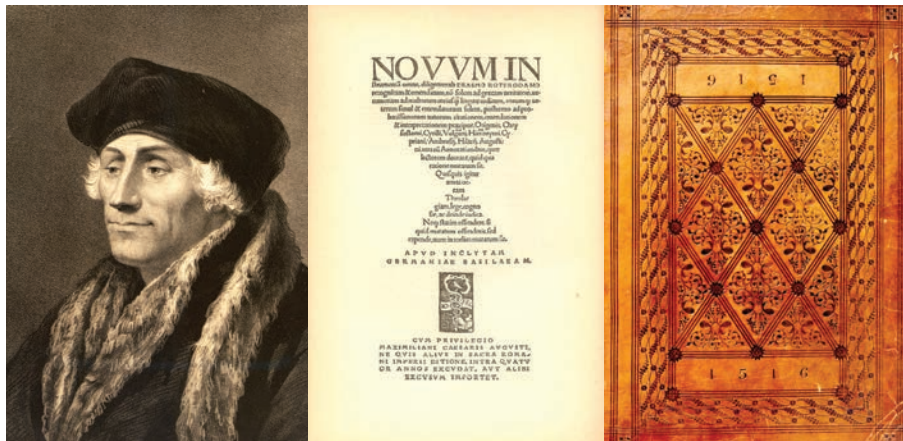


REFORMATION SUNDAY: OCTOBER 30, 2016

A New Testament



n March 7, 1516, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) wrote to a friend with great relief that the printing of his New Testament, the *Novum Instrumentum omne*, was complete. The research of a decade and the labor of nearly a year had produced the first published version of the New Testament in Greek, the common language of the early church. A printed Greek New Testament meant that what had been available only to a few was now available to many: the Gospel in its original language.

Erasmus—Renaissance humanist, Catholic reformer, and Dutch educator—had long seen the need for a reliable print edition of the Greek text. Many had been promised but none delivered. In 1514, Swiss printer Johann Froben offered him a chance to publish his own, and Erasmus moved to Basel to oversee the work. The first edition featured Greek text, based on manuscripts available to Erasmus in Basel and corrected through his own research, alongside a lightly edited version of the Latin translation that had been used in the Western church for centuries.

In his title Erasmus used the Latin word “instrumentum” (a written document that establishes the terms of an agreement) in place of the traditional “testamentum” (an unwritten will or covenant). He reasoned the Old Testament was based on an unwritten covenant of God with Israel, but the New Testament was the terms of a covenant made by Christ with the church in the Lord’s Supper. Froben set the title-page type in the shape of a chalice to emphasize this point.

Erasmus’s volume received attention across Europe. He issued a second, corrected edition in 1519 that reverted to the traditional “testamentum” title and replaced the Latin text with his own fresh translation. This was the edition Martin Luther used to translate the New Testament into German in 1522. English-language Bibles such as the Geneva (1560) and King James (1611) were also strongly influenced by Erasmus. The reformation of the church began with the reformation of the Bible.

Reformation Sunday materials are provided by the [Presbyterian Historical Society](http://www.history.pcusa.org/reformation-sunday). For more information on the Reformation and PHS, visit us at www.history.pcusa.org/reformation-sunday

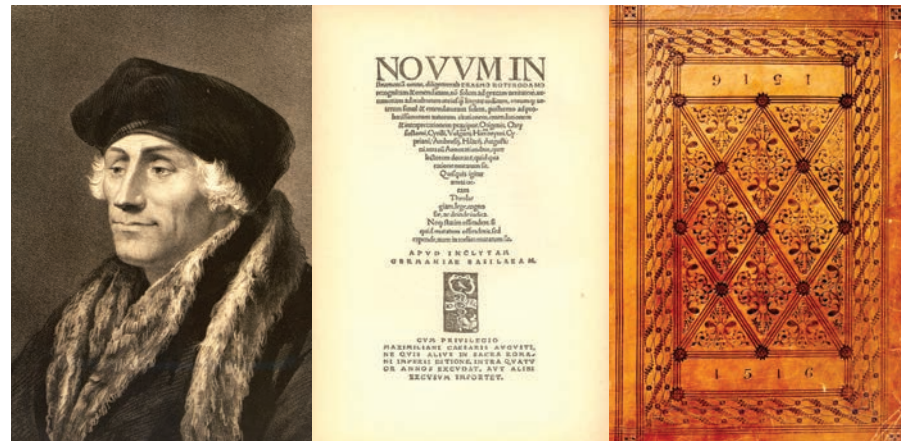
Above left: Portrait of Erasmus of Rotterdam. Lithograph by Fr. Schenck after Hans Holbein, 1849. **Above center to right:** Title page and cover of the society’s 1516 edition of Erasmus’s New Testament.

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