Juliusz Domański, Raymond Marcel, Jean-Pierre Massaut, and André Godin (eds.)


Erasmus' *Enchiridion* (1503) was the first fruit of his decision to devote his life to Christian writing. Written as a spiritual guide for a Christian soldier, it quickly found a much wider readership. The soldier for whom it was written (a friend of a friend) paid it no mind, but other readers reported that it raised their spirits. Erasmus was pleased with the *Enchiridion* even if he did not always take its advice. He admitted, “holiness of life is more noticeable in the book than in its author” (CWE 66.8; “in libello plus conspici sanctimoniae quam in libelli autore” [ASD V–8: 60; ep. 858]). More disciplined than he was, his *Enchiridion* rewarded him generously for his effort in its behalf: at least forty editions were published in Erasmus’ lifetime.

The ASD edition of the *Enchiridion* was barely begun by Raymond Marcel (†1972). Juliusz Domański took over, collated ten editions, and chose the 1518 Basel edition as his copy text. He completed the introduction, expanded the notes, and performed the duties of publication. Domański finished his editorial work in 1999 but publication awaited the edition of a companion piece, Erasmus’ *Exomologesis*, first published in 1524. Jean-Pierre Massaut and André Godin chose the enlarged 1530 edition as their copy text.

Both texts were originally published as parts of different miscellanies. The *Enchiridion* first appeared in *Lucubrationes*, with Erasmus’ commentary on Psalm 1 and early works on Jesus and the Virgin Mary. *Exomologesis* originally appeared with Erasmus’ remarks on deathbed confession (the “Epistola de morte,” ep. 1347), his commentary on Psalm 3, a rebuttal of Jacobus Stunica, and his correspondence with Pope Adrian VI regarding Erasmus’ adversaries. Their conjunction in this volume exposes their stark contrasts.

*Exomologesis* is a small lead counterweight to the longer lighter *Enchiridion*. They are a pair like noon and midnight, or advance and retreat. The *Enchiridion* bids its readers to soar past the minds of angels to become one with God (ASD V–8: 134; CWE 66: 41; LB V: 11f). *Exomologesis* bows down rather than uplifts. Closer to his skin than his heart, it expressed Erasmus’ support for the sacrament of confession and the authority of the Church, despite monks and priests who “frequently outdo the ignorant people in their own ignorance and moral depravity” (ASD V–8: 348; CWE 67: 21; LB V: 146c).

Luther and his partisans disputed whether confession could be a sacrament, since it is not in Scripture. Erasmus sought to avoid such quarrels. He wrote
instead to fortify those who felt confession was good for the soul. Erasmus compared a priest at confession to a physician healing a wound or sore. He described himself as such a physician and forewarned his reader that “You should expect sound advice, not pleasant conversation, from a doctor” (ASD V–8: 350; CWE 67: 22; LB V: 147c). Contemporaries asked, could confession before a priest be holy when the practice was a scandal everywhere, liable to hypocrisy, blackmail, and espionage. Erasmus was aware of such abuses, yet approved the opinion of the Church and praised confession as an “excellent institution.”

*Exomologesis* is short and unpleasant. It was briefly important. No other work of Erasmus was more immediately translated: a French translation appeared in March 1526, barely a month after Froben published the Latin (the *Enchiridion* was not translated into French until 1519, sixteen years after its original). It is one of Erasmus’ dubious loyalty pledges to the Church, but was scorned by Reformers and the Church alike. In an unavailing effort to satisfy Catholic critics Erasmus published an expanded version in 1530. When its editions and translations were forbidden by the Index, the *Exomologesis* vanished, to be read solely by specialists.

In *Exomologesis* Erasmus sings a Praise of Humiliation: “To be raised up you must abase yourself” (CWE 67: 26; “Ut attollaris, deicas te necesse est” [ASD V–8: 352; LB V: 148E]); “Let it suffice to be humiliated just once before a man” (CWE 67: 74–75; “satisque sit semel apud hominem pubescere” [ASD V–8: 418: LB V: 170D]). Erasmus lauds the usual virtues, hates the usual vices (vanity especially), recoils at creeping paganism, refrains from mentioning shameful sexual acts, and excuses nocturnal emissions (*pollutionibus nocturnis*) as sinless accidents. While Erasmus expected *Exomologesis* to be read by confessors and penitents, he most wished to reach the penitents: the bulk of the book blares warnings about telling secrets to priests.

The ASD edition of the *Exomologesis* appears on the heels of the 2015 translation by Michael J. Heath (CWE 67). Both books are keyed to the Leiden edition (LB), per their series, and thus to each other. English readers uneasy with Latin will benefit from both. Domański’s excellent *Enchiridion* should enhance appreciation and use of Charles Fantazzi’s English translation and notes (CWE 66).

The ASD *Enchiridion* and *Exomologesis* improve upon the Leiden edition by dividing the texts into additional paragraphs, making them more legible. Erasmus’ Latin orthography is respected (*vt, vbi, viuit*) but abbreviations are spelled out. All apparatus is in French. The editors provide reliable Latin texts, but the greater part of their labor—and their greater achievement—is their attention to variora, marginalia, and notes. Source notes precisely identify allusions and quotations, link their texts to other works by Erasmus, and offer venera-