

Erasmus and Dietenberger on Divorce

Erasmus on divorce

The publication of Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum omne* in 1516 at Froben's press in Basle was an important event in the history of biblical criticism. In the first place, of course, because this was the editio princeps of the Greek text of the New Testament. Furthermore, because of Erasmus's commentary, *Annotationes in Novum Instrumentum*, which took up the second volume. Hardly ever before — of course apart from Lorenzo Valla's annotations of the year 1444, which Erasmus himself had published a little more than a decade before his own edition was published, in 1505 — had a strictly philological interpretation of the text of the New Testament at such a scale and with such consistency been attempted.

One of Erasmus's annotations, on Matthew 19:8,¹ contained a remarkable statement. The Gospel says (Matthew 5:32): "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."² And elsewhere (Matthew 19:9): "And I say unto you: whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." "This is the principal place," Erasmus says, "from which the law has been introduced among Christians that marriages may not be dissolved. Whereas we have either allowed other dogmas of Christ to become obsolete or have entirely abrogated them by means of a convenient interpretation, such as the commandments not to swear, not to resist evil, to live on from day to day without caring for the future, to help and love enemies, etc., we only stick to the one concerning marriage. But if Moses allowed divorce to the Jews because of the hardness of their hearts, and we have an almost similar hardness, why is not the same concession made to us, whereas even brothels are allowed to us? Christ made an exception for fornication, but with us there is no kind of fornication, no matter how obscene it may be, which sets either partner free, whereas once both of them were free, after a divorce, to contract a new marriage."³

¹ All quotations from Erasmus's *Annotationes* are from the edition by A. Reeve - M.A. Screech, *Erasmus's Annotations on the New Testament. Facsimile of the final Latin text with all earlier variants* (3 vols.; London 1986; Leiden 1990-1993).

² All translations are from the King James Version.

³ Reeve - Screech ed., *Annotations* 1, 78; Appendix A: "Ex hoc potissimum loco lex inducta apud Christianos ne dirimantur matrimonia, cum caetera Christi dogmata, de non iurando, de non resistendo,

It was to appear soon that this more or less casual remark was only the harbinger of a much more elaborate exposition of this controversial and thorny subject. When three years later, in 1519, the second, much enlarged edition of the *Annotationes* was published, Erasmus, in order to preclude misunderstandings concerning his annotation on the place in Matthew, had added a long note on 1 Corinthians 7:39,⁴ in fact rather a short essay, because it definitely surpasses the boundaries of an annotation (its takes up more than ten columns in LB). “Res voluminis [est], non annotatiunculae”, Erasmus himself remarks somewhere near the end of his note.⁵ In fact, this note (in its final form) has been published as a separate pamphlet in an early English translation (dating probably around 1550).⁶ In later editions of the *Annotationes* (especially in the edition of 1522, but also afterwards in those of 1527 and 1535), Erasmus again added considerably to the text of the annotation. The short remark on Matthew 19:8 has not been taken over in any edition after 1516.

It is perhaps useful to give a survey of the contents of Erasmus’s annotation on 1 Corinthians 7. In doing this, I will restrict myself to the contents of the edition of the year 1519 for reasons which will become clear later on. Erasmus starts by repeating what he had already said in the beginning of his work, viz., that he does not want to be the author of a contentious dogma. He wishes to respect the judgement of the holy Church and of those who are more learned than he himself. He thinks it is not insolent to dissent from great authorities; on the other hand, he himself is willing to abandon his point of view if he is persuaded by someone else that it is not correct.

After this ‘captatio benevolentiae’ the point at issue comes forward. There is a wide-spread point of view among Christians, he says, that once a marriage is contracted, it cannot be dissolved except by the death of one of the partners. This was the opinion of, among others, Chrysostom, Augustine and of canon law.⁷ Nevertheless it would be wise to see if there are no grounds to change this opinion. There should be a possibility to dissolve certain marriages, not just like that, but for serious reasons, and not just by anyone, but by high ecclesiastical authorities or legitimate judges. The result should be that either both parties can remarry, or at least the one who is innocent of breaking up the marriage. By ‘divorce’, therefore, Erasmus understands, as he also underlines further on in his annotation, the complete dissolution of marriage with the permission to remarry.

de in diem vivendo, de iuvandis ac diligendis inimicis, atque id genus permulta vel antiquare patiamur, ut interpretatione commoda prorsus abrogemus, solum urgemus de matrimonio. Atque si id Iudaeis concessit Moses ob duriciem cordis, et par pene duricies sit in nobis, cur non idem conceditur, quibus conceduntur et lupanaria? Christus fornicationem excepit, at apud nos nullum tam obscœnum fornicationis genus, quod liberet alterutrum, cum olim post divortium utriusque liberum fuerit novum inire matrimonium.”

