

THE ATTITUDE OF ERASMUS TOWARDS THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH

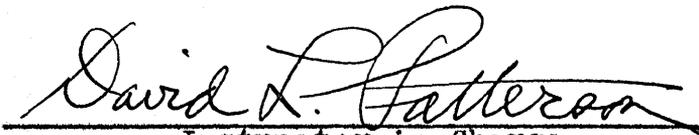
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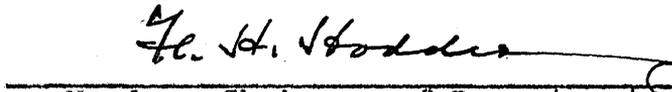
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Submitted to the Department of
History and the Faculty of the Graduate
School of the University of Kansas in
partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts.

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May 28, 1928.

FOREWORD

We desire to express our sincere thanks to Prof. David L. Patterson for the patience direction and friendly counsel which he has given to us in the preparation of this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I. LIFE OF ERASMUS.....	1
A. Birth	
B. Parents	
C. Monastery Life	
D. At Paris	
E. In England	
F. Further Travels	
F. In Switzerland	
H. Writings	
CHAPTER II. ERASMUS' IDEAS OF REFORM.....	12
A. State of the Christian Church at the Time of Erasmus	
B. Papacy in the Age of Erasmus	
C. Cardinals	
D. Bishops	
E. Priests	
F. Monasticism	
G. Theologians	
H. The Bible	
I. Doctrine	
J. Popular Religion	
CHAPTER III. CONTEMPORARY REFORMERS.....	83
A. Reuchlin	
B. Luther	
C. Others	

CHAPTER IV. PLACE OF ERASMUS IN HISTORY..... 93

A. Moral Qualities

B. Position on Reform

C. Importance

CHAPTER ONE
LIFE OF ERASMUS

Desiderius Erasmus was born at Rotterdam, Holland, between the years 1464 and 1469. The exact year of his birth is in doubt. In one of his letters, Erasmus stated that he met John Colet when both men were thirty years of age. This was in 1499. At another time, Erasmus asserted that he was fourteen years of age (nearing his fifteenth year) when he left Deventer in 1484. However, of twenty-three references to his age made by Erasmus in his writings, between the years 1506 and 1524, thirteen indicate 1466 as the year of his birth. In later years, 1525 to 1534, his works contained eight references to 1464, as being the date of his birth.¹

Gerard, the father of Erasmus, was a resident of Gouda. Desiring to become a scholar, he acquired a mastery of Greek and Latin. Later he was influenced by his brothers to become a priest. Before his ordination, Gerard had promised to marry Margaret, the daughter of a physician in Zevenberghen, Holland.² The marriage was not performed, but a child was born to Margaret in Rotterdam soon after Gerard became a priest. This child was named Erasmus, which was a Greek word for Gerard, his father's name.³ Erasmus' parents were of the middle class and well-to-do.⁴

1 Preserved Smith, Erasmus, (New York, 1923), pp. 7, 8; P. S. Allen, The Age of Erasmus, (Oxford, 1914), p. 33.

2 Smith, p. 6; George Horcross, Erasmus, (Washington, 1899), p. 365.

3 Smith, p. 7.

4 James Anthony Froude, Short Studies on Great Subjects, I, (London, 1891), p. 76.

Desiderius, a Latin form of the same name, was an addition selected by Erasmus as early as 1496. In the second edition of the "Adagia," published by Josse Badius at Paris in 1506, there appeared the complete form of the name, Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, the last word being a reference to his birthplace,⁵ Rotterdam.

About the time of the birth of Erasmus, his father left the mother and went to Rome where he supported himself by copying manuscripts.⁶ Gerard returned home in a few years because of false news sent to him of Margaret's death. After his return,⁷ however, he did not live with the mother.

The boy's education began when he was five years of age. He attended school in Gouda, where his chief study was the Dutch language.⁸ When he was nine years of age, Erasmus was taken by his mother to the school at Deventer. This school was connected with the chief Church of the town, St. Lebuin,⁹ and emphasized religion and Latin in the curriculum. The education of Erasmus at Deventer was interrupted by an interval¹⁰ of a few years during which he was a chorister at Utrecht.

Erasmus was left an orphan at an early age. His mother died of the plague in 1483, and his father, who had recalled Erasmus to Gouda after the death of his mother, in the following year.¹¹ Erasmus was assigned three guardians after the

5 J. Huizinga, Erasmus, (New York, 1924), p. 8.

6 Smith, p. 6.

7 Ibid, p. 6.

8 Ibid, p. 8; Huizinga, p. 8.

9 Allen, p. 33; Smith, p. 8; Huizinga, p. 8.

10 Smith, p. 8; Huizinga, p. 8.

11 Smith, p. 8; Huizinga, p. 9; R. C. Jebb, Erasmus, (New York, 1877), p. 3.

death of his father. The boy desired to enter a university but the guardians sent him to a school at 'S Hertogenbosch which emphasized religious training. He remained in school there until October, 1486, when he returned to Gouda. Here he learned that his father's estate had been wasted, and that one guardian had died.¹² Erasmus was influenced by the remaining guardians, and monks, to enter the monastery of Steyn, a short distance from Gouda. This monastery was one of Augustinian canons. After a year, he took the vows of a monk.¹³ The Bishop of Utrecht, David of Burgundy, ordained Erasmus as a priest on April 25,¹⁴ 1492.

Erasmus disliked the life of the monastery and desired to leave it. Therefore, he accepted a position as Latin Secretary¹⁵ of the Bishop of Cambrai, Henry of Bergen, about 1493. In the fall of 1495, the patron of Erasmus, the Bishop of Cambrai, gave him a small allowance and the authorities of Steyn monastery permitted him to go to a university. Since he desired to obtain a doctor's degree in theology, he entered Montaigu College of the University of Paris. Erasmus became ill there from the rough and insufficient food and was forced to go to Holland during the next year to regain his health.¹⁶

12 Smith, p. 12; Allen, p. 66.

13 Allen, p. 66, 67; Smith, p. 14; Huizinga, p. 11.

14 Huizinga, p. 19; Smith, p. 18.

15 Huizinga, p. 19; Allen, p. 68.

16 Allen, p. 102; Froude, I, p. 77; George Haven Putnam, Books and Their Makers During the Middle Ages, (New York, 1896), II, p. 193.

Returning to Paris, Erasmus, dissatisfied with the priesthood, discarded the clerical garb. He sought the society of educated men. Losing the patronage of the Bishop of Cambrai, Erasmus was forced to live in poverty.¹⁷ The degree of Bachelor of Divinity was conferred upon Erasmus in 1498. While in Paris, during his university career, he had composed various poems and completed other writings.¹⁸

The young Lord Montjoy, William Blount, who had been a student at the University of Paris, persuaded Erasmus in 1499 to accompany him to England as his tutor. Erasmus stayed in England for a year during which he met John Colet and Thomas More, who encouraged him to pursue his work as a scholar and a writer. He, however, declined Colet's invitation to teach at Oxford.¹⁹ Prince Henry offered him a large house and a pension of one thousand pounds if he would stay in England, but he declined. Archbishop Warham of Canterbury gave him a benefice in Kent,²⁰ later changed to a pension.

Erasmus left England in 1500 and returned to France. His life was that of a wandering scholar. During the year following his return to France he was often in need of money but used his talent in writing to earn a livelihood. In 1501, Erasmus visited friends in Holland and in the following year, he continued his writings at Louvain.

17 Froude, I, p. 78.

18 Allen, pp. 103, 104.

19 Ibid, pp. 116, 130; Huizinga, p. 36.

20 Froude, I, p. 79.

After two years at Louvain, Erasmus returned to Paris but left soon to go to England.²¹ While he was in England, he accepted the position as tutor to the two sons of the court physician of Henry VII, during a trip to Italy. On this journey, Erasmus received the degree of Doctor of Theology at the University of Turin, September 4, 1506. After visits in Rome, Florence and other Italian cities, Erasmus left Italy. This was his only visit to the cities of Italy.²² Erasmus returned to England in 1511 to lecture at Cambridge on Greek and religion. He continued his writings and theological studies.²³

Again leaving England in 1514, Erasmus travelled to Basle. There he met John Froben who became his chief printer until Froben's death, thirteen years later.²⁴ Before going to Louvain in 1517, Erasmus made two additional short visits to England. Then he spent four years at Louvain.²⁵ While there, on March 28, 1519, Erasmus received a letter from Martin Luther which asked for his friendship.²⁶ This letter was the only one received from Luther until 1524.²⁷

Erasmus returned to Basle in 1521. During the eight years that he spent at Basle, he completed several new editions of church fathers, the "Colloquia," and various other works.²⁸ Short visits were made by Erasmus to Freiburg, Constance, and other neighboring cities during this period at Basle.²⁹

21 Huizinga, pp. 36, 46, 71, 74; Norcross, p. 372.

22 Huizinga, pp. 77, 79, 86.

23 Ibid, p. 102; Allen, p. 134.

24 Allen, p. 152; Huizinga, p. 115.

25 Huizinga, p. 121.

26 Ibid, p. 131.

27 Robert H. Murray, Erasmus and Luther, (New York, 1920), p. 216.

28 Huizinga, pp. 196, 199.

29 Smith, p. 263.

When the Reformation reached Basle, Erasmus went to Freiburg, in the Breisgau, about forty miles north of Basle. There he became a professor of theology in the University of Freiburg, and a member of the university senate in 1533.³⁰ Discouraged by the attacks of monks and theologians in Freiburg upon him, and by the news of the death of his friend More in England, he left Freiburg in 1535 and returned to Basle³¹ where the University of Basle welcomed him. He spent the year before his death superintending the printing of some of his writings.³²

The death of Erasmus occurred on July 11, 1536, after an illness of almost two months. The city authorities gave him a splendid funeral and his body was laid to rest in a marble tomb in the Cathedral. A statue in stone in the public square, and the house in which he died, stand in his memory at Basle.³³

Erasmus published hardly anything until he was thirty years of age, and very little of value, until after his fortieth year. The great success of his "Praise of Folly," "New Testament," Paraphrases," "Colloquies," and "Epistles," raised his fame as a scholar, and caused a greater value to be given to his earlier works.³⁴ The book entitled "Adages," "Adagiorum Collectanea," or "Familiar Quotations from the Classics," was one of the earliest successes of Erasmus, having been published about 1500 in Paris after he returned from his first sojourn in England. It was a collection of Latin proverbs with brief explanations for the reader. A

30 Smith, pp. 39, 404, 405.

31 Ibid, pp. 417, 419.

32 Ibid, p. 419.

33 Ibid, pp. 419, 420; William Harrison Woodward, Desiderius Erasmus, (Cambridge, 1904), pp. 28, 29.

34 Smith, p. 33; Norcross, pp. 371, 373.

larger edition was published by Erasmus at Paris in 1506 after he returned from Italy. This book gave him a reputation as a scholar over all of Europe, and, like most of Erasmus' works, was written in Latin.³⁵

In 1500 Erasmus wrote four volumes on the Epistles on St. Paul. He completed this work later, and resumed work on the New Testament while at Louvain.³⁶ Next to be published, in 1503 at Antwerp, was a small book of devotion, called the "Enchiridion Militis Christiani" or the "Handbook of the Christian Knight." This book was reprinted almost yearly after 1515, and in many languages.³⁷

The most widely read of Erasmus' works was the "Praise of Folly," written soon after he returned from Italy. This book was completed in More's home in England, while Erasmus awaited the arrival of his library, and was suffering an attack of lumbago.³⁸ The "Praise of Folly" is an amusing satire exposing the follies of the Church and the state. Attacks are made on the Pope, fake scientists, superstitious persons, theologians, monks, princes, and others.³⁹ Erasmus wrote another satire in the form of a dialogue, entitled "Julius Excluded from Heaven." Pope Julius II, who died in 1513, was the main character in this book.⁴⁰

The greatest writing of Erasmus was published in 1516.

35 Smith, p. 36; Allen, p. 137; Huizinga, p. 49.

36 Allen, p. 140.

37 Smith, pp. 55-58.

38 Ibid, p. 117.

39 Ibid, pp. 117, 119-122.

40 Huizinga, p. 107; Smith, p. 127.

It was the "Novum Instrumentum", or "New Testament", in the original Greek as corrected by Erasmus with a Latin translation and notes.⁴¹ The revival of the Greek language and the coming of the Renaissance caused an examination of the Bible, and the faults of the old translation were found. The Vulgate was criticized first by Lorenzo Valla in 1450 by his "Notes on the New Testament", based on a study of three Latin and three Greek manuscripts. This work was not published until 1504. Erasmus found the writing in the Abbey of Parc near Louvain and published it at Paris, with a preface written by himself.⁴² The scholars of that age desired a complete correction of the Bible and Erasmus completed a Latin translation of the New Testament in manuscript by 1506, although he made further corrections three years later. After the Abbot of Glastonbury, a personal friend in whose judgment Erasmus had great confidence, had disapproved of the work, Erasmus did not publish it until the second edition of the "New Testament", which contained this first translation, was edited in 1519.⁴³

Ten Greek manuscripts were used by Erasmus in his work on the first edition of the "New Testament". He secured four of these in England, five at Basle (left there by a member of the Council of Basle in 1431), and one from John Reuchlin as a loan. A critical survey and comparison of those manuscripts enabled Erasmus to make many alterations in the former version. The preface was expanded and published separately later in a book called "The Method of Theology".

41 Huizinga, pp. 115.

42 Smith, pp. 160, 161; Norcross, p. 369.

43 Ibid, pp. 162.

He continued this critical work with the publication of the second edition in 1519, in which he inserted four hundred more alterations. For this edition, he used also a Latin manuscript loaned him by the King of Hungary, two manuscripts from the Austin Priory of Corsendonk and a Greek manuscript loaned him by the monastery of Mount St. Agnes.⁴⁴ A third edition was published three years later, and a fourth followed, and also sixty-nine reprints by 1536. The "New Testament" was dedicated to Pope Leo X, with his permission, and he and his successor, Pope Adrian VI, gave full approval of the work. The liberal class in Europe welcomed the work which was a source for the new translations of the Bible into the vernaculars. This was the first scholarly revision of the Vulgate and the work benefited greatly the religion and the Church.⁴⁵

Another great work by Erasmus was his part in the publication of the writings of Jerome, one of the early theologians of the Church. Nine volumes of "Jerome" were published in 1516 and 1517, and Erasmus edited four of these. This work was dedicated to Archbishop Warham of Canterbury. After the publication of "Jerome" was completed, Erasmus was recognized as the leader of a large group of scholars in Europe of that age.⁴⁶

Seven years later, Erasmus published the "De Libero Arbitrio Diatribe" or "A Disquisition upon Free Will." In

44 Smith, pp. 163, 165; Erasmus, *Opus Epistolarum*, trans. by Allen, II, (London, 1910), pp. 164-166.

45 Smith, pp. 163, 183-185.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 192; Allen, p. 162.

this work, he discussed his belief in the freedom of the will which had been opposed by Luther.⁴⁷ Many classics were edited by Erasmus. In "Ciceronianus" completed in 1527, he attacked false classicists who tried to imitate Cicero but failed.⁴⁸ Erasmus completed a book of similitudes called the "Parabolae" which contained metaphors and practical and scriptural allegories. Other works were a treatise on the education of a prince entitled "Institutio Principis Christiani," the "Ecclesiastes" which discussed the low standard of society, and a book of witty anecdotes called "Apophthegmata." The last writing of Erasmus was dedicated in January, 1533, to a friend who had requested a psalm. This treatise was called "On the Purity of the Christian Church."⁴⁹

In addition to the writings named above, Erasmus contributed many others. Theological writings, and a great number of letters of this scholar were published in several editions. In 1529 the large "Opus Epistolarum" was published, which contained over one thousand letters.⁵⁰ The "Epistolae Floridae" two years later, the "Epistolae Palaeonaei" in the following year, the appendix of his "De Praeparatione ad Mortem" in 1534, and the volume with his "De Puritate Tabernaculi," two years later added new letters to the collection in the "Opus Epistolarum."⁵¹

The complete works of Erasmus may be found in, Erasmi

47 Huizinga, pp. 206.

48 Ibid, p. 216.

49 Ibid, pp. 50, 231, 236.

50 Smith, p. 206.

51 Ibid, p. 206, 207.

Opera, 10 volumes, Leyden, 1703-1709. The bibliographies of Erasmus may be found in several places. First, Bibliotheca Erasiana, Liste Sommaire, 3rd series, 1893, Ghent, and . Preserved Smith, Erasmus, with a bibliography for literature between 1893 and 1922; also in P. S. Allen, Opus Epistolarum.

