Erasmus and the Politics of Translation in Tudor England

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Desiderius Erasmus was a significant figure in early sixteenth-century England, and many of his works were translated into English during the reign of Henry VIII. In the process of translation the original intention of these works was subverted as Erasmus's reputation was appropriated by his translators and their patrons for their own purposes. His works were recast in English form to serve a variety of different agendas, from those of Henrician conservatives to Protestants pushing for more radical religious reform. This article looks at some of these translations, showing how they illustrate the variations in religious attitudes during these volatile years and the competing claims for validation. In particular, Erasmus's pronouncements on the importance of Scripture translation were annexed and deployed in the debate over the English Bible, demonstrating how his views about translation were in themselves translated to reflect the political and religious needs of the English situation.

Desiderius Erasmus, the famous Dutch humanist scholar, achieved an uncommonly glowing reputation in the early years of England's Reformation. His customary diligent efforts to craft his own image were met with particular enthusiasm from English scholars.[1] The author responsible for the first English translation of a work by Erasmus, Gentian Hervet, thought it important that 'folke may knowe how noble is the autor of this warke / and how moche we be

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[1] Stephen Ryle, ed., *Erasmus and the Renaissance Republic of Letters* (Turnhout, 2014); Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma* (Princeton, NJ, 1993); James K. McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics* (Oxford, 1965).

bounde to hym for it'.[2] In his preface to this translation, which was of the sermon *De immensa dei misericordia*, Hervet described Erasmus as 'the man / to whom in lernynge no lyvyng man may hym selfe compare', who not only exceeded all his contemporaries, but older authors too, including the Christian doctors of the Church.[3] On the continent he may have been a more contentious figure, but in England there was a rare level of agreement on the revered status of 'the moost famous doctour mayster Erasmus Roterodamus'.[4] This in part reflected his significance in the royal schoolroom, since Henry VIII as a prince and all his immediate descendants were educated in line with Erasmian precepts and using his works.[5] Yet it was more than just a question of royal patronage. This complex, unpredictable and ambiguous figure was to hold a place close to the hearts of a variegated array of English scholars and writers.

Erasmus made three lengthy visits to England, although he was often quite rude about it. 'I do not know how I can contrive to live in England any longer', he wrote to a friend in 1511, 'I am quite out of sympathy with this nation's dirty habits'.[6] He was unhappy with the climate and despondent at the poor quality of the wine. He was, however, genuinely excited about the friends he made there, who were the leading scholars and churchmen of the day and included among their number John Colet, Thomas More, John Fisher, Cuthbert Tunstall, William Warham, John Longland, William Grocyn, William Lily, William Latimer and Thomas Linacre.[7] It was Grocyn, Lily, Linacre and More who encouraged Erasmus in his

[2] Desiderius Erasmus, *De immensa dei misericordia: A sermon of the excedynge great mercy of god*, trans. Gentian Hervet (London, 1526), sig. Aij^{r}.

[3] Ibid., sig. Aij^{v}.

[4] Erasmus, *A devoute treatise upon the Pater noster*, transl. Margaret Roper (London, 1526?), title page.

[5] Aysha Pollnitz, *Princely Education in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2015), 9–12.

[6] *The Correspondence of Erasmus*, 2: *Letters 142 to 297*, transl. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson, ed. Wallace K. Ferguson, Complete Works of Erasmus (Toronto, ON, 1975), 182 (to Andrea Ammonio, 1511).

[7] *ODNB*, *s.n.* 'Desiderius Erasmus'; McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics*, 2–9.

study of Greek, which was to have such momentous consequences.[8] When in 1527 he drew up his will and arranged for bequests of his complete works, the first six beneficiaries in his list were English, namely Warham, Tunstall, More, Longland, Fisher and Queens' College Cambridge.[9] In turn, these friends connived in his energetic self-aggrandizement and encouraged and defended his publications. It is therefore unsurprising that many of Erasmus's works were translated into English from the 1520s onwards.

