

CHAPTER TWO

RENAISSANCE OF THE BIBLE

Only a very few can be learned, but all can be Christian, all can be devout, and – I shall boldly say – all can be theologians.¹

– *Desiderius Erasmus, in the introduction to the first edition of the New Testament in the original Greek (1516)*

We do not ordinarily associate the words 'Renaissance' and 'Bible'. Yet we should. One of the most enduring contributions of the Renaissance was the dissemination of the Bible. In the first century of printing, European presses produced hundreds of editions of the Bible in dozens of languages and formats. By 1550, millions of printed Bibles saturated European culture.

Availability is only one aspect of the Bible revolution. Texts and translations became reliable, uniform, and, as we will see particularly in the English translations, stunningly elegant. The scholarly standardisation of the printed Renaissance Bible was a major innovation over the medieval manuscript Bibles, no two of which were identical. Despite the serious efforts of many theologians, textual confusions could never be definitively rectified in medieval Bibles.

The process of laying a foundation for a reliable text begins with Desiderius Erasmus's Greek Bible of 1516, the first edition of the New Testament in the original language. This is a major break-

through in Renaissance scholarship and an important milestone in the history of Christianity.

Desiderius Erasmus

Erasmus (1467-1536) was an international celebrity during his lifetime. He was one of the first contemporary authors to achieve such renown, something that became possible only as a result of the growth of the printing industry. A diverse and prolific writer, he has been heralded as one of the most influential figures in the history of education, the greatest Latin writer of the Northern Renaissance, and the most important intellectual precursor to the various reform movements.

He was born in the Netherlands, the son of a widow and a priest. Erasmus would never concede that his father was a priest at the time of his birth because children of priests were excluded from church offices. This fact was significant, as Erasmus became an Augustinian canon in 1487. Even though both his parents died while

he was still a boy, Erasmus enjoyed an excellent basic education before going on to study at university.

He wrote many influential literary works – *Praise of Folly*, the *Colloquies* and *Julius Excluded* to name a few examples. These works are distinguished for their wit and erudition, especially their irony and blunt sarcasm. They also contain earnest criticism of practices and corruption in the church. *Julius Excluded*, a satire he published anonymously, portrays a conversation at the pearly gates between St Peter and Julius II, the warrior pope of the Renaissance. When St Peter denies Julius entry, the pope decides to raise an army to force his way into heaven. This and other examples of searing criticism would lead his contemporaries to blame Erasmus, at least in part, for the Protestant Reformation. His humanist challenges to the church – especially his insistence on the study of the Bible and the early church – appealed to many intellectuals and certainly conditioned initial reactions to Luther, even if it would be going too far to say that Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched.

He also published many scholarly works. Among his most frequently reprinted works were several manuals for humanist rhetoric. Another research speciality was editing the writings of early Christian authors. His pioneering work in that genre was the edition of St Jerome that he published in 1516. It successfully assessed the authenticity of works ascribed to Jerome in medieval manuscripts and included a biography of St Jerome that was grounded in text-historical criticism of the sources. For northern Europeans, this constituted a major breakthrough in historiography. Among his other editions of early Christian writers were Arnobius (1522), Ambrose (1528-9), Augustine in ten volumes (1528-

9), Basil (1532), Chrysostomos (1530, 1536), Hilary (1523) and Lactantius (1529). These books formed the beginning of a reliable library for research into the early centuries of Christianity.

His greatest accomplishment was the first edition of the New Testament in Greek, a work that shook the edifices of Latin Christianity to their foundations.

Although he may have inspired many who would become Protestants, Erasmus remained a devout Roman Catholic. He dedicated his edition of the Bible to Pope Leo X. He spent many of the early years of the Reformation in the city of Basel, Switzerland, where his printer, Johann Froben, operated one of the most scholarly publishing houses in Northern Europe. In 1528, however, Erasmus decided to move from Basel to Fribourg. Tremendously destructive iconoclastic riots blazed in Basel in February 1528, leading the city council to outlaw the celebration of the Catholic Mass. This necessitated Erasmus's departure, but he continued to visit the city frequently in order to continue his collaborations with Froben. It was in Basel, at Froben's house, that Erasmus died on 11 July 1536.