The writings of Erasmus prove that he was the most learned man of his age, and assure him for all time a place of great importance in the field of literature and learning. ⁵²

52 Smith, p. 441.

CHAPTER II.

ERASMUS' IDEAS OF REFORM

Desiderius Erasmus although the leading scholar of his age, was always loyal to the Catholic Church. The abuses of the clergy and the general decline of religion discouraged him greatly and he devoted his ability as a scholar in an effort to check the revolt that threatened the life of the Church. Though favoring reforms, Erasmus desired that these reforms should be made within the Church. He did not favor a revolt that would oppose the Church and seek to disunite it. He was not in favor of the radical actions of Martin Luther as a whole, though he did favor Luther's criticisms of the sale of indulgences and the institution of monasticism. Erasmus wished the Pope to act wisely against the reformers, to forgive them their offenses, and then to lead a movement to reform the abuses of the Church. He thought that a general council of conservative men would be the best solution of the reform question.

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With this in mind, Erasmus advocated a Church council of educated men in 1520, to seek the causes of the decline of religion and with full power to make reforms. The Papacy at that time was centralized in power and opposed the idea as a foolish theory. However, Erasmus was working for a better Church for the people then, and in the future, so he

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continued to fight for this council. He wrote to Pope Adrian VI on December 22, 1522, and advised him that private enmity should not be used to hurt public business. The scholar was fighting for peaceful reform which would not injure the activities of society. He reminded the Pope that no "vindication" of human authority should betray the authority of Jesus Christ. The Pope answered this letter courteously, and stated that he desired to crush the evil (the revolt) while it was possible to do so, and invited Erasmus to come to Rome to aid in the work.

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Erasmus did not accept this invitation because he desired to retain his independence as a scholar and writer. However, he continued to advocate reform by peaceful means. In a letter to a friend, in 1533, he related that he had dreamed that peace in the Church would soon appear. The scholar declared that he had supported the party of conciliation because he desired to offer a compromise that would satisfy the opposing factions. In a book published in 1533 and entitled "De Sarcienda Ecclesiae Concordia," Erasmus suggested that an agreement based upon reciprocal concessions be made. The scholar declared that both parties must give up some claims in order to have peace. In the next year, Pope Paul III followed the suggestion of Erasmus. The ruler tried to make peace with Germany and England and

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54 Murray, pp. 379-381.

55 M. Creighton, A History of the Papacy, (New York, 1897), VI, p. 239.

56 Murray, pp. 339, 340.

planned to call a council for the purpose of making reforms. The Pope earnestly desired Erasmus to be a member of this council and give his aid to the plan of reform. The Pope's desire to have Erasmus join the clergy and aid the Church was also shown by the offer of a cardinal's hat to the latter in the year before his death. The scholarship of the humanist was fully recognized by Paul III. The proposal of Erasmus that a council for reform be called was considered wise in 1534, though deemed foolish fourteen years before. However, the council, which was planned to meet in Mantua two years later, was not called, and the great Erasmus died before his request, and his plan to save the Church, to which he was still devoted, were followed.

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A. State of the Christian Church in the Time of Erasmus.

In the age of Erasmus, Rome, the Capitol of Christendom, was a central point of corruption from which influences spread over the civilized world. The ambassador from Venice in 1499 called it the "sewer of the world" and Machiavelli declared that its example had destroyed all religion in Italy. The public marriages of openly acknowledged daughters of such Popes as Alexander VI and Innocent VIII influenced many of the clergy to keep concubines and to have children. Religion and morality seemed to be separated. The majority of the people still dreaded future punishment for sins but thought

57 Froude, Life and Letters, (London, 1902), p. 423; Huizinga, p. 235; Murray, p. 381.

that penalties could be escaped by confession, absolution and the purchase of indulgences. In this age, on the other hand, there was a great external show of devotion and piety. Religious relics commanded a high price, pilgrims visited shrines in great numbers and pious ceremonies were frequent. The people, however, did not approve entirely of the priesthood and preaching. For more than a century, Europe had asked a reform of the Church in the acts of the Pope and the members. The councils had made plans for reforms in the fifteenth century but the various popes had checked their fulfillment. In their place, papal decrees had been issued to order reforms but these commands were not observed. Pope Julius II called the fifth Lateran council to meet at Rome in April, 1512, to make reforms in the morals of the laity and of the clergy, to bring peace between Christian rulers, and to carry on war against the Turks. The Pope started the preliminary work on reforms by the appointment, in March, 1512, of a commission of eight cardinals "to reform the curia and its officials". On March 30, 1512, Julius II issued a decree to reduce the heavy fees and tributes collected by the Church. His sudden death, in 1513, did not end the council, for it approved in the following year a papal decree outlining reforms. The good results expected from this decree did not take place because many of the clergy objected to being reformed.

58 The Cambridge Modern History, (New York, 1902) Vol. I, pp. 672, 673.

59 Ibid, I, pp. 674-678.

The council lasted until 1517 without making any important reforms and its failure encouraged the coming of the Lutheran revolt, because the majority of the people did not now expect reforms to be completed by the papacy or councils. The primary cause of the revolt was the extensive corruption of the Church and its wide use of its supernatural authority. The failure of councils to make reforms, and the growth of learning in western Europe during the Renaissance, encouraged the people to resist the control of the papacy.⁶⁰

Two different theories as to the definite limits of papal authority existed, in this age. One belief was that the greater part of the clerical power should be placed in the hands of bishops while the other theory was that the papacy should be an absolute monarchy. Advocates of the former theory believed that the Church councils were superior, in legislative power, to the Pope, who was said to be merely the executive head of the Church. They declared that it was lawful to appeal from a papal decision to a Church council.⁶¹ The advocates of the other theory declared that the Pope was superior in power to any Church council, and was the source of all authority of the Church. This dispute injured the influence of the Church.⁶²

In Rome, the Pope maintained an army of notaries, judges, managers, and other officials to aid him with the great amount of business brought to his attention. The officials surround-

60 Cambridge Mod. His. I, pp. 678, 679.

61 Rev. Dr. John Alzog, Universal Church History (Cincinnati, 1876), II, p. 923.

62 Ibid., II, p. 924.

ing the Pope made up the Papal curia.

The officials of the Church constituted the central and local government of the organization. In the former, the Pope was the head and was elected by the cardinal college within ten days after the death of the former Pope. The cardinals numbered seventy usually, although the number varied from seven to seventy-six, and were appointed by the Pope. The remainder of the curia consisted of thirteen congregations, three tribunals and five offices. The congregations were appointed by the Pope and consisted entirely of cardinals. These different groups were the Congregation of Holy Office, of the Consistory, of Sacraments, of Council, of Religions, Propaganda, of the Index, of Rites, of Ceremonies, of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, of Studies, of Loreto and of the Fabric of St. Peter. The three tribunals were the Sacred Penitentiaria, Sacred Roman Rota, and the Apostolic Signatura. The members were appointed by the Pope, with a cardinal acting as chairman. The five offices of the curia were the Apostolic Chancery, Apostolic Diataria, Apostolic Camera, Secretariate of State, and the Secretariate of Briefs.

The local government consisted of six main divisions. First, the archbishop, at the head of an archbishopric, was elected by the cathedral chapter. Second, the bishop, as the head of a diocese, was usually elected by the cathedral chapter, although until 1433, he was appointed in certain cases by the Pope through encroachment upon the power of the

chapter. The council of Basle in that year abolished the Pope's power of appointment of the bishop, although he regained it somewhat in Germany later. Third, the cathedral chapter had important members known as canons, who were appointed by the bishop or by the lay noble, who originally held the prebend in that district. Fourth, the priest as the head of a parish was appointed usually by the feudal noble of that district but might be selected by the bishop of that diocese and be approved by the people. Fifth, the deacon, a sub-deacon also in some churches, was appointed by the bishop or lay noble of that district. Sixth, five minor orders, the ranks of which were filled like that of the deacon, consisted of acolytes, exorcists, cantors, readers and porters. ⁶⁴

Those persons who brought money to the Papal Court were numerous, including collectors, bankers, new holders of benefices, pilgrims, prelates visiting the court, persons seeking dispensation or pardon for sin, and commissaries or sellers of indulgences. Each furnished his part of the papal revenue. ⁶⁵ These persons represented all parts of the civilized world.

The sources of revenue to the Church and to the Papacy consisted mainly of tithes, which were a tax laid upon the revenue of a benefice belonging to the Church. Other sources of the papal income were; the Patrimony of St. Peter, better known as the Papal States, furnished an income by feudal dues;

64 Schaff, V, Pt. 1, pp. 782-799; Andre Lagarde, The Latin Church in the Middle Ages, (New York, 1915), pp. 70, 71; Catholic Encyclopedia, (New York, 1912), XIII, pp. 136-149
65 Lagarde, p. 339.

the denarius of St. Peter, St. Peter's pence, was usually a tax of a penny a hearth, although sometimes it was given as alms; the apostolic tax was paid yearly by monasteries and kingdoms for protection of their property by the Pope; annates were revenues paid by the new holder of a benefice, and consisted of the first year's income; the servitia constituted a tax paid by bishops and abbots of monasteries for the verification of their election, consecration after nomination, and the reception of papal decrees; the right of pallium was a tax paid by archbishops when the pallium was given to them; the right of spolia was the privilege of the Popes to claim the property of a bishop when the latter died; the right of vacancies allowed the Popes to take the revenues of a vacant benefice; the caritative subsidies were formerly free gifts by priests to bishops when the latter needed money, but later became compulsory gifts by the bishops to the Papacy; indulgences were sold that gave a substitution for penance to the purchasers; dispensations were granted to those contributing money, as a rule, to escape punishment by the Papacy, to be relieved of a pilgrimage, or to be allowed to have certain clerical laws suspended. Those various revenues⁶⁶ enriched the papal treasury greatly before the Reformation.

Europe had been asking for reforms in the Church several centuries before the age of Erasmus, and frequent attempts had been made to carry out plans of betterment. The Albigenses, so named by the Council of Tours in 1163, were members of a sect that was very active in the southern part of France in the

66 Lagarde, pp. 305-339.

twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Many people who protested against the ignorance and worldly lives of the clergy joined or protected this sect. The Albigenses believed in two mutually opposed principles, existing as good and evil. The latter principle was the source of all evil, and it imprisoned the soul, created by God, in a material body. They declared that one must join the Church of Christ, the Albigenses, to secure its benefits. This sect denounced war and capital punishment. The members declared that there was no purgatory, and that the soul of an Albigensian, who had taken the rite of purification, would ascend directly after death to heaven. Their officers were bishops and deacons, with assistants for each, chosen from those who had performed certain ceremonies. After persuasion had failed to check the work of this sect, the Catholic authorities used force against it. A crusade in 1209 and 1210 destroyed the larger part of the sect and the Dominicans were allowed to use the inquisition to complete the work. The Albigenses had practically disappeared in 1400.

In the last half of the twelfth century, the Waldenses appeared in France. The founder of this sect was a rich merchant of Lyons, named Peter Waldo or Waldes, who had studied religious works and listened to preachers of the Gospel. He took a vow of poverty, gave away all of his wealth, and encouraged the development of this sect. The members preached obedience to God instead of to man and protested against the wealth of the medieval Church and the worldly lives of some of its

67 Henry Charles Lea, A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages, (New York, 1900), pp. 129-209; The Catholic Enc. Vol. I, pp. 267-269.

officers. The sect advocated poverty but denounced war, belief in purgatory, in indulgences and in prayers for the dead. The followers refused to take an oath, and condemned death sentences. There were two classes of members consisting of the "perfect" who furnished the officers and did no manual labor and the "friends" who carried on regular activities of society and supported the other class. Bishops, priests and deacons were officers. In 1498 Pope Innocent VIII started a crusade against the Waldenses but the sect was not destroyed. Its doctrines were modified by the Reformation and its members are found in America and Europe today.

68

One of the greatest of the early reformers was John Wyclif or Wycliffe, of England, who lived in the fourteenth century. After receiving a degree of doctor of theology at Oxford, he started his preaching against the Church. Several papal bulls ordered him to desist but he refused to do so. He sent out followers, called Lollards, to emphasize the power of the Bible and of preaching. In 1380 he attacked the doctrine of transubstantiation, a belief that Christ's body and blood were present in the bread and wine of the mass, which caused the doctors of Oxford to condemn him. The English Government then ordered him to stop preaching. He obeyed this order but continued to write his beliefs in Latin and English until his death in 1387. Wyclif's criticisms of clerical and monastic

wealth, and of the authority of the Pope, were adopted by
⁶⁹
 later reformers.

This work of attempted reform was continued by John Hus, or Huss, of Bohemia, who lived from 1369 to 1415. He received a master's degree from the University of Prague and was later ordained a priest. The writings of Wyclif influenced him and he translated one of the Englishman's writings into Czech. Hus preached against the lax morals of the lower clergy, the episcopacy and of the papacy. Because of his activities against the burning of Wyclif's writings, Hus was excommunicated by Archbishop Zbynek of Prague. The reformer continued his preaching although the Pope called him to Rome. He pleaded illness and did not go to Rome but sent representatives to see the Pope. In 1411 the latter excommunicated Hus but the reformer answered this decree by defending Wyclif, and attacking the papal bulls of that year which authorized indulgences to those giving financial aid for a crusade against Naples.
⁷⁰

The Pope replied by issuing a decree which ordered his imprisonment. This command was not obeyed and in 1414 Hus came to the Council of Constance to explain his beliefs, after being given a promise of safe conduct by the Emperor. After a trial, the council sentenced him to be burned and his life ended in
⁷¹
 this manner in 1415.

69 Lea, II, pp. 438-444; Catholic Enc. XV, pp. 722-723.

70 Ibid, VII, pp. 584; Lea, II, pp. 444-449.

71 Ibid, II, pp. 449-493; Catholic Enc. VII, p. 585.

John Wesel was a German reformer of the fifteenth century. He became a professor of theology at Erfurt and later preached at Mainz and at Worms. After becoming a preacher, he attacked indulgences and certain doctrines of the Church. The universities at Cologne and Heidleberg condemned his beliefs and he was tried before the Inquisition at Mainz in 1479. His writing on indulgences contained doctrines opposing traditional beliefs of the Church. Other criticisms of his work arose from his teaching that Christ was the only one who could explain the Bible and that no Pope or bishop or indulgence could aid salvation, since the names of those to be saved were written in God's book of life. Wesel also denounced all councils and popes, and declared that Christ did not order fasts or pilgrimages. The Court of the Inquisition sentenced Wesel to imprisonment for life and he was taken to the Augustinian convent at Mainz. Before his death two years later, he retracted and submitted to the Church.

72

Another reformer of this period was John of Wessel who was a Dutch theologian. He secured a master's degree at the university of Cologne. After travels to Paris, Venice and Basle, he returned to Holland and spent several years in monasteries. Wessel wrote several theological works one being the "De sacramento Eucharistiae et audienda Missa". He denied not only the infallibility of popes and councils but also that the authority of the Church as a teacher was infallible. Wessel believed in absolution by a priest in the sacrament of

penance, but not in the judicial character of the ceremony because remission of sins brought the abolition of temporal punishment. He believed that purgatory was not a place of punishment but of purification of souls, and that an indulgence merely released the buyer outwardly from censure and punishment by the clergy in this world. Wessel asserted the doctrine of freedom of the will, and denied the merits of good works and some other Catholic doctrines, such as the primacy of the Pope. This reformer did not leave the Church and he was not accused by the Inquisition.⁷³

In Italy, before Erasmus started his work, a reformer was attacking the Pope. This man was Girolamo Savonarola born at Ferrara in 1452. He entered the Dominican order at Bologna early in life and sought to keep all vows of this body. In 1490 he was preaching against the lax living of society and soon started a reform movement. He began to interpret the Bible to the people. Encouraged by his success, Savonarola attacked the abuses of the clergy and the immoral lives of members of the Roman Curia, including Pope Alexander VI. The reformer's work at Florence brought results and many people there gave up luxuries, such as playing cards, ornaments, and pagan writings, to be burned. The Pope ordered him to stop preaching and to come to Rome but Savonarola refused. He laughed at the papal excommunication of himself. Under his leadership the people revolted against the rule of the Medici and formed a republic. However, shortly after this, opposition to Savonarola began to grow because the strict

⁷³ C. Ullmann, Reformers before the Reformation, (Edinburgh, 1877), II, pp. 263-379; Catholic Enc. XV, p. 590.

moral laws and the tyrannical government under his control were disliked. Finally after failing to undergo an ordeal of fire when challenged by a Franciscan, Savonarola lost the support of the people. He was captured, tried, and condemned to death and was executed in 1498.