Erasmus himself had in part built his career upon his work as a translator.[10] He translated an astonishing range of works by the Greek Fathers into Latin, as well as pagan authors such as Lucian or Isocrates. Most famously of all, in 1516 he published an edition of the New Testament in Greek with his own Latin translation, and the association between Erasmus and the translation of Scripture soon became a recurrent trope in the books and letters of the time.[11] This article will suggest that in the process of translation into English, more than just words were translated. In the febrile intellectual environment of Henry VIII's England, a variety of different scholars and churchmen sought to validate their own religious agendas by association with Erasmus. The works of his which they translated show how his ideas were appropriated and reconfigured to reflect the circumstances of the early English Reformation as it slowly, painfully emerged.

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[8] Pollnitz, *Princely Education*, 39.

[9] Léon-E. Halkin, *Erasmus: A Critical Biography*, transl. John Tonkin (Oxford, 1993), 215.

[10] Paul Botley, *Latin Translation in the Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti and Desiderius Erasmus* (Cambridge, 2001); Jan Den Boeft, 'Erasmus and the Church Fathers', in Irena Backus, ed., *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1997), 2: 537–72; John C. Olin, 'Erasmus and the Church Fathers', in idem, *Six Essays on Erasmus* (New York, 1979), 33–47.

[11] Lisa Jardine notes how Erasmus was complicit in his own representation as St Jerome: see her *Erasmus, Man of Letters* (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 55–82. See also Erika Rummel, *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: From Philologist to Theologian* (Toronto, ON, 1986).

It could be said that one of the earliest voices calling for the Bible to be translated into English was that of Erasmus, since William Tyndale's famous determination that the 'boy that driveth the plough shall know more scripture than thou dost' was lifted from Erasmus's preface to his 1516 *Novum instrumentum*.[12] Yet Tyndale's utterance was in itself a kind of translation, or appropriation, of what Erasmus had originally written in that preface.[13] Like many humanists, Erasmus wrote enthusiastically in favour of the Scriptures being translated into the vernacular. It should be remembered, however, that this enthusiasm was invariably expressed in Latin. The conflation of these two quite separate utterances has obscured the distinctly different set of objectives held by their respective authors.[14] When Tyndale translated the Bible into English, it was with an evangelical aim in view, quite separate from anything envisaged by the humanists, for all that he was making a tacit appeal for Erasmus's sanction.[15] His invocation of Erasmus's words about the ploughboy, meanwhile, comes down to us through the rarely impartial conduit of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, in a

[12] S. L. Greenslade, *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 3: *The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* (Cambridge, 1963), 141–2. Ian Green has pointed out that Tyndale was also echoing Luther: see his *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), 42.

[13] Erasmus in his preface to the New Testament translation wrote that he wanted vernacular Scripture to become readily available, hoping to see 'the farmer sing some portion of them at the plow': J. C. Olin, ed., *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus* (New York, 1987), 101.

[14] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, IL, 1980), 106.

[15] David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven, CT, 1994); J. T. Day, E. Lund and A. M. O'Donnell, eds, *Word, Church, and State: Tyndale Quincentenary Essays* (Washington DC, 1998); Alan Stewart, 'The Trouble with English Humanism: Tyndale, More and Darling Erasmus', in Jonathan Woolfson, ed., *Reassessing Tudor Humanism* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), 78–98, at 78.

carefully staged description of Tyndale's confrontation with a small-minded conservative.[16] There is an appeal here to a consensus about Scripture which never quite existed.

The apparently straightforward connection between Erasmus and Tyndale, who are so often linked in the historical record, is an early and influential example of the misappropriation of Erasmus's work. Tyndale did of course acknowledge his debt to Erasmus, and in many ways started out as an 'English Erasmian'.[17] The fluidity of religious identities in the early years of the Reformation stemmed in part from the complex and ambiguous relationship between humanism and reform, which almost always featured a shared enthusiasm for biblical revival.[18] Yet Erasmus's own views on the translation of the Bible were arguably much closer to those of his humanist friends in England, particularly Thomas More, than they were to Tyndale's more uncompromising stance. Later Catholics were uneasy about the friendship between Erasmus and More, and tried to play it down; yet particularly when it came to their approach to Scripture the two expressed very similar opinions.[19] They were happy to countenance vernacular Scripture as long as the work of translation was done carefully and charitably. In early works they voiced their enthusiasm; in later works their caution. In Erasmus's case this emerged in the furore after the publication of *Novum instrumentum* in 1516. Attacked by Henry Standish for his heretical tendencies, Erasmus responded by illustrating the many different variants of different Bible passages found even in the Latin manuscripts, and the way in which the Church itself used different versions of the psalms in the liturgy and the readings, arguing that educated readers needed to

[16] John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London, 1563), book 3, 570.

[17] Anne Richardson, 'Tyndale's Quarrel with Erasmus', *Fides et Historia* 25 (1993), 46–65; John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), 99.

[18] Woolfson, ed., *Reassessing Tudor Humanism*, editor's introduction, 2–9.

[19] Dominic Baker-Smith, 'Erasmus and More: A Friendship Revisited', *RH* 30 (2010), 7–25; Erika Rummel, *Erasmus and his Catholic Critics* (Nieuwkoop, 1989).

discern the meaning of Scripture carefully, using manuscript evidence and patristic testimony but ultimately relying on the judgement of the Church.[20]

Three points stand out here: Erasmus did not expect to find a single definitive text; he was happy (like St Augustine) to see several possible interpretations of any given biblical verse; and he expected ultimately to rely on Church tradition. This was a long way from Tyndale. When Tyndale took More to task for not criticizing Erasmus's translation of *ecclesia* by *congregatio* in his Latin New Testament, he accused More of favouritism towards his 'darling' Erasmus, given that he had attacked Tyndale himself for using the word 'congregation' in his English translation.[21] More responded: 'I have not contended wyth Erasmus my derlynge, bycause I found no suche malycyouse entent wyth Erasmus my derlynge, as I fynde wyth Tyndale'. The difference was, More argued, that 'Erasmus … ment none heresye therein'.[22] Yet there was more to it than this, because as More pointed out, Erasmus was inventing a Latin word where there had not been one before, whilst Tyndale, by contrast, had no need to employ the word 'congregation' since the English language was already supplied with the word 'church'. A Scripture translation from Greek into Latin was a completely different matter from a translation into the vernacular.

When other scholars praised Erasmus's translation of the Bible, it is important to remember that they were speaking of this translation from Greek into Latin, a translation intended solely for an educated audience. One Cambridge friend in 1516 enthused: 'Your revision of the New Testament and your notes at the same time have thrown a wonderful flood of light on Christ, and earned the gratitude of all who are devoted to it.'[23] Another told

[20] Gergely M. Juhász, *Translating Resurrection: The Debate between William Tyndale and George Joye in its Historical and Theological Context* (Leiden, 2014), 141–2.

[21] Stewart, 'Trouble with English Humanism', 85–8.

[22] Thomas More, *The Complete Works of St Thomas More*, vol. 8, ed. L. A. Schuster, R. C. Marius and J. P. Lusardi (New Haven, CT, 1973), 1: 177.

[23] *The Correspondence of Erasmus*, 4: *Letters 446 to 593*, transl. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson, ed. James K. McConica, Complete Works of Erasmus (Toronto, ON, 1977), 36 (letter 450).

him that Cambridge men in general were 'great supporters of your edition of the New Testament; what a book it is! – So elegant, so clear, so delightful and so highly necessary in the opinion of all men of sound judgement.'[24] These letters, and others like them, were written not in English but in Latin. Erasmus's translation was emphatically a scholarly achievement, bringing enlightenment to the educated classes.

