

ERASMUS, HIS GREEK TEXT AND HIS THEOLOGY

By Doug Kutilek



Part One: Erasmus and His Greek New Testament

Desiderius Erasmus, (b. 1466?, d. July 12, 1536) was one of the most important men in Europe during one of the most important periods in all of European history, the time of the Protestant Reformation. Born in Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Erasmus grew up in a world dominated by Roman Catholicism. He himself took, under duress, monastic vows, and was a lifelong devoted son of the Roman Church. He was a friend and acquaintance of kings, emperors, and popes.

Erasmus had, even from childhood, a craving to read, study, learn, and know. He spent his life as a scholar and writer. He was a man of quick wit and a keen mind. In 1509 he turned his literary talents to the ridicule and denunciation of monastic vice, immorality, and wickedness in his book *Encomium Moriae* ("The Praise of Folly"). This provoked the ire of the priests and monks. He had struck a raw nerve. But it must be noted that while Erasmus found the wickedness of the priests repulsive, he did not disapprove of Roman Catholic doctrine. He wished only for a reformation of priestly morals and conduct, not of Roman theology, and he disapproved of the doctrinal revolution initiated by Luther. Though Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched, Erasmus disowned completely his offspring.

Other literary works proceeded from Erasmus' pen, among them critical editions and translations of classical authors and early church fathers. The latter included Jerome, Hilary, Irenaeus, Ambrose, Augustine, Epiphanius, Chrysostom, and Origen, who was Erasmus'

favorite church father (Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*, p. 143), and of whom Erasmus once wrote, "I have also read a great part of Origen, who opens out new fountains of thought and furnishes a complete key to theology." (Froude, *Life and Letters of Erasmus*, p. 93). Erasmus wrote many other works, including *Colloquia Familiaria* ("Ordinary Conversations"), which gives sketches of life from his own day, and *Diatribae de Libero Arbitrio* ("Discourse on the Freedom of the Will"), to which Luther responded with his classic *The Bondage of the Will*.

Erasmus almost single-handedly revived the study of Greek in the universities of Europe. He seems to have been practically self-taught, there being no one to turn to for help. He lectured for a time on Greek at Cambridge University. The statement sometimes met with, that Tyndale went "to Cambridge to learn Greek under Erasmus, who was teaching there from 1510 to 1514" (so stated but not documented by Benjamin Wilkinson in *Which Bible?*, p. 145) is mere wishful thinking. F. F. Bruce (*The English Bible*, pp. 26-27) states, "It has sometimes been suggested that one of Erasmus' pupils at Cambridge was William Tyndale; unfortunately, the evidence is against this. Erasmus left Cambridge in 1514, and Tyndale probably did not arrive there before 1516 at the earliest."

Erasmus is generally acknowledged as the greatest classical scholar of his time, though he was better at Latin than Greek (Schaff, *Companion to the Greek Testament and Revised Version*, p. 230). But of far greater importance than the revival of Greek studies was his editing and publishing of the Greek New Testament for the first time in 1516. The degraded condition of Greek studies in Europe just before the Reformation is evidenced by the fact that while the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible was printed about 1453 (the famous Gutenberg Bible), and was in fact the first book ever printed after the invention of movable type, and the complete Hebrew Old Testament had been printed as early as 1488, no one put the Greek New Testament in print until 1514. The churchmen and scholars had the authoritative Vulgate, so what need was there, they thought, to have the Greek?

The idea of editing and printing the Greek New Testament perhaps occurred to Erasmus as early as 1506 (cf. Froude, pp. 100, 117-18), though a revision of the Vulgate translation occupied his attention to a greater degree. In 1514, a Greek New Testament was printed as

part of the Complutensian Polyglot being produced in Spain (a delay of eight years intervened before the Complutensian New Testament was actually published). A printer named Froben in Basle, Switzerland, learned of the Spanish-produced Greek New Testament and wished to publish one himself and beat the other into the marketplace. So Froben negotiated with Erasmus, who finally agreed to take part in the enterprise. Erasmus traveled to Basle and used what few Greek manuscripts were there as the basis of his text. Printing began in September or October, 1515, and was completed in March, 1516. The book was dedicated to Pope Leo X, and was duly copyrighted (see facsimile of title page in Schaff, p. 532).

In constructing and editing the text, Erasmus had the feeblest of manuscript resources. He chiefly used one manuscript of the Gospels, dating from the twelfth century, and one manuscript of Acts and the Epistles, also from the twelfth century. These he edited and corrected, using one or two additional manuscripts of each section, along with his Latin Vulgate. For Revelation, Erasmus had but one Greek manuscript which, though of better than average quality (so says Hort), yet lacked the last six verses of the book. To remedy this defect, Erasmus back-translated the last six verses of Revelation from Latin into Greek, with the result that the final verses of Revelation in his printed Greek text contain numerous Greek readings found in no Greek manuscript of any kind, and are therefore devoid of manuscript authority. (A list of these are given in Scrivener, *Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 296, n. 1, and Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 100, n. 1).