The humanists in Germany during the fifteenth century and up to the opening of the Reformation sought to effect reforms in the Church as part of their work. Scholars and professors directed this movement which became very active after 1500 through the efforts of Reuchlin, Erasmus, Hutten, and others. Johann Reuchlin was an authority in law, Greek and Latin authors, history and poetry. His Hebrew works were well known at that time. Johann Pfefferkorn, a baptized Jew, had influenced the emperor to issue an order to suppress all Hebrew works except the Old Testament. When Reuchlin opposed this order Pfefferkorn attacked Reuchlin with a theological writing and Reuchlin replied with another. Theologians in Cologne also attacked Reuchlin and he appealed to the Pope for aid. Finally, in 1520, the Pope ordered him to be silent in the dispute. This struggle divided Germany into two factions and was a prelude of the Reformation. The work of Erasmus was also called a forerunner of the revolt and will be discussed later. Ulrich von Hutten encouraged the centrali-

74 Lea, III, pp. 210-238; Catholic Enc. XIII, pp. 490, 491.

zation of power in the hands of the emperor, and war against the papacy. By the use of poems, pamphlets and dialogues which were written in Latin and German, he attacked the illiteracy and evil lives of the clergy. The humanistic movement really closed with his death in 1523 and the Reformation continued. Many humanists opposed the latter movement but their work led greatly to the revolt, especially that of Erasmus.

B. Papacy in the Age of Erasmus

The public and private life of the Popes during the age of Erasmus often was of such character as to draw criticism upon the head of the Church. Erasmus wrote that Popes had "weapons and sweet blessings", as, "Interdictions, Hangings, Heavy Burthens, Reproofs; Executions in Effigie, and that terrible Thunder-bolt of Excommunication", to sink "men's Souls beneath the bottom of Hell". They use excommunications against those who try to rob them of St. Peter's patrimony, or lessen it. They call it "Lands, Cities, Tribute, imposts and Riches", and even contend for these with war in which many are killed but they call it defense of the Church. The scholar thought that the higher offices of the Church had too much wealth and power, for he believed they should have only a staff and a wallet, and not try to rule kings. In addition to these criticisms of the heads of the Church, the humanist declared that they kept many

75 Lea, II, pp. 423-425; Catholic Enc. VII, p. 538-542.

76 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, trans. by Wilson (Oxford, 1913) pp. 147, 148.

77 Ibid, p. 146

scribes, clerks, notaries, judges, secretaries, grooms, muleteers⁷⁸ and others who received high wages for their services.

Pope Paul II, ruler from 1465 to 1471, favored reforms of the worst abuses in the Church when he came into office, but⁷⁹ the opposition of cardinals influenced him to give up the idea. The Pope was very diligent in the collection of the papal revenues, for he owned fifty-four silver chests filled with pearls, two tiaras, and a chest of sapphires. This property was worth⁸⁰ about six hundred and twelve thousand ducats. He used a part of this money in seeking sensual pleasures and in staging public⁸¹ amusements for the benefit of the people in Rome.

Pope Sixtus IV followed Paul II and ruled until 1481. The modern "spoils" system was general in this period. The advancement of his own pleasures, and the promotion and enrichment of his relatives concerned Sixtus IV more than the religious interests of the Papacy. Six nephews became cardinals, and other relatives were appointed to different offices. The Pope's son, Riario, was appointed Bishop of Spoleto, Seville, Valencia, and other places, until his total income amounted⁸² to sixty thousand florins. He used this money to maintain⁸³ a retinue of one hundred persons, and to keep many mistresses.

78 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 146

79 M. Creighton, A History of the Papacy, IV, p. 9

80 The ducat was a gold or silver coin formerly used in Europe and worth about \$2.32, usually.

81 Schaff V, Pt. 2, pp. 425-429.

82 A florin had a value of twelve lire, or about \$2.40.

83 Schaff, V, Pt. 2, p. 431.

In regard to his public policy, the Pope caused the Papacy to become an important Italian political power, and carried on wars with the use of the money and other resources of the Church.⁸⁴ He favored the overthrow of the Republic of Florence which opposed his power, and encouraged enemies of the Republic.⁸⁵ He encouraged a civil war between two factions in Rome, the Orsini and the Colonna, which, together with a large number of assassinations,⁸⁶ almost destroyed the latter.

Pope Innocent VIII succeeded Sixtus IV, and ruled until 1492. As a result of pre-election promises of benefices and money, he was selected to the office by the cardinals.⁸⁷ In fact, six cardinals were asleep during the election and were not awakened until the contest was closed. The vote was then made unanimous.⁸⁸ Those cardinals, who aided the Pope, were appointed by him to other high offices and their palaces in Rome were defended by soldiers.⁸⁹ Dissipation, lack of discipline and bribery were common among members of the papal curia at this time, and many clerical offices could be bought; for example, the office of papal bull sealer was purchased for twenty-five hundred ducats.⁹⁰ New offices were created and

84 Creighton, IV, p. 717

85 Schaff, V, Pt. II, pp. 431-433.

86 Ibid, V, Pt. II, pp. 434.

87 Ibid, V, Pt. II, pp. 435-437.

88 Creighton, IV, p. 157.

89 Ibid, pp. 139, 146.

90 Schaff, V, Pt. II, pp. 435, 438.

sold by the Pope to increase the revenue. A position of secretary brought sixty-two thousand ducats.⁹¹ Great wealth was amassed by Innocent VIII, the treasury containing over one million ducats at the time of his death. His will granted forty-eight thousand ducats to relatives,⁹² many of whom had been appointed to offices by the Pope.⁹³

In addition to being guilty of nepotism, the Pope was said to have been the father of sixteen children born to married women. Concubinage in Rome was permissible by order of the Pope, and almost all members of the clergy there had concubines.⁹⁴ Innocent VIII held many receptions in the Vatican, as he delighted in the presence of ladies at his court.⁹⁵ One other criticism of the Pope was based upon the issuance of the bull in 1484, which caused the death of witches in Germany. Finally, Innocent VIII was blamed for the extermination of the Waldenses by a Crusade in 1487. Erasmus was twenty-six years of age when the Pope died, so the abuses of the clergy in Rome in this period had, without doubt, great influence upon the young humanist.⁹⁶

Alexander VI became Pope in 1492. It was a general belief

91 Creighton, IV, p. 178.

92 Schaff, V, Pt. II, p. 443.

93 Creighton, IV, p. 176.

94 Schaff, V, Pt. 2, pp. 433, 439.

95 Creighton, IV, p. 177.

96 Schaff, V, Pt. 2, p. 442.

at that time that he used bribery and other means of illegitimate influence to secure his office but no absolute proof of this charge has been found. Alexander VI was well versed in diplomacy and law and his vigorous action reestablished a good administration of justice and brought peace to Italy. King Charles VIII of France invaded Italy to seize Naples and other lands that he claimed. The Pope organized the defense of Italy but the French captured northern Italy and later Rome and Naples. Alexander VI feared that his corrupt election and low morality would cause the French king to dethrone him but the Pope was able to conclude peace by giving up three hostages. After the formation of a league of Italian cities, Alexander VI was able to drive the French from Italy. This success seemed to encourage the Pope to seize additional territory which he gave to his children. His almost absolute control of the cardinal college gave him power to carry out his plans of sending forces to conquer various states. Some of his children became rulers of the subdued states. Alexander VI was not checked by religious laws or moral scruples in his work. In some ways he was temperate, but in others he was very immoral. His absolute authority gave him power to carry out his plans but he was always careful of the welfare of his people. Investigation, in later years, has proven that he was not a model Pope, but has cleared him of some bitter criticisms of his character. After his death in 1503, this Pope was followed by Pius III. The latter was succeeded after a rule of only twenty-seven days

97

by Julius II.

The election of Julius II as Pope was secured largely by bribery, as in past contests. He was known as the father of three daughters and sought to advance the interests of his children and relatives. Four nephews were appointed by Julius II to the cardinal college. This Pope achieved great fame as a warlike leader, and has been called the "warrior Pope." He first secured the aid of France to build up the states of the Church and then later allied with the forces of Venice, Spain, England and Switzerland to drive the French from Italy. After securing the aid of these four nations, Julius II re-
 98
 stored the Medici dynasty in Florence. In the field of finances, this Pope was also successful, obtaining much plate and coin for the papal treasury, and encouraging the sale of indulgences. The fifth Lateran council, called in this period, did little except to declare again the theory that
 99
 the Pope had greater power than any other ruler. Far from being ashamed of his temporal power and warlike reputation, the Pope requested the great artist, Michael Angelo, to make a bronze statute of him. The ruler told the artist to place a sword in his left hand, because he did not claim to be a scholar. However, keys were placed in the hand instead of
 100
 the sword.

97 The Cambridge Modern History, I, pp. 110, 226-242.

98 Schaff, V, Pt. 2, pp. 466, 473.

99 Ibid, V, Pt. 2, pp. 475-478.

100 Ibid, V, Pt. 2, p. 467.

While Julius II was Pope, Erasmus wrote the "Praise of Folly". He declared in this work that if Popes would imitate Christ in His work and life, they would lose much "wealth, honor, riches, offices, tribute, dispensations, pardons, horses, mules, guards, pleasures", and that these things would be replaced by subjects that were more religious.¹⁰¹ The scholar described Julius II as one who desired to upset the world¹⁰² regardless of the labor or use of money.

Julius II was the first Pope attacked directly by Erasmus, and satire was the method used. A play, based upon a recent book entitled "Julius Coelis Exclusus" was produced on the Paris stage in 1514.¹⁰³ Erasmus, in several letters to friends in England and Germany, denied being the author of this book, but the style was similar to that ordinarily used by him. More and other scholars accepted Erasmus as the author of this work, and today it is named as one of Erasmus' writings.¹⁰⁴ The scholar did not desire to write anything that would hinder piety, corrupt the young, or encourage sedition, and hoped that his work would advance the Christian religion. Therefore, he considered it wise not to admit that he was the author of "Julius Coelis Exclusus".¹⁰⁵ Erasmus criticized in this book the actions of Pope Julius II who had died in 1513. The Pope, as he tried to force St. Peter to open the gates of

101 Desiderius Erasmus, The Praise of Folly, p. 146.

102 Ibid, p. 147.

103 Desiderius Erasmus, The Epistles of Erasmus, trans. by Nichols, (New York, 1918), II, p. 448.

104 Ibid, III, pp. 19, 20, 384; James Anthony Froude, Life and Letters of Erasmus, p. 156.

105 Erasmus, Epistles, III, p. 385.

Heaven, boasted of his wars, simony and methods of gaining wealth, such as selling and creating offices, selling indulgences and dispensations, and other worldliness. Erasmus wrote that the Pope used his key of power in an effort to open the gates but found that the key was of little value in Heaven. In this book, the humanist portrayed in an able manner the abuses of the Church, and the great need for reforms. The story related that even Pope Julius II was barred from entering the gates of Heaven. Erasmus wrote that St. Peter knew, after Pope Julius II had departed, why so few people applied for entrance to Heaven. The saint was convinced that the example of such a Pope influenced many people to imitate him and to lead evil lives.

During his rule, Julius II had ordered the ancient basilica of St. Peter leveled. His plans called for a larger unit, and to secure the needed finances, the Pope had directed that indulgences should be sold in Italy. This policy was continued and extended by the next Pope Leo X. Leo X was selected Pope in 1513 and acted as the head of the Church until his death in 1521. Erasmus visited Rome while Leo X was Pope, and found the city to be a center of culture for Europe. The fine libraries and large number of scholars in the city had great influence upon Erasmus. He wrote that persons came from all parts of the world to Rome for the sake of religion, and

106 Fronde, Life and Letters, pp. 156-174.

107 Lagarde, p. 536.

108 Dr. Ludwig Pastor, History of the Popes from the close of the Middle Ages, (St. Louis, 1900) VIII, pp. 64, 140.

that one could find a great number of cardinals, bishops, and churches there. The humanist considered Rome under the rule of Leo X to be more like a world than a city.¹⁰⁹ Leo X did not seem to be affected by the bitter lines about popes written by Erasmus in the "Praise of Folly." The scholar, in 1518, wrote that "The Pope read the *Moria* and laughed. His only comment was this, 'I am glad to find our Erasmus has his own place there too.' And yet there is no set of men whom I treat with more bitterness than the Popes."¹¹⁰ The humanist in this book had pointed out to the Popes their follies, but the warning was not heeded.¹¹¹

Freedom of opinion was favored by Leo X unless papal revenues and the power of the Papacy were affected. Though offices, absolution, and dignities were for sale in Rome, the love of art by Leo X left the papal treasury bankrupt in 1520.¹¹²

Julius II confined the public sale of indulgences to Italy but Leo X, as Pope, extended this sale to Germany in the first year of his rule. The archbishop of Magdeburg, Albert of Brandenburg, who was also administrator of the diocese of Halberstadt, was informed by the Papacy that he might secure the position of archbishop of Mainz. However, a special dis-

109 Erasmus, *Epistles*, III, p. 143.

110 *Ibid.*, III, p. 209.

111 Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, pp. 18, 20.

112 Murray, pp. 97, 115.

pensation from the Pope was necessary because the holding
 of more than one benefice violated Church law.¹¹³ By the final
 arrangements, Albert agreed to accept the additional arch-
 bishopric, and to pay for his confirmation and pallium. He
 secured a loan of twenty-one thousand ducats from the bankers,
 Fuggers, for this purpose. To recover this money, Albert was
 given permission by the Pope to sell indulgences for eight years
 within the provinces of Mainz, Magdeburg and the domains of
 the House of Brandenburg, which in totality was almost half of
 Germany. One-half of the proceeds of these sales was sent to
 the Papacy at Rome to aid the rebuilding of St. Peter's, while
 the remainder was assigned to Albert as part of the income of
 the Archbishop of Mainz.¹¹⁴

Leo X used his power to check opposition to the sale of
 indulgences, and opponents could be excommunicated. The sale
 of these articles was needed to furnish sufficient money for
 a part of the expense of the work of the papal court in Church
 and state, and especially for the rebuilding of St. Peters in
 Rome.¹¹⁵ The receipts from indulgences were used to enrich the
 papal treasury. In some instances, however, the Pope required
 towns to send only thirty to fifty percent of the proceeds of
 the sales to him while the remainder could be devoted to re-
 building sections lost by fire, to erecting cathedrals and to
 constructing dikes and bridges.¹¹⁶

113 Hartmann Grisar, Luther, (London, 1914), I, p. 348.

114 Ibid, pp. 349, 350.

115 Schaff, V, Pt. 2, pp. 764.

116 Schaff, V, Pt. 2, p. 761.

Erasmus, in the "Praise of Folly", wrote of the cheat of pardons and indulgences, causing people to believe that the time of souls in purgatory could be determined accurately to the second by an hour glass. In addition merchants, soldiers or judges may for part of their unjust gains secure atonement for perjuries, lusts, bloodsheds, debaucheries and other gross impieties. And having paid off the arrears they could
117
begin on a new record.

Despite his criticisms of the Pope for the sale of indulgences, Erasmus wrote in praise of Leo X on several occasions. A letter addressed by the humanist to the Pope in 1516 tells of the ruler's "incomparable majesty and more than potential kindness". Erasmus thanked the Pope for his recommendation of the former to the English king and the Church powers in England. The Pope was informed by this letter that the "New Testament" in Greek and Latin was dedicated to him and that Erasmus would write further praise of the Pope in the future. This message seems to show that the scholar had a great amount
118
of respect for Leo X, much more than he had for Julius II. In this same year, Erasmus wrote that "under the happy auspices of Pope Leo, the pontiff greatest in every sense, peace is at last restored to the world". The humanist sent a letter from Louvain on November 13, 1517 to Cardinal Grimani in

117 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 82.

118 Erasmus, Epistles, II, pp. 314-317.

which he wrote that one hardly felt like a Christian until he had visited Rome and greeted the Pope as a God on earth. He thought that the welfare of all people was in the power of the Pope.¹¹⁹ After securing permission from Leo X, Erasmus dedicated his edition of "St. Jerome" to him, and also the "New Testament". The humanist, in a later letter, thanked the Pope for his friendship and promised to eulogize him, since he had aided poetry and learning.¹²⁰

Pope Leo X in turn was not ungrateful. He wrote to Erasmus on January 26, 1517, and gave the latter permission to hold church offices to the annual sum of one thousand ducats of gold. The ruler stated that the work of Erasmus for the good of the people deserved this reward.¹²¹ In this same month, the Pope issued two dispensations in favor of Erasmus. The birth of the latter was declared to be legitimate, and he was freed from any clerical punishment imposed because he had not kept his monastic vows. These dispensations aided the reputation of Erasmus very much.¹²²

Although Erasmus was a friend of Leo X and expected him to make reforms, the abuses of the Papacy continued under this Pope. State revenues, mines, and sale of indulgences

119 Erasmus, Epistles, II, p. 191; III, p. 143.

120 Pastor, VIII, pp. 253-256.

121 Erasmus, Epistles, II, pp. 463, 464.

122 Pastor, VIII, p. 254.

brought about six hundred thousand ducats to the papal treasury annually. This revenue evidently was not sufficient because loans were made on valuable statues, gems, Vatican plate and tapestries. The great wealth of the papal court and lack of sanctity seemed to announce to the world that the Papacy would not lead a reform movement to purify the clerical system. ¹²³

This attitude of the Papacy caused the people to believe that Christianity had declined. Erasmus, in a letter to the chaplain preacher of the Bishop of Basle, dated February 26, 1517, complained that "there are some among Christians, that acknowledge Christ in name but breathe inwardly a Heathen spirit". ¹²⁴ However, he thought that there was a great promise for renewed morality and piety at this time because all Europe was again in an age of peace. In addition, the scholar believed that the Florentine Pope, Leo X, of the house of Medici, would seek now to uplift Christianity by peaceful reform. Erasmus thought also that they great kings of Europe, such as Henry VIII, of England, Francis I of France, and the Emperor Maximilian I of the Holy Roman Empire, all friends of the humanist, would assist in the movement. This wish of Erasmus was not fulfilled, because Leo X did not start the reform. ¹²⁵

This pleasure loving Pope was followed by the patron of learning, Adrian VI, who became the head of the Church in 1522. The new Pope desired to retain all former authority of the office. He did not favor free discussion of Church

123 Schaff, V, Pt. 2, pp. 492-496.

124 Erasmus, Epistles, II, p. 508.

125 Ibid, II, p. 506.

doctrines, but decided to combine reform and repression. However, the officials of the papal curia complained that reform checked the sale of indulgences and dispensations, so the Pope gave up the idea of reform and retained that of repression. He decided to crush Luther and his followers.¹²⁶

In a letter to Adrian VI about this time, Erasmus asked the ruler not to use harsh methods in his repression, because impartial reform with a spirit of unselfishness would be better. In the meantime, Erasmus suggested that the Pope should end all argument and make a promise of amnesty.¹²⁷ Pope Adrian VI did not take this advice of Erasmus because he believed that a loss of revenue, almost equal to two-thirds of the papal income, would result from reform of the Papacy. He did not ask further advice from Erasmus on methods to check the Reformation.¹²⁸

Pope Clement VII, who succeeded to the Papacy in 1523, sent Cardinal Campeggio to Germany in the following year to investigate the revolt and to seek to check the Reformation. The people in that country had many complaints against the Papacy, as, for example, that many holders of benefices in Germany were absentees, living in Italy, that many possessors of benefices belonging to bishoprics had never been consecrated, that money raised by clerical taxes in Germany was spent by the Papacy elsewhere, and that the sale of indulgences caused great damage to religion. A request for a general

126 Creighton, VI, pp. 240-244.

127 Ibid, VI, p. 239.

128 Froude, Life and Letters, p. 319.

council was widespread. The Pope also did not favor a council and those persons who suggested one lost his friendship. Erasmus was of this class, and as a result a book of sermons by Herborn, a Franciscan monk, shortly afterwards was circulated, with the permission of the Pope, attacking Erasmus and other reformers.

The scholar answered this indirect attack of the Pope with an amusing colloquy entitled "On the Eating of Fish" which has reference to Pope Clement VII. In this colloquy, a butcher and a fishmonger are the characters. They discuss the religion and the condition of the Church at that period. The thought of Erasmus can be found in the words of the butcher, "But I hope a Time will come, that the Pope, who is Clement by name, and most of all so by Nature, will mitigate all these things, which hitherto seem to have alienated some people from the Roman Church; that he will bring all Nations to the Communion of it, and will rather pursue those things that are for the Good of the Church than his own private Interest. I hear daily complaints of Yearly Offerings, Pardons, Dispensations and other Exactions and Church Grievances" ¹³¹ And the butcher continued, "what others would do, I can't tell, but as for me, I would make no Scruple of telling fifteen as notorious Lyes as ever Homer told in his Life, and presently wash away my guilt with Holy Water." The fishmonger replied, "I would

129 Janssen, History of the German People at the close of the Middle Ages, (London, 1896), IV, pp. 36-39.

130 Froude, Life and Letters, p. 422.

131 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. (London, 1900), trans. by N. Bailey, II, p. 264.

do the same." Erasmus is pointing out to the readers of this book how the respect for religion has declined because of the abuses of the clergy.
132

In a letter written in 1529, Erasmus declared that the Pope had made a serious mistake when he urged the people to buy indulgences and pardons, even from the point of the clergy, because the humanist believed that the monks and other sellers of indulgences became wealthy from the traffic and as a result their religious work was less efficient.
133 On the other hand, the purchasers likewise deteriorated. In one of his colloquies, Erasmus related that a certain man had died and was now supposed to be in Heaven, because he had carried with him a satchel full of indulgences. Papal bulls in Latin protected him against thieves. These bulls would serve as passports on the way. Erasmus asserted that papal indulgences were insignificant and absurd and could not promote true piety.
134

The decline in religion and the conduct of many of the clergy discouraged Erasmus. He feared that the images too often were regarded as idols, and the same applied to many pictures placed upon church walls. He wrote that even the music in the Church had deteriorated and changed, words used by the clergy in ceremonies were mumbled, mass was sold and only a part was said by priests, secret confessions were for sale, priests were immoral, and the people refused to follow the customs of religion and ceremonies of the Church.
135

132 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. II, p. 273.

133 Froude, Life and Letters, p. 373.

134 Desiderius Erasmus, Fam. Coll. I, pp. 56-60.

135 Froude, Life and Letters, pp. 373-374.

Paul III, as a cardinal, had favored Erasmus' plan of reform. When he became Pope in 1534, he sought to induce the scholar to accept an appointment as a cardinal so he could attend a council, silence the attacks of enemies, and win again great glory in his fight for the Church. ¹³⁶ Many of these attacks were by monks and priests who resented his criticisms of their actions. Letters came to him after 1530, accusing him of being a hypocrite, denying the Church faith and doctrines, and acting as a guide for Luther. ¹³⁷ These hostile opinions of Erasmus were not held by Paul III, because the latter in 1535 appealed especially to the scholar to work in Germany in aid of the Church against the attack of its opponents. The Pope sent a cardinal to Erasmus to persuade him to accept the request and to present the scholar a large gold cup as a gift from the ruler.

However these plans came to nothing because Erasmus was nearing the end of his life. He was very ill, and was carried to Basle from the Catholic town of Freiburg in a litter. The change benefited him at first but later he became worse and ¹³⁸ died in Basle in 1536.

C. Cardinals.

Erasmus thought reforms were necessary because he con-

¹³⁶ Froude, *Life and Letters*, pp. 422-423; Huizinga, pp. 234, 235.

¹³⁷ Froude, *Life and Letters*, pp. 423.

¹³⁸ Froude, *Life and Letters*, p. 431; Jebb, p. 53.

sidered the popes and monks to be leaders in corrupting the Church in his time. However, he also found fault with cardinals, and other officers. While he was in Rome in 1509, Erasmus was well acquainted with the cardinals and he studied their actions closely. ¹³⁹ In the "Praise of Folly", he suggested that the cardinals should follow the actions of the Apostles and not try to be lords and to be worldly rulers. Their dress drew this comment, "what that inner Purple? is it not an earnest and fervent love of God? or what that outward, whose loose plaits and long Train fall round his Reverence's Mule, and are large enough to cover a Camel...?" Erasmus declared that cardinals did not need honor and wealth, as the Apostles were poor and were willing to give their lives to ¹⁴⁰ the people of Christ.

Pope Leo X clearly did not seek to make the cardinals live like the Apostles, since he appointed new cardinals for the main purpose of financial and political consideration. At least thirty-one received positions as cardinals during his rule because of these reasons. The Pope seized the goods and lands of three cardinals who were in prison, but a large money payment influenced him to release two of these prisoners. The frequent appointments, and the relations with the

139 Pastor, VII, p. 323; VIII, p. 140.

140 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, pp. 144, 145.

Ibid, pp. 143-145; Froude, Life and Letters, pp. 103, 165.

three cardinals, indicate that Leo X controlled the cardinal college. In his criticism of the Pope and the cardinals, Erasmus praised the education, progressiveness, and efficiency of the Pope and cardinals but pointed out their personal vices as being unworthy.

141

D. Bishops.

Erasmus' criticisms of bishops were more complete and more bitter than his criticisms of the cardinals. This would be expected, since he had made but one trip to Italy, and, as a result, his opportunities to observe the conduct of cardinals were fewer than those in connection with the bishops.

The income of the bishop was formed in several ways. He received gifts, revenues from land, tithes, clerical taxes, proceeds from the sale of indulgences, and contributions by newly appointed priests. In some cases, a bishop would act as an administrator of another diocese and receive pay for the work.

142

These various methods of gaining wealth caused Erasmus to criticize the bishop and archbishops severely. He declared that bishops sought now only to feed themselves, "... and for the care of their Flock, either put it over to Christ, or lay it all on their Suffragans, as they call 'em, or some poor Vicars. Nor do they so much as remember their name, or what the word Bishop signifies; to wit, Labour, Care and Trouble. But in racking to gather moneys, they truly act the part of

141 Creighton, V, p. 285, 286.

142 Schaff, V, Pt. 1, pp. 794-797.

Bishops and herein acquit themselves to be no blind Seers".¹⁴³

In addition to the desire to gain wealth, the bishops of the age of Erasmus were often declared to be of a low moral standard. Erasmus, in his annotations on the New Testament, declared that almost anyone could become a bishop, even immoral priests, criminals, and vulgar men. However, the scholar wrote that a man, who had two wives in succession, could not become a bishop.¹⁴⁴ In a certain colloquy, Erasmus stated that bishops who sought benefices would often sacrifice their money and morals in an effort to obtain the grant. He explained this desire by writing that a benefice meant a life of ease and that many men preferred to own a benefice instead of a home.¹⁴⁵

The holding of a benefice did not check the bishops from leaving their charges to go on a pilgrimage to distant lands. However, in one colloquy, Erasmus wrote that a certain archbishop promised to protect the wife of one who travelled to a holy place on a pilgrimage.¹⁴⁶ During the absence of the husband, the archbishop forced the wife to become his concubine,¹⁴⁷ and killed her when the husband returned. Erasmus advised the bishops, as well as others of the clergy, to seek books and knowledge instead of concubines.¹⁴⁸

The delinquencies of the bishops discouraged Erasmus

143 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 144.

144 Smith, p. 171.

145 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. I, p. 64

146 Ibid, III, p. 277.

147 Ibid, III, p. 278.

148 Ibid, I, p. 64.

very much and he declared that these bishops, as well as Popes, were ridiculed by the laity. He feared that their misdeeds would cause a revolt against the Church. The reasons for this fear are contained in one of his statements, in which he wrote "As if the Church had any deadlier enemies than wicked Prelates, who not only suffer Christ to run out of request for want of preaching him, but hinder his spreading by their multitudes of Laws, meerly contriv'd for their own profit, corrupt him by their forc'd expositions and murder him by the evil example of their pestilent life." He ridicules the bishops but shows his loyalty to the Church.

E. Priests.

During the age of Erasmus, the bishop of the diocese could reject or allow the nomination of a priest by certain men of the laity, usually a rich feudal noble. A priest was required to be twenty-five years of age, truthful, moral, to use simple dress and diet, and to keep away from theaters and taverns. The priest's income consisted of voluntary fees, as a rule, though in Germany this officer received a small salary in addition to tithes and revenue from clerical lands. Many priests amassed considerable wealth through these payments of money by the laity. This collection of money by clerics drew the criticism of Erasmus. He declared that they were often better lawyers than religious leaders, if one judged by their ability to collect money.

149 Erasmus, *Fam. Coll.* III, p. 161.

150 Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, p. 148.

151 Schaff, V, Pt. 1, pp. 799-803.

152 Erasmus, *Select Colloquies*, (Philadelphia, 1902), pp. 44, 98.

153 *Ibid.*, *Praise of Folly*, p. 151.

This mercenary conduct of the priests is reflected in their attitude toward ceremonies. In a letter written in 1530, Erasmus stated that priests marched up and down the aisles during communion, and talked loudly during the sacrament. He declared that this sight caused him to compare them to shoemakers working at a trade for the sole purpose of earning an income. In the reading of the Scriptures, the priest would often burlesque and try to be witty by substituting wicked words in the reading.¹⁵⁴ Erasmus declared that priests often inquired into personal secrets during a confession, and later told what was confessed. He did not consider it safe to trust a priest with a secret. The scholar wrote that many priests were uneducated and foolish but would listen to a confession earnestly though their minds were not fixed upon the act of confession. Therefore, the priest could not tell a good deed from a bad one, and was not able to offer valuable advice.¹⁵⁵ In addition to their inefficiency in confession, priests mumbled prayers so that no man nor God could hear or understand them, or thundered the words and caused the same result.¹⁵⁶ The priest's work in the death ceremony also drew the criticism of Erasmus. In a colloquy, he wrote that the priest engaged in spirited argument with friars as to which officer should receive the confession from a dying man. The problem was solved by having

154 Froude, *Life and Letters*, pp. 131, 386.

155 Erasmus, *Fam. Coll.* I, p. 101.

156 *Ibid*, *Praise of Folly*, pp. 150, 151.

the patient make a confession to each cleric. The ceremonies of tolling the bell, pardon for sins, relief from punishment in purgatory, and for burial were paid for by the dying man to the priest before death. In this case, the patient was rich and the priest was eager to give all religious ceremonies connected with death. However, in another case, the patient lived in poverty so the priest did not exert himself for the dying man. The latter desired only two of these ceremonies because he placed more faith in the Scriptures and Christ than in ceremonies.

157

Erasmus, in general, thought that the number of church ceremonies and confessions should be reduced, and that persons should be barred from taking a sacrament unless they could go through the act with a pure conscience. This requirement evidently was not always enforced because a soldier in war might commit many crimes such as robbery, arson, rape of nuns, or murder, and yet upon his return, could find a priest who would forgive his sins by muttering some words, and by laying a hand upon the soldier. Erasmus stated that this soldier did not believe that the devil favored this pardon of sins, but that God did so because He was of a forgiving nature.

158

159

The scholar explained the priest's leniency in confession by declaring that the latter would often hasten, after this work was completed, to a drinking party or to a gambling

157 Erasmus, *Fam. Coll.* III, pp. 13-21.

158 *Ibid.*, I, pp. 196, 197.

159 *Ibid.*, I, pp. 67-71.

group. In this association, the priest mixed with the worst classes of society. Erasmus declared that the priest should live a good life at all times because the proper garb and the office itself did not guarantee that the priest would have good morals.¹⁶⁰ However, the priests desired to shift religious burdens to the monks and they to the people. In speaking of the priests, Erasmus asserts "... these jolly fellows say they have sufficiently discharged their office if they but anyhow mumble over a few odd Prayers, which, so help me, Hercules!" The duties to their people were not as important to the priest as worldly desires were.¹⁶¹

These desires produced a reflex action upon the morals of priests. Erasmus criticised these officers in his annotations upon the "New Testament." He thought that many lived evil lives. Since celibacy was broken constantly he suggested that priests, who could not keep the vow, should be allowed to have wives.¹⁶² In that age, Erasmus declared that the celibates were many and the chaste were few. He stated that very few priests, secular or regular, at that time were chaste. The humanist wrote that priests "count it no crime to game, whore, and drink, tho' these Things are forbidden both by the Law of God and Man." Furthermore, a priest would often profess publicly a clean life, and yet live privately an immoral life.¹⁶³ An amusing incident along this line was written by Erasmus

160 Froude, Life and Letters, p. 306.

161 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 150.

162 Froude, Life and Letters, p. 133.

163 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. II, p. 308.

in a colloquy. The story relates that a priest was caught in a home with the wife of a layman. The husband chased the priest to a certain room, where the latter locked the door and prayed to the Virgin to make his body smaller so that he might escape through a little window. In this way he made his exit.¹⁶⁴ The life of such priests caused some to adopt peculiar customs when danger was near. Erasmus wrote of a priest who was traveling on a ship when a storm rose. The cleric stripped himself to his shirt, because he feared that the ship would sink, and then preached to the others upon the benefits of confession. After receiving some confessions of lay companions, the priest gave his confession to a monk on the ship, and the latter did similarly to the priest. Both clerics were placed by the crew in a boat, but the former, in exchanging confessions again, were thrown into the sea. However, the priest reached the shore safely by grasping a floating mast.¹⁶⁵

F. Monasticism.

Popes, bishops and priests were not the only members of the clergy to suffer criticism for offenses committed. In addition to these groups, monks and nuns drew bitter strictures from Erasmus. The latter's experience in a monastery, and his frequent association with monks gave him much material for writing on monasticism.¹⁶⁶

Erasmus has been criticised somewhat because he attacked

164 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. II, p. 148; Select Coll. pp. 151-153

165 Erasmus Fam. Coll. II, pp. 13-16.

166 Froude, I, Short Studies, pp. 76, 77.

monks, after having been a member of a monastic order. However, monastic life did not appeal to him. In a letter written in 1514, to a friend, Erasmus stated his reasons for giving up the monastic life, namely, that his guardians had forced him to enter the Steyn monastery at Gouda, that his body was weak physically, that his mind called for freedom and rebelled against following ceremonies, and that vice prevailed in the monastery.

167

In another letter, Erasmus related the story of a boy forced to enter a monastery. This letter was signed with a fictitious name. The boy found the monastery to be damp and unhealthful, and that bad food was served. He could not sleep there, so desired to leave, but was unable to secure permission to do so. Fear of terrible punishment checked desertion, so he studied secretly, refused to take part in the drinking, and planned to leave when possible. A bishop came later to the monastery and selected the boy as his clerk. Later he sent him to a university. The letter tells about the lax discipline of the monks, the cruel beating of boys, the meaningless ceremonies and other objections to the monastery. The events and description follow so closely the life of Erasmus that it would seem as if he were describing his own personal life in

168

the Steyn monastery.

After leaving the monastery, Erasmus was so bitter against the monks that he declared they were responsible for all of the abuses in the Church at that time. He refused to obey the

167 Erasmus, Epistles, II, pp. 141-143; Huizinga, p. 111.

168 Erasmus, Epistles, II, pp. 352-363.

the request of the prior of Steyn to return because he felt that, although his own morals had not been injured by the monastic life, he did not desire to risk them further.¹⁶⁹

While in England, he gave up the clerical dress to save criticism, and did so later in Italy, to save himself from an attack by laymen who ridiculed the habit. Pope Julius II granted him a dispensation which released the scholar from his monastic vows.¹⁷⁰

The desire of Erasmus to escape from monasticism can be more fully explained as we study the life of the monastery of that age. In one of his colloquies, Erasmus pictured two old men in a dialogue in which one deliberated whether to hang himself or go into a monastery. Hating himself and choosing the more cruel method of dying,¹⁷¹ he entered the monastery. Another character in this story declared that some entered monasteries in order to live more comfortably. The first speaker related that he had gone to Ireland where he became a monk for two months. However, the Irish discipline was too mild, so he became a Scottish monk, in an order which some described as follows: "These are the men who are wholly dead to the world". The lazy, effeminate life there, and the ignorance of the monks caused the newcomer to leave and become a Benedictine monk in France. The lack of faith

169 Janssen, III, pp. 8, 9.

170 Frounde, I, Short Studies, p. 82; Erasmus, Epistles, II, pp. 148, 149.

171 Erasmus, Select Coll. p. 34; Fam. Coll. II, p. 86.

exhibited by the Benedictines caused him to change orders again and he became a Crossbearer, the order of Trinitarians or Cruciferi. These carried crosses of various colors but held no piety in their hearts. This colloquy by Erasmus gives us a general survey of monastic orders in the monasteries. ¹⁷²

In another colloquy, Erasmus wrote that the abbot of a certain monastery did not allow his monks to read much, because he feared that they would know more than he. And he did not have a single book in his room. The abbot declared that his monks enjoyed hunting, horses, court life, and long prayers, but did not care to study the Bible. ¹⁷³ The humanist asserted that a monk who devoted his time to drunkenness, public and secret relations with women, and to other evils, would often be promoted to the position of an abbot. ¹⁷⁴

It was difficult to secure release from a monastery after one became a monk. Erasmus relates that a cardinal had told him of a Dominican group that had buried a young monk alive when the latter's father demanded his release. This boy had been tricked into joining the order. A similar case occurred in Poland with Franciscian monks as the guilty persons. Papal bulls granting release to a monk were often torn up, while the one who asked for the decree would be thrown into prison. A further criticism of monks is made by Erasmus in another writing, in which he declared that certain monks claimed to be Benedictines but did not approach St. Benedict in wearing his

172 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. II, pp. 86-88; Select Coll. pp. 34-38.

173 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. p. 115; Select Coll. pp. 175, 176.

174 Erasmus, Epistles, II, pp. 363, 364.

dress, or in following his life. Augustian monks were guilty of the same act, in living very differently from the founder of the order.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, Erasmus affirmed that monks did not deserve to be called religious, because the majority were so far from religion. He declared that many men avoided monks since the belief was prevalent that bad luck followed such a meeting, because of the low standard of monasticism.¹⁷⁶

This low standard was caused by the lax discipline and bad habits of many monks. Erasmus said that they rejoiced in being illiterate. They boasted frequently that they followed the lives of the early Apostles, though they never tried to live like Christ. The monks of one order endeavored to live in a different way from other monastic groups, and yet all loved wine and women. Many monks too were beggars and one could meet them on ships, on roads, or in inns.¹⁷⁷ However, in one colloquy, Erasmus explains that Franciscans would often be barred from inns since they had no money but would eat and drink heavily if allowed to do so. A certain country parson refused to allow some Franciscans (Erasmus called them "Rich Beggars") to enter his home, because he declared they were chicken thieves.¹⁷⁸ In one writing Erasmus described a monk as follows; "He was a swindging fellow, with a red Face, a paunch Gut, and a hopper arse. You would take him to be a Master of the Science, and one that I verily believe drinks more than one Pint of Wine at a Meal". In this case, the emperor Ferd-

175 Erasmus, Ciceronianus, (New York, 1905), pp. 65, 93.

176 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 126.

177 Ibid, pp. 126-129.

178 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. II, pp. 96,97; Select Coll. pp. 145-155.

inand allowed each monk to take four pints of wine a day out of the royal cellar, because the king had a bounteous disposition, and a pious inclination. Moreover this monk did not possess any money.¹⁷⁹ Erasmus believed that Benedictine monks drank much and lived highly, and as a result they had to visit a "hot house" every twelve days to sweat out diseases caused by their method of living.¹⁸⁰ Erasmus attacked the habit of monks in using a confession to steal the virtue of girls. Moreover, he denounced these clerics for conducting ceremonies, while they were "reeking with filth".¹⁸¹

The monks were often careless of their morals but paid particular attention to their dress. Erasmus described the dress of Franciscans in one of his writings. The gown was ash colored, and also the cowl, the shoes had cut uppers, and a rope girdle was worn around the waist. The members shaved their heads.¹⁸² The humanist declared that some monks of this order persuaded themselves that st. Benedict was "... mightily attached to them, if they wear his cowl and cloke; tho I don't believe he ever wore one so full of folds, and that cost so much money, and they are not afraid of his Anger, in that they do not imitate him in his Life at all".¹⁸³

This expensive dress of Benedictines required wealth. This order, and others, recruited young friars who had been instructed by bishops on methods of gaining wealth, and in defense of their

179 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. III, p. 145.

180 Ibid, II, p. 293.

181 Froude, I, Short Studies, p. 87.

182 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. III, p. 198.

183 Ibid, II, p. 311.

possessions. The nobility would often control a monastery and indirectly fill vacant offices with unqualified holders. Monks collected money in Germany to send to Rome, and used sacred things for financial gain.¹⁸⁴ Erasmus declared that rich gifts should not be made to monasteries as luxury was introduced by donations of this kind. He advised gifts only for necessities.¹⁸⁵

Moreover, the monks were not worthy of rich rewards, as their faith was often of a low standard. Erasmus wrote that Franciscans carried their faith in their hands alone, in the form of a book containing the rule of St. Francis, but other monks used their mouths to hold their beliefs. The scholar advised each monk to have faith in his head, mouth and heart if he desired to do good work.¹⁸⁶ In a letter to John of Louvain, dated January 5, 1518, Erasmus wrote that the only religion in monasteries was that found in Church services and ceremonies. John of Louvain was a Franciscan and Erasmus told him that the humanist's desire was that the members of religious orders would become worthy of that title.¹⁸⁷ Dominicans preached that pardon could be secured for crimes committed in war, so that a soldier could commit any misdeed on society and be pardoned for the sin if he paid a small amount of money. Erasmus made one of his characters say that this would be true even if one robbed Christ and cut off his head. In war time, a monk might visit three different countries and preach that God was on the side of each

184 Janssen, II, p. 298.

185 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. I, p. 201.

186 Ibid, I, p. 81.

187 Erasmus, Epistles, III, pp. 209, 210.

nation, though two might be enemies. The faith of monks often led to superstition. Erasmus wrote in a colloquy, "I know some monks so superstitious that they think themselves in the Jaws of the Devil if by chance they are without their sacred Vestments; but they are not at all afraid of his Claws, while they are lying, slandering, drunkening and acting maliciously." 189

This superstition was associated with sacred relics at the various shrines. Erasmus denounced the mechanical ceremonies, gifts to shrines instead of to charity, the lack of true belief in saints but full belief in relics, and the lack of internal religion. Furthermore, he believed that monks fostered these undesirable conditions. He urged them to develop religion only along useful and logical lines. 190 The foolishness of pilgrimages and the deceit of monks with relics were exposed by Erasmus in several writings. He stated that the monks at the shrine of St. James at Compostella, in Spain, covered one pilgrim's clothes with shells, lead and tin images when he visited there. Many pilgrims merely saluted the saint and did not leave rich gifts. Erasmus wrote that he had seen in chapels many forged relics, such as St. Peter's finger or water from a spring started by the Holy Virgin. 191 Erasmus and Colet visited the shrine of St. Thomas in Kent, England, and the former related the experiences there in a colloquy. The attendants wore fine silken garments, and golden candlesticks and a staff of silver were seen. The face of the saint was set in jewels. St. Thomas was said to have been a friend to the poor, and Colet in skeptical vein

188 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. I, p. 70.

189 Ibid, II, pp. 309-311.

190 Creighton, VI, p. 47.

191 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. II, pp. 210, 219.

asked the keeper if a widow would, in any case, be permitted to have part of the saint's wealth there. Because of this inquiry, Erasmus said they would have been thrown out if money had not been given to the keeper. The casket of St. Thomas was of gold, and lined with rare jewels, some of which were larger than a goose egg. The place that was used for the Virgin Mary was surrounded by iron bars to prevent theft of gems. Friars near the shrine sprinkled travellers with holy water and offered the sole of an old leather shoe to be kissed, if the pilgrim gave them money, because they claimed it belonged to St. Thomas. Erasmus wrote that the monks were careful to keep this leather sole tied to a glass ring, which they carried, so that it might not be stolen. This shrine was at a Benedictine monastery and various relics were shown to Erasmus, such as the saint's handkerchief and a coarse silk gown. Erasmus ridiculed the showing of linen rags which the saint was said to have used for wiping sweat from his body, and for blowing his nose. The humanist asserted that many rags retained "still the Marks of the Snot!"¹⁹² The belief in the power of relics at shrines gave a reflex action upon the people. Erasmus ridiculed their belief that relics in a house would make it sacred, and the idea that the touching of Christ's cross gave strength to a person. The scholar wrote that various chapels had enough wood reputed to be from the cross of Christ to load a large ship. Moreover, these chapels claimed to have large quantities of the Virgin Mary's milk,

192 Erasmus, *Fam. Coll.* II, pp. 237-244.

because many of them boasted of having that relic. Erasmus declared that God's mildness allowed irreligious persons to rob Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit and God himself by making false claims about these great beings. A pilgrim would be thrown out of a chapel if he questioned the genuineness of the milk, unless he used bribery. The scholar stated that the sincere belief of pilgrims in the value of relics caused them to leave so much money and other riches on the altar table that the wealth of Midas and Croesus was small in comparison.¹⁹³

The faith in relics was comparable with the belief of some persons in certain ceremonies when a death occurred. Monks of several orders would often take part, such as Franciscans in grey dress, Dominicans in black, and Augustinians in white. Erasmus wrote that these orders drew lots to find their places in the funeral procession, and each group collected a sum of money from the dying man for their services. In a colloquy, the scholar stated that a Franciscan coat was placed about the patient, after the coat had been consecrated with holy water and prayers. The patient held a wax candle and a crucifix until death came. The corpse was buried in the Franciscan dress.¹⁹⁴ This act was completed because the Franciscan monks claimed that neither the devil or worms would touch a body in the dress of their order. Erasmus wrote in regard to this claim, that these monks asserted the dress would save a Turk and "It would save the Devil himself if he would suffer it to

193 Erasmus, *Fam. Coll.* II, pp. 220-236.

194 *Ibid.*, III, pp. 5-17.

be put on him, and could but believe this Revelation".¹⁹⁵ This clever satire ridiculed, to the pleasure of the laity, the claim of the monks. The Franciscans furthermore thought that a great number of deaths in their order would cause the Lord to grant them special favor in heaven.¹⁹⁶

Erasmus returned to the attack, by criticising the belief of monks in purgatory and heaven. According to him, the Franciscans claimed that they would not suffer any punishment of fire in purgatory, because they could not commit sin. Erasmus denounced such beliefs, which often became traditions. He affirmed that the Lord had said that those persons who preferred traditions to His commands and claimed to be holier than He, should erect for themselves a new Heaven.¹⁹⁷ When the monks reached Heaven, Christ would ask, "Whence this new kind of Jews"? Christ will say also, "I acknowledge one commandment which is truly mine, of which alone I hear nothing. I promised, it is true, my Father's heritage and that without parables, not to crows, odd prayers and fastings, but to the duties of Faith and Charity. Nor can I acknowledge them that least acknowledge their faults....".¹⁹⁸

These criticisms of their lives by Erasmus, especially in his "Praise of Folly", caused the monks to attack him. The humanist stated that he saw no reason for this because the Pope had read the book and laughed at it, though he criticised

195 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. III, pp. 209.210.

196 Ibid, III, pp.198,207.

197 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 130.