⁴ Reeve - Screech ed., *Annotations* 2, 467-481; LB 6, 692D-703C.

⁵ Reeve - Screech ed., *Annotations* 2, 480; LB 6, 702D-E.

⁶ *The Censure and judgement of the famous clark Erasmus of Roterodam: Whyther dyuorsemente betwene man and wyfe stondesth with the lawe of God ...* (London s.a. = Amsterdam - New York 1972), STC No. 10450. Erroneously identified as a translation of the *Responsio adversus Phimostomum*: F. Vander Haeghen, *Bibliotheca Erasmiana. Répertoire des œuvres d'Érasme*, 1re série (Ghent 1893 = Nieuwkoop 1961) 174.

⁷ Reeve - Screech ed., *Annotations* 2, 467; LB 6, 692E: “Scio receptissimum esse inter Christianos ubi semel coit matrimonium nullo pacto posse dirimi nisi morte alterius. Atque in hac sententia fuisse video Chrysostomum ac veteres Latinos; sine dubio certe fuit Augustinus, eamque veterum episcoporum constitutionibus et Decretalium legum autoritate esse confirmatam ...”

Then, Erasmus proceeds to state his reasons for his opinion. There are so many unhappy marriages, as anyone can observe; if these can be helped without violating a divine commandment, it should be done. There are even some precedents from the history of the early Church; thus, Origen⁸ states that some bishops have allowed divorced women to remarry, although he admits that this was done against the Lord's and St. Paul's commandment. Even Ambrose (that is, the author of the commentary on the Epistles now usually designated as Ambrosiaster⁹) allows a man to marry another woman after he has repudiated his first wife. And there is no reason to doubt that Ambrose as a bishop did what he wrote. Yes, he even allows a woman to remarry during the life of her first husband.¹⁰ In this connection Erasmus refutes the remarks of Peter Lombard,¹¹ who quotes these statements and claims that they are not by Ambrose: the style is exactly Ambrose's, he says, and even in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas there are statements which the Church rejects.

Then Erasmus states his reasons for allowing divorce in some cases: Christ's laws are most fair; and it would be most unfair to force a man who has married a dissolute woman to remain married to her for the rest of his life or to spend the remainder of his days as an unwanted bachelor.

Since the impossibility to divorce and remarry seems contrary to natural equity, we should see whether the statements in the Gospels and the Epistles should not be interpreted differently. It is not true that the Church has never changed its doctrine, so why can't this be done here? Furthermore, popes Innocent III and Celestine have taken entirely opposed decisions regarding second marriages, and some rulings of earlier popes have later been abrogated by their successors.

An interpretation of the places in the New Testament which seem to prohibit divorce and remarriage follows. First Matthew chapter 5.¹² Here, he repeats what we have already learned from his note on this particular passage: that whereas other commandments given in the same chapter are more or less argued away by means of a convenient interpretation, only the rules concerning divorce are strictly maintained. The commandments not to swear, not to resist evil, loving one's enemies, etc., were meant for the disciples, not for ordinary human beings, and the same should hold for the commandment concerning divorce: ordinary people should be permitted to divorce and to remarry in order to prevent worse, as Moses once permitted it to the Jewish people. Just in the way Paul sometimes mitigates Christ's commandments, thus the Pope should be able to do the same thing.

The words in chapter 19, "what God has joined together, let no man put asunder"¹³ should be understood as follows: what God has united as it should be, may not be separated; God separates what should be separated. Marriages are the result of mutual consent, but this consent should be mature, not the result of drunkenness or

⁸ Origen, *In Matthaëum* tom. 14, 23; *GCS* X, 340, 17-341, 14; *Migne PG* 13, 1243-1246.

⁹ Ambrosiaster, *In I. Cor.* 7:11; *CSEL* 81/2, 74, 22 - 75, 4; 75, 5-11; *Migne PL* 17, 230 A; B.