Despite his loyalty, ultimately the Roman Catholic Church would place all Erasmus's works on the index of forbidden books at the conclusion of the Council of Trent (1545-63).

One of his last major works was *On Mending the Harmony of the Church* (1533; *De sarcienda ecclesiae concordia*), an interpretation of Psalm 83 that proposed a way to end the religious rancour of the times. It attracted much attention, as did everything Erasmus published, but nothing short of force – something Erasmus abhorred – could have reunited the fractured church in the sixteenth century.

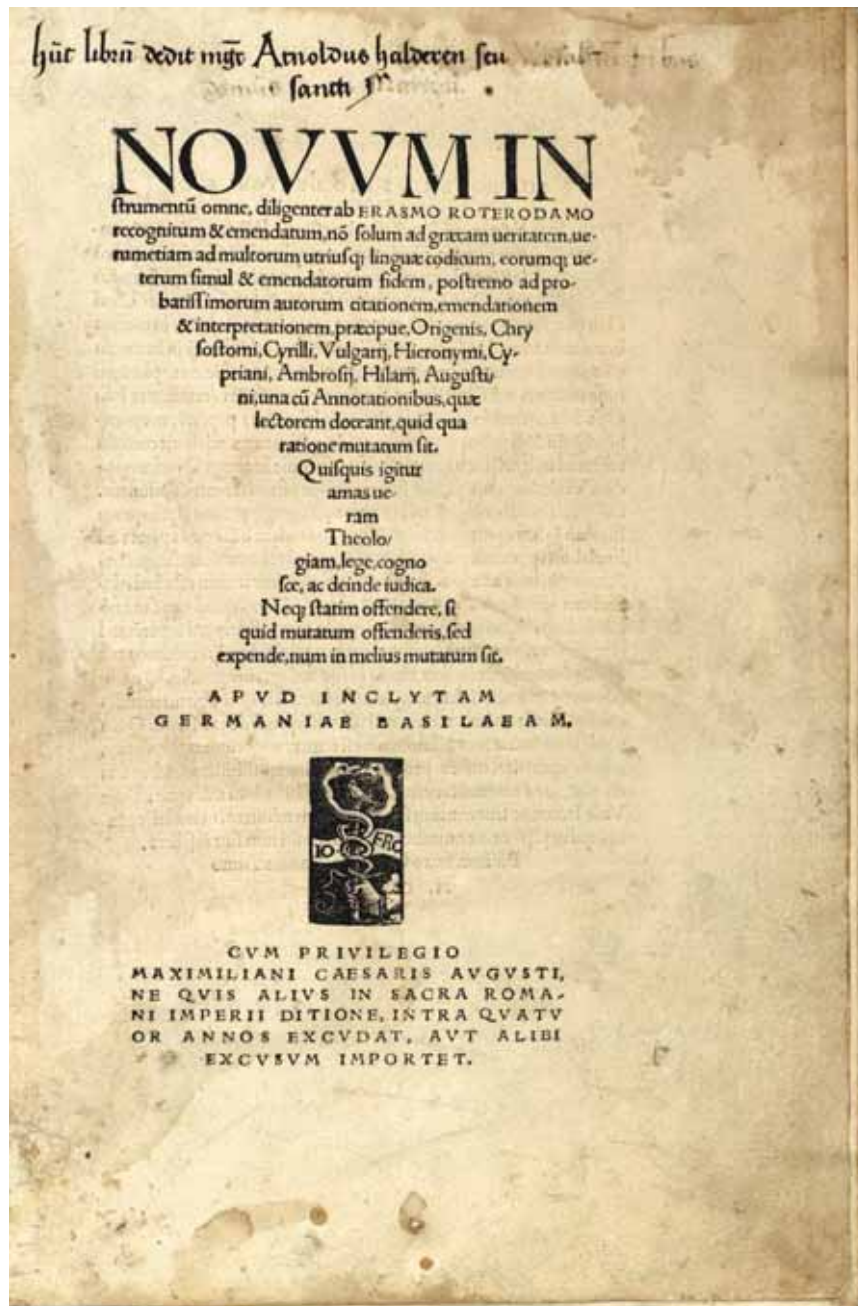


Fig. 2.1. The first edition of the New Testament in Greek appeared in 1516. It was the crowning achievement in the career of the scholar and writer Desiderius Erasmus. This work was both influential and controversial for several reasons, one of which is that it offered a new authoritative text for Western Christianity. The long title, a typical feature in Renaissance books, narrows in the centre of the page to emphasise a challenge: 'If you love true theology, read this [the New Testament in Greek], understand it, and then pass judgment' [Quisquis igitur amas veram Theologiam, lege, cognosce, ac deinde iudica].



Fig. 2.2. Albrecht Dürer, Erasmus (engraving, 1526). When the German artist Albrecht Dürer executed this engraved portrait, Erasmus was an intellectual celebrity, renowned for his Latin literary works and his edition of the New Testament in Greek. The motto, in Greek, states that [Erasmus's] 'writings will show his image better', an echo of Erasmus's contention, as expressed in the Introduction to the New Testament, that Christ's words, i.e. the Bible, represent him better than could any physical relic.

The New Testament in Greek

Producing an edition of the New Testament in the original Greek was not a simple task. Good manuscripts of the Bible in Greek were scarce in Western Europe. In fact, Erasmus's efforts suffered somewhat from the inferiority of the textual witnesses that he could turn up. His manuscripts were not of notable antiquity – none predated the twelfth century – and several were somewhat defective.

