

A Scholastic Strikes Back: Noël Bédá's *Apologia ... adversus clandestinos Lutheranos* (1529)

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Between the summers of 1527 and 1528, Noël Bédá was occupied with writing a response to four works that had recently appeared in print attacking the book he had published, the year before, against the New Testament scholarship of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and Desiderius Erasmus.¹ This task presented the embattled syndic of the Paris Faculty of Theology with a major challenge: how to defend his own writing. For nearly a decade he had been warning his fellow theologians, lawyers in the Parlement, royal officials, and other powerful people, of the dangers of subjecting Holy Scripture to humanist-inspired philological and critical analysis.² He had even published four books on the topic, the latest of which—the one that occasioned his current quandary—explicitly identified both biblical humanists with Martin Luther.³ Up to this point, however, he had always been on the offensive — excerpting what he viewed as erroneous passages in the works of others, and offering reasons for his judgment. He had never had to defend his own writing in print before.

¹ The full title of the book was *Annotationum Natalis Bedae doctoris theologi Parisiensis in Jacobum Fabrum Stapulensem libri duo et in Desiderium Erasmus Roterodamum liber unus, qui ordine tertius est*, (Paris: Josse Bade, 1526). For the Latin text and English translation of the preface to this work, see Mark Crane, “A Scholastic Response to Biblical Humanism: Noël Bédá against Lefèvre d'Étaples and Erasmus (1526),” *Humanistica Lovaniensia: The Journal of Neo-Latin Studies* 59 (2010): 55-81.

² The most recent and complete overview of Bédá's contribution to the debates over humanist biblical scholarship is James K. Farge, “Noël Bédá and the Defense of Tradition,” in *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus*, ed. by Erika Rummel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2008), 143-164. See also Erika Rummel's account of the controversy in *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics, 1516-1536*, 2 vols., (Nieuwkoop: De Graff, 1989) 2:1523-1536, 29-59 and *idem*, “Why Noël Bédá Did Not Like Erasmus' Paraphrases,” in Hilmar M. Pabel and Mark Vessey eds. *Holy Scripture Speaks: The Production and Reception of Erasmus' Paraphrases on the New Testament*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 265-278. Indispensable to an understanding of Bédá is the work of Walter F. Bense, “Noël Bédá and the Humanist Reformation at Paris, 1504-1534,” unpublished PhD thesis, 3 vols., Harvard, 1967.

³ For a list of his publications, see Farge, *Biographical Register of Paris Doctors of Theology, 1530-1536* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), 34-35.

The book he ended up writing, published in early 1529 under the title *Apologia magistri Natalis Bedae Theologi, adversus clandestinos Lutheranos*, thus marks a significant departure in Bédà's polemical style. The defensive position that he adopted for the first time in this book offered him a new set of strategies for defending himself from charges that his own writings contained errors, and reinforcing his central message that the writings of the "theologizing humanists," as he called them disdainfully, contained errors that were at the root of contemporary religious discord. The book reveals a side of Bédà's personality that serves as a useful counter-balance to the larger-than-life caricature constructed by both his contemporaries and modern scholars.⁴ Furthermore, it supplies clear evidence that Bédà had changed his mind on how best to deal with the humanists: instead of appealing solely to his authority as a doctor of theology and labeling them heretics, he now also appealed to the authority of learned public opinion to do so.

The book that he was defending in the *Apologia* was a collection of "annotations," or notes, that he had written on Lefèvre's commentaries and Erasmus's paraphrases of the New Testament. It contained excerpts from the humanists' publications that Bédà deemed erroneous (352 from Lefèvre's commentaries and 198 from Erasmus's paraphrases), each one followed by an explanation of why he believed the passage was in error. In the prefatory epistle to that work, Bédà argued that sheer arrogance had driven Lefèvre and Erasmus to propose ideas that went against the teachings of Church, and claimed that he was moved by Christian piety to correct those errors.⁵ Throughout his notes, Bédà attempted to illustrate how the conclusions of both scholars were not only supportive of but also, as often as not, the source of Luther's teachings – and as such were harmful to Christians. No reader could have missed this blunt message; in nearly every annotation Bédà makes his judgement clear with phrases like, "This proposition is clearly Lutheran," or "This proposition is heretical." Such strong words, echoing the form and language of the faculty's formal condemnations of Luther and others, could only be interpreted as a direct assault on the biblical humanists and the *évangéliques* who put their principles into practice.⁶

Not surprisingly, considering its menacing tone, the book elicited swift reaction from the humanists' supporters both at home and abroad. Within three months of its publication, King Francis I, recently returned from his captivity in Spain, banned its sale. No doubt he was advised to do so by his sister, Marguerite de Navarre, the highest ranking patron of Lefèvre and his circle, and he had been asked to do so by Erasmus himself in a direct appeal.⁷ Fortunately for Bédà, the book's printer had sold most of the copies by the time the ban was instituted, and it was immediately re-printed in Cologne, a city outside of Francis' jurisdiction.⁸ Even before the

⁴ The doctoral thesis of famed French historian Pierre Caron, recently re-published in a modern edition, is a good example of this. See Pierre Caron, *Noël Bédà, précédé de Le Diabolique Docteur et les Saints Erudits par Arnaud Laimé*, (Paris, Belles Lettres, 2005).

⁵ See note 1.