¹⁰ Ambrosiaster, *In I. Cor.* 7:15; *CSEL* 81/2, 77, 2-18; *Migne PL* 17, 231 A-C.

¹¹ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* 4, 35, 3; *Migne PL* 192, 929: "Sed hoc a falsariis in Ambrosii libro positum creditur".

¹² Reeve - Screech ed., *Annotations* 2, 473-474; *LB* 6, 697D-698C.

¹³ Matthew 19:6. Cf. Reeve - Screech ed., *Annotations* 2, 475-477; *LB* 6, 698D-700D.

the machinations of procurers. If an ecclesiastical official dissolves such a marriage, he is not separating what God has united, but what the devil has brought together.

Another objection: the Church does allow divorce, they say, but only in so far as the partners may not remarry. But this is certainly not the kind of divorce Christ was speaking about; he was addressing the Jews, who had never known any other kind of divorce than the one which allowed a second marriage.

Next, Erasmus discusses the question as to why remarrying is prohibited even in the case of adultery. He thinks that the reasons adduced by Jerome and Augustine (viz., that the impression is made that the second marriage is not because of the adultery committed by the first partner, but because the new partner is more attractive) are not really valid. The reasoning that the indissolubility of the marriage is a result of the fact that it is a sacrament is also refuted: no one among the Church Fathers has ever stated that marriage is a sacrament.

Finally, Erasmus pays attention to the interpretation of the places in Paul's Epistles that are adduced against permitting divorce. First, Romans 7:1-3.¹⁴ This passage is not about divorce; it is a parable intended to show that the ceremonial precepts of the Law of Moses have been abolished. Second, I Corinthians 7:38-40,¹⁵ a passage which is very similar to the one in Romans. Here no more than in the former passage does Paul speak about divorce. The last passage Erasmus deals with is, he says, also the most difficult one: verses 10-11 in the same chapter.¹⁶ The exception mentioned in the Gospel, "saving for the cause of fornication", should be considered to be implied here, as Ambrose (i.e., Ambrosiaster¹⁷) remarks. Second, what Paul deals with here is not serious disgraceful acts, but minor offences, which in Greece were often a reason for divorce. Paul is warning against divorce on frivolous grounds. Once a wife has forsaken her husband without a serious reason, they should either be reconciled or else she should remain unmarried.

All this is not meant to say that Erasmus wishes to open the doors widely to frequent divorces. Only in case everything else has been tried should recourse be taken to divorce. If divorces are to be a rare phenomenon, we should take care that marriages are not so easily contracted.

The note in its original form ends as follows: "I wished to give our scholars material for reflection on this matter. I have not tried to preclude the judgement of greater scholars, let alone of the catholic Church."¹⁸

It does not come as a great surprise that this annotation met with fierce opposition from the Roman Catholic side. Here we encounter the names of some famous contemporaries of Erasmus, i.a. those of Jacobus van Hoogstraten, Edward Lee and Noël Bédá. Erasmus answered Hoogstraten's attack (as contained in his polemic against Reuchlin, *Destructio Cabale seu Cabalistiche perfidie ab Joanne Reuchlin Capnione*

¹⁴ Reeve - Screech ed., *Annotations* 2, 477-478; LB 6, 700D-F.

¹⁵ Reeve - Screech ed., *Annotations* 2, 478; LB 6, 700F-701A.

¹⁶ Reeve - Screech ed., *Annotations* 2, 478-479; LB 6, 701A-E.

¹⁷ Ambrosiaster, *In I. Cor. 7:11*; CSEL 81, 2, p. 75, 5-11; Migne *PL* 17, 230 B.

¹⁸ Reeve - Screech ed., *Annotations* 2, 480; LB 6, 702E: "Haec ... paucis libuit delibare quo doctis ac studiosis uberiorem cogitandi materiam praeberemus. Nec ullo pacto iudicio maiorum ob haec praeire conamur, multo minus ecclesiae catholicae."

iam pridem in lucem editae, Cologne, April 1519) in a long letter written on August 11, 1519.¹⁹ The polemics with Edward Lee is centered around the question whether marriage is a sacrament yes or no. Béda's attack (representing the opinion of the Sorbonne) is against Erasmus's interpretation of Matthew 5:32; according to Béda, Erasmus's teaching boils down to allowing one partner to remarry if the other one commits adultery.

