Even bishops play their parts in these fantastic shows, and approve and dwell on them in their rescripts.

I (Erasmus says) saw with my own eyes Pope Julius II. at Bologna, and afterwards at Rome, marching at the head of a triumphal procession as if he were Pompey or Caesar.

St. Peter subdued the world with faith, not with arms or soldiers or military engines. St. Peter's successors would win as many victories as St. Peter won if they had Peter's spirit.

St. Paul says he would rather speak five words with a reasonable meaning in them than ten thousand in an unknown tongue. They chant nowadays in our churches in what is an unknown tongue and nothing else, while you will not hear a sermon once in six months telling people to amend their lives.¹⁵

At the dawn of the sixteenth century, a spirit of rebellion against the Roman Church was spreading everywhere. The beginning of the Reformation is marked as 1517, with Martin Luther, the Augustinian priest who came to faith while reading Romans 1:17. Martin Luther posted ninety-five theses against the sale of indulgences to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany.

Learning Greek was immensely important to the Reformation. Had Erasmus not been able to learn Greek, there would have been no printed Greek New Testament. Two years after the Reformation started, Martin Luther was translating the Bible into German using Erasmus' second edition. The scholars of the east had brought excellence in teaching Greek to Western Europe.

Erasmus Became a Priest

Yes, Erasmus became a Roman Catholic priest, but he never performed the services of a priest. He was Roman Catholic all his life. Nevertheless, he believed the church needed extensive and deep reform. He simply wanted to do the reform from within the organization, rather than leave it. Many of the early reformers felt the same way. Martin Luther may have been the first to leave the Catholic Church. However, he didn't leave it. It left him. The Roman Church "kicked him out." He was excommunicated. From then on, a mass exodus occurred. Below is how Erasmus came to be a priest.

When Erasmus and his brother were plunged into poverty, it was determined that they should go to a monastery for training. Both boys hated the idea equally. Erasmus preferred to go to the university in Paris. Both boys refused the decision of the schoolmaster with Erasmus leading the way. They were taken to talk to the banker. Erasmus continued to refuse although Peter was weaker. "In the end the wretched being ran away from the monastery, took to abandoned courses, and died miserably."¹⁶ Erasmus, still refusing the monastery, was tortured.

Erasmus, whose tastes were all for learning, cared nothing for the monks' enjoyments and continued obstinate. His habits were simple. His constitution was delicate. To break his spirit he was hardly treated at home. No one spoke to him. His food was cut down. He fell ill, but was still determined, and the blockhead of a guardian then set a parcel of friars upon him, with relations, male and female, persuading, threatening, beseeching - all to melt the will of a single boy ... Every imaginable weapon was made use of to batter down his resistance ... In short, no artifice was left untried to vanquish a sick child deserted by his treacherous brother. He was watched like a besieged city. The rival orders in the town had their emissaries clutching at him on account of his reputed talents, each wishing to secure a proselyte who they hoped would be an ornament to their community.¹⁷

In the end, Erasmus was led to a meeting with a pleasant childhood friend named Cantelius, who had taken his vows in a monastery. He painted a wonderful picture and told Erasmus, "If he wished for books there was the library and a quiet place for reading."¹⁸ He finally agreed to go and try it for a few weeks. They promised him that he could leave if he did not like it. After he was there for several weeks he came to a time when he must decide, but he was still unsure. He demanded freedom and whatever

was left of his inheritance. The accounting they presented to him showed him to be a poverty-stricken beggar. So, he relented to become a novice – the first step to becoming a monk. He was allowed to study, but the books were not satisfying, and the conditions were intolerable. Then Henry of Bergen, Bishop of Cambrai took pity on him. He implored the Pope to allow the boy to leave the monastery and become the bishop's secretary. The Pope gave the necessary dispensation, and Erasmus escaped his prison.

You will ask if all monasteries were like that in which Erasmus suffered ... Erasmus will tell you that a great many of them were no better than lupanaria (a brothel in the ancient city of Pompei-Author). If you desire particulars you will find particulars more than enough in Cardinal Morton's account of the Abbey of St. Albans at the end of the fifteenth century. Sir T. More fixes a hundred years before his time as the period at which monastic degradation began. There is no period in English history when you do not find corruption and irregularity, but in the fifteenth century the degradation had become universal.¹⁹

Erasmus' Education and Travels

Even though he had left the monastery behind, Erasmus was ordained a priest in 1492. He still craved education, and he finally got his chance. Erasmus was allowed to go to Paris and attend the university there in 1495. The Bishop gave him a small allowance. He supplemented his allowance by tutoring other students. Learning Greek was an opportunity that was hard to come by, so he taught *himself* the elements of Greek and then taught his pupils. He wrote some works and sold them to booksellers. A letter he wrote in Paris to a friend during a time of sickness included these words.