Most of the work comparing medieval manuscripts was done in the Swiss city of Basel, and in considerable haste. Even though he had studied four Greek manuscripts in England, including a complete work, the Leicester Codex, there are reasons to believe that it was the printer Johann Froben who encouraged Erasmus to create the first edition of the Greek text. This was, as Froben must have stressed, the logical conclusion to his decade-long

research on the text of the New Testament. Froben employed other scholars who could aid in such a demanding project, in particular the learned sons of the deceased printer Johann Amerbach and the budding scholar Johannes Oecolampadius. Erasmus and his team collated some five Greek manuscripts on site at the press in Basel. These manuscripts are now at the University of Basel Library and show some curious signs of wear and tear – Erasmus’s handwritten notes in some margins (in the Renaissance, as now, scholars were known to write notes directly on the pages of library books!). Erasmus’s text would not quite satisfy modern standards – and was even superseded in the Renaissance. All of Erasmus’s manuscript sources derive from what scholars refer to as the Byzantine recension, a family of manuscripts no longer in favour. The now standard editions of the New Testament (the Nestlé-Aland editions) prefer readings from a western family of manuscripts (often called the Hesychian or Egyptian recension).

Nonetheless, with few exceptions, it is a remarkably adequate edition. Its most infamous lapse is the end of the Book of Revelation. His only manuscript for Revelation (the Codex Capnionis, which was borrowed from the great Hebrew scholar Johannes Reuchlin) was so defective that Erasmus had to translate six verses – the final verses of the Bible, Revelation 22:16-21 – from Latin back into Greek in order to fill the gap. Obviously, this was not a satisfactory solution; even though Erasmus has been ridiculed for it, it is only fair to mention that he openly admitted the problem in the first edition.

Erasmus’s edition would undergo a series of revisions. He re-edited it himself four further times, his last version appearing in

1535, just months before his death. Probably the most influential edition was the second (1518-19), which was a major improvement on the first. This became the basis of Luther’s revolutionary translation of 1522.

