In 1516 the *Novum Instrumentum* appeared from Johann Froben’s press in Basel. It contained the first printed edition of the New Testament to be published in its original language, Greek. The editor was Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, who also provided a parallel Latin translation, annotations, and three introductory essays, entitled *Paraclesis*, *Methodus*, and *Apologia*, in which he encouraged the reading of Sacred Scripture, set out his views on theology and biblical studies, and justified his own approach as editor-translator of the *Novum Instrumentum*. In 1517 Erasmus moved to Leuven, where he remained until 1521, but he spent the summer of 1518 in Basel preparing Froben’s second edition of his New Testament. In November 1518, after his return, he published a separate and much enlarged edition of his *Methodus* with Dirk Martens in Leuven, under the new title *Ratio verae Theologiae*. The second edition of Erasmus’ New Testament came out in Basel in 1519.

On the whole, the theologians of Leuven were sceptical of the benefits of Erasmus’s style of theologizing, which was not founded on the doctrines of the Church and the exegesis of the scholastics, but on Scripture and the method of textual analysis humanists had developed to study the pagan authors of classical antiquity. The theologians were inclined to think that the biblical orientation of Erasmian theology could become a source of error and heresy. Notwithstanding these reservations, there are indications that in the autumn of 1517 the theologians accepted Erasmus into the collegium strictum, the governing body
of their faculty, which in principle was open to doctors of theology resident in Leuven.³

They saw further evidence that Erasmian theology could lead to heresy, when a volume arrived in Leuven at the end of 1518, containing a number of Latin treatises by an Augustinian monk, the still obscure German theologian Martin Luther.⁴ This volume had been brought out late in 1518 by Erasmus’ publisher Johann Froben. The theologians of the Leuven faculty scented heresy in a number of the opinions expressed. They took steps to prevent the dissemination of the work, drew the attention of their colleagues on Cologne’s faculty of theology to the work, and systematically examined it with a view to condemnation. Froben’s publication of a collection of Luther’s treatises seriously disrupted the understanding between Erasmus and his colleagues on the Leuven faculty of theology. The latter suspected the humanist of having had a hand in publishing the work during his time in Basel in the summer of 1518, as well as of having penned the elegantly Latinate prefaces.⁵

This was the beginning of a decades-long struggle on two fronts for Leuven’s faculty of theology: against Erasmus and humanistic theological innovation and against Luther and other Protestant reformers along with their followers in the Low Countries. This chapter will examine the stance adopted in polemical works written by Leuven theologians against Erasmianism and humanism, but it is unavoidable that this will involve consideration of the struggle against Luther and early Protestantism, as many of them saw this simply as an extreme form of Erasmianism. I will begin by considering at some length the conflicts in 1519. This key year saw three developments: Jacques Masson, effectively on behalf of the faculty, published a fundamental critique of Erasmian innovations in theology; the University of Leuven accepted the Collegium Trilingue; and the faculty of theology issued a formal condemnation of some aspects of Luther’s theology. Next, I will discuss the later career of Masson, one of the most famous opponents of Luther and the best