⁶ The faculty's condemnation of 104 passages in Luther's works was passed on 15 April 1521 and printed immediately afterward. Its full title was *Determination theologicae facultatis Parisiensis super Doctrinal Lutheriana hactenus per eum visa* (Paris: Josse Bade, 1521). Two years later, the faculty condemned fourteen propositions that were preached in the Dioceses of Meaux and other places, which were also printed. Its full title was *Determinatio facultatis theologicae Parisiensis, super aliquibus propositionibus certis e locis nuper ad eam delatis, de veneratione sanctorum, de canone missae, deque sustentatione ministrorum altaris, et caeteris quibusdam* (Paris: Jean Petit, 1523).

⁷ On Marguerite's influence on her brother Francis I during the period immediately following his release from captivity, see Johanathan Reid, *King's Sister – Queen of Dissent: Marguerite of Navarre (1492-1549) and Her Evangelical Network*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009) 1:355-371. For Erasmus' appeal to Francis I, see Ep. 1722 in *Collected Works of Erasmus* vol. 12. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 243-247.

⁸ The book's printer, Josse Bade, reported to Bédà on 18 August 1526 (less than three months after printing) that he had already sold or sent away 600 copies out of a print run of 650. See Philippe Renouard,

book was printed, Erasmus—never one to let criticism go unanswered—sent a hand-written defence against Béda’s charges directly to the Paris Faculty of Theology.⁹ Four months later, just a month after Béda’s book appeared in print, Erasmus sent a brand new hand-written defence to the Parlement of Paris, seeking its intervention in the matter.¹⁰ In October 1526, he published both of those earlier defences in a volume preceded by yet another defence, which he called *Prologus supputationis errorum in censuris Bedae*. The *Prologus* anticipated the much more systematic, point-by-point rejoinder to Béda’s criticisms he published in February 1527, under the title *Supputationes errorum in censuris Natalis Bedae*. Together, these two books comprise more than 700 pages of printed text. In the latter book, Erasmus claimed to refute 181 lies (*mendacia*), 310 tricks (*calumniæ*) and forty-seven blasphemies (*blasphemia*) that he encountered in Béda’s annotations.¹¹

Closer to home, Béda was likely aware that during this time supporters of both Lefèvre and Erasmus in Paris were circulating manuscript lists of passages from his *Annotations* that they claimed were erroneous.¹² In the summer of 1527 a pair of anonymous pamphlets (one in Latin, the other in French), printed in Paris, advertised a dozen passages drawn from Béda’s book (eight from his annotations on Lefèvre and four from his annotations on Erasmus) that purported to show his lack of Christian faith.¹³ The Latin pamphlet, entitled *Duodecim Articuli infidelitatis Natalis Bedae*, was distributed widely, especially at court where it was brought to the attention of King Francis.¹⁴ In July 1527 Francis ordered the four faculties of the University to review the Latin version of the pamphlet and make an official report to him on whether or not the charges laid out in it—namely that Béda’s book contained many errors—were true.¹⁵

During the period in which he was writing his *Apologia*, then, Béda had good reason to be anxious about clearing his name. Not only was his reputation taking a beating from printed attacks claiming that he was, among other things, a liar, a cheat, and a heretic, but his efforts to combat heresy were also meeting more and more resistance from the French king because of these accusations. The report on the pamphlet and Béda’s book that Francis ordered was, however, never produced. The faculties of arts, medicine, and law referred the matter directly to the Faculty of Theology’s judgement alone, arguing that it was the only faculty competent to

Bibliographie des impressions et des oeuvres de Josse Badius Ascensius, imprimeur et humaniste (1462-1535) 3 vols. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1964) 2:154-155. The Cologne edition was printed by Petrus Quentel.

⁹ This piece was entitled *Divinationes*, so called, according to Erasmus, because he had to make “guesses” at the meaning of Béda’s criticisms. See Ep. 1664 in *Collected Works of Erasmus* vol. 12 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 25-30.

¹⁰ In this longer piece, entitled *Elenchus*, Erasmus responded to 142 of Béda’s 198 notes on his *Paraphrases*. See Ep. 1721 in *CWE* 12.

¹¹ The adding up of numbers here echoes Erasmus’ title *Supputationes*, presenting his book as “computations” of the number of errors in Béda’s book.

¹² In an appeal before of the Parlement of Paris on 18 January 1527, Jacques Merlin’s lawyer told the court that his client could “immediately bring before the court a great number of propositions drawn from Béda’s book that are erroneous and suspect in faith.” See Farge, *Le parti conservateur au xvii^e siècle: Université et Parlement de Paris à l’époque de la Renaissance et de la Réforme* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1992), 90.

¹³ The French version of the pamphlet is not extant. According to Béda its contents mirrored the Latin closely (see section 12 of the preface). He also excerpts seven short passages from the French pamphlet which he says differ from the Latin. See fos. L^v-LIII^v.

¹⁴ Though often attributed to the French nobleman Louis de Berquin, the Latin version at any rate is more likely the work of the theologian Jacques Merlin. See Ep. 1763, n. 12 in *Collected Works of Erasmus* vol. 12 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 392-393.

¹⁵ For the French text of Francis I’s letter to the Faculty of Theology, see P.S. Allen, *Epistolae Erasmi*, 7:233-235. An English translation of that letter appears in the introduction to Ep. 1902 in *CWE* 13:433-436.

make judgements on theological matters. There the investigation was put to one side and never dealt with again; Béda claimed that the faculty was too busy dealing with more pressing issues, but it is likely that he was involved in quashing the investigation through his influence on the faculty. But that influence should not be overstated. The faculty minutes for 1 August 1528 report that Béda complained that the investigation of his *Apologia* was going too slowly, and that he even offered to pay the members of the examining committee from his own pocket if they would finish their examination quickly.¹⁶ All books dealing with religious subjects printed in Paris had, since 1521, required the faculty's approval before being printed. The faculty turned down Béda's offer and, in its accustomed fashion, agreed to pay the examiners from its own funds. It took another five months, however, until late December, before the examiners finally made their report to the faculty, who then approved it for publication.¹⁷ It was printed on the press of Josse Bade in February 1529.

