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Erasmus on the Study of Scriptures

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Erasmus (1469-1536) was the editor of the first published Greek New Testament printed from movable type (1516). He translated the books of the New Testament into Latin and also paraphrased them (except Revelation) in that language. He published the notes of Lorenzo Valla (1406-1457) on the New Testament. He must likewise be accounted as one of the important theologians of the first half of the 16th century as well as an earnest advocate of the study of Scriptures.

I

Prerequisites for Biblical studies coincide with the characteristics one brings to the philosophy of Christ, Erasmus held. This meant a heart undefiled by the sordidness of vice and unaffected by the quietude of greed. We must therefore examine the philosophia Christi concept in Erasmus as the basis for understanding his approach to Sacred Writ.


8 "Methodus," AS, III, 40, "sed plane cælestem animum afferamus ea dignum."

9 "Paraclesis," AS, III, 20, "celesta Christi philosophia;" "Ratio," AS, III, 158, 200; "Paraclesis," AS, III, 10: "He alone came down from heaven as Teacher; He alone can teach with cer-
trine, the doctrine of Christ, the religion of Christ, the Christian philosophy. For him it was the philosophy of the Gospel, the religion of the Gospel, the doctrine of the Gospel, the evangelical wisdom, the evangelical philosophy, the evangelical doctrine. This heavenly wisdom is Christ's heavenly philosophy, His godly and wholesome philosophy. To Erasmus the concept of "philosophy" was a broad one, to be equated with doctrine or religion. Since it was from Christ it was divine, heavenly, and above all evangelical, for it embodied the Gospel. Christ's wisdom alone is the evangelical and heavenly philosophy.

The philosophia Christi was programmatic for Erasmus, practical and functional, the holiest and the most beneficial blueprint for Christian living. In Baptism, he said, a person first professes the philosophia christiana; through Baptism he enters into a covenant with his Leader. It can be made plain and easy to every man,

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10 STC 2854a, ad Luke 10:31, fol. xcvi\(^3\).
11 STC 2854a, ad Matt. 5, fol. xvii\(^3\).
12 STC 2854a, ad "Preface to the Gospel of John," fol. i.A.i.\(^5\).
13 STC 2854a, ibid., ( ). ii\(^5\).
15 STC 2854a, "Preface to Matthew."
16 STC 2854a, fol. ii, A, i'.
17 STC 2854a, ad Matt. 7, fol. xxxii\(^5\).
for one who is docile (teachable) has advanced greatly in this philosophy.26 "The sun is not as communal and exposed to everyone as is the doctrine of Christ." 27 In the "Preface" of his rendering of the Gospel According to St. Matthew Erasmus said that the wisdom of Christ should be learned with the intent of becoming a better person, correcting and ordering one’s life according to its prescription.28 Elsewhere Erasmus said that this doctrine had its loci in the Sermon on the Mount and its theologians in those who live according to that sermon. He echoed the Sermon on the Mount when he wrote:

To me he is a genuine theologian who teaches not by tightly intertwining syllogisms, but by love, by the expression of his countenance and eyes, by his life, disdaining wealth. A Christian ought not to put his trust in the protection of this world, but ought totally to depend upon heaven. Injustice is not to be retaliated. Those who curse should be blessed, blessings being acquired for those deserving evil. He loves all good men as members of the same body and cherishes them as equals; he tolerates the wicked, if they cannot be corrected. Those who are deprived of their goods, who are driven out of their possessions, who mourn, they are blessed and are not to be lamented; furthermore the pious desire death since it is nothing but the transfer to immortality. If, being inspired by the spirit of Christ, he preaches and teaches this and similar things, and exhorts thereto, invites and encourages, he is indeed a true theologian, even if he is a ditch-digger or a weaver. If he maintains this also by his deeds, he is indeed a great doctor.29

From this it is evident that the philosophy of Christ may be regarded as an unlearned philosophy but wisdom nevertheless.30 It is a renewal, a rebirth (renascentia) of man’s good created nature and it has its foundation in love, in life, in inspiration, in transformation, rather than in logic, disputations, erudition, or reason.31