All I ask for is leisure to live wholly to God, to repent of the sins of my foolish youth, to study Holy Scripture, and to read or write something of real value. I could do nothing of this in a convent. Never was a tenderer plant. I could not bear fasts and vigils when I was at my best. Even here, where I am so well cared for, I fall sick; and how would it be with me if I was in the cloister? I had meant to go this year to Italy and study theology. My plan had been to take a degree at Bologna, go to Rome for the jubilee, and then come back and settle myself into some regular course of work. It cannot be. I am too weak to endure long journeys in hot weather. I should want money too. Life in Italy is expensive. The degree would be expensive, and his Lordship of Cambrai is not lavish in his presents. He is more kind than generous, and promises more than he performs. Perhaps I ought not to expect so much, though he is liberal enough to some others that I know. I must just do the best that I can.²⁰

It should be noted that Erasmus was fluent in Latin. Many of his writings and lectures were done in Latin. It was the lingua franca of the scholarly world at the time. He also knew Dutch, and he probably knew French. He also learned English *a little*. He spent considerable time in England.

Erasmus' young friend and student, William Blount (who eventually became *Lord Mountjoy*) invited him to travel to England and study there. He consented and went there in 1499.²¹ He was there quite a while, weeks or months. He also made some key friendships with men who would be important later in the English Reformation. The new friendships included John Colet, Thomas More, William Grocyn, Thomas Linacre, and others. His friend, Grocyn lectured on the rudiments of Greek at Oxford, but at that time there were *no* Greek lexicons nor grammars. Later, just before his departure from England, he wrote the following words to his good friend John Colet.

Theology is the mother of sciences. But nowadays the good and the wise keep clear of it, and leave the field to the dull and sordid, who think themselves omniscient. You have taken arms against these people. You are trying to bring back the Christianity of the Apostles, and clear away the thorns and briars with which it is overgrown; a noble undertaking. You will find the task a hard one, but you will succeed, and will not regard the clamours of fools. You will not stand alone. The crowded rooms where you have been lecturing will have shown you how many are on your side.²²

This was his first trip to England, but not his last. When it came time for him to leave England, his English friends had given him some patronage, but it was a small amount. However, all he had was confiscated by the customs office when he left England. He arrived in Paris penniless. So, he wrote a book called *Adagia*, a book of Greek and Latin adages, which made him famous and gave him some income, but still not enough. Being nearly destitute, he was invited to Tournehem Castle, owned by the Lord of Vere and his wife, Lady Anna Bersala, whom Erasmus called princess. He had made their acquaintance when he tutored students at the University of Paris.

However, plans change, and Erasmus was not able to go to Tournehem. Instead, he went to Antwerp, Belgium. By this time, he had already collected a number of manuscripts. He did not say how many or what they were. For at least two months, he stayed in Antwerp and visited other towns, where he was probably searching libraries. Every library in Europe was open to him, as were monasteries, if he wished to look for manuscripts there. No one knows for certain how many manuscripts he was actually able to read and study. "It is well known also that Erasmus looked for manuscripts everywhere during his travels and that he borrowed them from everyone he could."²³

Erasmus had been inspired back in 1504 by his discovery of Lorenzo Valla's *Adnotationis Novum Testamentum*, a work comparing the Latin Vulgate against Greek manuscripts. Erasmus republished Valla's work in 1505 and wrote in his preface about the need to recover the true text of the Bible. In 1499, encouraged by John Colet of Oxford, Erasmus had already begun an intensive study of the Greek language. Now he began studying, collecting and comparing Latin and Greek manuscripts far and wide in order to provide the world with a fresh Latin translation from the Greek.²⁴

Erasmus, who from his youth had been an admirer of Valla found a manuscript of Valla's treatise in 1504 and had it printed in the following year. In this work Valla favored the Greek New Testament text over the Vulgate. The Latin text often differed from the Greek, he reported. Also there were omissions and additions in the Latin translation, and the Greek wording was generally better than that of the Latin.²⁵

The Valla manuscript was found in a monastery in Leuven, revealing that Erasmus also searched monasteries for manuscripts.²⁶

From there, he returned to Paris, but his desire was to go to Italy and take a doctor's degree. Erasmus seems to have been constantly moving about. The plague broke out in Paris, and he had to move to Orleans. While there, he was searching for books, comparing Greek manuscripts, and writing a commentary on Jeremiah. He also wished to write a book on theology. He had a vision of printing a Greek New Testament and was hard at work on it. In 1504, Erasmus also published his *Handbook of the Christian Soldier*.