198 Ibid, pp. 126-129; Frederic Seebohm, The Oxford Reformers, (New York, 1896), p. 200.

Popes severely in it. He wrote that he would be moderate in his future works but he would not guarantee them to be free from criticism, for he would try to write only things worthy of Christ.¹⁹⁹ However, in an effort to save the Church from destruction, Erasmus later returned to his bitter satires on the monastic orders. In a colloquy, he mentioned almost all of the evils discussed in this division on monasticism, so it can be used as a summary on this subject. He wrote: "Good God! What Monsters there are in the World! What Men in Holy Orders to be ashamed of nothing! Why certainly they think they are talking to Musrooms, and not to Men".²⁰⁰ In addition, "But among them all that are thus nice, how many do we see that are not at all afraid to come to the Lord's Table drunk with the last night's Debauch? How fearful are they lest they should touch the wafer with that Part of the Hand that has not been dipp'd in consecrated oil? Why are they not as religious in taking care that an unhallow'd Mind²⁰¹ does not offend the Lord himself?"

In these colloquies and the "Praise of Folly" Erasmus attacked bitterly the monastic orders. He was subject to the counter attack of monks who used bitter statements in sermons on some occasions to criticize him before their congregations, and of others who denounced his writings.²⁰² However, Erasmus desired to reform monasticism and risked these attacks. He considered the power of the Pope to be

199 Erasmus, Epistles III, pp. 209, 210.

200 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. III, p. 143.

201 Ibid, II, p. 297.

202 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. III, p. 84; Seebohm, p. 200.

too lax over these orders, for not one would show the image of Christ, although they used Jewish laws to judge the conduct of others.²⁰³ The scholar thought that monks and friars should be barred from the reformed Church, and he advised the Pope to this effect. He wrote that these groups cared merely for themselves, especially as to the food they ate. Therefore, when the people became better educated and understood these abuses fostered by monks and friars, the power of these groups would be abolished.²⁰⁴

Some of the criticisms of monks made by Erasmus were applied by him also against nuns. He expressed his opinion of the nunneries of that age by a few lines in a colloquy, in which he advised women, "... not to precipitate themselves unadvisedly into that State from which there is no getting out afterwards: And the rather, because their Chastity is more in Danger in a Cloyster than out of it: and beside that, you may do whatsoever is done there as well at Home".²⁰⁵ The reader may find the reasons for this opinion in some other writings of Erasmus. He criticized nuns in another colloquy for drinking wine at night, and then later dancing and singing immoral songs. Erasmus did not believe that nuns should indulge in these pleasures.²⁰⁶ The scholar emphasized the dangers of a nunnery in one of his writings in which a dialogue between a lover and a maiden is related. The latter planned to enter a nunnery but the lover objected, and declared that monks "are

203 Erasmus, Epistles, II, p. 144.

204 Proude, I, Short Studies, p. 86.

205 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. I, p. 251

206 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. II, p. 294.

207

no Capons", and "are called Fathers", and endanger women.

The lover stated that all nuns were not virgins unless they could be like the Virgin Mary, and remain virgins after child-

208

birth. However, the girl entered the nunnery despite the objections of the lover. The immoral life there endangered the maiden, and after twelve days of association with the nuns, she begged her parents to secure her release if they desired to save her life. The parents disregarded the great cost of obtaining this release, and saved their daughter who declared that she had lost her desire to be a nun, because

209

"The burnt child dreads the Fire". Erasmus claimed that little girls were often taken to nunneries and shown the bright features of the life there, such as the neat chapels, well kept gardens, and the educational conversation with some nuns. These early impressions influenced girls to become

210

nuns later. The patriarch or director of a certain nunnery was cited by Erasmus as being nothing but a drunkard, and his two assistants lacked education, and qualities of manhood, although these men were kind and civil to little girls and their parents whenever the authorities of the nunnery met them.

211

Erasmus declared that the gains of life in a convent were not numerous and consisted of a veil, a stole (a long narrow scarf fringed at the ends), and certain ceremonies which did not

207 Erasmus, Fam. Coll., I, pp. 242, 243.

208 Ibid., I, pp. 245.

209 Ibid., I, p. 255.

210 Ibid., I, p. 243.

211 Ibid., p. 243.

advance piety or make one's body more acceptable to Christ,
 because he regarded only the purity of the mind.²¹²

G. Theologians.

The attacks of Erasmus upon the immoral life of monks and nuns were not directed against theologians, although he criticised the latter class on other grounds. He declared that they defended their own ignorance with the claim that it was piety. They denounced anyone who criticised them as a person who sought to destroy religion, and so influenced the common people against the fault finder.²¹³

On the other hand, the theologians were eager to criticise religious writings of others. Erasmus believed they would attack him when he turned to the writing of sacred literature in 1505. He expected them to denounce his publication of Laurentius' Valla's "Notes on the New Testament" although they would benefit greatly by the work.²¹⁴ The theologians attacked Erasmus because he published his annotations on the "New Testament" and changed the Scriptures, though many obscure ideas were cleared by the publication. The humanist defended the work by declaring that the educated class of writers had a right to correct the ignorant.²¹⁵ Erasmus was not discouraged by the attack of the theologians upon his writings, because he thought they would not hesitate to criticize and denounce

212 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. I, p. 248.

213 Erasmus, Epistles, II, p. 507.

214 Ibid, I, p. 381.

215 Ibid, I, p. 383.

works that were approved even by the Pope.²¹⁶ However, the scholar stated that he found nothing more trying than the condemnation by certain theological sycophants of writings which they had never read. He thought that they should try to learn, instead of always finding fault, because he had tried to write particularly for their benefit.²¹⁷ Erasmus did not believe that these divines were the only ones privileged to speak correctly although they claimed the Holy Spirit taught them the right methods of interpretation.²¹⁸

The theologians at the University of Louvain seemed to have great respect for Erasmus, because they invited the latter to join their order. This was unusual, since Erasmus had not taken a degree there.²¹⁹ However, he accepted the invitation, although the university did not allow him then to assume the title of doctor.²²⁰ These associates praised the publication of the works of Jerome by Erasmus and found no fault with his annotations on the "New Testament". This caused Erasmus to state in 1518 that he was having a wonderful friendship with the theologians at Louvain.²²¹ In the same year, however, he wrote that the theologians at Cologne were engaged in a bitter battle, and had dragged the name of Erasmus into the dispute, so he fared better at Louvain than at

216 Erasmus, Epistles, II, p. 331.

217 Ibid, III, p. 315.

218 Ibid, I, p. 382.

219 Ibid, III, p. 23, 25, 27.

220 Ibid, III, p. 113.

221 Ibid, III, p. 303.

222

Cologne. Two years earlier, Erasmus had called these divines at Louvain, pseudo-theologians, since they had praised him in his presence but had bitten him behind his back like an enemy. And he declared, "How I wish great Jupiter would break up and recast this whole race of creatures, who contribute nothing to make people either better or more learned, and yet give trouble to everybody." In the interval, their difficulties had been adjusted.

Theologians accused Erasmus of writing a book called "Nemo." They claimed to have better eyes than lynxes and to know that it was his work, although Ulrich von Hutten was really the author. They also claimed that he was the writer of "Fever" which the scholar said was greatly different from his works. The writings of Erasmus were not appreciated by the theologians, although many other persons, except a few monks, thanked the scholar for his work. Erasmus declared that theologians would not accept his writings because they did not desire to be any wiser.

The humanist thought this class showed its ignorance by the great waste of time its members spent upon foolish questions. Some of these were: "Could Christ have taken upon Him the likeness of a woman, or of the Devil, or of an ass, or a Stone, or of a gourd?" "... and then how that Gourd should have Preach't, wrought miracles, or been hung on the Cross."

222 Erasmus, Epistles, III, p. 346.

223 Ibid, II, p. 405.

224 Ibid, III, pp. 383, 384.

225 Ibid, III, p. 385, 386.

226 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 115; Seebhm, p. 196.

Another question was in regard to what Peter had consecrated if he had administered the sacrament while Christ's body was upon the cross. Another was as to whether there would be any eating and drinking after the resurrection. Erasmus wrote that "there are infinite of these subtile Trifles and others more subtile than these; of Notions, Relations, ... Formalities, ... which no one can percieve without ... eyes, that could look through a stone-wall".

The scholar claimed that theologians boasted of their ability to interpret things of the greatest obscurity, because of their method of investigation. ²²⁷ Erasmus declared that the theologians changed the doctrines advocated by the Apostles if they considered the verses were not intricate enough to call for the services of a master. He denounced these divines for claiming that the questioning of hidden meanings was sacrilegious, and also because they asserted that people should show better reverence for ²²⁸ obscure secrets of religion. The theologians claimed that their work and ideas were necessary to keep the ²²⁹ Church alive. They maintained that no one could become a Christian solely by worship of saints or by reading the Bible, because grace comes only from theologians. ²³⁰ These doctrines did not find favor with the humanist.

227 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 116.

228 Ibid, pp. 120-122.

229 Ibid, p. 123.

230 Ibid, p. 124.

H. The Bible

Erasmus protested against the restriction of the reading of the Bible to a few persons. He desired that this book should be translated into all tongues, and that it should be read by women, Turks, Irish, and all people. This could easily be done, because Christ did not teach difficult doctrines. He wished that all people might come to Christ and read the Gospels, and that children might be instructed in the Bible. ²³¹

While he was in Paris in 1505, Erasmus wrote concerning his first work, which related directly to the Bible. He stated that he had found during the previous summer the "Notes on the New Testament" by Laurentius Valla. The scholar found the book in an old library, and though fearing the old antagonism to Valla because of this book, Erasmus decided to publish the notes for the benefit of thousands of students. ²³²

This work by Valla encouraged the humanist to develop further material on the Bible, and he published the annotations on the New Testament in 1516. Erasmus related to a friend how this work was started and completed. He wrote that ten Greek manuscripts were studied, and those which were the most genuine were followed. Collating these copies, a translation into Latin was made by Erasmus, who placed it in parallel columns with the Greek text, in order that the reader could compare the two versions. The scholar stated that he

²³¹ Smith, p. 185.

²³² Erasmus, Epistles, I, p. 381.

tried to keep the integrity of the Latin language as far as possible without injuring the simple language of the Apostles. He explained obscure and doubtful sentences with as little deviation from the original as possible, and based his explanation upon the writings of ancient Church writers, such as Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine. ²³³ Some annotations were added to inform the reader upon whose authority various judgments rested, but the ancient authors were always cited. ²³⁴ The scholar asserted that he did not tear up the Vulgate edition, but that he had pointed out its errors and explained passages that were not clear. Theologians admitted, according to Erasmus, that he had explained over six hundred passages that had been obscure before. ²³⁵ He hoped that this work would be a great aid to sacred studies and this reward is all that the humanist desired. He dedicated the writing to Pope Leo X. ²³⁶

The second edition of Erasmus was the basis of Luther's celebrated translation of the "New Testament" into German by 1522, and also that into French during the following year. It soon had great influence over all Europe. Spanish and English translations also were made later. ²³⁷

The majority of the educated class approved the annotations on the "New Testament", although one college of

²³³ Erasmus, Epistles, III, p. 450.

²³⁴ Ibid, III, p. 431.

²³⁵ Ibid, III, p. 431.

²³⁶ Ibid, III, p. 432.

²³⁷ Smith, pp. 185, 186.

238

theology at Cambridge barred its circulation there. This college condemned the work because it was started without the authority of a general council. Erasmus claimed that even the version used by the Cambridge people was written first, and approved later, and that his edition might ultimately receive a similar approval. He pointed out that the version that had been used was based upon various Church writers of former times, hence he doubted whether any council had approved the accepted version. He said further that a printer might make errors in editing a religious work, hence the official Bible might not be perfect. ²³⁹ The scholar wrote that his book might correct errors made by a council. He related that he had followed a law made by a former Church council, in having a bishop and two teachers of theology approve the work before it was published. ²⁴⁰ The Pope had known of his work and approved the idea before the writing was completed. ²⁴¹ Erasmus asserted that all other theologians had approved the book, and, that if the divines at Cambridge attacked this work, they would tear to pieces something favored by the Pope. He expected the people of the future to be much more appreciative of the work on the ²⁴² New Testament.

The humanist realized that the novelty of "Novum Instrumentum" offended some people, but he thought that the majority of educated people everywhere liked the writing. He expected

238 Erasmus, Epistles, II, p. 324.

239 Ibid, III, p. 325.

240 Ibid, II, p. 329.

241 Ibid, II, p. 331.

242 Ibid, II, pp. 330, 332.

to publish a second edition that would please all persons.

Albert, the archbishop of Mainz, praised Erasmus for his correction of the New Testament, because it freed the former version from errors and obscurity. ²⁴⁴

Erasmus was not satisfied with the first edition of the "New Testament", since he thought it had been hurried through the press at Basle, instead of being edited. ²⁴⁵ He hoped to better this second edition and make it more worthy of Pope Leo X than the first. ²⁴⁶ When the latter was informed of the new edition, he sent a papal brief to Erasmus in which he praised the scholar for his great work in the first edition, which the Pope considered most perfect. ²⁴⁷ The Pope thought that this second edition would benefit greatly the students of theology and Catholicism. He encouraged Erasmus to continue and to complete the work and trusted that the humanist would receive suitable reward in Heaven, commendation from the Pope, and ²⁴⁸ perpetual praise from all loyal Christians.

The work was very difficult and Erasmus wrote in 1517 that his labor on the "New Testament" had almost cost him his eyesight, and also his life, but he hoped to finish it before death came. ²⁴⁹ In this second edition, Erasmus had less fear in making changes from the former version than he had in the first publication, because many educated men had encouraged him in ²⁵⁰ that direction. He supported these changes by an enlarged

243 Erasmus, Epistles, III, p. 37.

244 Ibid, III, p. 57.

245 Ibid, III, p. 113.

246 Ibid, III, p. 429.

247 Ibid, III, p. 436.

248 Ibid, III, p. 437.

249 Ibid, III, p. 91.

250 Ibid, III, p. 324.

citation of authorities, and altered those sentences that might offend educated and pious minds. The scholar declared that critics might despise his work but they must admit that many passages had been made clear. He stated that he had translated the Greek text but had also pointed out in notes which reading he approved or disapproved. ²⁵¹ Errors had been corrected by him but the faith was not endangered by this ²⁵² work.

The preface to the first edition of the "New Testament" was expanded by Erasmus into the book entitled, "The Method of Theology", which was published separately in 1519. In this work, he urged all to have a better knowledge of the original languages on which to build studies in other subjects. He advised the readers to learn certain verses in this work. He gave certain rules on reading the Bible, such as one to interpret figurative language. ²⁵³ Erasmus also wrote "Paraphrases" on all books of the New Testament except St. John. These followed the leadership of the original Scripture, but he ²⁵⁴ enlarged and interpreted the verse.

Erasmus did not have much confidence in the value of the Old Testament to the Church. He considered this division of the Bible to have much obscurity and darkness, and thought that the Church should not attribute so much importance to it. In its place, he suggested that the people should prefer later Christian writings, and seek to follow more closely

251 Erasmus, Epistles, III, p. 325.

252 Ibid, III, p. 326.

253 Smith, p. 173-4.

254 Ibid, p. 186; Murray, p. 23.

the steps of Christ.

I. Doctrine

The letters of Erasmus to other reformers and to friends, and also his literary works, give his opinion upon the doctrines of the Church. The scholar did not encourage heresy, but he questioned some traditional doctrines. However, he advocated that each person be allowed to work out a solution for his own individual case, and yet yield in general matters to the decision of the Bible and of the Church. He declared that creeds did not make religion, but that a good life, based upon the imitation of Christ was the big factor. ²⁵⁶ Another statement on doctrine by Erasmus was the following advice to the Church, "Reduce the Articles of Faith to the fewest and simplest". ²⁵⁷

Erasmus was in favor of a simple faith. He believed in study of the Bible and of the life of the Apostles. Although he wished that bishops, cardinals, and Popes might be more like the Apostles, he did not think of having these offices abolished. He believed that Church authority should be retained. ²⁵⁸

In his "Colloquias", the "Moria", and other works, he frequently criticized Popes but said that it was innocent mockery, and that "Erasmus will always be found on the side of the Roman See, and especially of its present occupant" ²⁵⁹ (Leo X). A letter to a friend in Rome contained another

255 Erasmus, Epistles, III, p. 310.

256 Smith, pp. 53-56.

257 Froude, Life and Letters, p. 220.

258 Ibid, p. 365, 350.

259 Ibid, p. 217.

statement of the respect of Erasmus for the Pope, "The Pope's dignity must of course be supported ..."²⁶⁰ He believed that the people should obey the commands of the Pope because, "The Apostles bade their people obey the magistrates, although the magistrates were heathens". The scholar did not consider²⁶¹ the abolition of the office of Pope.

