

## DOCUMENT 9

# Two Letters from Erasmus Concerning the Reuchlin Affair

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), perhaps the most influential humanist in northern Europe, entered the Augustinian order as a young man, but later obtained a papal dispensation that allowed him to live outside the monastery and devote himself to scholarship. He studied at Paris but conceived a strong dislike for scholastic theology and left the university without a degree. A doctorate in theology was later conferred on him *per saltum* (that is, without passing the usual examinations) by the University of Turin. He travelled and made friends in England and Italy; at the time of the Reuchlin affair he was a resident of Louvain. He was sympathetic toward the Reformation in its early stages, but withdrew his support once the schismatic nature of Luther's movement became apparent.

Erasmus was one of the great champions of language studies and a pioneer in applying philological principles to the scriptural text. His edition of the New Testament (1516), which contained the first printed Greek text to appear on the market, was hailed by humanists and attacked by conservative theologians. His subsequent entanglement with the theologians of Louvain and Paris was often compared by his contemporaries to Reuchlin's controversies with the theologians of Cologne.

The following excerpts from two letters, in which Erasmus comments on the Reuchlin Affair, are translated from the Latin text in *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P.S. Allen (Oxford, 1906–58). An English translation of Erasmus's correspondence can be found in *The Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto, 1965– ).