

JULIUSZ DOMAŃSKI

FAUSTO SOZZINI'S *EXPLICATIO PRIMAE PARTIS PRIMI
CAPITIS EUANGELII IOANNIS* AND ITS ERASMIAN EXEGESIS*

My analysis of the topic described by the title, which is addressed to historians of the Reformation, must begin with my confession that I do not work in this field, which is crucial for my approach as well as the nature and scope of what I seek to discuss. I have been most certainly persuaded to do so by Erasmus, whose life and work are dear to me and whose writings I have been translating for more than a decade, which have made me more intimately acquainted with him rather than with Faustino Sozzini, whose writings have only occasionally been my concern—and mainly in relation to the ideas and writings of Erasmus. Not without significance is the fact that I am, above all, a philologist rather than a historian, a historian of philosophy rather than of religious doctrines, and in regard of disciplines that fall under history of philosophy, I am more of a historian dealing with philosophy from before the Reformation rather than after it. For someone studying Erasmus, like me, focusing solely on the sources and models of his thought and doctrine, entering the realm of Erasmus' "afterlife," that is, his bearing on religious and intellectual currents and the evolution of his ideas, means penetrating an uncharted territory, which obviously makes one feel like a dilettante, given the circumstances

To these excuses, which I must make as an outsider, I also need to add several remarks meant to indicate and explain the limitations of the thematic scope of a comparatist study like this, imposed by my Erasmian rather than

JULIUSZ DOMAŃSKI, Emeritus Professor, Polish Academy of Science in Warsaw and University of Warsaw.

* This is an English translation of Juliusz Domański's "Fausta Socyna *Explicatio primae partis primi capituli Euangelii Ioannis* i egzegeza erazmiańska," in his *Erasmiana minora. Studia i szkice o pisarstwie filozoficznym i religijnym Erazma z Rotterdamu* (Warsaw: Instytut Tomistyczny, Instytut Filologii Klasycznej UW, 2017), 337–63. Translated with the Author's permission.

Sozzinian optics. I am aware that these limitations may disappoint my audience for I am going to omit from my considerations nearly all of the “substance” making Sozzini’s *Explicatio*, namely, the doctrinal content of the argument proving that Jesus Christ was only a human being, based on the prologue to the Gospel of John, and focus instead on the structure of his argument, specifically his mode of interpreting the Bible. It is on this ground that I wish to demonstrate the relationship between Sozzini and Erasmus. This choice, I admit, is entirely arbitrary and premised on my limited competence, inclining me to reasonably avoid entering the territory of grand doctrinal issues as I might risk repeating what is already clear from the rather modest yet accurate literature on Sozzini. It is all the more worth underlining that I do not aim to discredit questions regarding the dependence, direct or indirect, of Sozzini on Erasmus, also in the light of the central thesis of the *Explicatio* and its individual constitutive elements of doctrine. It is my wish that any brief or digressive remarks I make on this central issue be considered as fulfilling this obligation.

It is true that Erasmus never claimed—unlike Sozzini—that Christ was only a man. On the contrary, he would often declare—opposing the views of ancient Arians—that he considers Christ to be God, as taught by the Roman Church.¹ While emphasizing the little sense, if not the nonsense, of exploring the duality of Christ’s nature, and urging to treat this matter as a mystery, reason suspended,² Erasmus admits on several occasions, including in his *Annotationes* to the Prologue to the Gospel of John, that except for two or three passages (one of which is in John’s Prologue) Christ is never called God in the Bible, and even in these few exceptional places the meaning of the term is vague and ambiguous.³

Erasmus does not write anywhere, unlike Sozzini in the *Explicatio*, that the term *logos*, when applied to Christ, does not carry any ontological weight in the Gospel of John, that it does not refer to the nature of the person

¹ See, e.g., *Symboli catechesis* (1533), LB V 1148E, 1157A–E; 1157A–E; *Apologia ad Sanctium Caranzam*, LB IX, 404 F–405D. In *Ep.* 1334, 493–503 (preface to St. Hilary’s *De Trinitate*) Erasmus explains the Arian dogma of Christ’s nature.

² *Ep.* 1334, 339–456; *Ratio*, LB V, 133F–134F (H 297, 6–298, 33).

³ See, e.g., *Annotationes* (*in Io.* 20, 28), LB VI, 417D–E (417 D: “Hic est unus locus, in quo palam Evangelista Christo Dei vocabulum tribuit”); *ibid.* (*in Rom.* 9, 5), LB VI 610–612 B; *ibid.* (*in Tim.* 1, 17), LB VI 930C–931C (930C: “id rarum est in litteris apostolicis Christo aut Spiritui Sancto tribuere vocabulum Dei”); as regards *Io.* 1, 2 see *Annotationes* (*in Io.* 1, 2), B VI, 337C–D (337C: “vere ac natura Deum significet”). Erasmus even more emphatically stresses the fact that the Holy Spirit is not called God in the Bible; see, e.g., *Ep.* 1334, 404–438; *Ecclesiastes*, LB V 1089F–1090 A.

it signifies, that therefore it has nothing in common with the meaning and term known to Greek philosophy, but rather it is a (most adequate) name of the teaching and exemplary (not soteriological) role that Jesus Christ played as per his unique chosenness and mandate given to Him by God. Nevertheless, Erasmian Christology and exegesis of the Bible (the two being inseparable) contain plenty of elements that we are allowed to treat as factual premises (unintended by Erasm, apparently) for such an understanding of John's *logos*. After all, it was Erasmus who emphatically claims in *Enchiridion* that Christ is what He preached ("Christum vero esse puta non vocem inanem, sed nihil aliud quam caritatem, simplicitatem, patientiam, puritatem, breviter quidquid ille docuit"),⁴ and argues in *Paraphrasis Evangelii Ioannis* that *sermo* (λόγος) is the most adequate term for the manifest and, as it were, intersubjective, mind of Christ as teacher.⁵ Likewise, there is no reason for us to consider the "nihil aliud quam" in *Enchiridion*, as some earlier interpreters did,⁶ as a limiting term and not, as in fact is the case, a corroborating phrase.⁷ It is all the more unjustified to treat the identification of John's *logos* with Christ's teaching as an idea developed in line with Sozzini—both Erasmian formulations of *logos*, after all, are flexible enough so that we may argue that, "logically", they implicitly contain practically the whole of Sozzini's Christology.

Nowhere in *Adnotationes* or *Paraphrasis Euangelii Ioannis* does Erasmus claim that in John's phrase καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος the word Θεός is not used as *nomen proprium vel personae* but as an *appellativum* and *nomen auctoritatis, potentiae et benefitentiae*, as Sozzini argues in *Explicatio* while analysing these exact words.⁸ Nor does Erasmus reference, in his explication of the Prologue to the Gospel of John, the numerous instances in the Bible where

⁴ LB V 25A–B (H 63, 11–13).

⁵ LB VII 499A–B: "Nec est alia res, quae plenius et evidentius exprimat occultam mentis imaginem quam oratio non mendax." It is "animum loquentis transfert in animum auditoris. Sermo dicitur, quod per hunc Deus, qui in suapte natura nulla ratione comprehendi potest, nobis voluit innotescere;" cf. *Ecclesiastes* LB V 771Bff.

⁶ See, e.g., Jean-Baptiste PINEAU, *Erasme, sa pensée religieuse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1924), 115; Lucien FEBVRE, *Le problème de l'incroyance religieuse au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: A. Michel, 1942), 349.

⁷ This is how this passage is interpreted by Henri de Lubac in *L'exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'Écriture* (Paris: Aubier, 1964), 2:472–74), who reaches different conclusions than the two authors cited in the previous footnote.

⁸ *Explicatio primae partis primi capituli Euangelii Ioannis...* (Racoviae: typis Sebastiani Sternacii, 1618), 16. All further quotes come from this edition (which is more accurate than that in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* [henceforth: *BFP*], 1:75ff).

Θεός denotes people, which Sozzini adopts as the fundamental evidence against the claim that John the Evangelist speaks of Christ as God. However, elsewhere⁹ Erasmus would highlight (emphatically enough) such a use of the term, both in biblical exegesis and other readings, so that we may regard him as one whose ambiguous formulations and more or less intentionally under-specified ideas could contribute to the formation of a precisely and unambiguously delineated Christology by Sozzini.

We can validly say—without supplying other detailed examples but merely generalizing on the one mentioned above, which discusses the sense of the name *logos* attributed to Christ in the Prologue to the Gospel of John—that the whole of Erasmus’ work tacitly degrades (or at least obfuscates for Christians) speculative and pseudo-scientific ontology, while brashly deprecating dialectics as instrumental knowledge that is useless for Christianity, and elevating the ethical-personal themes of Christianity to the highest rank as *philosophia Christi*—this “Christ’s philosophy”, largely comparable and widely coinciding with Socrates’ ethics as a way of life and the teachings of Cynics, but also with the spirit and style of the philosophy of Aristotelianists and scholastic Averroists, which dialectically seeks to fathom the structure of “natures” and “essences”,¹⁰ and which can be reconciled only if its essence is compromised. The same redefinition of the hierarchy of philosophical disciplines from the perspective of their usefulness for Christianity determined by its essential elements of Christian doctrine is certainly constitutive of Sozzini’s system. His *Explicatio* shows, however, that Platonism—not Aristotelianism—is the philosophical doctrine whose speculative ontology, when applied to John’s Prologue warped its real meaning.¹¹ Erasmus, for his part, stresses the ethical context of Platonism and would never accept that the *logos* of Plato and the *logos* of the Gospel of John have nothing in common.¹² Still, despite differences of opinion about

⁹ See *Adagia*, 169 (*Homo homini Deus*), LB II 53 F–55 C; *Encomium medicinae*, LB I 53 E.

