Cornelis Augustijn. *Erasmus: His Life, Works, and Influence*, translated by J. C. Grayson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. Pp. X, 239.

"Erasmus stands apart." So the author warns us at the beginning, quoting one of Erasmus' early detractors. He goes on to explain that this elusiveness is not the fault of lack of sources, as anyone even vaguely familiar with Erasmus' works will readily concur. In the welter of research that surrounds Erasmus, Augustijn sets himself four objectives: 1) a synthesis of recent scholarships in the various languages, especially necessary in Erasmus studies since each European culture regards him so differently; 2) allowing Erasmus to speak for himself, rather than measuring him by the standards of others; 3) Erasmus' position in the world of the humanists in the years between 1500 and 1520; 4) his distinct contribution to the culture of his time. Before the biography proper Augustijn draws a succinct picture of Europe in 1500, emphasizing the power of the church and the abuse of that power. He also informs the reader of important influences on Erasmus' life, such as the inward spirituality of the *devotio moderna*, the degeneracy of the scholastic method, the cultivation of good letters, and the importance of the printed book.

Of Erasmus' writings, the early *Enchiridion militis christiani* (Handbook of the Christian Soldier) is singled out for particular attention as a seminal work in the development of Erasmian piety, a quality of his that is often neglected. Augustijn contrasts the cool reception accorded this work by modern theologians with its popularity in its own time. To help us read the *Enchiridion* as Erasmus' contemporaries did, he cites passages from two priests, one a professor at Louvain, the other a chaplain at St. Peter's church in the same city. They reacted very differently, the professor seeing it as a mortal blow to religion, the other as a liberating breakthrough to the essence of true piety. The principal message of the book is the supremacy of the inner life over mere external observance, which Erasmus called Judaism. The ideal of the Christian is to rise from the visible world to the invisible, spiritual world. Erasmus describes this opposition in many ways: flesh against spirit, letter against spirit, temporary versus eternal, darkness versus light. In his call to spirituality, Erasmus does not merely try to revive asceticism and to restore the monastic ideal. Indeed he extends the practice of piety to the ordinary layman, inveighing against "that superstitious tribe of monks who lived as if their was no Christianity outside the habit." In his discussion of the *Praise of Folly* Augustijn makes the valid point that the book is more known by its title than actually read. He begins his analysis with the first edition of 1511 and then examines the important additions made in the 1514 edition, which bore witness to the future scholarly activities of Erasmus, biblical studies and the edition of the works of Jerome. Grammar and rhetoric have ousted dialectic from its place in his new programme of life.

The section on the idea of the "philosophy of Christ" is well done, reinforced, as always, with Erasmus' own words. As for the prodigious work that Erasmus produced on the New Testament and the Fathers of the Church, Augustijn illustrates it with well-

chosen examples from the *Annotations*, as they progressed from mere philological notes to short essays that grew out of the scriptural passage. The significance of the *Annotations* consisted, of course, in their being based on the Greek text, contrary to the practice of the Middle Ages, and in the fact that he gave more importance to the Fathers than to medieval glossators and exegetes. Erasmus' aim was to put the philological methods developed in humanism at the service of the biblical scholarship and theology, a method which Augustijn calls biblical humanism, the wedding of *bonae litterae* and *sacrae litterae*. As Augustijn summarizes it, Erasmus was convinced that theology was a unit, but that unit had been breached, and the study of the Bible, systematic theology, and devotional reading had become separated. He wished to integrate them again. The controversies that this approach engendered are the subject of another chapter, but it is the Luther question that receives the fullest treatment, and here Augustijn is at his best, as he traces the inexorable confrontation between the two men, culminating in the disputations on free will.

In the last chapter, summing up the phenomenon Erasmus on his impact on later ages, Augustijn reviews his own portrait, comparing it to past representations of his subject. The first, which was the result of the dissemination of his ideas in such works as the *Adages*, the *Praise of Folly*, and the *Colloquies*, is quite negative. It presents him as a relativist and skeptic. This view is still with us, especially in the Catholic Church. The second view depicts him as a forerunner of the Reformation, who was too weak to propagate his reforms. The third view, that of his contemporary admirers, is favourable. They saw him as the renewer of the Church and of theology, who reached back across the Middle Ages to the theology of the first centuries. Recent interpretations are returning to this view and Augustijn is of that number. He gives Erasmus due credit as a theologian as well as a philologist, and qualifies him as a man of great piety, "a piety of the lowlands rather than of the mountains, intimate rather than passionate." And Augustijn's own portrait of his fellow Dutchman is in that same vein. It is fair, level-headed, uncluttered, an antidote, perhaps, to the too vehement and controversial life of Erasmus written by Huizinga. The translation is very fluent and readable, another fine paragon of the Toronto Collected Works.

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