

ERASMUS AND THE TEXTUS RECEPTUS

by
William W. Combs*

This first issue of the *Journal* is dedicated to Dr. William R. Rice, the founder of Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. Like most fundamentalists in this century, Dr. Rice has always used the KJV in his public ministry. He often consulted other versions and commonly suggested alternative or improved translations from the pulpit. He never made an issue of Greek texts and English translations. Yet today there is a growing debate in fundamentalism regarding English translations of the Scripture and the texts behind them, especially the NT Greek text. One area of dispute involves the Greek Textus Receptus. For those who may be new to this controversy, Textus Receptus is a Latin term which means “Received Text.” The name itself comes from an edition of the Greek NT produced by Bonaventura and Abraham Elzevir (or Elzevier). The Elzevirs printed seven editions of the Greek NT between 1624 and 1678.¹ Their second edition (1633) has this sentence in the preface: “Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum, in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus” (Therefore you [dear reader] have the text now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted).² From this statement (Textum...receptum) comes the term Textus Receptus or TR, which today is commonly applied to all editions of the Greek NT before the Elzevir’s, beginning with Erasmus’ in 1516.

*Dr. Combs is Academic Dean and Professor of New Testament at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary in Allen Park, MI.

¹J. Harold Greenlee, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), p. 65. Unlike the editions of Erasmus, Estienne, and Beza before them, the Elzevirs were not editors of the editions attributed to them, only the printers. The 1633 edition was edited by Jeremias Hoelzlin, Professor of Greek at Leiden. See Henk J. de Jonge, “Jeremias Hoelzlin: Editor of the ‘Textus Receptus’ Printed by the Elzeviers Leiden 1633,” *Miscellanea Neotestamentica* 1 (1978): 105–28. De Jonge also notes that Abraham and Bonaventura were not brothers, as is frequently repeated, but that Abraham was the nephew of Bonaventura (p. 125, n. 48).

²Bruce Metzger aptly calls this an advertising blurb (*The Text of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], p. 106). The preface to the 1633 edition was written by Daniel Heinsius (de Jonge, “Jeremias Hoelzlin,” p. 125).

Numerous individuals who identify themselves with fundamentalism are now arguing that the TR is to be equated with the text of the original manuscripts of the NT. For example, D. A. Waite says:

It is my own personal conviction and belief, after studying this subject since 1971, that the words of the Received Greek and Masoretic Hebrew texts that underlie the King James Bible are the very words which God has preserved down through the centuries, being the exact words of the originals themselves. As such, I believe they are inspired words.³

That the TR, which underlies the KJV, could be thought to be “the exact words of the originals themselves” would seem to be far-fetched, to say the least, to anyone familiar with the history of the TR. But possibly, that is part of the problem; some who hold the TR position may not be adequately informed about the position they champion. This article will seek to shed some light on this subject by bringing forth the well-established facts about the history of the TR.

ERASMUS' BACKGROUND

The origins of the TR go back to the Roman Catholic priest and Christian humanist Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, who lived from 1466 to 1536.⁴ He was the second illegitimate son of a priest named Gerhard, and Margaret, a physician's daughter.⁵ His early education was at a school in Gouda and then under the Brethren of the Common Life at Deventer. After his father and mother both died of the plague, Erasmus was sent to another Brethren school at Bois-le-Duc and was eventually persuaded to enter the Augustinian monastery at Steyn. After five years, in 1492, he was ordained a priest.⁶ The very next year Erasmus was able to escape the secluded life by becoming secretary to the bishop of Cambrai. Erasmus had hopes of accompanying the bishop to Italy, but the trip never materialized. In 1495 he received permission from the bishop to travel to France to study for his doctorate in theology at the University of Paris.

³*Defending the King James Bible* (Collingswood, NJ: Bible For Today Publishers, 1992), pp. 48–49.

⁴It is not clear if Erasmus was born in 1466 or as late as 1469, since his own statements appear contradictory. See, e.g., Roland H. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York: Scribner's, 1969), p. 7; and Albert Rabil, Jr., *Erasmus and the New Testament* (reprint of 1972 ed.; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), pp. 2–3, n. 3.

⁵Erasmus had an older brother named Peter.

⁶John C. Olin, “Introduction: Erasmus, a Biographical Sketch,” in *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus*, ed. John C. Colin, 3rd ed. (New York: Fordam University Press, 1987), p. 3; Rabil, *Erasmus*, p. 5.

ERASMUS' KNOWLEDGE OF GREEK

The language of educated persons in the sixteenth century was Latin, "the language in which Erasmus thought, spoke and wrote."⁷ It was truly the *lingua franca* of Europe. Because of this Erasmus was able to visit countries such as England, socialize with important people, and even teach at Cambridge, though he could not speak English. But Erasmus was also born into a time when there was a renewed interest in learning the original languages of Scripture (Hebrew and Greek), and he shared that passion for Greek. In his early years at Deventer and his later studies at the monastery at Steyn, Erasmus apparently learned no more than the letters of the Greek alphabet and the meaning of some individual words.⁸ While at the University of Paris, he took up the study of Greek in greater earnest. What he learned seems to have come from his own personal study with the help of a few friends.