The polemics between Erasmus and Dietenberger on divorce

The polemics between Erasmus and Johannes Dietenberger on divorce are perhaps the least known of all Erasmian polemics concerning this question. Norskov Olsen in his book on *The New Testament Logia on Divorce*,²⁰ who discusses the attacks on Erasmus of Lee and Béda, does not even mention Dietenberger in this connection.

I suppose the person of Johannes Dietenberger needs some introduction.²¹ He was born in Frankfurt on the Main around the year 1475. Having studied in Cologne, Heidelberg and Mainz he became doctor of divinity in 1515. He had entered the Dominican order around 1500, and from 1526 until 1532 he was prior in Koblenz. In 1530 he played a role of some importance on the Catholic side at the Augsburg Reichstag. In 1532 he was appointed professor in Mainz, an office he continued to hold for the remainder of his life; he died in Mainz on 4 September 1537.

In the year he became a professor (1532) Dietenberger published his most important polemical treatise, entitled *Phimostomus scripturariorum* (I will explain this curious title later on). The first fifteen tracts that make up the contents of this work reflect the discussions between Lutherans and Roman Catholics during the Augsburg Reichstag in 1530. They treat of questions like the authority of tradition, the number of canonical books, good works, confession, and transubstantiation. As an appendix to these treatises the book contains a polemic against Erasmus's statements on divorce as voiced in the annotation on 1 Corinthians 7. According to its title ("tractatus ... iam olim elaboratus"²²) this dissertation had already been written at an earlier date (viz., than the remaining sixteen chapters of the *Phimostomus*). When exactly the chapter was written, can, however, not be ascertained. Dietenberger's book is not without importance; a little more than ten years ago, a critical edition with a substantial introduction and explanatory notes was published as volume 38 of the *Corpus Catholicorum*.

¹⁹ Allen Ep. 1006.

²⁰ V. Norskov Olsen, *The New Testament Logia on Divorce: a study of their interpretation from Erasmus to Milton* (Tübingen 1971).

²¹ See on Dietenberger H. Wedewer, *Johannes Dietenberger 1475-1537, Sein Leben und Wirken* (Freiburg 1888 = Nieuwkoop 1967); *Contemporaries of Erasmus* 1, 391-392 (I. Guenther); *Johannes Dietenberger OP, Phimostomus scripturariorum, Köln 1532*. Ed. E. Iserloh - P. Fabisch. *Corpus Catholicorum* 38 (Münster 1985) introduction; most recently: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 3 (3rd ed.; Freiburg 1995), 220-221 (P. Fabisch); *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*. Ed. H.J. Hillerbrand (New York-Oxford 1996) 1, 484-485 (K. Brinkmann Brown).

²² Iserloh - Fabisch ed., *Phimostomus*, 211.

The circumstances under which Dietenberger's polemic had come into being can be called rather curious; they gave occasion to Erasmus to make the following ironic remark: "... perhaps Dietenberger will use as an excuse that he has not read my books. This sounds likely; he expresses his great gratitude to the Carthusian Lambertus, who allowed him to read the Erasmian annotation against which he polemicizes. However, he does not make the impression of having read it diligently enough."²³

The following had happened: at a certain moment, Dietenberger had entered into a discussion about the permissibility or rather impermissibility of divorce with the lawyer and theologian Valentin von Teutleben or Tettleben. Tettleben²⁴ was born in 1488 or 1489; he studied law in Erfurt and Bologna. From 1520 onwards he was coadjutor of the bishop of Mainz, Albrecht von Brandenburg. Like Dietenberger, he was a delegate at the Augsburg Reichstag. In 1532 he was appointed canon of the chapter of Mainz, the city which was also Dietenberger's residence. He died there in 1551. It is impossible to say when exactly the discussion between Tettleben and Dietenberger took place; Dietenberger's editors say it was in 1527,²⁵ but as far as I can see this is not founded on any evidence. Nevertheless, 1527 seems a reasonable possibility. Dietenberger himself refers to the discussion with the imprecise words "some time ago", "iam pridem",²⁶ which is too imprecise to allow any conclusions. Although during this discussion Tettleben as a matter of course agreed with Dietenberger that there was no possibility for divorcees to remarry, he was inclined to believe that this injunction was based on an ordinance of the Church rather than on a Scriptural commandment. During this discussion Tettleben had proved himself to be under the strong impression of Erasmus's argument in the *Annotationes*. However, at the time of their discussion Dietenberger had been unable to consult a copy of the *Annotationes*; he did not own one himself, nor had he read the book ever before. Only at a later stage — again, it cannot be said in which year (Dietenberger does indeed mention a date, viz., 10 October,²⁷ but without stating the year; it cannot have been the year 1531, as some have thought²⁸) — he received a copy on loan from the Koblenz Carthusian Lambertus Pascualis; after this, he soon embarked upon a reply. In this connection it should be noted that the copy of the *Annotationes* Dietenberger was given on loan by his Carthusian friend was, as professor Erika Rummel has established beyond any doubt,²⁹ a copy of the 1519 edition. This is clear from the fact that Dietenberger polemicizes nowhere in his treatise against the numerous and voluminous additions of the later editions, mainly that of 1522. The circumstance, on the