One of those readings produced by Erasmus that lacks any Greek manuscript support is the reference to the "book of life" in Rev. 22:19. All Greek manuscripts read "tree of life"; not a single one reads "book of life." The corruption of "tree" into "book" occurred in Latin when a careless or sleepy scribe miscopied the correct *ligno* (tree) as though it were the similar-appearing *libro* (book). When Erasmus back-translated from Latin, he introduced for the first time ever in Greek the reading "book of life" in Rev. 22:19, and by the slavish reprinting of Erasmus' text by later editors, the reading "book of life" found its way into the *textus receptus* and the King James Version, even

though it is completely without support of any kind in any Greek manuscript.

But not only in Rev. 22:15-21 do readings without Greek manuscript support occur. One lengthy insertion made by Erasmus on the basis of the Latin Vulgate and not on the basis of Greek manuscripts is found in Acts 9:5-6. The words (as found in the King James Version), "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said to him," are not found in any Greek manuscript of Acts. Where did they come from? Erasmus found the passage in the Vulgate as he knew it but not in the Greek; nevertheless, he inserted the words into his Greek text, borrowing those forming part of verse 5 from the parallel passage in Acts 26:14, and back-translating those forming part of verse 6 from Latin into Greek. (See Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, p. 201.) The slavish reprinting of Erasmus' text by later editors resulted in the *textus receptus* and the King James Version reading in Acts 9:5-6 as no Greek manuscript on earth has ever read. In fact, in more than twenty places, Erasmus' Greek text is not supported by any known Greek manuscript (Schaff, p. 231).

Devoid of truth is the bold assertion made by Benjamin Wilkinson without supporting documentation, that "There were hundreds of manuscripts for Erasmus to examine, and he did (emphasis added); but he only used a few." Wilkinson gives the clear implication that "the few Erasmus used were typical, that is, after he had thoroughly balanced the evidence of many," he used "the few which displayed the balance" (*Which Bible?*, p. 143). Erasmus no doubt was familiar with other Greek New Testament manuscripts besides those used in constructing his text, but to assert that he made a thorough investigation of hundreds of manuscripts and chose those typical of his findings is to fabricate that which did not happen. That Erasmus did not carefully select manuscripts he had found to be typically Byzantine is obvious from the fact that among his very limited resources was manuscript 1, one of the most non-Byzantine of the minuscule manuscripts; add to this the fact that Erasmus' sole manuscript of Revelation lacked the last six verses altogether, and it becomes transparently obvious that Wilkinson has engaged here, as

he very often does, in a flight of fancy and mere wishful thinking rather than serious historical research.

The work on the Greek text was hastily and carelessly done. Erasmus' biographer Froude characterized Erasmus: "haste made him careless; and this fault always clung to him" (p. 8). Erasmus himself admitted that the work on his first edition "was done too hastily" (Froude, p. 189). He declared that the work was more precipitated than edited. Though Erasmus had spent fifteen years editing the works of Jerome and ten years in preparing a new Latin translation of the New Testament, he spent less than ten months, or rather part of ten months, in editing the Greek New Testament. The printer's work showed the haste of the production the book abounded in printer's errors, of which Scrivener said, "Erasmus' first edition is in that respect the most faulty book I know" (p. 296). Erasmus hated the tedium of proofreading and correcting his own books (Froude, p. 8).

One passage not included by Erasmus caused a great storm of controversy. That passage was the so-called Trinitarian passage, which in the King James Version reads, "in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost. And these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth" (found in 1 John 5:7- 8). The exclusion of these words from Erasmus' text was not from carelessness or haste, but was based on solid evidence: these words were not in the Greek manuscripts that Erasmus had used for his text; indeed, they were not found in any Greek text Erasmus had ever seen. When asked why he had deleted this proof text for the trinity, he replied that he didn't find it at all in the Greek manuscripts. The combination of accusations of Arianism, with Erasmus' thin-skinned sensitivity to criticism, caused him to rashly vow that if any Greek manuscript could be found to include the words in question, he would add them to his text. A manuscript was duly manufactured in Britain to suit the conditions of Erasmus' vow, so in his third edition (1522), Erasmus added the words to his text, but added a marginal note declaring his belief that the manuscript had been deliberately doctored. (The Greek manuscript evidence and the evidence from early translations and church fathers overwhelmingly declare that the trinitarian text is not an original or genuine part of 1 John, and has no legitimate place in the text of the New Testament, as anyone can see for himself by examining the evidence in,

e.g., the commentaries of Adam Clarke [Vol. VI, pp. 927-933], Henry Alford [Vol. IV, pp. 503-505], and B. F. Westcott [pp. 202-209], Scrivener's Introduction [pp. 8, 149-150, 457-463], and Bruce Metzger's Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament [pp. 716-718].) Luther never included the passage in any German translation produced in his lifetime. Both Tyndale and Coverdale indicated that they thought the suspect words were spurious.