Erasmus left Paris in 1499, without having finished his doctorate, in order to visit England. He stayed for eight months and made a number of important friendships, including Thomas More and John Colet. During this time Erasmus dedicated himself to the mastery of Greek, and upon his return to Paris, he began to study it with greater determination.⁹ About the importance of Greek, he wrote:

Latin scholarship, however elaborate, is maimed and reduced by half without Greek. For whereas we Latins have but a few small streams, a few muddy pools, the Greeks possess crystal-clear springs and rivers that run with gold. I can see what utter madness it is even to put a finger on that part of theology which is specially concerned with the mysteries of the faith unless one is furnished with the equipment of Greek as well, since the translators of Scripture, in their scrupulous manner of construing the text, offer such literal versions of Greek idioms that no one ignorant of that language could grasp even the primary, or, as our own theologians call it, literal, meaning.¹⁰

⁷Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Erasmus' Contribution to New Testament Scholarship," *Fides et Historia* 19 (October 1987): 7. Léon-E. Halkin observes that at the age of fourteen "Erasmus was speaking Latin as a living language" (*Erasmus: A Critical Biography*, trans. John Tonkin [Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993], p. 2).

⁸Erika Rummel, *Erasmus as a Translator of the Classics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 5.

⁹B. Hall, "Erasmus: Biblical Scholar and Reformer," in *Erasmus*, ed. T. A. Dorey (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1970), pp. 89–90; Bainton, *Erasmus*, p. 59; Rummel, *Erasmus as a Translator*, pp. 11–12.

¹⁰Epistle 149. The translation is from *The Correspondence of Erasmus*, vol. 2 in the *Collected Works of Erasmus*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 25, hereafter cited as CWE.

Erasmus returned to England in 1505 to prepare for his doctorate at Cambridge. However, he did not stay in England, because the very next year he was given the opportunity to visit Italy. In Italy he could perfect his Greek since in Italy there were many Greeks teaching Greek. They had fled after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Erasmus' first stop in Italy was in Turin, where he received his doctorate in theology. He traveled throughout Italy and spent some time in the home of the famous Venetian scholar-printer Aldus Manutius. Aldus had gathered around him a group of Italian and Greek scholars who ate, slept, and worked together, while pledging themselves to speak only Greek. Here in Venice and during his entire three years in Italy, Erasmus was able to perfect his Greek.

In 1509 Erasmus returned to England and had mastered Greek so well that in 1511 he was invited to teach the language at Cambridge University. Erasmus left England in 1514 for Basel to join forces with the printer Johann Froben. Together they began to publish a number of important works, including his Latin-Greek NT in 1516.

ANNOTATIONES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the summer of 1504, while he was working at the library of the abbey of Parc, near Louvain, Erasmus discovered a manuscript by the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla (1407–57). He published it a year later under the title *Adnotationes in Novum Testamentum*.¹¹ Valla's purpose was to evaluate the Vulgate as a translation of the Greek New Testament, and his work consisted of a compilation of annotations on the Vulgate in light of Greek manuscripts.

Valla attempted to patch up the Latin scriptures and render them a more faithful reflection of the Greek. Thus he presented in his work for the most part a "collatio," a comparison of the Latin Vulgate with the Greek New Testament. He set for himself a straightforward scholarly task: the evaluation of the Vulgate as a translation of the Greek New Testament. In carrying out his task he found many passages, he said, vitiated by unlearned or negligent copyists; others he found corrupted by conscious alteration on the part of audacious scribes; still others he found inaccurately translated from the Greek. In his "collatio," then, Valla annotated these passages in order to offer Latin Christians the clearest possible understanding of the New Testament.¹²

Valla's work had a profound influence upon Erasmus, so much so

¹¹For a discussion of Valla's work, see Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), chapter 2.

¹²Ibid., pp. 35–36.

“that he devoted much of his career to the task of developing, refining, and extending Valla’s methods.”¹³ Like Valla, Erasmus was convinced that the Vulgate New Testament had many deficiencies which could only be corrected by appeal to the Greek New Testament. But that viewpoint was not well received in Erasmus’ day.

The Greek original was regarded as the biased authority of schismatical, if not heterodox, Greeks: to use their Greek original was to favour their dangerous opinions. Again it was assumed that the making of the Vulgate Latin version had been guided by inspiration of the Holy Spirit; it had been sanctified by eleven hundred years of use in the Latin Church; and it was most intimately related to the most sacred traditions of worship, piety and doctrine. Many thought that to turn aside to the Greek was not only unnecessary, it would begin the dissolution of the Catholic authority.¹⁴

In addition, many medieval scholars, beginning in the twelfth century, had even begun to teach that the Latin Scriptures were more reliable than the Greek.¹⁵

Six months after discovering Valla’s *Adnotationes*, Erasmus wrote to John Colet in December of 1504 saying that he was going to devote the rest of his life to the study of Scripture.¹⁶ Erasmus made his second trip to England in 1505, and until recently, most scholars believed that it was about this time Erasmus began working on his own Latin translation of the NT, his first effort into the field of biblical studies since being inspired by Valla’s work.¹⁷ This belief was based on some manuscripts containing Erasmus’ Latin NT translation and the Latin Vulgate in parallel columns. These manuscripts, two dated 1509 and one 1506, incorrectly led scholars to believe that Erasmus was working on his Latin translation ten years before its publication. However,

¹³Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁴Hall, “Erasmus,” p. 85.

¹⁵This was based on a misunderstanding of Jerome’s prologue to the Pentateuch (Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, p. 16).

¹⁶Epistle 181, CWE 2:86.

¹⁷P. S. Allen, *Erasmus: Lectures and Wayfaring Sketches* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1934, pp. 67–68; Rabil, *Erasmus*, pp. 61, 92. Allen and (apparently) Rabil (p. 67) say that Erasmus produced a translation of the entire NT before he left England. Others have suggested that he only began the work at this time. See C. C. Tarelli, “Erasmus’s Manuscripts of the Gospels,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1943): 160; Eileen Bloch, “Erasmus and the Froben Press: The Making of an Editor,” *Library Quarterly* 35 (April 1965): 115–16; Henk J. de Jonge, “*Novum Testamentum a Nobis Versum*: The Essence of Erasmus’ Edition of the New Testament,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 35 (October 1984): 402 and “The Character of Erasmus’ Translation of the New Testament as Reflected in His Translation of Hebrews 9,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14 (1984): 83; Yamauchi, “Erasmus’ Contributions,” pp. 8–9.