²³ Erasmus, *Responsio ad disputationem cuiusdam Phimostomi de divortio*: LB 9, 965C: "Verum hic fortassis excusabit quod mea scripta non legerit, et quod adfert verisimile est; quandoquidem ingentes gratias agit Lamberto Cartusiano, quod per illum contigerit legere annotationem Erasmicam in quam scribit. Nec eam tamen videtur satis attente legisse."

²⁴ See on Tettleben (1488/9-1551) *Contemporaries of Erasmus* 3, 314-15 (P.G. Bietenholz).

²⁵ Iserloh - Fabisch ed., *Phimostomus*, LXXXI.

²⁶ Iserloh - Fabisch ed., *Phimostomus*, 212.

²⁷ Iserloh - Fabisch ed., *Phimostomus*, 212.

²⁸ Wedewer, *Dietenberger*, 414; Iserloh - Fabisch ed., *Phimostomus*, LXXXI.

²⁹ E. Rummel, *Erasmus and his Catholic Critics 2 1523-1536*. Bibliotheca Humanistica et Reformatorica 45 (Nieuwkoop 1989) 25-26.

other hand, that Erasmus seems to be unaware (or at least pretends to be unaware) of the fact that his opponent is polemicizing against an outdated version of his note complicates the situation even more.

Dietenberger's treatise consists of two main sections; after the dedication, he first investigates the use of the term 'divortium' in Scripture, concluding that this term does not denote a real divorce (which should include the permission to contract another marriage), but merely a separation. He then shows that Scripture is unequivocal in its prohibition of divorce; even the passage in the Law of Moses which seems to speak against this (Deuteronomy 24:1) is no proof to the contrary.³⁰ The second main part³¹ of Dietenberger's treatise consists of 61 quotations from Erasmus's annotation, each of them followed by a refutation. A short epilogue concludes the treatise.

As far as is known, this tract has only been published as an appendix ("tractatus specialis") to Dietenberger's *Phimostomus scripturariorum*, which was published in Cologne in 1532. The title contains two neologisms: "phimostomus" is a newly coined Greek compound meaning 'muzzle'; "scripturarius" is of course a derogatory designation of his Lutheran adversaries, who derive all their arguments from Scripture and neglect the tradition, or in Dietenberger's own words, "qui scripturis omnia se agere gloriantur". Erasmus replied in the same year, he too in the form of an appendix to another work; his short polemic *Responsio ad disputationem cuiusdam Phimostomi de divortio* (which takes up only ten and a half columns in LB³²), a mere "lucubratiuncula", as he designates it himself,³³ was written and finished in Freiburg on 19 August 1532 and published in the same city by Johann Faber in the next month, September 1532, as an appendix to a collection of his letters, the *Epistolae palaeonaei*.³⁴ It cannot be said with any degree of certainty why Erasmus judged Dietenberger worthy of a reply; in his correspondence he nowhere mentions either the person or the book of his adversary. It may have something to do with the fact that he was not displeased with Dietenberger's learning and his moderate temper as shown by the style of his polemics, both of which he mentions with some appreciation in the introduction to his reply.³⁵ On the other hand, Erasmus notes with a certain pique the fact that Dietenberger had stated in chapter III of his book "that Erasmus of Rotterdam doubts whether sacramental confession as practiced in the Church is a rule of divine law and is necessary for salvation"; Erasmus was not amused by the fact that he was mentioned there between Karlstadt and Zwingli in a list of heretical authors which begins with Arius and Sabellius and ends with Luther.³⁶ Erasmus's apology is

³⁰ Iserloh - Fabisch ed., *Phimostomus*, 212-226.