¹⁰ On Erasmus’ concept of “Christ’s philosophy” and philosophy in general, see, e.g., Primo GASBARRI, “Il significato storico della ‘Philosophia Christiana’ di Erasmo di Rotterdam,” *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 35, no. 2 (1944): 75–114; Margaret MANN-PHILLIPS, “La ‘Philosophia Christi’ reflétée dans les ‘Adages’ d’Érasme,” in *Courants religieux et humanisme à la fin du XV^e et au début du XVI^e siècle. Colloque International de Strasbourg 9-11 mai* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959), 45–51; Juliusz DOMAŃSKI “Głosy do erazmiańskiego pojęcia filozofii,” *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej* 15 (1969): 5–45.

¹¹ *Explicatio...*, 12–13.

¹² This does not mean that Erasmus speculated about the (neo-)Platonic *logos* as the foreshadowing of the one from the Gospel of John, or as testimony to partial philosophical truth preceding the revealed truth; nor does this mean that he followed St. Augustine (see Aug., *Conf.* III, 9, 13–

Greek philosophical doctrines, the very principle of not contaminating authentic Christianity with them—for the sake of the latter's non-speculative character—seems identical for both thinkers, also stylistically. Erasmian analogies and precedents of Sozzini's anti-ontological and anti-metaphysical approach to Christianity are manifested in *De Sacrae Scripturae auctoritate* even with greater force, perhaps, than in the *Explicatio*, in one of the proofs that Christianity is superior to all other religions. Sozzini sees it in the exemplarism of its founder, who, for one thing, lived in absolute agreement with the ethical precepts he proclaimed (*praecepta*), and, for another, delivered on the promises (*promissa*) he had made before his resurrection.¹³ This theme is so distinctly Erasmian that although Erasmus himself—applying methods of identical exemplarism to show the uniqueness of Christianity and its superiority to both Greek and Old Testament philosophies—drew on old patristic themes, chiefly (as I believe) on John Chrysostom, it seems incontrovertible that Sozzini was inspired not by the writings of Church Fathers but Erasmus' prefaces to the New Testament, namely *Paraclesis* and the later (no less interesting but typically ignored in Erasmian literature) *Epistola de philosophia euangelica*, when making that point in his apology of Christianity.¹⁴

So much for my brief digressions. Any further study of these and related issues would amount to no less than showing Erasmus' role in the creation of sixteenth-century religious heterodoxy, clarifying but also warping the sense and spirit of Erasmian indeterminacies evolving in the several-decade-long period when religious doctrines were developing intensely and gaining in complexity. It would be impossible to address all of these points in one and necessarily brief lecture, even if they were very familiar to the speaker.

15; VIII, 2, 3; Erasmus knew these texts when he was writing *Ratio* and referred to St. Augustine's argument (LB V 83A [H 191, 26–29]) that there are similarities between Platonism and Christianity). What matters here is his claims about similarity between Platonism and Christianity considered more generally and manifested, above all, in the literary form of Platonic and Biblical writings, as discussed by Erasmus in *Enchiridion*, LB V 7F; 29B; 30A (H 32, 25–28; 70, 13–19; 21, 33–72, 8); cf. also *Ratio*, LB V 80 D–81A; 82 B–83A (H 187, 135; 190, 12–191, 30).

¹³ *De S. Scripturae auctoritate...*, II, 1 (Hispani 1588), 35–37. This passage is also examined in Zbigniew OGONOWSKI, "Kryteria prawdziwości chrześcijaństwa u Fausta Socyna," *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej* 9 (1963): 81–83.

¹⁴ See on this aspect of *Paraclesis* in Pierre MESNARD, "La 'Paraclesis' d'Erasmus," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 13 (1951): 26–34; on *Paraclesis* and *Epistola de philosophia euangelica*, see DOMAŃSKI, "Głosy," 9–12; Juliusz DOMAŃSKI, "Z patrystycznych źródeł philosophia Christi: św. Jan Chryzostom i erasmiańska koncepcja filozofii," *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego* 250, *Prace Historyczne* 33 (1971) (= *Erasmiana Cracoviensia, W 500-lecie urodzin Erazma z Rotterdamu* [Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1971]): 89–93.

Since they are not on account of my inability to view Erasmianism from the global perspective of sixteenth-century religious heterodoxy, and all I could do here is reproduce what Konrad Górski wrote in his rather excellent studies on Erasmianism¹⁵ as a source and inspiration for Socinianism (which in fact I did in my digressive observations, where only the last inferred similarity is lacking a precedent), therefore I confine myself to a comparatist attempt on a much smaller scale, yet underscoring that the word “attempt” is fully appropriate here for the results achieved.

*

Let me begin by saying that the above-mentioned characteristics of Sozzini's views, when juxtaposed with those held by Erasmus, are also manifested in the exegetic method employed in *Explicatio*. First, it expands on some elements that make up Erasmus' theory of exegesis; second, it constitutes a disambiguation—usually in a drastically acute form—of rather casual advice and instruction offered by Erasmus; third, it specifies and elaborates on principles laid down by Erasmus in a direction that he neither followed nor even anticipated, and that he certainly would never accept. I think I will best precede my more in-depth account and exemplification of this characterisation with several remarks about the specific situation created by the writings of both thinkers, which need to be accounted for in this study. This is because the two works represent different literary genres, testifying to deeply-ingrained differences both in their intellectual professions and their predispositions, mentality and temperaments determining those careers. These differences are not without significance when we realise the similarities but, above all, differences between the two thinkers' methods of biblical exegesis. Let us first take a look at those divergences.

There are few separate works by Sozzini devoted to practical and methodological questions used by philologists and theologians-Bible experts. Likewise, texts addressing other questions hardly ever relate to knowledge acquisition and research. Even if such themes do crop up, they are always secondary. If they happen to be the subject matter of a particular work, this study will be one written for a specific occasion, and undertaking a methodological enquiry seems not so much the result of an inner call and own initiative as a response to someone else's request. This is nicely illustrated, on

¹⁵ Konrad GÓRSKI, *Studia nad dziejami polskiej literatury antytrynitarskiej XVI w.* (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1949), chap. 1, “Humanizm i antytrynitaryzm,” 1–51.

the one hand, by the philological and historical considerations regarding the credibility of the Bible in *De Sacrae Scripturae auctoritate*,¹⁶ and on the other hand by such occasional writings as the voluminous letter to Andrzej Dudycz, dated 10 June 1582,¹⁷ on the method of Bible interpretation, or the letter written to Andrzej Wojdowski, dated 18 March 1583,¹⁸ talking at length not about the method but rather the purpose (understood in ethical terms) of humanistic research. Still, the case of Erasmus is completely different. One of his strongest and most lasting passions was to discover paths leading to knowledge and the most efficient ways of gaining it. In contrast, in accordance with the period's characteristic view on the essence and source of knowledge, these methods can be in fact reduced to one skill: textual interpretation. This preoccupation of Erasmus is visible not only in separate didactic and methodological works, such as *De pueris instituendis* or *De ratione studii*, or *Ratio seu methodus verae theologiae*, which is primarily a handbook of biblical exegesis, but also in parts of *Enchiridion* devoted to exegesis of literary text¹⁹ (*Enchiridion* is no less than a "method" of living a godly and honest life²⁰)—and in *Ecclesiastes*, where themes from *Enchiridion* and perhaps even more from *Ratio* are further developed.²¹ This is one of the two differences—fundamental for our study—between the intellectual and writing practices exercised by Sozzini and Erasmus.

The second difference consists in the dissimilarity of their strictly biblical studies. Here, one might say, the relation is inversely proportional to the one I just described. Erasmus' passion as a learned biblical scholar is manifested, on the one hand, in his methodological indications how to search for meaning in Scripture, or—to be more precise and closer to the spirit and message of Erasmian formulations—how to interpret the Bible in a way that brings multiple benefits (not only hermeneutically),²² and on the other hand in deciphering the text of the Bible rather than clarifying its meaning because the sheer vastness of its content is such that it cannot be exhausted by any exe-

¹⁶ *De S. Scripturae auctoritate*, 22–27.

¹⁷ *BFP*, vol. 1, pp. 501a–508a.

¹⁸ *BFP*, vol. 1, pp. 469b–471b.

¹⁹ *Enchiridion*, LB V 7D–8B (H 31, 34–33, 12).

²⁰ Erasmus digresses on this, interrupting his discussion of textual exegesis (of pagan and biblical writings) in *Enchiridion*, LB V, 9D (H 35, 23–24): "Propositum erat, ut tibi vitae, non studii formam praescriberemus."

²¹ Concerning *Ratio*, Erasmus clearly emphasises this in *Ecclesiastes*, LB V 1033F.

²² *Ratio*, LB V 77 B–C (H 180, 22–30); cf. *Apologia in dial. Iac. Latomi* (lib. II, § 55), LB IX 94B.

genesis.²³ At any rate, one domain of work does not contradict the other; quite the opposite, they complement each other, and the commentator's self-restraint is paralleled by the self-restraint of the exegetic methodologist, who openly admits that his recommendations cannot be deemed universally valid, underscoring that there are multiple ways of interpreting the same work,²⁴ and that there are biblical texts that make the exegete humbly go down on his knees instead of trying at any cost to fathom and explicate them.²⁵ We shall return to a more detailed discussion of this aspect of Erasmus' exegetical recommendations later on. Now, to continue our characterisation of Erasmus in terms of technique and literary form, let us observe that obviously and naturally Erasmus' restrained *Adnotationes* is his commentary to the New Testament—where he basically intends to justify his text and translation (granted, doctrinal comments are not rare in *Adnotationes*, but in nearly all of them Erasmus scrupulously underlines their accidental character and that they contradict the work's purpose)²⁶—so is his paraphrase, which he stresses to be a kind of commentary, the implication being that it is peculiar and distinctive.²⁷ The explication of the Lord's Prayer (in the case of the New Testament) and some of the Psalms, as discussed in *Enarrationes* (in the case of the Old Testament), do not differ much from paraphrasing, notwithstanding certain external differences. For Sozzini, the text of Scripture, as a linguistically and literarily original work, was of much less interest. Instead, he passionately searches for meaning, the only and unambiguous, and for its conceptualization, which would be to articulate the established sense in terms and concepts heterogeneous to the text, and systematize it in a different formula, using a different pattern than the one furnished by the text itself. All of this simply contradicts the very idea of paraphrase, following

²³ *Paraclesis*, LB V, 140B (H 141, 35–142, 5, especially 142, 3–5: “quo longius in huius opes progressus fueris, hoc longius illius maiestate submoveris”).

²⁴ *Ratio*, LB V, 127C–D (H 284, 2–27); cf. *Ecclesiastes*, LB V 1047 A, and John B. PAYNE, “Toward the Hermeneutics of Erasmus,” in *Scrinium Erasmianum. Mélanges historiques publiés sous le patronage de l'Université de Louvain à l'occasion du cinquième centenaire de la naissance d'Erasmus*, ed. Joseph COPPENS (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 2:46–47, and p. 36, note 117.

²⁵ *Ratio*, LB V 76E–77A (H 179, 27–180, 9); cf. also *Ratio*, LB V 133F–136A (H 297, 6–301, 9); *De libero arbitrio*, LB IX 1216C.

²⁶ As regards the character of *Annotationes*, see, e.g., *Ep.* 337, 864–868; *Ep.* 384, 59–64; *Ad lectorem*, LB VI 5: “Primum annotatiunculas scribimus, non commentarios, et eas dumtaxat, quae ad lectionis sinceritatem pertinent.” See also John W. ALDRIDGE, *The Hermeneutics of Erasmus* (Winterthur 1966), 57ff. Traces of reflection on the casual character of doctrinal commentaries can be found in *Annotationes (in Mt. 5, 11)*, LB VI 27F; *Annotationes (in Mt. 5, 37)*, LB VI 29F; *Annotationes (in Mt. 6, 12)*, LB VI 35E.

²⁷ *Ep.* 1255, 38; *Ep.* 1342, 929.

faithfully the message of the work it refers to, preserving, as best as possible, certain formal and literary elements. For Sozzini paraphrase is not enough, nor does he deem it necessary to comment on text only to demonstrate that its specific form is authentic or show that a given translation is the most adequate. Sozzini's typical biblical exegesis consists in discussing a topic that has an arbitrary relevance to Scripture, yet based on almost exclusively biblical content. Sozzini left behind few commentaries in the strict sense of the term, yet they rely on the assumptions just mentioned: they are monothematic, revolving around one biblical question; Scripture forms the foundation for a logical argument that culminates in a proven thesis. This is the case not only in *De loco Pauli Apostoli in Epistolae ad Romanos cap. septimo...*, whose complete title contains the word *disputatio*, with a subtitle specifying (whether authentic or not) the subject matter even further: *Utrum Apostolus illic sub sua ipsius persona de seipso iam per Christi spiritum regenerato necne loquatur*, but also in *Explicatio primae partis primi capituli Euangelii Ioannis*, which bears all the hallmarks of a commentary, elucidating the interpreted text by strictly following its argumentation. If we were to employ terms from a different epoch—which, nevertheless, have some relevance to sixteenth-century biblical exegesis (of which we speak further below) and certainly figuring in minds of its reformers—that is, from scholastic literary nomenclature, we might be tempted to say that *Explicatio* is a commentary that scholastics knew as *ad litteram textus*; in contrast, *De loco Pauli Apostoli* definitely constitutes an *ad modum quaestionis* commentary—and this type of commentary seems to agree with Sozzini's intellectual predilections and the tasks he deemed as essential for any theologian. To continue this mediaeval trail of associations, we might also want to say that Erasmian biblical *lectio* was replaced by Sozzini with a philosophically and theologically grounded *quaestio*. Put differently and in line with the contemporary classification of sciences, we may simply state that Erasmus, a biblical scholar, was a philologist, whereas Sozzini (if he can be called a biblical scholar at all) practiced not philology but biblical theology.²⁸

²⁸ Naturally, differences between Erasmus and Sozzini as exegetes or “biblists-theologians” (key features of Sozzini's approach are marginally discussed in Delio CANTIMORI, *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento. Ricerche storiche* (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1939), 350: “In Fausto il ragionamento astratto precede sempre l'argomentazione scritturale”) cannot be documented in the case of Sozzini the way it is done here for Erasmus, because—as noted above—Sozzini did not come up with any exegetic principles in the strict sense. For this reason, Sozzini's method or theory of exegesis was inferred and reconstructed from material that is slightly adequate, derived from his own practice and juxtaposed with his theoretical observations, which are not only scarce but also

Differences at the technical level are clearly visible in those biblical studies of the two authors which show the greatest external and formal affinity resulting from the same genre: Erasmus' *Adnotationes* and Sozzini's *Explicatio*. The former's commentary to his edition and translation of the New Testament would be impossible if it did not comment on the original—it is in this textual grounding that Erasmus saw the only way to restore the true value of the *viva imago Christi*—this repeated and perhaps the more sublime incarnation of Christ—Scripture.²⁹ The play-safe strategy is not the reason

arrived at entirely incidentally. The most important ones, as I believe, can be found in *De Sacrae Scripturae auctoritate...*, pp. 22–27, where Sozzini considers the question whether differences among manuscripts of the New Testament demonstrate a distortion of its meaning. Strikingly, Sozzini does not seem to care about these differences, not only regarding them as something natural but plainly as a proof of its authenticity (pp. 24–25: “inter antiqua scripta illud minus depravatum censi debet, cuius pluribus in locis variae lectiones extant: ut verissime sit, in quolibet loco, quem tempus immutavit, veram lectionem extare; quam lector, ratione duce et collatione aliorum locorum similium, assequi atque amplecti possit. Magis vero depravatum illud existimandum est, cuius nulla usquam extat varia lectio”), downplaying them since it is impossible to distort Scripture in fragments where important messages are communicated (p. 23: “si quis dixerit, ex depravatione in rebus levioribus iure dubitari posse, ne hoc idem in rebus gravioribus acciderit, respondebo, iam hic, ut demonstratum est, pro concessio sumi, in rebus gravioribus hoc non accidisse”). Further, Sozzini believes that grave or utter distortions, consciously introduced by those wanting to bend Scripture to their own dogmatic assumptions, would be impossible because not only many different versions of the original texts exist but also numerous translations and commentaries can be found, where the source text is cited; thanks to them, passages can be recognized, as it invariably happened (pp. 25–26, esp. p. 26: “ex eis ipsis codicibus gloriantur hodie innumeri se detegere istorum [i.e., forgers of the Bible] tyrannidem ac falsitatem innumerabilem ab eis receptarum opinionum”). Such philological matters fascinated Erasmus, even more than Sozzini. Erasmus considered them to be at the heart of exegesis understood as “biblical philology” (this concept is discussed in Ernst-Wilhelm KOHLS, *Die Theologie des Erasmus* (Basel: Reinhardt, 1966), 1:190, 2:131), while Sozzini viewed them not as settled matters but rather as less relevant and thus rejected. At any rate, Sozzini juxtaposes philological conjectures about distortions of the Bible with the following “logical” conjecture of the faithful yet rational theologian (p. 26): “Quamquam praetera et contra hanc et contra quamcumque aliam coniecturam, quam quis in medium afferre possit, depravationis scriptorium Novi Testamenti coniectura quaedam pugnat longe illis gravior, quae sola eas omnes diluere atque evertere potest. Ea est, quod plus quam verisimile censi debet, Deum, cuius bonitas et providential infinita est, non permisisse, ut illa scripta, quibus continebatur potissima, quam sui ipsius suaeque voluntatis simulque salutis nostrae humano generi, toto hoc ab orbe condito tempore, largitus est, notitia quaeque ut talia, quae eam continerent, a vere piis in ipsum Deum hominibus semper recepta fuerunt, ulla ratione depravata ac corrupta fuerint.” As for the monothematic character of Sozzini's commentaries, see, e.g., *Commentarius in Epistolam Ioannis Apostoli primam*, prolegomena, *BFP*, vol. 1, p. 157a: “statuendum est ... postremo, quae sit eius [sc. Epistolae] summa quaedam sive argumentum,” words preceding the summary.

