

Summary

This dissertation is devoted to biblical works of Franciscus Titelmans, a 16th-century Franciscan theologian from Leuven. Although one of the leading intellectuals of his time, he has been studied almost exclusively as a background figure to Erasmus of Rotterdam, against whom he wrote several polemical treatises. The older historiography perceived him as a conservative scholastic, opposed to all humanist learning. An analysis of his biblical commentaries demonstrates, however, that the reality was much more complex, and Titelmans' criticism of Erasmus' biblical scholarship had deeper theological grounds. In the first chapter we present an overview of the history of biblical exegesis from its earliest times to the Renaissance. We argue that the premodern exegesis rested on two pillars: an equilibrium between the literal and spiritual senses and a strongly ecclesiastical dimension of exegesis. This exegetical consensus persisted throughout the Middle Ages but came under question in the Renaissance. Humanist scholars, such as Lorenzo Valla, Jacques Lefèvre and especially Erasmus of Rotterdam emphasised the literal sense at the expense of the spiritual one and transformed exegesis into an individualistic scholarly pursuit. The second chapter presents the life and works of Titelmans. He received a mixture of scholastic and humanist education and in many ways was himself a humanist. The third chapter analyses how he explained the literal sense of Scriptures. It shows that the Franciscan exegete often used the original languages of the Bible, Greek and Hebrew, to correct corrupted texts and explain difficult passages, never, however, challenging established dogmatic interpretations. Whenever the Catholic doctrine was at stake, he followed the dogma even against philology. The following chapter concentrates on the spiritual or mystical sense of the Bible in Titelmans' exegesis. This chapter argues that he considered the spiritual sense to be the primary sense of the Scriptures. His interpretations followed patristic and mediaeval exegetical traditions, occasionally enriching them with actualising additions based on current events. The final, fifth chapter re-evaluates in the light of his biblical commentaries Titelmans' polemics against Erasmus and other humanists. It shows that he was not *per se* opposed to the humanist methodology. What he was afraid of was what he perceived as a secularisation of the Word of God. Titelmans stood strongly in the ancient tradition that perceived the Bible as the Living Word. Its deep, mystical meaning was discovered in an act of inspired reading by the community of faith. He was scandalised by the humanist concept of treating the Scriptures as if they were merely a text, that would unlock their hidden treasures to a skilled philologist. We argue that the early 16th-century debates, in which Titelmans took an active part, mark the beginning of transitions in the understanding of the Bible, which continue to trouble biblical theologians until the present day. We believe that a better understanding of the historical process that led to this change can also help to find the way forward.

Keywords: biblical humanism, history of exegesis, pre-Tridentine exegesis, Franciscus Titelmans, Erasmus of Rotterdam.

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