Erasmus favored retention of all members of the clergy, except monks, and criticized Lutherans for advocating the abolition of the priesthood. However, he did favor a higher²⁶³ standard for these officers.

In addition to his advocacy of the retention of this sacrament of Holy Orders, the humanist believed that the other sacraments of the Church should remain. He believed in regard to baptism that parents should decide whether the sacrament should be given in infancy or postponed to maturity. Erasmus declared that Anabaptists must not be tolerated because they would not obey even Christian princes, and forced persons to²⁶³ adopt their creed by use of the sword.

Another sacrament which the humanist desired to retain was penance. He declared that it had been accepted since the age of the early Church, and that all should believe in the sacrament until the Church decided differently. Erasmus²⁶⁴ believed that men should confess their mortal sins.

A fourth sacrament in which the scholar believed was the Eucharist. He considered the attacks made on this ceremony,

260 Froude, Life and Letters, p. 269.

261 Ibid, p. 344.

262 Ibid, p. 344.

263 Ibid, p. 345, 429.

264 Ibid, p. 344.

but declared that the old belief should remain until a Church council gave a new revelation. However, he criticized the administration of this sacrament in houses and taverns for a payment of money. The scholar denounced the use of this ceremony to furnish amusement, and stated that it was not to be carried around by priests on horses. Erasmus thought that Christians should adore the divine nature of the sacrament, and not the human element. He thought that Christ would never have allowed His Church to have worshipped a wafer for God through ²⁶⁵ centuries, if this were an error. Erasmus stated that the theologians could discuss the difficult questions connected with the Eucharist, but the common people must believe that the "real body and blood of our Lord are actually present"²⁶⁶.

In the matter of Church doctrine, one of the most striking characteristics of Erasmus' program is clearly illustrated, namely, his emphasis upon intellectual, religious toleration. Erasmus realized that the faith of various persons in the doctrine of purgatory was not identical, so he advocated freedom of belief in this matter for each one. He wrote that no one should criticize another for holding a different opinion about purgatory.²⁶⁷

The belief in the power of indulgences had been exploded, according to Erasmus, after the monks and theologians had

265 Froude, *Life and Letters*, p. 344.

266 *Ibid.*, p. 386.

267 *Ibid.*, p. 344.

fooled the world for many years. However, he declared that those persons, who believed in saints, should be allowed to keep this opinion. The opponents of this belief should pray to God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost, and try to imitate Christ in their daily life, but should not criticize those who prayed to saints.
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The humanist advocated toleration likewise on the question whether works, or faith, justified. He maintained that all admitted that faith would not save without good works. On other doctrines, Erasmus suggested that toleration and moderation be allowed in order that peace might return to Christianity.
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The subject of Christianity was very important with Erasmus as early as 1506, because he wrote of his determination at that time to devote the rest of his life to piety and to Christ. He stated that he would be content with his medium qualities as a humanist.
270 Erasmus gave an outline of his religious creed in one of his colloquies. In this writing, the leading character declared that he believed in a God, who made heaven and the earth, and who was supreme in power; that angels lived in heaven; that God was a certain eternal Being, which "neither had Beginning, nor shall have any end, than
271 which nothing can be either greater, wiser or better". He placed God first, and alone in his worship, and he believed that Jesus was the Son of God, and that what he owed to God,

268 Froude, Life and Letters, p. 344.

269 Ibid, p. 350

270 Erasmus, Epistles, I, p. 399.

271 Erasmus, Pam. Coll. II, pp. 60-62.

he owed also to Jesus, because of God's gift to His Son; that Jesus was born of man, was persecuted and crucified and was without sin; that He arose after death to assure us resurrection after our lives here end, that He was immortal, and would raise us after death to a new life, if we were good Christians. Erasmus thought that Christ sat at God's right hand, and would be present on the day of judgment, as a result of which all godly people would dwell in heaven with him. He believed also in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Church, and that this Church represented the body of Christ and was sacred in itself. The scholar declared that he, although sinful, would face the greatest danger for his faith, even though it meant death. In case the revolt divided the Church, Erasmus declared he would "stand on the Rock of Peter till peace returned." He declared that he could not leave the Church to join the Lutherans. The belief of Erasmus was the faith of a true Christian, faithful to the Church, Christ and God, as the doctrines had been taught in the early Church. These doctrines had been advocated in the Church for centuries, "and taught by popes and councils and saints." Therefore Erasmus declared that persons who believed in these doctrines should not be attacked.

272 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. II, pp. 65, 64.

273 *ibid.*, pp. 65, 66.

274 Erasmus, Fam. Coll., II, pp. 67, 68.

275 Erasmus, Epistles, III, p. 268.

276 Froude, Life and Letters, p. 286.

277 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. II, p. 310.

278 Froude, Life and Letters, p. 324.

J. Popular Religion

In addition to his effort to protect the doctrines of the Church, Erasmus devoted his ability as a scholar, and as a writer, to batter the popular religion of that age. He believed that internal worship was necessary to please God, although external worship was permissible if ceremonies were not emphasized. The scholar suggested that individual belief be left to each person for a solution, because the true religion of a Christian would refine the ritual. ²⁷⁹

The condition of popular religion at that time discouraged Erasmus, because he thought that much of it was devoid of piety, and contained many faults. Many persons who sought righteousness were not successful, because, as Erasmus said: "... consider first that boyes, old men, women and foole are more delighted with religious and sacred things than others, and to that purpose are ever next to the Altars; and this they do by meer impulse of Nature." ²⁸⁰ These persons could not understand the deeper meanings of religion, and thought that the purpose of a sacrifice was their presence at the altar. Hence ²⁸¹ they crowded near to see the ceremonies. This situation caused Erasmus to declare that there should be only one celebration of mass a day in the churches, and that it should never be held in taverns where money was paid for the service. ²⁸²

279 Smith, pp. 54, 55.

280 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 177.

281 Ibid, pp. 183, 184.

282 Froude, Life and Letters, pp. 344, 345.

The superstitions of the people were also criticized by the humanist. He ridiculed the delight of some persons in hearing stories of ghosts, spirits and devils. Some believed that the sight of a wooden statue or painted picture of a certain saint would check any chance of death coming to them that day. Others would make application to a saint on certain days with small candles and selected prayers that they might be rich.²⁸³ Others burned candles to the Virgin Mary although the sun was high in the sky.²⁸⁴ He wrote that some persons worshipped certain saints for special things, such as one to cure sheep of certain diseases, or to bring relief to women in labor. The scholar believed that, if persons must worship saints, they should seek to imitate their good qualities and not reverence their bones and burn candles to them.²⁸⁵ Erasmus related that some persons thought the worship of magical charms would bring them long life, wealth, and honor.²⁸⁶ He declared that images and candles could not replace the worship of Christ,²⁸⁷ so he favored the abolition of the reverence of images and the removal of an excessive number of statues from the churches.²⁸⁸ Erasmus denounced the popular belief in these fallacies, although some theologians defended them. He criticized the opinion of certain persons who believed that a daily recitation of seven verses of

283 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 81.

284 Ibid, pp. 97.

285 Ibid, pp. 83, 97; Fam. Coll. II, p. 310.

286 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 82.

287 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. II, p. 310.

288 Froude, Life and Letters, p. 344.

289

the Psalms would bring gains of wealth and fame. Likewise he denounced the belief held by some merchants and soldiers that they could commit any crime and later be relieved of penance, if they would make a payment of money to some member of the clergy. ²⁹⁰ The scholar said that all such beliefs were ²⁹¹ absolutely opposed to the true teachings of Jesus.

In addition to superstitions and peculiar beliefs, Erasmus criticized the hanging of tablets on the walls of churches. He declared that tablets were hung to commemorate escapes from shipwreck, recovery of a victim in a duel, the escape of a person from prison, the recovery of one from illness despite his doctor, the escape of one after a fall, or the saving of horses after a cart had been destroyed. ²⁹² His conclusion was: "All these hang up their Tablets, but no one gives thanks for his recovery from Folly; so sweet a thing it is not to be Wise, that on the contrary men pray against anything than Folly." ²⁹³

The scholar believed that all persons should place more emphasis upon fundamental Christianity than upon the custom of thanking Christ for their escapes from accidents. He declared that some persons who pretended to be religious, would sooner endure the most bitter attacks against Christ than hear the slightest criticism of a prince, especially if it concerned the latter's income. ²⁹⁴ Instead of this, Erasmus contended that true Christians should be concerned mainly in sacred things. They

289 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 83.

290 Ibid, p. 82.

291 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. II, p. 310.

292 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 84.

293 Ibid, p. 84.

294 Ibid, p. 4.

should study oratory, liberal arts and philosophy in order that that they might know Christ and celebrate his glory. He thought that a successful orator had to be a good Christian because "He who is so much a Ciceronian that he is not a Christian is not even a Ciceronian for he does not speak fittingly, does not know his subject well, does not feel deeply the things that he speaks and does not present his religious beliefs with the same adornment that Cicero presented the philosophy of his times." ²⁹⁵

Erasmus desired the people to be such true followers of the faith and of Christ that the class called religious then "would not appear Religious at all." ²⁹⁶

In order to encourage the people to follow the teachings of Christ better, Erasmus thought that preachers should abolish the abuses in that profession. He believed in preaching, and missionary work by preachers, whom he considered as holders of an important office. The preacher was a bearer of the message of Christ, according to Erasmus, and was as important as any member of the clergy. ²⁹⁷

However, the scholar disliked to see the abuses introduced by some preachers and used his pen to criticize their actions. He declared they were mere "Stage-players" and "impudent pretenders to Religion which they ha'n't." Erasmus thought they were vaudeville entertainers in the pulpit, without much knowledge of the true principles of religion. ²⁹⁸

The humanist gave further evidence as to the reason he thought these preachers were entertainers of the stage. He

295 Erasmus, Ciceronianus, p. 129.

296 Erasmus, Epistles, III, p. 209.

297 Schaff, V, Pt. 2, p. 678.

298 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 138.

claimed that they played the fool in their preaching but tried to imitate the art of good speaking. He wrote, "Good God! what several postures they have! How they shift their voice, sing out their words, skip up and down, and are ever and anon making such new faces, that they confound all things with noise." ²⁹⁹ He continued this description by stating another opinion: "... but O Venus! so void of wit and so little to the purpose, that it may be truly call'd an Asses playing on the Harp." ³⁰⁰

Erasmus elsewhere spoke of "Billingsgate Parsons" when referring to coarse and crude preachers, who forced people to remain away from Church because they disliked to hear the talk of these preachers. One of these "parsons" was declared by Erasmus "scarce fit to preach to a Flock of Geese." Preachers of this class were considered by Erasmus to know but one line of argument in their work. ³⁰¹ The humanist claimed that some "declainers", called preachers, were compelled to tell spicy stories in order to keep the congregation from sleeping. ³⁰² By these criticisms, Erasmus hoped that the abuses developed by such preachers would be abolished and that the conduct of popular religion would be bettered so that all persons would become closer followers of Christ.

299 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 131.

300 Ibid, p. 136.

301 Erasmus, Fam. Coll. III, p. 144.

302 Erasmus, Praise of Folly, p. 92.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEMPORARY REFORMERS

Not content with promoting his own plans for reforms, Erasmus was friendly to those of other reformers of that age. One of these men was John Reuchlin who introduced the study of Hebrew and Greek into Germany, and was one of the first scholars to favor textual criticism of the Bible.³⁰³ He was ordered by the Emperor Maximilian I to write his opinion upon the proposed burning of all books of the Jews, except the Bible, which the orthodox clergy in Germany desired at that time. Reuchlin wrote the "Oculare Speculum" and this was attacked by the theologians of Cologne, because this work contained a protest to Emperor Maximilian I against the destruction of the Hebrew literature. The scholar defended himself with another writing. This work caused the Dominicans to charge Reuchlin with heresy, and to burn his "Oculare Speculum."³⁰⁴ After securing a copy of the book at Mainz, Erasmus read the work and wrote to Reuchlin, declaring to the latter that the charge of heresy based upon this writing was amusing, because it did not contain any irreligious statements.³⁰⁵

Erasmus feared that Reuchlin might receive severe punishment, so he wrote a special appeal to the cardinals at Rome. The scholar informed them that the world would be disgraced if Reuchlin were sacrificed. He asserted that theologians

³⁰³ Froude, Life and Letters, p. 187.

³⁰⁴ Erasmus, Epistles, II, p. 130.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., II, pp. 154, 157.

could find as much fault with the writings of Jerome as with those of Reuchlin, if they desired to investigate. Erasmus informed the cardinals that the entire country expected the clergy at Rome to save Reuchlin.³⁰⁶ In another letter he declared that Reuchlin was blameless in life and character, and had been attacked by a "detestable prosecution, and all for a matter as absurd as the ass's shadow of the proverb."³⁰⁷ In the meantime, Reuchlin had appealed to the Pope, and the ruler directed the Bishop of Spire to try the case. The German scholar was cleared of the charge of heresy.³⁰⁸

During the following year, 1515, Erasmus met Reuchlin at Frankfort. The two humanists exchanged only casual greetings at that meeting and did not see each other again,³⁰⁹ although several letters were exchanged by them after this meeting. In one, Erasmus advised Reuchlin to suppress two of the latter's books which were ready for publication, because, as the writer declared, he did not approve of the use of violent sarcasm by authors. He thought that this spirit of censure came from the world and not from Christ. Notwithstanding this incident, Erasmus declared that he had found that scholars everywhere favored Reuchlin.³¹⁰

There was one man, however, a converted Jew and a scholar, whom Erasmus had not met, and who was the principal opponent of Reuchlin. This was Pfefferkorn, who represented the orthodox clergy in Germany in the campaign to cause the burning of

306 Froude, Life and Letters, p. 187.

307 Ibid, p. 188.

308 Erasmus, Epistles, II, p. 151.

309 Ibid, III, p. 38.

310 Ibid, III, p. 20.

all Hebrew books except the Bible. Erasmus was very bitter against this person and refused, in a letter to Reuchlin, to admit that Pfefferkorn was a Christian. He called him a professor of Christianity. The humanist declared that this man had caused more injury to Christianity than a whole "sink of Jews", because he believed that Pfefferkorn was a masked traitor to the Church. Erasmus advised Reuchlin that they must turn their backs upon such men and seek their pleasure in Christ.³¹¹ His loyalty to the Church did not prevent Erasmus from protesting against false charges of heresy, and he was always friendly towards Reuchlin in the latter's work in Germany.

In addition to Reuchlin in Germany, Erasmus had relations with Martin Luther. The humanist seemed to have been a friend of the latter in the first years of Luther's revolt. Erasmus wrote to Luther from Louvain, declaring that he had told the theologians there that he did not approve or reject Luther's writings because he had not read them. The theologians were advised by the scholar to refrain from discussion of Luther's works in the pulpit and from attacks on the latter's spotless character. He advised Luther, as a friend, to denounce those who misused the Pope's power instead of attacking the Pope. Erasmus also suggested to Luther that he should avoid all sedition, and use quiet argument in his campaign because anger and hate would bring bad results.³¹²

This letter brought a charge by enemies of Erasmus that he had joined Luther. The humanist denied that he was either

³¹¹ Erasmus, Epistles, III, p. 149.

³¹² Froude, Life and Letters, p. 242.

the accuser, patron, or judge of the Wittenberg reformer.