²⁹ On *viva imago Christi* see *Paraclesis*, LB V 144B–D (H 148, 24–149, 12) (148, 35–37: “At cur non potius vivam illius imaginem in hisce veneremur libris?”; 149, 8–9: “hae [sc. evangelicae litterae] tibi sacrosanctam illius referunt imaginem”; *Enchiridion*, LB V 31F–32D (H 75, 14–76,

(or partly, at least) why Erasmus keeps reminding himself to keep to his modest role of a “grammarian” whenever he happens to wander off the track and let his doctrinal reflections roam free (or, more precisely, historical-doctrinal reflections—a label that radically plays down those departures).³⁰ In fact, Erasmus was aware of the limits to doctrinal exegesis, which necessarily employs tools that are heterogeneous to Scripture.³¹ Sozzini does otherwise. Early enough, in the introduction to his *Explicatio*³² makes it clear that there is absolutely no need to draw on the original text, or any translation other than the Vulgate, to extract the authentic sense of John’s Prologue. I believe that Sozzini’s justification that he does not wish to delve into philological problems arising from an analysis of the original so as not to make the argument inaccessible to simple people³³ is at best a half-truth for two fundamentally different reasons. First, despite this pledge, Sozzini consults the Greek original several times and does not even hesitate, if need be, to reach for the Hebrew lexical and conceptual pool. Second, the very kind and subject of Sozzini’s considerations is such that he can disregard the subtle shades of meaning that are untranslatable.³⁴ It is easy to explain, as it seems, why for a person who used logic to conclude that Christ cannot be God it was equally unimportant whether the metonymic yet metaphorical description of the role of Christ should be rendered in Latin as *verbum* or *sermo*, or whether it is denoted by λόγος, φάτις, ῥήμα in Greek or by some other designation.

16) (75, 5–6: “vivam illius [sc. Pauli Apostoli] imaginem adhunc loquentem, quae in illius litteris superest”); see also *Paraclesis*, LB V 142E (H 146, 22–28); *Ratio*, LB V 76C (H 179, 14–16). On Erasmus’ understanding of Christ’s real presence in the Gospels, see KOHLS, *Die Theologie*, 1:80, 98, 182–183; Sem DRESDEN, “Présence d’Erasme,” in *Actes du Congrès Erasme, organisé par la Municipalité de Rotterdam sous les auspices de l’Académie Royale Néerlandaise des Sciences et des Sciences Humaines*, ed. Cornelis Reedijk (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1971), 1–13, especially p. 8. On Erasmus’ restoration of the Bible warped by “barbarians” see *Enchiridion*, LB V 66AB (H 135, 19–33); see also the prefaces to the New Testament, quoted in ALDRIDGE, *The Hermeneutics of Erasmus*, chap. 4, “Philology as method of interpretation,” 98–126.

³⁰ See above, note 26.

³¹ See *Paraclesis*, LB V 143D (H 148, 3–10); *Ratio*, LB V 82B–84A (H 190, 12–193, 23).

³² *Explicatio*, p. 4: “In sacrarum vero litterarum locis citandis in his verbis, quae nobis explicanda sumpsimus, (ut omnis calumniandi occasion auferatur) veterem translationem secuti sumus, nisi si quando a sana interpretatione nimis recte recedere est visa.”

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 11: “ut exemplis quam accomodatissimis imperitorum causa utamur” (where no language is at stake but the kind of biblical metaphors and metonymies quoted therein).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28: (ἐρχόμενος, v. 9, which might as well be translated either as *venientem* [sc. *hominem*] or as *veniens* [sc. *lux*]); pp. 36–38 (*verbum caro factum est* or *verbum caro fuit* in relation to ἐγένετο); p. 44 (μονογενής is not the equivalent of *unigenitus* but *acceptissimus et aliis dignitate praestans*); cf. pp. 29–30 (the true meaning of *mundus* in line 10, elucidated by analysing certain properties of Hebrew).

Such are the differences between Sozzini and Erasmus as exegetes of the Bible—general ones and those visible in *Explicatio*, a work which easily lends itself to comparatist analysis. It is obvious, however, that the identification of these differences alone is not the only task here: it would be a futile undertaking if we did not define a *tertium comparationis* against and relative to them. In my view, there is at least one methodological and practical aspect that both authors share. Since Erasmus, as a theoretician of exegesis, described it with greater detail and precision than Sozzini, who would not theorize on ways of biblical interpretation but put them in practice, let us turn to its characterization by Erasmus in his *Ratio seu methodus verae theologiae*.

Convinced that there is no such thing as the one and only objective interpretation of any contentious passage in the Bible, Erasmus prescribes many hermeneutical techniques: allegorical reading, which traditionally distinguishes four senses (which he, drawing on ancient exegetes, would rather limit to three or even two³⁵)—a philological collation of passages in the original and in a translation, direct or indirect (Erasmus was probably the first to realize the benefits of the latter so lucidly);³⁶ knowledge of languages³⁷ and “antiquity”, as well as any other biblical contexts³⁸—and a multifaceted analysis of literary forms and conventions;³⁹ contextual understanding of the content of each isolated episode⁴⁰—and reshuffling the content of the entire Bible (in *Ratio* this naturally concerns only the New Testament) to arrange it in homogenous thematic blocks, i.e., so-called *loci theologici*;⁴¹ and finally, besides these and other subtle techniques, simply learning text by heart.⁴² It goes without saying that Erasmus recommends drawing on both the “material” (substantive) and the “methodological” heritage of previous commentators—a thing he does—which he nevertheless ad-

³⁵ *Ratio*, LB V 124E–127D (H 274, 24–284, 27), esp. H 280, 23–27 (addition from 1523 that is missing from *LB*); cf. *Methodus*, H 157, 25–158, 5; *Ecclesiastes*, LB V 1034D–E; see also KOHLS, *Die Theologie*, 1:135–36; 2:114; PAYNE, “Toward the Hermeneutics of Erasmus,” 36.

³⁶ *Ratio*, LB V 78B–F (H 182, 18–183, 19); LB V 79B–C (H 184, 10–22); *Apologia*, LB VI f.** 2r (H 165, 31–168, 7); *Ep.* 182, 151ff; see also: ALDRIDGE, *The Hermeneutic of Erasmus*, 101ff.

³⁷ *Ratio*, LB V 77E–79C (H 181, 15–184, 22); LB V 120C–121B (H 266, 5–267, 23); LB V 124B (H 273, 23–24).

³⁸ *Ratio*, LB V 79C–80D (H 185, 23–186, 34).

³⁹ *Ratio*, LB V 80D–83A (H 187, 1–191, 30); LB V 117A–120C (H 259, 32–266, 4).

⁴⁰ *Ratio*, LB V 85E–F (H 196, 29–197, 5); LB V 128B–F (H 285, 28–287, 8).

⁴¹ *Ratio*, LB V 130F–131B (H 291, 13–34) (cf. *Methodus*, H 158, 33–158, 14).

⁴² *Ratio*, LB V 132A (H 293, 19–26) (cf. *Methodus*, H 159, 23–24).

vises to submit to free critical judgment regardless of their authority.⁴³ Dividing commentators into “old” (*veteres, antiqui*) and “new” (*recentiores, neoteric*), recommending the former and disapproving the latter,⁴⁴ are both instructive in relation to the negative criteria that are useful for choosing non-Christian aids for interpreting the Bible. These criteria essentially refer to methods of exegesis that were developed on the basis of literary material closely resembling the Bible; this category encompasses a great deal of ancient poetry and philosophy, chiefly the Platonic tradition,⁴⁵ and exclude works created on the basis of material and in the intellectual atmosphere alien to Christianity and the spirit of the Bible—here, generally speaking, belongs the philosophical tradition of Aristotelianism, which finds its extension in scholastics, in a monstrous and hybrid way (because it merged with Christianity against its own nature and that of Aristotelianism).⁴⁶ Nevertheless, even these “external” aids that Erasmus thinks are worth accepting can be only of secondary importance. At any rate, of the numerous techniques of interpretation listed above, Erasmus clearly prefers one, relying on the patristic practice of giving priority to it. This method explains the Bible by means of the Bible:

... haec non Origeni tantum, sed et Augustino optima ratio est interpretandi divinas litteras, si locum obscurum ex aliorum locorum collatione reddamus illustrem et mysticam scripturam mystica, sacra sacram exponat. Qua quidem ex re non solum illud commodi capietur, ut sensus alibi non intellectus percipiatur, verum adiungetur auctoritas. Nam quamvis ubique divinae scripturae auctoritas vel unico verbo nobis satisfacit, tamen alinquando fit, ut de interpretatione possit ambigi, praesertim cum veteres etiam non raro dissentient. Proinde si plura consentient, ad rem facient; sin dissentient aut etiam pugnabunt, excitabunt nos ad exactius scrutinium.