Erasmus' Greek New Testament sold quickly, as Froben had anticipated. A second edition was soon called for. The opportunity was taken to correct mistakes and revise the text somewhat, on the basis of an additional manuscript. The second edition was published in 1519; this edition served as the basis for Luther's translation. A total of 3,300 copies of the first two editions were sold (Scrivener, p. 297). A third edition (for the first time including 1 John 5:7) came out in 1522. Tyndale based his epoch-making translation on this edition. A fourth edition, revised on the basis of the Complutensian Greek text (90 changes were made in Revelation alone) came out in 1527, and a fifth in 1535. These editions were, of course, not exactly alike. Mill estimated (greatly underestimated, according to Scrivener) the variations to number: between the first and second editions, 400; between second and third, 118; third and fourth, 113; fourth and fifth, 5 (Scrivener, p. 298).

Erasmus' fourth and fifth editions were all but slavishly reprinted by Stephanus, Beza, the Elzivirs, and others, in their editions of the Greek New Testament in the century that followed. All these collectively are often referred to as the *textus receptus*, or received text. It must be observed that these reprints merely reproduced, without examination of evidence, the hastily-produced text of Erasmus. The result is that the text of Erasmus, hurriedly assembled out of the slimmest of manuscript resources, containing a number of readings without any Greek manuscript support, became for nearly 300 years the only form of the Greek New Testament available in print, and the basic text for the Protestant translations of the New Testament made in those centuries. The so-called received text cannot claim authority on the basis of extensive manuscript evidence employed in its construction, for only a mere handful of manuscripts out of the thousands that exist were used in its compilation. Nor can it claim authority on the basis of a careful and

deliberate sifting of evidence, for it was rushed through the hands of Erasmus and into print in great haste. Nor can it claim authority as representing always the Byzantine or majority text type (which some I think wrongly believe is the most original form of the New Testament text), for it departs from the majority of manuscripts in over 1,000 places (Pickering, *Identity of the New Testament Text*, p. 232).

In short, there is no ground whatsoever for accepting the *textus receptus* as the ultimate in precisely representing the original text of the New Testament. Rather than being the most pristine and pure Greek New Testament, it was in fact the most rudimentary and rustic, at best only a provisional text that could be made to serve for the time being until greater care, more thorough labor, and more extensive evidence could be had so as to provide a text of greater accuracy. It is unfortunate that what was only a meager first attempt at publishing a New Testament Greek text became fossilized as though it were the ultimate in accuracy. It was not until the nineteenth century that the shackles of mere tradition were thrown off and a Greek text based on a careful and thorough examination of an extensive amount of manuscript evidence was made available. The Greek texts of Griesbach, Tregelles, Tischendorf, Alford, and Westcott and Hort were, individually and collectively, a great improvement over the text of Erasmus, because they more accurately presented the text of the New Testament in the form it came from the pens of the Apostles.

In spite of the limitations and defects of the *textus receptus*, there is consolation in the fact that there is hardly a hair's breadth in doctrinal difference between Erasmus' text and that of, say, Westcott and Hort. Both texts are orthodox in theology. Where they differ, it is usually a case of the *textus receptus* supplementing or filling out passages by borrowing words from a parallel Gospel account or a similar phrase in another Epistle; an addition based on liturgical usage; expanding a title of one of the three persons of the Trinity; revising an Old Testament quotation into conformity to the Septuagint translation, or smoothing out an apparent difficulty in the original text. A. T. Robertson wrote, "It should be stated at once that the *Textus Receptus* is not a bad text. It is not a heretical text. It is substantially correct." (*Introduction to Textual Criticism*, p. 21; cf. p. 196.) J. Harold Greenlee

