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### Christ-von Wedel, Christine. Erasmus of Rotterdam: Advocate of a New Christianity

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[See table of contents](#)

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itself. With his edition, Martínez Torrejón has done readers and, indeed, Las Casas himself an invaluable service.

JAMES NELSON NOVOA

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Christ-von Wedel, Christine.**

***Erasmus of Rotterdam: Advocate of a New Christianity.***

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. Pp. 374. ISBN 978-1-4426-4508-0 (hardcover) \$85.

This book is an important contribution to scholarship on Erasmus that brings to the English-speaking world the work of a scholar who has published mainly (and widely) in German. In fact, this book is a translation and expansion upon a work originally published in German in 2003 under the title *Erasmus von Rotterdam: anwalt eines neuzeitlichen Christentums*. The book is important because it addresses the complex issue of the relationship between Erasmus's historical consciousness and his theology—ultimately one of the main lines that distinguished him from (and drew the ire of) both his Catholic and reformed critics. What emerges from this thorough and insightful study is an Erasmus comfortable with ambiguity on matters of faith, where such ambiguity would support an understanding of Christian doctrine that “fit with the times.” While this understanding was unacceptable to contemporary critics of all stripes, it is a consciousness that appears surprisingly modern, and familiar to our eyes. As such, the book's English title is somewhat misleading, because the core of this study is much less the novelty of Erasmus's views on Christianity than it is the historical consciousness that underlay those views. The English word “new” certainly does not offer the same nuance as the German *neuzeitlichen* (which has the sense of modern or contemporary), and it certainly tells us very little. How many times have we warned undergraduate students from basing their argument of a time period on the fact that it is new? However, as Erasmus might have advised, *fronti nulla fides* (loosely: don't judge a book by its title). Readers will find here a useful and fruitful model for analyzing both how Erasmus understood Christian doctrine and how that understanding shaped his theological vision.

The book begins and ends with a letter written by Martin Luther in 1534 (just two years before Erasmus's death) in which the reformer charged Erasmus with being the "devil incarnate." This damning epithet was a response to Erasmus's matter of fact belief that during Hilary of Poitiers's lifetime the orthodox view of the Trinity had not been fully worked out, and thus the Church Father had offered little on the role of the Holy Spirit. His writings against the Arians had concentrated on the question of the relation between God and the Son. For Luther, as for medieval scholastics, the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity was trans-historical, and all acknowledged orthodox figures were understood to have upheld that doctrine, even if the doctrine post-dated their lifetimes. In the case of Hilary, Erasmus had objected to the liberty scribes over the ages had taken in changing the text of his writings to make him agree with the doctrine as it developed after his death. This commitment to textual originality, even when it clashed with doctrinal purity that could be proven by Scripture, is a prime example of what the author argues is unique about Erasmus's theology—a dispassionate, critical eye more interested in original texts than in a grand, harmonizing vision. To be sure, the author does argue that Erasmus had an underlying vision, but one that allowed the human past to have its own foibles that could not be neatly explained away.

In order to explore this feature of Erasmus's thought, the book is organized into four thematic parts: "Erasmus's Early Development," "The Exegetical Theologian," "In Conflict with Church Reformers," and "Erasmus's Reform Ideas." The author devotes individual chapters within each part to specific works by Erasmus, ordered roughly chronologically, which explore this train of thought. The chapters in part 1 discuss a number of Erasmus's early writings (including, among others, the *Antibarbari*, *The Handbook of the Christian Soldier*, and *Praise of Folly*) to chart the development of his historical consciousness. A single chapter devoted to the last of these demonstrates clearly the author's argument that Erasmus was much more interested in exploring the limits of human understanding than in resolving all of its questions. Part 2 contains seven chapters which deal with Erasmus as a theologian. The two opening chapters deal with method; the first with philology and the second with writing paraphrases on the Gospels. These are followed by five chapters dealing with particular doctrines, including the Trinity, creation, God, justification, and the Apostle's creed. In these chapters the author shows her deep understanding of theology and the history of doctrine. The two chapters in

part 3 deal with Erasmus's controversies with Luther and with the reformers in Zürich and Basel. The chapters in part 4 are on more focused themes of Erasmus's reform ideals, including one on the observance of Christian rituals, one on peace and war, and a final one on women. These are oft-explored themes in the scholarship on Erasmus in the twentieth century, yet the author gives them new focus and insight. They serve as a poignant conclusion to this portrait of Erasmus.

There is a tendency among scholars of early modern Europe to find a particular moment or personality that marks the shift to a particularly modern way of thinking. Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* is a recent example of a long-standing genre. If this book goes too far in that direction for this reviewer's liking (despite hiding the emphasis on Erasmus's "modernity" with the ambiguous "new"), the author's erudition and insights more than make up for it.

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### **Cox, Virginia.**

#### ***Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance.***

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. Pp. xvi, 455. ISBN 978-104214-0888-0 (paperback) \$29.95.

This anthology presents the English translation of a compelling body of poetry authored by Italian women during the Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation. It not only features well-known poets such as Vittoria Colonna, Gaspara Stampa, and Veronica Franco, all of whom have received a great deal of critical attention; it also gives ample space to lesser known authors, such as Amedea degli Aleardi, Camilla Scarampa, and Francesca Turina, who have been completely ignored or mentioned only *en passant* in previous anthologies or studies on women. The key criterion for inclusion in the anthology was the literary quality of the poetry. Not surprisingly, the majority of authors included are those who engaged with the poetic model established by Petrarch. Cox's volume complements her previous two books, *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation* (2011) and *Women's Writing in Italy*,