Erasmus: A Timeline

1469	Born Gerrit Gerritzoon, an illegitimate 2nd Son of a soon-to-be monk in Rotterdam
1484	Death of parents by plague - placed in an Augustinian Monastery, hated life as a monk.
1499	Went to England, met **Thomas More** , **John Colet** and **Hugh Latimer** and others.
1503	*Enchiridion Alilitis Christiani* (**Dagger of a Christian Gentleman**) which was reprinted 23 times in his lifetime. This volume set forth a simple Christianity which highlighted the dangers of ritualistic, non-reflective religion.
1505	England Pilgrimage with John Colet to shrine of Thomas A'Becket. Colet was the source of his method of Biblical interpretation. Durant says of Colet: "though asserter and champion of the old theology, he astonished his time by practicing Christianity." It was Colet that Erasmus got his interest and interpretive approach to the Scriptures.
1508	Visited Rome - In contrast to Luther, Erasmus was attracted by the "good life" of the Bishops.
1509	England - In hopes of an appointment in the court of newly crowned King Henry VIII.
1511	Wrote **In Praise of Folly** while living at More's home, which criticises abuses in the Church and in particular the sale of indulgences.
1513	Wrote the Anonymous **Julius Exclusus**, a bitter attack on the corruption of the Papacy.
1516	Published his **Greek New Testament**, dedicated to Pope Leo X. Exposing translation errors in the Vulgate, it also became the text which Luther used to write his German Testament of 1522.
1519	Luther wrote seeking his support. Erasmus denied having read Luther's writings and urged him to quiet moderation. The talk around Europe was that "Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched", but he denied it saying "I laid a hen, but Luther hatched a gamecock." At first supportive of Martin Luther (Erasmus sent copies of the 95 Theses to Colet and More); as Luther began to reject the Papacy, Erasmus tried hard to distance himself from Luther, while appealing for restraints in dealing with him.
1524	Pressured into attacking Luther by Clement VII , he chose what he thought would be an insignificant issue - free will. However Luther responded vigorously with On the Bondage of the Will.
1536	Dies in Basel not long after hearing of the death of Thomas More

Tasks

1. Provide key quotes from the FOUR key works by Erasmus listed here to illustrate the message of each.

From *The Praise of Folly* (1509)

The merchants are the biggest fool of all. They carry on the most sordid business and by the most corrupt methods. Whenever it is necessary, they will lie, perjure themselves, steal, cheat, and mislead the public. Nevertheless, they are highly respected because of their money. There is no lack of flattering friars to kowtow to them, and call them Right Honorable in public. The motive of the friars is clear: they are after some of the loot. . . .

. . . After the lawyers come the philosophers, who are reverenced for their beards and the fur on their gowns. They announce that they alone are wise and that the rest of men are only passing shadows. . . . The fact that they can never explain why they constantly disagree with each other is sufficient proof that they do not know the truth about anything. They know nothing at all, yet profess to know everything. They are ignorant even of themselves, and are often too absent-minded or near-sighted to see the ditch or stone in front of them. . . .

. . . Perhaps it would be wise to pass over the theologians in silence. That short-tempered and supercilious crew is unpleasant to deal with. . . . They will proclaim me a heretic. With this thunderbolt they terrify the people they don't like. Their opinion of themselves is so great that they behave as if they were already in heaven; they look down pityingly on other men as so many worms. A wall of imposing definitions, conclusions, corollaries, and explicit and implicit propositions protects them. They are full of big words and newly-invented terms. . . .

. . . Next to the theologians in happiness are those who commonly call themselves *the religious* and *monks*. Both are complete misnomers, since most of them stay as far away from religion as possible, and no people are seen more often in public. They are so detested that it is considered bad luck if one crosses your path, and yet they are highly pleased with themselves. They cannot read, and so they consider it the height of piety to have no contact with literature.... Most of them capitalize on their dirt and poverty by whining for food from door to door. . . . These smooth fellows simply explain that by their very filth, ignorance, boorishness, and insolence they enact the lives of the apostles for us. It is amusing to see how they do everything by rule, almost mathematically. Any slip is sacrilege. each shoe string must have so many knots and must be of a certain color. . . . They even condemn each other, these professors of apostolic charity, making an extraordinary stir if a habit is belted incorrectly or if its color is a shade too dark. . . . The monks of certain orders recoil in horror from money, as if it were poison, but not from wine or women. They take extreme pains, not in order to be like Christ, but to be unlike each other. Most of them consider one heaven an inadequate reward for their devotion to ceremony and traditional details. They forget that Christ will condemn all of this and will call for a reckoning of that which He has prescribed, namely, charity.

Questions and Tasks

• Read through this account and underline a key phrase in each paragraph which captures the essence of Erasmus's argument.