

The that the praise of
folly could



The Praise of Folly takes on a very diverse form of life during sixteenth century Europe.

In 1509 the author, Desiderius Erasmus, turned his literary talents to the ridicule and denunciation of monastic vice, immorality, and wickedness. He was considered the "Prince of Humanists" ¹ because he was one of the most important men in Europe during the period of the Reformation. The historical and cultural references in his book prove that the Praise of Folly could not have been written during any other time period except sixteenth century Europe. Erasmus is one of the most fascinating and inscrutable characters in history. There is no doubt that he was a genius. He was also a bon vivant, but his tastes ran toward good conversation and good food rather than conspicuous consumption.

He whined endlessly about his troubles, and he begged shamelessly for ever more money from his patrons. But he was one of the "most far-sighted individuals to walk this planet," ². Before any others, he saw how the corruption and misdeeds of the church would lead to danger, and when Martin Luther hijacked Erasmus reform efforts and turned them into outright revolt, Erasmus saw that this split in Christendom would lead to catastrophe; a catastrophe that was realized a century later.

Erasmus, even from childhood, had a craving to read, study, learn and know. He spent his life as a scholar and writer. He was a man of quick wit and a keen mind. He had struck a raw nerve by writing the Praise of Folly. But it must be noted that while Erasmus found the wickedness of the priests repulsive, he did not disapprove of Roman Catholic doctrine. He praised

himself to be a citizen of the world, not attached to a particular country but finding himself at home in European countries where culture and humanism were flourishing. The two societies he claimed to belong to were both the republic of letters and the Christian church.

In Roman Catholic doctrine, he wished only for a reformation of priestly morals and conduct, not of Roman theology, and he disapproved of the doctrinal revolution initiated by Luther. It is said that Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched, meaning that Erasmus was the one who inspired the Protestant Reformation. The particular state of mind which produced the “modern world” was a manifestation of the same mind as underlay the Protestant Revolution.

The Protestant “calling” was a treatment of worldly vocations as God-created and fulfillable in a spirit of worship. This concept enabled the Protestant to see in his ordinary daily work an activity pleasing to God and therefore be pursued as actively and profitably as possible. On the other hand, medieval and Roman Catholic Christianity were held to have condemned the world, with consequent hostility to economic activity and especially to that essential capitalist ingredient, the taking of interest on usury. Protestantism were therefore asserted to have been the necessary precondition of the growth of modern industrial capitalism. The basic belief of Protestantism promoted the spirit of the entrepreneur, and for that reason capitalism is found flourishing in reformed countries, while the Reformation is found spreading among the commercial and industrial middle classes. The desire for spiritual nourishment was great in many parts of Europe, and movements of thought which gave intellectual content to what in

<https://assignbuster.com/the-that-the-praise-of-folly-could/>

so many ways was an initial search for God have their own dignity. Neither of these, however, comes first in explaining why the Reformation took root here and vanished elsewhere led to a permanent division within the church that had looked to Rome. This particular place is occupied and the play of secular ambitions.

The Reformation maintained itself wherever the lay power favored it; it could not survive where the authorities decided to suppress it. For this was the age of uniformity, an age which held at all times and everywhere that one political unit could not comprehend within itself two forms of belief or worship. Much of the work of the Praise of Folly is satire at the expense of rhetoricians, grammarians and theologians, but towards the close, Erasmus tackles monks and prelates also, not excluding the Popes.

But it concludes in an unexpected way; a witty moving praise of a form of religious ecstasy with the folly of God in saving the world through crucifixion associated with the folly and madness of the pious. Erasmus regarded scholasticism as the greatest perversion of the religious spirit; according to him this degeneration dated from the primitive Christological controversies, which caused the church to lose its evangelical simplicity and become the victim of hair-splitting philosophy, which culminated in scholasticism. With the latter there appeared in the