Andrew J. Brown has now demonstrated conclusively that these dates apply only to the Vulgate text contained in them, and that Erasmus' translation was added to these manuscripts in the 1520s.¹⁸ Rummel notes:

The theory that Erasmus had begun work on a translation before 1506 was, however, at odds with his own testimony, for he consistently claimed that the idea of adding a translation to his New Testament edition occurred to him only when the project was already well advanced. In polemics against Edward Lee, Johannes Sutor, and Frans Titelmans, Erasmus declared that the plan was conceived by friends when the publication was already in progress. He claimed that it had not been his own intention to add a new translation—scholarly friends had urged him to do so—and insisted that nothing had been further from his mind at first. He described the circumstances surrounding the publication of the translation in similar terms in a letter to Budé: “When the work was already due to be published, certain people encouraged me to change the Vulgate text’ (Ep 421:50–2). In 1533 he repeated this version of events: “When I had first come to Basel I had not even thought about translating the New Testament—I had merely noted down some brief explanatory notes and had decided to be content with that” (Allen Ep 2758:12–14).¹⁹

Erasmus' first endeavor into NT studies was not his Latin translation, but his *Annotationes* on the NT, which were eventually published in 1516 as part of his Latin-Greek NT. Similar to Valla's *Adnotationes*, “in their original form, the *Annotations* were predominantly a philological commentary, recording and discussing variant readings and commenting on passages in the Vulgate that were in Erasmus' opinion either obscurely or incorrectly rendered.”²⁰ When he began working on these annotations is not certain, but by the time of his stay at Cambridge (1511–14), his letters indicate considerable progress. There he was able to compare the Vulgate against certain Greek and Latin manuscripts. In a letter dated July 8, 1514, Erasmus tells a friend: “After collation of Greek and other ancient manuscripts, I have emended the whole New Testament, and I have annotated over a thousand passages, not without benefit to theologians.”²¹ In a later letter to Johannes Reuchlin, he

¹⁸Andrew J. Brown, “Date of Erasmus' Latin Translation of the New Testament,” *Transactions of the Cambridge Biographical Society* 8-4 (1984): 351–80.

¹⁹Erika Rummel, *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp. 20–21. Interestingly, before Brown's study was published, Rummel also believed that Erasmus started his Latin translation as early as 1506. See her *Erasmus as a Translator of the Classics*, p. 89.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. vii.

²¹Epistle 296, CWE 2:300.

notes: “I have written annotations on the entire New Testament.”²² It was the desire to publish these annotations that ultimately led to Erasmus’ Latin-Greek NT.

THE COMPLUTENSIAN POLYGLOT

Actually, the first *printed* Greek NT was produced under the auspices of Cardinal Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros of Spain at the university he built in Alcalá.²³ The Greek NT was printed in 1514 as volume 5 of a larger work called the Complutensian Polyglot (Alcalá was called Complutum in Latin).²⁴ It was not until 1520 that permission was obtained from Pope Leo X to *publish* the work, though it seems not to have circulated until 1522.²⁵ The Complutensian Polyglot was actually a complete Bible in six volumes. The OT had the Hebrew, Latin Vulgate, and Greek Septuagint texts in parallel columns, and in the NT, the Latin Vulgate and Greek in parallel columns. Only 600 copies of the Complutensian Polyglot were ever printed. Because of its expense, its influence was limited in comparison to the more popular editions of Erasmus.

PUBLICATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Erasmus came to Basel to meet Froben in August of 1514. He carried with him a number of works. Beatus Rhenanus, an employee of Froben, wrote a letter to a friend in September in which he reported: “Erasmus of Rotterdam, a great scholar, has arrived in Basel most recently, weighed down with good books, among which are the following: Jerome revised, the complete works of Seneca revised, copious notes on the New Testament, a book of similes, a large number of translations from Plutarch, the Adages...”²⁶ It seems clear that when Erasmus came to Basel in 1514, his intention was to publish his annotations accompanied only by the Latin Vulgate.²⁷ But it is not certain that Erasmus originally planned for Froben to do the work—rather intending that project

²²Epistle 300, CWE 3:7.

²³For an excellent discussion of the Complutensian New Testament and the facts surrounding its publication, see Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, pp. 70–111.

²⁴Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, p. 96.

²⁵Allen reports that was when a copy reached Erasmus at Basil (*Erasmus*, p. 144).

²⁶Cited by Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament*, p. 23.

²⁷Brown, “Date of Erasmus’ Latin Translation,” p. 374; Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament*, p. 23.

for Aldus.²⁸ But Aldus died in February of 1515, and by the summer of 1515 Erasmus and Froben had reached an agreement.

During this time plans were made to include the actual text of the Greek NT, probably at the instigation of the printer. Many scholars believe that Froben had heard of the imminent publication of the Complutensian Polyglot and wanted to publish his own edition of the Greek NT first in order to reap the anticipated financial rewards.²⁹ In later years Erasmus implied that he had been pressured into undertaking it: “At that point Johann Froben—of blessed memory—took advantage of my being accommodating.”³⁰ Because Erasmus had not intended to print a Greek text when he came to Basel, he now had to rely on Greek manuscripts locally available.³¹

Reluctantly, Erasmus also agreed to substitute his own Latin translation for the Vulgate. Because it was done hastily, his 1516 Latin translation retains much of the Vulgate wording and “represents a much less comprehensive revision than Erasmus’ later editions...After 1516 when he had more leisure, he undertook the thorough-going revision which was printed in the second edition of 1519.”³²

The actual printing began in August of 1515. The work was carried on at a frantic pace, involving two presses, and was completed by March of 1516. In June of 1516 Erasmus wrote to a friend: “At last I have escaped from the workhouse in Basel, where I have got through six years work in eight months.”³³ Erasmus himself confessed that the first edition was “thrown together rather than edited.”³⁴ There were numerous typographical errors. F. H. A. Scrivener complained: “Erasmus’ first edi-

²⁸Rabil, *Erasmus*, p. 90; Hall, “Erasmus,” p. 95.