[For in the opinion not only of Origen but of Augustine also, the best method of interpreting divine literature is this: to make an obscure passage clear through a

⁴³ *Ratio*, LB V 132E–133E (H 295, 1–297, 5); on the critical approach of the Fathers, see *ibid.*, LB V 133A (H 295, 20–21): “ut hos ipsos cum iudicio delectuque legamus, etiamsi reverenter legi volo.”

⁴⁴ *Ratio*, LB V 82A–B (H 189, 26–190, 11); LB V 90A–C (H 204, 34–205, 23); LB V 127E (H 284, 34–36); cf. *Enchiridion*, LB V 8D–E (H 33, 31–34, 13); LB V 29F–30B (H 71, 21–72, 10).

⁴⁵ *Ratio*, LB V 80D–81A; 82C–E (H 187, 1–35; 190, 12–191, 2); *Enchiridion*, LB V 7D–8A; 30A–B (H 31, 34–32, 32; 71, 33–72, 10), cf. also LB V 29B (H 71, 13–19).

⁴⁶ *Ratio*, LB V 82E–84A (H 191, 2–193, 23); LB V 133F–137B (H 297, 6–304, 15); *Enchiridion*, LB V 304 (H 71, 33–34).

comparison of other passages, to explain mystic Scripture from mystic Scripture, the sacred from the sacred. From this, indeed, not only will one reap the advantage that the meaning, not otherwise understood, will be perceived, but also authority will be added. For although the authority of Divine Scripture everywhere, even with a single word, is sufficient for us, still sometimes cases arise where there can be ambiguity about the interpretation, especially when even the ancients quite often disagree. Accordingly, if many passages agree, they will stimulate confidence; if they disagree or are even in conflict, they will arouse us to a more thorough investigation.]⁴⁷

Neither Hajo Holborn, the editor and publisher of *Ratio seu methodus*,⁴⁸ nor Charles Béné, the author of an excellent monograph on Erasmus and St. Augustine,⁴⁹ provide any reference to Origenes, whom Erasmus evokes first. As for Augustine, Erasmus refers to *De doctrina christiana*, which he regarded as the most important model for *Ratio seu methodus*.⁵⁰ The meticulous research carried out by Béné reveals how much this text bore on Erasmus' views, not only with respect to biblical exegesis.⁵¹ It is worth quoting these Augustinian passages to see whether and what elements are his in the quoted excerpts, having confronted texts by the two authors.

The principle of explaining abstruse passages using more intelligible fragments is one of the many hermeneutic techniques used by Augustine. He lists it in a logical order after another, more fundamental rule that concerns the knowledge of biblical language, but he does not emphasize or even imply any significance it may have:

Tum vero, facta quadam familiaritate cum ipsa lingua divinarum scripturarum, in ea, quae obscura sunt, aperienda et discutienda pergendum est, ut ad obscuriores lectiones illustrandas de manifestioribus sumantur exempla, et quaedam certarum sententiarum testimonia dubitationem auferant.

[After this, when we have made ourselves to a certain extent familiar with the language of Scripture, we may proceed to open up and investigate the obscure

⁴⁷ *Ratio*, LB V 131B–C (H 292, 1–11). [Translation from *The New Testament Scholarship of Erasmus: An Introduction with Erasmus' Prefaces and Ancillary Writings, Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 41, ed. Robert D. Sider (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 691 (emphasis removed).]

⁴⁸ H 292, 1.

⁴⁹ Charles BENE, *Érasme et Saint Augustin ou influence de Saint Augustin sur l'humanisme d'Érasme* (Geneva: Droz, 1969), 273ff.

⁵⁰ *Ratio*, LB V 57D (H 178, 7–17); cf. *Methodus*, H 150, 17–22.

⁵¹ Cf. BENE, *Érasme*; see also KOHLS, *Die Theologie*, 1:36; cf. *Ep.* 844, 119–271.

passages, and in doing so draw examples from the plainer expressions to throw light upon the more obscure, and use the evidence of passages about which there is no doubt to remove all hesitation in regard to the doubtful passages. And in this matter memory counts for a great deal; but if the memory be defective, no rules can supply the want.]⁵²

Further, where this hermeneutical principle is discussed, Augustine shows even more reserve:

Ubi apertius ponuntur [sc. verba et locutiones], ibi discendum est, quomodo in locis intelligentur obscuris.

[And in the same way other objects are not single in their signification, but each one of them denotes not two only but sometimes even several different things, according to the connection in which it is found.]⁵³

As is clear from the above comparison, Erasmus not only assigned to the Augustinian method a label putting it above all others (“haec ... Augustino *optima* ratio est interpretandi”), which Augustine uses a lot, but also justified it in his own way, making Augustine’s argumentation relevant, so to speak. It appears that the principle *locum obscurum ex aliorum locorum collatione reddere illustrem* not only explains the Bible best but also provides something that no other can guarantee—a reading that is genuinely authoritative—one that does not seek any help from outside. Scripture—holy and mystical, full of mysteries—interprets itself, as it were: “mysticam scripturam mystica, sacra sacram exponit.” The Augustinian theme comes second: if a comparison of related passages in the Bible reveals contradictions, it can provoke a more scrupulous scrutiny. For Augustine, contradictions in the Bible have their own place in the economy of revelation: they are supposed to elicit the saving cognitive effort that would not have been made if Scripture were a tight logical sequence, free from ambiguity or contradiction.⁵⁴ It is one of the fundamental themes in Augustine’s theory of exegesis; in logical terms, it takes precedence over the *locum ex loco* principle. Eras-

⁵² *De Doctrina Christiana*, 2, 9, 14 (cf. 3, 28, 29). [Translation from <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/ddc2.html>.]

⁵³ *De Doctrina Christiana*..., 3, 26, 37. [Translation from <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/ddc3.html>.]

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 3, 25, 36. In Erasmus, see *Ratio*, LB V 93C–E (H 215, 3–31); some examples of biblical *loci* regarding Christ and having characteristics “quae prima specie pugnare etiam inter se videntur,” were assembled probably independently of St. Augustine.

mus takes the opposite path, deeming it only a supplement or addition and introducing it into *Ratio* only in the second edition (1520, or in the third if we assume the first edition to be the 1516 *Methodus*, where the first sentence of the quoted passage is identical) along with a several-sentence-long passage that begins with the words “Qua quidem ex re.”⁵⁵ If this extension of the original text of *Ratio* is carefully considered, it will turn out to be in fact a philological specification of a reference to Augustine, which was previously formulated without enough clarity. It therefore seems pertinent to say that in the said text by Erasmus, the formulation “(ut) mysticam scripturam mystica, sacram sacra exponat” is of paramount importance, being original, spontaneous, and formulated boldly and without restraint—untrammelled by the scrupulousness of the author amending his own text. This captures the gist of Erasmian exegesis, which—despite its reliance on Augustine—cannot be seen as the product of mere imitation, a realisation of the formula that Erasmus was often vocal about—that is, to return to the ancient and patristic form of Christian culture. Just as many points in Erasmus’ doctrine reinterpret (sometimes referring to rather fundamental content) patristic themes, intelligible only when viewed against the backdrop of the thousand-year-long mediaeval Christian culture, this principle of exegesis, which is the most important of those expounded in *Ratio seu methodus verae theologiae*, becomes clear only when considered as an immanent and constitutive element of Erasmian doctrine, separated from Church Fathers by centuries of scholastic exegesis.⁵⁶

What does Erasmus’ formula amount to, then, if we attempt to make sense of it not through the prism of the Augustian theory of exegesis but in the manner I have just postulated? Let us first consult the literature devoted specifically to Erasmian exegesis. Unfortunately, John William Aldridge does not attend to it sufficiently in *The Hermeneutic of Erasmus*:⁵⁷ the passage quoted from *Ratio* serves him merely to illustrate the role and significance of patristic models in Erasmus’ exegesis.⁵⁸ However, Aldridge does not reference it in his analysis of the Erasmian appeal to go back to the source, concluding nonetheless his discussion with interesting notes on the difference between Erasmus’ *ad fontes* and Luther’s *sola scriptura*.⁵⁹ In con-

⁵⁵ See *H*, *Einleitung*, xiv–xvi.

⁵⁶ See KOHLS, *Die Theologie*, 1:66–67, 182–183; 2:88, 86–87, 100–101, 124–129; DOMAŃSKI, “Z patrystycznych źródeł.”