If the philosophy of Christ were followed, Erasmus held, wars would cease, the conflicts between church and state would end, and those who profess it would be recognizable by their behavior instead of by name and ceremonies. Erasmus hoped to see a genuine (γυνισκόν) Christendom that testified to the philosophy of Christ not merely by its cultus but by its life.32 The beginning of this wisdom is an understanding that agrees with the Scriptures.33

Erasmus warned, however, that the student of Scriptures, yes, every follower of Christ, should not rely on himself; he must avoid Pharisaism.34 "He [Paul] attributes whatever in us may be a virtue to the Spirit of Christ and to Christ; everywhere he calls it the gift and grace of God." 35 Erasmus spoke of the righteousness of faith in Pauline terms and of the completeness

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26 "Paraclesis," AS, III, 12, "Tantum esto dociliis, et multum in hac philosophia promovisti."
28 LB, VII, [v]; STC 2854a, fol. i.
30 "Paraclesis," AS, III, 18. The contrast is between "illiterata philosophia" and "sapientia."
31 "Paraclesis," AS, III, 22. See also Kohls, I, 152—221; ibid., II, 96, n. 127; 119, n. 565.
34 "Ratio," AS, III, 278.
35 "Ratio," AS, III, 284.
of the gift of God in Christ. In the heart of the servant of Christ, and this means one who has embraced the philosophy of Christ, trust in oneself is completely eliminated. "No one relies on God more genuinely than he who totally mistrusts his own powers." Therefore, the wisdom of Christ must be learned from Christ Himself.

Now since faith is the only door to Christ, the first rule [for living a Christian life] ought to be that for this you know the Scriptures very thoroughly, which are indeed given by His Spirit, and believe them, not only with the mouth, not coldly, not listlessly, not indecisively, as the mass of Christians does, but with a whole heart. Deep inside be firmly and immovably determined, that in them there is contained not an iota, which does not pertain greatly to your salvation.

"Hear ye Him," was quoted by Erasmus as well as by Luther. Christ can be heard, Erasmus said, in the Gospels and in the Pauline epistles; he spoke through Peter

36 "Ratio," AS, III, 284—90. He paraphrased passages 2 Cor. 10, 2 Cor. 3, Rom. 9,10, Rom. 3 and quoted Rom. 3:22, 1 Cor. 7:25, Rom. 11:29.


39 "Enchiridion," AS, I, 152.


41 Luther used almost the same words that Erasmus used: "You do not know the truth of Matt. 23 [:10]: 'You should not call one another masters on earth, for you have one Master, the Christ.'" "'Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament, 1522," trans. A. R. Wentz, Luther's Works, 36 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 248. I have counted at least 37 instances in Luther's Works where Luther quoted or applied the words "Listen to Him!"

and John. Bainton translated the paraphrase of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), ending with the sentence: "Now in the natural love of this father for his son behold the goodness of God, who is far more clement to sinful man, if only he repents and despises himself, than any father to his son, however tenderly he may love him." Bainton's comment? "This is the essence of Erasmus."

In his *Enchiridion* (1503) he maintained that the divinely inspired Scriptures, which have God as their author, present the *doctrina Christi* wholly pure, clear, and sound. The Holy Scriptures, especially the gospels, provide a pattern of life in all things. Christ taught both faith and love. Faith, Erasmus emphasized, enables the believer to look away from self and to rely entirely on God; love exhorts him to do good to all. In "The Funeral" (1526) Erasmus told of Cornelius who "read from the Bible passages exhorting man to trust God and setting forth God's love for us."