Finally, after long monetary struggles, he received a generous gift from the Marchioness of Vere, Lady Anna Bersala. Though he had a great desire to go to Italy and the gift could help him do that, he went back to England in 1505. During this visit to England, he made his own translation of the New

Testament into Latin from 1505-1506. Colet loaned him two Latin Manuscripts for this. He must have also used Greek manuscripts, but we do not know which manuscripts.²⁷

He was asked by Colet to be the tutor to the two sons of Dr. Baptista, the personal physician of King Henry VII of England. The boys were to take an Italian tour and Erasmus accompanied the Baptista party. He soon parted from the Baptista group and continued in Italy alone. He was well received, since his reputation had preceded him. He lectured at Sienna. When he traveled to Rome, he was received by the Cardinal of St. George, by Pope Julius II, and he met the future Pope Leo X, who supported his Greek New Testament. Erasmus had access to the Vatican library (where the Alexandrian manuscript, Vaticanus, reposed), and to any other library in the vicinity. This is probably when he met Paul Bombasius, the Prefect of the Vatican Library. Erasmus was in correspondence with Bombasius, who sent him any variant readings from Vaticanus that he desired.²⁸

He was tempted to tie to the Cardinals and cast his fortunes with theirs, but successfully resisted the temptation. "Long after, when the pinch of poverty came again with its attendant humiliations, he admitted that he looked back wistfully to the Roman libraries and palaces, and glorious art, and magnificent and refined society. All that might be his if he would consent to become a red-hatted lackey of the Holy See."²⁹ He could have, but he did not. While he was in Rome, he had access to the libraries there, including the Vatican library.

Erasmus spent three years in Italy. He gained a doctoral degree from the University of Turin. He traveled to Venice and was in Bologna when Pope Julius II rode triumphantly into the city he had just conquered. He met the famous printer Aldus Manutius and became an honorary member of the Aldine Academy. He worked with the Aldine Press to expand and publish his *Adagia*. He studied advanced Greek in Padua with Giulio Camilla, the Venetian natural philosopher.

In Rome, he had been offered a potentially wonderful position and comfortable life. He decided to return there, and, so, he did. He joined his friend, Cardinal Raphael, in Rome, and it appears that he decided to remain. However, he received a letter that changed his mind. It was from Lord Mountjoy, informing him that young Henry had been crowned Henry VIII, and that King Henry wanted Erasmus to attach himself to the English court to help him reform the church in his realm. This was 1509. Erasmus returned to England in response to this invitation. However, Henry was involved in many things including wars and could not give his time to the reason for which he had reached out to Erasmus. From 1509 to 1514 Erasmus taught Greek at Cambridge. He soon realized that England was not the place for him, and this may have brought back thoughts of Rome.

By this time, it was well known that Erasmus intended to issue an edition of the Greek New Testament. He had been laboring over Greek manuscripts and working on the New Testament from 1505 or before, and the work had progressed. Through many past years and as he traveled across Europe, he had been hard at work on his Greek New Testament and the new Latin translation he was making from it. All indications are that he had examined Greek manuscripts wherever he found them in his travels and profited from them in his work on the New Testament. By 1514, the work on the New Testament was nearly finished. Greek manuscripts of the New Testament were not the only sources he found. He had worked in the classics and accomplished an unbelievable volume of work. Also, in addition to the classics he republished many works of the early church "fathers," which contained many New Testament quotes. These works went back to the early third century. Although, the following quote does not include the name, Erasmus also studied the works of *Origen* (AD. 185-253).

One might think that all this moving around would have interfered with Erasmus' activity as a scholar and writer, but quite the reverse is true. By his travels he was brought into contact with all the intellectual currents of his time and stimulated to almost superhuman efforts. He became the most famous scholar and author of his day and one of the most prolific writers of all time, his collected works filling ten large volumes in the

Leclerc edition of 1705 (phototyped by Olms in 1962). (4) As an editor also his productivity was tremendous. Ten columns of the catalogue of the library in the British Museum are taken up with the bare enumeration of the works translated, edited, or annotated by Erasmus, and their subsequent reprints. Included are the greatest names of the classical and patristic world, such as Ambrose, Aristotle, Augustine, Basil, Chrysostom, Cicero, and Jerome. An almost unbelievable showing.³⁰

The New Testament Printed

In 1515, he was again on the European continent and went to Basel, Switzerland. There he found several manuscripts ready for his use.

When Erasmus came to Basel in July, 1515, to begin his work, he found five Greek New Testament manuscripts ready for his use. These are now designated by the following numbers: 1 (an 11th-century manuscript of the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles), 2 (a 15th-century manuscript of the Gospels), 2ap (a 12th-14th-century manuscript of Acts and the Epistles), 4ap (a 15th-century manuscript of Acts and the Epistles), and 1r (a 12th-century manuscript of Revelation). Of these manuscripts Erasmus used 1 and 4ap only occasionally. In the Gospels Acts, and Epistles his main reliance was on 2 and 2ap.³¹