The book is divided into roughly equal halves, the first dealing with the *Duodecim Articuli*, the second with Erasmus's two printed defences. The order suggests, not surprisingly, that Béda's primary concern was with his Paris critics, the ones who had brought his work to the attention of Francis I, who was now actively blocking Béda's program for combating heresy. The exchange with Erasmus was secondary.¹⁸ This is further substantiated by the fact that in the section dealing with the Paris pamphlet he composed a rebuttal of each alleged error, while in his response to Erasmus he did not defend a single passage that Erasmus had marked as erroneous, but rather excerpted a new set of passages from Erasmus' most recent defences—sixty in total—which he dubbed “the new errors Erasmus has made while attempting to defend his old ones.” Despite this difference in response, however, to Béda's mind the teachings of Lefèvre and Erasmus really were one and the same. He had claimed in the preface to his 1526 book that he could not rightly condemn the errors of the one without mentioning the errors of the other because the errors were so similar; that same sentiment is clearly evident in his *Apologia*.

Within a month of the book's publication, Erasmus responded with a bitter missive, which was to be the final word in this polemical exchange.¹⁹ Though we will never be sure whether it was due to lack of time or interest, Béda contributed nothing more print to this controversy or any other. If in writing the *Apologia*, as suggested above, Béda was seeking to ease the strain on his relationship with Francis I, his campaign against heresy during the period following the book's publication achieved quite the opposite, resulting eventually in exile, followed by a bout of imprisonment upon return, and then another exile, all executed by royal order.²⁰ Though he may not have achieved a primary goal with the *Apologia*, the book nonetheless provides valuable insight into the mindset of one of the most influential and powerful Paris theologians during the early years of the Reformation. The preface presented here is especially useful for its detailing of events that transpired in Paris between the summer of 1525 and the fall of 1528. To be sure,

¹⁶ James K. Farge ed., *Registre des procès-verbaux de la Faculté de Théologie de l'Université de Paris de janvier 1524 à novembre 1533* (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1990), 196.

¹⁷ *IBID.*, 204-205.

¹⁸ This point is echoed in the book's subtitle, where the material against his Paris critics is labelled “*declaratio*,” and the material against Erasmus is labelled “*subnotatio*.” See opening of Latin text.

¹⁹ The *Notatiunculae quaedam extemporales ad naenias Bedaicas* (Basel: Froben, March 1529) was appended to the longer *Responsio ad epistolam paraeneticam Alberti Pii*. Erasmus did compose one more long and tedious response to the Paris Faculty of Theology's condemnation of his works in 1532, entitled *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas sub nomine Facultatis Theologiae Parisiensis*, recently published as volume 82 in *CWE*. Though the faculty had passed its condemnation of several passages in Erasmus' works in 1527, the *Determinatio facultatis theologiae in schola Parisiensi super quampluribus assertionibus D. Erasmi Roterodami*, (Paris: Josse Bade), was not printed until 1531.

²⁰ For a detailed account of Béda's anti-heresy campaign from 1529 and its results see Farge, “Noël Béda and the Defence of Tradition,” 161-164.

Béda's account is subjective, and for this reason, needs to be read with caution. It does, however, provide some balance to a story that has been told largely through the evidence of Erasmus and his supporters.

Béda's Latin is notoriously complicated and quite far from the classicizing style espoused by his humanist opponents. The predilection of modern scholars for the humanist style has led them to judge Béda's Latin as "barbarous," and thus unworthy of study. This imbalance has inevitably led to a skewed interpretation of Béda's efforts that implicitly favours the humanists. What this view tends to ignore is that Béda's Latin was perfectly intelligible to his intended audience—theologians trained in the scholastic tradition, ecclesiastical leaders, and jurists—with whom he shared a Latin idiom. My point here is neither to glorify Béda, nor to champion his cause. Indeed, if judged by classical standards, his Latin is awful. Pitted against adversaries who were masters of a classicizing literary style, he didn't stand a chance of besting them on a rhetorical level. As unpleasant as Béda's Latin might be to read on a level of literary appreciation, nonetheless it is still important to hear his side of the story.

Note on the text

The Latin text transcribed here is the 1529 edition published in Paris by Josse Bade. Abbreviations have been resolved silently, *-ijs* endings have been changed to *-iis*, and ampersands (&) have been changed to *et*. Paragraphing, punctuation, and the use of quotation marks have been brought into line with modern practice.

Latin Text

Natalis Bedae Theologi Parisiensis, adversus sui, et operis in Fabri et Erasmi errata, criminatores, Apologetica sententiae suae in quibusdam propositionibus dicti operis aut non intellectis, aut perperam citatis, declaratio; novorumque errorum ipsius Erasmi ac defensorum eius et Fabri, subnotatio; in Collegio Acuti Montis elaborata, Ad Idibus Octobris M.D.XXVIII.

Natalis Beda Lectori Pio et vere Christiano Salutem.