²⁹See e.g., Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament*, p. 23. Allen doubts this was the motivation of Froben (*Erasmus*, pp. 44–45).

³⁰Epistle 2758, cited by Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament*, p. 23.

³¹The Greek manuscripts used by Erasmus will be discussed below.

³²Brown, “Date of Erasmus’ Latin Translation,” p. 374. Based on his study of Hebrews 9, Henk J. de Jonge estimates that Erasmus’ Latin translation owes sixty percent of its text to the Vulgate, even in its final 1535 (5th) edition. He notes: “It is clear that, in the chapter under consideration, Erasmus’ translation is not an independent version, but a revision of the Vg. with the aid of Greek manuscripts” (“The Character of Erasmus’ translation of the New Testament as Reflected in His Translation of Hebrews 9,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14 [1984]: 82).

³³Epistle 411, CWE 3:290.

³⁴“praecipitatum verius quam aeditum,” Epistle 402. The Latin text is from P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and H. W. Garrod, eds., *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, 12 vols. (Oxford 1906–58), 2:226, hereafter cited as Allen *EE*.

tion is in that respect the most faulty book I know.”³⁵

Though the Complutensian Polyglot was *printed* in 1514, Erasmus’ Greek NT of 1516 was the first one to be *published*. It was, as has been noted, a Latin-Greek edition, which he called *Novum Instrumentum*. Years later, in 1527, Erasmus explained that he “chose the word *Instrumentum* in the title because it conveyed better than *Testamentum* the idea of a decision put down in writing: *testamentum* could also mean an agreement without a written record.”³⁶ The over one thousand pages of *Novum Instrumentum* contain three main parts: the Greek text, Erasmus’ Latin translation, and his *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*. The latter, as we have noted, were his explanatory remarks. Erasmus felt they were essential in order to explain and defend his Latin translation according to its Greek base.³⁷ The Greek and Latin texts are set out in parallel columns with *Annotationes* following on separate pages. To forestall criticism Erasmus prefaced the text of the NT with a number of apologetic writings. These included a letter addressed to the Reader, a dedication to Pope Leo X, an appeal to study Scripture (*Paraclesis*), a program of theological studies (*Methodus*), and a defense of his work (*Apologia*).³⁸

PURPOSE OF THE *NOVUM INSTRUMENTUM*

It is a common misconception that Erasmus’ main purpose behind the *Novum Instrumentum* was to produce a Greek NT. Erasmus’ work is commonly described as the “first publication of the Greek text of the NT.”³⁹ De Jonge has shown that “Erasmus and his contemporaries regarded the *Novum Instrumentum* and its later editions in the first place as the presentation of the NT in a new Latin form, and not as an edition

³⁵A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament, 2nd ed. (London: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1874), p. 383.

³⁶de Jonge, “*Novum Testamentum a Nobis Versum*,” p. 396, n. 5. Erasmus’ explanation is found in Epistle 1858, Allen *EE* 7:140.

³⁷For a full discussion of the *Annotationes*, see Jerry H. Bentley, “Erasmus’ *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* and the Textual Criticism of the Gospels,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 67 (1976): 33–53 and Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament*.

³⁸Erika Rummel, “An Open Letter to Boorish Critics: Erasmus’ *Capita argumentorum contra morosos quosdam ac indoctos*,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (October 1988): 438.

³⁹E.g., L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 160. Similarly, see Greenlee, *Textual Criticism*, p. 63; and David A. Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), p. 29.

of the Greek text.”⁴⁰ The primary purpose of Erasmus was to publish his annotations along with his Latin translation. The Greek text was only there for the purpose of confirming the Latin translation. This is easily demonstrated.⁴¹

First, the title under which Erasmus published his work includes these words, *Novum Instrumentum...recognitum et emendatum*, which means “The New Testament...revised and improved.” These words must refer to Erasmus’ Latin translation, not to any Greek text, since there was not at that time a printed edition of the Greek NT in circulation which could be “revised and improved.” “They mean: here you have a NT, obviously in the language in which it was current, Latin, but in improved revised form, i.e., no longer in the generally current Vulgate version.”⁴² The title offers no evidence at all that the *Novum Instrumentum* contains an edition of the Greek text.

Second, in his dedication to Pope Leo X, Erasmus says:

I perceived that that teaching which is our salvation was to be had in a much purer and more lively form if sought at the fountain-head and drawn from the actual sources than from pools and runnels. And so I have revised the whole New Testament (as they call it) against the standard of the Greek original....I have added annotations of my own, in order in the first place to show the reader what changes I have made, and why; second, to disentangle and explain anything that may be complicated, ambiguous, or obscure.⁴³

In Erasmus’ own words, then, what he offers is his new translation based on the Greek. In addition, he has included his explanatory remarks (*Annotationes*) which were to justify the new translation’s deviations from the Vulgate. In all of this, Erasmus gives not a hint that he is also offering an edition of the Greek text.

Third, numerous statements in the *Apologia* clearly demonstrate that what Erasmus was defending was not the Greek text, but his new Latin translation. At one point he says the “Greek text has been ‘added’ (!) so that the reader can convince himself that the Latin translation does not contain any rash innovations, but is solidly based.”⁴⁴ This is not to say that the Greek text was not important, but clearly it was subordinate to

⁴⁰“*Novum Testamentum a Nobis Versum*,” pp. 395ff.