Current scholarship, taking their cues from the teaching of eighteenth and nineteenth century scholars, who tended toward liberal theology, tells us that these few manuscripts Erasmus had possession of in Basel were the ONLY manuscripts he used for his Greek New Testament. This modern *mythology* is poor history and poor scholarship. The fact that *we* can only *identify* a few of the manuscripts he used, does not in any way mean those were the only ones he had access to or that he used in producing the first printed Greek New Testament. Modern scholarship, in its haste to denigrate the text of Erasmus, loses its scholarly intelligence when it speaks of these things. It forgets that textual sources include more than New Testament manuscripts. There are also the writings and commentaries of the church "fathers," which include hundreds, if not thousands, of New Testament quotes. They also date back to the early third century, so Erasmus cannot honestly be accused of only having late dated material to work with. There are also lectionaries or ancient church service guides that include New Testament quotes. Erasmus may have found some of these, as well. In addition, he had access to the Vaticanus manuscript, dated by scholars at 350 AD., through his friendship with Prefect Bombasius of the Vatican Library. More detail will be given on these things later.

Erasmus himself declared that he had used other manuscripts than the few that are listed as found in Basel. When he printed his first two editions of the Greek New Testament, he did not include the famous words of 1 John 5:7, because they were not in the Greek manuscripts he was able to locate. The words were, however, in the Latin Vulgate. So, the fact that he did not include 1 John 5:7 caused quite a stir. He was attacked by Diego López de Zúñiga (1470-1531), a theologian, for not including the passage. Erasmus' reply to him and another man, Edward Lee, tells us clearly that he consulted manuscripts in places other than Basel. Lee had accused him of being negligent in his use of manuscripts. In his reply, Erasmus referred to the manuscripts that contained 1 John he had checked and where he had seen them. The Erasmus scholar, Henk Jan de Jonge (1943-2022), explains.

I have checked again Erasmus' words quoted by Erika Rummel and her comments on them in her book Erasmus' Annotations. This is what Erasmus writes [on] in his *Liber tertius quo respondet ...* Ed. Lei: Erasmus first records that Lee had reproached him with neglect of the MSS. of 1 John because Erasmus (according to Lee) had consulted only

one MS. ***Erasmus replies that he had certainly not used only one ms., but many copies, first in England, then in Brabant, and finally at Basle.*** He cannot accept, therefore, Lee's reproach of negligence and impiety. 'Is it negligence and impiety, if I did not consult manuscripts which were simply not within my reach? I have at least assembled whatever I could assemble. Let Lee produce a Greek MS. which contains what my edition does not contain and let him show that that manuscript was within my reach. Only then can he reproach me with negligence in sacred matters.' (emphasis-Author)³²

Some, such as Bruce Metzger and James White, have called this challenge to Lee a wager or a promise that if Lee found a manuscript with the words, Erasmus would include them in his text. That is clearly not what Erasmus said. Erasmus was defending himself from the charge of negligence in his use of manuscripts.

Erasmus met the famous printer, Johann Froben (1460-1527), in Basel. It was he, whom Erasmus asked to print the New Testament in 1516. It was titled *Novum Instrumentum Testamentum*.

Between the years 1516 and 1535 Erasmus published five editions of the Greek New Testament. In the first edition (1516), the text was preceded by a dedication to Pope Leo X, an exhortation to the reader, a discussion of the method used, and a defense of this method. Then came the Greek New Testament text accompanied by Erasmus' own Latin translation, and then this was followed by Erasmus' notes, giving his comments on the text. In his 2nd edition (1519) Erasmus revised both his Greek text and his own Latin translation. His substitution in John 1:1 of *sermo* (speech) for *verbum* (word), the rendering of the Latin Vulgate, aroused much controversy. The 3rd edition (1522) is chiefly remarkable for the inclusion of 1 John 5:7, which had been omitted in the previous editions. The 4th edition (1527) contained the Greek text, the Latin Vulgate, and Erasmus' Latin translation in three parallel columns. The 5th edition (1535) omitted the Vulgate, thus resuming the practice of printing the Greek text and the version of Erasmus side by side.³³

Professor Froude explained what the appearance of the New Testament meant to the world as it then was.

The Christian religion as taught and practised in Western Europe consisted of the Mass and the Confessional, of elaborate ceremonials, rituals, processions, pilgrimages, prayers to the Virgin and the saints, with dispensations and indulgences for laws broken or duties left undone. Of the Gospels and Epistles so much only was known to the laity as was read in the Church services, and that intoned as if to be purposely unintelligible to the understanding. Of the rest of the Bible nothing was known at all, because nothing was supposed to be necessary, and lectures like Colet's at Oxford were considered superfluous and dangerous. Copies of the Scripture were rare, shut up in convent libraries, and studied only by professional theologians; while conventional interpretations were attached to the text which corrupted or distorted its meaning. Erasmus had undertaken to give the book to the whole world to read for itself. The original Greek of the Epistles and Gospels, with a new Latin translation to wake up the intelligence, to show that the words had a real sense, and were not mere sounds like the dronings of a barrel organ. It was finished at last, text and translation printed, and the living facts of Christianity, the persons of Christ and the Apostles, their history, their lives, their teaching were revealed to an astonished world. For the first time the laity were able to see, side by side, the

Christianity which converted the world, and the Christianity of the Church with a Borgia pope , cardinal princes, ecclesiastical courts, and a mythology of lies. The effect was to be a spiritual earthquake. ³⁴

As has been noted, Martin Luther used the second edition of Erasmus' Greek text to translate the New Testament into German. Luther became such a powerful voice for the gospel, shouting - "Scripture Only!" and "Salvation by grace through faith alone!" - that he tore up the spiritual countryside in his reform zeal. The monks came up with a saying, "Erasmus laid the egg and Luther hatched it."³⁵ Erasmus replied that the egg he laid was a hen, but Luther hatched a *game cock* (a fighting rooster)!

At last, Erasmus had published his Greek New Testament and a new day had been born. This was the foundation upon which God intended to build freedom from the religious whore of Revelation 17 and launch a gospel movement greater than the world had yet seen. A great many translations of the whole Bible into the vernacular languages of Europe followed the publication of Erasmus' New Testament. Eventually the whole tradition of the Greek text edited by Erasmus and the others who followed him (Stephanus, Colinaeus, Beza, and Elzevir) became known as the Textus Receptus or Received Text. God used the Textus Receptus and the translations from it to shake the entire world from that day to this. The Alexandrian text represented by the manuscript Vaticanus was available to Erasmus, but he judged it to be a corrupt text and did not use it. God could easily have led him to use it, but God chose not to. God did not use Vaticanus at all during the world-wide expansion of the gospel that followed 1516. Vaticanus and its sister manuscript Sinaiticus were dragged out of the Vatican Library and the trash bin of the monastery on Mount Sinai (according to Tischendorf) in the mid and late 1800's by two Anglicans, Westcott and Hort, and a German, Tischendorf. Westcott and Hort used them to create a brand-new Greek text, which was used for the English Revised Version (1881) and the American Standard Version (1901). Both of them died quick deaths, while the King James Version (translated from the Textus Receptus) marched right on past them. The King James Version remained the most popular English Bible until the 1960's-80's when the NIV finally began to rival its sales. The KJV remains a best seller every year in spite of all the opposition and complaints raised against it.

Such things as this cannot happen without God's guidance and blessing. God is the God of history, and it should be evident to any man with a spiritual mind that God led Erasmus to all the materials he needed to produce a text that pleases God and is blessed by God. God's blessing is clear. "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10). After God had tolerated the monster of the Roman Catholic Church for one thousand years, and He in His wisdom determined that the time was right to send history in a better direction, does it make sense that He would do that through a false Greek New Testament that was weak and corrupt, a false text that had the many errors and inadequacies as we are told it does by modern textual critics? A text that has over 8,000 differences in words from the critical text now promoted by the critics? I am speaking of the United Bible Societies Greek text based on Vaticanus and Sinaiticus.

What Manuscripts Did Erasmus Use?

Modern Textual critics would have us believe that the manuscripts Erasmus found in Basel, Switzerland, were the only manuscripts he had. The entire 1516 Textus Receptus was based on those manuscripts, we are told. Remember that Erasmus traveled over most of Western Europe. He lived in or visited the following: Rotterdam (Netherlands), Cambrai (France), Paris (France), Cambridge (England), Oxford (England), London (England), Leuven (Louvain, Belgium), Antwerp (Belgium), Orleans (France), Sienna (Italy), Venice (Italy), Bologna (Italy), Turin (Italy), Rome (Italy), Freiburg-im-Breisgau (Germany), Basel (Switzerland), and others. Erasmus was constantly looking for old Greek manuscripts. "It is well

known also that Erasmus looked for manuscripts everywhere during his travels and that he borrowed them from everyone he could" (Hills). Also, he did not wait until 1515, when he came to Basel, Switzerland, to begin working on the Greek New Testament. He had been working on it as far back as 1505. It should be clear by now that Erasmus consulted many more manuscripts than those in Basel. The following manuscripts were checked against the manuscript lists in Wikipedia and the history of the manuscript was consulted. Those on the lists below are considered to have been definitely used by Erasmus or to have possibly been available to him to use.