³¹ Iserloh - Fabisch ed., *Phimostomus*, 226-252.

³² LB 9, 955-965.

³³ LB 9, 965D.

³⁴ *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami Epistolae palaeonaei. Ad haec. Responsio ad disputationem cuiusdam Phimostomi de divortio* (Freiburg i. Br.: Ioannes Emmeus Iuliacensis, September 1532) 154-164; cf. L.-E. Halkin, *Erasmus ex Erasmo, Erasme éditeur de sa correspondance* (Aubel 1983) 177-183.

³⁵ LB 9, 955A: "Legi disputationem de divortio hominis meo iudicio satis διδακτικοῦ animique sedatioris quam quosdam esse videmus qui versantur in hac harena."

³⁶ LB 9, 965A-B: "Caeterum quum initio disputationis me 'suum' appellet, tamen in computatorio scripturariorum honoris gratia commemorat me inter egregios viros exorsus ab Ario et Sabellio usque ad Martinum Lutherum. In hoc venerabili choro commemorat Erasmus inter Carolstadium et Zuinglium ..."

dedicated to the same Valentin Teteleben to whom Dietenberger had dedicated his tract; since Erasmus does not mention Dietenberger's name (he only calls him Phimostomus after the title of his book), he also withholds Teteleben's name, who is merely designated as "clarissimus vir iuris utriusque doctor N".³⁷

I will now give a short survey of the contents of the *Responsio*. Erasmus starts by making some comments on the book and its author: he has some learning and is more peaceful than most polemical authors, but the title of his book, *Phimostomus scripturariorum*, and the headings, which mention "bridles" ("frena"), show that he is very pleased with himself. Why he calls his adversaries "scripturarii" is unclear; it would be more just to call the other party "rationarii", because they neglect Scripture, they only approach the Gospels rationally and only refer to it more or less unwilling and in a way which betrays their unfamiliarity with the Good Book.

The first main point of discussion is the use of the term 'divorce'. According to Dietenberger, this word is everywhere in Scripture (including even the Old Testament) only used in one single meaning, viz., the termination of the cohabitation without, however, the dissolution of the marital bond. Erasmus refutes this opinion, and also complains about the fact that first Dietenberger uses several other terms in idiosyncratic meanings and then criticizes Erasmus for sticking to the normal usage.

The second starting-point of Dietenberger's argument is that Christ's statements on divorce do not introduce any new precepts, but only explain what Moses had said. This is to say that when Moses said: "because he hath found some uncleanness in her" (thus the King James translation; the Revised Version more clearly reads "indecenty"), he only aimed at adultery, as mentioned in Matthew 5. Erasmus shows that this interpretation is impossible. Subsequently, Erasmus repeats the gist of his comments on Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 7 in the *Annotationes*. Since Dietenberger had stated that he did not care for the opinions voiced by the Church Fathers whom Erasmus had quoted at length in his annotation, Erasmus here restricts himself to a discussion of the Scriptural places themselves and of the statements found in canon law. Dietenberger had adduced proof from the *Decretum Gratiani*, and of course Erasmus somewhat maliciously does not omit to mention the fact that this text abundantly quotes from authors whose authority Dietenberger does not want to accept. Again repeating the arguments from his annotation, Erasmus mentions the fact that many earlier decrees of popes and councils have been revised and abrogated by later authorities.

Erasmus concludes that Dietenberger's starting-points do not hold in any way: both his claim that the term 'divorce' in Scripture everywhere denotes a separation, not a full divorce and his other assumption, that Christ's and Paul's statements on divorce do not in any way diverge from the precepts in Moses's Law are untenable.

The last part of Erasmus's polemic is devoted to the sixty-one remarks that constitute the second part of Dietenberger's tract, short notes on various statements in Erasmus's annotation. Erasmus does not pay much attention to them (not even two columns in LB³⁸); he introduces his short remarks on some of them with the

³⁷ LB 9, 955A.