has summarized the situation very well: "The Textus Receptus is not a 'bad' or misleading text, either theologically or practically. Technically, however, it is far from the original text. Yet three centuries were to pass before scholars had won the struggle to replace this hastily- assembled text by a text which gave evidence of being closer to the N. T. autographs" (Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism, p. 72). God in His providence has seen fit that the text of the Greek New Testament has been kept doctrinally intact, so that there is no doctrinal issue garbled or marred by the manuscript and printed variations that exist. Richard Bentley, the greatest authority on the text of the New Testament in the eighteenth century, stated, "the real text of the sacred writings is competently exact, nor is one article of faith or moral precept either perverted or lost, choose as awkwardly as you will, choose the worst by design, out of the whole lump of readings.... But even put them into the hands of a knave or a fool, and yet with the most sinistrous and absurd choice, he shall not extinguish the light of any one chapter, nor so disguise Christianity, but that every feature of it will still be the same" (quoted in Scrivener, Plain Introduction, p. 7). F. H. A. Scrivener wrote of "the almost complete freedom of Holy Scripture from the bare suspicion of wilful corruption; the absolute identity of the testimony of every known copy in respect to doctrine, and spirit, and the main drift of every argument, and every narrative through the entire volume of Inspiration.... Thus hath God's Providence kept from harm the treasure of His written word, so far as is needful for the quiet assurance of His church and people" (Plain Introduction, pp. 6-7).

I do not wish to be too hard on Erasmus. After all, I recognize him as a pioneer who opened up a frontier for others to follow and laid a foundation on which others would build. Erasmus did not have the leisure (because of Froben's urging of haste) nor the resources, either in manuscripts or money, to produce as thoroughly and carefully and accurately done a Greek New Testament as he might have, had he had the things he lacked. But in a number of matters, his judgment on the original text of the New Testament closely follows that of recent editors of the New Testament. As we have seen, he rejected 1 John 5:7 as not being an original part of 1 John. In this, all Greek New Testament editions (other than mere reprints of

Erasmus' text) agree, including The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text of Hodges and Farstad. Erasmus also surmised that the doxology to the Lord's Prayer in Matt. 6:13, "for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, amen," was a later liturgical addition to Matthew, and formed no original part of that Gospel (Bainton, p. 137). In this virtually all Greek New Testament editors agree. Further, Erasmus doubted that Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11 formed an original part of those Gospels (ibid., p. 136). On the basis of available evidence, most New Testament editors agree with the judgement of Erasmus (the evidence on these disputed passages can be readily found in Alford's commentary or Metzger's Textual Commentary). All in all, Erasmus believed "the only way to determine the true text is to examine the early codices" (Bainton, p. 135). It is not unreasonable, therefore, to suppose that, were Erasmus alive today, he would use a Greek text like that of Nestle or the United Bible Societies' text.

One more matter about the text Erasmus published: in each edition he included in a column parallel to the Greek text a revision of the Latin Vulgate translation made by Jerome around 400 A.D. It must be remembered that Jerome's Latin translation had become esteemed and venerated to the point that it was considered beyond improvement, beyond correction, beyond alteration of any kind. Some even claimed the Greek and Hebrew originals of the Bible should be corrected by the Latin! (See Gill, Body of Divinity, p. 13.) No other translation of the Bible had been so widely used by God, they would protest. Bainton gives a lively account of the furor that arose over the revision of the Vulgate. Dorp, a friend and colleague of Erasmus, was shocked and outraged to hear that Erasmus proposed to publish the New Testament in Greek and accompanied by a new translation. To be sure Ambrose and Augustine had not depended upon Jerome's translation, but after he had castigated all of the errors his rendering had become standard as the basis for the decrees of councils. "What councils?" demanded Erasmus. "There were Greek councils which did not know Latin at all." "Don't listen to the Greeks," said Dorp. "They were heretics." "But," rejoined Erasmus, "Aristotle was even a pagan. Will you not read him? If you claim that the Vulgate is inspired equally with the original Greek and Hebrew and that to touch it is heresy and blasphemy what

will you say about Bede, Rhabanus, Thomas Aquinas, and Nicolas of Lyra, not to mention others who undertook to make improvements? You must distinguish between Scripture, the translation of Scripture, and the transmission of both. What will you do with the errors of copyists?" Dorp was eventually persuaded and Erasmus was thereby confirmed in his judgment that courtesy rather than invective is the better way to win over an opponent. A sharper antagonist was Sutor, once of the Sorbonne, later a Carthusian who asserted that "if in one point the Vulgate were in error the entire authority of Holy Scripture would collapse, love and faith would be extinguished, heresies and schisms would abound, blasphemy would be committed against the Holy Spirit, the authority of theologians would be shaken, and indeed the Catholic Church would collapse from the foundations." Erasmus pointed out that prior to Jerome the early Church had not used the Vulgate and had not collapsed. To all who cried, "Jerome is good enough for me," he replied, "You cry out that it is a crime to correct the gospels. This is a speech worthier of a coachman than of a theologian. You think it is all very well if a clumsy scribe makes a mistake in transcription and then you deem it a crime to put it right. The only way to determine the true text is to examine the early codices." (Bainton, p. 135)