However, Erasmus emphasized love more than faith in setting forth the *philosophia Christi.* Erasmus turned to Paul to prove his point, extolling "love that issues from a pure heart and a good con-
science and sincere faith.” Writing on the *locus classicus*, 2 Tim. 3:16, Erasmus showed the relationships between the Scriptures and faith and godliness:

... which Scriptures being rightly understood, even without our authority, are able to make thee learned, as far as belongeth to the obtaining of salvation, which the Gospel promiseth us, not through the observation [observing] of Moses’ law, but through the assured [sure] faith, whereby we believe in Christ Jesus. That, which the Gospel partly teacheth to be already done, the same the Old Testament telleth and expresseth beforehand shall come. And yet it teacheth none other thing than the Gospel doeth, howbeit after another sort if it have a godly and a learned reader. There is no reason why we should esteem the books of the Prophets or Moses to be of none effect after the Gospel is published, if through a spiritual understanding they be applied unto Christ and unto godliness. But all the whole Scripture, that is set forth unto us not by man’s wit but by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, hath great profit, either to teach the things which are not unknown but with peril of salvation, or to reprove them which are against the verity, or to correct and call again them into the way that err of ignorance, or else to order and inform not in Jewishness or human philosophy, but in true innocence and uprightness of life, and is so much available for all things that make to the offices of godliness, that the man dedicated to God can be behind in nothing, but to be perfect and fully furnished to all the works of a Christian life.

Erasmus said that the Scriptures were given so that by faith men may come to eternal bliss. He also said that the essence of Christianity is living according to the Gospel. The Bible shows the Author “through whom every man has health and salvation, without whom no man may hope for health and salvation.” In his *Inquisitio de fide* Erasmus makes Barbatius his spokesman: “I believe those who gave us the books of the Old and New Testament were inspired by this Spirit, without whose help [power] no one attains salvation.”

Moreover, Erasmus maintained that the attitudes of the student of Scriptures had to be in harmony with the philosophy of Christ. Because the Scriptures are the genuine oracles of God, welling forth from the deepest recesses of the divine mind, Erasmus said they should be approached with reverence. Humility and veneration are needed to find the secret chambers of eternal wisdom. “Stoop to enter,” Erasmus warned, “else you might bump your head and bounce back!” Absolute purity of mind is another prerequisite for the study of Scripture. Erasmus pointed to the example of Moses and Aaron, of whom a

other the Apostles. Whereunto is added a Paraphrase upon the Revelation of S. John (London: Edward Whitchurch, 1549), Fol. xxiiiijr-V, The copy in the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., was used. Cited as STC 2854.3.

50 Ad Matt. 1, STC 2854a, fol. ii.Ajf; LB, VII, 1B.


52 AS, I, 88; *Essential Erasmus*, p. 37; LCC, XIV, 305. See also “Ratio,” AS, III, 126: “You must bend your neck, if you want to be admitted.”
great degree of purity was demanded before they could ascend Mount Horeb. Moses had to remove his sandals to approach the burning bush. The eye of faith, Erasmus maintained, is to be guiltless and without dissimulation. The incomparable pearl of divine wisdom cannot be sought vulgarly or with divided affections. To enter into the palace of this queen (to mix metaphors), the innermost sanctuary of the divine Spirit, one must have a simple faith; there must be no impious curiosity, no seeking after glory, no evil obstinacy. Erasmus lashed out against an unyielding contentiousness, calling it earthly, beastly, demonic. He cited James 3:17: "The true theological wisdom is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity." Erasmus took great pains (he was evidently hurt) to correct Luther's accusation against him that he was a skeptic. Addressing Luther directly he told him that his reverence of Scripture was no less than that of those who devoutly worshiped them and in them he found his hope and consolation. Repeatedly in the De libero arbitrio he asserted that he and Luther loved and revered the same Scriptures. In this way he emphasized that attitudes of prime importance in one's approach to Scriptures.

In the same vein Erasmus insisted that the authority of the Scriptures should not be questioned; complete trust was needed in studying them. He said that Paul "doesn't know how to lie," and 10 years later he repeated that Scripture "cannot lie." He said, "Sacred Scripture is of course the basic authority in everything." The heavenly philosophy of Christ is not to be corrupted by human laws or doctrine, but Christian people will follow "the sacrosanct and inviolable authority of..."
the Scriptures." Scripture cannot contradict itself. The Holy Spirit is the Author of the Sacred Books, and it is not possible for Him to oppose Himself; these books are "the treasury of eternal and most certain truth." Holy Writ is for Erasmus a portrait of Christ. This can be seen also that in his recounting of the details of the life of Christ, he did so as an aid for better exegesis and postulated that all details were to be evaluated as *doctrina pietatis*.