1. These manuscripts are specifically identified manuscripts that Erasmus used.

- 1-1) 1-an 11th century manuscript of the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles.
- 1-2) 2-an 11th or 12th century manuscript of the Gospels. (Previously designated 2e)
- 1-3) 2815-a 12th century manuscript of Acts and the Epistles. (Previously designated 2ap)
- 1-4) 2816-a 15th century manuscript of Acts and the Epistles. (Previously designated 4ap)
- 1-5) 2814-a 12th century manuscript of Revelation. (Previously designated 1rk)
- 1-6) 7-a 12th century manuscript of the Gospels. (Previously designated 7)
- 1-7) 817-a 15th century manuscript of the gospels. (Previously designated 817).
- 1-8) 92-a 10th century manuscript of the Gospel of Mark. This manuscript *might* have been available in Basel when Erasmus was there. It was in Worms in 1485 and Basel later. It is currently in Basel.
- 1-9) 3-a 12th century manuscript of the entire New Testament except Revelation (Still designated 3). This was used in Erasmus' second edition. It is currently in Vienna.

2. Specifically identified additional manuscripts used by Erasmus in his first or later editions.

- 2-1) The Complutensian Polyglot in his later editions: The Complutensian Polyglot was an edition of the entire Bible in Latin, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The project was led by Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436–1517). It seems to be generally uncertain which manuscripts were used for the Greek New Testament. The Harvard Divinity school says of one of the scholars involved, "... Diego López de Zuñiga (d. 1531) by providing manuscripts he had borrowed from Venice and the Vatican or purchased."³⁶ Whatever the manuscripts were, Erasmus got the benefit of them by using the Complutensian Polyglot in his later editions.
- 2-2) 61, Codex Montfortianus-a 15th century manuscript. Erasmus used this codex to insert the Comma Johanneum into 1 John 5:7 in his third edition.
- 2-3) 141-a 13th century manuscript of the entire New Testament. The great textual scholar, Herman Hoskier, seemed to have the opinion that Erasmus used this manuscript for his Greek text of Revelation. It has been suggested that Erasmus translated the last six verses of Revelation from the Latin Vulgate into Greek. However, the great scholar, Herman Hoskier, "seems to doubt that Erasmus did this, suggesting that he may have followed Codex 141."³⁷ It is currently in Vatican City.

3. Manuscripts were available in the cities Erasmus visited. Below I have made an extensive list of these by city. The cities listed are the current location of the manuscripts, usually of the cities Erasmus visited. Some or all of these were available in Erasmus' time. All of these are listed with detail in Wikipedia under the heading "Lists of New Testament Manuscripts." I have tried to list only manuscripts, for which the history of the manuscripts indicate they could have been available to Erasmus. Only the first two hundred minuscule manuscripts out of about 3,017

were reviewed for these entries. (A minuscule manuscript is one that is written with lower case Greek letters.) There may be many more manuscripts that should be listed here, but the history of the manuscript does not give information on when they came to the locations that Erasmus visited, and there was no other reason to include them.

3-1) Paris, France:

- 1) 4-a 13th century manuscript with an almost complete copy of the four gospels (An additional Manuscript not usually listed as a Basil manuscript for Erasmus, but it was definitely used by both Erasmus and Stephanus.
- 2) 5-a 13th century manuscript of the New Testament. It was definitely used by Stephanus. Since both Stephanus and Erasmus lived in Paris, the manuscript may also have been available to Erasmus.
- 3) 7-a 12th century manuscript of the gospels. Scrivener thought Stephanus used it. Therefore, Erasmus may have also.
- 4) 9-a 12th century manuscript of the Gospels. This manuscript was used by Stephanus and possibly used by Erasmus.
- 7) 21-a possibly 10th century manuscript of the Gospels.
- 8) 22-an 11th or 12th century manuscript of the Gospels.
- 9) 24-a 10th century manuscript of Matthew and Mark.
- 10) 25-an 11th century manuscript of the Gospels.
- 11) 26-an 11th century manuscript of the Gospels.
- 12) 27-a 10th century manuscript of the Gospels.
- 13) 28-an 11th century manuscript of the Gospels.
- 16) 31-a 13th century manuscript of the Gospels.
- 17) 32-a 12th century manuscript of the Gospels.
- 18) 33-a 9th century manuscript of the New Testament except Revelation.
- 19) 38-a 12th century manuscript of the Gospels, Acts, Pauline epistles. This was used by Stephanus and possibly by Erasmus.
- 20) 120-a 12th century manuscript of the Gospels that was probably used by Stephanus, designated by him $\iota\delta'$ and, therefore, possibly used by Erasmus.

3-2) Oxford, England:

- 1) 48-a 12th century manuscript of the Gospels.
- 2) 53-a 13th or 14th century manuscript of the Gospels.
- 3) 56-a 15th century manuscript of the Gospels. It was in Oxford in 1502, so it was definitely there on Erasmus' second trip to England.

3-3) Leicester, England:

- 1) 69-a 15th century manuscript of the New Testament that was in England when Erasmus was there.

3-4) London, England:

- 1) 117-a 15th century manuscript of the Gospels. It came to England in the first half of the 16th century, but it may still have been too late for Erasmus to use.