1. Decreveram ab ea ego sententia non discedere, qua mihi fuit propositum ad quosdam in me clandestine sparsos dudum libellos non levibus scatementes criminationibus, esse tanquam surdus non audiens et sicut mutus, cum Eremicola beato Agathone, non aperiens os suum,²¹ exemplo ad hoc motus Ezechiae Regis et prophetae, qui suis ne verbum quidem ullum impii Sennacherib nunciis deo et populo eius perverse detrahentibus responderent, prohibuit, ne forsan ex responsis ampliosem, in deum blasphemandi occasionem illi assumerent.²² Ita inquam decreveram, nisi me renitentem, ita tandem devicisset praeseverans quorundam amicorum instantia, ut quod ante sesquiennium suadere coeperant, nec persuaserant tamen, iam aliqua ex parte conari sim pollicitus, partim vero quod minime conducens et mihi munus impar id censerem, immo et per alios antehac satis videbam factitatum, prorsus abnuui.

²¹ Cf. Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, ca. 178, which relates the story that St. Agathon kept a pebble in his mouth for three years, until he learned how to be silent.

²² Cf. 2 Kings 18:36.

2. Videlicet amici hortabantur pro me plus quam ego ipse zelantes, ut nonnihil scriberem in purgationem improperorum, conviciorum, calumniarum, contumeliarum, maledictorumque omnium quae in me variis epistolis, praefationibus, et opusculis effudit ac iaculatus est Desiderius Erasmus, et praesertim *Elencho* et libro, quem *Supputationes* vocavit, quibus quidem ita suadentibus amicis, respondebam quod dixit Augustinus Petiliano Donatistae, qui cum eo egerat pene ut mecum Erasmus: “Si ego Erasmo vellem pro maledictis maledicta rependere, quid aliud quam duo maledici essemus?”²³ Scio (aiebam) qui dixit quod “maledici regnum dei non possidebunt,”²⁴ et Christus, “Beati (inquit) eritis cum maledixerint vobis homines.”²⁵ Et utinam cum Apostolo sicut re ita et syncera mente dicamus: “Nos maledicimur et benedicimus.”²⁶
3. Scio (deinde dicebam) quod neque verbis neque scriptis cessurus sit Desiderius. Non enim in opinionibus est aut doctrinae dogma tam apparens in veritate aut falsitate, cuius oppositum sua rhetorica et eloquentia non facillime sibi addictis suadeat et incautis, quod lucide satis monstrarunt, Leeus, Stunica, Sutor, et quidam alii scriptores qui re ipsa quantum ad iniurias et artes quibus in alios uti novit, pro me responderunt Erasmo, quoniam de illis eadem ferme quae et de me antea scripsit.²⁷ Quicumque enim Erasmi scripta redarguere ausus est, eo ipso factus est aemulator et invidus, inani gloria percitus, mendax, calumniator, impius, blasphemus, haereticus, temerarius, arrogans, barbarus, ineptus, ignarus, imperitissimus, ac omni qua prius pollebat doctrina privatus. His equidem ac aliis pluribus me depinxit coloribus homo iste, cui prius eram (ut illius ad me datis liquet epistolis) “eximius doctor,” “vir egregius,” “absolutissimus theologus.”²⁸ Mihi et Desiderio dimittat pius dominus peccata omnia.
4. Ipse praeterea etiam suis scriptis quibus me lacerat, et suo iudicio confundit, ac radicitus exterminat, utcumque sibiipsi pro me nesciens prudentiorum sententia occurrit, dum nunc negat me censurarum in errores suos authorem fuisse, nunc quod biennio multorum praesidiis adiutus, id effecerim, saepius quod nullo locorum iuste fuerit in censuris correptus. Cum tamen in *Elencho* veritate coactus, in tribus et quinqueginta propositionibus (nisi me fallat numerus) errorem aut oscitantiam suam proprio agnovit silentio. Illas enim indefensas reliquens transilivit, quod ad oculus indicat ipse, per Erasmus positus numerus. Porro de prima transit (secunda suppressa) ad tertiam, et de illa ad xii, de qua ad xvii, et ita de caeteris ad numerum usque liii. Caeterum in *Supputationibus* factus (ut modeste dicam) audacior (qua virtute tamen ipse viderit) nullam omnium intactam praeterit, sed de unaquaque sese iustificare contendit.
5. An autem id defensionibus legitimis efficiat, utinam quandoque qui eius sunt et literaturae et autoritatis ut adversus eorum decreta nihil Erasmo crederetur, penitius disquirant et, declarent mundo decernentes satisne damna non loculorum, sed animarum per priores editiones, in plurimis nocentiores posterioribus, illata lectoribus, repararit Erasmus, quod nostro ut

²³ Augustine, *Contra Litteras Petiliani Donatistae, Cirtensis Episcopi, Libri tres*, 3:1.

²⁴ 1 Cor 6:10.

²⁵ Matt 5:11.

²⁶ 1 Cor 4:12.

²⁷ For an overview of Lee’s controversies with Erasmus, see Erika Rummel, “Introduction,” *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* (ASD) IX-4 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2003): 1-19. An abridged version of this introduction appears in *idem*, “Introduction,” *Collected Works of Erasmus* (CWE) 72 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005): xi-xxvi. On Diego Lopez de Zuniga, see H.J. de Jonge, “Introduction,” *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* (ASD) IX.2 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1983): 3-57. On Pierre Cousturier, see Rummel, *Erasmus and his Catholic Critics*, vol. 2 (Nieuwkoop: De Graff, 1989): 61-79, and *passim* on the unnamed “others.”