Naturally, the Greek New Testament attracted the attention of many other scholars. The most notable of the post-Erasmian editors of the Greek New Testament was Robert Estienne. Estienne was originally the scholarly printer to the King of France. As of 1550, he fled Paris for a refuge in Calvin’s Geneva. Just before leaving, he produced his masterpiece, the Greek New Testament of 1550 – often called the ‘received text’. This edition set the standard for the rest of the Renaissance. Among Estienne’s improvements are a carefully printed listing of variant readings in the Greek manuscripts (such a list is traditionally called an ‘apparatus’) and the use of the ancient Codex Bezae, a Greek and Latin manuscript of the New Testament that probably dates from the fifth century. Estienne’s *textus receptus* would be the principal foundation for the New Testament in the King James Version.

Controversy

The appearance of the new Bible ignited many theological controversies. After all, with the publication of Erasmus’s edition in 1516, the very word of God changed for Western Europeans. Even more unsettling, Erasmus’s research made it clear that the original formulation of the word cannot always be unequivocally known. The manuscript traditions of the Greek New Testament were sufficiently heterogeneous to cause uncertainty. And even today – it is a most uncomfortable fact – we cannot

always be sure what the original words were in some passages of the New Testament.

The immediate question posed by Erasmus's Greek Bible concerned the status of the Vulgate Bible. That was a huge question, however, because St Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible had served as the basis for doctrine in the West for over a millennium. The church considered his Vulgate an inspired translation. Yet what should one make of passages in the Vulgate that could not be found in the Greek manuscripts? How accurately did the Vulgate render the original Greek? Had misunderstandings conveyed by the Vulgate translation unduly informed the development of some points of doctrine? The Vulgate, of course, still does have importance for the textual criticism of the Bible. It provides many clues about the state of the text at the end of the fourth century and helps us assess the reliability of the Greek manuscripts.

Consequently, a controversial part of this book is Erasmus's fresh translation of the Bible from the Greek into Latin, the language of the church and of scholarship. He included the new translation as an aid to scholars, few of whom had yet been able to learn Greek. But the unmistakable implication was that Jerome's ancient translation did not convey the sense of the original Greek as well as Erasmus could. Especially bitter objections were raised when Erasmus, in the second edition, translated the beginning of John's Gospel as 'In principio erat sermo', a rough translation of which would be: 'In the beginning was the discourse'. This new word was jarring to those accustomed to *verbum* (word). He felt that *sermo*, which has a slightly broader range of meanings than *verbum*, better captured the complexity of

logos, which, in addition to 'word', connotes 'thought' and 'concept'.

Indeed criticism immediately rained down on Erasmus from all quadrants of the heavens. How could some scholars oppose such a benign undertaking as the first publication of the New Testament in Greek? The unspoken reason for the anti-Erasmian storms was his fierce assault on scholastic theology, the complex, speculative theology, grounded in Aristotelian logic, that then dominated Europe's universities. The truth of the matter is that Erasmus fashioned the edition as part of a wider campaign against scholasticism. When Erasmus declared the centrality of the 'philosophy of Christ' for Christians, by which term he meant Christ's teachings as recorded in the Bible, he was implicitly rejecting the hegemony of the actual philosophy of his time – scholasticism. The Bible and not Aristotle, was the source of the '*philosophia Christi*'. This theology was accessible to every pious Christian, and not just to intellectuals. As Erasmus put it, 'Therefore, I believe, one should not consider himself to be a Christian because he disputes about instances, relations, quiddities and formalities with an obscure and irksome confusion of words, but rather because he accepts and exhibits what Christ taught and showed forth.'² Despite his deserved reputation as an advocate of preserving peace and unity in the church, Erasmus knew how to throw down the gauntlet. These are fighting words. Even more importantly, Erasmus's competing concept of theology, as we can see so dramatically in the epigraph to this chapter, urges one of the most significant developments of the Renaissance: the deep penetration of European culture by the Bible.