3-5) Vienna, Austria:

- 1) 76-a 14th century manuscript of the New Testament except Revelation. It was possibly used for the Complutensian Polyglot, according to its history. If so, it indirectly influenced Erasmus.

3-6) Vatican City and Florence, Italy:

- 1) 131-a 15th century manuscript of the New Testament except Revelation. It was given to Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590). It was still in the Vatican when Erasmus was in Rome.
- 2) 140-a 13th century manuscript of the Gospels. It was given by the Queen of Cyprus to Pope Innocent VII (1404-1406).
- 3) 158-an 11th century manuscript of the Gospels. It was given to the Library by Pope Pius II (1458-1464).
- 4) 165- A manuscript of the Gospels written in 1292 AD. It was probably written in Calabria. A note in the manuscript states that it was written by Romanus for one Archbishop Paul, and given to the Library by Eugenia, daughter of John Pontanus (about 1503).
- 5) 196-a 12th century manuscript of the Gospels. It once belonged to Lorenzo de' Medici, who presented it to the Convent of S. Marco de Florentia des Predigerordens in 1473.

Items 1-4 above are housed in the Vatican and item 5 is in Florence. The history of these reveals that they came to Italy in time to be seen by Erasmus. The history of the others (many) that are not listed show that they were either too late for Erasmus, or the history does not tell when they came to Italy. There were hundreds of manuscripts available to Erasmus when he spent three years in Italy, as the next major entry will reveal (4). These manuscripts include Vaticanus (see below).

4. **Janus Lascaris** (1445-1535) was a noted Greek scholar of the Renaissance. Fleeing from the fall of Byzantium, he came to Italy while still young. Lorenzo de' Medici welcomed him to Florence where he gave Greek lectures. Lorenzo sent him to Greece twice in search of manuscripts. The second time, he returned in 1492 with **about 200 manuscripts from Mount Athos** the location of a great monastery. He became a member of the Aldine Academy of Aldus Manutius. The reader may remember that Erasmus was an honorary member of that society. Lascaris went to France and was back in Italy by 1513. It is uncertain whether Erasmus ever made his acquaintance, but presumably the manuscripts were in Italy when Erasmus was there.

5. **Vaticanus (Codex B)**: This manuscript was one of the most well-known Uncials (written in capital letters) that is among the so-called "older and better" manuscripts bragged about by liberal and evangelical scholars. It is usually dated 350 AD. and considered by many to be the best text. Did Erasmus have access to Vaticanus? The short answer is *yes*. To remind the reader, we have already noted that Erasmus had good relations with Pope Julius and the Cardinals when he was in Rome and later with Pope Leo X. Those he met in Rome most likely included the Prefect of the Vatican Library, Paul Bombasius, because in later years Erasmus had correspondence with him. Erasmus could have had a transcript of Vaticanus if he had wanted it.³⁸ However, he was able to ask Bombasius for any variant reading he wished. One occasion when he did this involved the question of 1 John 5:7 in 1521.³⁹ Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, a Dominican priest, opposed Erasmus' Greek text. In 1533, he corresponded with Erasmus, sending him a number of readings from Vaticanus as proof of its superiority over the text of Erasmus.⁴⁰ In fact, Sepúlveda gave Erasmus 365 readings from Vaticanus.⁴¹ Erasmus was aware of the Vaticanus manuscript. The manuscript was in Rome while he spent three years in Italy, much of it in Rome. He had ample opportunity to view the manuscript and take notes. He also had experience with variant readings from Vaticanus. Therefore, he was familiar with Alexandrian readings and had access to the so-called "older" manuscript. Most later scholars do not have access to much more than Erasmus did. Erasmus opinion of Vaticanus is explained in this excerpt from the outstanding Erasmusian scholar, H.J. de Jonge:

“It should be pointed out here in passing, that certain Greek manuscripts of the New Testament have been corrected in agreement with those of the Latin Christians. This was done at the time of the reunion of the Greeks and the Roman church. This union was confirmed in writing in the so-called Golden Bull. It was thought that this (sc. the adaptation of the Greek biblical manuscripts to the Latin) would contribute to the strengthening of unity. We too once came across a manuscript of this nature, and it is said that such a manuscript is still preserved in the papal library (...) written in majuscule characters.”