Yet as the name of Erasmus swiftly became one to conjure with, his sanction was claimed by a wide array of English authors with a great many different viewpoints and objectives, including King Henry VIII, who confessed to the humanist that he 'nourished an uncommon devotion' to him, and who would find his ideas a 'politically appropriate substitute for scholasticism' in the campaign for royal supremacy.[25] In particular, the association of Erasmus's name with the idea of biblical translation, based on the edition of the Greek and Latin texts in the *Novum instrumentum* of 1516, was picked up and applied to a very different debate about the translation of the Scriptures from Latin into English. What had begun as a debate between scholars began to filter down into a broader argument about popular access to the Bible.

The first three English translations of works by Erasmus, all dating from the 1520s, demonstrate how his reputation and reform ideas could be appropriated and reapplied to the English situation. The first appeared in 1526, and was a translation of his sermon *De immensa dei misericordia*. The translator's preface to this work, as we have already seen, was lavish in its praise of Erasmus, 'whom my preyses can no more ennoble / than the son with a candel may be made clerer', and in particular singled out the work he had done explicating the Bible, explaining how the

[24] Ibid. 34 (letter 449).

[25] Pollnitz, *Princely Education*, 119; Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London, 1986), 141.

> … clere springes of the holy scripture / that the Philistines had so troubled / so marred / and so defiled / that no man coude drynke or haue the true taste of the water … be nowe by his labour and diligence to their olde purenes and clerenes so restored that no spotte nor erthly fylthe in them remayneth …[26]

The second English translation was of Erasmus's treatise on the *Pater noster,* which again evoked the importance of Scripture, speaking of spiritual hunger, and how 'we thy spirituall and goostly children / desyre and crave of our spirituall father / that spirituall and celestiall breed', namely 'thy worde full of all power / bothe the gyver and norissher of lyfe'.[27] The third was a translation of the *Paraclesis*, Erasmus's preface to the 1516 edition of the New Testament, or *Novum Instrumentum*. This was published as *An exhortation to the diligent study of scripture*, which deplored how 'at this present tyme … with soch great diligence all mennes invencyons are studyed and commended / yet only this immortall fontayne of Christes pure philosophye / is despysed and mocked of so many'.[28]

All three of these works praised the work of biblical renewal. All three used the metaphor of living water: the *Exhortation* spoke of wisdom being gathered 'out of so small bokes as out of moste pure springes'.[29] Yet they were published by very different people with very different aims. Gentian Hervet, who translated the first of the three, was a French humanist and chaplain to Margaret Pole, countess of Salisbury, whom in his preface he praised for her 'great mynde and depe affection bothe towarde al maner of lernyng / and specially towarde that which … concerneth the way of our salvacion'.[30] Margaret Pole was a

[26] Erasmus, *De immensa dei misericordia* (London, 1526), sig. Aij^{v}.

[27] Margaret Roper, *A Devoute Treatise upon the Pater noster* (London, 1526?), sig. eiij^{r}.

[28] Erasmus, *An exhortation to the diligent study of scripture* (London, 1529), fol. [2^{r}].

[29] Erasmus, *An exhortation*, fol. [5^{r}].

[30] Erasmus, *De immensa*, sig. Aij^{r}. Hervet later joined the household of Reginald Pole in Italy where he worked on translations of the Greek fathers, and in later life became well known as a Catholic

close friend of Katherine of Aragon, tutor to the Princess Mary, well known for her conservatism in religion and mother to the Catholic reformer Cardinal Pole. She was executed by Henry VIII in 1541 for her associations with Pole in particular and Catholicism more generally.[31] The second work was translated by Margaret Roper, Thomas More's daughter, so again might be placed within the context of a reforming but staunch Catholicism.[32] The third, however, was the work of William Roye, and was published in Antwerp, probably by Tyndale's publisher, and certainly using the same slightly inappropriate frontispiece of frolicking nymphs as appeared in Tyndale's *Obedience of the Christian Man* and several other works.[33] From the very first, then, Erasmus's works were being reconfigured in translation in the service of a varied array of reform objectives.