Fig. 2.3. Title page of the second edition of Erasmus's Bible (1518-19). The woodcut borders are attributed to Ambrosius Holbein, the brother of Hans Holbein the Younger. Johann Froben of Basel, Switzerland, was the publisher of Erasmus's editions of the New Testament (and of many other works by Erasmus). Froben operated an academic publishing house and had excellent scholars on his staff to see projects such as this through press.

This new title page, designed for the second edition – now called the *Novum Testamentum* (New Testament) – might appear rather unusual for a Bible. The left border shows Cupid, while the right border is dominated by a nude Venus; the top border depicts, on the right, the myth of Apollo and Daphne; the lower border depicts the 'Calumny of Apelles'. These motifs remind us that Erasmus's Bible was a Renaissance phenomenon, part of the effort to recover the heritage of antiquity.

Doctrine

Many difficulties arose from comparisons of St Jerome's Latin translation with the original Greek text. Christian theology had developed in the West without the benefit of scripture in its original languages. Erasmus's editions remedied that deficiency for the New Testament. Theologians experienced a shock when Erasmus showed that a proof text for the Trinity, 1 John 5:7-8 ('For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one'), was in the Vulgate but not in any of the Greek manuscripts. This verse is called the 'Johannine phrase' (*comma Johanneum*). Most scholars nowadays concur with Erasmus's initial decision to delete it as an interpolation in the Vulgate.

Nonetheless, a manuscript, now in Trinity College, Dublin, was reported to include the Johannine phrase, and it was restored to the Greek text by Erasmus in the third edition of 1522. The Dublin manuscript was almost certainly produced in the sixteenth century as an attempt to forge a Greek attestation of the heavenly witnesses. Erasmus suspected as much, but restored the text so as to put an end to the bitter assaults on that issue.³ Striking a similarly conciliatory note, he printed the Vulgate as a third version (in addition to the Greek text and his own Latin translation of the Greek) in his fourth edition published in 1527. This is important as it shows Erasmus bowing to pressure concerning the significance of the Vulgate and also embracing it as a valuable early textual witness. Indeed, probably the most principled criticism of Erasmus's first edition questioned the status he accorded the Vulgate, an issue raised vociferously by Diego López de Zúñiga, editor of a rival scholarly Bible, the

Complutensian Polyglot Bible of 1514-17. The Greek manuscripts, after all, really were defective and could not necessarily be declared the panacea for all of the Vulgate's woes. Zúñiga, for instance, held that the Vulgate's authority was adequate for justifying the inclusion of the Johannine phrase on the Trinity.

Only a few people would question the doctrine of the Trinity in the Renaissance, and Erasmus was most definitely not among them. But many, in the aftermath of Erasmus, would question the established doctrine of the sacraments. The problem was that the sacraments of the church appeared to lose some textual grounding when one consulted the original Greek rather than the Latin translation. The very word for sacrament in Greek, *mysterion* (as in Ephesians 5:32), from which we have the English word 'mystery', was shown to have a significantly different sense from that of the Latin *sacramentum*.

The most important example of this problem was St Jerome's rendering of *metanoieite* as *agite poenitentiam* ('do penance'), John the Baptist's charge in Matthew 3:2, which Jesus repeated in an expanded formulation in 4:17. When divorced from the Greek original, the words *agite poenitentiam* came to be the proof text for the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance. As Erasmus pointed out in 1516, *metanoieite* does not quite mean 'do penance', but rather 'turn your mind', or, as it is usually translated into English, 'repent'. Following Erasmus's lead, Luther translated this as 'Bessert Euch!' ('improve yourself'). Luther, in fact, defined the meaning of Matthew 4:17 in the very first thesis of the *Ninety-Five Theses*, making it the opening foray for his revolutionary rejection of the church's penitential system.

