
These handsomely produced volumes offer an annotated English version of what is one of Erasmus’ most popular works. Craig R. Thompson has long been associated with Erasmus’ Colloquies in the English-speaking world, since he brought out the most recent edition of the work (published simultaneously by University of Chicago Press and University of Toronto Press in 1965). He had intended to publish another volume offering annotations on Erasmus’ Colloquies, but that work was never brought to publication. Instead, Thompson — who was involved with the University of Toronto Press’s project, The Collected Works of Erasmus (hereafter, CWE), from the beginnings of the project — took on the task of producing a new and annotated edition of Colloquies for CWE. Thompson poured much energy into his project (along with much other involvement in CWE). Regrettably, he did not live to see his project completed; however, he had finished most of it, and other scholars have completed the work. The result is the two-volume set under review — a truly magnificent achievement of careful scholarship and publishing excellence.

Colloquies began as an instructional tool for students. The first edition was brought out in 1522 without Erasmus’ knowledge and incurred his displeasure for the errors that marred it. The enthusiastic reception of the work, however, encouraged him to improve and expand it; several revised versions were produced and the final work did not appear until 1533. By then, Colloquies had grown from a tool for students to an incisive reaction to the society and culture of Erasmus’ day, a work intended for all ages and both genders. By the twentieth century, Colloquies and The Praise of Folly have become Erasmus’ most popular works. In the sixteenth century, however, the reception was more mixed.

Although Colloquies were, undeniably, immensely popular in the sixteenth century, the work also attracted a host of opponents. It is one thing to encourage students to develop polished, eloquent, even elegant communication; it is quite another to provide reading pleasures by pillorying the foibles of the contemporary world. The follies of everyone from princes to beggars, from false knights to used-horse sellers, from popes to monks, were exposed to laughter; only the last group was dangerous to authors in Erasmus’ day. When the gifted satirist turned his sights on religious practices which he (with many others, both before and during his time) considered superstitious and worthy of ridicule, clerical umbrage was compounded by ostensible religious offence. Much to his disappointment and surprise, Erasmus discovered that many intellectual and ecclesiastical leaders had a limited capacity for humour — especially if the humour pricked intellectually or religiously thin skin. (Alas, not much has changed since Erasmus’ time.) Erasmus was genuinely perplexed that such leaders could not distinguish between the essential elements of Christian practice and the (to him) obvious aberrations of it...
in his day, and that they could not be brought to laugh at themselves in any way. For Erasmus, the ability to laugh at oneself was the beginning of wisdom: not taking oneself too seriously allowed one to discover what must be taken seriously; to pillory the absurd and preposterous was a way of exalting the important. However, his numerous opponents could not bring themselves to be amused by what seemed to them either blasphemous or frivolous. In due course, Erasmus' *Colloquies* found their way onto various indexes of forbidden books — books which were to be avoided by right-thinking Christians. With this, many generations lost the opportunity readily to obtain and be entertained — and challenged — by Erasmus' remarkable *Colloquies*. In that work, Erasmus holds up his world to be seen for all it was — beauty, warts, and all. In so doing, he shows what seem to be constant patterns in human life and society: in its own way, *Colloquies* is a work about everyman and everywoman, in every age. In this day, it is a privilege to have access to the work in such a well-crafted publication as the *CWE* edition.

The volumes under review offer improvements on the 1965 edition of *Colloquies*. The *CWE* volumes include some revisions of Thompson's previous English edition. However, these are neither numerous nor particularly weighty. The reason for this is not hard to find: Thompson's elegant 1965 English renderings required only minimal modifications. Indeed, if the improvements in this regard were the only benefits found in the *CWE* volumes, one would be hard pressed to argue the economy — scholarly or otherwise — of obtaining the *CWE* volumes, given their considerable cost (at $250.00 Canadian). Stylistic improvements or more felicitous renderings are not the last or most significant of the improvements on the 1965 edition, however.

Along with expanded treatments in the introductions available to each colloquy, *CWE* 39–40 offer extensive annotations. These show, on the one hand, how widely Erasmus was familiar with the works of antiquity, both pagan and Christian: hundreds of citations and allusions have been tracked down by Thompson and his collaborators. Beyond that, the annotations indicate where Erasmus was influenced by medieval theology and to what degree he endorsed or turned from its distinctive postulates. Moreover, the annotations include wide-ranging and detailed references to sixteenth-century figures, problems, and controversies with which Erasmus was familiar or to which he was responding. The annotations detail who had objected to Erasmus' colloquies, precisely where those opponents had their problems with the colloquies, and where and how Erasmus responded to them. Beyond these, the annotations manifest a considerable cognizance of the scholarly discussions in fields far distant from sixteenth-century studies, fields which nevertheless have relevance to various elements of Erasmus' presentations and arguments. Altogether, the annotations are a breathtaking achievement of scholarship. They alone make the purchase of these admittedly costly volumes worth the investment. Further benefits of the *CWE* edition are the inclusion (at the end of Volume 40) of a list of works
frequently cited; a list of short titles for Erasmus' works; indices of biblical and apocryphal, of classical, and of patristic, medieval, and Renaissance references, and a general index.

In such a wealth of learning, it is not surprising that a few flaws can be detected. Few are significant; one, however, struck this reviewer as a considerable misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the situation. In the annotations to "An Examination concerning the Faith" (Inquisitio de Fide), in the discussion of Erasmus' comments on the "procession of the Holy Spirit," the annotator takes note of the divergence between Eastern and Western Christendom on the question (pp. 440–441, n. 87). As is rightly indicated, Eastern Orthodoxy affirms that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father; whereas Western Christianity declares that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son (filioque). However, the annotation goes on to claim, "the doctrine of the double procession was endorsed by the Council of Constantinople in 381." Quite the contrary is true: the Council of Constantinople did not include the "and from the Son" phrase. Western Christianity subsequently added this phrase to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed; Eastern Orthodoxy has maintained the original form and, consequently, has not accepted the filioque. The rest of the annotation, however, breathes an Erasmian spirit that would please Eastern Orthodox sensibilities about the confidence to be placed in human attempts to define doctrine.

The cost of the CWE edition of Erasmus' Colloquies is clearly prohibitive for all but the most determined readers of Erasmus. Unquestionably, library supporting programs in Early Modern European Studies will want to purchase CWE 39–40; scholarly specialists of Erasmus will certainly, and many other Reformation era specialists will probably, want to obtain the volumes; and, it may be hoped, numerous others will make an investment in the CWE edition of Colloquies — the profit to be obtained from reading these remarkable volumes merits the cost.

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Le Moyen de parvenir est un cas unique dans la littérature occidentale; ouvrage outrageant et longtemps anonyme, dont le propos à la fois érudit et scatologique en fait un monstre littéraire ayant longtemps provoqué peur et dégoût. Le célèbre philologue Sainéan avait qualifié le livre de "monstrueux mélange d'érudition et de grossièreté, de savoir et d'obscénité." Verdun Saulnier répondait en 1944, dans une étude devenue classique, en montrant l'originalité intérieure de l'ouvrage tout en proposant l'attribution définitive à Béroalde de Verville.