²⁸ See, in order, Ep. 1571 (salutation), Ep. 1581, (line 42), Ep. 1620 (salutation) in *CWE 11*.

nonusquam fatetur beneficio, aut aliorum instructus in ipsis posterioribus multa de suis correxit erratis. Et quoniam mihi id non sat esse semper est visum, quia priores istas editiones innumeri habent, non visuri castigatiores, per epistolam illam obnixè rogavi et monui quod pro eius salute necessarium existimabam, scilicet libello ad hoc parando lapsus suos omnes (quorum non paucos ob id amicissime ad eum transmisi) descriptos retractaret, in morem patris sui professione regulari divi Augustini, et per orbem emitteret, a novorum interim conditione librorum temperando, donec repurgasset impure prius edita.²⁹ Epistolae meae ad ipsum Erasmus super hac fraterna correctione inferius exemplum fide bona exarabitur, et illius qua mihi respondit, et quoniam ad hoc cogimur, caeterarum quae intercesserunt, ut pii cognoscant lectores quo in Erasmi salutem animo fuerim et adhuc dei gratia sim.³⁰

6. Pro refutatione autem eorum quae in nostras censuras triplici opere, sed superflue omnino scripsit, sufficere puto pro veritatis tuitione et cautela, dimissis omnino quibus nos ipse laesit iniuriis, si docuero quod dum priores excusare molitur errores et fucis obtegere, novos absque modo disseminat. Transcribam itaque duntaxat excerptos per me novos Desiderii in fide aut moribus lapsus, eorum censuras (quando illius arbitrio tam iniquus censor ego sum) aliis cedens perpensis quas addemus notulis. Istud est enim cum dictarum in nos iniuriarum detersione, in quo amicorum non acquievi suasionibus. Alterum autem quod eisdem amicis provocantibus tentare non renuimus, quamvis Erasmi rem praesentem ex parte contingeret, quidnam sit paucis aperiamus, modis et mediis quae dominus permisit.

7. Iunio mense anno incarnationis Dominica M.D. XXV, in commentarios Iacobi Fabri super beati Pauli epistolas et quattuor evangelia annotationes et subinde in paraphrases Desiderii Erasmi in eadem evangelia quattuor et apostolicas omnes epistolas scribere censuras sumus exorsi, cui labori menses fere undecim horis nostrae libertati concessis incubuimus. Opusculum autem absolutum collegio Theologorum examinandum (ut modo sit) obtuli. Auditis postmodum tribus magistris quibus illud commissum fuerat negotium super contentis in eo scripto quod (haud dubito) exactius perlegerant, consentit et permisit illius editionem eadem theologorum universitas mota ad id causis in rei huius testimonio quod in librorum ipsorum limine cernitur expressis.³¹

²⁹ Ep. 1579 (lines 69-88).

³⁰ Bédà prints four letters Erasmus wrote to him (Eps. 1571, 1596, 1620, and 1679) along with his four replies to those letters (Eps. 1579, 1609, 1642, and 1685). The three extant letters written by Erasmus to Bédà that he does not print here include Ep. 1581, 1610, and 1906. Bédà claims that he omitted Ep. 1581 "...especially because its contents are retracted in the second one [i.e. Ep. 1596]; ("...ob id praeseritum quod per secundam, illam retractare videtur," fo. CI^r. Bédà likely omitted Ep. 1610 because it neither responds to one of Bédà's letters, nor pertains to the controversy between them. James Farge suggests that Bédà might not have received Erasmus's final letter, Ep. 1906; see introduction to Ep. 1906 in *CWE*.

³¹ "De consensu facultatis Theologicae Parrhisiensis, super his libris emittendis, testimonium. Cum multi dicerentur errores inveniri in commentariis, quos magister Jacobus Faber in epistolas Pauli, et in evangelia edidit, multi etiam in Paraphrasibus, quas in Novum Testamentum evulgavit Erasmus Roterodamus, scripsissetque in confutatione illorum magister Natalis Bédà, Parisiensis studii theologus nonnulla, quae pro more iam observato suae praesentasset Facultati, ut per illius deputandos visitarentur; ipsis perlectis post factam in Facultate eadem per deputatos ad id relationem super his quae in huiusmodi Bedae scriptis comperissent, consentit et permisit Facultas ipsos libros imprimi et venditione exponi, tanquam qui utiliter et pie possent legi, utpote qui pleraque complecterentur ad declarationem, defensionemque veritatis, et revincenda perversa dogmata, non parum conducentia. Et pro libris quidem Fabri hoc determinavit ipsa facultas XV die Februarii, Anno MDXXV in aede sancti Mathurini. Pro libris autem Erasmi XVI Maii, Anno MDXXVI, in Collegio Sorbonnae, quemadmodum ex eiusdem Facultatis decretis authentice signatis, quae apud Impressorem asservantur, constat."

8. Quibus quidem consensu et permissione nequaquam est existimandum ipsam sacrae Theologiae facultatem velle, et intendere singula in eo descripta uti omnino certa, et adversus quae nulli disputare liceat, aut aliquorum forsitan oppositum sentire et docere sua comprobata esse auctoritate, absit istud. Nempe honorem hunc et didicit illa, et novit solis Bibliae Sacrae libris tribuere, cum Augustino, qui etiam prologo iii libri de trinitate scribens ait: "Noli meis literis quasi canonicis scripturis inservire."³² Frustra igitur tantopere sudavit Erasmus, mundo suadere contendens testimonium hac de re praescriptum operi veritate non fulciri. Ratus aut se credere simulans quod eiusmodi foret nostrum scriptum, ceu illud ipse etiam sacramentis frequentibus, exercitationibus quoque ac detestationibus incredibili acrimonia sua descripsit lance, quasi in id generis disceptationum censura iureiurando Erasmi velut oraculo sit immorandum, aut totam causae ipsius controversiam illius detulerim execrabilibus iuramentis.