D'Aubigne describes Erasmus' adversaries on this point: "The priests saw the danger, and... attacked the translation and the translator. 'He has corrected the Vulgate,' they said, 'and put himself in the place of Saint Jerome. He sets aside a work authorized by the consent of ages and inspired by the Holy Ghost. What audacity!' " (History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 730)

Sir Thomas More, an Englishman and close friend of Erasmus, came to the defense of both the printing of a Greek New Testament and the revision of the Latin translation of Jerome:

I am in danger, forsooth, because I consider Erasmus (as a good Greek scholar) to have given a better rendering of passages in the New Testament than I find in the received translation. Where is the danger? May I not find pleasure in a work which the learned and pious admire,
and which the Pope himself has twice approved? Erasmus determined nothing. He gives the facts and leaves the

reader
to judge. Froude, p. 151) You complain of the study of
Greek
and Hebrew. You say it leads to the neglect of Latin. Was
not the New Testament written in Greek? Did not
the early Fathers write in Greek? Is truth only to be
found in Gothic Latin? You will have no novelties; you say
the "old is better;" of course it is; the wisdom of the
Fathers is better than the babblings of you moderns.
You pretend that the Gospels can be understood without
Greek;
that there is no need of a new translation; we have the
Vulgate
and others besides, you say, and a new version was
superfluous.
I beseech you, where are these others? I have never met
a man
who has seen any but the Vulgate. Produce them. And for
the
Vulgate itself, it is nonsense to talk of the many ages for
which it has been approved by the Church. It was the best
the
Church could get. When once in use it could not easily be
changed, but to use it is not to approve it as perfect.
(Ibid., pp. 152- 153)

Froude himself describes the situation.

Pious, ignorant men had regarded the text of
the Vulgate as sacred, and probably inspired.
Read it intelligently they could not, but they had
made the language into an idol, and they were
filled with horrified amazement when they found in page
after page that Erasmus had anticipated modern criticism,
correcting the text, introducing various readings,
and retranslating passages from the Greek into a new
version. He had altered a word from the Lord's Prayer.
Horror of horrors! He had changed the translation of the
mystic Logos from Verbum into Sermo, to make people
understand what Logos meant. (Ibid., p. 234)

Substitute "English" for "Latin" and "King James Version"
for "Vulgate" in the above quotes, and one needs very little
imagination to see how precisely these remarks, first of
Erasmus, then More, and finally of Froude, address the
present English Bible translation controversy, and fully
answer the antagonists in our day who object to any and

every kind of revision, correction or improvement of the King James Version, even where the Greek text behind it is devoid of adequate manuscript support, where printer's errors still persist, where the English disagrees with the meaning of the original, or the English has become shrouded in obscurity through 400 years of change in the English language. The doctrine that the King James Version, or any other translation of the Bible, is sacrosanct and inviolable expressly denies the infallibility and authority of the Bible in the original languages. This is a fundamental doctrinal error and destroys the very foundations of the Christian faith.

Human nature (I might have said human perversity) has not changed in half a millennium. The doctrine of the medieval Catholic priests and monks that the translation of the New Testament they had always had and used was perfect in every jot and tittle has merely been adopted by some ill-informed Baptists (and others) today and transferred to the English translation they have always had and used. Ignorance loves darkness and objects to change of every kind, but the truth never fears the light. The sound reasoning and solid arguments that refuted such folly in the sixteenth century are still valid today.

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Part Two: Erasmus and His Theology

Erasmus, as we have shown, was responsible for the publishing of the Greek New Testament for the first time. In his lifetime, five editions were issued by him. These editions, and especially the fourth (1527), were more or less slavishly reprinted by Stephanus, Beza, the Elzivirs, and others. All these editions are now collectively referred to as the *textus receptus* or received text (though no two are precisely alike in every single detail, differing from one another in a number of minor matters). In a very real way, then, Erasmus is the father of the received Greek text, which served as the basic text for all Protestant New Testament translations until the 19th century.

There is currently in some quarters a lively debate over Greek texts, namely whether the *textus receptus* text or the critical text usually identified as the Westcott-Hort text more accurately reproduces the inerrant original writings of the Apostles. In reality, Westcott and Hort were not the first to print a revised Greek text, nor the last to do so. The English Revised Version of 1881 did not precisely follow their text. While a handful of obscure English translations were made directly from the Westcott-Hort text, no one holds today that this text is precisely correct in every reading and detail. Nevertheless, we will use the Westcott-Hort text for comparison, since it is mentioned so prominently.