IMPORTANT EDITIONS OF THE BIBLE IN GREEK

- 1516** Erasmus's first edition of the New Testament in Greek
- 1518** Aldus Manutius of Venice prints the complete Bible in Greek. The text of the Old Testament is the Septuagint, the third-century B.C. translation, and it is the first edition of the Septuagint in print. The New Testament is from Erasmus's 1516 edition.
- 1518/19** Erasmus's corrected and expanded second edition. This was the basis for Martin Luther's translation of 1522.
- c.1520** The Complutensian Polyglot Bible is published. The New Testament volume had been printed in 1514, that is before Erasmus's version. Nonetheless, the work was not released until c. 1520.
- 1522** The third edition of Erasmus New Testament in Greek. In this edition, Erasmus bowed to pressure from theologians and inserted the controversial *comma Johanneum*, a proof text for the Trinity that does not appear in the oldest manuscripts.
- 1550** Robert Estienne, the Royal Printer in France, produced a magnificent edition that would be declared the *textus receptus*, the 'received text'. This was a significant improvement over Erasmus. It includes readings from the Codex Bezae, an ancient Greek and Latin manuscript of the New Testament (probably 5th century). This is also the first edition to include a 'critical apparatus' that prints variant readings from manuscripts in the margins. Richard Bentley dubbed this edition the 'Protestant Pope'.
- 1551** Robert Estienne produced a tiny New Testament (in 16mo) that included the Greek text, the Latin Vulgate and Erasmus's Latin translation, all in parallel columns. This is the first Bible that divided chapters into verses. Estienne printed this work in Geneva, the city where he found refuge after fleeing from Paris in 1550.
- 1587** The Sixtine or Roman edition of the Septuagint based on the Vatican Codex B. The work was edited by Cardinal Antonio Carafa and became the authorised Catholic version.

Literary Attitude toward the Word of God

The first love of Erasmus's life was literature. While he would remain true to that first love, ultimately creating the greatest Latin literary work of the Renaissance – *Praise of Folly* – he would form new loves, most importantly, a love for scholarship and, in particular, a love for biblical scholarship.

One aspect of Erasmus's biblical research has not received adequate attention: his attitude toward the language, the literary quality of the holy word. In the introduction to the New Testament, Erasmus casually and repeatedly refers to the Bible as 'literature'. This was, daringly, the *bonae litterae*, the belles-lettres, that he would place at the entrance to the humanist library.

This was a departure, a profound one, from the traditional attitude toward the Bible. It was the utilitarian, artless, even rough, language of fishermen, if not fish-mongers. The message, not the medium, was all that mattered.

Erasmus negotiates this shift by acknowledging the simplicity of biblical rhetoric, counting that as a virtue instead of a vice. But he does rewrite the Bible in his Latin versions. For his new Latin translation, he explicitly explains the degree to which he smooths over the roughness of the Greek original: 'I followed the rules of correct writing everywhere so far as it was possible to do so always provided that there was no loss of simplicity'.⁴ Following 'the rules of correct writing' means, in his case, conforming to the highest standards of Latin rhetoric.

He went further in his *Paraphrases* of the books of the New Testament. Erasmus laboured long, hard and seriously on a most curious theological project: paraphrasing the

words of the New Testament in diffusive Latin prose, modelled especially on the style of Cicero. The claim is that the *Paraphrases* are not translations but equivalents of the biblical message in a Roman literary style. In essence, the *Paraphrases* are stylistic exercises in finding classical equivalents and high-flying rhetorical amplifications for biblical words and phrases. The exercise of paraphrasing was known in the Renaissance from the handbook of Quintilian, the highly influential Roman rhetorician. After all, the New Testament does have a simple, sometimes even lapidary, manner. As we can see in the following extract, Erasmus's paraphrases certainly overcame that.

Our father, which hast regenerated us to heaven, who were once unluckily born of Adam, and hast prepared for us (forsaking earthly things) a kingdom and inheritance everlasting: which art said to be in heaven because thou doest replenish all and hast no manner of dross or earthly infirmity: grant that thy name be honourable and glorious among men through us, which by thy benefit, be perfect and pure.⁵

For better or worse, this is the paraphrase for the simple statement, 'Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name'.

