

COLLECTED WORKS
OF
ERASMUS

PARAPHRASE ON MATTHEW



COLLECTED WORKS OF ERASMUS

VOLUME 45

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COLLECTED WORKS OF ERASMUS

NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP

General Editor Robert D. Sider

PARAPHRASE ON MATTHEW

translated and annotated by

Dean Simpson

Contributing Editor Robert D. Sider

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Preface

When, in late 1520, Erasmus looked back on his work on the *Paraphrases*, he observed that he had originally intended to paraphrase the Epistles of only Paul and Peter.¹ It was the ecclesiastical diplomat, Matthäus Schiner, Cardinal Bishop of Sion, with whom he had dined in Cologne in November of that year, who persuaded him to complete the *Paraphrases* on all the canonical Epistles.² Within little more than two months, Erasmus had finished the *Paraphrases* on James, on John 1–3, and on Hebrews.³ In June of 1521, Schiner met Erasmus again, this time in Brussels, and urged him ‘to do for St Matthew’s Gospel what [he] had already done for the apostolic Epistles.’⁴ In response Erasmus ‘at once made numerous excuses’:⁵ a large part of the Gospels is ‘a narrative of events in simple and straightforward style,’⁶ which scarcely benefits from the expansive clarification of paraphrase. Moreover, he found much obscurity in the words of Jesus, while some expressions were simply inexplicable.⁷ Further, if he were to paraphrase all the Gospels, as he feared would be expected, there must be considerable repetition, while a single ‘harmonization’ of them all would, due to the discrepancies among them, destroy the clarity desired in a paraphrase.⁸

Accordingly, Erasmus did not immediately follow the advice of the Cardinal. He was, in any case, fully engaged in other matters. During the summer, he was busy preparing the third edition of his New Testament;

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1 Cf Ep 1171:48–50.

2 Cf Epp 1171:50–8 and 1255:25–9.

3 Cf Epp 1171, 1179, 1181.

4 Ep 1255:30–1

5 Ep 1255:31–2

6 Ep 1255:43

7 Ep 1255:50–65

8 Ep 1255:71–9

then in October he moved to Basel both to oversee the printing of the New Testament and to escape his enemies at Louvain.⁹ But after he had arrived in Basel on November 15, he evidently reconsidered, and set to work to compose the *Paraphrase on Matthew*. As usual, Erasmus worked rapidly and was able to claim on December 14 that he had completed the task.¹⁰ The *Paraphrase on Matthew*, dated March 1522, was published by Froben in a folio edition that contained also the text of the highly popular *Paraphrases on All the Apostolic Epistles*.¹¹ Three revised editions would follow in the course of Erasmus' lifetime: in 1524 the *Paraphrase on Matthew* appeared in the *Tomus primus* of the complete *Paraphrases*, a volume that contained the *Paraphrases* on the four Gospels and Acts;¹² it was revised again for an octavo edition of the complete *Paraphrases* in 1534, while in 1535 a new folio edition of the *Paraphrases* on the Gospels and Acts was published.

In all these editions the dedicatory letter to the emperor Charles v prefaced the *Paraphrase*, and Erasmus' letter of 14 December to Schiner was appended at the end of the *Paraphrase*. Neither letter, however, had the importance or the effect of a prefatory essay written as a letter 'To the Pious Reader' at the request of the printer who 'complained there would otherwise be some pages left blank.'¹³ In this essay Erasmus reiterated the message of the *Paraclesis*, first published in 1516 with the first edition of his New Testament, the message that the Scriptures should be available to all in the vernacular, since it is in the words of Scripture that we meet the saving presence of Christ. But the letter to the pious reader that prefaced the *Paraphrase on Matthew* went beyond the *Paraclesis* in one important respect: it proposed a service of confirmation for young people in which youth would publicly assume responsibility for the baptismal vows taken on their behalf by their sponsors. This proved to be one of Erasmus' most provocative suggestions.¹⁴

If, as we have seen, Erasmus had originally questioned the possibility of paraphrasing narrative text, his *Paraphrase on Matthew*, so rapidly com-

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9 Cf Ep 1242 introduction.

10 Ep 1248:16-17; cf Ep 1255:91-2.

11 Cf CWE 42 xxiii.

12 In their first edition the *Paraphrases* on the Gospels of John, Luke, Mark, and the book of Acts were published between February 1523 and February 1524; see 'The Sequence and Dates of the Publication of the *Paraphrases*' below.

13 Cf 28 below. For a similar 'filler' devoted to an evangelical message see the 'afterword' 'To the Pious Reader' appended to some editions of the *Paraphrase on John* CWE 46 226-8 and 226 n1.

14 Cf notes 72-6 to this preface, below.

pleted, should have dispelled his doubts. While in some narrative parts – frequently, for example in the parables – paraphrastic expansion is relatively limited, more generally the stories of Scripture are, as narrative, considerably enhanced by the rhetorical techniques Erasmus applied to them: the exposition of character, the insinuation of motive, and the externalization of the psychology of the actors in a story, as well as the representation of the action in vivid sequential detail, for example in the case of the swineherds who ‘saw the spectacle, fled in terror, entered the city, and reported to the citizens.’¹⁵ These narrative qualities invite a crisp translation, frequently demanding the reduction of the long, complex sentence of the Latin into the simpler structures of English. At the same time, the vibrancy of the Erasmian Latin can often be simulated best in translation by a studied effort to remain otherwise faithful to the original.

As an interpretation of Matthew, the *Paraphrase* reflects several dominant themes that condition the Latin. In the first place, throughout the *Paraphrase* Jesus is represented as the master teacher, his future apostles as learners, the *discipuli*. Perhaps no word is used with more discernible purpose than the word *magister* ‘teacher,’ pointing unmistakably at the proud claims of those who possess the title in the universities of sixteenth century Europe. Everywhere Jesus is the model for gospel teachers. He is the *bonus doctor*, the *prudens litterator*, the *peritus artifex* who knows precisely how to fashion his still-unformed disciples, finally achieving his goal when, after the resurrection, he sends them out into the world as mature and skilled catechists. If the language of educational theory, the *ratio instituendae* ‘method of instruction’¹⁶ comes frequently into play, the Sermon on the Mount appears to be an open window through which the reader may see an unexcelled example of good pedagogy, a classroom enlivened by the provocative questions of the *magister*, the direct address to the learners, the imaginary objector (‘But someone will say’), the shocking antithesis between the common opinion and the authoritative word of the *magister*.¹⁷ The result is a lively, almost jaunty style, which the translation here has tried to reflect.

In the second place, the *Paraphrase* reveals Erasmus’ profound concern for the religious welfare of society and the individual, both ever open to attack by the forces of evil. These forces, so vividly represented in the temptation of Christ by Satan, are active in the passions of the leaders of society

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15 Cf 150 below.

16 Cf 158 below.

17 For Jesus as teacher see Jacques Chomarat ‘Grammar and Rhetoric in the Paraphrases of the Gospels by Erasmus’ ERSY 1 46–68.

and in the hypocrisy of the religious establishment. The pervasive hypocrisy Erasmus sees in religious leaders brings constantly into play the language of the theatre. But hypocrisy is driven by the 'affections,' and from these in turn emerge the sinister desire to destroy Christ by catching him out, ensnaring and entrapping him. The language used to describe the action of the 'hypocrites' echoes the language found in the story of the temptation of Christ, where Satan seeks to ambush and entrap the Messiah. In this way the language implies a relationship between the demonic forces and the corrupted religious establishment. The corruption of the establishment is especially well imaged by the frequent use of the word *praeposterus*, which in this translation is rendered variously by 'disproportionate,' 'inverted,' 'priorities reversed,' 'misdirected,' 'preposterous'; everywhere it signifies that the judgment of religious hypocrites is irrational, their values disordered.

But the seat of action lies in the 'affections' (Latin *affectus*). The word is ubiquitous in this *Paraphrase*, and is used with a broad range of meanings; indeed, Erasmus at one point defines the word as 'those who are most closely joined by the law of nature,'¹⁸ referring to the natural pull of the heart for family members. Elsewhere Erasmus speaks of the 'affections' of the body, and the 'affections' of 'body and mind.'¹⁹ Here again, the translation employs a variety of English words: emotions, feelings, disposition; but perhaps most frequently it adopts the English derivative from the Latin, 'affections,' allowing the ambiguity inherent in the Latin to remain in the translation.²⁰

In contrast to the hypocrisy and intrigue of the religious establishment stands the pure gospel of Jesus Christ, the 'teaching' that fulfils the Law by going beyond it, replacing its relative justice with a demand for absolute righteousness. Erasmus begins this *Paraphrase* by defining 'gospel': the 'book of the generation of Jesus Christ' [Matt 1:1] is, in fact, a book about the 'heavenly philosophy,' about the 'gospel,' 'that is, this hoped for and joyous news.'²¹ Throughout the *Paraphrase*, this word 'gospel,' used both as an adjective and a noun,²² gleams like a many-faceted jewel, casting its light upon the multiple aspects of life: gospel message, gospel truth, gospel godliness, gospel virtue, gospel holiness, gospel man, and in its noun form, the

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18 Cf 177 below.

19 Cf 354 below.

20 Cf the brief consideration of the word in CWE 44 xvii and CWE 56 64–5, 222–3.

21 Cf 31 below.

22 In its Latin forms, *evangelium* (noun), *evangelicus* (adjective)

striking 'gospel of my death.'²³ The word is clearly intended to impress, at times to arrest if not to shock. Hence for the Latin noun and adjective the somewhat stark English derivatives from Anglo-Saxon generally seemed more appropriate in translation than the more complex and sophisticated 'evangelical,' derived from the Latin. In a word, we have attempted in our translation to be sensitive to Erasmus' design in projecting what he wishes to make the central Matthean themes.

The annotation to the translation follows previous volumes in this series in attempting to facilitate the access of the reader to the *Paraphrase*. In the first place the notes register changes in the three editions of the *Paraphrase* from 1524 to 1535.²⁴ Many of the changes are relatively insignificant, some correct manifest, even glaring (though unimportant) mistakes, a few have genuine theological interest.²⁵ Second, the *Paraphrases* of Erasmus should not be read as isolated endeavours; each *Paraphrase* reflects ideas, images, expressions found not only in other *Paraphrases* or in the *Annotations* on the New Testament, but in other works as well. In our notes references to Erasmus' other works are far from exhaustive, but they will help the reader to trace to some extent the topography of Erasmus' mind.

While all Erasmus' writings are to some degree contextual for the *Paraphrases*, it is his response to criticisms specifically of the *Paraphrases* that is of primary importance. In Paris Noël Bédard led the Faculty of Theology at the University in its attacks on the *Paraphrases*. Bédard began by compiling notes on the *Paraphrase on Luke*, but soon came to include in his criticism the *Paraphrases* on other Gospels, and eventually on the entire New Testament, publishing in 1526 a volume that examined not only the *Paraphrases* of Erasmus but also the biblical commentaries of Erasmus' distinguished contemporary, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples. Erasmus rather hastily defended himself in a publication of August 1526 that included the *Elenchus* and the

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23 Cf 344 below.

24 The notes take into account only the published editions (their dates are italicized in the notes, as are the dates of editions of his *Annotations* on the New Testament). Erasmus claims in the *Elenchus*, published in 1526, that he had already begun to make corrections to his *Paraphrases* in response to the criticism of Noël Bédard (LB IX 497A). In 1529 he appended (under the title *Loca quaedam in aliquot Erasmi lucubrationes per ipsum emendata*) to the second edition of his *Apologia adversus monachos* a list of brief corrections of some of his works, including the *Paraphrases*; cf Allen Ep 2095 intro and 57–62, 81–3.

25 Cf eg the paraphrase on Matt 4:1–11, where additions of 1534 compare Christ in temptation to Adam (chapter 4 n13).

Divinationes ad notata Bedae.²⁶ He offered a more considered reply the following year with his *Supputatio calumniarum Natalis Bedae*. The Faculty of Theology formally condemned Erasmus' *Paraphrases* along with other works on 16 December 1527, though the condemnation was not released in print until 1531.²⁷ Erasmus responded to the 'censures' of the Paris theologians with his *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas*, published in 1532. In Spain criticism of the *Paraphrases* became virulent among the monks, and came to a head in a meeting at Valladolid in 1527. Though the meeting was abandoned (due to the plague) without resolution, Erasmus attempted to answer in his *Apologia adversus monachos* the charges brought against him.²⁸ The notes reflect the manner in which the *Paraphrase on Matthew* was involved in these controversies.

In the third place, the notes are designed to give the reader some access to the language of Erasmus. In many instances comments on language are intended to develop, beyond the possibility of translation, the semantic significance of a word. Sometimes a word has received attention because of its inherent interest, as in the various terms used to designate 'hell.' In some cases a word has been marked to cast further light on words studied in previous volumes – probably no word has teased the translators of the New Testament Scholarship series more than the apparently simple word *crassus*.²⁹ The study of this and other words in the successive volumes of the *Paraphrases* broadens the perspective from which we can view the mind of Erasmus.

But undoubtedly the most ubiquitous task for the annotator has been to put the reader in touch with the sources on which Erasmus drew in writing the *Paraphrase on Matthew*. Certainly language and ideas found in classical literature play a role in the composition of the *Paraphrase*. Far more significant is the literature of the Bible, and especially of the other Gospels; it is above all from these that Erasmus creates the texture of the *Paraphrase on Matthew*. Though Erasmus had, as we have seen, denied the possibility of writing a 'harmonization' of the Gospels, the paraphrastic narrative is so frequently and so fully filled out with details from the other Gospels

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26 For a succinct account of the course of the controversy up to 1526 see Ep 1664 n1.

27 Cf CEBR 1 117.

28 Cf Epp 1742 introduction and 1786 n5 for the reception of Erasmus' writings in Spain and for the Valladolid conference.

29 Cf eg the extensive study of the word by Jane Phillips in CWE 48 32 n16; for the language of 'hell' in the *Paraphrase on Matthew* see chapters 3 n41 and 8 n37.

that at points it actually approaches a 'harmonization.' Occasionally, indeed, Erasmus momentarily abandons the Matthean narrative altogether to follow a story from the Gospel of Luke.³⁰ The biblical influence does, of course, extend well beyond the ordering of events, for Erasmus composed this *Paraphrase*, as he did his others, with images, phrases, and expressions drawn with learned spontaneity from the entire range of Scripture.

For most readers, however, it will be the patristic and medieval sources that are likely to engage the most attention. Happily, Erasmus himself informs us of his main sources for the *Paraphrase on Matthew*: 'In this work I have mainly followed Origen, the most experienced theologian of all, along with Chrysostom and Jerome, the most generally approved among the orthodox.'³¹ This appears to be substantially true, though the influence of pseudo-Chrysostom is suggested at some points, and it seems likely that Erasmus drew on Augustine for the paraphrase on the Sermon on the Mount, and on Cyprian as well for that on the Lord's Prayer. But Erasmus' reading in the Fathers by this time was broad, and the notes point occasionally, without claiming direct influence, to similarities between Erasmian expression and that of several other patristic writers. It is uncertain how far in this *Paraphrase* Erasmus followed specific medieval exegetes, but references are included to both the *Gloss* and the *Postilla* of Nicholas of Lyra,³² primarily to suggest that the tradition of biblical exegesis represented in these two constituted a source on which Erasmus could have drawn, a tradition derived from and therefore often coinciding with the exegesis of the Fathers, but sometimes apparently extending beyond it.³³

Erasmus' use in this *Paraphrase* of the *Homilies on Matthew* by Chrysostom, and the *Commentary on Matthew* by Jerome is so pervasive and so apparently direct as to suggest that he had these books open before him as he wrote. From Jerome he seems to have derived factual information as well as interpretive ideas, including the allegorization of some Matthean passages. It appears, however, that Chrysostom's *Homilies on Matthew* provided the most dominant influence. Similarities between the *Homilies* and the *Paraphrase* extend not only to interpretation, but to argumentation, to the

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30 Cf eg the representation of the preaching of John the Baptist (66–7 below), and that of the role of Herod at Jesus' trial (365 below).

31 Cf the dedicatory letter below (Ep 1255:117–20).

32 For the character and dates of these exegetical works see CWE 44 xv n29 (the *Gloss*) and 134 n12 (Nicholas).

33 Jane Phillips in her 'Translator's Note' CWE 48 xiii wisely cautions against the definitive ascription of particular sources used by Erasmus in every instance in his *Paraphrases*.

description of topographical settings, to expressions that, on occasion, are so nearly identical that one may cautiously assume that Erasmus transferred them directly from the *Homilies*; the similarities extend also to the explanatory connections made between biblical passages in order to set an individual pericope in the broader context of the Matthean narrative. In the careful and extensive identification of such sources as these, we can understand better the intellectual context in which Erasmus wrote; we can discern the lively dialogue between Erasmus and the great biblical expositors of Christian antiquity; and we can appreciate the degree to which the *Paraphrase on Matthew* is, beyond the invention of Erasmus' own imagination, a fabric woven from the literature of the past.

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PARAPHRASE ON MATTHEW

Paraphrasis in Matthaeum

DEDICATORY LETTER

TO THE INVINCIBLE EMPEROR CHARLES,
FIFTH OF THAT NAME,
FROM ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM, GREETING¹

Right well I know, invincible Emperor Charles, the great respect and reverence due to all the sacred literature which sainted Fathers put forth for our benefit under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and especially to those who give us a faithful account of all that our heavenly Father did or uttered in the person of his Son Jesus Christ for the salvation of the whole world; and I am well aware of my own unworthiness. When a few years ago I first set my hand to an exposition of the Pauline Epistles in the form of a paraphrase² – it was an unprompted impulse that put the idea into

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¹ The translation of the dedicatory letter (Ep 1255) to Charles v is by R.A.B. Mynors with modifications, the notes by James M. Estes with modifications. Charles (1500–58) was born in Ghent, grew up and was educated in the Netherlands. He was the grandson of the emperor Maximilian I; his Spanish mother, Joanna, was acclaimed queen of Castile and Aragon in 1502. Charles' father, Philip, died in 1506, and, after his maternal grandfather, Ferdinand II, died, Charles became in 1517 king of Aragon and Castille. He was elected emperor in June 1519, was crowned in Aachen in October 1520, then went with his court to Cologne, and later to Worms for the Diet in early 1521. Probably in January 1516 Erasmus had been appointed Councillor to the young Prince (Ep 392:17n); hence he was in Cologne in Nov 1520 when he met Cardinal Schiner, who would later urge Erasmus to write the *Paraphrase on Matthew*. Charles' election as emperor intensified the antagonism between the Hapsburgs and the French royal house, an antagonism that had broken out in open war by 1521 (Ep 1228 n12). Erasmus had already in 1516 dedicated to Charles his *Institutio principis christiani*, in which he had advocated 'the arts of peace' (CWE 27 253–60, 282–8). It was appropriate that in the political situation of 1521–2 he should again cautiously admonish the relatively new emperor against war. For Erasmus' dismay at the war that had broken out, see Ep 1238:65–81; for a general account of Charles' life see CEBR 1 295–9. For Charles as the dedicatee of the *Paraphrase on Matthew* see the letter to Matthäus Schiner, appended to the *Paraphrase* (Ep 1248:51–4), 381–3 below.

² See Ep 710.

my head – I felt myself to be undertaking an exceedingly bold and self-confident enterprise and one ‘full of dangerous hazard’ as the saying goes;³ so much so that after trying the experiment with two or three chapters, I was minded to furl my sails and abandon my intended course, had not my learned friends with surprising unanimity urged me to continue. Nor would their importunity allow me any rest until I had finished all the apostolic Epistles that we possess, although I had not intended to deal with any except those that beyond all question were written by St Paul. It has not always turned out well when I have obeyed the promptings of my friends; but in this instance I was gratified to find the result of my rash undertaking more successful than I had expected, both for its author, who earned very little unpopularity, and for all who wish to learn the gospel authority, who vie with one another in their gratitude, having found in my work an inspiration to pursue the wisdom of the apostles or a great aid in its pursuit.

Having performed this task, I was not expecting thereafter to have anything more to do with this type of literature. But no: I went to pay my respects to his Eminence Matthäus, cardinal of Sion,⁴ in Brussels,⁵ when he was on his way back from the Diet of Worms (it was he who had encouraged me to complete the canonical Epistles),⁶ and at the very start of our conversation, as though he had thought of this in advance, he began to urge me to do for St Matthew’s Gospel what I had done for the apostolic Epistles. I at once made numerous excuses. I had already shown sufficient audacity, I said, in attempting this for the letters of the apostles. The apostles were of course inspired, but they were only human, while the majesty of Christ was too great for the same boldness to be permissible in respect of the words he uttered. If I were not deterred by the solemn nature of the task, yet the subject-matter was unsympathetic and did not admit of paraphrase; and not solely because in the Gospel different characters appear, so that while the writer adapts his style to suit them (as he has to), his pen is constrained within very narrow limits and of course is debarred from the freedom allowed to other kinds of commentary. For a paraphrase is a kind

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3 Horace *Odes* 2.1.6; cf *Adagia* I iv 32.

4 On Matthäus Schiner see the letter to Schiner appended to the *Paraphrase* 381 n1 below. Schiner spent the latter half of June 1521 in Brussels, departing for Milan on the thirtieth to negotiate with the Swiss on behalf of the emperor.

5 in Brussels ... conversation] The translation here differs from CWE 9 827–9.

6 See Ep 1171:50–7.

of commentary.⁷ Besides that, since a great part of the Gospel consists of a narrative of events in a simple and straightforward style, he who seeks to paraphrase such material will perhaps be thought to do no more than, as the Greek proverb has it, kindle a lamp at midday.⁸ Then again, since the ancients in expounding the allegories show great variation and sometimes behave, in my view, as though they were not wholly serious, nor will it prove possible to set them down except as one who reports the words either of Christ or of the evangelist, it is clear that I should be facing very great difficulties. I need not add that Christ sometimes spoke as though at the time he wished not to be understood, for instance when he said, 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up',⁹ and again when he spoke of buying a sword¹⁰ or being wary of the leaven of the Pharisees.¹¹ Again, in the discourse in which he foretells the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of this world, and the afflictions that will befall the apostles in the future,¹² Jesus so mixes and adapts what he has to say that he seems to me to have wished to remain obscure not only to the apostles but to us.

Again, there are some passages that in my opinion are quite inexplicable, among them the phrase about the sin against the Holy Ghost that can never be forgiven,¹³ and the last day, which only the Father knows and which is unknown even to the Son.¹⁴ Faced with such places in a commentary, one can without peril report the differing views of different scholars, and even confess outright that one does not understand the passage. But the author of a paraphrase is not allowed the same freedom. Furthermore, some things are expressed in such a way that they refer equally to modern times, in which we see many things that conflict with the institutions of the apostolic age. Granted that the evangelists knew these things in advance by the spirit of prophecy, they cannot be recounted as if the evangelists themselves were speaking, except in a very unnatural and artificial way. My mind was influenced also by the thought that if I undertook this task in Matthew only, some people would demand forthwith the same

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7 For the *Paraphrases* as 'commentary' see CWE 42 xi-xix; also Jean-François Cotier 'La paraphrase latine de Quintilien à Erasme' in *Revue des études latines* 80 (2002) 237-52.

8 See *Adagia* II v 6.

9 John 2:19

10 Luke 22:36

11 Matt 16:6-12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1

12 Luke 21:5-33

13 Matt 12:31-2; cf chapter 12 n29 below.

14 Cf Mark 13:32; also Matt 24:36 and chapter 24 n31 below.

treatment for the other evangelists. If I were to comply with their wishes, I foresaw that I should often have to repeat the same words, wherever in fact the evangelists agree among themselves. Suppose, on the other hand, I were to construct some kind of continuous narrative out of them all;¹⁵ since to explain the discrepancies between the evangelists is like going round and round in some sort of maze, I could not then have maintained the clear texture of a paraphrase.

With these arguments and many others like them I begged to be excused the task that was set before me, and thought I had a good case which must win the day. But the cardinal's eloquence and his authority were too much for me; he took the risk and hazard of the whole business on his own shoulders. I had not the face to stand out any longer against the advice of a man whose wisdom your Majesty is often happy to follow in matters of the greatest moment. At any rate, though I had not entirely accepted the burden, but had only promised that I would try sometime if it could be made to work, he went on to Milan,¹⁶ and promised the Germans in my name that the work would come out this winter. Consequently, on my return to Basel I was beset by my German friends, who can be very obstinate when they want something, so that to fulfil the promises he and I had made I finished the work in about a month. Thus he commanded, I obeyed, and I only wish the result may be a happy one for us all; of which I have some hopes, if your Majesty will accept this modest gift which is dedicated to you.

At this point, someone who knows nothing of you but your imperial title will ask: What can a lay prince make of a subject that was more suitably dedicated to abbots or bishops? In the first place, I consider that any honourable gift made to a Christian prince is an appropriate gift. Besides which, while no prince is such a pagan as to find the faith of the gospel foreign to him, emperors are anointed and consecrated expressly that they may either protect or amend or propagate the religion of the gospel. And so the emperor is no teacher of the gospel, but its champion, I quite agree; yet at the same time it is right to have some idea what it is for the defence of which you take up arms. What is more, when I consider how devoted you are in spirit to religion and piety, so that bishops and abbots might find in you a standard or a stimulus to zeal for true religion, I think there is no one to whom this gift might have been offered more appropriately than to your Majesty. And so what I might fitly have dedicated to any Christian prince,

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15 A task subsequently undertaken (but never finished) by Jakob Ziegler; see Ep 1260:200–2, 303–4.

16 See n4 above.

and still more fitly to an emperor, I dedicate most fitly of all to Charles. Less appropriate are the gifts offered by those who bring precious jewels, high-mettled horses, hounds for the chase, or barbarous tapestries. Again, since the evangelists wrote down the gospel to be read by all, I do not see why all should not read it, and I have treated it in such a way that even illiterates can understand it. But it will be read with the greatest profit if each person takes it up with the intention of becoming better than he was before, not of adapting the Gospel text to fit his own affections but of correcting his way of life and his desires to match the rule that it lays down. In this work I have mainly followed Origen, the most experienced theologian of all, along with Chrysostom and Jerome, the most generally approved among the orthodox.¹⁷

May that heavenly prince grant you, most august Emperor, to will and to attempt those things which are best, and may he bring your efforts to a happy outcome, so that your great empire, which hitherto has come to you without bloodshed, may be extended or maintained on the same terms. In the meanwhile, merciful Prince, never forget that no war can be undertaken for so just a cause or fought with such moderation that it will not bring with it a vast horde of crimes and calamities, and further, that the largest share of these evils falls upon harmless people who do not deserve them.

Basel, 13 January 1522

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17 The precedence given to Origen here may well be rhetorical; our notes suggest that the *Paraphrase* is more dependent on Chrysostom and Jerome than on Origen.

While Erasmus' comments in the dedicatory letter to Charles v give some hints about the composition of this *Paraphrase*, they offer little that is explicit about his procedure. But for a hypothetical reconstruction on the process Erasmus effected in composing a paraphrase see John Bateman in the 'Translator's Note' CWE 44 xiv–xvi and the reference (n18) to the article by Irena Backus on 'évolution théologique' in the *Paraphrases*.

TO THE PIOUS READER

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM TO THE PIOUS READER, GREETING

I recall, good reader, that I have elsewhere on another occasion affirmed that I strongly disagree with those who think that lay and uneducated people must be entirely kept from reading the sacred books, and that only the few, who over many years have been worn out by Aristotelian philosophy and scholastic theology, should be admitted to these inner sanctuaries.¹ Now, in the present work I will not dispute with those who judge that such people are better suited for reading and interpreting the arcane books because they bring to the task a gifted mind trained in the humane disciplines. So let it be – provided that in the course of their life they have engaged in these disciplines with prudence and restraint, and have not grown old in them; provided they do not ascribe to them too much importance, provided they are without arrogance and blind self-love,² provided the eye by which God is seen in the arcane Scriptures is sound³ and pure, and the heart has not been tainted by the worldly affections from which the heavenly Spirit recoils.

The scribes and Pharisees grasped well in other respects the sacred writings, and, when asked about the Christ, they proffered testimony from the prophets without hesitation;⁴ asked about the chief precept of the Law,

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1 Cf the *Paraclesis* Holborn 142:10–14: ‘I disagree entirely with those who do not want divine literature to be translated into the vernacular tongues and read by ordinary people, as if Christ taught such convoluted doctrine that it could be understood only by a handful of theologians and then with difficulty ...’

2 ‘Blind self-love’: *caecus amor sui*. For the expression and its significance see Horace *Odes* 1.18.14 and *Adagia* 1 ii 15; I iii 92.

3 ‘Sound’ *simplex*. With *oculus* the expression reflects the Vulgate of Matt 6:22. For *simplex* see chapters 6 n42 and 10 n24.

4 Cf Matt 2:4–6.

they responded appropriately.⁵ Even Caiaphas proclaimed the oracle that the world would be redeemed by Christ's death.⁶ Nonetheless, seeing they did not see, because they had eyes diseased by envy and hatred; hearing they did not hear, because they had ears stopped up with the filth of evil desires; understanding they did not understand,⁷ because they had minds blinded by the darkness of ambition and greed. In fact, no one resisted Christ more stubbornly than those who chiefly had possession of the very books in which he had been both promised and foreshadowed. Still, a detailed knowledge of sacred literature must not be condemned on this account, if some, through their own flawed character, turn what is by its nature good and salvific to their own ruin.

Granted, then, that the first place in teaching may be given to these; nevertheless, I do not see why the uneducated must be kept away from the Gospel literature particularly, like the profane from the holy, since these books were produced for learned and unlearned alike, for Greek and Scythian equally, for slave as well as free, for women along with men,⁸ for plebeians no less than kings. Their teaching pertains to everyone equally, what they promise pertains to everyone equally. They have been set forth in a manner to be understood by an uneducated person who is godly and modest, more quickly than by an arrogant philosopher.

It is the way of the Jews, who were dwelling in the shadows, to keep the people and their mysteries apart.⁹ The gospel light does not bear to be suppressed. It used to be that one man, a priest, entered into the holy of holies,¹⁰ but when the temple curtain was torn in two at the Lord's death,¹¹ access to Christ himself, who is truly the holy of holies and sanctifier of all, was given to everyone. Raised up from the earth, he who wants to save everyone draws all things to him.

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5 Cf Mark 12:28–34. In fact, in this story it is one of the scribes who asks Jesus what is the 'chief precept,' but to Jesus' reply he offers an 'apt' response.

6 Cf John 11:49–52.

7 Cf Matt 13:13–15. On 'diseased eyes' *oculos vitiatos* cf chapter 6 n42 below.

8 Cf 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11.

9 An allusion to the veil that separated the holy of holies, in which the ark of the covenant was kept, from the outer courts of the temple; cf Exod 26:31–5; Heb 9:1–5.

10 Cf Lev 16:11–14, 33; Heb 9:6–7.

11 The language here, and frequently in what follows, echoes and incorporates numerous images and expressions from Scripture. For the curtain torn in two see Matt 27:51; cf also Heb 2:11 (sanctifier), John 12:32 (raised up), also John 12:32 (draw all things, where 'all things' represents the Vulgate rather than Erasmus' translation, 'all people').

They cry that it is an unseemly act if a woman or a tanner speaks about Holy Scripture. But I would rather hear some girls speaking about Christ than I would certain teachers¹² who are commonly regarded as exalted. Why are we stricter than the Jews?¹³ They allowed the boy Jesus to ask and answer questions in the midst of their teachers, when they still had no idea there was anything divine in him.¹⁴ He reproached his disciples for not letting the children come to him. For of such, he said, 'is the kingdom of heaven.' [Matt 19:14] Therefore, let us not keep children from reading the Gospels. Perhaps Jesus will deign to embrace even these, and to touch them with his holy hands and bless them. It was the young in years who sang the Hosanna that pleased the Lord, while the Pharisees were disparaging.¹⁵ This was the class from which he chose disciples of the gospel philosophy, not only fishermen and unlettered,¹⁶ but even by nature rather slow to understand, as is apparent from the considerable evidence in the Gospel narrative.¹⁷ He gives thanks to his Father for these children: 'I thank you, God of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the understanding, and revealed them to babes' [Matt 11:25], that is, to fools in the judgment of the world. Often those who are most scorned by the world are prized most highly by Christ, and those whom the world takes to be most learned are simpletons in Christ's judgment. It is about these that Paul is speaking when he writes to the Romans: 'They became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. For professing themselves to be wise they became fools.' [1:21–2] I have not said these things to diminish the authority of good teachers, or to encourage any uneducated people to claim knowledge of mystical Scripture and, relying on their own understanding, to spurn the teachers of the church. Human wisdom has its own arrogance, but the ignorance (no less haughty) of the uneducated has its arrogance, too.

Paul does not allow a woman to speak in church, not even in order to learn.¹⁸ And he censures silly women¹⁹ laden with sins who are always in

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12 'Teachers': *Rabbinos*. For this expression as a designation of professors of theology see chapter 23 n14 below.

13 For a further elaboration of this unfavourable comparison see chapter 11 n38.

14 Cf Luke 2:46–7.

15 Cf Matt 21:15–16.

16 'Unlettered': ἀναλφαβήτους

17 The Gospel narratives frequently portray the disciples as 'slow to understand'; cf eg Matt 15:15–16 (the blind guides), 16:5–12 (the leaven), 16:21–3 (the suffering Christ); Luke 24:25–6 (the risen Christ).

18 Cf 1 Cor 14:34–5; 1 Tim 2:11–12.

19 'Silly women': *mulierculae* the Latin (both Vulgate and Erasmus' translation) for the Greek γυναικάρια of 2 Tim 3:6, 'silly women' (NRSV), 'weak women'

the process of learning and never arrive at a knowledge of the truth.²⁰ By contrast, St Jerome encouraged virgins and widows and wives to read the sacred volumes,²¹ and nonetheless he complains that the profession of this knowledge is everywhere arrogated by those who are unfit. He says, 'This knowledge the garrulous hag, the delirious old man, the loquacious sophist, all presume, mangle, and teach before they learn it.'²² Yet so far am I from approving the arrogant profession of this knowledge in a lay person that I do not find it tolerable even in the learned. In fact, what is more arrogant than for a man to profess that he is a teacher of divine things?

However, just as 'profession' is assumed with too little modesty even by the learned, so I think everyone must be allowed 'inquiry' – one that is sober and godly – especially into those things that render life better. Furthermore, since a variety of delights grows in those gardens,²³ let each person pluck what suits him. Let us reflect on what sort of hearers Christ himself had. Were they not the indiscriminate crowd including the blind, the lame, beggars, tax collectors, centurions, craftsmen, women, and children? Would he be vexed if he were read by those he wanted to hear him? Indeed, if I have my way, the farmer, the smith, the stone-cutter will read him, prostitutes and pimps will read him, even the Turks will read him.²⁴ If Christ did not keep these away from his spoken words, I will not keep them away from his written words. How do you know that what happened to the eunuch may not also happen to them?²⁵ Among the books of the Old Testament perhaps there are some you would with good reason keep

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(rsv). *Muliercula*, a word common in Erasmus' writings, is 'sometimes, but not always, a disparaging term' (Craig R. Thompson 'Scripture for the Plough-boy and Some Others' *Studies in the Continental Background of Renaissance English Literature. Essays Presented to John Lievsay* edited by Dale B.J. Randall and George Walten Williams [Durham NC, 1977] 8 n13).

20 Cf 2 Tim 3:6–7.

21 Jerome writes to Eustochium Ep 22.17: 'Read often, and let it be a sacred page that supports your falling head.' See also Jerome Ep 107.7, 9 and 12 (where a program of biblical reading starting with the Psalter and ending with *Song of Songs* is outlined in detail), and Ep 127.4 and 7.

22 Jerome Ep 53.7

23 'Gardens': *hortis*, referring to the Scriptures; for the similar, and common, image of the 'meadows of Scripture' see eg *Apologia adversus Petrum Sutorem* LB IX 791A.

24 Cf the *Paraclesis* Holborn 142:17–19: 'O that these books were translated into every tongue of every land so that not only the Scots and the Irish, but Turks and Saracens too could read him.' On the labourers cf n67 below.

25 Cf Acts 8:27–39 and n68 below.

out of the hands of the uneducated. Ezekiel is one, also The Song of the Betrothed, and nearly all the books of the Old Testament, because in them one stumbles often over either an apparently absurd story or the obscurity of the riddles. Nonetheless, I will not forbid anyone desirous of Christian philosophy from reading even these.²⁶ Surely they will reap some benefit in that they will come to church better equipped and prepared for the sermons, they will hear with more pleasure sermons in which they recognize some things, and they will understand more easily things of which they have now had some taste. In the Gospels divine wisdom lowers itself marvellously to the capacity of even the lowest,²⁷ with the result that no one can be so unlearned that he is incapable of learning the gospel philosophy.

Only let there be present a mind, no matter how unformed, as long as it is open, untainted, and devoid of the cares and desires that render even the most learned people unfit for learning Christ.²⁸ Before an uneducated person takes the Gospel into his hands, let him prepare himself for reading with a little prayer. Let him ask that that best Jesus, who died even for the most scorned of men, might deign to impart his spirit, which only comes to rest on one who is humble and gentle and trembling at his words.²⁹ Let him be strengthened by the counsel of James: 'Whoever lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men abundantly and reproaches not.' [1:5] Let him say with the writer of the Psalms: 'Open my eyes and I will consider the wondrous things of your Law.' [119:18] Likewise this: 'I am your servant, give me understanding, Lord.' [119:125] Finally, let him look for nothing else in this hunting ground than that he emerge a better person.

He labours under ignorance; let him watch for some glimmer of light from some source. He is tortured by hatred and envy, he is held by desire, greed, ambition, or some other disease of the mind; let him seek here a remedy and he will find it. Someone grieves; let him seek from here a solace for his grief and he will depart more cheerful. Someone is at a loss and is perplexed; from nowhere else will he meet with better counsel. Someone is

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26 For a somewhat similar depreciation of the Old Testament see the *Ratio Holborn* 293:29–294:5.

27 Cf the *Enchiridion* CWE 66 35: 'Divine wisdom . . . accommodates its words to our state of infancy.' Elsewhere Erasmus expresses this principle by pointing to the image of the Silenus; cf chapter 1 n43 below.

28 On the phrase 'learning Christ' cf Eph 4:20. On the mental and spiritual preparation necessary for the study of Scripture cf the *Ratio Holborn* 179:19–35.

29 For the need of a humble spirit see the *Ratio Holborn* 179:27–32, and the catechist's advice in *Explanatio symboli* CWE 70 237; also CWE 50 10 n76.

put to the test and is tried; let him seek support from the gospel. Someone will thirst for righteousness; he will find here the purest fountain – from this, if anyone drinks, ‘it will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life’,³⁰ and no longer will he thirst for the waters that are drawn from pools trodden over and muddied by the hooves of all the beasts of the earth.³¹ If someone hungers for living food, here is the bread descending from heaven; whoever eats of it will go forth invigorated and strong in Christ, until he attain to perfect manhood, to the measure of the fullness of Christ.³² Here is the fountain of paradise, from which flow forth the four rivers irrigating the entire surface of the earth.³³ Here is the bread of the divine word, from which even today Jesus restores the indiscriminate crowd rushing to him and clinging to him in desert places.³⁴

I know it is the role of pastors³⁵ to give this bread, broken and handed over³⁶ by Christ, to the people. What if the shepherds become remiss? What if they are turned into wolves?³⁷ It is their job to dig the wells, and from these to extend to the people a liquid draught of heavenly teaching, lest they perish of thirst in the desert. But what if shepherds become Philistines, and block the veins of living water, throwing in soil?³⁸ What will the people do? Naturally, they will implore the help of Jesus, the chief shepherd.³⁹ He lives still, and has not forsaken the care of his flock. Petitioned by their public prayers, he will do what he promises in Ezekiel: ‘Behold, I myself will seek my sheep and I will visit them, as a shepherd visits his flock, on the day

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30 Cf John 4:14; Erasmus cites the Vulgate. On ‘thirst for righteousness’ cf Matt 5:6.

31 Elsewhere the contrast between the pure source and the muddy pools reflects the difference between the pure Scriptures and their medieval commentators; cf eg the *Ratio* Holborn 284:28–32, but the image here may also in part reflect Ezek 34:17–19.

32 Cf John 6:41, 50–5 (bread) and Eph 4:13 (perfect manhood).

33 Cf Gen 2:10–14.

34 An allusion to the feeding of the multitudes; cf John 6:1–14; Mark 6:31–44.

35 ‘Pastors’: *pastorum*. *Pastor* is ambiguously both ‘shepherd,’ the literal meaning of the Latin word, and ‘pastor,’ referring metaphorically to priests as shepherds of the flock. In what follows the Latin is rendered as both ‘pastor’ and ‘shepherd,’ as seems appropriate. For the metaphor see Ezek 34.

36 ‘Broken and handed over’: cf Mark 6:41.

37 Cf John 10:12–13.

38 For the wells see Gen 26:15, a story Erasmus described in the *Ratio* (Holborn 260:35–261:5) as a ‘mystic parable’; for ‘thirst in the desert’ see Exod 17:1–7.

39 Cf 1 Pet 5:4 (chief shepherd).

when he is among his sheep that have been scattered,' [34:11–12] and the rest that follows upon this sentence in the same prophet.

The sheep are uneducated, but possessing reason, and from the sheep shepherds are made.⁴⁰ Indeed, it sometimes happens that a sheep knows more than the shepherd himself. Accordingly, just as it is not right for laymen to rebel seditiously against their priests (that the order Paul wants in the body of Christ should not be disturbed), so it is not right for priests to exercise tyranny over their flock,⁴¹ or the sedition must be charged to them.⁴² Therefore, whenever pastors fulfil their duties, they must be heard with reverence, like the angels of God through whom Christ speaks to us.⁴³ If they teach dishonestly, still one must pick out any good that is mixed in. If they are utterly remiss, or teach things that plainly contradict the gospel, or if sometimes it transpires that there are no teachers, let each person refresh his mind by private reading.

From the springs of the Saviour, let each person draw for himself what he can.⁴⁴ Let each person break off for himself from the sacred loaves, so that he may satisfy his hungering spirit. The spirit of Jesus, who promised that he would be present whenever two were gathered in his name,⁴⁵ will not fail even one person meditating upon some such thing in his name. Even six thousand will gather in vain unless they gather in the name of Jesus. But they gather in his name who look for nothing but the glory of their prince and eternal salvation.

Someone will say to me: 'It is not easy to discern between spirits'⁴⁶ – even the angel of Satan sometimes disguises himself as an angel of light.'⁴⁷ I grant this, and for this reason I would not want the judgment to be hasty. Nevertheless, each of us has the testimony of his own conscience⁴⁸ as the

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40 The sheep-shepherd image here can have only metaphorical significance, though in the next sentence the image may invite a comparison based on the actual capabilities of sheep.

41 For 'tyrannizing the flock' see 1 Pet 5:3.

42 For the 'order Paul wants' see 1 Cor 14:40, for 'obedience' and the accountability of bishops see Heb 13:17.

43 Echoing apparently Gal 4:14, though Erasmus no doubt assumed his readers would catch the ambiguity of the word *angeli*; cf his annotation on Mark 1:2 (in *Esaia propheta*): 'Even those who are ignorant of Greek know that "angel" means "messenger."'

44 An allusion to Isa 12:3 may be intended; cf also John 4:14.

45 Cf Matt 18:20; also Phil 1:19 (spirit of Jesus).

46 Cf 1 Cor 12:10.

47 Cf 2 Cor 11:14.

48 The expression echoes Rom 9:1; 2 Cor 1:12.

surest basis for forming opinions. Then there is the agreement of Scripture and the life of Christ. Finally, some things are so obvious they do not need debating or require interpretation.⁴⁹ Even so, those who have devoted themselves totally to the world stumble over things of this last sort, because such things oppose the regulations they have made and the vows they have taken. Why else was Christ so irksome to the Pharisees and scribes – Christ, whose teaching was fairest, whose life was most innocent, whose power most beneficent? No doubt they already possessed some sort of kingdom. They were honoured as teachers, they were revered as holy men, they were enriched abundantly, and they wanted that status – which was nevertheless most wicked – to be perpetual. That is why they did not tolerate the light of gospel truth through which, they saw, the pretext of their authority was to be shattered. If such people are publicly lamented, Christ shows well enough how much is to be attributed to them when he says: ‘Let them alone, they are blind leaders of the blind.’ [Matt 15:14]

Surely Christ, who once imparted his prophetic spirit to shepherds,⁵⁰ closes the sanctuary of his Scriptures to no godly person, even if he be a swineherd. Therefore let everyone who seeks the Christian philosophy be busy with the books of Christ. If the effort is successful, give thanks to God. But if not, do not immediately lose heart: ask, seek, knock. The one who searches will find. To the one who seeks it will be given. To the one who knocks, he will open⁵¹ – he, that is, who holds the key with which he opens in such a way that no one closes, and so closes that no one opens.⁵² Ask someone nearby for help if you do not understand something; perhaps the secret Spirit, which is accustomed to implant itself in the minds of persons in more than one way, will speak to you through him.

Indeed, let there be present pious inquiry and inquisitive piety,⁵³ but let there be no rashness, let there be no hasty and stubborn claim to in-

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49 For a somewhat similar discussion on ‘discerning the spirits’ in the interpretation of Scripture, see *De libero arbitrio* CWE 76 16–20, where, however, Erasmus considerably qualifies his confidence in the unlearned to interpret Scripture properly.

50 Perhaps an allusion to the prophet Amos, ‘who was among the shepherds of Tekoa’ (Amos 1:1 NRSV), but cf Luke 1:17–20.

51 Cf Matt 7:7.

52 Cf Isa 22:22 and Rev 3:7.

53 ‘Pious inquiry and inquisitive piety’: *pia curiositas et curiosa pietas* – the expression is virtually an oxymoron. Erasmus indulges in various forms of the expression; cf eg the *Paraclesis* Holborn 141:20; also the *Ratio* Holborn 221:16, where the devout reader is described as *pie curiosus*. John O’Malley CWE 66

disputable knowledge. What you read and understand, embrace with utmost faith. Dismiss frivolous little questions, or ones that arise from impious curiosity, should any by chance spring to mind. Say, 'The things that are above us are nothing to us.'⁵⁴ Do not debate how the body of Christ left the sealed tomb. It is enough for you that it left. Do not investigate how it is the body of Christ on the holy table when it was bread that was placed there. It is enough for you to believe that the body of the Lord is there. Do not explore how the Son is different from the Father, when he is one in nature with the Father. It is enough for you to believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons, but one God. But this you must particularly beware: not to twist Scripture to your own desires and resolutions.⁵⁵ Rather temper your opinions and way of life to its rule. Otherwise there arises from such sources stubborn assertiveness, contentions, disputes and hatreds, and heresies – poisons to faith as well as to Christian harmony.

Nor yet must uneducated people be kept from reading the sacred books if someone has arisen who has taken the opportunity thus provided to fall into error. That is not the fault of reading, but the fault of the man. A former age did not forbid the Gospel to be read aloud in churches just because the early heretics drew from this the seeds of their errors. Bees are not kept from flowers because a spider sometimes sucks poison from them. Therefore, let everyone read, but let the person who wants to read with profit read soberly; let him not read listlessly, as one might read some merely human story that has nothing to do with oneself, but rather, eagerly,

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xvii observes that '[Erasmus] defines his *pietas* in large part as an alternative to much of what he saw around him.' Perhaps nothing, in Erasmus' view, was more inimical to *pietas* than *curiositas*, by which he usually meant the endless questions and unseemly debates of the theological schools. For *pietas* see further CWE 66 xv–xxv, and for a succinct, if defensive, definition see the *Apologia adversus rhapsodias Alberti Pii* CWE 84 126–7; for *curiositas* see the *Apologiae contra Stunicam* (1) ASD IX-2 258:525–6, where Erasmus contrasts *pia studia* with *curiosa studia*, and 526n for elaboration. See also CWE 44 66 n15 and CWE 50 8 n38.

54 Erasmus comments on this Socratic dictum in *Adagia* I vi 69. He frequently offers lists of questions like those cited here to suggest the futility of the methods of scholastic theology. For an evaluation of Erasmus' critique of scholasticism, and a review of scholarly literature see the lengthy note by Craig Thompson CWE 39 227–31 n190.

55 Erasmus found in Hilary *De Trinitate* 1.18 PL 10 37C–8B authority for this principle, to which he often recurs; cf Ep 1334:281–3, and for the principle, see the *Ratio* Holborn 204:29–33.

attentively, assiduously. Like a devoted disciple of Jesus, let him follow after him footstep by footstep; let him observe what he does and says, let him sniff out, track down, scrutinize every single thing, and he will find in that very simple and unpolished writing the unspeakable design of the heavenly wisdom. He will see in that foolishness of God (if one may speak thus), at first glance lowly and contemptible, something that far surpasses all human wisdom, however lofty and wonderful it may be.⁵⁶

Nothing is said there that does not pertain to each of us; nothing is done there that is not done in our lives on a daily basis – less obviously, to be sure, but more truly. Christ is born in us, nor is there a lack of Herods, who try to kill the infant still fragile and suckling. Christ grows and develops through the stages of life.⁵⁷ He cures every kind of disease, if only a person implores his aid with confidence. He does not reject the lepers, or the demoniacs, or those unclean with a flow of blood, or the blind, or the lame. No defect of mind is so foul, so incurable, that he does not take it away, if we say to him with sincerity: ‘Jesus, son of David, have mercy,’ [Matt 9:27] and ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’ [Matt 8:2] He even raises the dead to life. He teaches, he terrifies, he threatens, he coaxes, he consoles.

Now as well, he has his Jews, who do not permit his light to cast a shadow over their Moses. He has scribes and Pharisees to lay snares – if only he did not have more than the two, Annas and Caiaphas! He has his Iscariots who sell innocent blood for money. Nor is Pilate missing and the company of soldiers who flog, spit upon, crucify him. Meanwhile, he has also his tiny flock, depending on him. He has those who say: ‘Lord, where will we go, you have the words of eternal life.’ [John 6:68] To be engaged with such philosophy will be profitable for everyone, however uneducated or unlearned. Those engaged soberly will not fail to receive the anointing that will teach them about all the things that relate to eternal salvation, according to the prophecy of Joel: ‘I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and all will be *θεοδιδάκτοι*,’ that is, ‘taught by God.’⁵⁸

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56 For the ‘unspeakable design of the heavenly wisdom’ see Rom 11:33–4 and 2 Cor 9:15; for the ‘foolishness of God’ 1 Cor 1:25. For the ‘contemptible’ proving to be ‘wonderful’ see chapter 1 n43.

57 Cf Luke 2:52 and the paraphrase on the verse. For the allusions that follow see, in Matthew’s Gospel: 4:23 (every disease), 8:2–4 (leper), 9:1–7 (lame), 9:18–26 (flow of blood, dead raised), 9:27–31 (blind), 9:32–3 (demoniac).

58 A conflation of Joel 2:28 and Isa 54:13 (quoted in John 6:45), though in citing the Greek Erasmus adopts the form found in 1 Thess 4:9, a single compound *θεοδιδάκτοι* rather than two words *διδάκτοι θεοῦ* as found in John. For

Paul does not want the Spirit to be hindered, but he wants everyone to prophesy.⁵⁹ Moses, asked to keep Eldad and Medad from prophesying, says: 'Who would grant that all the people might prophesy, and that the Lord might give them his spirit?' [Num 11:29 Vulgate] Some think it an affront to piety if the sacred books are translated into French or English.⁶⁰ But the evangelists did not fear to write in Greek just because Christ spoke Aramaic.⁶¹ The Romans were not afraid to translate the apostolic speech into Latin, that is, to set it forth for the indiscriminate multitude. Neither was it against Jerome's religious scruples to translate sacred literature into Dalmatian.⁶² Indeed, I would like Scripture translated into every language. Christ wants his philosophy to be propagated as widely as possible.⁶³ He died for all,⁶⁴ he wants to be known by all.

It will serve this end if either the books of Christ are translated into all the languages of the nations, or if rulers take care that the three languages to which especially divine wisdom has been entrusted are known by all peoples. If through the diligence of the Roman emperors Gauls, Germans, Spaniards, Africans, Egyptians, Asians, Cilicians, and Palestinians within a few years spoke Latin and Greek, even in their everyday lives, and for no other reason than to propagate more advantageously by common languages

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the preceding allusions see Matt 22:15 (snares) and Matt 26-7 (persons and events in the Passion narrative).

59 Cf 1 Thess 5:19-20 and 1 Cor 14:39.

60 For the emergence of vernacular translations of the Bible before 1500 and the widespread negativity toward them, see the resourceful notes by Craig Thompson CWE 39 517-18 n36 and CWE 40 722-3 n24. In 1523 the Paris Faculty of Theology made a 'general condemnation of Bible versions and translations' (CEBR 1 117), and this was followed in 1525 by the vicious attack of Petrus Sutor on translations (*De tralatione Bibliae*); for the character of Sutor's argument see eg the quotation in Erasmus' response *Apologia adversus Petrum Sutorem* LB IX 790E-F.

61 'Aramaic': *Syriace*, literally 'Syrian'; cf chapter 27 n8 below.

62 'Dalmatian': *Dalmatice*. Craig Thompson has attempted to show 'that for sixteenth and seventeenth-century scholars in the West, the notion, widely held, of a translation by Jerome of Scripture into Dalmatian comes mainly from or through Erasmus'; see 'Jerome and the Testimony of Erasmus in Disputes over the Vernacular Bible' in *Proceedings of the Patristic, Mediaeval and Renaissance Conference* 6 Augustinian Historical Institute (Villanova 1981) 15. Thompson argues that when Jerome speaks of his 'mother tongue' he was referring to Latin, not the vernacular speech of his native Illyria; *ibid* 20.

63 Cf the *Paraclesis* Holborn 142:15 'Christ desires his mysteries to be known as widely as possible'; and cf n24 above.

64 Cf 2 Cor 5:15.

an empire that was not to last long, how much more justly must we pay heed to this in order that the kingdom of Christ, which will continue on without end, might be extended throughout every region of the world? (Why the empire of Christ has now been drawn into so narrow a confine, I do not know, unless it is, as I suppose, that there are men who prefer to possess a worldly kingdom in a narrow corner of the earth under the pretext of Christ, than that Christ himself reign over the entire earth. But perhaps there will be time to speak about this elsewhere.)⁶⁵

Now to continue my argument: why does it seem inappropriate if someone sounds forth the gospel in his native language, the language he understands – the French in French, the English in English, the German in German, the Indian in the language of India? It seems to me more out of place – even ridiculous, rather – that the uneducated and women, like parrots, mumble their psalms and the Lord's Prayer in Latin, although they do not understand what they themselves are uttering. I share the view of St Jerome in that I would sooner rejoice in the glory of the cross, and account it something especially magnificent and triumphant, if it should be proclaimed in every language, by every race of men.⁶⁶ If it be the ploughman guiding his plough, let him chant in his own language something from the mystic Psalms. If it be the weaver sitting at his loom, let him ease his labour by reciting in rhythm something from a Gospel. From the same let the skipper as he steers his boat give voice. Finally, let a friend or relative recite something from this for the matron who sits at her spinning.⁶⁷

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65 Erasmus had already lamented the growing confinement of Christianity (cf the *Ratio* Holborn 227:24–5 [1520 addition]) and would do so again; cf eg Ep 1381:409–16 (1523), and *De bello Turcico* CWE 64 211–66, especially 219–20, 242–3, 265.

66 On the obscurity of the Hieronymian source cf Thompson 'Scripture for the Ploughboy' 16; cf n19 above.

67 Cf the *Paraclesis* Holborn 142:21–3: 'How I wish that the farmer at his plough would chant some passage from these books, that the weaver at his shuttles would sing something from them, that the traveller would relieve the tedium of his journey with talk of this kind . . .' For the idealized portrait of the pious ploughman and other rustic characters in late medieval literature see Thompson 'Scripture for the Ploughboy' 8–10. The bold claim Erasmus makes in this Preface that the Scriptures in the vernacular should be made available to all to read was severely criticized by Bédæ and the Paris theologians; see n60 above, the *Supputatio* LB IX 551F–4B, and the *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 870F–5F. Since it is probable that Erasmus never wavered in his approval of the Bible in the vernacular it is surprising to find that in 1533, late in his career, he was prepared to write a preface commending (somewhat unenthu-

What thing could be more alien to the mysteries of the prophets than the eunuch of queen Candace,⁶⁸ brought up in a palace, devoted to womanly indulgences, an Ethiopian besides, of all races the most effeminate? Nevertheless, while he, as a man of luxury, is being conveyed by chariot, he reads Isaiah's prophecy about Christ. As a profane and uneducated man he was not understanding the meaning of the Scripture, and nevertheless since he was reading with godly desire, Philip was suddenly sent to him as an interpreter. The eunuch is turned into a man, he is baptized, and the black Ethiopian is clothed in the snow-white fleece of the immaculate lamb; immediately he who was the slave of a profane queen becomes a servant of Jesus Christ.⁶⁹

The fact that we now have so many Christians so untutored that they do not understand much more of Christian wisdom than those who are most alien to the Christian profession, must in my opinion be blamed in great part on priests. Now I think I see a way by which we may hereafter have people somewhat less unsuited for sacred reading, namely, if a summary of Christian faith and teaching is propounded annually to the Christian people, a summary brief but clear, simple but learned. Further, in order that nothing be distorted through the fault of the preachers, I would like learned and virtuous men to write a short book for priests to read aloud verbatim to the congregation. I want it to be a mixture, taken not from the shallow pools of human literature, but from Gospel sources, from apostolic writings, from the Apostles' creed. (Whether this was produced by the apostles, I do not know; certainly it exhibits an apostolic majesty and purity.)⁷⁰ This I think might be done not inopportunistically during Easter celebrations. It would, I think, be preferable to inciting the people to laugh

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siastically) a book written by his friend Johannes Cochlaeus that strongly opposed the principle of vernacular translations; cf Allen Ep 2886.

68 Cf Acts 8:27–39. For the Ethiopian eunuch as 'a favourite text in discussions of Biblical study' see Thompson 'Scripture for the Ploughboy' 15–16.