⁴¹The following points are taken from de Jonge, “*Novum Testamentum a Nobis Versum*.” For a similar viewpoint, see also Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament*, pp. 23–26; Halkin, *Erasmus*, pp. 104–105; Hall, “Erasmus,” pp. 94–96.

⁴²de Jonge, “*Novum Testamentum a Nobis Versum*,” p. 396.

⁴³Epistle 384, CWE 3:222–23.

⁴⁴de Jonge, “*Novum Testamentum a Nobis Versum*,” p. 400.

the Latin translation. Erasmus was concerned about the Greek text only to the extent that it proved his Latin translation was not plucked out of thin air. That he was not primarily interested in the Greek text is clear from the fact that he never brought out a separate edition of just the Greek text, in spite of the fact he was encouraged to do so.⁴⁵

SOURCES FOR THE *NOVUM INSTRUMENTUM*

Seven manuscripts were used by Erasmus in Basel to compile the Greek text which was printed alongside his Latin translation.⁴⁶

1. Codex 1^{eaP}, a minuscule containing the entire NT except for Revelation, dated to about the 12th century.
2. Codex 1^r, a minuscule containing the book of Revelation except for the last 6 verses (Rev 22:16–21), dated to the 12th century.
3. Codex 2^e, a minuscule containing the Gospels, dated to the 12th century.
4. Codex 2^{aP}, a minuscule containing Acts and the Epistles, dated to the 12th century or later.
5. Codex 4^{aP}, a minuscule containing Acts and the Epistles, dated to the 15th century.
6. Codex 7^P, a minuscule containing the Pauline Epistles, dated to the 11th century.
7. Codex 817, a minuscule containing the Gospels, dated to the 15th century.

All of these were the property of the Dominican Library in Basel except for 2^{aP}, which was obtained from the family of Johann Amerbach of Basel.⁴⁷ Manuscripts 1^{eaP} and 1^r had been borrowed from the Dominicans by Johannes Reuchlin. Erasmus borrowed them from Reuchlin.

Thus Erasmus had 3 manuscripts of the Gospels and Acts; 4 manuscripts of the Pauline Epistles; and only 1 manuscript of Revelation.⁴⁸ However, the main sources for his text were Codices 2^e

⁴⁵Epistle 352, CWE 3:172–73. See also de Jonge, “*Novum Testamentum a Nobis Versum*,” p. 401.

⁴⁶Cornelis Augustijn, *Erasmus: His Life, Works, and Influence*, trans. J. C. Grayson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 93; Brown, “Date of Erasmus’ Latin Translation,” p. 364; de Jonge, “*Novum Testamentum a Nobis Versum*,” p. 404; Yamauchi, “Erasmus’ Contributions,” pp. 10–11; Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, pp. 127–32.

⁴⁷Brown, “Date of Erasmus’ Latin Translation,” pp. 364–5. Amerbach (c. 1445–1513) was the first humanist printer in Basel and Froben’s predecessor and teacher. See Bloch, “Erasmus and the Froben Press,” p. 112.

⁴⁸Clinton Branine (*The History of Bible Families and the English Bible* [Greenwood,

and 2^{ap}.⁴⁹ Erasmus did not compile his own Greek text from the manuscripts at his disposal, few as they were; instead, Codices 2^e and 2^{ap} themselves served as the printer's copy for all the NT except Revelation. They still contain Erasmus' corrections written between the lines of the text and occasionally in the margins, which came from the other four manuscripts, though he made little use of some of them.⁵⁰ A comparison between the manuscripts used by the printer and the printed text indicates that the printer did not accept every correction that Erasmus proposed, and that the printer made some revisions not authorized by Erasmus.⁵¹

For the book of Revelation, Erasmus had only one manuscript (1^r). Since the text of Revelation was imbedded in a commentary by Andreas of Caesarea and thus difficult for the printer to read, Erasmus had a fresh copy made. The copyist himself misread the original at places, and thus a number of errors were introduced into Erasmus' printed text.⁵² For example, in Revelation 17:4 Codex 1^r and all other Greek manuscripts have the word ἀκάθαρτα ("impure"), but Erasmus' text reads ἀκαθάρτητος, a word unknown in Greek literature. In a similar fashion, the words καὶ παρέσται ("and is to come") in 17:8 were misread as καίπερ ἔστιν ("and yet is").⁵³ These and other errors produced by the scribe who made the copy of Revelation for the printer are still to be found in modern editions of the TR, such as the widely used version published by the Trinitarian Bible Society.⁵⁴

IN: Heritage Baptist University, n.d.], p. 12) makes the fantastic claim that Erasmus used 2nd century manuscripts of the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles, and 5th century manuscripts of the Gospels.

⁴⁹K. W. Clark, "Observations on the Erasmusian Notes in Codex 2," *Texte und Untersuchungen* 73 (1959): 749–56; Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, p. 127. Tarelli ("Erasmus's Manuscripts of the Gospels," pp. 159ff.) suggests that Erasmus may have also consulted Codex E, which was also the property of the Dominicans at Basel, but, as Bentley has shown (*Humanists and Holy Writ*, pp. 129–30), the evidence points in the opposite direction.

⁵⁰Clark, "Observations on the Erasmusian Notes in Codex 2," p. 751; Bo Reicke, "Erasmus und die neutestamentliche Textgeschichte," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 22 (July–August 1966): 259.

⁵¹Clark, "Observations on the Erasmusian Notes in Codex 2," p. 755.