Erasmian scholar H. J. De Jonge explains the meaning of this quote from Erasmus:

The manuscript to which Erasmus refers at the end of this passage is the Codex Vaticanus par excellence, now Gr 1209, designated as B. Erasmus regarded the text of this codex as influenced by the Vulgate and therefore inferior. For the same reasons he had earlier, in 1515/6, also excluded Gregory I as an inferior manuscript, from the constitution of the Greek text of his own *Novum Instrumentum* although this manuscript is now generally regarded as more reliable than the Codices which Erasmus preferred and made use of. Erasmus passed the same verdict on the Codex Rhodiensis (minuscule Wettstein Paul 50 = Apostolos 52) from which Stunica cited readings in his polemic against Erasmus. (Erasmus and the Comma Johanneum) ⁴²

6. Church “Fathers”: Erasmus was familiar with the writings of the church *fathers*. “He had studied the New Testament. He had studied the early Fathers.”⁴³ So Erasmus was familiar with the condition of the New Testament, according to the writers, back to very close to the apostle John. He had studied the writings of Origen, who wrote commentaries and other works with quotations from the New Testament.⁴⁴ Origen died in 253 AD. He quoted both the Traditional Text and the Alexandrian Text. The early church writers quoted the New Testament hundreds of times. Their writing went back to the second and third centuries. There is very little known by current scholars that was not known by Erasmus.

7. Textual Problems: Erasmus knew and discussed most of the major textual difficulties that are still discussed by today’s scholars.

Indeed almost all the important variant readings known to scholars today were already known to Erasmus more than 460 years ago and discussed in the notes (previously prepared) which he placed after the text in his editions of the Greek New Testament. Here, for example, Erasmus dealt with such problem passages as the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:13), the interview of the rich young man with Jesus (Matt. 19:17-22), the ending of Mark (Mark 16:9-20), the angelic song (Luke 2:14), the angel, agony, and bloody sweat omitted (Luke 22:43-44), the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53 - 8:11), and the mystery of godliness (I Tim. 3:16). In his notes Erasmus placed before the reader not only ancient discussions concerning the New Testament text but also debates which took place in the early Church over the New Testament canon and the authorship of some of the New Testament books, especially Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation.⁴⁵

Those who say that the only manuscripts Erasmus had to work with were those few manuscripts he found at Basel when he arrived there in 1515, are either ignorant, disingenuous, or dishonest. The same is true when they say he only had “late” manuscripts to work with. He also had Vaticanus, which the scholars date 350 AD. He also had the early church *fathers*, which are considered to be valid sources

of knowledge for the New Testament text. All indications of the historical record are that Erasmus had been working on the Greek New Testament for ten years before he arrived at Basel. Erasmus died in 1536, and between 1516 and 1535, nineteen years, he published four more editions of his Greek New Testament, the last being published in 1535. It took him almost twenty years for his revision work. In the opinion of this author, it is ridiculous to think that he started his Greek New Testament in 1515 at Basel and published the original edition within only a few months.

NOTES

¹ Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/1498–1543). Holbein-erasmus.jpg. Portrait of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam with Renaissance Pilaster. National Gallery by Longford Castle. This is a faithful photographic reproduction of a two-dimensional, public domain work of art. The work of art itself is in the public domain for the following reason: This work is in the public domain in its country of origin and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 100 years or fewer. This work is in the public domain in the United States because it was published (or registered with the U.S. Copyright Office) before January 1, 1928. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Holbein-erasmus.jpg>.

² J. A. Froude. *Life and Letters of Erasmus, Lectures Delivered at Oxford 1893-94*. Charles Scribner's Sons: New York. 1895. Google Edition. Pg. 1.

³ Wikipedia. Erasmus. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erasmus>.

⁴ Froude. Pg 2.

⁵ T. Walter Wallbank, Alastair M. Taylor, Nels M. Bailkey. *Civilization Past and Present*. Scott, Foresman and Company: Glenview, Il. 1971.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Wikipedia. Greek scholars in the Renaissance. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_scholars_in_the_Renaissance.

⁹ Samuel P. Tregelles. *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*. Samuel Bagster and Sons: London. 1854. Pg. 1. Forgotten Books Edition. 2012.

¹⁰ Wikipedia. Transmission of the Greek Classics. Cite. Alexander A, Vasiliev. *History of the Byzantine Empire*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transmission_of_the_Greek_Classics#cite_note-Vassilev-2.

¹¹ Wikipedia. Greek scholars in the Renaissance. Cite. Denis Hay. *The Italian Renaissance in its Historical Background*. Cambridge University Press 1976. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_scholars_in_the_Renaissance#cite_note-6.

¹² Wikipedia. Transmission of the Greek Classics. Cite. Maria Constantoudaki. Kitromilides in *From Byzantium to El Greco*. pg. 51-2. Athens 1987, Byzantine Museum of Arts. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_scholars_in_the_Renaissance#cite_ref-7.

¹³ Froude. Pg. 59

¹⁴ Ibid. Pg. 66

¹⁵ Ibid. Pg. 121-123

¹⁶ Ibid. Pg. 11

¹⁷ Ibid. Pg. 11-13

¹⁸ Ibid. Pg. 14

¹⁹ Ibid. Pg. 18-19.

²⁰ Ibid. Pg. 25.

²¹ Dr. Edward F. Hills. *The King James Version Defended*. Chapter Eight. Online version.

²² Froude. Pg. 48

²³ Hills.

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