³⁸ LB 9, 963F-965C.

following ironic words, which at the same time give a good summary of the main disagreements between the two polemicists: “His refutation of some fragments from my annotation is entirely successful, provided that we grant him that neither Moses in Deuteronomy nor the Lord in the Gospel nor Paul in his epistles knew any other cause of divorce than adultery, nor any other kind of divorce than the separation of living together, the bond of marriage remaining indissoluble; if we grant him that by the word ‘fornication’ the Lord meant both spiritual and external fornication; if we grant him that the Apostle by the word ‘death’ meant both civil, i.e., monastic, and natural death; finally, if we admit that the Pope or the Church can take no decisions except what has been expressed in Holy Scripture”.³⁹

On Erasmus’s own example, I will skip these short remarks, except for number 34, not because it is of more importance than the other ones, but because I cannot withhold from you Erasmus’s almost pornographic description in his reply, which he uses to show the over-strictness of the rules of canon law regarding matrimonial vows. In his annotation Erasmus had said that when a bishop or other lawful judges dissolve a marriage contracted under the influence of drunkenness or youthful ignorance, they are not separating what God had united, but dissolving what the devil had joined together.⁴⁰ Dietenberger agrees: “I honestly admit that the Church rightly dissolves a marriage that has been contracted under the influence of drunkenness.”⁴¹ “But,” Erasmus replies, “I ask him, whether after lascivious touching, embraces and kisses, a young man, heated by wine and love, already having his spear in the entrance of the natural parts of the girl, when their naked bodies are touching, can still employ his reason. When the poor girl, instructed by the procuress, sees that the boy is no longer himself, she says: I will not have intercourse with you unless you marry me; he answers: I will marry you, not knowing that the intercourse turns these ‘verba de futuro’ into ‘verba de praesenti’. Nevertheless this is called a lawful marriage, and we are warned: “let no man separate what God has united”.⁴²

Erasmus ends his tract by addressing Valentin Teteleben (whose name, as I have said, he does not mention) in the following words: “I addressed my short essay to

³⁹ LB 9, 963F-964A: “... illi bonum atque commodum est, si illi concedamus nec Mosen in Deuteronomio nec Dominum in euangelio nec Paulum in epistolis ullam novisse causam divortii nisi adulterium, nec ullum divortii genus nisi quod dirimit vitae consuetudinem manente nodo coniugii; si largiamur illi Dominum nomine ‘fornicationis’ aequae expressisse spiritualem atque externam; si donemus Apostolum ‘mortis’ nomine evidenter expressisse tam mortem civilem, hoc est monasticam, quam naturalem; denique si fateamur pontificem aut ecclesiam nihil posse statuere praeter quod in sacris litteris expressum est.”

⁴⁰ Reeve - Screech ed., *Annotations* 2, 475; LB 6, 698E: “Caeterum ubi cognitissimis causis episcopus aut alii legitimi iudices dirimunt huiusmodi matrimonium, non hoc separat homo quod Deus coniunxit, sed quod male conglutinavit pueritia, quod vinum, quod temeritas, quod inscitia, quod male per lenas ac lenones suos diaconos coniunxerat diabolus, hoc per suos ministros recte dirimit Deus.”

⁴¹ Iserloh - Fabisch ed., *Phimostomus*, 241: “At ingenue fateor matrimonia per non nubilem pueritiam, per vinum rationem prorsus absorbens perque quodvis impediens ac dirimens contracta recte a Deo posse per ecclesiam aut eius primores tanquam suos legitimos ministros dirimi.”

⁴² LB 9, 964E: “Sed quaero ab isto an adolescens post lascivos contactus, amplexus et oscula vino pariter et amore calens, iam telum habens in vestibulo naturae puellaris, in ipso nudorum corporum contactu habeat usum rationis. Puella paupercula docta a lena quum videt iuvenem non esse sui compotem, dicit ‘non admittam coitum nisi me velis ducere’; ille respondet ‘ducam’, ignarus quod congressus ille verba futuri temporis vertat in verba praesentis temporis. Et tamen haec dicuntur legitima matrimonia, et occiditur nobis, quod Deus coniunxit, homo non separat.”

you, because he dedicated his to you, too; if you like, you can act as an arbitrator and a mediator between us.”⁴³

Conclusion

Finally, some remarks on the influence of Erasmus’s treatment of the question of divorce. It is of course obvious that his short polemics with Dietenberger has left no traces in later authors, as far as I have been able to establish. This should not come as a surprise; as we have seen, Erasmus’s *Responsio ad Phimostomum* is not much more than a repetition of some of the main ideas he had already published in his annotation on 1 Corinthians 7. The opinions voiced in this annotation itself had, it is true, already created a stir in Roman Catholic circles (earlier I have pointed to the fact how already before Dietenberger Jacobus van Hoogstraten, Edward Lee and Noël Béda attacked Erasmus), but strangely enough the influence of Erasmus’s ideas on contemporary and later reformers remained limited. Just to take an example, someone like Heinrich Bullinger in his opinions on marriage and divorce remains entirely within the bounds of canon law.