⁵⁷ ALDRIDGE, *The Hermeneutics of Erasmus* (as in note 26).

⁵⁸ *The Hermeneutics of Erasmus*, 87.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

trast, Ernst-Wilhelm Kohls,⁶⁰ in an extremely interesting way, elucidates in his monograph on Erasmian theology the crucial principle of exegesis, stating that exegesis was not a goal for the thinker, who considered the treatment of exegesis as an autonomous end to be a perversion of contemporary exegesis; that Scripture interprets itself and that it finds human exegesis redundant; finally, that both the goal and horizon of Erasmus' exegetic endeavors—and thus all theoretical advice on exegesis—is to submit oneself to the mystery of Scripture.⁶¹ Similar observations can be found in two studies on Erasmian exegesis: *La méditation des Écritures chez Erasme* by M. J. Etienne⁶² and M. J. B. Payne's *Toward the Hermeneutics of Erasmus*.⁶³

Let us clarify these claims, also with the help of Kohls' advice in this regard, so that they may become more relevant for the present confrontation. The *locum ex loco* explication and its effectiveness are circumscribed by mystery—Scripture contains inscrutable mysteries, and attempting to unravel them at all cost is wrong.⁶⁴ It is even worse if one tries to do so using means and tools that are not fit for this task, and this is the sin of late scholasticism.⁶⁵ The exercise of the philological *lectio* that Erasmus proposes, following Church Fathers, alternately with meditation and prayer,⁶⁶ cannot

⁶⁰ KOHLS, *Die Theologie* (as in note 28).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 2:127, 136–138, 192.

⁶² In *Scrinium Erasmianum*, 3–11. In this exquisite essay, which amplifies certain features of Erasmus' theory of exegesis, contrasting it with the analogous theory of Spinoza, also identifies other ideas that are important from the present perspective, especially the explication of Erasmus' interest in the original text of the Bible (p. 6): "Erasmus is interested in literature not just out of love for formal beauty but, to be more precise, because he saw literary form as more than an adornment of already developed concepts, an accidental luxury, somewhat risky, perhaps; he regarded it as intimately tied to the message that it forms and gives existence to." Jacques Latomus, in contrast, argues that "concepts are prior to words, which means that studying original languages, as much as it can be beneficial, is not in any way fundamental"; this applies, *mutatis mutandis*, also to Sozzini.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 13–49. Also in this in-depth study of philosophical and "technical" problems inherent in Erasmus' exegesis the importance of *mysterium* is emphasized (p. 34): "in spite of the optimism of his [Luther's] scientific exegesis, Erasme retains a certain reverence and scepticism vis-à-vis the *mysterium* of the Bible"; as well as the multiplicity of biblical meanings foregrounded by Erasmus (pp. 46–47). Unfortunately, I have not been able to consult the third, latest work on this topic, George CHANTREINE, "*Mysterium*" et "*philosophia Christi*" selon Erasme. *Étude de la Lettre a Volz et de la "Ratio verae theologiae" (1518)*, mentioned in *Scrinium Erasmianum*, vol. 2; see the bibliography there.

⁶⁴ *Ratio*, LB V 76C–77A (H 179, 16–180, 8) (cf. *Methodus*, H 151, 4–17); *Ratio*, LB V 134F–135B (H 299, 7–17).

⁶⁵ *Ratio*, LB V 82B–84A (H 190, 12–193, 23); especially LB V 83A (H 191, 33–192, 30); *Ratio*, LB V 133F–138C (H 297, 6–305, 30).

⁶⁶ *Ratio*, LB V 77C (H 180, 32–34); cf. *Enchiridion*, LB V 5Eff. (H 25, 11ff.); *Paraclesis*, LB V 142D (H 146, 8–9).

and will not, anyway, transcend the boundary of the mystery.⁶⁷ Its tangible benefit must be such a cognitive effect (which owing to the Bible's content and style is necessarily tied to the emotional, or experiential, result) that the one who practices *lectio* is internally transformed.⁶⁸ To enable this change, one need not cross the boundary of the intelligible; on the contrary, doing so obviates the effectiveness of engaged reading.⁶⁹ The speculative philosophical *quaestio* applied by late scholastics (not ones like Thomas Aquinas, who ushered in the golden age of scholasticism⁷⁰) is incapable of effecting internal change in the scholar carrying out exegesis. Added to that is the drawback that at the lower, cognitive level concerned with dispassionate and disengaged determination of meaning—or possible meanings—in a specific passage of the Bible its effectiveness is incomparably lower.⁷¹ This is the sense of preferring the *locum et loco* principle and the limit of relying on “external aids”. Erasmus have nothing against applying these aids within those limits while not regarding the *locum ex loco* principle as exclusive, as discussed at length above.

*

As already mentioned, Sozzini's exegetical practice visible in *Explicatio* is taking the Erasmian principle to the extreme, chiefly by making it the only one. Throughout his piece, Sozzini does not evoke even one authority or any “external aid”. He expounds the Prologue to the Gospel of John as if no one had done that before him; when he defines his goal, he takes all previous exegesis of this text to be of so little avail that it deserves no polemic other than saying that John's explication of *logos* has never been properly interpreted.⁷² The exclusivity of the principle of explaining Scripture through

⁶⁷ See KOHLS, *Die Theologie*, 2:65–66; 1:27; 2:111.

⁶⁸ *Ratio*, LB V 77B–C (H 180, 22–30); *Ratio*, LB V 133F (H 296, 31–297, 5); *Methodus*, H 161, 10–16 (*lectio* on works by commentators and theologians); *Paraclesis*, LB V 141D–F (H 144, 18–145, 3); LB V 142C–E (H 146, 5–22).

⁶⁹ *Ratio*, LB V 134F–136A (H 299, 5–301, 9).

⁷⁰ Cf. KOHLS, *Die Theologie*, 1:223–24.

⁷¹ See, e.g., *Ep.* 858, 57–60 (H 4, 28–31); *Ratio*, LB V 133C–E (H 296, 16–31); *Methodus*, H 160, 36–161, 8.

⁷² Although, as a side note, Sozzini mentions in *Epistola ad lectorem* several “proper explanations” provided by his predecessors (p. 3: “in iis..., quae ab aliquibus ante nos recte exposita fuere, breves esse laboravimus, longiores tantummodo fuimus in iis explicandis, quorum verus sensus omnes prorsus (qui quidem extarent) explanatores latuisse videtur”), in his own comments he limits himself to purely negative statements; see, e.g., p. 29 (commentary to the phrase “Et mundus eum non cognovit,” *Io.* 1, 10): “Quid ... hoc loco sibi velit Ioannes, a nemine (quod sci-

Scripture refers not only to authorities and scholars of the past. In *Explicatio*, Sozzini does not draw any comparisons with the non-Christian world of antiquity and its intellectual achievements as tools that could be helpful in interpreting the Bible—which Erasmus did as a rule. Therefore, by implementing the principle that Scripture explicates itself, Sozzini is more Erasmian than Erasmus himself. He may be less categorical in declaring thus, but let us recall that neither in *Explicatio* nor elsewhere was he inclined to theorize on proper exegesis. Perhaps the sufficiently convincing argument that he embraced this principle as his programme, fully aware of its implication as a methodological directive, is that he states several times in *Explicatio* that the best or “the most elegant” way of interpreting Scripture is to explain one passage by means of another.⁷³

However, this is where similarity ends, already diminished by Sozzini’s exclusive claim to the application of a rule that is one among many in the programme pursued by Erasmus. Despite justifying this exegetic rule as the only one, Sozzini’s view on what Scripture is as containing divine revelation and on how much it submits to human inquiry, and how essential it is for the attainment of goals for which the revelation took place, has a different grounding than that which made Erasmus proclaim the superiority of this principle over others—on the whole, it differs radically from Erasmus’ view on this matter. In Sozzini’s perspective, Scripture which contains mysteries inaccessible to reason is internally contradictory because divine revelation would be in vain and pointless if it gave people a thing that people could not comprehend with the help of the only tool they possess—reason.⁷⁴ I reckon dwelling further on this issue makes no sense, especially as we are going to hear a lecture on rationalism in Sozzini and his followers from someone who is far more competent in this regard than me.⁷⁵

My task here is to draw attention to how Sozzini’s use of the concept of revelation caused him to depart from Erasmian *lectio* and move toward

am) adhuc recte expositum fuit”; p. 38 (*egento* = *fuit*, not *factum est* in *Io.* 1, 14): “mirum est ... tot theologos ... in hanc sententiam non cessisse.”

⁷³ *Epistola ad lectorem*, p. 9: “Et sane mirum videtur, quid cum theologi fere omnes passim testentur, nullum interpretandi genus melius et securius inveniri posse, quam si sacrae litterae eisdem sacris litteris exponantur, hoc tamen loco, sui ipsorum obliti, valedicto divinarum litterarum auctoritati, suis somniis indulgent.” Sozzini’s “nullum intepretandi genus ... sacris litteris exponantur” resembles Erasmus’ statement, not only due to its phrasing but also the very concept of “security,” which is none else but Erasmus’ “authority.”