II

To understand the Scriptures one must embrace the *philosophia Christi*. However, a key to the treasure store of the Scriptures is a knowledge of the languages. Erasmus shared with Luther a high estimation of the worth of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. There is no question, Erasmus stated, that a thorough knowledge of the languages is needed for an understanding of the Sacred Writings. They can be learned with comparative ease, according to him, at least to the point of neatness and elegance. One cannot be satisfied with knowing only the Vulgate (Jerome made some mistakes), or, for the Old Testament, even with knowing the Septuagint and not the Hebrew. Erasmus cited the examples of Cato, Ruolph Agricola, and himself to encourage his readers to take up the study of the languages, especially Greek, even though one is no longer of the same age as school boys.

Erasmus helped to further the study of the three languages by encouraging Jerome Busleiden to leave a bequest for the establishment of an institute in Louvain (1517). Busleiden left an endowment large enough to support a rector, three professors, and eight students. Its history cannot be followed here (later it was absorbed in the university). Erasmus praised Busleiden highly in one of his colloquies. In another he allowed that Greek and Latin books were fit for young misses and married women. Magdalia, a character in that colloquy, praised the knowledge of the languages possessed by various women:

In Spain and Italy there are not a few women of the highest rank who can rival any man. In England there are the More girls [the daughters of Sir Thomas More], in Germany, the Pirckheimer [the five daughters of Willibald Pirckheimer of Nuremberg] and Blaurer [of Constance] girls.

Erudition and learning can be of service to the student of the Scriptures. Erasmus was conscious of class distinctions in soci-

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62 "A Fish Diet" (1524), *Colloquies*, p. 339.
63 "De libero arbitrio" (1524), AS, IV, 36 Ib 10.
64 Ibid., AS, IV, 156 IV 1, "non potest pugnare secum."
65 "Hyperaspistes" (1526), AS, IV, 494.
66 "Enchiridion" (1503), AW, p. 73, lines 17-24; p. 94, lines 34-95; p. 148, lines 9-12; Kohls, I, 98-99; ibid., II, 98, n. 180 and n. 182.
67 Kohls, II, 112, n. 413; see also Kohls, I, 80—81, 182—83.
71 "The Epithalamium of Peter Giles" (1524), *Colloquies*, pp. 225—29, especially p. 227.
72 "The Abbot and the Learned Lady" (1524), *Colloquies*, p. 219.
73 Ibid., p. 223.
ety and knew that not all could know the ancient languages and that their knowledge was not essential to the philosophia Christi. Without them the pious Christian possessed the "true gifts of Christ," which in the rollicking farce about Pope Julius II he described as "holiness of life, sacred learning, burning love, prophecy, virtues." For all that, it must be emphasized that Erasmus contended frequently for the study of the ancient languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. In paying tribute to the late Johannes Reuchlin (1455 to 1522) he called him "that famous phoenix of learning, triple-tongued John Reuchlin." In a vision he saw Reuchlin and Jerome dressed in robes of transparent crystal decorated with tongues of bronze, emerald, and sapphire, signifying "the three languages in which they excelled." Erasmus composed a collect for Reuchlin:

O God, thou lover of mankind, who through thy chosen servant John Reuchlin hast renewed to the world the gift of tongues, by which thou didst once from heaven, through the Holy Spirit, instruct the apostles for the preaching of the gospel, grant that all men everywhere may preach in every tongue the glory of thy son Jesus. Confound the tongues of false apostles who band themselves to build the impious tower of Babel, attempting to obscure thy glory whilst minded to exalt their own; since to thee alone, with Jesus thy son our Lord, and the Holy Spirit, belongs all glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Elsewhere Erasmus recounted in some detail how Jerome (ca. 350—420) studied Hebrew after he settled down in Bethlehem at the age of about 35. In the Praise of Folly Jerome is identified as one "who knew five languages." Erasmus defended his strictures of theologians who do not know the languages in his "Letter to Martin Dorp" (1515), and after the publication of the Greek New Testament he issued a defense of the study of languages.

Erasmus did not minimize the value of the seven liberal arts, especially dialectics and rhetoric. The would-be theologian needs that training, but the formalities and the ecceities of the schoolmen have no profit for him. He should remember the foremost tasks of the theologian, which according to Erasmus were "to expound wisely the Divine Writings, to give an account of the faith, not of frivolous questions, to discourse about piety with propriety and effectively to bring forth tears, and to inflame souls for heavenly things."
Erasmus did not disdain translations of the Sacred Scriptures. He wanted all to read the Scriptures as lay theologians. His words have often been paraphrased or repeated (sometimes without credit to him):

Indeed, I disagree very much with those who are unwilling that Holy Scripture, translated into the vulgar tongue, be read by the uneducated, as if Christ taught such intricate doctrines that they could scarcely be understood by very few theologians, or as if the strength of the Christian religion consisted in men's ignorance of it. . . . I would that even the lowliest women read the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles. And I would that they were translated into all languages so that they could not only by Scots and Irish but also by Turks and Saracens. . . . Would that, as a result, the farmer sing some portion of them at the plow, the weaver hum some parts of them to the movement of his shuttle, the traveler lighten the weariness of the journey with stories of this kind! Let all the conversations of every Christian be drawn from this source.

To make the Scriptures a part of one's self one should memorize the sacred books verbatim, Erasmus counseled, echoing Augustine. "However, in the first instance make yourself familiar with Paul. Keep him in your possession always; day and night he should be at hand and at last memorize the words." Erasmus advised that this memorizing begin with the New Testament, presumably, for the theologian, in the original Greek.

Erasmus had a higher regard for the New Testament than for the Old, as he had a higher regard for Greek than for Hebrew. The books of the Old Testament were filled with typology and prophecies, outlines and shadows of the Christ, according to Erasmus, citing Tertullian for his authority. Because of the New Testament "we are Christians" and in it Christ is taught more clearly than in the Old. After the books of the New Testament Erasmus placed those books of the Old Testament which agreed with the New Testament to a greater degree than the others, as for instance Isaiah. Isaiah ranked above Judit or Esther. Erasmus quoted the New Testament much more extensively than the Old. In his Adages, for instance, there are 73 Biblical references, of which only 14 are from the Old Testament.

As for commentaries, they can be useful, especially if the best are used. Here, according to Erasmus, Origen cannot be compared with anyone else. He is better than Basil, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, and others. All are human, to be used with critical acumen and respect. Life is so short and there are so many books that one must begin with the best. Elsewhere Erasmus favored Jerome as the best along with

86 Kohls, I, 166—67.
89 "Enchiridion," AS, I, 372; *Essential Erasmus*, p. 93.
91 "Ratio," AS, III, 216; see also Kohls, I, 186.
93 "Ratio," AS, III, 222.
Origen. However, the student of the Scriptures should go to the commentaries only after he has studied the books of the Old Testament, the gospels, and the epistles at first hand and groups his findings under loci, topics, for example, faith, fasting, the study of the Scriptures. Erasmus was ready to grant the use of tools, but it was more important for the study of Scriptures to go to the Scriptures themselves, ad fontes, in their original languages (for the theologians) and in translations (for the lay theologians).

III

Erasmus was mindful of the fact that there are difficult passages, obscurities, seeming contradictions, and almost unresolvable statements in Sacred Writ. His doubts and misgivings were many. Yet he would not brook Luther’s charge that he was a skeptic. Nevertheless he wrote:

For however much the authority of the Sacred Writings satisfies us everywhere even with one word, nevertheless it happens sometimes or other, that one can be undecided about an interpretation, particularly since the ancients also not infrequently differ. Accordingly, if many agree, they make for faith; if however they disagree or even oppose each other, they excite us to more thorough research (scrutinium).

Such an investigation will help the student of the Scriptures to recognize idioms and figures of speech more readily and his constant meditation on the Scriptures, day and night, will make these peculiarities of the language second nature to him.