Even where the text itself resisted, appropriation could be achieved through the careful use of paratext. A slightly later translation of Erasmus's *Exposicyon of the xv psalme*, published by Wayland in 1537, was a masterly reworking of a fairly traditional text in a much more emphatically Protestant direction. The work itself emphasized 'one onely way unto salvacyon … whiche is to know god, and to obeye his comaundementes'. But the translator's

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polemicist: see Elizabeth M. Nugent, ed., *The Thought and Culture of the English Renaissance: An Anthology of Tudor Prose 1481–1555*, 2 vols (The Hague, 1969), 2: 343–4.

[31] Pole had alienated Henry by his outspoken opposition to the royal supremacy in his treatise of 1536, *De Unitate*, and his mother's death was part of a vengeful attack by the king on Pole's extended family in England: see John Edwards, *Archbishop Pole* (Farnham, 2014), 39–83; Hazel Pierce, *Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, 1473–1541: Loyalty, Lineage and Leadership* (Cardiff, 2003).

[32] John A. Gee, 'Margaret Roper's English Version of Erasmus' Precato Dominica and the Apprenticeship behind Early Tudor Translation', *Review of English Studies* 13 (1937), 257–71; E. E. Reynolds, *Margaret Roper: Eldest Daughter of St Thomas More* (London, 1960); Elizabeth McCutcheon, 'Margaret More Roper', in Katharine M. Wilson, ed., *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation* (Athens, GA, 1987), 449–65; John Guy, *A Daughter's Love: Thomas and Margaret More* (London, 2008).

[33] Daniell, *Tyndale*, 108–11, 132–4, 142–51.

preface insisted that Erasmus's eloquence accorded with 'the moost pure expositers of scripture / whome god hathe gracyouslye nowe in our tyme raysed up to the expulsyon of fylthye and grosse errours / that otherwyse be called of unpure preachers unwrytten verytes', thereby firmly anchoring the translated work within Protestant parameters. This process was continued through the text itself by glosses, such as the emphatic statement that 'they which do trust in theyr good workes (as they calle them) do nat please god'. When Erasmus reproved 'myschevous dedes, done towarde our neighbour', the gloss hastily insisted that 'Unbylefe is the rote of al myschevous dedes / lyke as faithe is the rote of charyte'; where Erasmus wrote of man's reliance on the mercy of god, the gloss optimistically endorsed the passage 'Agaynste fre wyll'. In this way, a text on charitable living was claimed for a Protestant view of justification by faith alone.[34]

In the 1530s, evangelicals of various hues were busily constructing an Erasmus who suited their purposes. Their motivations could mingle religious concerns with political aspiration. A translation of Erasmus's exposition of the Creed and the Ten Commandments published in 1534 proclaimed on its title page that it had been written 'at the requeste of the moste honorable lorde / Thomas Erle of wyltshyre: father to the moste gratious and vertuous Quene Anne'. Here too the text was massaged by the careful deployment of glosses. Thus, in a passage about the two remedies against evil, faith and charity, Erasmus's text (faithfully translated) is a subtle elucidation of the interdependence of the two, but a gloss plucks out and reiterates the bald statement that 'Charyte is the servaunt of fayth'.[35] In the same year, Leonard Cox, the schoolmaster from Thame who had rescued John Frith from the stocks, published his translation of Erasmus's *Paraphrase* on Paul's epistle to Titus. He asked what could be a better proof of God's pleasure at the marriage of King Henry with Anne Boleyn than that it had pleased him 'to shewe abrode in this regyon, the lyght whiche afore laye

[34] Erasmus, *An exposicyon of the xv psalme* (London, 1537), sigs Biii^{v}, Bi^{v}, Fv^{v}.