What could something like this do to the history of the English Bible? The procedure frees the writer from the constraints of direct translation. More importantly, with its primary goal being the replication of the Bible in classical, Ciceronian style, this exercise compels the translator to explore the esthetics of the language of translation. In this case, the result is copiousness and clarity, even if that depends on a radical departure from the word-for-word rendition.

IMPORTANT EDITIONS OF THE BIBLE IN HEBREW

- 1477-87** Parts of the Hebrew Bible appear at Jewish presses in Italy. The first Hebrew printing of the Psalms is published in Bologna in 1477, followed by the editio princeps of the Pentateuch (Soncino, 1482) and the Hagiographa (Naples, 1486/87). The Pentateuch in Hebrew was also printed in Faro, Portugal in 1487.
- 1488** The first complete Hebrew Bible appears at the press of Joshua Solomon ben Israel Nathan Soncino in Soncino, Italy.
- 1491/93** The second complete Hebrew Bible is printed by Soncino, probably after his move to Naples.
- 1494** Third edition of the Hebrew, printed by Joshua Soncino's nephew Gershon ben Moses Soncino in Brescia. It became the *textus receptus* for some time. Martin Luther is known to have used this edition for his translation of the Old Testament into German.
- 1514/c.20** The first Christian production of Hebrew Bible occurs in Spain as part of the Complutensian Polyglot, a massive project undertaken by Cardinal Ximenes. Though printed 1514-17, the volumes were not published and released until c.1520. Four of the six volumes make up the Hebrew Old Testament.
- 1516/17** First Rabbinic Bible, Hebrew with full vowel points and accents. The text, edited by Felix Pratensis, includes important Jewish commentaries as well. The book was published by Daniel Bomberg, a Christian who specialised in printing Hebrew books for Jews.
- 1524/25** The second edition of the Rabbinic Bible, including the first edition of Massoretic texts. It was edited by Jacob ben Chayyim and printed by Daniel Bomberg. This edition of the Massora remains the standard today.
- 1535** Sebastian Münster's edition of the Hebrew Bible with his fairly literal Latin translation. A popular edition among reformers in Germany, Switzerland, England and France.
- 1575-79** Immanuel Tremellius, a converted Jew who soon left the Catholics and became Protestant, translated the Bible from Hebrew and Syriac, together with his son-in-law, Franciscus Junius. The fairly literal translation served as a useful aid to the translators of the King James Version.

THE SONCINO PRESS

The Soncino family of Italy produced over one hundred and thirty-five books in Hebrew from 1484 to 1547. Israel Nathan ben Samuel set up a printing press in the city of Soncino in 1483 and published the Berakot in early 1484. Though they kept the name Soncino, the press moved its location regularly after 1490, with works published in Casal Maggiore (1486), Naples (1490-2), Brescia (1491-4), Barco (1494-7), Fano (1503-6), Pesaro (1507-20), Ortono (1519), and Rimini (1521-6). They also printed in Salonica (1532-3) and Constantinople (1534-47). Joshua Solomon ben Israel Nathan Soncino succeeded his father and worked mainly in Naples. Joshua's nephew, Gershon ben Moses Soncino, was the most influential of the Soncino printers and printed books in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Gershon was the printer of the important 1494 Hebrew Bible.

Translating Erasmus into English

Erasmus's prestige was sufficient to guarantee a reception of this unusual procedure. He truly was the greatest European celebrity before Luther came onto the scene. More specifically for England, the Edwardian injunctions of 1547 conferred a special status on Erasmus's *Paraphrases*. Those injunctions renewed the 1538 mandate of Henry VIII that a printed English Bible of the largest size (i.e. in folio format) be set out on a lectern in every church in the realm, but with an additional requirement:

[Parsons, vicars and other curates] shall provide within three months next after this visitation, one book of the whole Bible, of the largest volume, in English. And within one twelve-months next after the said visitation, the Paraphrasis of Erasmus also in English upon the Gospels, and the same set up in some convenient place, within the said church that they have cure of, whereas their parishioners may most commodiously resort unto the same and read the same.⁶

As regards Erasmus's *Paraphrases*, this is an unusual policy and we need to pause to reflect on how it came about. The *Paraphrases*, though striking, were simply not one of Erasmus's most acclaimed works. Nonetheless, they do accord with the general English policy in place at the beginning of Edward's reign, of establishing the Bible as the icon of authority in the new church without a pope. Moreover, because the *Paraphrases* aim only to recast the biblical message, they disseminate a most moderate theology. Erasmus expands on the words of the New Testament with the sole intention of amplifying the philosophy of Christ. The paraphrases are daring in their literary flights but cautious in their strict adherence to the biblical text. They model a quite restrictive form of Bible-based evangelising – retelling the message of scripture. To use Shakespeare's words, we might say that Erasmus was 'retelling what is told' (Sonnet 76).

Moreover, Queen Catherine played a special role in the elevation of Erasmus's stature in England. Catherine Parr was Henry VIII's last wife, the fortunate survivor in the mnemonic device 'divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived'. Her accom-

plishments were numerous. She was the force behind the reconciliation of the three children from Henry's previous marriages. Her gracious support of all the royal children proved highly influential as the Reformation unfolded in England, since each would become monarch. In part, her actions ensured, on the one hand, a Protestant education for Edward and, on the other hand, the rehabilitation of Mary, the Catholic daughter of Catherine of Aragon. In her enthusiasm for an Erasmian-style reform, Catherine Parr organised a group of scholars to translate into English the biblical paraphrases. The most notable participant in the project was Princess Mary, who would succeed her half-brother King Edward VI in 1553 and reconcile England with Rome. She translated the paraphrase of the Gospel according to John into a stately English version. Catherine, who recognised Mary's legitimacy, even used this project to reconnect Mary to the English church. Erasmus was the ideal figure for this delicate theological manoeuvring in the final years of Henry's reign. Indeed, in the mid-1540s, Erasmus was the only major figure who was admired by some people on all sides of the religious divides. The Edwardians and the future 'Bloody Mary' could share an enthusiasm for him. He was a reformer who had remained adamantly loyal to the Catholic faith. He could function as an icon of moderate reform, especially before the Council of Trent. Unfortunately, Trent ultimately articulated an official Roman Catholic scepticism toward Erasmus's career when it formally prohibited all of his books.

As it turns out, Mary was the only English monarch of the sixteenth century to compose an English version of a biblical text. All Henry's children were good

scholars but only Mary put pen to paper to create an English biblical text, the translation of Erasmus's paraphrase of John. This is highly ironic, for, in the course of her re-Catholicisation, not a single English Bible would be printed in England.

Obviously, Erasmus did not himself produce a Bible in English or any European vernacular language. Nonetheless, an outstanding feature of Erasmus's Bible is its advocacy of universal access to scripture. This is all the more noteworthy because Erasmus's Greek edition and his new Latin translation formed a book that was obviously intended for scholars, and scholars such as Professor Martin Luther of the University of Wittenberg read it immediately. Yet, as the introduction makes abundantly clear, Erasmus looks beyond the scholarly Bible in the original language to the vernacular Bibles for the people:

Christ wants his mysteries published as openly as possible. I would that even the lowliest women read the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles. I would that they were translated into all languages so that they could be read and understood not only by the Scots and the Irish but also by Turks and Saracens. . . . Would that . . . the farmer sing portions of them [i.e. scriptures] at the plough, the weaver hum some parts of them to the movement of the shuttle, the traveller lighten the weariness of the journey with stories of this kind. Let all the conversations of every Christian be drawn from this source.⁷

Sure enough, when Martin Luther and William Tyndale produced their revolutionary Bibles in German and English in less than a decade from then, they began by translating Erasmus's Greek.