⁵²Rummel, *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament*, p. 38. Some of these errors can conveniently be found in Frederick H. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1874), pp. 382–83, n. 2.

⁵³The marginal note in the old *Scofield Reference Bible* corrects this error (p. 1346).

⁵⁴H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ. This version is subtitled *The New Testament: The Greek Text Underlying the English Authorised Version of 1611*. My copy is not dated, though it

Because Codex 1^r was missing its last page and thus the last six verses of Revelation (22:16–21), Erasmus retranslated these verses from the Latin Vulgate, and he honestly admitted in the *Annotationes* that he had done so.⁵⁵ But again, this produced, by my count, twenty errors in his Greek NT which are still in the TR today.⁵⁶ They have no Greek manuscript support whatsoever.⁵⁷

In other parts of the NT Erasmus occasionally introduced into the Greek text material taken from the Latin Vulgate where he thought his Greek manuscripts were defective. For example, in Acts 9:6 the words τρέμων τε καὶ θαμβῶν εἶπε, κύριε, τί με θέλεις ποιῆσαι; καὶ ὁ κύριος πρὸς αὐτόν (“And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him”) were inserted by Erasmus at this point because they were in the Vulgate. He frankly admitted in his *Annotationes* that he took the words from the parallel passage in Acts 26:14. Though still found in the TR, the words have absolutely no Greek manuscript support.

With so few manuscripts from which to establish his Greek text, Erasmus was bound to adopt a reading which would ultimately, in light of future manuscript discoveries, prove to be in error. This is especially true in the book of Revelation where Erasmus had only one manuscript. Since no two manuscripts agree exactly, it is essential that manuscripts be compared to determine where the errors lie. But since that was not possible in Erasmus’ case, his text in Revelation is limited by the accuracy of his one manuscript. An example of this problem can be seen in Revelation 20:12. Following Codex 1^r, the text of Erasmus and the TR read ἑστῶτας ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ (“standing before God”). However, all other Greek manuscripts read ἑστῶτας ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου

was published in 1976. See Andrew J. Brown, *The Word of God Among All Nations: A Brief History of the Trinitarian Bible Society, 1831–1981* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1981), p. 130.

⁵⁵Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament*, p. 193, n. 15.

⁵⁶v. 16: insertion of τοῦ before Δαυίδ and ὀρθρινός instead of πρωῖνός; v. 17: aorist tense ἔλθε twice instead of the present ἔρχου, aorist tense ἐλθέτω instead of the present ἐρχέσθω, insertion of καὶ after ἐρχέσθω, present tense λαμβανέτω instead of the aorist λαβέτω, and insertion of τό before ὕδωρ; v. 18: συμμαρτύρομαι γάρ instead of μαρτυρῶ ἐγώ, present tense ἐπιτιθῆ instead of the aorist ἐπιθῆ, πρὸς ταῦτα instead of ἐπ’ αὐτά, and omission of τῷ before the last occurrence of βιβλίω; v. 19: present tense ἀφαιρῆ instead of the aorist ἀφέλη, omission of τοῦ before the first occurrence of βιβλίου, ἀφαιρήσει instead of ἀφέλει, βιβλίου instead of τοῦ ξύλου, insertion of καὶ before τῶν γεγραμμένων, and omission of τῷ before the last occurrence of βιβλίω; v. 21: insertion of ἡμῶν before Ἰησοῦ and insertion of ὑμῶν after πάντων. See Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 382, n. 2; Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, p. 100, n. 1.

⁵⁷Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 382.

(“standing before the throne”).⁵⁸

Besides the seven previously mentioned manuscripts which Erasmus used in Basel for his Greek text, his *Annotationes* indicate that he had examined and collated a few other manuscripts in his various travels. One of these, which can be identified with certainty, is Codex 69, a 15th century manuscript of the entire NT with minor gaps. In a few places Erasmus selected distinctive readings from this manuscript.⁵⁹

OTHER EDITIONS

A second edition of Erasmus' Latin-Greek NT was published in 1519 in which the title was changed from *Novum Instrumentum* to *Novum Testamentum*. In this edition his *Annotationes* almost doubled in size, and a new piece was added: *Capita argumentorum contra morosos quosdam ac indoctos*, “Summary arguments against certain contentious and boorish people.” Erasmus also had access to other manuscripts, chiefly Codex 3^{cap}, a minuscule containing the entire NT except for Revelation, dated to the 12th century.⁶⁰ The Greek text differs from the first edition in hundreds of places, chiefly in the correction of misprints.⁶¹ John Mill estimated these changes to number 400.⁶² However, the real character of the text changed little, since the manuscripts which Erasmus consulted were primarily of the Byzantine family. As was noted earlier, his Latin translation for this edition was a more thoroughgoing revision of the Vulgate.

A third edition was published in 1522.⁶³ Erasmus had been criticized because his first and second editions did not contain the famous “heavenly witnesses” passage of 1 John 5:7b–8a (*Comma Johanneum*), which was in manuscripts of the Vulgate.

(7) For there are three that bear record [*in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.* (8) *And there are three that bear witness in earth,*] the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three

⁵⁸Again, the old *Scofield Reference Bible* corrects this error (p. 1351).

⁵⁹See Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, p. 126; Brown, “Date of Erasmus' Latin Translation,” p. 368.

⁶⁰Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, p. 133; Yamauchi, “Erasmus' Contributions,” p. 12.

⁶¹Leon Vaganay, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 2nd ed. rev. by Christian-Bernard Amphoux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.132.

⁶²In his *Novum Testamentum Graecum* (Oxford, 1707), cited by Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 385. From his own study, Scrivener believed that Mill's numbers were low.

⁶³Mill estimated 118 changes were made.

agree in one.