Various arguments have been put forward to discredit the Westcott-Hort text. One of these, employed by Benjamin Wilkinson in "Our Authorized Bible Vindicated" (included as part of *Which Bible?*, edited by D. O. Fuller, 2nd ed., 1971) is the classic tactic, "poisoning the wells" (see A. J. Hoover, *Don't You Believe It!*, pp. 63-65, for an explanation of this particular type of fallacious argument). This line of argument seeks to discredit information a priori by discrediting its source before even considering the information the source has to present. The maxim, "If you cannot answer a man's arguments, all is not lost; you can still call him vile names," summarizes this argument. In the case of Westcott and Hort, the vile names hurled at them are "apostate" and "Romish." Wilkinson tries to establish (pp. 194- 199) by quotes extracted from biographies of Westcott and of Hort that they were less than orthodox, less than conservative, sympathetic to higher criticism, and inclined to Roman Catholicism. These things being established as true in Wilkinson's mind, the implication is then given that these errors automatically discredit

everything Westcott and Hort did, including in particular their Greek text.

I do not write to defend the orthodoxy of either Hort or Westcott. I have not read the biography of either, and have read only small amounts of Westcott's commentaries. Of Hort's works, I have read a part of his "Introduction" to their edition of the Greek New Testament, plus one other small and rather unimportant book. Since this is not enough in the case of either man to form a first-hand opinion as to his doctrinal soundness, I will reserve judgment until such time that I have read more extensively in their works. I do write, however, to expose the inherent flaw in the "poisoning the wells" argument as used by Wilkinson and others. This tactic is logically fallacious and doesn't "wash" in this particular case for several reasons.

First, Wilkinson's case is substantially weaker than a casual reading may indicate. On the one hand, a number of the quotes are colorless. Hort is quoted as saying, "I am very far from pretending to understand completely the oft-renewed vitality of Mariolatry." Such a statement surely does not implicate Hort in Mary-worship. Who has not been surprised at the continued worship of Mary, including the construction of shrines with cement statues as found in the yards of many Catholics? Such idolatrous folly in otherwise educated people is indeed difficult to understand. This quotation proves nothing at all.

On the other hand, Wilkinson has (wittingly or unwittingly) altered the thrust of at least one quote through deletion. Under the heading "Their Mariolatry," Westcott is quoted at length (p. 195):

After leaving the monastery, we shaped our course to a little oratory (a small chapel for private prayer) which we discovered on the summit of a neighboring hill.... Fortunately we found the door open. It is very small with one kneeling-place; and behind the screen was a "Pieta" the size of life (i.e., a Virgin and dead Christ).... Had I been alone I could have knelt there for hours.

From the quotation in its edited form, it appears that Westcott was here inclined to venerate this statue of Mary and Jesus. However, the full quotation shows just the opposite. In the second editorial deletion made by Wilkinson (immediately following the parenthesis), Westcott continues:

The sculpture was painted and such a group in such a place and at such a time was deeply impressive. I could not help thinking on the fallen grandeur of the Romish Church, on her zeal even in error [emphasis added], on her earnestness and self-devotion, which we might, with nobler views and purer end, strive to imitate. (Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott, vol. I, p. 81)

Then follows the remark about praying for hours. Clearly it was not the statue or veneration for Mary that compelled him to want to pray, but recognition that those in error are often more zealous, self-devoted, and earnest than the orthodox. Certainly it would serve Christianity well if our enthusiasm in propagating our belief matched that of the heterodox.

Of course, some of the quotations produced by Wilkinson do seem to set Hort and Westcott in a bad light doctrinally. I do not deny this, nor do I care to gloss over their theological errors or defend them in any way. However, doctrinal error does not in and of itself discredit their Greek text. "If the premises are sufficient, they are so, no matter by whom stated" (M. R. Cohen). "You can prove I'm the Devil's brother, and you still haven't answered my argument" (Anonymous, both quoted by Hoover, p. 59).

Second, many doctrinally orthodox men have accepted the critical Greek text as more closely corresponding to the inerrant original writings than the textus receptus. S. P. Tregelles was a British scholar affiliated first with the Plymouth Brethren and reportedly later with the Baptists. (See Schaff-Herzog, vol. IV, p. 2388, and Life and Letters of John A. Broadus, p. 352.) Tregelles was premillennial and wrote a famous commentary defending the Book of Daniel. He produced a revised Greek text (1857- 1879) before the Westcott-Hort text was issued (1881). Tregelles' text was the result of decades of laborious and exacting personal inspection of manuscripts. There is very little difference in substance between his text and the later text of Westcott and Hort. If orthodoxy in theology guaranteed the soundness of an author's textual studies, then we would be compelled to accept the critical text because Tregelles was doctrinally orthodox. (The same line of argument could be pursued using another 19th century Greek text editor, Constantine Tischendorf.