Erasmus declared that he, as a Christian, should try to save Luther if he were innocent, and to reform him, if he had made mistakes, in order that he might preach better to the glory of Christ. The humanist thought that certain theologians had condemned Luther without reading his works, while others attacked him because of mistaken ideas about the doctrines of Luther. ³¹³

Moreover, Erasmus declared that certain doctrines of Luther, which had been called heretical, could be found in the writings of Augustine and other Church Fathers. The scholar advised the theologians to reform the morals of Christianity, which were worse than Turkish, instead of seeking to have Luther executed. ³¹⁴

Erasmus admitted that Luther had been indiscreet in questioning the value of indulgences, in which other persons "pretended to believe." Luther later had attacked the Pope on account of this abuse, and had denounced other evils of the clergy. Erasmus thought that the Pope was a good man, but was ill-advised by certain persons to punish Luther. The scholar maintained that he did not have any connection with Luther, and that he had not started any false opinions. In addition, he had not formed a party, and preferred death to causing a revolt in the state. ³¹⁵

The humanist did not desire to be connected with Luther's revolt and wrote to Cardinal Wolsey in England in regard to this matter. He declared that Luther and he were strangers.

³¹³ Froude, *Life and Letters*, p. 253.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 256, 257.

He also wrote that he had had time to read only one or two pages of Luther's writings. Therefore, he should not be given credit, or blamed, for the writings of the German. He thought that Luther's moral character was without fault, and that his life was generally approved.

316

The friends of Luther urged Erasmus to join him, while enemies of the German tried to force the humanist to do so, because they felt that Erasmus was as dangerous an opponent of the Church as was the Wittenberger. However, they both failed because Erasmus declared that he knew Christ, but not Luther, and that he would be loyal to the Roman Church until death, unless it left Christ.

This statement was written because Erasmus hated sedition and disliked to see the Germans and Luther using this method of attack. Erasmus favored quiet discussion of questions, and was willing to hear almost anything rather than to upset the world. He had advised Luther to publish nothing that was revolutionary. The humanist advised everyone not to read radical books, or libelous writings on religion, but to submit to the Pope's authority.

317

318

The neutral position of Erasmus in the revolt brought attacks upon him from both factions. The scholar declared that the Dominicans criticized him daily in their sermons, and Luther had discredited him and his cause. Admitting that the Church had been corrupt and tyrannical, he declared that "medicines wrongly applied make the patient worse" and that when "attempts were made and fail, the symptoms only grow more dangerous."

316 Erasmus, Epistles, III, p. 381.

317 Luther, Correspondence, trans. by Smith and Jacobs, (Philadelphia, 1918), I, p. 501; Froude, Life and Letters, p. 261.

318 Luther, I, p. 565; Froude, Life and Letters, p. 263.

He regretted very much that Luther had not been more prudent and conservative, not so much out of consideration for the Wittenberger, but because he feared the contest would injure Christianity and Gospel truth. However, Erasmus wrote that he would bear gladly all criticisms and attacks directed against him because he hoped to save Christianity.

The scholar continued to express this opinion, and especially after the Diet of Worms in 1521. He did not attend this assembly but favored a policy of moderation on the part of the diet. To a friend who had attended, Erasmus asserted that he was greatly surprised that moderate counsels had not been followed at the diet in order to check further tumult, and to restore peace in the Church. He declared that Luther was foolish to try to do something impossible. Therefore he hoped that the German scholar would be corrected, if there was any chance that he would do better things for the Church. Erasmus wrote that the corruption of the Papacy and of the Church was generally admitted, and that there was a common cry for reform. This condition of religious affairs caused Luther to be popular with the people when he started his work. However, Erasmus denounced Luther for the latter's bitter attacks upon popes, theologians and mendicant friars, because he had only made bad conditions worse. He wrote: "Did he wish to set the world on fire? This was not Christ's way, or the Apostle's way" He criticized Luther for attempting to make reforms where the latter were doomed to

failure, and declared that "Luther has wilfully provoked his fate", because the German reformer had refused at Worms to listen to threats, promises or entreaties. ³²⁰ Erasmus declared that Luther should have foreseen what would happen when he fell "into this hole". Therefore, he did not care now whether Luther was "boiled or roasted", but he hoped that the Emperor Charles V would restore accord among Christians.

Erasmus asserted that violence would never reform the Church, and that he would never rebel against the organization. He thought that scholars should write their opinions upon the dispute, in order to find the causes of all disturbances and then to remove these causes. He, personally was willing to give up his fame and his life to end the struggle, and would now read Luther's books and seek to write something on the questions in dispute. ³²¹

Pope Adrian VI had invited Erasmus to Rome to write against Luther, but the humanist replied that he would be accused of accepting a bribe if he did so. He advised the Pope that violence against Luther would cause bloodshed, and the use of it was not practical in Germany, especially because that country was divided into many principalities. Erasmus thought the Pope should grant a universal amnesty, and then seek to abolish all abuses charged against the clergy. ³²²

The repeated urgings of the Pope, scholars, and other friends, that he should write a book against Luther finally

320 Luther, I, pp. 494, 563-566; Froude, Life and Letters, pp. 291-293.

321 Froude, Life and Letters, 294, 295.

322 Ibid, pp. 318, 319.

influenced Erasmus to do so. It was at this time that he published the "De Libero Arbitrio", a discussion of free will. In this writing he cited the Bible as a standard authority but declared that different persons could interpret various verses of the Bible in different ways. He declared that free will was proved in two ways. First, without it, repentance would be foolish and punishment for sins would be unfair. Second, verses in the Bible declare that a person has freedom of choice, and that he is responsible to a God, who desires his conversion more than his death.

323

This work was followed by another in defense of free will, "Hyperaspistes" in which Erasmus blamed Luther for violence and loss of life in Germany. Other theological writings came later which were written for the purpose of ending the revolt and restoring the peace of the Church. He remained unshaken in his loyalty to the Church although he thought that reform of abuses should be made.

The relations of Erasmus to Luther overshadowed those with any other reformer. The humanist had dissensions with a former friend in France, Lefèvre d'Étaples, upon doctrines of religion. The latter had published his "Commentaries on St. Paul" in which he had criticized Erasmus severely. In reply, Erasmus wrote that he would answer this attack, not because of anger, but to show Lefèvre that he, Erasmus, was not stupid. The two scholars differed, for example, upon the question of Christ's resurrection after death, whether it had occurred in three days or

324

after three days, Erasmus taking the latter point of view. Lefèvre had asserted that those persons, who declared that Christ rose after three days, contradicted the "Christian Faith and the Gospels". Answering this attack, Erasmus affirmed that the Latin and the Greek churches supported his point of view. However, Lefèvre declared that Erasmus was a heretic, "unworthy of Christ and of God". The humanist wrote to the reformer in France, denying these charges, and urged him to be moderate in his attacks.³²⁵ In a later letter, Erasmus urged Lefèvre to make peace in order to save the reputation of both scholars, and for the sake of Christianity.³²⁶ However, the dispute continued until Erasmus wrote that he was being praised for his victory over Lefèvre. The humanist declared that the latter was his friend, but he refused to allow Lefèvre to call him a "blasphemer against Christ".³²⁷

In addition to this controversy with Lefèvre, Erasmus was attacked by another friend, Ulrich von Hutten, which caused the former to write a pamphlet in reply entitled "Spongia", "Wipe it up and say no more about it". Before 1520, Hutten and Erasmus had been good friends and the latter had declared that he was delighted with the character of Hutten.³²⁸ Hutten in turn called Erasmus the "Socrates of Germany" and declared that he would rather study at the feet of Erasmus than be in the life of a royal court, or at Rome.³²⁹ Hutten wrote other letters

325 Erasmus, Epistles, III, pp. 54, 168; 264, 267.

326 Ibid, III, p. 340.

327 Ibid, III, p. 304.

328 Ibid, III, p. 260; Froude, Life and Letters, pp. 323, 324.

329 Erasmus, Epistles, II, p. 225.

of praise to Erasmus, and sent to him accounts of his travels to Italy.³³⁰ However, the refusal of Erasmus to join Luther caused Hutten to forget his friendship and to attack Erasmus. The reply of the latter by the "Spongia" was very severe. The controversy was ended, shortly after this publication, by the death of Hutten. In this book Erasmus attacked Hutten and other "New Gospellers" because they refused to cooperate with the efforts made for peace by the Pope. The ruler had sent a legate to Germany to start reform. Erasmus declared these enemies would not listen to either a bishop or a prince although they professed the Gospel. The scholar stated that he desired that reform should be carried out fairly under constituted authority, instead of allowing mobs and violence to complete the changes. He denounced the "New Gospellers" for refusing to allow men, "who could not gulp down the new wine," to keep doctrines that were sanctioned by tradition and advocated by popes, councils and saints. He concluded by saying that even if the claims of these reformers were true, they should do the work of Christ in His spirit, and not try to cure "diseases of a thousand years" by medicines that would be "fatal to the whole body."³³¹

³³⁰ Erasmus, Epistles, II, p. 592.

³³¹ Froude, Life and Letters, pp. 324, 325.

CHAPTER FOUR

PLACE OF ERASMUS IN HISTORY

The study of the relations of Erasmus with reformers, and other persons of his age, reveals several moral qualities which are worthy of praise. Industry was a notable trait shown in the continued and varied work of the great humanist. With the publication of several poems and other writings during his university career before 1500, he began a literary life which was filled with many religious works, educational treatises, over a thousand important letters, and other papers of value, until death came in 1536. His travels were extensive for that age and, in the countries which he visited, enabled him to make a large circle of friends, who desired to secure letters or other writings from the great scholar. He was industrious in his effort to defend the Church during the Reformation, from those who advocated its destruction, and wrote several works in an attempt to bring peace. In addition to his lucubrations as an author, his work as a professor at Cambridge, as a monk at Steyn, and even as a choir boy at Deventer, suggest that the quality of industry was ever present, even before literary labor became so important with him.

Erasmus was well known for his justice, both to friends and enemies. He did not attack Reuchlin when the latter was accused of heresy by the theologians of Cologne, because he considered the charge unjust. Moreover, he advised Reuchlin to avoid bitter attacks.

In his satirical writings, Erasmus did not, as a rule, name the characters that he attacked. He was a friend of Thomas More in England until death parted them, although the latter differed with Erasmus on several theological questions. He tried to make peace with Lefèvre d' Etaples when their dispute was spirited, and wrote several letters to the latter in which he offered concessions. Erasmus would not attack Luther, or praise him, until he had read his writings and studied the conditions of the revolt. Moreover, when he did write against Luther, later, Erasmus criticized only those policies of Luther which differed from his ideas upon Church doctrines and methods of reforms. He deplored the use of violence in any struggle, and the loss of life by the use of force.

Another moral quality which was outstanding in regard to Erasmus was toleration. He asserted that both factions in the revolt should make concessions, so that crimes and injuries would end, such as allowing baptism in infancy or adult life, and the belief in purgatory, to those who preferred such doctrines. He wrote that, "toleration may be a misfortune, yet a less misfortune than war".³³² And also "... to calm a tempest by prudence and judgment is a worthy achievement indeed". He realized that all persons do not think alike, and suggested that differences on minor matters should be allowed, such as permitting one to be guided by his conscience or his stomach on the question of eating fish. Erasmus did not believe in idolatry but stated that he would allow images to remain in

churches as "silent poetry", if others favored this concession.

Good morals were exemplified in Erasmus. He practiced what he preached. Wine drinking was a very common custom in his age, but he denounced drunkenness. He criticized vice of all kinds and praised those persons having a spotless character. His denunciations of immoral Popes, cardinals, monks and other members of the clergy can be found in his "Moria" and "Colloquia." Moreover, although his enemies leveled many attacks against him, that of immorality was never made.

Wit was noticeable in the writings of the scholar, especially in the "Colloquia" and "Moria." Also the "Aprophthegmata" contained many humorous anecdotes. Examples of this quality have been used in this thesis. His letters contain many homely statements, such as, "he fawns in my presence, and bites behind my back," and, "it is a case, in which I have the wolf by the ear, without being able to overpower him or let him go." ³³³ The great popularity of Erasmus was partly due to his wonderful humor.

Another quality of the humanist was bravery. Some writers, such as Luther, have claimed that Erasmus did not possess this virtue but much evidence can be shown to the contrary. In his travels, dangers from robber bands and other criminals were often prevalent, but they did not check him. His denunciations of members of the clergy for their conduct drew upon him bitter replies and charges of heresy, but he continued the policy. In the Reformation, he declared that he would

333 Erasmus, Epistles, II, p. 405.

join Luther when the latter was on the Catholic side. Erasmus would not join Luther also because the doctrines of the German reformer were not identical with those of the humanist. He chose his position in the struggle and defended himself there against all attacks of Lutherans and Catholics, because his position was one of toleration. Erasmus was at the apex of his career in popularity, honors, and learning, but he decided without equivocation to fight for his policy of reform even though it might mean disaster and failure, possibly death, to him.

This quality of courage is connected with his great loyalty to friends, and to the Church. His large group of friends continued faithful during his life, and the scholar was ever-ready to give his valuable advice to aid a friend. When the death of More occurred in England, Erasmus declared that he, himself, had died because the two men had but one soul. He advocated reforms in the Church because he desired to better the organization which he respected. The scholar dedicated his complete talent to the glory of Christ and the Catholic Church and declared that he would not leave the Church unless it left Christ. He wrote in regard to the revolt: "But if the worst comes and the Church is divided, I shall stand on the Rock of Peter till peace returns".³³⁴ Erasmus was always loyal to the Church despite his severe criticisms of it on the one hand, and, on the other, the temptations presented to him in an effort to break his allegiance.

Erasmus favored reform within the Church, but this

reform was to be made constructively and not destructively. He did not believe in revolt against the Church and criticized Luther because he chose to break away. The scholar desired that concessions should be made by both factions in order to bring peace to Christianity. He believed that a council of learned men could determine the causes of dispute and bring peace and reform. Erasmus realized that his position as a conservative would be difficult to defend and that he would be attacked by members of both groups. However, he hoped that his plans of compromise would cause both factions to modify their claims for the good of Christianity. He hoped that each side would give the victory to Christ. He stated that reform was needed, but that the changes might have to be gradual. Lutherans should not expect that traditions and teachings, which had been part of the Church since the time of Christ, could be overturned in a moment. He advised the clergy of the Church to "draw out the poison" of the Lutherans by degrees and tolerate them for a few years. The position of Erasmus shows that he believed deeply in the greatness of the Roman Catholic Church, in its officers, doctrines, worship and organization, but that he desired reform to be made within the Church, so that all abuses by its members might be abolished. He desired peaceful and gradual reform and turned away from Luther after 1520 because the latter advocated violence and revolt.

Erasmus was the greatest scholar of his age. His classical and religious training, humor, wisdom, loyalty, and morality

made him a man who was admired over all Europe. Popes, kings, princes and scholars welcomed his friendship, and his presence. Some persons called him a saint. He was offered in turn a position as a teacher, bishop, and a cardinal, but preferred to keep his freedom of action. Luther admired him greatly in literature and religion, and read his books even after 1520. The Emperor Charles V, honored his friendship and wrote to him: "The whole Church of Christ is your debtor as much as I am. You have done for it what emperors, popes, princes, and academies have tried in vain to do. I congratulate you from my heart".³³⁵ The great wisdom of Erasmus was recognized by Pope Paul III, who urged him to consent to attend a council in an effort to end the Lutheran revolt. The scholar realized that toleration and arbitration should be used in political and religious disputes. Without the preparatory work of Erasmus, Luther might have been unknown today, because the humanist's advocacy of reform emphasized the great need of betterment. The leadership of Erasmus during his age in learning, literature, and theology has been acknowledged for centuries.

We close our discussion of a great character in history with this conclusion: namely, that human nature in the age of Erasmus was fundamentally the same as today. A peacemaker, between two opposing forces, trying to do the things which are best and logical for the people, is ever liable to fill the position of one disliked by both parties. The work of Erasmus

was not fully appreciated in his age, but posterity has given him the deserved rewards. This study does not claim to have exhausted the material upon this subject. The purpose of the writer has been to collect information about the attitude of Erasmus toward the medieval Church, and his suggestions for reforms of the abuses among the clergy and the evils in the Church of that age. Another purpose has been to organize these materials under definite titles so that it could be put under one cover for the benefit of the historical student.

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