9. Theologi sane in probationibus novorum scriptorum ut edantur potissimum an opus rei Christianae conducibile sit perpendunt, utrum argumentum competentem habeat gravitatem et illius deductio vim utcumque efficacem; utrum veritatis defensionem scriptor studeat et eliminationi errorum; utrum opus ipsum nihil palam improbabile contineat aut quod non valeat ad sanum sponte trahi sensum, sed ut plurimum sint omnia sua probabilitate tolerabilia; quae si comperiantur, agunt ipsi quod ecclesia et maiores ab ecclesiae primordiis in istiusmodi rebus semper effecerunt, scilicet lecturam et studium scriptorum eiusmodi permittunt, laudant, et consulunt, sic enim in concilio Romae sub Sancto Gelasio olim celebrato doctorum plurima commendantur scripta, plurima item damnantur; nullius tamen intendit ecclesia (quantum ex decreti constat litera, cuius partem maiorem Gratianus enarravit) singulis dictis auctoritate sua probationis pondus tribuere, excepta beati Leonis ad Flavianum epistola, de qua quidem ita habet decretum: "Epistolam item recipit, scilicet ecclesia, beati Leonis papae ad Flavianum episcopum Constantinopolitanum destinata, cuius textum aut unum iota si quisque idiota disputaverit et non eam in omnibus venerabiliter acceperit, anathema sit."³³ Caetera autem (quantumlibet sanctorum patrum et doctorum scripta) solum recipit ecclesia et theologorum ordo ut conducentia pietati, et quae fructuose legi possunt, nec ad ullum respiciunt perversitatis scopum.

10. In talibus enim ante omnia quorsum mens feratur scribentis attendendum est, quod si in sinistram quempiam respiciat auctor finem scienter aut ignoranter, et si permulta complectantur scripta illius vel utilia, nova aut subtilia et pluribus grata, vel curiosa qualia fere sunt Lutheri, Erasmi, Fabri, et consimilium per humanitatis artes theologizantium, recenter edita opera, suppressenda sunt prorsus, nec prodire sinenda. Ubi autem scribentis intentio, simplex est et recta et rei ecclesiasticae opus conducit, quia forsitan consimile non habetur pro argumento quod prosequitur, si pauca inveniantur quae sensum aliquem pravum reddant, et alium sanum quamvis forsitan non ita proprium sed scribentis intellectui consentaneum, solent tunc doctores dictum tale ad rectum trahere sensum reiecto non sano, et hoc revera ut meretur pia auctoris intentio ita id debent publicae utilitati lectores, et talia certe puto nostra esse, salvo sapientiorum meliori iudicio.

11. Si vero varius sit scriptorum finis et plura lectione digna in scripto comperiantur quae forsitan aut eis similia non ita videntur in aliorum libris, quamvis perniciose quoque nonnulla mixta sint, ut prodeat permitti potest, adiecta ad cautionem praefationis notula quemadmodum de ecclesiastica Eusebii Caesariensis historia in praesignato concilii Romae sub Gelasio habiti decreto legitur. Ita quippe illic habetur: "Chronicam Eusebii Caesariensis atque eiusdem historiae ecclesiasticae libros

³² Augustine, *De trinitate* III, *prooem.*

³³ *Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis.*

quamvis in primo narrationis suae libro tepuerit, et post in laudibus atque excusatione Origenis schismatici, unum (scilicet sextum) conscripserit librum, propter rerum tamen singularem notitiam quae ad instructionem pertinet usquequaque non dicimus renuendos.”³⁴ Ad hunc consentaneae modum agens nostrum theologorum parisiensium Collegium, complura scriptorum opuscula sibi oblata ut eorum consentiret editioni, constanter denegavit; prodire item permisit nonnulla, prius tamen quae videbantur minus recta iussit castigari.

12. Illius itaque secundum praescriptam intentionem interveniente consensu prodire demum annotationes nostrae in Fabrum, et in Erasmus censurae, pressae prius sub Iodoci Badii praelo Parisi, et secundo brevissimo post tempore in Germaniae civitate Colonensi praeclara; quas editiones cum addicti Fabro et Erasmo cernerent viri inter nos commixti, id est Lutherana diligentes dogmata, licet ob domini nostri Regis et eiusdem officiariorum formidinem nomen verbo deprecentur pro viribus vehementer concitati sunt ac indignati, quod tam aperte et nominatim in Fabrum et Erasmus, quorum alter ob eloquentiam, alter vero ob philosophiam praeclarum iam nomen apud externos fuerat adeptus, Beda proditis illorum qui latebant erroribus scribere fuisset ausus; nostra proinde studiose perscrutantur si forsitan occurrant illis quae valeant accusare. Iactitant primo sese articulos fere nonaginta in nostris scriptis erroneos deprehendisse signasseque, quos propediem mundo cognoscendos traderent; postmodum vero maturius omnia conferentes numerum illum multum ad tricenarium reducunt, et clam suis faventibus votis articulos triginta haereticos (ut dicebant) calamo scriptos et de Bedae assertionibus excerptos ad communem eorum laetitiam de superato adversario communicant. Triginta denique propositiones huiusmodi ad duodecim restringunt Latine sermone compactas, et duodecim gallico vulgari quae tamen quo ad multa sunt eadem cum praedictis Latinis duodecim sicuti ex earum inspectione unicuique constare potest excerptas.³⁵
13. Itaque ex nostris vigiliis huiusmodi bis duodecim propositiones variis argumentis, quibus pro sua virili reprobas eas esse monstrare satagunt, tradunt calcographis sua arte edendas; praemuntur tandem, pressae tamen non prostant, neque enim scribitur ubi sint impressae, locus, neque artificis sev librarii ponitur nomen, sed neque authorum; verum clanculo ad coniuratos illas prope et procul in gratiam destinant, ad me autem et catholicos permultos ad iniuriam ut perveniant miris curant artibus. Adeoque brevi temporis decursu passim et apud aulicos et in multis regni regionibus apud plurimos inveniuntur, ut etiam ad aures Christianissimi domini nostri Regis res ipsa fuerit delata.
14. Audiens autem quod in libris quibus Fabri et Erasmi lapsus prodideram dicerentur haereses inveniri non paucae, non cito id pius Rex credidit, sed inito consilio libellum articulorum duodecim in nos Latine editum ad totam Parisiensem scholam destinavit mandans, quatenus illo et singulis ad rem ipsam attinentibus exactius discussis sibi significaretur totius negotii meritum, seque eum esse principem protestans qui more suorum avorum omnem haeresim ac erroneam doctrinam a regno suo eliminatam summopere cupiat, sicuti christianissimum decet Regem et animadvertere prout iura volunt, in homines (quicumque fuerint) qui in suae ditionis populum perversa contra fidem et mores invehunt dogmata, aut fovent vel tuentur.
15. Impositum ab ipso christianissimo Rege officium debita cum veneratione, et actione gratiarum deo, qui tam sanctum dedit in cor[de] Regis propositum suscepit illi devotissima omnium magistrorum universitas, et haud segniter vacare coepit executioni commissorum, quod quidem

