
Professor Richard Schoeck (emeritus, English, University of Colorado) published this tome in December of 1990. It is the first part of a two-volume biography of the Renaissance intellectual who was both priest and humanist. *Erasmus of Europe* is a major biographical achievement because it blends current scholarship on Erasmus with an engaging style.

One of the important contributions of this book to intellectual history is Schoeck's discussion of Erasmus' indebtedness to the *Devotio Moderna* (Chapter three). Far too many scholars have accepted unconditionally the thesis of R. R. Post, which is detailed in *The Modern Devotion: Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism* (1968), that the Brethren of the Common Life had little influence on Erasmus. Post, according to Schoeck, was as guilty of misrepresentation as Albert Hyma, who took to an extreme the opposite point of view in *The Youth of Erasmus* (1931). In assessing the contributions of the Brethren of the Common Life to printing, both Post and Schoeck would have benefitted from the work of Kenneth A. Strand on "The Brethren of the Common Life and Fifteenth-Century Printing: A Brief Survey," *The Dawn of Modern Civilization: Studies in Renaissance and Other Topics Presented to Honor Albert Hyma*, edited by Strand (1962).

Another merit of Schoeck's volume is that it underscores the importance of events in Erasmus' life before 1500 in contrast to the recent biography by Cornelis Augustijn (1986) which largely dismisses them. Schoeck stresses, for example, the early poetical talents of Erasmus (50, 69) whereas Augustijn downplays Erasmus' precociousness.

In reviewing the secondary literature on Erasmus before 1500, Professor Schoeck steps gently on the toes of certain of his predecessors when he calls to mind Erasmus' sense of embarrassment at discovering the details surrounding his birth (32). Such biographers as J. K. Sowards (1975) and J. K. McConica (1991) have maintained opposing views. Moreover, Schoeck underscores the "general seriousness" of Erasmus' first book, *De contemptu mundi*, which was composed about 1489, unlike Albert Hyma, J.-C. Margolin and Walter Gordon who have described it as a literary exercise. At the same time I cannot accept as compatible Schoeck's idea that this "treatise in its 1521 form does not recommend monasticism to a young man reading the book" (129) and the contrasting view that Thomas Paynell, a fellow canon regular, published an English translation (which included the controversial
chapter twelve) of the work about 1531 for the express purpose of “encouraging vocations in England” (130, n. 1).

I likewise found it difficult to accept Schoeck's view that Erasmus' "illegitimacy may have kept him from entering the monastery earlier" than he did (39, n. 18), since canon law specifically granted legitimacy to those men and women who professed vows in a religious order. Far from deterring his early admission, the canons regular at Steyn would have welcomed Erasmus to their community as a sign of remorse for his parents' indiscretion. Additionally, I believe that Erasmus entered the monastery at Steyn rather than the one at Delft, where his brother Pieter was living, because of the rules of the Congregation of Sion regarding fraternal relationships and not on account of Erasmus' personal preference, which is argued by Schoeck (56).

The only serious typographical error in this book concerns the chronological chart that Schoeck provides on page 57. I am reproducing it below together with corrections in brackets which will aid the reader in determining Erasmus' age at a particular point in his life. Schoeck's chronology is based on the premise that Erasmus was born on 27/28 October 1467 (whereas most Dutch scholars prefer 1469). If Schoeck wishes to maintain 1467 as the year of birth, he must also insist that Erasmus was 24 years of age when he was ordained to the priesthood on 25 April 1492 and not 25 as his chart indicates or "about twenty four or five" as he expresses it on page 56. I am also reluctant to accept Professor Schoeck's assertion that Erasmus "manipulated or even deliberately falsified his chronology" without more concrete evidence to sustain such a declaration (62).

Schoeck's Chart

28 Oct. 1467    born at Rotterdam (Gouda?)       Aged:
1471?    to school at Gouda                      4+    [for 3/4]
1475-1484 to school at Deventer...            8-15   [for 7/8-16/17]
1484-1486/87 at 's-Hertogenbosch               16-17  [for 16/17-18/19]
1486/7    at Gouda...                             17-18  [for 18/19]
1487    enters Steyn as novice                   18-19  [for 19/20]
1488    makes profession                         19-20  [for 20/21]
25 Apr. 1492    ordained                        25    [for 24]

At times one gets the impression that Professor Schoeck changes his mind about certain ideas that are in the text and subsequently calls the reader's attention to these changes in the footnotes. Compare, for example, Schoeck's doubts concerning St. Augustine's authorship of the Rule of St. Augustine on pages 89-90 with his view on page 115 (n. 16) where he observes that "it