

DeMolen, Richard L. *The Spirituality of Erasmus of Rotterdam*. Bibliotheca Humanistica and Reformatorica, Vol. XL. Nieuwkoop: De Graff Publishers, 1987. xviii + 224 pp. Fr 90.

The significant role played in relationship to both the Renaissance (especially Northern Humanism) and the Protestant Reformation by Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, called the "Prince of the Humanists" even in his own lifetime, is well known. The features of his career and activities best known to nonspecialists are a few of his more satirical works (such as the *Praise of Folly*) and his preparation of the Greek text of the NT—the Greek text which served as the primary source from which Luther translated his famous German NT.

In a number of ways, however, Erasmus has seemed quite enigmatic to his biographers and to Renaissance/Reformation historians. For instance, just how did Erasmus view the Roman Catholic Church, some of whose ceremonies he at times ridiculed, but from whose communion he never departed? What was his attitude toward monasticism? And in his own personal life, did he have genuinely serious goals, or was he a neurotic—possibly even an immoral—person? In the massive Erasmus literature that has emerged in recent decades, one can find a variety of answers to these and other questions. The beauty of the present publication by Richard L. DeMolen is that, rather than adding to the confusion, it brings focus to the question of the *real* Erasmus through careful analysis of his voluminous correspondence and numerous treatises.

In producing several earlier books, DeMolen compiled and edited significant essays by various distinguished scholars: *The Meaning of Renaissance and Reformation* (reviewed in *AUSS* 14 [1976]: 250-251); *Essays on the Works of Erasmus* (reviewed in *AUSS* 19 [1981]: 263-264); and *Leaders of the Reformation* (reviewed in *AUSS* 24 [1986]: 270-272). In contrast to such volumes, the present one is comprised totally of essays by DeMolen himself. He has gathered together eight essays prepared for various occasions and appearing in print in a variety of scholarly publications from about 1971 to 1987. The chapter titles are: "Erasmus of Rotterdam in Profile" (pp. 1-14); "Erasmus as Adolescent" (pp. 15-34); "The Interior Erasmus" (pp. 35-67); "*Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi*: Rungs on the Ladder to the *Philosophia Christi*" (pp. 69-124); "First Fruits: The Place of *Antibarbarorum Liber* and *De Contemptu Mundi* in the Formulation of Erasmus' *Philosophia Christi*" (pp. 125-142); "Erasmus on Childhood" (pp. 143-164); "The Expression of Love in the *Oeuvre* of Erasmus" (pp. 165-190); and "Erasmus' Commitment to the Canons Regular of St. Augustine" (pp. 191-197). In addition to these chapters, the volume has a "Selected Bibliography" (pp. 205-216) and a fairly comprehensive "Index" (pp. 217-224).

DeMolen has shattered a number of the more popular caricatures of Erasmus, including that of his being some sort of scoundrel who shunned neither falsification nor contradictory statements if such would foster his own welfare. Rather, a careful study of both Erasmus' written works and his correspondence from the earliest extant pieces until the time of his death in 1536 reveals a rather remarkable consistency in his outlook and emphases; indeed, for most of this time he had an overriding concern to encourage, and also to attempt to exemplify, a holiness of life in imitation of Christ. Among sources important to him were the sacred Scriptures, the Church Fathers, and devotional-type writings such as Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*.

DeMolen's assessment stands in sharp contrast to the view that Erasmus was but a classicist, whose genuine interest was ancient letters, but who had generally little religious conviction. It also modifies the view of those scholars who would allow some small degree of spiritual tone to Erasmus' work, especially as evidenced in his *Handbook of a Christian Knight* (prepared in 1501 and first published in 1503). What DeMolen demonstrates is that Erasmus began his emphasis on his *Philosophia Christi* as early as 1489, while he was a canon in the Augustinian monastery at Steyn; and, moreover, that from that time onward the theme is pervasive, not simply incidental, in Erasmus' writings.

Although I normally do not review the same title for more than one scholarly journal, in the case of *The Spirituality of Erasmus of Rotterdam* I have also prepared a critical review for the *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*, 8 (1988): 145-148. That review differs somewhat in nature from the present one, and therefore the interested reader may wish to consult that review also. (The most helpful procedure, of course, is to peruse the book itself for the genuinely fascinating information it presents.)

In closing, a *caveat* is in order: The reader of this book should not expect total cohesiveness, for the topical treatment utilized does not lend itself to a consistent chronological presentation; and there is, as well, some duplication of material among the various chapters. Nevertheless, the volume is lucid both in its parts and in its totality. I would highly recommend it to anyone seeking a better understanding of Erasmus, and especially to those who are interested in the great Humanist's spiritual dimensions.

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Elwell, Walter A., ed. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. 2 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988. 2210 pp. \$79.95.

The primary intention of the two-volume *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* is to make the ancient concepts of the Bible vibrant and understand-