One of Erasmus' critics was Diego López Zúñiga (better known by his Latin name, Stunica), who was one of the editors of the Complutensian NT. The Complutensian NT had included 1 John 5:7, though they translated it from Latin into Greek. Stunica could never cite any Greek manuscript which included the text, but only argued that Latin manuscripts were more reliable than Greek.⁶⁴ Another critic was Edward Lee, who was later to become Archbishop of York. Lee accused Erasmus of encouraging Arianism. "Latin Christians since the early Middle Ages had considered this passage the clearest scriptural proof of the doctrine of the Trinity."⁶⁵ But Erasmus had excluded it from his first two editions because he found it in "no Greek manuscript, few Latin manuscripts of antique vintage, and only rarely in patristic works. He cited with approval the opinion of St. Jerome, that Latin copyists had introduced the passage on their own in order to refute the Arians and provide scriptural support for Trinitarian doctrine."⁶⁶

In the many retellings of this famous episode, it has become the common tradition that Erasmus rashly made a promise to his critics that he would include the *Comma* if a single Greek manuscript could be brought forward as evidence.⁶⁷ However, Henk J. de Jonge has recently demonstrated that nothing in Erasmus' writings indicates he formally made such a promise.⁶⁸ DeJonge suggests that the notion of a promise came from a misinterpretation of a passage in a 1520 response to Edward Lee (*Responsio ad Annotationes Eduardi Lei*). Erasmus wrote:

If a single manuscript had come into my hands, in which stood what we read (sc. in the Latin Vulgate) then I would certainly have used it to fill in what was missing in the other manuscripts I had. Because that did not happen, I have taken the only course which was permissible, that is, I have indicated (sc. in the *Annotationes*) what was missing from the Greek manuscripts.⁶⁹

De Jonge suggests that Erasmus included the *Comma Johanneum* be-

⁶⁴Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, pp. 95–96.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 95

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 152.

⁶⁷E.g., Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, p. 101; Jack Finegan, *Encountering New Testament Manuscripts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 57; Greenlee, *Textual Criticism*, p. 64; Bainton, *Erasmus*, p. 137.

⁶⁸Henk J. de Jonge, "Erasmus and the *Comma Johanneum*," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 56 (1980): 381–89.

⁶⁹The translation is from de Jonge, "Erasmus and the *Comma Johanneum*," p. 385.

cause he did not want his reputation ruined over a minor detail in the Greek text that might prevent his Latin translation from receiving wide distribution. When Erasmus was informed that the passage had been found in Codex 61, a 16th century manuscript then in England, he included it, though he notes in his *Annotationes* that he did not believe the *Comma* was genuine.⁷⁰

Another part of this episode has also been incorrectly reported. Again, Metzger, among others, has said that Erasmus *believed* that Codex 61 “had been prepared expressly in order to confute him.”⁷¹ And Harris has shown that Codex 61 was, in fact, probably produced at the time of the controversy for the purpose of refuting Erasmus.⁷² But Erasmus himself had a different theory as to why Codex 61 contained the *Comma*. He believed

that the Codex, like many other manuscripts, contained a text which had been revised after, and adapted to, the Vulgate. This was one of Erasmus’ stock theories, to which he repeatedly referred in evaluating Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. He regarded manuscripts which deviated from the Byzantine text known to him, and showed parallels with the Vulgate, as having been influenced by the Vulgate.⁷³

Erasmus continued to include the *Comma* in his later editions.⁷⁴

A fourth edition was published in 1527. Erasmus made use of the Complutensian Polyglot, especially in the book of Revelation. The text of the Vulgate was added in a third column. A fifth and final edition was published in 1535, one year before Erasmus’ death. The Vulgate was no longer included.

⁷⁰Erasmus was, of course, correct. That the *Comma* is a later addition to the text can be demonstrated from the fact that it is found in the text of only four manuscripts (61, 629, 918, 2318), the earliest of which is from the fourteenth century, and in the margin of four others (88, 221, 429, 636), the earliest of which is the tenth century. It was not cited in the 4th century Trinitarian controversies (Sabellian and Arian) by any Greek Father, an absolutely inexplicable omission had they been aware of the passage. The old *Scofield Reference Bible* says that it “has no real authority, and has been inserted” (p. 1325).

⁷¹*Text of the New Testament*, p. 101. In the Appendix to his 3rd edition, Metzger notes that these statements have now been demonstrated to be inaccurate by the research of de Jonge (p. 291, n 2).

⁷²J. Rendel Harris, *The Origin of the Leicester Codex of the New Testament* (London, 1887), pp. 46–53.

⁷³de Jonge, “Erasmus and the *Comma Johanneum*,” p. 387.

⁷⁴Greenlee (*Textual Criticism*, p. 64) and Yamauchi (“Erasmus’ Contributions,” p. 12) incorrectly report that Erasmus dropped the *Comma* from his later editions. But see Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, p. 153.

REACTION TO THE *NOVUM INSTRUMENTUM*

The criticism which Erasmus received for his work was primarily directed toward his Latin translation and his *Annotationes*, not his Greek text directly, which few people could read.⁷⁵ The translation was criticized because the Vulgate, which Erasmus was correcting by examining Greek manuscripts, was considered to be inspired. Even before the *Novum Instrumentum* was published, Maarten van Dorp, a friend of Erasmus from the theology faculty at Louvain, wrote in a 1514 letter:

Now I differ from you on this question of truth and integrity, and claim that these are qualities of the Vulgate edition that we have in common use. For it is not reasonable that the whole church, which has always used this edition and still both approves and uses it, should for all these centuries have been wrong.⁷⁶

Dorp goes on to say if anything in the Vulgate “varies in point of truth from the Greek manuscript, at that point I bid the Greeks goodbye and cleave to the Latins.”⁷⁷ Another critic of Erasmus, Petrus Sutor, a theologian at the University of Paris, said of the Vulgate:

If in one point the Vulgate were in error the entire authority of Holy Scripture would collapse, love and faith would be extinguished, heresies and schisms would abound, blasphemy would be committed against the Holy Spirit, the authority of theologians would be shaken, and indeed the Catholic Church would collapse from the foundations.⁷⁸

Besides failure to include the *Comma Johanneum* in his first two editions, Erasmus’ Latin translation was the object of numerous attacks wherever it departed from the “inspired” Latin Vulgate. For instance, when the angel greets Mary in Luke 1:28, the Vulgate translates the Greek κεχαριτωμένη with *gratia plena* (“full of grace”). Erasmus, however, correctly believed the Greek is better translated by *gratiosa* (“favored”).⁷⁹ This rendering caused an uproar since the translation

⁷⁵For a discussion of some of the controversies surrounding Erasmus’ work, see Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament*, chapter 4 and “An Open Letter to Borrish Critics,” pp. 438–59; Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, chapter 5 and “Erasmus’ *Annotationes*,” pp. 33–53; Bruce E. Benson, “Erasmus and the Correspondence with Johann Eck: A Sixteenth-Century Debate over Scriptural Authority,” *Trinity Journal* 6 (Autumn 1985): 157–65.

⁷⁶Epistle 304, CWE 3:21.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 22.

⁷⁸Cited by Bainton, *Erasmus*, p. 135.

⁷⁹Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament*, p. 167; Bentley, “Erasmus’ *Annotationes*,” p. 41.

gratia plena had been understood by the church in the technical sense of “full of divine grace,” and thus supporting the doctrine of Mary’s sinlessness.

Erasmus was also attacked for some of his interpretative comments in the *Annotationes*. He was justly criticized because of his view of inspiration. He believed correctly that it extended only to the original authors, but incorrectly held that it protected them only in matters of faith. In a note on Acts 10 he stated that the apostles’ Greek was in error. Divine inspiration extended only to their thoughts, not their words. “It was not necessary to ascribe everything in the apostles to a miracle. They were men, they were ignorant of some things, and they erred in a few places.”⁸⁰ In the *Capita* he insisted that “there were in the apostle’s speech some things that were not grammatically correct.”⁸¹ Because of this criticism Erasmus added a statement to the *Apologia* of his fourth edition (1527) in which he affirmed the authors of Scripture had made no mistakes but “that errors crept into Scripture only through inattentiveness of copyists and translators.”⁸²

THE GREEK TEXT AFTER ERASMUS

Erasmus’ Greek text was reprinted with various changes by others. Robert Estienne (Latin, Stephanus) produced four editions (1546, 1549, 1550, 1551). His third edition of 1550 was the first to have a critical apparatus, with references to the Complutensian Polyglot and fifteen manuscripts.⁸³ It was republished many times and became the accepted form of the TR, especially in England.⁸⁴ It influenced all future editions of the TR. According to Mill, the first and second editions differ in 67 places, and the third in 284 places.⁸⁵ The fourth edition had the same text as the third but is noteworthy because the text is divided into numbered verses for the first time. It was the source for the NT of the Geneva Bible (1557).

Theodore Beza, the successor of John Calvin at Geneva, produced nine editions between 1565 and 1604. Only four are independent edi-

⁸⁰Cited by Rummel, “An Open Letter to Borrish Critics,” p. 454.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, p. 204.

⁸³T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries* (London: SCM Press, 1971), p. 103.

⁸⁴Philip Schaff, *A Companion to the Greek Testament and the English Version*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1896), p. 236.

⁸⁵Cited by Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, pp. 387–88.

tions, the others being smaller-sized reprints. His text was essentially a reprinting of Stephanus with minor changes.⁸⁶ A study of the KJV NT by F. H. A. Scrivener concluded that Beza's edition of 1598 was the main source for the translators.⁸⁷

As was noted at the beginning of this article, Bonaventura and Abraham Elzevir produced seven editions between 1624 and 1678. And it was from their second and definitive edition of 1633 that the term Textus Receptus originated. In Europe the third edition of Stephanus (1550) became the standard form of the text in England and that of the Elzevirs (1633) on the continent. Scrivener suggests that they differ in 287 places.⁸⁸

CONCLUSION

Upon receiving a copy of Erasmus' Latin Greek NT, John Colet responded: "The name of Erasmus shall never perish."⁸⁹ His "prophecy" has proved to be true for nearly 500 years. His "Textus Receptus" was the standard form of the Greek Text until challenged in the nineteenth century, but, as has been noted, still has many defenders in fundamental circles. Greenlee has wisely observed: "The TR is not a 'bad' or misleading text, either theologically or practically."⁹⁰ No one will be led into theological error from using the TR, either directly or in a translation based on it (e.g., KJV and NKJV). But is it, as Waite believes, "the exact words of the originals themselves"? Hardly! It is based on a few very late manuscripts, and in some cases has no Greek manuscript support whatever. Without question it is possible to produce a text which is closer to the autographs by comparing the more than 5,000 Greek manuscripts available today. Fundamentalists should reject the attempts by some in our movement to make the TR the only acceptable form of Greek text.

⁸⁶Vaganay, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, p. 134. Scrivener (*A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 391), citing Wetstein, says that Beza's text differs from that of Stephanus in about 50 places.

⁸⁷*The New Testament in Greek: According to the Text Followed in the Authorised Version Together with the Variations Adopted in the Revised Version* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1908), p. vii.

⁸⁸*A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 392.

⁸⁹Epistle 423, CWE 3:312.

⁹⁰Greenlee, *Textual Criticism*, p. 63