An obscure page, he advised, is to be clarified in the light of other passages; mystical passages explain other mystical passages, and one holy word is explained by another holy word. Difficulties can be resolved by comparing the more concealed (tectius) with the clearer (dilucidius). At first glance, at least, Erasmus pointed out, there are contradictions in the Scriptures. "Yes indeed even in many narratives an evident variation in outward appearance allows for the perversions of the wicked." However, obscurities will remain in the Scriptures, he maintained against Luther, whether one ascribes them to the words or to the subject matter. There are inner and most sacred portions of Scripture into which God does not want us to penetrate.

In his Diatribe or Sermon Concerning Free Will Erasmus said, "Many difficulties occur in Holy Writ." He began this work on that note and in his final conclusion repeated that Holy Scripture is

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96 See Kohls, II, 81, n. 202, for references.
98 "Ratio," AS, III, 418; see Kohls, I, 28 to 29; ibid., II, 35, n. 39; LB, X, 1260B.
99 "Hyperaspistes," AS, IV, 250, 252, 270; LB, X, 1258D, 1262A.
100 "Ratio," AS, III, 454.
101 Ibid. In this connection Erasmus quoted from the Ars poetica by Horace, not Deut. 6.
103 "Ratio," AS, III, 170.
105 "De libero arbitrio," AS, IV, 192, IV, 17; "Hyperaspistes," IV, 1276; LB, X, 1263B-C.
106 "De libero arbitrio," AS, IV, 10, 1a 7.
107 "De libero arbitrio," AS, IV, 2 1a 1, "Inter difficulitates, quae non paucae occurrunt in divinis literis, . . ."
either obscure and figurative or seems, at first sight, to contradict itself.108

The difficulties in the Scriptures will, of course, give the earnest student anxieties, but when such anxieties (scrupi) arise, one ought not to take offense or doubt the trustworthiness of the Scriptures (de fide scripti). One will weigh all the circumstances and look for a way to explicate the difficulties. The nature of the languages themselves cause a goodly part of the difficulties; figures of speech, parables, allegories obscure the Scriptures sometimes to the point of presenting riddles (ad aegignmentis obscuritatem).109 Sometimes Christ spoke in the riddles of allegories, said Erasmus, so that later His own might the better grasp what He intended to teach them.110 "If, however, Scripture has no obscurities, what does that word 'search' [John 5:39] actually mean?" God willed that there be some obscurity.111 Besides that, the idiomatic usages of the language must be understood.112

Difficulties can be reconciled. Hyperbations and hyperboles must be reckoned with.113 Popular expressions and ambigubilities (ambiguities)115 are found in the Scriptures. Heed must be paid to the emphasis given a word or words.116 The literal sense cannot be accepted at all times, because the Scriptures frequently are written in allegorical language.117 "Whoever, therefore, wishes to investigate the Scriptures in earnest, let him observe moderation therein. However, the most prudent thing in examining the allegories would be to follow the sources (fontes)."118

Some parts of the gospels are a simple and plain report, Erasmus held; in some instances the authorities varied. There he would have to travel in "narrow straits." Hence, said Erasmus, "I let pass and say nothing." He cited some instances which in his opinion illustrated that Jesus doeth so intermingle and temper His talk, that me seemeth His will and pleasure was, to be dark and not understood, not only to the apostles, but also unto us. There be also certain places (as I think) almost impossible to be expounded, of which one sort is concerning that [the] sin against the Holy Ghost shall never be remitted, another concerning the day of judgment reserved to the knowledge of the Father only and unknown even to the very Son [Him]self.

In these places and such like, if one write commentaries, he may at his pleasure without danger report the sundry opinions of sundry expositors. He hath liberty frankly to confess and acknowledge that he doth not understand the meaning of the place.119

108 "De libero arbitrio," AS, IV, 190, 192.
110 "Ratio," AS, III, 368.
111 "Hyperaspistes," AS, IV, 488. See also p. 536.
119 A modernization of the translation in STC 2854a, fol. 1.
The obscurities in the Scriptures were cited by Erasmus also as the cause for the divisions among the Protestants. "Since all deal with the Scriptures," he wrote to Luther, "why is there among you no agreement, if the Scriptures have no obscurities?" Even the simplest questions lead to the most persistent contentions. One key to the understanding of Scripture is postulated by Erasmus in his distinction between the littera and the spiritus. "Everything that is written (in Holy Scriptures) has both an external, or, as it were, corporal, meaning as well as a mysterious, or spiritual, significance." This distinction is for him analogous to the distinction between soul and body.