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See n. 14.

intelligens plurimum gaudebam sperans, brevi futurum, ut veritas in lucem se exeret; quamobrem in frequentissimo totius studii consensu, ut id fieret quam potui obnixissime supplicui, animo volenti me et omnia mea scripta eorum supponens iudicio et paratum professus sum me fuisse semper ac esse ad eiusdem omnium doctorum et magistrorum universitatis arbitrium exequi et efficere quicquid in me decernerent. Procuravi autem his ita propositis qua potui instantia apud omnes studii nostri ordines uti rem sibi commissam prosequerentur, dant operam, multis, incumbunt mensibus; et quoniam causa praesens ad theologorum peculiariter pertinet facultatem, cum ius concernat divinum, cuius sunt ipsi professores, caetera universitatis membra, ut accepi post multas inter sese habitas conferentias praestolari statuerunt dominorum theologorum iudicium, qui propter varia alia impedimenta negotium ipsum nondum absolverunt; solus autem ego sum illud assidue prosequutus, non autem partes adversae, praesentientes enim non pro votis suis successurum, causae definitionem remediis omnibus occulte per amicos remorati sunt; quod perpendens ego et quod nemo apparuerit qui audeat unius aut alterius praefatorum libellorum authorem se profiteri.

16. Nam et doctor Petrus Caroli eum se negat, et Ludovicus a Berquin (quem vehementi et quidem non una coniectura opinabantur mecum prudentes viri multi rem promovisse adiutore Amedeo Meigret doctore plusquam Lutherano, qui nuper apud Germanos quo hinc profugerat, periit) a me coram gravissimis iudicibus ut medio sacramento adactus diceret et profiteretur. An author fuisset vel praefatorum libellorum vel editionis eorundem, post dilationem, ad hoc ut ipsos libellos pervideret a dominis concessam, scripto etiam manu propria respondit sese neque compositionis authorem fuisse neque editionis, adiecit tamen nonnulla quae potius vanitatem praetendebant quam modestiam et meae querimoniae impertinentia erant; haesitare coepi quidnam mihi potissimum pro bono rei Christianae foret agendum, quod ad amicos ego retuli, eosque consului.³⁶
17. Illi autem mihi solito ferventius suggessere veritatis causam libello defenderem, ut vel in parte datum minueretur scandalum vanis Lutheranorum rumoribus auctum. Dum namque in angulis et conventiculis asserunt Bedam in Erasmum et Fabrum agendo abundantius illis absurdus delirasse pusillorum multi et incautorum qui creduli sunt offendiculum datum accipiunt et laeduntur eorum conscientiae, et qui prudentiores sunt talia audientes, inde cruciantur; quibus malis (aiunt amici nostri) compendiosa quadam nostrarum quas vellicarunt assertionum praefatorum authores libellorum declaratione perfacile obviari potest.
18. Quamquam autem ista faterer non esse improbabilia fructumque ex istiusmodi explicatione nostrorum et obiectorum in ea refutatione futurum non desperarem, nonnulla nihilosecius me ne id aggrededer dehortabantur; quae amicis monentibus in mei proponebam excusationem. Porro dicebam utrumque emissum in me codicillum famosum libellum esse non in me tamen, sed et in alios etiam optimos aut certe insignes viros complures, quin et in ordinem ipsum theologiae doctorum adeoque criminis ut nulla sit responsione dignus, sed solis silentio et patientia superandus, praesertim cum ut praedictum est, nemo qui se authorem tam infandorum scriptorum fateretur prodire ausus fuerit, et qui putantur artifices extitisse, rogati et in iudicio et extra, constanter deierando abnegarint opellas illas praeclaras suas esse. Neque id proculdubio ab re declinant; propria enim praevident si cognoscantur pericula. Quid enim authores re ipsa semet esse aliud contestati sunt, quam fautores et defensores haeresum ac errantium, et hostes catholicorum eorum qui, uti tenentur, perniciosorum dogmatum ab ecclesia vel maxime ab hoc

³⁶ On the doctors of theology Caroli and Maigret, see entries in Farge, *Biographical Register*. On Berquin, see *idem*, "Les procès de Louis de Berquin: Épisodes dans la lutte du Parlement de Paris contre l'absolutisme royal." *Histoire et Archives*, 18 (juillet-septembre 2005): 49-77.