[35] Erasmus, *A playne and godly exposition or declaration of the commune Crede … and of the x commaundementes of goddes law* (London, 1534), title page, sig. Avi^{r}.

manye yeres … under the bushell'. [36] At the same time he attacked those who opposed the gospel: 'To rede the new testament with them is heresy', he lamented and he commented with satisfaction on 'the angre of god evydently fallen upon the bysshop of Romes tyrannye / and his adherentes whose proude power daylye decreaseth'.[37] One particular reference was especially precise: he warned his readers 'Let here no man murmour as some do yet / that his grace is electe to be hedde of the chyrche in his realme / no forther then goddes lawes do permyt'. This was a reference to the pardon of the clergy, who in Convocation in 1531 had accepted the king's headship of the Church, but added the phrase 'so far as the law of Christ allows' as an attempt to salvage what they could of clerical authority. Cox insisted firmly that there was not 'one iote in scripture' that proved the people 'to be above kynges or temporall rulers', in words which spoke to the specific circumstances of 1534 as the supremacy was being enshrined in statute. [38]

Behind some of the translations of Erasmus we can discern the hand of Thomas Cromwell, whose ability to organize scholarly activity in support of his political aims is long attested.[39] Through the publications of Richard Taverner in particular, Erasmus was claimed for an evangelical agenda, often in ways which simultaneously aimed to bolster support for the royal supremacy. A translation of 1536, published by John Byddell, of Erasmus's colloquy on pilgrimage, had an uncompromising preface by the translator which attacked not only 'thys desperate synne of ydolatrye', but also those who had risen in rebellion 'contrary to the ordynaunce of gode, agaynst theyr kynge and liege lorde, provokynge and allurynge the

[36] Erasmus, *The Paraphrase of Erasmus Roterodame upon the Epistle of saint Paule unto his discyple Titus* (London, 1534).

[37] Ibid., sigs Aiv^{v}, A vi^{r}.

[38] Ibid., sig. Avii^{r}.

[39] G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police*, 206–7; McConica, *English Humanists*, 150–99.

symple comynaltye to theyre dampnable ypocrysye and conspyracy'.[40] The damning, if imprecise, characterization of these rebels as recognizable by 'theyr Sodomitical actes, and most horryble ypocrysy' is redolent of much of the Cromwellian anti-monastic propaganda of these years.

Yet not all the translations of the 1530s followed a Cromwellian path.[41] In 1537, even as the dissolution of the monasteries was taking hold, the Augustinian canon Thomas Paynell translated Erasmus's *Comparation of a Vyrgin and a Martyr*, dedicating it to the prior of his own community, Merton Abbey, which was the mother house of St Mary's College, Oxford, where Erasmus had stayed on his first visit to England.[42] This treatise had originally been written in 1523 for the Benedictine nuns at the Convent of the Machabees in Cologne, and gave an exalted account of the monastic life, paying careful tribute to both virgins and martyrs, and accounting their sufferings and sanctity as more or less equal. It also paid tribute to the famous relics housed in the Cologne convent.[43] Paynell was to become a prolific translator, a chaplain to Henry VIII and to all three of the king's children in turn, so he was in

[40] Erasmus, *A dialoge or communication of two persons … intituled ye pylgremage of pure devotyon* (London, 1536?), sigs +iij^{r}, +iiii^{v}. Usually ascribed to 1535, the reference to the Pilgrimage of Grace means it must have been published in 1536 or 1537.

[41] For a contrary claim, see J. K. Yost, 'Taverner's Use of Erasmus and the Protestantization of English Humanism', *RQ* 23 (1970), 266–76. Yost sees Taverner's use of Erasmus to steer a middle way between 'gospellers' and 'papists' as 'Protestant moderation', but his evidence for terming Taverner's views Protestant is shaky, and the works might be better viewed as more distinctively Henrician. Taverner published six translations in 1539–40.

[42] The prior, John Ramsay, would surrender his house in 1538, and later became a Protestant; he published two works in 1548, *A corosyfe to be layed hard unto the hartes of all faythfull professours of Christes gospel* and *A plaister for a galled horse*.