There is one prominent exception to this almost general rejection or at least disregard of Erasmus’s ideas and opinions on divorce: the Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer. Recently, in 1994, an exemplary monograph (regrettably only available in Dutch) on Bucer’s opinions on marriage and divorce, written by H.J. Selderhuis was published.⁴⁴ Selderhuis has shown indisputably to how great an extent Bucer was influenced by Erasmus. (Earlier already, another scholar, Friedhelm Krüger, in his study *Bucer und Erasmus* of the year 1970,⁴⁵ had made clear Erasmus’s influence on Bucer in other respects). Bucer himself testifies to his indebtedness to Erasmus when at a certain place, treating the subject of divorce, he writes: “Das Erasmus in 7. cap. 1 Cor. hievon geschrieben und beweret, halt ich recht und gut.”⁴⁶ And to quote a source of an unimpeachably Roman Catholic nature, the Dutch inquisitor Ruardus Tapperus somewhere loses his temper over Erasmus, “whom,” he says, “Bucer and present-day heretical movements follow.”⁴⁷ This quibbler was entirely right, this time.

The outlines of Erasmus’s argument in the annotation on 1 Corinthians 7 can also clearly be found in Bucer’s writings. In Bucer’s opinion marriage is not a sacrament — in this respect, too, he is in the tradition of Erasmus, who had already made

⁴³ LB 9, 965D: “Hanc lucubratiunculam ad te scribendam putavi, quod ille suam disputationem tibi dicavit, ut inter nos arbitri sequestrique, si videtur, officio fungaris.”

⁴⁴ H.J. Selderhuis, *Huwelijk en echtscheiding bij Martin Bucer*. Kerkhistorische Monografieën 1 (Leiden 1994).

⁴⁵ F. Krüger, *Bucer und Erasmus: eine Untersuchung zum Einfluß des Erasmus auf die Theologie Martin Bucers (bis zum Evangelien-Kommentar von 1530)*. Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte 57 (Wiesbaden 1970).

⁴⁶ *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften*. Ed. R. Stupperich (Gütersloh 1981) 17, 375: quoted by Selderhuis, *Huwelijk en echtscheiding*, 57, 296.

⁴⁷ R. Tapper, *Omnia quae haberi potuerunt opera* (Cologne 1582) 293: “Erasmus, quem Bucerus et scholae haeticorum huius nostri temporis sequuntur”: quoted by Selderhuis, *Huwelijk en echtscheiding*, 404.

a tentative attempt to contradict the opinion of the Church on this tricky subject — but the constituent factor of the marriage is the mutual love between the two partners. If this love no longer exists, a marriage can no longer be spoken of, and in such a case the road has been cleared for a complete divorce, including the possibility to contract another marriage. Legal separation, the only remedy for a failed marriage allowed in canon law, is in Bucer's view an invention of Satan: the result can only be an increase of fornication. Earlier Erasmus had, as we have seen, objected to this so-called solution. Also regarding the exegesis of the nineteenth chapter of Matthew Bucer relies heavily on Erasmus, viz., when he claims that the only ground for divorce mentioned there by Jesus (adultery) is only meant as an illustration, not as the only part of an exhaustive enumeration.⁴⁸

If, finally, we try to find out the extent of Bucer's (and therefore also indirectly Erasmus's) influence on later authorities on marriage and divorce, the results are very meagre: in fact, such an influence can hardly be spoken of.⁴⁹ On the other hand, I have the strong impression that in our age the love between a man and a woman is considered as the most important, yes even the exclusive basis of a marriage. But of course this can hardly be regarded as a specimen of Erasmian influence. If I were to state now that this lofty ideal of mutual love is only one side of the picture, and has resulted in a culture in which at least in this country one out of three marriages ends in a divorce, I would definitely exceed the limits of my province. It seems better, therefore, to conclude my paper here.

⁴⁸ Cf. Selderhuis, *Huwelijk en echtscheiding*, 315-316.

⁴⁹ Cf. Selderhuis, *Huwelijk en echtscheiding*, 405-412.