⁷⁴ See Ludwik CHMAJ, *Faust Socyn, 1539-1604* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1963), 21–25.

⁷⁵ See Zbigniew OGONOWSKI, “Le rationalisme danse la doctrine des sociniens,” in *Movimenti ereticali in Italia e in Polonia nei secoli XVI-XVII. Atti del Convegno italo-polacco, Firenze, 22-24 settembre 1971* (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, n.d.), 141–57.

quaestio, embracing and categorically reformulating one of the fundamental exegetic principles most closely related to Erasmus' postulate. This is clearly visible, as it were, from outside, in Sozzini's other exegetic works, but its spirit is present in *Explicatio* too. Naturally, it is not a scholastic *quaestio*: it neither invokes four senses nor follows the argumentative schemata developed at mediaeval universities. In its external form, Sozzini's commentary has more affinity to commentaries furnished by Church Fathers and, even more so, to ones offered by modern philologists. However, from the perspective of Erasmus' exegesis (which I adopt here as I explained at the outset) the differences are formal at best. For Erasmus, an exegete who denies the existence of mysteries of divine revelation in the name of non-contradiction or any other principle inferred from the realm of human rationality, in fact follows late scholastics, who interpreted the Bible using tools alien to its letter and spirit. Numerous analogies present in the doctrines of both thinkers—which are rather peculiar, as I have tried to demonstrate in my digressions—cannot invalidate the perhaps fundamental disparity in their attitude towards the relationship between human reason and divine revelation. Having encountered in the Bible the problem of Christ-man called God (in just a few instances), Erasmus found himself helpless, treating his helplessness not as a failure of an exegete or a theologian—following St. John Chrysostom, in his *Ratio verae theologiae* he urges us to acknowledge that two natures are united in Christ, and that it is futile to enquire how it happened.⁷⁶ This in fact underlay Erasmus' preference for the human face of Christ, which so many older historians of Renaissance religious thought regarded as the negation of the other, divine face. Sozzini, on the contrary, solved this problem promptly by interpreting the unintelligible in terms of the intelligible: assuming that divine revelation addressed to humanity cannot contain anything that would contradict reason,⁷⁷ he considered it the duty of the exegete to find such an explanation of Scripture that would be fully knowable by means of reason. Both thinkers employed the same principle for Scripture to explicate itself. It is extremely difficult to judge which attitude was more consistent with the hermeneutic principle. In any case, these attitudes have been a feature of Christianity for centuries: Erasmus teaches Tertullian's credo of *quia absurdum* (with some modifications), while Sozzini adopts the scholastic *fides quaerens intellectum* (also modifying it, perhaps more profoundly).

⁷⁶ *Ratio*, LB V 134E (H 298, 5–33).

⁷⁷ *De ecclesia*, BFP, 1:343a; cf. Zbigniew OGONOWSKI, "Wiara i rozum w doktrynach religijnych Socyna i Locke'a," in *Studia nad arianizmem*, ed. Ludwik Chmaj (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1959), 436.

*

I do not think that my considerations so far, serving chiefly to highlight profound differences between Erasmus and Sozzini, have had *tertium comparationis* to make them meaningful. It is true, however, that I have shown them in terms of an exegetic principle widespread in the sixteenth century, which thus can be regarded as obvious yet completely accidental resemblance if Sozzini could adopt it from anyone. Indeed, he adopted it from the only certain source for his *Explicatio*—an anonymous commentary to the Prologue of the Gospel of John, identified by Cantimori as written by Sozzini's paternal uncle Lelius.⁷⁸ Sozzini's only addition to Fausto—visible at first glance—the clearly formulated principle of explicating Scripture through itself consists in calling it by its name, using a formula that is practically identical to the one Erasmus used in *Ratio*. Thus, the question arises whether there is any evidence suggesting it was a reading of Erasmus that made Fausto Sozzini realize that his uncle's hermeneutical treatment embodies a theoretical principle the knowledge of which is worth manifesting. In other words, the question is whether *Explicatio* contains any indications that the author read Erasmus. The question is entirely legitimate, not only for the comparison pursued here. It follows that the time when Sozzini wrote his *Explicatio* is a blank page in the biography of a young lawyer who turned to theology under the influence of his uncle's writings. We know very little about Sozzini's reading interests in this period, and he does not reveal any of his sources in *Explicatio* due to the exegetic principle he adopted. Let us then conclude this rather abstract comparative study with a more empirical and philosophical note. In what follows are three glosses intended to demonstrate similarities between Erasmus and Sozzini not only in terms of ideas but also their formulation. Disregarding a marginal remark in the Raków edition of *Explicatio* from 1618, which references Erasmus' adagium *Homo homini (Adag., 69)*,⁷⁹ no doubt an addition from the publisher (as it is missing from the first edition), I list three passages that point to Sozzini reading Erasmus, from the least to the most convincing.

In the first passage there is a commentary to the meaning of *verbum* in the first line of St. John's Prologue, where Sozzini complains that seeking some "abstruse natura aut substantia Christi" in Scripture lead to the introduction

⁷⁸ Delio CANTIMORI and Elisabeth FEIST, eds., *Per la storia degli eretici italiani del secolo sedicesimo in Europa* (Rome: Reale Accademia D'Italia, 1937), 61–78.

⁷⁹ LB II 54.

of “prius inaudita dogmata, Platonica certe magis quam Christiana, in Christi ecclesiam,” although the Bible warns us that “scrutator maiestatis opprimitur a gloria” (Proverbs 25:27). Later on, we read:

... dum Graecae philosophiae libentius quam Dei verbo dant operam, partem hanc, unde hominum pendet salus, vel intactam reliquerunt, vel ita frigide et oscitanter tractarunt, ut quidvis aliud egisse videantur. Quorum vestigia nos neutiquam insistentes, de Dei essentia disputationes fere omnes relinquamus, minimum siquidem ad pietatem conducere videntur; quid vero nos facere iusserit, quid nobis promiserit, diligenter inquiramus; ubi invenerimus, studiose servemus certoque future credemus.

[Greek philosophers, who focus on the words of God rather than actions, either entirely disregard the latter, although this is where salvation lies, or remain indifferent and bored, as if this was worth nothing. But we shall not focus on appearances and abandon all in-depth enquiry of God because it certainly is not pious to do so. Instead, we shall do as commanded: let us pursue what He so eagerly promised. And when we find it, let us tend to it so as to remain hopeful of the future.]⁸⁰

The point is not just that these words dovetail with Erasmus’ programme as outlined in *Paraclesis* and other prefaces to the New Testament (similarities that we discussed above), but also that certain formal and stylistic elements characteristic of Erasmus are repeated here: the quote from Proverbs (25:27) appears elsewhere in identical semantic function; the phrase *frigide tractare* is one of his favourites disengagement, just like in Sozzini, connotes indifference and a lack of involvement;⁸¹ finally, some phrases used by Sozzini are similar to ones appearing in Erasmus’ *Epistula de philosophia euangelica*:

At nescio quo pacto fit, ut hominum curiositas non alibi magis intendat omnes ingenii nervos quam in his, quae et plurimum absunt a captu mortalitatis et ad

⁸⁰ *Explicatio*, 12–13.

⁸¹ For more on this quotation from Proverbs, see, e.g., *De amabili Ecclesiae Concordia* (*Enarratio Ps. LXXXIII*), LB V 480B–C (on its frequent appearance in mediaeval exegeses, see De LUBAC, *L’exégèse médiévale*, 1:301–17). As regards *frigide tractare* and other sentences containing the words *frigide*, *frigidus*, *frigere*, see, among others, *Paraclesis*, LB V 139B (H 140, 11–14): “cum tam ardentibus animis in sua quisque studia mortales incumbant, hanc unam Christi philosophiam a nonnullis etiam Christianis rideri, a plerisque negligi, a paucis tractari, sed frigide; non enim dicam insincere”; *Ep.* 858, 57–59 (H 4, 28–30); *Ratio*, LB V 83F (H 191, 13–14) (“Haec demum nobis erudite videntur, quae sunt frigidissima”) and the entire context; *Colloquia, Convivum religiosum*, LB I 682A–B.

vitae pietatem quam minimum conducunt. Quod genus fere sunt illa, quae, disputantur de essentia divina.

[But somehow human curiosity directs all the powers of the mind towards those matters particularly that are both farthest removed from human understanding and are least conducive to the leading of a holy life—most disputations on the divine essence, for example.]⁸²

The second text is a commentary to the words “Omnia per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil, quod factum est,” demonstrating that *omnia* refers not to the creation of the visible world, but to this “spiritualis mundi structura,” which “euangelii verbo construitur.” Towards the end of the following passage from his commentary, Sozzini draws our attention to the addition and confirmation intended to specify the meaning of this passage:

Omnia haec igitur per Christum facta sunt et sine ipso factum est nihil, quod ad hanc (ut ita dixerim) factionem pertineat. Nam et ipse Apostolis suis dixit: Sine me nihil potestis facere (*Io.* 15, 5), qui locus hunc nostrum explicat elegantissime.

[Everything was done through Christ. Without him, nothing could happen pertaining to this party, so to speak. For he also said to his Apostles: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5), which elegantly explains the passage in question.]⁸³

Beyond doubt, this is the source of Sozzini’s *Explicatio*. Lelius Sozzini (allegedly) translated this passage *quo ad rem* with the help of other passages from the Bible,⁸⁴ in fact compiling many more such excerpts than listed in *Explicatio*. Alas, Lelius Sozzini offers no quote or even a reference to John 15:5! Yet we find the passage quoted as a commentary to *sine ipso* in Erasmus’ *Adnotationes* (where it serves as proof that the Greek χωρὶς αὐτοῦ is not *extra eum* in the sense of “beyond him” but *absque eo* in the sense of “without his participation,” which proves something that openly contradicts the main thesis of *Explicatio*⁸⁵). It seems almost certain that Sozzini borrowed it from there to supplement the nonetheless rich argumentation of his

⁸² LB VI f.*4v. [Translation from *The New Testament Scholarship of Erasmus*, 730.]

⁸³ *Explicatio*, 23.

⁸⁴ *Per la storia*, 67–71.

⁸⁵ *Annotationes* (*in Io.* 1, 3), LB VI 337D.

model, thus adding a tinge to his own interpretation that was missing from the model.

The third and final passage is a commentary to the words “Qui non ex sanguinibus, neque ex voluntate viri, se ex Deo nati sunt.” The alleged Lelius does not provide any gloss on to this line. Fausto Sozzini offers the following comment:

Iudaeorum supercilium retundit, qui gloriabantur se originem duxisse a patribus.

[He lifted his brows when he saw Jews boasting about their descent from patriarchs.]⁸⁶

The idea of Jews being of great noble descent, who traced their lineage to the patriarchs, often recurs in Erasmus whenever he criticises their unreasonable pride in their noble origin, calling it an illusory value.⁸⁷ When applied to the line from the Prologue to the Gospel of John, it figures in *Paraphrasis Euangelii Ioannis*, explaining it differently than usual (juxtaposing the spiritual birth of the Son of God with the physical birth of other people):

Qui hactenus habebantur populus Dei, qui veri Dei cultu, qui Legis religione, qui patrum cognatione, qui divini Testamenti primissis soli gloriabantur, venientem Dei Filium aversati sunt.

[Those who to that point were considered the people of God, who alone boasted of their worship of the true God, their reverence for the law, their descent from the patriarchs, and the promises of the divine covenant, turned away from the Son of God when he came.]⁸⁸

It seems certain that both the interpretation and its formulation were adopted by Sozzini from Erasmus’ *Paraphrasis Euangelii Ioannis*, reducing the latter’s facultative and divergent meanings to one strictly defined—in accordance with model I have attempted to describe above.

Translated by Grzegorz Czemieli and Tomasz Palkowski

⁸⁶ *Explicatio*, 34.

⁸⁷ See, e.g., *Enchiridion*, LB V, 41C (H 93, 6–94, 9); *Ratio*, LB V, 102A–B (H 230, 11–24).

⁸⁸ *Paraphrasis Ev. Ioannis*, LB VII, 502F. [Translation from *Paraphrase on John, Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 46, ed. Robert D. Sider, trans. Jane E. Phillips (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 21.]

REFERENCES

Sources

- Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami Opera Omnia* [LB]. Vols. 1–10. Leiden: Van der Aa, 1703–1706.
SOZZINI, Fausto. *Explicatio primae partis capituli Evangelii Joannis*. Raków: Sternack, 1618.

Literature

- ALDRIDGE, John W. *The Hermeneutics of Erasmus*. Basel Studies of Theology 2. Winterthur 1966.
BENE, Charles. *Érasme et Saint Augustin ou influence de Saint Augustin sur l'humanisme d'Érasme*. Geneva: Droz, 1969.
CANTIMORI, Delio, and Elisabeth FEIST, eds. *Per la storia degli eretici italiani del secolo sedicesimo in Europa*. Rome: Reale Accademia D'Italia, 1937.
CANTIMORI, Delio. *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento. Ricerche storiche*. Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1939.
CHMAJ, Ludwik. *Faust Socyn, 1539-1604*. Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1963.
DOMAŃSKI, Juliusz. "Fausta Socyna Explicatio primae partis primi capituli Evangelii Ioannis i egzegeza erazmiańska." In *Erasmiana minora. Studia i szkice o pisarstwie filozoficznym i religijnym Erazma z Rotterdamu*, 337–63. Warsaw: Instytut Tomistyczny, Instytut Filologii Klasycznej UW, 2017.
DOMAŃSKI, Juliusz. "Glosy do erazmiańskiego pojęcia filozofii," *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej* 15 (1969): 5–45.
DOMAŃSKI, Juliusz. "Z patrystycznych źródeł philosophia Christi: św. Jan Chryzostom i erazmiańska koncepcja filozofii," *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego* 250. *Prace Historyczne* 33 (1971): 89–93.
DRESDEN, Sem. "Présence d'Érasme." In *Actes du Congrès Érasme, organisé par la Municipalité de Rotterdam sous les auspices de l'Académie Royale Néerlandaise des Sciences et des Sciences Humaines*, edited by Cornelis Reedijk, 1–13. Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1971.
FEBVRE, Lucien. *Le problème de l'incroyance religieuse au XVI^e siècle*. Paris: A. Michel, 1942.
GASBARRI, Primo. "Il significato storico della 'Philosophia Christiana' di Erasmo di Rotterdam." *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 35, no. 2 (1944): 75–114.
GÓRSKI, Konrad. *Studia nad dziejami polskiej literatury antytrynitarskiej XVI w.* Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1949.
KOHLS, Ernst-Wilhelm. *Die Theologie des Erasmus*. Vols. 1–2. Basel: Reinhardt, 1966.
LUBAC, Henri de. *L'exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*. Vols. 1–2. Paris: Aubier, 1964.
MANN-PHILLIPS, Margaret. "La 'Philosophia Christi' reflétée dans les 'Adages' d'Érasme." In *Courants religieux et humanisme à la fin du XV^e et au début du XVI^e siècle. Colloque International de Strasbourg 9-11 mai*, 45–51. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959.
MESNARD, Pierre. "La 'Paraclesis' d'Érasme." *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 13, no. 1 (1951): 26–34.
OGONOWSKI, Zbigniew. "Kryteria prawdziwości chrystianizmu u Fausta Socyna." *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej* 9 (1963): 81–83.
OGONOWSKI, Zbigniew. "Le rationalisme dans la doctrine des sociniens." In *Movimenti ereticali in Italia e in Polonia nei secoli XVI-XVII. Atti del Convegno italo-polacco, Firenze, 22-24 settembre 1971*, 141–57. Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, n.d.

OGONOWSKI, Zbigniew. "Wiara i rozum w doktrynach religijnych Socyna i Locke'a." In *Studia nad arianizmem*, edited by Ludwik Chmaj, 425–50. Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1959.

PAYNE, John B. "Toward the Hermeneutics of Erasmus." In *Scrinium Erasmianum. Mélanges historiques publiés sous le patronage de l'Université de Louvain à l'occasion du cinquième centenaire de la naissance d'Erasmus*, vol. 2, edited by Joseph Coppens. Leiden: Brill, 1969.

PINEAU, Jean-Baptiste. *Erasmus, sa pensée religieuse*. Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1924.

FAUSTO SOZZINI'S *EXPLICATIO PRIMAE PARTIS PRIMI CAPITIS EUANGELII IOANNIS* AND ITS ERASMIAN EXEGESIS

Summary

The paper compares the method of Biblical interpretation used by Erasmus of Rotterdam with the method of Socinus, raising the question of the extent to which the method outlined by Socinus in his *Explicatio primae partis primi capituli Euangelii Joannis* can be seen as continuous and consonant with the method of Erasmus, and to what extent it should be seen as its rejection or modification. In addition, the essay outlines similarities and differences, with respect to both method and content, between Erasmus' *Adnotationes* and Socinus' *Explicatio*.

Keywords: Erasmus of Rotterdam; Socin; Biblical interpretation.

FAUSTA SOCYNA *EXPLICATIO PRIMAE PARTIS PRIMI CAPITIS EUANGELII IOANNIS* I EGZEGEZA ERAZMIAŃSKA

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest omówieniem porównawczym metody interpretacji Biblii zastosowanej przez Erazma i Socyna, połączonym z próbą odpowiedzi na pytanie, do jakiego stopnia egzegezę Biblii wyłożoną przez Socyna w *Explicatio primae partis primi capituli Euangelii Joannis* można uznać za kontynuację i rozwinięcie metody egzegetycznej Erazma, a na ile za jej negację lub modyfikację. Poza tym artykuł jest próbą ukazania podobieństw i różnic między *Adnotationes* Erazma i *Explicatio* Socyna pod kątem zarówno warsztatowym, jak treściowym.

Słowa kluczowe: Erazm z Rotterdamu; Socyn; interpretacja biblijna.