Not only text editors, but also pastors, scholars, and seminary professors of unquestioned doctrinal orthodoxy could be paraded almost ad infinitum who accept the primacy of the critical text. A few examples will suffice. B. B. Warfield, the great Princeton theologian, was one of the authors of *The Fundamentals*. J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., called him "the greatest defender of the inerrancy of the Bible among scholarly theologians of the recent past." (See *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, vol. I, p. 325.) In his book *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, Warfield advocated the superiority of the critical text over the received text. John A. Broadus, the preeminent Baptist in America in the 19th century, advocated the superiority of the revised text of the *textus receptus* (*Commentary on Matthew*, preface, p. xlix; *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, Weatherspoon revision, pp. 21-22, 36). A. T. Robertson, probably the greatest New Testament scholar America has ever seen, and an orthodox Baptist, advocated the revised Greek text as more accurately representing the original text of the New Testament than the *textus receptus* (*An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, throughout). We could add the names of Spurgeon (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1881, pp. 342-343), B. H. Carroll (*Inspiration of the Bible*, pp. 52-53, 105) and a multitude more, but this is unnecessary. The point made is this: if doctrinal orthodoxy alone guaranteed sound judgment on matters of the Greek text, then the critical or revised text should be accepted simply because sound men do so. What's good for the goose is good for the gander. If the one argument is invoked (discrediting the critical text because of the heterodoxy of Westcott and Hort), then so must the other (accepting the critical text because of the orthodoxy of Tregelles, Warfield, Broadus, Robertson et al.) In reality, neither argument has any necessary relationship to the issue at hand.

Third, if there are hints of Romish leanings in Hort and Westcott (we allow the assertion for the sake of argument), there is a veritable flood of quotes from Erasmus himself protesting his absolute and undying loyalty to Roman Catholicism, its doctrine, and its pope.

Erasmus was a Roman Catholic priest. While he vigorously denounced the corruption and immorality of the monks and priests of his day, he did not object to Roman Catholic doctrine. He objected to Roman conduct, not to

Roman theology. He was a lifelong, devoted Catholic. Note his own words (taken from Froude, *Life and Letters of Erasmus*):

From the time when I was a child I have been a devoted worshipper of St. Anne. I composed a hymn to her when I was young, and the hymn I now send to you, another Anne. I send to you, besides, a collection of prayers to the Holy Virgin. They are not spells to charm the moon out of the sky, but they will bring down out of Heaven her who brought forth the Sun of Righteousness. She is easy to approach. (p. 86)

Disowning any connection at all with Luther, Erasmus wrote, "Christ I know; Luther I know not. The Roman Church I know, and death will not part me from it till the Church departs from Christ" (p. 261). Again, "I have sought to save the dignity of the Roman Pontiff, the honour of Catholic theology, and the welfare of Christendom" (p. 262). And again, "But be assured of this, if any movement is in progress injurious to the Christian religion, or dangerous to the public peace or to the supremacy of the Holy See, it does not proceed from Erasmus.... I have not deviated in what I have written one hair's breadth from the Church's teaching. p. 162) I am not so mad as to fly in the face of the Vicar of Christ. (pp. 271-272)

The Holy See needs no support from such a worm as I am, but I shall declare that I mean to stand by it. (p. 270)

The Pope's authority as Christ's Vicar must be upheld. (p. 275)

You may assure yourself that Erasmus has been, and always will be, a faithful subject of the Holy See. (p. 279)

The Lutherans alternately courted me and menaced me. For all this, I did not move a finger's breadth from the teaching of the Roman Church. (p. 340)

... I will bear anything before I forsake the Church. (p. 355)

Froude speaks of the need to clearly differentiate between Erasmus' desire to change the conduct of the Church and Luther's desire to change its doctrine:

You cannot understand the sixteenth century till you recognize the immense difference then present in the minds of men between a change of doctrine and a

reformation of the Church's manners and morals. (pp. 295-296)

This truth is illustrated by a number of Erasmus' own statements:

The reformers turn the images out of the churches, which originally were useful and ornamented. They might have been content to forbid the worship of images, and to have removed only the superfluous. They will have no priests. It would be better to have priests of learning and piety, and to provide that orders are not hastily entered into. There would be fewer of them, but better three good than three hundred bad. They do not like so much ritual. True, but it would be enough to abolish the absurd. Debauched priests who do nothing but mumble masses are generally hated. Do away with the hirelings, and allow but one celebration a day in the churches. Indulgences, with which the monks so long fooled the world with the connivance of the theologians, are now exploded. Well, then, let those who have no faith in saints' merits pray to Father, Son and Holy Ghost, imitate Christ in their lives, and leave those alone who do believe in saints. If the saints do not hear them, Christ may hear them. Confession is an ancient custom. Let those who deny that it is a sacrament observe it till the Church decides otherwise. No great harm can come of confession so long as men confess only their own mortal sins. Let men think as they please of purgatory, without quarreling with others who do not think as they do. Theologians may argue about free will in the Sorbonne. Laymen need not puzzle themselves with conundrums. Whether works justify or faith justifies matters little, since all allow that faith will not save without works. In Baptism let the old rule be kept. Parents may perhaps be left to decide whether it shall be administered in infancy or delayed to maturity. Anabaptists must not be tolerated.... As to the Eucharist, let the old opinion stand till a council has provided a new revelation. The Eucharist is only adored so far as Christ is supposed to be present there as God. The human nature is not adored, but the Divine nature, which is Omnipresent. The thing to be corrected is the abuse of the administration. (pp. 344-345)

