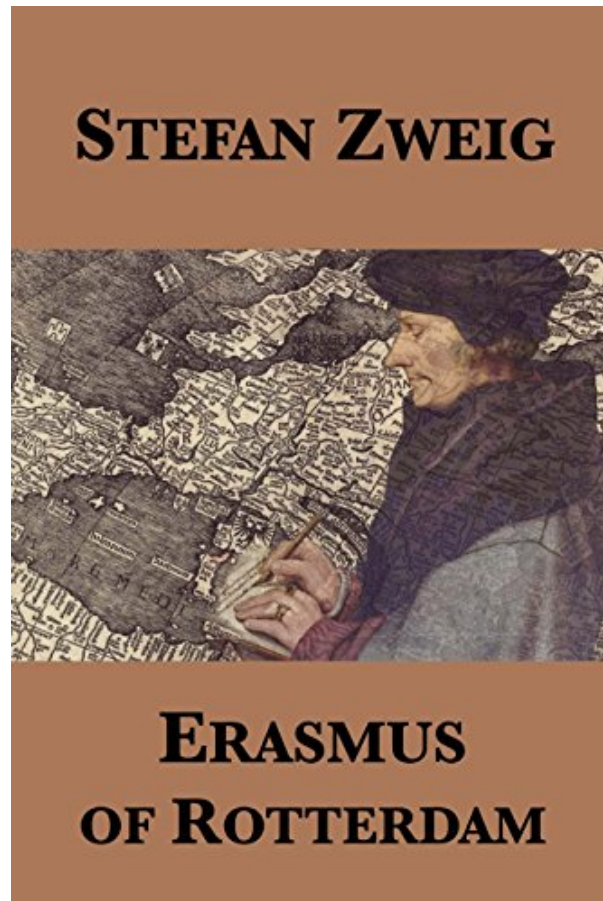


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ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM BY STEFAN ZWEIG PDF

This Plunkett Lake Press eBook is produced by arrangement with Viking, an imprint of Penguin Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

Hailed as a parable for modern times, Erasmus of Rotterdam is the biography of a great humanist who, when pressed for a confession of faith, said, "I love freedom, and I will not and cannot serve any party." At no time does Zweig mention Hitler by name, but it is obvious that his biography of a man who tried to remain above the battle, and who was torn to pieces by both Lutherans and Catholics, was aimed to illustrate the predicament of a man who refrains from activism and prefers to focus on his work.

Erasmus believed in a united Europe, and thought that Luther was splitting it in two. He first tried to reconcile the Pope to Luther's Wittenberg theses, then to bring the German Protestants together with the representatives of Rome. Zweig portrays a steadfast Erasmus, unwilling to let emotion betray the lucidity of his thought, who knew he was the most famous intellect of his age, and evaded any commitment that would bring a host of enemies down upon his head. In Erasmus, Zweig may have seen parts of himself. (adapted from "Book of the Times" by John Chamberlain, The New York Times, November 2, 1934)

"Under Zweig's magic pen Erasmus leaps into vital existence... The book is a quietly astounding bit of biographical and historical achievement." — Percy Hutchison, The New York Times

- Sales Rank: #730073 in eBooks
- Published on: 2015-10-02
- Released on: 2015-10-02
- Format: Kindle eBook

Most helpful customer reviews

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

A beautifully written intellectual portrait of the first great European

By Shalom Freedman

Zweig writes an intellectual biography of Erasmus. He does not focus on tracing the everyday life, or the personal encounters of Erasmus. Instead he is interested in Erasmus' overall view of life and civilization, his historical role and contribution. He shows how Erasmus was the first true European with a vision which transcended national boundaries and focused on a world living in peace. He portrays Erasmus as a balanced, cautious person who fought all his life for, and maintained his intellectual independence and freedom. He writes of how for Erasmus the one great source of happiness was his Work. Erasmus was the champion of Learning, and had according to Zweig a tremendously broad book- knowledge. Erasmus loved books and gave his life to studying them and writing them. Erasmus wanted Reform of the Church but a reform which would be done without violence. He above all was an opponent of Fanaticism, and in his masterpiece 'In Praise of Folly' Fanaticism is the number one enemy. Zweig tells of how Erasmus came to be the overwhelming intellectual figure of his age. He writes with beauty and skill about the tremendous excitement of the Age of Exploration, the Renaissance which Erasmus played an important part in. He too tells the story of the conflict between Luther and Erasmus, how the violent, emotional passionate Luther led to the split in

Western Christendom, and how the rational, balanced Erasmus was no counter to him. This work is not only the portrait of a man but the portrait of a Civilization through vital phases of its development. It is written beautifully by Zweig. Of course the great tragic element here is that Zweig who espoused Erasmus-like values of tolerance, moderation, reason wrote this just as his own world was being swept up in the fanaticism and hatred which would be Nazi Germany.

Zweig movingly describes Erasmus in old age, disappointed and rejected, a foreshadowing of his own tragic exile and death.

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Correct appreciation

By Luc REYNAERT

In this short book, Stefan Zweig sketches an impressive portrait of Erasmus as a private and a public man.

Erasmus was an erudite humanist but a loner (his motto: *nulli concedo, homo per se*).

He should be considered as the first true European and a real pacifist (all conflicts should be solved through negotiations).

But he was in no way a proponent of democracy, more a supporter of an oligarchic rule.

His biggest failure was that he couldn't prevent the schism between Catholics and Protestants, although he played a crucial role in the negotiations. The Elector of Saxony asked his opinion on Maarten Luther. He couldn't give a clearcut answer.

Erasmus went a long way: 'I am against the truth if it causes dissension'.

But he was too honest. He grasped the fact that the compulsory selling of indulgences by the Pope was an unforgivable extortion.

In a good hundred pages Zweig tells the ultimate tragedy of Erasmus's life: on the one hand, his belief in civilisation and the power of reason; on the other hand, a world full of dissensions and war.

Stefan Zweig writes in an enthusiastic style, full of dramas and contrasts.

A simple but masterful psychological and historical analysis.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

In praise of Erasmus in condemnation of Luther

By Shalom Freedman

This biography focuses not on the individual details of Erasmus' life but rather on his view of the world, and its meaning for European history. For Zweig, Erasmus is the first true European. Without true homeland he had no national loyalty. He was the true man of conciliation and peace, whose great enemy was Fanaticism and the Violence it led to. He was above all loyal to his own independence and his work in writing. In one beautiful passage Zweig contrasts him with Pascal and Spinoza, thinkers of far greater intensity and depth. Erasmus was not according to Zweig so much deep as he was broad, and his vast knowledge came from what he took from outside, rather than found inside himself. In the latter part of the book the non-fanatical Erasmus is contrasted with the violent, partisan, passionate and angry Luther. Erasmus at the end of his life somewhat tragically feels the world that he tried to make has not been made. Instead of a Europe of peace and conciliation of harmony and non-violence, there is a Europe of bloodshed and faction.

Zweig writes with great sympathy of Erasmus and one almost feels he is writing about his own views of

Europe and mankind. After all he writes when the faction of absolute fanaticism is about to take over Germany and lead the world to the horrors of the Second World War.

Zweig is a wonderfully clear and articulate writer. This is an exceptionally good book.

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