

## Erasmus

...Erasmus's influence and how his writings contributed to the support and advancement of anti-Trinitarian views, read the following sentences from the inquisitional examination of a Dutch Anabaptist.

This examination (1569, Bruges) was before the Inquisitor Broer Cornelio (Cornelio Adrians) and the Anabaptist examined was Hermann Van Flekwyk, who was afterwards burned at the stake. I select only the sentences which go to show the influence of Erasmus.

*Inquisitor:* 'Christ, the second person of the Trinity, you refuse to call him God?'

*Prisoner:* 'I call him the "Son of the living God," as Peter does, and "the Lord," as the other apostles call him, and with Paul "that man—by whom God shall judge the world in righteousness."' "

*Inquisitor:* 'These are the wretched arguments of the wicked Erasmus in his treatise "On Prayer" and in his "Apology to the Bishop of Seville." Does not Saint John say, "There are three that bear record in heaven—the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one"?'

*Prisoner:* ‘Erasmus in his annotations shows that this text is not in the Greek original.’

Upon this the Inquisitor, turning to the secretary and clerk who were present, exclaimed: ‘Gentlemen, what do you think of this? That wicked anti-Trinitarian, Erasmus, has the boldness to tell us we have added these words.’ Then, continuing the examination, he asked, ‘If Christ is not God, how is it we call the holy virgin “Mother of God”?’

*Prisoner:* ‘Because those of your communion generally affect to speak a different language from that of Scripture. The virgin is called in Scripture “the mother of Jesus,” and *never* “the mother of God.”’

Here the inquisitor called the prisoner a ‘blasphemer,’ ‘a diabolical anti-Trinitarian,’ etc. The prisoner continued: ‘You say there are three persons in the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. . . . If the three jointly are but one God, it follows that the virgin is the mother of all three.’

*Inquisitor:* ‘May you be roasted in hell-fire, you wicked and abominable anti-Trinitarian! You would make a hundred thousand doctors of divinity mad.’

This extract gives us an idea of the influence of the writings of Erasmus, and this influence was felt throughout Europe.

Erasmus foresaw the inevitable result of violently suppressing heresy, and wrote to a friend: 'Theologians, schoolmen, and monks fancy that in what they are doing they strengthen the Church. They are mistaken. Fire is not quenched by fire.'

(Frederick Blount Mott, *A Short Unitarian History*, London: British & Foreign Unitarian Association, 1906, 11-13; Excerpt from Chapter I, *The Pursuit of Truth*, paragraph structure modified)

\*Unitarians are anti-Trinitarian, but they do not believe that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh.