


## Theology of the Eucharist in Erasmus' and Titelmans' Paraphrase of John 6

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explores theological differences in biblical paraphrases of Erasmus of Rotterdam and Francis Titelmans. Erasmus' biblical scholarship included paraphrases of New Testament books; a genre of biblical commentary that he effectively reinvented. His paraphrases were acclaimed by fellow humanists but criticised by many theologians, including Noël Beda. Meanwhile, Beda's protegee, Francis Titelmans prepared his own paraphrases, borrowing from Erasmus his innovative form, but filling it with conservative content. This article concentrates on their respective paraphrases of John 6. It demonstrates Titelmans' indebtedness to the older humanist in terms of styles and explores theological differences between them. Erasmus departed from the traditional, eucharistic reading of John 6 and emphasised ethical issues. He often described the Lord's Supper as symbolic and mystical, which entangled him in accusations of sharing eucharistic theology of Swiss reformers. Titelmans, on the other hand, upheld in all aspects traditional, Catholic teaching and read John 6 through a sacramental prism. The analysis of those early 16th century paraphrases sheds light on pre-Tridentine Catholic biblical exegesis and shows methodological developments that came to full fruition after the Council.

**KEYWORDS:** biblical humanism, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Francis Titelmans, Eucharist, Gospel of John

This article is a study in the history of the 16th-century exegesis and offers a comparative analysis of the biblical paraphrases of Erasmus of Rotterdam and his imitator and critic, Francis Titelmans. Erasmus gave an enormous stimulus to the development of the philological study of the Bible when in 1505 he published a manuscript of Lorenzo Valla's *Collatio Novi Testamenti*, that he had discovered in Abdij van Park, near Leuven, a year earlier.<sup>1</sup> Valla's innovation was that he applied to the Bible tools of philological analysis, as if it were any other text.<sup>2</sup> This 'secularisation' of the Biblical text was by no means intended to dimin-

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1 Cf. J.H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1983) 116.

2 Literature on Valla and scholars mentioned in subsequent notes is too vast to be cited here. A reference to some recent works is given, where further bibliographical data can be found. On Valla, see A. den Haan, "Valla's False Modesty: The *Annotaciones Novi Testamenti* Compared with the Biblical Scholarship of Giannozzo

ish the authority of the Scriptures. Quite the contrary. Valla and his imitators had a great esteem for the Holy Writ and wanted to deepen its understanding. Valla's methodology inspired many: in France Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples prepared a new translation of Pauline Epistles,<sup>3</sup> in Spain humanists centred around Cardinal Jimenez prepared a Polyglot Bible,<sup>4</sup> but above all else Erasmus himself applied his extraordinary intellect to the Biblical text producing a Greek edition of the New Testament with an accompanying new Latin translation and philological annotations, first published as *Novum Instrumentum* in 1516.<sup>5</sup>

After this groundbreaking achievement, Erasmus continued to work on the Bible. Between November 1517 and February 1524, he published paraphrases of all the books of the New Testament except for the Revelation.<sup>6</sup> The very genre of biblical paraphrase was in a way an Erasmian invention.<sup>7</sup> It corresponded to the humanist preoccupation with good Latin style and the clarity of exposition. Just like his new translation of the Bible, also his paraphrases were an attempt to make the Bible more appealing to humanist tastes. Theologians, however, were not pleased. Noël Beda, the prepotent syndic of the Parisian Faculty of

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Manetti (1396–1459) and Aurelio Lippi Brandolini (1454?–1497),” *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 25/2–3 (2023) 119–135, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14622459.2023.2286544>; C. Christ-von Wedel, *Erasmus of Rotterdam: Advocate of a New Christianity* (Erasmus Studies; Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 2013) 55–59.

- 3 On Lefèvre, see: P.E. Hughes, *Lefèvre, Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1984); G. Bedouelle, “Attacks on the Biblical Humanism of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples,” *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus* (ed. E. Rummel) (BCCT 9; Leiden: Brill 2008) 115–141; C. Schönau, *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples und die Reformation* (QFRG 91; Gütersloh: Gütersloher 2017).
- 4 On Spanish biblical humanism, see C. del Valle Rodriguez, “Antonio Nebrija's Biblical Scholarship,” *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus* (ed. E. Rummel) (BCCT 9; Leiden: Brill 2008) 55–72; I. García Pinilla, “Reconsidering the Relationship between the Complutensian Polyglot Bible and Erasmus' Novum Testamentum,” *Basel 1516: Erasmus' Edition of the New Testament* (eds. M. Wallraff – S. Seidel Menchi – K. von Greyerz) (SMHR 91; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2016) 59–77.
- 5 On Erasmus' *Novum instrumentum*, see: A. Rabil Jr., *Erasmus and the New Testament: The Mind of Christian Humanist* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press 1972) 37–127; E. Rummel, *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: From Philologist to Theologian* (Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 1986); T. Amalou – A. Vanautgaerden (eds.), *Le Nouveau Testament d'Érasme (1516): Regards sur l'Europe des humanistes* (Turnhout: Brepols 2020); R. Faber, “Erasmus' *Novum Instrumentum* (1516): Reforming the Bible into the Bible of the Reformation,” *Renaissance und Bibelhumanismus* (eds. J.M.J. Lange van Ravenswaay – H.J. Selderhuis) (R5AS 65; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2020) 295–312; J. Bloemendal, “Erasmus and Biblical Scholarship,” *A Companion to Erasmus* (ed. E. MacPhail) (Renaissance Society of America Texts and Studies Series 20; Leiden: Brill 2023) 68–89.
- 6 For the history and chronology of Erasmus' paraphrases, see Rabil, *Erasmus and the New Testament*, 128–139.
- 7 Cf. J.-F. Cottier, “La théorie du genre de la paraphrase selon Érasme,” *Les paraphrases bibliques aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles: Actes du colloque de Bordeaux des 22, 23 et 24 septembre 2004* (eds. V. Ferrer – A. Mantero) (Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 415; Genève: Droz 2006) 45–58; J.-F. Cottier, “Erasmus's Paraphrases: A 'New Kind of Commentary'?” *The Unfolding of Words: Commentary in the Age of Erasmus* (ed. J.R. Henderson) (Erasmus Studies; Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 2012) 27–45; J.R. Henderson, “Editor's Addendum: Translating an Erasmian Definition of Paraphrase,” *The Unfolding of Words: Commentary in the Age of Erasmus* (ed. J.R. Henderson) (Erasmus Studies; Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 2012) 47–54.

Theology, found them theologically deficient and methodologically flawed.<sup>8</sup> A paraphrase, according to the Parisian theologian, was *per se* a false interpretation. “The grammarians tell us that one meaning of the word *paraphrastes* is “wrong interpreter and corruptor”; and *paraphrasis* may denote “a wrong interpretation, one that is alien to the sense.”<sup>9</sup> At Beda’s instigation, in December 1527, the Parisian Faculty of Theology condemned Erasmus’ paraphrases.

In this context, it is all the more surprising that a year later, Beda’s protegee, Francis Titelmans, started publishing his own paraphrases of biblical books.<sup>10</sup> Were paraphrases not *per se* false interpretations? Titelmans was a lecturer in Holy Scriptures at the Observant Franciscans study house in Leuven. Before joining the Franciscans, he was educated at Leuven’s house of the Congregation of Montaigu.<sup>11</sup> Throughout his life, Titelmans remained faithful to Montaigu’s ideals of *devotio moderna*, and kept a close contact with leading theologians of the Congregation: Beda, Jacques Masson [Jacobus Latomus], and Pierre Cousturier [Petrus Sutor].<sup>12</sup> Indeed, he demonstrated his adherence to the theological conservatism of Montaigu by attacking Erasmus’ *Novum instrumentum* in his 1529 *Collationes quinque*.<sup>13</sup> Why, then, did he choose to expound on the Bible using the very genre of paraphrase that his mentor condemned?

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- 8 On Beda, see J.K. Farge, “Noël Beda and the Defense of the Tradition,” *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus* (ed. E. Rummel) (BCCT 9; Leiden: Brill 2008) 143–164; E. Rummel, “Why Noël Beda Did not Like Erasmus’ Paraphrases,” *Holy Scripture Speaks: The Production and Reception of Erasmus’ Paraphrases on the New Testament* (eds. H.M. Pabel – M. Vessey) (Erasmus Studies; Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 2002) 265–278.
- 9 N. Beda, *Annotationum in Jacobum Fabrum Stapulensem libri duo; et in Desiderium Erasmus Roterodamum liber vnus* (Cologne: Petrus Quentell 1526) f. 271r: ‘Est enim notione una, iniquum grammatici, [...] perversus interpres et depravator, paraphrasis autem dictionum perversa et aliena interpretation.’
- 10 On Titelmans’ biography, see: A. Paquay, *Frans Tittelmans van Hasselt (Franciscus Tittelmanus Haselensis, december 1502–12 september 1537): Opzoekingen over zijn leven, zijne werken en zijne familie* (Hasselt: Ceysens 1906). The full list of Titelmans’ bibliography, see: B. de Troeyer, *Bio-bibliographia Franciscana Neerlandica saeculi XVI* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf 1969) I, 87–100.
- 11 M. Godet, *La Congregation de Montaigu (1490–1580)* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honore Champion 1912); P.J.J.M. Bakker (ed.), *The College de Montaigu at the University of Paris: Aspects of Its Institutional and Intellectual History (14th–18th Century)* (History of Universities 22/2 [Special Issue]; Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008).
- 12 On Titelmans’ links with Montaigu, see P. Sartori, “Tracce dell’opera di Jacobus Latomus nel «Prologus Apologeticus» di Frans Tittelmans,” *Margarita amicorum. Studi di cultura europea per Agostino Sottili* (eds. F. Forner – C.M. Monti – P.G. Schmidt) (Milano: Vita & Pensiero 2005) 1032–1042; P. Sartori, “Indocti sine bibliis coelum caecis aperiunt’: Frans Tittelmans e l’eredità spirituale di Jan Standonck,” *Università, umanesimo, Europa. Giornata di studio in ricordo di Agostino Sottili* (ed. S. Negruzzo) (Fonti e studi per la storia dell’Università di Pavia 47; Milano: Cisalpino 2007) 207–267; P. Sartori, “Frans Tittelmans, the Congregation of Montaigu, and Biblical Scholarship,” *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus* (ed. E. Rummel) (BCCT 9; Leiden: Brill 2008) 215–223.
- 13 F. Titelmans, *Collationes quinque super Epistolam ad Romanos beati Pauli Apostoli* (Antuerpiae: Guilielmus Vorstermannus 1529). For the discussion of this work, see P. Sartori, “La controversia neotestamentaria tra Frans Tittelmans ed Erasmo da Rotterdam (1527–1530 CA.): Linee di sviluppo e contenuti,” *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 52 (2003) 77–135; T.K. Mantyk, “Migracje Słowa Bożego, czyli obrona wartości Wulgaty według Franciszka Tittelmansa,” *BA* 9/3 (2019) 525–546.

Erasmus thought he knew the answer. In his rejoinder to Titelmans' attack, he suggested that the Franciscan intended to substitute Erasmus' paraphrases with his own. Not only did he blame Titelmans' arrogance, but suggested that he was instigated by Leuven Franciscans:

With extraordinary arrogance he [Titelmans] instructs Lorenzo Valla and all the rest of us about the correct meaning of Latin and Greek [...]. Often he teaches Lefèvre lessons he has extracted from my Annotations, and yes, sometimes he teaches me what he has learned from my writings. [...] It would have been a sign of true modesty if he had honestly admitted to whom he was indebted for what he teaches us; nor is my nose so insensitive that I cannot smell it. [...] But it is no wonder if fame inspires passions in a youth. What is a wonder is that seraphic persons should push forward their colleague onto this stage so that they can win this much praise for their order. Indeed they play several sorts of similar tricks to get my works out of the hands of scholars. This fellow had already replaced my Paraphrases with his Elucidations.<sup>14</sup>

Titelmans did not explain his motivations; however, we know from his writings that he was critical of Erasmus' biblical scholarship not so much because of his philological method, as because he challenged Church's dogmas and authority. In fact, Titelmans was well versed in ancient languages and competent in philological analyses. He combined these linguistic competences with a conservative theological approach. Consequently, he was content to use philology as long as it did not challenge theology. He found Erasmus guilty of excess in valuing his own opinions based on philological study, more than the judgment of the Church. Therefore, it can be assumed that his motivation was to prepare paraphrases that would be pleasing to humanist readers, but at the same time perfectly orthodox in matters of faith.

The aim of this article is to verify the hypothesis presented above on the example of Erasmus' and Titelmans' paraphrases of John's Gospel, chapter 6. Careful parallel reading of both paraphrases of this chapter shall expose theological and literary differences between the two authors' approaches to the sacred text. In this way, it will also help us to understand better the kernel of their disagreement and consequently the nature of biblical controversies of the early 16th century. We shall begin with some observations on style and literary qualities of both works, then analyse Erasmus' theology of the Eucharist as expressed in his paraphrase, contrast it with Titelmans' work and finally indicate other theological issues

14 D. Erasmus, "Responsio ad Collationes cuiusdam iuuenis gerontodidascali," *Opera Omnia* (ed. J. Le Clerc) (Lugduni Batavorum: Van der Aa 1706) IX, 966B–D: 'Laurentium et nos omnes miro supercilio docet proprietatem Latini Graecique sermonis [...] Saepe Fabrum docet, quod ex meis hausit Annotationibus, imo nonnumquam me docet, quod ex meis scriptis didicit. [...] Erat et illud verae modestiae specimen, si ingenue professus esset quibus deberet illa quae nos docet: neque enim tam nullius nasi sumus, ut id non subleat. [...] Nil mirum tamen si iuveni imponit affectus gloria, illud mirum viros Seraphicos sodalem suum protrudere in hoc prosecutionum, ut hoc laudis suo afferent Ordini. Siquidem hoc variis modis agunt, ut meas Lucubrations excutiant de manibus studiosorum. Jam hic pro meis Paraphrasibus suas substituerat elucidationes.' English translation: *A Response by Desiderius Erasmus to the Discussions of a Certain Youth Who Would Teach His Elders* (ed. and trans. D.L. Drysdall) (CWE 73; Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 2015) 139–141.

emerging from the chapter under scrutiny. This will enable us to draw some conclusions and suggest paths for subsequent research.

Erasmus' paraphrases have attracted significant scholarly attention recently. Up until the late 1970s, paraphrases, and more generally Erasmus' biblical scholarship, was largely neglected by academics.<sup>15</sup> Albert Rabils' and John Payne's works tracing changes in Erasmus' theology on the basis of alterations introduced in latter editions of paraphrases and Jacques Chomarat's analyses of paraphrases from the rhetorical perspective were among the first works to change it.<sup>16</sup> Much new impulse came with the new critical edition of Erasmus' work (ASD) and their English translation (CWE).<sup>17</sup> These ongoing works not only facilitate scholars' access to Erasmus' texts but also resulted in many articles on various aspects of the Humanist's oeuvre: among others those of Jean-François Cottier and Jane E. Phillips.<sup>18</sup> Besides, two volumes of collected essays on biblical paraphrases appeared in English and one

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- 15 J. Bloemendal, "Erasmus' *Paraphrases on the New Testament*: Introduction," *Erasmus Studies* 36/2 (2016) 106–110, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18749275-03602003>.
- 16 A. Rabil, "Erasmus' *Paraphrases of the New Testament*," *Essays on the Works of Erasmus* (ed. R.L. DeMolen) (New Haven, CT – London: Yale University Press 1978) 145–161; A. Rabil, Jr., "Erasmus' Paraphrase of the Gospel of John," *CH* 48/2 (1979) 142–155; J.B. Payne, "The Significance of Lutherizing Changes in Erasmus' Interpretation of Paul's Letters to the Romans and Galatians in His Annotations (1527) and Paraphrases (1532)," *Histoire de l'exégèse au XVIe siècle: Textes du Colloque International tenu à Genève en 1976* (eds. O. Fatio – P. Fraenkel) (Études de Philologie et d'Histoire 34; Genève: Droz 1978) 312–330; J. Chomarat, *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Érasme* (Les classiques de l'humanisme. Études 10; Paris: Les Belles Lettres 1981) I, 587–665; J. Chomarat, "Grammar and Rhetoric in the Paraphrases of the Gospels by Erasmus," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 1/1 (1981) 30–68.
- 17 ASD, known also as 'the Amsterdam edition' stands for *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* published since 1969 by North-Holland, and later by Elsevier and Brill. It gradually replaces the 1703–1706 edition of Erasmus' works by Jean Leclerc (10 volumes; commonly known as LB). Of the paraphrases the following have been published so far: Luke (vol. VII-2), John (VII-3A), and the Apostolic Epistles (VII-5). On the ASD project, see M.L. van Poll-van de Lisdonk, "Erasmus' *Paraphrasis* on the Pauline Epistles: Outlines of a Commentary in the Scope of the ASD Edition," *Erasmus Studies* 36/2 (2016) 123–130, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18749275-03602004>. CWE stands for Collected Works of Erasmus, and is a scholarly translation of Erasmus' works into English, with an extensive apparatus, published since 1974 by the Toronto University Press.
- 18 J.-F. Cottier, "L'Exhortatio ad studium euangelicæ Lectionis: Érasme Paraphraste et son lecteur," *Moreana* 39/2 (2002) 21–38; J.-F. Cottier, "Les Paraphrases d'Érasme, une œuvre négligée: Bibliographie," *Moreana* 39/2 (2002) 39–42; J.-F. Cottier, "Lucernam accendere in meridie? Du bon usage de la paraphrase biblique selon Érasme," *Infant Milk or Hardy Nourishment? The Bible for Lay People and Theologians in the Early Modern Period* (eds. W. François – A.A. den Hollander) (BETL 221; Leuven – Paris – Walpole, MA: Peeters 2009) 65–86; J.-F. Cottier, "Four Paraphrases and a Gospel or How to Rewrite Without Repeating Yourself," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 36/2 (2016) 131–147; J.E. Phillips, "The Gospel, the Clergy, and the Laity in Erasmus' Paraphrase on the Gospel of John," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 10/1 (1990) 85–100; J.E. Phillips, "Food and Drink in Erasmus' Gospel Paraphrases," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 14/1 (1994) 24–45; J.E. Phillips, "On the Road to Emmaus: Erasmus' Paraphrase of Luke 24:27," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 22/1 (2002) 68–80; J.E. Phillips, "Sub evangelistae persona: The Speaking Voice in Erasmus' Paraphrase on Luke," *Holy Scripture Speaks: The Production and Reception of Erasmus' Paraphrases on the New Testament* (eds. H.M. Pabel – M. Vessey) (Erasmus Studies; Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 2002) 127–150, <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442675803-010>.

in French.<sup>19</sup> Finally, in 2016, the special issue of ‘Erasmus Studies’ was devoted to Erasmian paraphrases, providing also a very extensive bibliography of works on the subject.<sup>20</sup>

Far less attention has been devoted to Titelmans. Bernard Roussel compared his paraphrase of the Ephesians with those of three contemporary writers, while other scholars mentioned the Franciscan’s productions only in passing, as a background to the work of Erasmus.<sup>21</sup> This article intends to pay more attention to his opus and to confront it with that of his better-known counterpart.

## 1. Literary Qualities of Erasmus’ and Titelmans’ Paraphrases

Erasmus’ *Paraphrase on John* was first published in February 1523 in Basel.<sup>22</sup> The aim of Erasmus was to render the Gospel message in clear, elegant Latin that would be both easier to understand and more pleasing than the terse style of the Vulgate. The task was not an easy one, as Erasmus observed in a letter to a friend: ‘this Gospel contains more obscurities than the others, not only by reason of the sublime and heavenly themes of which it treats but also because the language is full of riddles which complicate the sense.’<sup>23</sup> Titelmans’ paraphrase was written about a decade later. It was based on lectures that Titelmans delivered while still a lecturer in Leuven, around 1533–1535 (before he joined the Capuchins in 1536, and died a year after), but it was not published until 1543.<sup>24</sup> The publication was

19 H.M. Pabel – M. Vessey (eds.), *Holy Scripture Speaks: The Production and Reception of Erasmus’ Paraphrases on the New Testament* (Erasmus Studies; Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 2002); V. Ferrer – A. Mantero (eds.), *Les paraphrases bibliques aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles: Actes du Colloque de Bordeaux des 22, 23 et 24 septembre 2004* (Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance 415; Genève: Droz 2006); J.R. Henderson (ed.), *The Unfolding of Words: Commentary in the Age of Erasmus* (Erasmus Studies; Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 2012).

20 J. Bloemendal, “Bibliography of Works on Erasmus’ Paraphrases,” *Erasmus Studies* 36/2 (2016) 187–194, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18749275-03602008>.

21 B. Roussel, “Exegetical Fictions? Biblical Paraphrases of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Holy Scripture Speaks: The Production and Reception of Erasmus’ Paraphrases on the New Testament* (eds. H.M. Pabel – M. Vessey) (Erasmus Studies; Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 2002) 59–83; Cottier, “La théorie du genre de la paraphrase selon Érasme,” 48.

22 A modern critical edition: D. Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem* (ed. J. Bloemendal) (ASD VII-3a; Leiden: Brill 2022).

23 P.S. Allen – H.M. Allen (eds.), *Opus epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami. V. 1522–1524* (Oxford: Clarendon 1924), V 143, ep. 1323, vv. 21–24: ‘quod hoc Euangelium plus habeat obscuritatis quam cetera, non tantum ob sublimitatem rerum diuinarum de quibus tractat, verum etiam ob sermonis aenigmata quibus inuolutum est.’ English translation: D. Erasmus, *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 1252–1355 (1522–1523)* (ed. J.M. Estes; trans. R.A.B. Mynors) (Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 1989) 202.

24 F. Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica, in sanctum Christi Euangelium secundum Ioannem, cum Annotationibus in aliquot capita* (Antwerpiae: Simon Coquus 1543). On the last year of Titelmans’ life, see M. D’Alatri, “Francesco Tittelmans o del lavoro manuale,” *Santi e santità nell’Ordine Cappuccino. I. Il cinque e il Seicento* (ed. M. D’Alatri) (Roma: Postulazione Generale dei Cappuccini 1980) 7–19.

due to Francis' older brother, Peter Titelmans, a feared inquisitor of Flanders.<sup>25</sup> The work was incomplete. It consisted of the paraphrase of the entire text of the Gospel and annotations to some of its chapters. It had nine editions, seven of them in pairs with Titelmans' paraphrase and annotations on Matthew.<sup>26</sup>

It is certain that Titelmans knew the work of Erasmus. Not only was it insinuated by the Prince of the Humanists, but it was acknowledged by Titelmans himself. In his attack on Erasmus' scholarship, he confessed that as a student he was excited to read Erasmus' biblical works but found them deeply disappointing on theological level.<sup>27</sup> Careful reading of both paraphrases validates the idea that Titelmans had Erasmus' work in front of him while writing his paraphrases. Certainly, he was not a slavish imitator. We can, nevertheless, discern some similarities on the level of ideas. For instance, in the paraphrase of John 6:2 both authors list in the same order the three motives of the crowd following Jesus (Table 1).

Table 1. The paraphrases of John 6:2

John 6:2	Erasmus	Titelmans
Et sequebat cum multitudo magna quia videbant signa quae faciebat super his qui infirmabantur.	Atque huc proficiscentem sequuta est ingens hominum multitudo, partim allecta <u>cupiditate miraculorum</u> , quia viderant eum insolita virtute tollentem morbos hominum partim <u>vt ab eo sanarentur</u> qui morbis immedicabilibus tenebantur, <u>partim illius inhiantes doctrinae</u> . <sup>28</sup>	Prosequatur autem eum, hominum plurima multitudo: idque potissimum <u>ob signa et miracula</u> , quae ab eo fieri videbant super male habentes. Quidam enim ex admiratione signorum, vt rerum nouarum cupidi: alii, <u>propter sanitatem</u> vel sibi vel suis acquirendam: alii, <u>propter eius doctrinam audiendam</u> , Christum prosequantur, omnes signorum eius potentia et efficacia permoti. <sup>29</sup>
	A great crowd of people followed him there: some drawn by a desire for miracles because they had seen him take away people's diseases with his strange power; some, who were incurably ill, to be healed by him; some thirsting for his teaching. <sup>30</sup>	A great crowd of people followed him: and this chiefly because of the signs and wonders which they saw him perform upon them that were sick. Some of them, as people eager to see novelties, out of their love for signs. Others, for the sake of gaining healing for themselves or for their close ones. Others yet followed Christ for the sake of hearing his teaching. All of them were moved by the power and efficacy of his signs. <sup>31</sup>

25 On Peter Titelmans, see J. van de Wiele, "De inquisitierechtbank van Pieter Titelmans in de zestiende eeuw in Vlaanderen," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 97/1 (1982) 19–63, <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.2288>; A. Cambier, "Pieter Titelmans, groot-inkwiteitseur, deken van Ronse in Vlaanderen," *Annalen van de Geschied- en oudheidkundige Kring van Ronse en het Tenement van Inde* 33 (1984) 19–28.

26 Troeyer, *Bio-bibliographia Franciscana*, I, 98.

27 Titelmans, *Collationes quinque*, f. 1r-v.

28 Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 156.

29 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 48v.

30 D. Erasmus, *Paraphrase on John* (trans. and annot. J.E. Phillips) (CWE 46; Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 1991) 75.

31 All translations of Titelmans to English are my own.

We must, however, note that the similarity here could result from using common sources. Both *Postilla* of Nicholas of Lyra, as well as *Enarratio* of Denis the Carthusian listed the same motives as Erasmus and Titelmans, although in different order and adding also a fourth one that both humanists omitted.<sup>32</sup>

Some similarities can be detected by analysing vocabulary. Wherever the Vulgate differed from the translation offered by Erasmus in 1516, Titelmans generally preferred the traditional reading. For instance, he repeatedly used *manducare* for 'eating', while Erasmus, both in his translation and in the paraphrase, preferred *edere/comedere*.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the younger of the humanists occasionally borrowed an expression from the older colleague, as, for instance, in paraphrases of John 6:10, 17, 38, 43.

The real influence of Erasmus on Titelmans, however, rests in the very choice of the genre. Albeit there had been some ancient precedent, Erasmus effectively reinvented paraphrase as a form of biblical commentary. Due to its literary qualities and freer form, it was more to the humanists' liking. Cottier, developing Chomarat's research, identified several rhetorical features typical of Erasmus' paraphrases: synonymy, periphrasis, amplification, and harmonisation.<sup>34</sup> Analysis of Titelmans' paraphrase indicates that he used the very same devices, although arguably less skilfully than his older colleague.

For instance, one of Erasmus' favourite techniques was that of amplification, which, according to Hoffmann, was for him 'a theological paradigm of spiritual freedom'.<sup>35</sup> He used it especially to search for causes or to give circumstantial precision.<sup>36</sup> Titelmans used it in an identical way. In the paraphrase of John 6:15 (*Iesus ergo cum cognouisset quia venturi essent ut raperent eum et facerent eum regem fugit iterum in montem ipse solus*), he explained both the crowd's motivation as well as reasons for Jesus' escape from them:

Lord Jesus, knowing through his divine omniscience that those people, from the admiration of this miracle, were so filled with excessive and inordinate favour towards Him as to contemplate in their minds making him their king in the matters of this world, withdrew from them back into the mountains, from whence he had come down to herd the crowd, in order to be away from them for some time, until people's immoderate affect and instant favour calmed down through the passage of time and the burning heat of their souls diminished a little. Unless he had removed himself by fleeing, they would have done so, since they were already getting ready for it, in such a way, that they would have dragged him to kingship despite his resistance, and thus make him revolt against the Romans (in so far as they thought that under such

32 Dionysius Cartusianus, "Enarratio in Evangelium secundum Iohannem," *Opera omnia in unum corpus digesta* (Monstrolii: Typis Cartusiae S.M. de Pratis 1901) XII, 382: 'Diversi tamen diversis de causis Christum corporaliter sequebantur: quidam, ut aliquid reprehensionis in verbis aut actibus ejus invenirent, quemadmodum Pharisaei et Scribae invidiosi; quidam, ut instruerentur et vitam suam corrigerent, ut studiosi ac poenitentes; quidam, ut signa viderent et nova audirent, ut curiosi; quidam, ut curarentur; quidam, ut suis sanitatem acquirerent, sicut de regulo dictum est; quidam, ut corporaliter alerentur.'

33 See paraphrase on vv. 23, 49, 53, 54, 55, 57. Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 164, 172–176. Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, ff. 52v, 55v, 56v–57r.

34 Cottier, "Four Paraphrases and a Gospel," 136–146.

35 M. Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Erasmus Studies; Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 1994) 146–147.

36 Cottier, "Four Paraphrases and a Gospel," 139.

king it cannot but go well in everything). In this way he provided us with an example to imitate, how we should not only abstain from seeking worldly honours and earthly ostentation, but even escape those that are offered to us.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from explicitly stating motivations only hinted at in the biblical text, he also added a moral teaching, which he derived from the exegetical tradition of this verse.<sup>38</sup> Erasmus' paraphrase carried a similar moral message.<sup>39</sup>

In the paraphrase on John 6:17, Titelmans gave more precision to the information from the Gospel, regarding Jesus' arrival by boat to Capharnaum: 'into the town of Capharnaum, which was situated opposite the place where the Lord had performed the aforementioned miracle, and in which the Lord lodged with his disciples in that time.'<sup>40</sup>

Another example of amplification commonly used by Erasmus and Titelmans was *distirbutio*, that is, expressing something that could be briefly described by referring to its constituent parts. For instance, the laconic phrase from 6:27b (*Hunc enim Pater signauit Deus*) Titelmans developed into an almost credal formula:

The heavenly Father has marked me, the Son of Man, born in time of a virgin, and has confirmed me as with a seal, and has declared and will further declare me with the most firm and irrefutable testimony as the one who ought to dispense to the mankind the true food of eternal life, and from whom true food for the soul should be expected. For the Father has marked me with an anointment and with a special selection above all other sons of men; me, whom from time eternal he has sealed as his image and stamp, in the identity of substance, by begetting me.<sup>41</sup>

37 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 51v: 'Dominus autem Iesus per diuinitatis suae omniscientiam cognoscens, homines illos ex miraculi huius admiratione sic nimio et incomposito erga se feruore affectos, vt animo meditarentur in regem temporalem ipsum sibi constituere, et nisi fuga se ab eis subduceret iamiam illos ad rem properaturos, sic vt etiam reluctantem eum conarentur in regnum subuehere, atque ita rebellare Romanis (quod putarent sub tanto rege non posse non optime agi) rursus in montem se subduxit, vnde ad pascendam turbam descenderat vt aliquantisper ab eis abesset, donec affectus ille immodicus et subitaneus feruor populi, temporis mora deferbisset, et calor ardetium animorum aliquantulum refixisset: exemplum nobis imitabile praebens, temporales honores et mundi pompas non tantum non ambire, verum etiam oblato quo ad licet refugere.'

38 Thomas Aquinas, *Catena aurea in quatuor Evangelia* (ed. A. Guarienti) (Torino: Marietti 1953) 417: 'Christus autem fugit, erudiens nos mundanas contemnere dignitates.'

39 Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 160–162: 'Ad regnum vocantibus furtim subduxit sese, ad crucem rapientibus vltro occurrit, euidens exemplar exhibens his, qui vices ipsius essent gesturi. Non enim potest syncere dispensare sermonem euangelicum, quisquis amat regnum et gloriam apud homines, quae adeo non sunt affectanda pastoribus, vt etiamsi vltro deferantur, fugere oporteat. Non enim conuenit regno coelorum cum regno mundi, non profecto magis quam luci cum tenebris.'

40 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 51v: 'in ciuitatem Capharnaum, quae sita erat ex opposito loci illius in quo miraculum praedictum Dominus patrauerat, et in qua tum temporis Dominus cum suis morabatur.'

41 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 52v: 'Me enim filium hominis in tempore de virgine natum, pater caelestis signauit, et quasi sigillo confirmauit, testimoniisque firmissimis et irrefragabilibus declarauit et declarabit amplius, illum esse qui hominibus cibum verum vitae aeternae debeam largiri, a quo verus animae cibus debeat expectari. Signauit etiam me pater vnctione et segregacione peculiari prae caeteris omnibus filiis

Moreover, similarly like Erasmus, Titelmans amplified or even made up speeches only alluded to in the biblical text. John 6:14 informs in reported speech that the crowds considered Jesus to be the Prophet who was to come. Titelmans gave us their very words:

Truly, he is the great and distinguished Prophet, who was promised in the Law, and who was until now so eagerly awaited from us, as the one who was to come, and who was to be sent by God into this world, for the salvation of people.<sup>42</sup>

A much more developed example of such a practice are the words of John the Baptist in Matt 3:7–12, which both Titelmans and Erasmus developed into a full-length sermon.<sup>43</sup>

Such examples could be multiplied but those given above suffice to show that Titelmans imitated Erasmus' in composing his commentary in the form of a paraphrase. This is a significant observation. Most literature on Titelmans emphasises his conservative approach to biblical studies. While this is true in regard to the doctrine, as this article will also affirm, it is not so when it comes to the style. Here, Titelmans was innovative, adopting the new, fashionable mode of commenting on Scriptures, which stood as far from a scholastic commentary as one could imagine. Despite his conservatism, he expressed his dislike for some aspects of scholastic exegesis.<sup>44</sup> In many ways, Titelmans prefigured post-Tridentine Catholic biblical studies that drew abundantly from humanist methodology and stylistic innovations, yet rested firmly orthodox in questions of faith.

## 2. Erasmus on the Eucharist in His Paraphrase on John's Gospel

Erasmus' orthodoxy was questionable. John 6 was traditionally used as one of the proof-texts for the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist. Surprisingly, Erasmus made no explicit reference to this sacrament in the whole paraphrase of this chapter. What he offered instead was the identification of the bread of life with the Word of God and a spiritual interpretation of eating this bread.

His paraphrase on John 6:35 (*ego sum panis vitae*) proclaimed clearly:

So in order to shake the dream of physical food from them, Jesus explained more openly that he was not talking about bread that is chewed with the teeth, passes through the throat into the stomach, and

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hominum, quem etiam ab aeterno vt characterem suum et imaginem quasi in identitate substantiae gignendo signauit.'

42 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 50r-v: 'Vere hic est ille Propheta magnus et insignis in lege promissus, et tanto desiderio hactenus nobis expectatus, vt qui venturus esset, et a Deo mittendus in mundum, ad salutem populi.'

43 D. Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium Matthaei* (ed. J. Leclerc) (LB VII) 14B–16E; F. Titelmans, *Paraphrastica elucidatio in Iesu Christi Euangelium secundum Matthaem, additis annotationibus in loca difficiliora* (Antwerpiae: in officina Ioan. Steelsii 1545) ff. 24v–26r.

44 Titelmans, *Paraphrastica elucidatio in librum D. Iob*, f. c2r-v.

soothes the body's hunger for a time; he meant heavenly bread, which is the divine word (*sermo*). He said, I am that bread, the bestower of eternal life. Whoever hungers for this and comes to me, and lets it pass by faith into the bowels of his soul will not hunger again when nagging emptiness after satiety returns; but it will remain in him who has eaten it even to eternal life.<sup>45</sup>

This was not an isolated remark. The paraphrase of the following verse (6:36) reassures: 'This bread is eaten not with an open mouth but with a believing soul.'<sup>46</sup> Earlier on, paraphrasing the story of the multiplication of bread and fish, Erasmus observed that Christ was forming Apostles to become dispensers of spiritual food, that is, the Gospel message (6:11).<sup>47</sup> The twelve waste-coffins that remained after the miraculous feast (6:13) taught that: 'he who has undertaken the task of feeding the Lord's flock must provide bountifully from the rich store of divine Scripture whatever is necessary to teach, advise, console, and hearten those who are in need of such nourishment.'<sup>48</sup> Once again, in John 6:63, Erasmus put into Jesus' mouth a clear statement: 'By my flesh and blood I mean my teaching.'<sup>49</sup> The bread from heaven was not Jesus' body but his words. While the emphasis on teaching rather than the sacrament of Eucharist was unusual in regard to John 6, it was not heretical. For Erasmus, Christ was above all else the teacher of 'heavenly philosophy', the eternal *sermo* of the Father, a term he famously used translating John 1:1.<sup>50</sup>

The heterodox air of Erasmus' paraphrase was magnified by his suggestion that Eucharistic presence was merely symbolic. 'And I shall leave my flesh and my blood as a mystical symbol of this union, though it will do no good to have received that unless you receive

45 Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 168: 'Iesus igitur vt excuteret illis somnium cibi corporalis, apertius eis explicat se non loqui de pane qui dentibus manditur et per gulam in stomachum traiectus corporis famem ad tempus sedat, sed de pane coelesti, qui est sermo diuinus, atque: Ego sum panis ille, vitae largitor aeternae. Qui hunc esuriens ad me venerit eumque in animae viscera per fidem traiecerit, non esuriet rursus recurrente post saturitatem famis molestia, sed permanebit in eo qui sumpsit vsque in vitam aeternam.' English translation: Erasmus, *Paraphrase on John*, 83.

46 Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 168: 'Non oris hiatu sumitur hic panis, sed animi credulitate.' English translation: Erasmus, *Paraphrase on John*, 83.

47 Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 158: 'vt imagine corporali consuescerent pastores agere et sermonis euangelici dispensatores animos gregis christiani cibo spirituali pascere. Nam ille panis est, qui de coelo descendit.'

48 Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 160: 'eum qui pascendi gregis Domini curam suscepit, largiter oportere suppeditare ex diuite penu Scripturae diuinae, quicquid ad erudiendos, admonendos, consolandos, animandos pertinet qui huiusmodi indigent cibo.' English translation: Erasmus, *Paraphrase on John*, 78.

49 Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 178: 'Carnem et sanguinem meum appello doctrinam meam.' English translation: Erasmus, *Paraphrase on John*, 88.

50 D. Erasmus, *Evangelium secundum Iohannem* (ed. A.J. Brown) (ASD VI-2; Amsterdam: Elsevier 2001) 13: 'In principio erat sermo, et sermo erat apud deum, et deus erat ille sermo.' Erasmus' use of *sermo* instead of traditional *verbum* was criticized, but he defended his preference for it both on philological grounds as well as theological, since it was more suitable to orthodox Christology and Trinitology; see T.J. Martin, *The Christology of Erasmus: Christ, Humanity, and Peace* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press 2024) 164–181.

it in spirit' (6:63).<sup>51</sup> Similar remarks can be found in other paraphrases of Erasmus, for instance that on Matt 26:26: 'During this, the last supper [...] he instituted that most holy symbol of his death.'<sup>52</sup> It is not exactly clear what Erasmus meant here by 'symbol'. John Payne observed that 'He is typically inexact in his application of the terms "symbol" and "sign" [...] most often Erasmus leaves clouded in obscurity precisely what he considers the sign to be.'<sup>53</sup> Such a strategy of equivocality was typical of Erasmus and, according to Ross Dealy, stemmed from his adherence to ancient Stoic philosophy, which preferred both/and to either/or.<sup>54</sup>

This obscurity got Erasmus associated with the views of the Swiss reformers. In April 1526, there appeared an anonymous book entitled *Des hochgelerten Erasmi von Rotterdam unnd Doctor Martin Luters maynung vom Nachtmal unnsers herren Ihesu Christi*.<sup>55</sup> Leo Jud, Zwingli's acolyte and the author of this work, insisted that views of Luther and Erasmus agreed fully with those of the Swiss reformers. Nothing could be further from reality. It was, nevertheless, precisely the sort of ambiguous statements as those cited above, which led Jud to believe that Erasmus shared Zwinglian theology of the Lord's Supper.

Erasmus was disturbed by the publication and sought to disentangle himself from any connection with Zwingli. He did not, however, change his views. In fact, Erasmus never meant to challenge the doctrine of the real presence, even if he was not greatly convinced about it.<sup>56</sup> He was always concerned with the plurality of possible theological arguments, without, however, challenging the dogma. Rather than altering the doctrine, Erasmus sought to shift the focus from the doctrinal to the ethical dimension. Theology was for

51 Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 178: 'Atque huius societatis vobis mysticum symbolum relicturus sum carnem meam et sanguinem meum, quod ne ipsum quidem sumpsisse profuerit, nisi secundum spiritum sumpseritis.' English translation: Erasmus, *Paraphrase on John*, 88.

52 Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Evangelium Matthaei*, 133E: 'In hac igitur extrema coena [...] instituit sacrosanctum illud symbolum mortis suae.' English translation: D. Erasmus, *Paraphrase on Matthew* (ed. R.D. Sider; trans. and annot. D. Simpson) (CWE 45; Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 2008) 348. Identification of the Eucharist as symbolic or mystical was repeated by Erasmus in paraphrases of many other biblical verses: Mark 14:23: 'Sub haec Iesus commendavit suis sacrosanctum illud symbolum mortis suae' (LB VII 260D); Luke 22:19: 'Sub haec Dominus Iesus mystico symbolo suis consecraturus novum Testamentum, accepit panem [...] Mors mea non iterabitur: sufficit enim unica victima pro peccatis omnium seculorum. Sed vos vobis huius meae erga vos caritatis memoriam frequenter renovabitis, facientes inter vos, quod nunc a me videtis fieri. Erit enim hoc sacrosanctum signum foederis inter nos initi' (LB VII 450F-451A); John 13:2: 'Posteaquam igitur suprema illa et mystica coena parata esset, in qua dato corporis et sanguinis sui sacro symbolo, perpetuum sui memoriam pacturus erat' (LB VII 602B); 1 Cor 11:25: 'Christus hoc convivium mortis suae commemorationem, et aeterni foederis symbolum esse voluit' (LB VII 897B).

53 J.B. Payne, *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments* (Richmond, VA: Knox 1970) 138.

54 See R. Dealy, *The Stoic Origins of Erasmus' Philosophy of Christ* (Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 2017) 7–8.

55 L. Jud, *Des hochgelerten Erasmi von Rotterdam unnd Doctor Martin Luters maynung vom Nachtmal unnsers herren Ihesu Christi* (Augsburg: Philipp Ulhart 1526). More on Swiss theology of the Eucharist and its relations to Erasmus, see Christ-von Wedel, *Erasmus of Rotterdam: Advocate of a New Christianity*, 191–193; E. Campi, "Theological Profile," *A Companion to the Swiss Reformation* (eds. A.N. Burnett – E. Campi) (BCCT 72; Leiden: Brill 2016) 471–476.

56 Payne, *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments*, 144–145.

Erasmus about ethics and practice, 'a way of life rather than a form of argument'.<sup>57</sup> Far from scholastic hair-splitting disputes about the mechanics of transubstantiation, he was interested in how the Eucharist could make Christians better human beings. His answer was clear: through spiritual eating.

Throughout his paraphrase of John 6, Erasmus constantly emphasised the contrast between carnal and spiritual eating of Christ's body. He took as his key text Jesus' words from John 6:64 (*Spiritus est qui vivificat: caro non prodest quidquam*). External observation was of no use, if not accompanied by deeper, spiritual absorption of Christ's teaching. In John 6:29, Erasmus put into Jesus' mouth criticism of ritualism, which sounded much as his own vituperations against mediaeval Church observances:

You are asking, he said, what things you can do to oblige God, who is spirit and who delights in things of the spirit; it is not sacrificing victims, or observing the Sabbath, or ritual bathing, or dietary restrictions, or wearing special clothing, or the other things that make up outward ceremonial.<sup>58</sup>

The ceremonial, special clothing, fasting, and so on were precisely the things that Erasmus disliked about late mediaeval religious life and contrasted them with inner piety. Without this internal disposition of faith no external ritual, even as holy as the Eucharist, was beneficial. Erasmus used Judas as his example, suggesting that he betrayed the Lord despite having received the Communion (6:72):

But among so few and so particularly chosen there is one devil, who will betray him whose body he will have eaten and whose blood he will have drunk in the flesh, not in the spirit, whose words he will have heard and whose miracles he will have seen.<sup>59</sup>

Bread and wine were Body and Blood, but unless they were received spiritually, they were of no help, according to Erasmus.

### 3. Titelmans on the Eucharist in His Paraphrase on John's Gospel

Erasmus' view of the Eucharist in his paraphrase of John 6 was perfectly congruent with his entire programme of Christianity's reform. While it was only moderately controversial in the early 1520s, by the time Titelmans wrote his paraphrase, it was entirely unacceptable. What changed the situation were obviously 'protestant' reformations, especially since some

<sup>57</sup> Martin, *The Christology of Erasmus*, 8–11; Martin, *The Christology of Erasmus*, 8–11.

<sup>58</sup> Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 166: 'Si quaeritis, inquit, quod sit opus, quo demereamini Deum, qui Spiritus est, et spiritualibus delectatur, non est immolatio victimarum, non observatio sabbati, non lotiones, non ciborum delectus, non vestitus religio, non caetera quae corporalibus constant ceremoniis.' English translation: Erasmus, *Paraphrase on John*, 81.

<sup>59</sup> Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 180: 'Et tamen e tam paucis et singulariter delectis vnus diabolus est, delaturus eum, cuius corpus ederet et sanguinem biberit iuxta carnem, non iuxta spiritum, cuius audierit sermonem, cuius miracula conspexerit.' English translation: Erasmus, *Paraphrase on John*, 90.

of them started challenging the doctrine of the Eucharist in mid 1520s. The Franciscan accused Erasmus that while he might be able to escape a charge of heresy himself, his works gave encouragement to others, who evidently crossed the line. He was not off the point. We have mentioned above Jud's identification of Erasmian teaching with Zwingli, but it is also worth noting that Oecolampadius, one of Erasmus' closest associates, was among pioneers of the reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper.<sup>60</sup> Thus, in his paraphrase, Titelmans sought to stress the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist as an antidote to Erasmus' vagueness.

Firstly, Titelmans omitted all ambiguous comments regarding spiritual eating. While he clearly shared Erasmus' idea that the inner disposition must accompany physical consumption, he was cautious not to create any impression that spiritual meant merely symbolic but it also meant sacramental (6:64):

What I have just said about the eating my body, you understand carnally, as if I wanted to have my flesh slaughtered and cut up into pieces and boiled in water or cooked in fire, torn apart with teeth, just as it is done in eating meat of sheep and oxen. Consequently you were scandalised by this carnal understanding. Meanwhile, my words should be understood as about spiritual eating, which is done through faith and sacramental communion, so that they might lead to life.<sup>61</sup>

Faith was necessary, but so was the sacramental reality. Paraphrasing John 6:51–57 Titelmans several times referred explicitly to the Mass. As we have mentioned such references were utterly absent in Erasmus' paraphrase. Erasmus elaborated Jesus' statement: 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven [...] and the bread that I will give, is my flesh, for the life of the world' indicating three mysteries hidden there: eternal co-existence with the Father, the sacrifice of the cross, and the Church as the mystical body of Christ.<sup>62</sup> Titelmans, while acknowledging those three doctrinal truths added explicitly:

I will also give, in the institution of the magnificent sacrament, in memory of my death, my body under the form of bread, so that it may be taken by the faithful. Taking it worthily they will receive life for their souls and will be carried into life (6:52).<sup>63</sup>

60 On Oecolampadius and his views, see D. Poythress, *Reformer of Basel: The Life, Thought, and Influence of Johannes Oecolampadius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books 2011); A.N. Burnett, "The Reformation in Basel," *A Companion to the Swiss Reformation* (eds. A.N. Burnett – E. Campi) (BCCT 72; Leiden: Brill 2016) 177–198.

61 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 59r: 'Quemadmodum videlicet id quod modo dixi de manducatione carnis meae, vos ita carnaliter intelligitis, quasi velim ego carnem meam mactatam et concisam in frusta, et aqua vel igne decoctam, dentibus discerpi, quomodo fit in manducatione carnis ouinae aut bouinae, et ideo in hoc carnali intellectu scandalizamini: cum mea verba de manducatione spirituali, quae fit per fidem et sacramentalem communionem, debeant intelligi, vt ad vitam proficient.'

62 Mediaeval exegesis identified the same mysteries here, adding however the Eucharist, which Erasmus omitted. See, for instance, Dionysius Cartusianus, "Enarratio in Evangelium secundum Iohannem," 400.

63 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 56r: 'dabo quoque in sacramenti magnifici institutione, in mortis meae memoriam, corpus meum sub panis specie sumendum fidelibus, vt digne sumentes vitam animae accipiant, et in vita feruentur.'

He continued (6:54) to emphasise the indispensability of the Eucharist for human salvation:

In truth I confirm this to you, firmly and earnestly, that you have no hope of salvation and of life eternal, except by eating my body and drinking my blood. [...] Likewise, you have no such hope unless, in the life-giving sacrament that I am about to give, when time and opportunity will demand it, you occupy yourselves with receiving worthily, under sacramental form, my true body and my true blood, as true food et drink for the soul, whoever of you are capable of it.<sup>64</sup>

Spiritual receiving was necessary, but it had to be accompanied by physical participation in the Eucharistic bread and wine.

Titelmans indicated the Eucharistic reading of this chapter not only with explicit comments, but also with his choice of words. Paraphrasing John 6:11, about the multiplication of bread, he deliberately chose vocabulary reminiscent of the Canon of the Mass (Table 2).<sup>65</sup>

Table 2. The paraphrase of John 6:11

Canon	Titelmans
Qui, pridie quam pateretur, <b>accepit</b> panem in <b>sanctas</b> ac venerabiles <b>manus suas</b> , et <b>elevatis oculis</b> in <b>caelum</b> ad te Deum Patrem suum omnipotentem, tibi <b>gratias agens</b> benedixit	Dominus Iesus in <b>sacras</b> illas ac benedictas <b>manus suas</b> panes quinque illos <b>accepit</b> , eosque adhuc in manibus tenens, <b>eleuatis</b> ad <b>caelum oculis</b> patri <b>gratias egit</b>

A reader of Titelmans' paraphrase was left in no doubt: the multiplication of bread and the dialogue that followed it were a foundation of Church's teaching and practice of the Eucharist. For Erasmus, the doctrine was secondary to ethics. Not so for Titelmans. His paraphrase made Jesus express it clearly:

Among all works [...] this is the first and foremost [...] that you [...] shift towards me all affection of your hearts, loving me above everything, and that you seek my doctrine, which I was sent by the Father to teach, more than all the riches of this world (6:29).<sup>66</sup>

64 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 56v: 'In veritate ego vobis serio et constanter illud affirmo, non esse vobis vllam spem salutis et vitae aeternae consequendae, nisi per manducationem carnis meae, et sanguinis potationem: nisi videlicet in me verum hominem habentem veram carnem et verum sanguinem fide sincera credideritis, quod est fide carnem meam manducare et sanguinem meum bibere: item nisi in sacramento per me ad mundi vitam instituendo, vbi tempus et opportunitas postulabit, meam veram carnem et verum meum sanguinem sub sacramentalibus speciebus digne sumere satageritis, tanquam verum animae cibum et potum, quicumque eius capaces estis.'

65 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 49v.

66 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, ff. 52v–53r: 'Inter omnia opera [...] hoc est praecipuum et primum, [...] vt vos [...] totum affectum cordis vestri, in me transferatis, me super omnia diligentes, et meam doctrinam ad quam docendam a Patre sum missus, super omnia mundi bona requiratis.'

Titelmans agreed with Erasmus that love was paramount. Nevertheless, he added that, unless it was paired with correct doctrine, it was not sufficient.

#### 4. Other Theological Aspects of Erasmus' and Titelmans' Paraphrases on John 6

It was not only the doctrine of the Eucharist that Titelmans thought worth defending in the paraphrase on John 6. He also spoke of Jesus' birth from the Virgin, Peter's primacy, grace, and predestination. All these issues were hotly contested at the time that Titelmans wrote his paraphrase. The virginity of Mary was upheld by major reformers, but contested by Andreas Karlstadt and the radicals.<sup>67</sup> It is not clear whether Titelmans knew their views, but he devoted considerable space in his annotations on Matthew to refuting an ancient heretic, Helvidius, who negated Mary's virginity.<sup>68</sup> This suggests his awareness that this dogma was challenged by some reformers, thus he also emphasised Mary's virginity in his paraphrase on John 6.<sup>69</sup>

The authority of the pope was under a much more open assault. It should be no surprise then that Titelmans took every opportunity to emphasise Peter's primacy, on which papal authority rested. Paraphrasing Matt 16:19, he expressed the idea of papal supremacy very openly:

Whatever you will do on earth, according to the rightful use of your power, I, sitting in heaven at the right hand of the Father, will approve and ratify, as if it were done by my vicar and in my person. Such will be your power, and that of those who will succeed you in office until the end of time. The power about to be given to you shall remain entirely in your successors until the very end of time, just as the Church will not fail until the last day.<sup>70</sup>

John 6 offered fewer opportunities for discussing papal authority; however, here also, Titelmans did not fail to emphasise Peter's unique position. In the paraphrase of John 6:69, Titelmans wrote: 'When this question was put to them, Simon Peter, burning with special love towards the Lord, as a head of the college of the Apostles, responded confidently in the

67 A survey of reformed opinions on Mary, see D. MacCulloch, "Mary and Sixteenth-Century Protestants," *SCH* 39 (2004) 191–217.

68 Titelmans, *Paraphrastica elucidatio in Matthaeum*, ff. 15r–16v.

69 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 52v.

70 Titelmans, *Paraphrastica elucidatio in Matthaeum*, f. 246r: 'Quicquid tu secundum rectum vsum tuae potestatis operaberis in terris, ego in caelis sedens ad patris dexteram approbabo ratumque habebō, utpote a meo vicario et in persona mea factum. Tanta erit tua auctoritas, et eorum qui in tuum locum successuri sunt usque ad consummationem seculi. Omnino enim ad consummationem vsque seculi perdurare debet in tuis successoribus tradenda tibi potestas, quomodo in consummationem vsque non deficiet Ecclesia.' See also Erasmus' and Titelmans' paraphraes of John 21:15. Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem* (LB VII, 647B–D); Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 185v.

name of all.<sup>71</sup> He emphasised that Peter was the head of the apostolic college, linking his authority with his office. Erasmus' paraphrase treated the subject differently, indicating that Peter, not so much due to his office as to his personal faith, represented the entire Church: 'At this Simon Peter, always a man of simple and fervent faith in Jesus, taking the part of the whole church, replied for himself and the others with great eagerness.'<sup>72</sup> Erasmus' comment was hardly anti-papal. It simply emphasised Peter's personal rather than institutional authority. Yet, in the context of the reformed challenge to the papal power this seemed insufficient and the Franciscan felt obliged to uphold the institutional aspect of Peter's primacy.

The theme of grace and predestination is particularly important, because Titelmans accused Erasmus of 'Pelagian' leanings. In their debate on the translation of Rom 5:12 Titelmans claimed that changes introduced by Erasmus (*quatenus* in place of *in quo*) were Pelagian. In doing so, Erasmus placed himself in line with Pelagius and Julian of Eclanum, against whom Augustine wrote his treatises. Titelmans asked his older colleague: 'Do you not see, that in those words you, alongside Julian, are being justly and deservedly castigated by the holy father Augustine; you, who are held equally guilty, or, I do not know, even more gravely.'<sup>73</sup>

In the light of Erasmus' entire theological output, it is difficult to uphold Titelmans' accusation (needless to say, Erasmus himself vehemently protested against being linked with Pelagius);<sup>74</sup> nevertheless, Erasmus' strong emphasis on human ethical effort could provide some substance to the Franciscan's claims. We can find examples of such a stress in his paraphrase of John 6. In the paraphrase of John 6:44, a verse that ostensibly spoke of the grace freely given, Erasmus highlighted human actions: '[The Father] does not grant so great a gift except to willing and eager people. And whoever has deserved to be drawn by the Father because of his ready will and devout zeal will achieve eternal life through me.'<sup>75</sup>

71 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 59r: 'Hac interrogatione proposita Simon Petrus erga dominum praecipuo feruens amore, tanquam caput Apostolici collegii, omnium nomine fidenter respondit.'

72 Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 180: 'Hic Simon Petrus, simplicis et ardentis fidei semper in Iesum, totius ecclesiae personam gerens caeterorum quoque nomine magna alacritate respondit.' English translation: Erasmus, *Paraphrase on John*, 89–90.

73 Titelmans, *Collationes quinque*, f. 118r: 'In quibus verbis nonne vides etiam te una cum Iuliano iuste et merito obiurgari a sancto patre Augustino, qui eadem in culpa deprehenderis, nescio an etiam graviori.' Interestingly, Erasmus was accused of Pelagian leanings also by Martin Luther. What linked Luther and Titelmans was their adherence to Augustinian theology; Erasmus on the other hand often distanced himself from the Bishop of Hippo and was admonished to read more of Augustine by both Beda and Luther, who otherwise had little common ground.

74 For the dispute over Rom 5:12, see T.K. Mantyk, "Translating Romans 5:12 in the Early 16th Century. Franciscus Titelmans's Polemic against Humanists," *BA* 11/2 (2021) 301–326, <https://doi.org/10.31743/biban.11297>.

75 Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 172: 'Non impartit ille tantum munus, nisi volentibus et audis. Quisquis autem promeruerit sua prompta voluntate pioque studio, vt attrahatur a Patre, per me vitam aeternam consequetur.' English translation: Erasmus, *Paraphrase on John*, 84.

He expressed a similar idea in the following verse: ‘The gift is God’s but the effort is yours.’<sup>76</sup> Titelmans, on the other hand, underlined the primacy of God’s action:

None of human beings can come to me, through true devotion of faith in me, unless the Father, who sent me into the world, has brought him to me by inner inspiration and instruction, and, as if bending his heart, has drawn him to me.<sup>77</sup>

In fact, Titelmans often referred to the idea of predestination, derived from Augustine. It was yet before Calvin’s teaching made predestination a hotly debated issue. Paraphrasing John 6:37, Titelmans wrote: ‘For all people, whom the Father gave me from eternity according to predestination, and in time according to a firm calling, election and adoption, all my elect, who are predestined to life by God the Father, will come to me.’<sup>78</sup> The Franciscan followed here mediaeval commentaries on this verse, that often spoke of predestination.<sup>79</sup>

None of those remarks should be taken as a statement in the crucial debate of that time, namely, about justification. Titelmans seemed to be completely unaware of the problem, and nowhere in his paraphrases, including those of such sensitive texts as Romans, Galatians, and James, did he hint at Lutheran theology of *sola fide* and *sola gratia*. In his paraphrase on John 6, he simply repeated traditional mediaeval formula of the faith formed by love.<sup>80</sup> His use of Augustine is, however, significant for another reason. Augustinianism, developed by Baius and later Jansenius, was to become the key term in Leuven theology in the late 16th and the 17th century. The roots of Baianism were in the opposition against humanist overemphasis of human effort. Titelmans is an early example of such an opposition, however, his potential direct or indirect influence on Baius remains yet to be proven.

Titelmans, although himself something of a humanist, well versed in ancient languages, was critical of what he considered as an excessive faith in human intellect, immoderate search of novelties, and pursuit of vain glory displayed by many representatives of the new

76 Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Euangelium secundum Ioannem*, 172: ‘Donum est Dei, sed vester est conatus.’ English translation: Erasmus, *Paraphrase on John*, 85.

77 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 55r: ‘Nemo enim hominum potest ad me venire, per veram in me fidei deuotionem, nisi Pater qui me in mundum misit, illum interius inspirando siue erudiendo ad me adduxerit, et quasi inflectendo cor eius ad me pertraxerit.’

78 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 54r: ‘Omnes enim homines quos ab aeterno secundum praedestinationem atque in tempore secundum stabilem vocationem, electionem et adoptionem, pater mihi dederit, electi mei omnes qui a Deo patre sunt ad vitam praedestinati, ad me venient.’

79 Dionysius Cartusianus, ‘Enarratio in Euangelium secundum Iohannem,’ 394: ‘Omne genus hominum quod dat mihi Pater, id est, quos Pater per inspirationem internam inclinat ad me, vel quos ab aeterno elegit ac praedestinavit in me, utpote quos decrevit per meam incarnationem ac passionem salvare, ad me veniet, nunc per fidem et gratiam, in futuro autem per beatificam visionem, imo et per localem sui exaltationem usque ad coelum empyreum.’

80 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 54v: ‘fide recta vera dilectione formata.’

learning.<sup>81</sup> His paraphrase on John 6 alluded critically to humanism in several places. In 6:2, he spoke of Jesus' immature followers as of people motivated by curiosity of new things. Excessive appetite for novelty was precisely the charge that Titelmans levied against new translations of the Bible. Such a desire for novelty was in vain, for, as he wrote in paraphrase of John 6:45: 'Human learning is thus of no help, unless there is present within the one who teaches, attracts and moves, the helper, more than that: the prime worker, God.'<sup>82</sup> Once again, this resonates with his criticism of Erasmus' translation, in which he argued that divinely inspired text could only be correctly translated with the help of the Holy Spirit.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusions

What we have presented in this article is an overview of Erasmus' and Titelmans' paraphrases on John 6. Their literary approaches were very similar, with both of them using comparable rhetorical devices in constructing their paraphrases. Naturally, Titelmans was a mere imitator of Erasmus and arguably a mediocre one, unable to match his older colleague's finesse. Titelmans demonstrated his more conservative approach also in remaining closer to the Vulgate's vocabulary, even though he also used Erasmus' *Novum instrumentum*.

What truly distinguished the two authors was their approach to theology. Erasmusian paraphrases reflected his reform ideas: anti-dogmatic, ethic centred theology, much indebted to patristic thinking and strongly opposed to scholastic emphasis on neat definitions and precise delimitations. Erasmus preferred to leave room for a concept of mystery, as for instance with the exact mechanics of bread and wine's transition into the Body and Blood of Christ. His theology was not meant as a challenge to the Church. On the contrary, he hoped that it can advance Church's reform and deepen the spiritual dimension of Christianity. Indeed, it was initially received as such, and, as Erasmus happily observed, his paraphrases stirred virtually no debate, unlike his *Novum instrumentum*.<sup>84</sup>

81 See, for instance, F. Titelmans, "Prologus apologeticus pro veteri et ecclesiastica Novi Testamenti latina interpretatione," *Collationes quinque super Epistolam ad Romanos beati Pauli apostoli* (Antuerpiae: apud Guilielemum Vorstermannum 1529) f. c8r-v.

82 Titelmans, *Elucidatio paraphrastica in Ioannem*, f. 55v: 'Humana quippe eruditio nihil proficit, si non adsit qui intus doceat, trahat et moueat, cooperato, imo praecipuus operator, Deus.'

83 Titelmans, "Prologus Apologeticus," f. d2r-v: 'At qui Spiritus Sancti negat requiri afflatum, in scripturarum interpretatione, humanam facit scripturam quam sine illo tentat interpretari; quando et quod docetur Evangelium, non iam diuinum est sine illo sed sit humanum. Et profecto si in uerbis, in superficie, in sermonum foliis esset Euangelium, posset utriusque linguae peritus sola eruditione et uerborum copia per se esse sufficiens. Quia uero in sensu, in medulla, in radice rationis latet Euangelium, constat haec sicuti a Spiritu pendent afflatu, ita Euangelii interpretationem, aut sanctae scripture, sine illo non recte fieri.'

84 P.S. Allen – H.M. Allen (eds.), *Opus epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* (Oxford: Clarendon 1923) III, 249, ep. 794, vv. 79–83: 'etiamsi Paraphrasis omnium calculis laudatur. Est aliquid vel vnico libello placuisse tam iniquis ac morosis. Atque vtinam in talibus campis me continuissem, in quibus non Paulo plus erat gloriae multoque minus laboris.' On controversies stirred by *Novum testamentum*, see E. Rummel, *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics*, 2 vols. (Bibliotheca Humanistica et Reformatorica 45; Nieuwkoop: De Graaf 1989).

As reformations progressed, also paraphrases came under criticism. While Beda instigated their condemnation in Paris, Titelmans took a different approach. What he offered was a theologically improved version of paraphrases. Our analysis of the paraphrase on John 6 demonstrated that he took great care to emphasise traditional teaching of the Church, especially in those places, where Erasmian theology was equivocal or even heterodox. Most importantly, he defended the exegetical tradition of the eucharistic reading of this chapter, indirectly challenged by Erasmus. In many ways, paraphrases on John 6 bring to the fore the difference in approaches of the two humanists: for Erasmus ethics and spirituality were paramount, while the doctrine was best left undefined, a mystery to be believed but not dissected. For Titelmans, the doctrine was crucial. Without correct doctrine there could be neither true ethics nor spirituality. And there was nothing vague about the doctrine, since it was firmly established by the Church's teaching.

What Titelmans' paraphrase of John 6 demonstrates is, however, the fact that he combined his theological conservatism with stylistic progressiveness. Unlike Beda and many other Erasmus' critics, instead of vituperating against the new learning, Titelmans took the form – namely, the genre of paraphrase – and filled it with traditional content. This shows that historians must be more nuanced with designations conservative–progressive, since one author could easily be both on different levels. Moreover, the example of Titelmans shows that there was perhaps more vitality in Catholic biblical studies on the eve of the council of Trent than some older scholarship was willing to admit.<sup>85</sup> Thirdly, Titelmans' approach in many ways prefigured post-Tridentine Catholic exegesis, which dwelled extensively on humanist methodology and style, but was careful to remain within the bonds of Roman orthodoxy.<sup>86</sup> It suggests that more research into Catholic theology and exegesis of the early 16th century is still needed in order to put the Council of Trent and its aftermath in the correct context.

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<sup>85</sup> An example of such scholarship is Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*.

<sup>86</sup> On post-tridentine Catholic theology, see, for instance, A. Gerace, *Biblical Scholarship in Louvain in the 'Golden' Sixteenth Century* (R5AS 60; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2019).

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