Erasmus gradually came to advocating that one must turn to the church for a solution of the difficulties in the Scriptures. In the Enchiridion (1503) he advised Christ's soldier to go to those commentators who do not stick too closely to the literal sense of Scripture if he wants a better understanding of Sacred Writ. In a letter to Martin Dorp (1515) he emphasized the reading of the Scriptures themselves in the original languages (ad fontes); he did not fear that corruptions in the text would divert anyone from Christ. When he wrote against Luther in 1524 he said that he was ready to bow to the judgment of many doctors of the church. He has Luther say, "Believe that there are by no means obscurities in the Scriptures and nothing that needs a judge, or, even if all are blind, I am not blind." He called upon him to accept the authority of the church. And in 1533, in his plea De sancienda ecclesiae concordia, he urged a clinging to what the Roman Catholic Church has handed down "from Holy Scripture," pleading the primacy of the church although not speaking here directly to the issue of difficulties in the Scriptures.

All the obscurities and difficulties in the Scriptures, Erasmus said, do not darken the way of salvation. Moreover, the Scriptures still remain a refreshment of the mind or soul more than food is for the body. He maintained that "the foundations of Sacred Scriptures" have been given "to refresh as well as cleanse our souls." The Scriptures point the way to true happiness. In adversity they point to Him

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120 "Hyperaspistes," AS, IV, 280, 494, 524; see also "Antibarbarus," LB, X, 1726E, 1263D.
121 "Enchiridion," Essential Erasmus, p. 65.
122 Kohls, I, 117—18, 136—38. This is the one hermeneutical principle which Erasmus has, for, as Kohls contends, in spite of John W. Aldridge, The Hermeneutics of Erasmus (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1966), passim, Erasmus has no full-blown hermeneutics. See Kohls, I, 141; ibid., II, 115, n. 486, 131, n. 798, 135—36, n. 29.
123 Essential Erasmus, p. 37.
124 Selected Writings, p. 88.
125 "De libero arbitrio," AS, IV, 192.
126 "Hyperaspistes," AS, IV, 586.
127 "Hyperaspistes," AS, IV, 495. Here he speaks of the tot Orthodoxis Ecclesiae senatus. Ibid., IV, 500, he refers to the Ecclesiae pri­mates. One of his most direct statements is, ibid., IV, 506: "Nec tamen statim hac in re [de libero arbitrio] auctoritas Ecclesiae inter­posuit suam sententiam, sed intentis aliquandiu oculis in Scripturae lucem, tandem perspecta manifesta veritate pronuntiavit."
128 Essential Erasmus, p. 375.
130 "The Epicurean" (1533), Colloquies, p. 548.
131 "The Godly Feast" (1522), ibid., p. 46.
132 Ad Matt. 1, STC 2854a, fol. ii A irr. See also ad Mark 1, STC, 2854a, fol. iiAa; ad Matt. 5, STC, 2854a, fol. xvii"
in whom men "have a good hope, trusting upon the help of God."\textsuperscript{133} The Word of God is a word of healing, a true panacea.\textsuperscript{134}

Erasmus' high regard for the Scriptures, his insistence that they be studied at first hand, his readiness to admit difficulties and yet to find the Scriptures the way to salvation and particularly the guide to conduct as the \textit{philosophia Christi}, make Erasmus important for Bible students. Whatever his services were by giving the world the first published edition of the Greek New Testament (1516) and by his \textit{Paraphrases}, his insistence that the Scriptures were given that men should study them was highly significant.

\textsuperscript{133} Ad Matt. 4, STC, 2854a, fol. xiii\textsuperscript{v}.

\textsuperscript{134} "The Epicurean," \textit{Colloquies}, p. 545.