Christianissimo regno extirpationi dant operam. In quo etiam se domini nostri regis et regni inimicos quicquid verbis loquantur blandientes, comprobant. Non enim stat Regis gloria et prosperitas regni absque vigore iustitiae, et puro dei ac sanctorum cultu, quae non subsistunt ubi impura fides est aut impune oppugnatur pura.

19. Quid autem ultionis in huius generis homines, fautores scilicet ac defensores haeresum iura decernant, non est obscurum. Quod si contendant delitescerent talium scriptorum opifices, non fovere se haereses aut tueri, sed veritatis zelo permotos fuisse (sicuti de me ego sentio et testificatus sum) ad examinandum Bedae libros, ut in eis compertos damnari procurarent errores? Si vera loquuntur, cur primo non mecum egerunt fraterne, scilicet monendo quemadmodum cum Iacobo Fabro et Desiderio Erasmo factitavi? Cur item non prodeunt, si rem commendatione dignam putarunt? Sed quid haec loquor? Qua iustitia quave trutina tam atrociter insectarunt me? Cur tam contumeliose in me vociferantur, qui fere compulsus veritatis suscepi patrocinium, ubi etiam esset a me nonnihil erratum in duodecim illis quos carpserunt articulis? Si falsitatis odio concitantur, quare non clamitant mecum in Fabri et Erasmi libros, quos utcumque discussi et argui adversus Fabrum articulos CCCLII, adversus vero Desiderium CXCVIII, qui simul sunt DL. In quibus manifestum est quam plurimos haberi qui nulla possunt apparenti ratione defendi, et unde in hoc alioquin felicissimo Regno non pauci causam acceperunt errandi et perierunt nonnulli.
20. Scriptis autem nostris in quibus articulos duodecim aut saltem non viginti, solum pupugerunt, nonnullos scio ad respiscendum provocatos et praeservatos plurimos a lapsu, hic sane consolans possim beati Augustini verba usurpare et hominibus istis dicere: “Vobis dico praesentibus sive absentibus, quibus inimicus efficior verum dicens, quibus consulendo videor onerosus, quorum requirens utilitatem cogor offendere voluntatem. Nolite fieri sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus. Nam et haec iumenta eos calce morsuque appetunt, a quibus curantur, non parcis, non parco, adversaris, adversor; resistis, resisto; lucta nos comparat, sed causa separat; tu inimicus est medico, ego morbo; tu diligentiae meae, ego pestilentiae tuae. ‘Retribuebant,’ inquit psalmista, ‘mihi mala pro bonis; ego autem orabam,’³⁷ dicebam amicis. Insuper scriptis nostris non offensos fuisse viros integrae fidei et vera pollentes sapientia, quod quidem argumentis certissimis, tum per epistolas a summis theologis e Germania ad me his de rebus datas, et aliunde possum monstrare, tum publicis peritorum contestationibus, qui deo gratias egerunt congratulantes quod eo in negotio mihi fuisset cooperatus. Dicebam denique cum beato Augustino: “Credant qui volunt malle me legendo quam dictitando laborare;”³⁸ qui et alibi Dulcitius respondens ad quaedam interrogata sic ait: “Ego quod confitendum est charitati tuae plus amo discere quam docere.” Nam hoc admonemur etiam dicente Apostolo Iacobo capite primo: “Sit omnis homo velox ad audiendum, tardus autem ad loquendum. Ut ergo discamus, invitare nos debet suavitas veritatis; ut autem doceamus, cogere necessitas charitatis. Ubi potius orandum ut transeat ista necessitas qua hominem docet aliquid homo.”³⁹
21. Alibi quoque non semel consimilia scribit beatus pater Augustinus, quae (dominus id cognoscit) et ex corde complector, et in me certa probo experientia. Difficillime siquidem induci possum ut scribam praesertim quod sit edendum, tum quod memoria eorum quae lectito nulla paene mihi remanet, qua valere scripturos maxime operapraecium est, tum quod occupationes mihi plurimae sunt, et illud ultro profecto refugit natura; his quidem de causis ad huc usque mensem Octobrem MDXXVIII hortantibus, ut scripto me quantum spectat ad articulos illos praesertim duodecim

³⁷ Augustine, Sermon 383:2.

³⁸ Augustine, *De trinitate* III, *prooem.*

³⁹ Augustine, Ep. 143. Bédá quotes this same passage in Ep. 1579.

latine in me editos purgarem, assensum non praebui; nam quamvis modicum in hoc laborem impendendum esse non dubitarem, sciebam tamen in praemissorum narratione sudandum, et maluissem longe magis rem ipsam iudicio totius Parisiensis scholae decerni, qui de sensibus meis certus sum quod a quovis bono theologo sint comprobandi. Quoniam tamen nondum mihi constat fiet id necne et necessitas fraternae charitatis illud expostulare multorum sententia videtur, meis cedo rationibus et quieti, et amicis postulata concedo coniectans quae dicturus sum ad informandos eorum animos qui ad ferendum delecti sunt iudicium, forsitan nonnihil conductura, nihil tamen prorsus de conviciis atrocibusque mihi impositis criminibus et opprobriis locuturus sum, iniuriam omnem scriptoribus quantum ad me pertinet toto corde condonans, memor verbi Regis David, quo ait: "Si reddidi retribuentibus mihi mala, decidam merito ab inimicis meis inanis."⁴⁰ Iacturae autem pietatis tam ex cuiusdam symboli cum abusu immodico divinorum editione, quam alias succurrant ad quod spectat, ut suo quod debent reddant officio, causam equidem veritatis duntaxat et perpaucis attingam.

⁴⁰ Psalm 7:5.