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**Renaissance and Reformation**  
**Renaissance et Réforme**



**Erasmus, Desiderius. The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 2204 to 2356: August 1529–July 1530. Trans. Alexander Dalzell, annotated by James M. Estes**

Mark Crane

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reformist dimension have been more accidental than strategically subversive, owing perhaps to the very homage paid in the print to Michelangelo as artist and anatomist?

This minor query results not from any weakness in the author's argumentation but from the reviewer's own sense of how jealously guarded Michelangelo was about his spirituality for both personal and political reasons. Would a Spanish artist in Rome, even if he had trained under Michelangelo's close friend and assistant Daniele da Volterra, have knowingly introduced a reformist element through the figure of Michelangelo? If he had known of Michelangelo's leanings, would he have chosen to embed them in a document meant to celebrate obedience to a Rome that rejected justification by faith? Had Michelangelo been directly involved in the creation of this work, would he have sanctioned this?

These questions ultimately amount to speculation on the reviewer's part—a point of reflection and curiosity. If the mark of important scholarship is that it gives rise to sustained thought or to intriguing questions, then Dillon's contribution achieves that rank. It has the additional merit of being a pleasure to read.

SARAH ROLFE PRODAN

Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies

Victoria University in the University of Toronto

**Erasmus, Desiderius.**

***The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 2204 to 2356: August 1529–July 1530.* Trans. Alexander Dalzell, annotated by James M. Estes.**

Collected Works of Erasmus in English 16. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. Pp. xxv, 440 + 18 b/w ill. ISBN 978-1-4426-4749-7 (hardcover) \$175.

When you're used to hunting through the indices of Erasmus's correspondence for a certain name or a term, and thumbing through several volumes to follow a particular thread, reading through a whole volume from cover to cover is a real treat. It gives you a chance to follow the day-to-day life of a leading Renaissance humanist, from the most grandiose statements of humanist principles to the mundane details of quotidian life, and just about everything in between. This

particular volume, which covers the twelve months between August 1529 and July 1530, opens a window not only on the ongoing controversies and scholarly projects in which Erasmus was engaged (indeed, things primarily of interest to the specialist) but also on a variety of facets of life—like illness, health, disease, education, religious devotion, networks of communication, friendship, and travel, to name a few—that will no doubt be of interest to a broad spectrum of scholars who study the early modern period.

Following the example of ancient scholars like Cicero and Pliny the Younger, Erasmus published about one third of the 156 letters presented in this volume during his lifetime. In fact, a volume of letters entitled *Opus Epistolarum* appeared at the beginning of the time period covered by the title under review. These letters were carefully chosen and edited, and presented as models—the period’s gold standard—of both style and substance. In other words, they present Erasmus in the way he wanted to present himself to his contemporaries. Readers of this volume, and all the others in the Correspondence of Erasmus series, have the great advantage that interspersed with these models are many more that are private in nature, and thus more candid and plain-spoken in tone. Of even greater advantage to modern readers are the hundreds and hundreds of meticulous historical and literary annotations, without which many of the letters would be, even for specialist readers, simply incomprehensible.

Illness and disease appear as constant concerns in these letters, with references to the “English sweat” which arrived on the continent during this period, reports of “a plague as yet without a name” which would be named “Syphilis, or the French Disease” a year later, as well as Erasmus’s recurring complaints of kidney stones. If all of these were not enough, for a period of nearly four months between March and June 1530 Erasmus suffered from a debilitating gastrointestinal infection that is identified in an appendix, with the help of a physician, as carbunculus. This resulted in a huge and painful abscess forming on his abdomen that only abated after it had been lanced in late June 1530. This explains why there is no surviving correspondence from the middle of April to the middle of May, and for the greater part of June.

During this period some old controversies, like the one with the Paris theologian Noël Beda and his former friend turned enemy (and blackmailer) Heinrich Eppendorf, continued to simmer in the background. He continued his controversy with Martin Luther in his *War Against the Turks*, published in May 1530, but in an indirect and muted fashion. Luther had not responded

to Erasmus's defenses on his views of free will that he published in 1526 and 1527 (*Hyperaspistes I and II*), and it appears that this controversy had come to an end. However, new controversies emerged that followed an already established pattern of including critics from both sides of the religious divide. From the Catholic side, it was members of the Franciscan order, particularly Luis de Carvajal in Spain and Frans Titelmans in Louvain, who drew Erasmus's attention. In a letter that was printed as a pamphlet, entitled *Letter to Certain Highly Impudent Jackdaws*, he characterized the two without naming them as "having no shame, no brains, there is nothing that can be taken from them, they cannot be apprehended, they are worse than octopuses, moving, as they do, from place to place" (196). On the reformers' side it was the evangelicals of Switzerland and Southwestern Germany who occupied Erasmus. In particular, Erasmus took exception to pamphlets that had been printed in Strasbourg and that contained excerpts from one of his works (in the original Latin and translated into German) where he called for clemency in dealing with heretics. Erasmus saw it as a sneaky attempt by Gerard Geldenhouwer to show Erasmus as a supporter of the Reformation, not only in Strasbourg but in Zürich and Basel as well. He took this opportunity to publish the *Letter Against the False Evangelicals* in order to distance himself from that insinuation. The letter drew responses from Geldenhouwer, as well as Martin Bucer.

Compared to earlier periods, this one was not terribly productive for Erasmus's scholarship. This was due, in large part it seems, to the illness discussed above. The main project that came to fruition at the very end of this period was a Latin edition of the works of John Chrysostom in five volumes. The series was a collaborative effort where Erasmus served as chief editor, and included translations by, among others, the French scholar Germain de Brie and the Basel reformer Johann Oecolampadius, though for polemical reasons the latter's name was suppressed. Writing to the English prelate Cuthbert Tunstall, Erasmus expressed a frustration that is no doubt shared by modern scholars who work on collaborative projects: "I have arranged with several scholars to translate some of the pieces [...] but all of them, I find, are slow workers" (166). Some things never change!

MARK CRANE

Nipissing University