The mass has been made a trade for illiterate and sordid priests, and a contrivance to quiet the conscience of reprobates. So the cry is raised, "Abolish the mass, put it away, make an end of it." Is there no middle course?

Cannot the mass be purified? Saint-worship has been carried so far that Christ has been forgotten. Therefore, respect for saints is idolatry, and orders founded on their names must be dissolved. Why so violent a remedy? Too much has been made of rituals and vestments, but we might save, if we would, the useful part of such things. Confession has been abused, but it could be regulated more strictly. (p. 358; cf. also p. 360)

But never will I be tempted or exasperated into deserting the true communion.... I will not forsake the Church myself, I would forfeit life and reputation sooner.... Doubtless I have wished that popes and bishops and cardinals were more like the apostles, but never in thought have I desired those offices be abolished. There may be arguments about the Real Presence, but I will never believe the Christ would have allowed the Church to remain so long in such an error (if error it be) as to worship a wafer for God. (p. 365)

Erasmus wished to avoid technical discussion concerning transubstantiation. "Such problems may be discussed among the learned. For the vulgar it is enough to believe that the real body and blood of our Lord are actually present" (p. 386)

And finally, did Erasmus reject the basis tenets of Romanism? Some of his accusers affirmed so. In defense, he wrote:

... they sing the old song. Erasmus laughs at the saints, despises the sacraments, denies the faith, is against clerical celibacy, monks' vows, and human institutions. Erasmus paved the way for Luther. So they gabble; and it is all lies. (p. 421)

Church historian Philip Schaff, while acknowledging that in many ways Erasmus laid the foundation for the Reformation, said his influence was felt in other areas as well: "He was as much a forerunner of Rationalism as of the Reformation." (History of the Christian Church, vol. VII, p. 404). His son David S. Schaff, in the same set speaks of Erasmus' loyalty to Rome:

Erasmus never intended to separate from Rome any more than his English friends, John Colet and Thomas More. He declared he had never departed from the judgment of the Church, nor could he. "Her consent is so important to me that I would agree with the Arians and

Pelagians if the Church should approve of what they taught." (vol. VI, p. 641)

Roland Bainton, in his biography of Erasmus, characterized the fundamental theological differences between Erasmus and Luther:

Luther shrank from the sight of the crucifix because the Christ on the cross would some day sit upon a rainbow to consign the damned to eternal perdition. Erasmus shuddered at death because it might cut him off before he could so far progress in virtue as to be "capable of eternal life." (p. 17)

The reading of Froude's biography of Erasmus left me with the distinct impression that Erasmus believed that sincerity alone was enough to please God.

One interesting side note on the theology of Erasmus: his favorite church father, like that of Hort, was Origen (Bainton, p. 143). Of Origen's writings, Erasmus wrote, "I have also read a great part of Origen, who opens out new fountains of thought and furnishes a complete key to theology" (Froude, p. 93).

It must also be remembered that Erasmus' first edition of his Greek New Testament was approved by Pope Leo X (Froude, p. 191).

Doctrinally, there is no question where Erasmus stood. Our perception is not limited to a few hints or suggestions, a deduction here or an inference there. Boldly and repeatedly, Erasmus declares himself to be a loyal and devoted Romanist, consenting to all that Rome stood for doctrinally, with its Mary-worship, veneration of the saints, sacrifice of the mass, papal supremacy, purgatory, monastic vows and orders and all else. He refused to side with Luther, and vigorously opposed the Protestant Reformation. He sought and got the Pope's sanction for his New Testament.

If theological inclination accredits or discredits a man's work on the text of the New Testament I do not think there is any necessary connection, but this is the argument of Wilkinson and others if Romish and heretical leanings by Westcott and Hort discredit their Greek text, then the text of Erasmus and all subsequent editions based on it, i.e., all textus receptus editions, are blown completely out of the water.

I trust advocates of the supremacy of the *textus receptus* see the corner into which they paint themselves by using this faulty argument. I strongly urge that the merit or demerit of printed Greek Testaments be evaluated on the basis of manuscript evidence, ancient translations, quotations from patristic authors, and principles of textual criticism, and not on the basis of the largely irrelevant issue of the theology of the text-editors.

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