[43] Erasmus, *The Comparation of a Vyrgin and a Martyr*, transl. Thomas Paynell (London, 1537), sig. Cv^{v}.

a sense a consummate survivor, and yet also an Erasmian who managed to balance his openness to reform with some conservative convictions.

Erasmus was not only hijacked by those of a Protestant inclination, therefore, but could also be used by those who were simultaneously evangelical and conservative. A translation of his treatise on confession, published around 1535, was an interesting example of this. In this treatise, originally written in 1524 during a difficult period in Erasmus's life in Basel, he referred to the contemporary quarrels over religion, and told the reader not to look for such debates in this work. As the translation rendered it, he said 'I lyst not nowe in this unquiete worlde, and troublous state of tymes, to styrre suche botches or soores'.[44] In a skilful piece of writing, Erasmus steered between those who insisted that auricular confession had been instituted by Christ, and those who declared it unscriptural, observing that he himself was inclined more towards those who thought it was ordained by Christ, and suggesting that 'this confession is many wayes, and for many causes very profitable and holsome / yf bothe parties do theyr duetie'. A gloss in the margin noted: 'Howe the author doth esteme confession / herof thou maye iudge good reder'. [45] This was about the time that Henry VIII was canvassing opinion from his bishops on whether confession might be considered to have a scriptural basis. Erasmus's work openly acknowledged the lamentable state of many priests, but argued that this might add to the value of confession, which required of the high and mighty even more humility to 'fall downe lowly and mekely at the feete of a preest / being often tymes but a vile and an abiecte persone / and of no reputation in the syght and iudgement of the worlde'.[46] The emphasis on spiritual endeavour, disregarding all doctrinal questions, had been Erasmus's response to the antagonisms of the early 1520s; unhelpfully the English translator is unknown, but in the circumstances of the mid-1530s this publication sounded a markedly moderate note.

[44] Erasmus, *A lytle treatise of the maner and forme of confession* (London, 1535?), sig. Av^{v}.

[45] Ibid., sig. Avii^{r}.

[46] Ibid., sig. Bv^{r}.

In 1545, a translation of another colloquy took a much more aggressive stance. *A very pleasaunt and fruitful Diologe called the Epicure* was published by Richard Grafton and translated by Philip Gerard, a member of Prince Edward's privy chamber. Here the actual translation seems to have been chiefly a hook on which to hang a lengthy preface from the translator. This was a powerful piece of writing pushing the young prince towards an unequivocally Protestant future. Rejoicing that Edward 'delecteth in nothyng more then too bee occupied in the holye Byble', Gerard laid out the blessings to be had from an evangelical commitment on the part of a prince. 'Blessed are you then if you obey unto hys word, and walke in his waies. Blessed are you, yf you supporte suche as preache Gospell'.[47] On a more practical level, he suggested some of the riches that might follow: not only the kingdom of God, but wealth and conquest on earth. 'You are promised also, too conquere great and mightie nations.'[48] He probably knew that this would go down well with a small boy who loved martial exploits.[49] More menacingly, he warned 'let your grace bee most fully perswaded in this, that ther was never Kyng nor Prince, that prospered whiche tooke parte against Goddes woord'.[50] This was the great Henrician myth, that the gospel somehow would compel obedience.[51] Gerard also wrote, with reference to reading the gospel, 'surely none but ypocrites or els devilles would go about too stoppe or allure men from suche a treasure and godly study'.[52] This reflected none too well on the king, who had two years before promoted

[47] Erasmus, *A very pleasaunt and fruitful Diologe called the Epicure*, transl. Philip Gerard (London, 1545), sigs Aiii^{v}, Aiiii^{v}.

[48] Ibid., sig. Av^{r}.

[49] Jennifer Loach, *Edward VI* (New Haven, CT, 1999), 155–8.

[50] Erasmus, *Epicure*, sig. Avi^{r}.

[51] Richard Rex, 'The Crisis of Obedience: God's Word and Henry's Reformation', *HistJ* 39 (1994), 863–94.

[52] Erasmus, *Epicure*, sig. Bi^{r}.

the ‘Act for the Advancement of True Religion’ which so dramatically attempted to restrict Bible reading to the higher echelons of society.[53]

Erasmus during his lifetime worked hard to avoid easy categorization, and once the Reformation had begun to unfold made strenuous efforts to avoid being claimed too directly for any single confessional standpoint. He died in 1536 just as the Reformation in England was beginning to get complicated and at a time when the English translations of his works were illustrating the many shades of reformist feeling seeking expression at that time. It is impossible to know what he would have thought of the greatest work of translation from the 1540s, that of his *Paraphrases* on the New Testament, which in due course would become a foundation stone of the Edwardian Reformation, placed in all parish churches alongside the English Bible.[54] It is often not sufficiently appreciated what an extraordinary work this was, not merely in terms of scholarly endeavour, but in bringing together such an eclectic group of translators under the aegis of Queen Katherine Parr.[55] It drew on the moderate humanism of Nicholas Udall and the Catholic humanism of Princess Mary, whilst the second volume of 1549 would strike a more Protestant note with the contributions of Leonard Cox and Miles Coverdale.[56]

The English translations of Erasmus, then, were conduits for the many shades of religious attitudes in these formative years of Reformation. His intellectual stature in England before the Reformation made him an authority worth appealing to long after his death. His name was invoked by Mary’s Catholic Reformation as well as by the Protestant Reformation

[53] Alec Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII* (Cambridge, 2003), 47.

[54] Catharine Davies, *A Religion of the Word: The Defence of the Reformation in the Reign of Edward VI* (Manchester, 2002), 210.

[55] McConica, *English Humanists*, 240–8.

[56] Aysha Pollnitz, ‘Religion and Translation at the Court of Henry VIII: Princess Mary, Katherine Parr and the *Paraphrases* of Erasmus’, in Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman, eds, *Mary Tudor: Old and New Perspectives* (Basingstoke, 2011), 123–37.

of Edward VI.[57] On the one hand this testifies to the universality of many of Erasmus's ideas. But on the other hand it demonstrates that the appropriation of Erasmus's reputation in Henry VIII's reign had given his work a veneer of political reliability. Just as all three of Henry's children would appeal indiscriminately to the memory of their father as a symbol of authority, so could churchmen and scholars appeal to the example of Erasmus as someone reliably biblical in inspiration but safely ambiguous on specifics. In Nicholas Udall's preface to the *Paraphrases*, he described Erasmus as someone 'whose doctrine the moste and best parte of all Christian Royalmes and universities hath evermore allowed and judged to be consonaunt to the trueth'.[58] In this way a figure who never straightforwardly agreed with either confessional viewpoint had been translated into a figure with whom nobody could disagree.

Translation creates a relationship between original text and translated equivalent which remains uncertain and open to manipulation. It can be seen at one level, therefore, as an exercise in deception, intended to mislead. In the 1530s, when the English Bible was for different reasons necessary to both Protestants and Catholics in England, Erasmus's authority was drawn on in support of these very different works of translation into English. This often meant ignoring much of what Erasmus had said about the vernacular, and applying sentiments which had been intended to describe the translation of the Greek New Testament into Latin to translation into English.[59] Erasmus's *Paraphrases*, published in English translation in 1548, had originally been written in Latin to elucidate the revised Latin translation which Erasmus presented in the *Novum Instrumentum*..[60] In refashioning them into English, the debate about translating had itself been translated.

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[57] Lucy Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2000), 114–52.

[58] Erasmus, *The first tome or volume of the paraphrase of Erasmus upon the newe testamente* (London, 1548), sigs B7^{r}–^{v}.

[59] See Naomi Tadmor, *The Social Universe of the English Bible: Scripture, Society and Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010), 1–9.

[60] Erasmus's famous 1519 translation of the first chapter of John using *sermo* and *oratio* was faithfully rendered by Princess Mary as 'word' and 'speech'; Pollnitz, 'Religion and Translation', 133.