69 Cf the similar portrait of the eunuch in the paraphrase on Acts 8:27 CWE 50 61.

70 Cf the colloquy 'An Examination Concerning the Faith' CWE 39 419–47 and n16, where Craig Thompson observes that Erasmus 'is disposed to date [the Apostles' Creed] from the first Council of Nicaea (325).' Béda found Erasmus' doubt about the origin of the Creed intolerable; cf *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* and *Supputatio* LB IX 457D–8D and 554C–7C; the Spanish monks supposed his position heretical LB IX 1080B–D; Alberto Pio attacked his views on the issue *Apologia adversus rhapsodias Alberti Pii* CWE 84 267–8; and the Paris theologians likewise objected LB IX 868C–70F.

at tasteless and sometimes even obscene jokes – a custom that some evil demon introduced into the church. Even if we must hold the attention of people with something pleasurable, even if sometimes people need to be awakened, nevertheless, to arouse laughter with pleasantries of that sort is the work of jesters, not theologians.⁷¹

In fact, I think the following idea would in no small measure serve the end I have in view: if those who were baptized as children upon reaching adolescence were asked to attend sermons in which it would be clearly shown to them what the profession of baptism involves. Then they would be carefully examined in private by virtuous men to see whether they understood well enough and remembered what the priest taught. If they should be found to understand well enough, they would be asked whether they confirm what their sponsors promised on their behalf at baptism. If they respond that they do confirm it, then let them and their contemporaries gathered there publicly renew their baptismal profession of faith. This should be done with ceremonies that are solemn, fitting, chaste, serious, and grand, and appropriate to a profession that is the most sacred of all. For what are human professions but certain likenesses of this most holy profession, that is to say, a sort of recall of a Christianity that has fallen away to the world?⁷²

Monks know how to commend their own profession to people by imitative ceremonies of this kind, acting out the drama in such a way that they sometimes wring tears from their audience. How much more fitting is it to do so in the case of this profession – by far the most religious profession of all – by which we enrol in the service not of a man but of Christ; in which we do not swear allegiance to the rule of Francis or Benedict, but to the gospel rule?⁷³ In this way, youths will understand their duty to their prince

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71 Cf Emile V. Telle “‘To everything there is a season . . .’ Ways and Fashions in the Art of Preaching on the Eve of the Religious Upheaval in the Sixteenth Century’ ERSY 2 (1982) 21: ‘Any procedure, trick, or theatrical performance, serious, hortatory, funny, learned, evangelical or otherwise, is good for a Franciscan anxious to keep his audience wide awake . . .’

72 Erasmus appears to have in mind the profession of monastic vows. The comparison between the profession of baptismal vows and monastic vows was familiar; cf Claude J. Peifer OSB *Monastic Spirituality* (New York 1966) 189–90; also the colloquy ‘The Seraphic Funeral’ CWE 40 1004:13–38. Erasmus defended the comparison made here between the profession of faith in baptism and the profession of monastic vows in his responses to Bédæ; cf *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* and *Supputatio* LB IX 458D–9A and 563C–5D.

73 Erasmus’ proposal here for a ‘confirmation’ ceremony for adolescents was unacceptable to Bédæ and the Paris theologians; cf *Supputatio* and *Declarationes*

and the pursuits with which they ought to strive toward true godliness. Meanwhile, their elders, too, will come to reflect in how many ways they have deviated from their own vows.

There are comedies now performed in some churches (to my mind something not altogether bad) about Christ rising and ascending into heaven, and about the sending of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁴ But how magnificent a spectacle would it be to hear the voices of so many youths dedicating themselves to Jesus Christ, so many recruits swearing allegiance to him, renouncing this world that is based entirely on malice, forswearing and hissing off the stage Satan with all his pomp, pleasures, and works; to see new Christs, wearing the sign of their commander on their brows; to see a flock of candidates processing from the sacred font; to hear the voices of the rest of the crowd shouting their acclamations and best wishes for the recruits of Christ!

I would like this ceremony to be conducted in public, with this in mind, that, right from the cradle,⁷⁵ children will, meanwhile, as much as is possible, drink in the teaching of Christ just as eagerly in private as in public. These things will surely have more authority if they are handled by the bishops themselves, not by parish priests or hired suffragans. If these things were done, as they ought to be, we should have Christians considerably more genuine than we have now.

But two difficulties are apparent. The first is that baptism may seem to be repeated – which is not permitted. The second is the risk that certain people, when the profession has been heard, will not approve what has been done by the substitutes. The first is dealt with easily, if the ceremony is so performed that it is nothing but a sort of renewing and reenacting of the

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ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas LB IX 557D–63B and 820A–2E. The Spanish monks thought Erasmus was, in effect, speaking against the sacrament of baptism *Apologia adversus monachos* LB IX 1061A–C. For the significance of the proposal see John B. Payne *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments* (Richmond VA 1970) 172–4.

⁷⁴ For the history and character of liturgical drama, and Resurrection plays in particular, see O.B. Hardison *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore 1965). Cf also *OPCC* 517: ‘The Resurrection play provided the model for other liturgical dramas, which were widely disseminated in Europe until the 16th cent.’; for designating such dramas as ‘comedies’ see *ibid.* In contrast to the moderately positive assessment of these ‘comedies,’ Erasmus took a very negative view of the ‘musical theatre’ that delighted the people in church, excoriating its ‘disgraceful love songs danced by mimic actors and harlots’; cf the annotation on 1 Cor 14:19 (*quam decem milia*).

⁷⁵ ‘Right from the cradle’: *ab ipsis statim incunabulis*. Cf *Adagia* I vii 53.

original baptism, the same sort of thing as when we are daily sprinkled with holy water. The answer to the second is more difficult. Still, every effort must be made so no one slides back from his early faith. If this cannot be prevented, perhaps it will be more expedient if such a person is not compelled, but is left to his own inclination until he returns to his senses and repents, and if in the meantime he receives no punishment except that he is kept from receiving the eucharist and the other sacraments. He should not, however, be excluded either from the liturgy or from the sermons.⁷⁶

I would also like to have circulated everywhere little books on the philosophy of Christ which portray the pure Christ, not one under the shadow of Jewish rituals or human fictions and decrees, and, further, not one forbidding and harsh, but one as he really is – winsome and lovable. Those who have been trained in such rudiments will not come utterly unprepared to the reading of the sacred books.

There are now many people in their fifties who do not know what vows they took in baptism, who have not the slightest idea what the articles of faith, what the Lord's Prayer, or what the sacraments of the Church mean. We often discover this either through casual conversation or when hearing confessions.⁷⁷ What is even more deplorable is that many of us priests are people who have never thought seriously about what it means to be truly Christian. We are Christians more in title, in customs, in rites, than in heart. Either through our ignorance we have nothing to teach people, or corrupted by worldly desires we serve our interests rather than do the work of Jesus Christ. What wonder then if the people dwell in darkness, when those who ought to be the light of the world are also full of darkness, when those who should properly be the salt of the earth savour of nothing that is worthy of Christ, when those who ought to be a lamp lighting the whole house are themselves blind, when those who ought to be a city set on a high mountain to show the way to wanderers are sunk in sordid wealth and

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⁷⁶ Béda found the response of Erasmus to the second difficulty inherent in his proposal blindly presumptuous and an open invitation to the careless to defect from the faith. But Erasmus explained that the secular power would discourage a backslider from the more criminal acts such as theft and blasphemy, while the opportunity to hear the Scriptures read in church and to listen to sermons could encourage repentance; *Supputatio* LB IX 562B–3B. The Spanish monks also marked the passage. Erasmus reminded the monks that it was, after all, only a proposal, and he pointed them to his comments in the *Supputatio*; cf *Apologia adversus monachos* LB IX 1060A–C.

⁷⁷ Craig Thompson refers to this statement in a note on Erasmus and other priests as confessors; see CWE 39 107 n70.

pleasures?⁷⁸ Would that there were not so many about whom the words of Isaiah can truly be said: 'His watchmen are all blind, they are all ignorant, dumb dogs, not able to bark, sleeping and loving their dreams, and most impudent dogs, they never have enough. The shepherds themselves have no understanding. All have turned aside onto their own way, everyone after his own gain.' [56:10–11] Likewise the following from Jeremiah: 'My people have been a lost flock. Their shepherds have caused them to go astray.' [Jer 50:6] Again Ezekiel with great license vents his anger against shepherds turned into wolves, who feed themselves and waste and tear apart their unhappy flock.⁷⁹ In other places as well, prophets often complain about shepherds because in them the misfortunes of the people generally have their source, as the prophet Zechariah attests: 'They shall be afflicted because they have no shepherd.' [10:2]

Sometimes the people, as a just reward for their sins, deserve this, that God allows an actor and an image to rule in place of a real shepherd when, according to Paul, they turn away from sound teaching, and, having itching ears, adopt teachers who teach things that please rather than are salutary.⁸⁰ Then 'the dish is given a worthy lid'⁸¹ and, as the prophet Hosea says, 'Like people, like priest.'⁸² For the flock of the people has mixed with it wolves, foxes, leopards, and other harmful wild animals. Nevertheless, for the most part the people are comprised of sheep. They are ignorant, simple and uneducated, yet useful to their Lord if they are guided by a faithful shepherd's care. For the sake of these that best of shepherds has grieved, that shepherd who wants none of the flock to perish, who brought back on his shoulders the little sheep that wandered, sought with great effort on the mountains.⁸³ It was he who, when he saw a great multitude of people, and at once considered how their shepherds – who at that time were the priests, the scribes and Pharisees – were not acting as shepherds, was moved with compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd,

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⁷⁸ The sentence is a pastiche of expressions from Matthew: 4:16 (dwell in darkness), 5:14 (light of the world), 6:23 (full of darkness), 5:13 (salt of the earth), 5:14 (city), 5:15 (lamp).

⁷⁹ Cf Ezek 34:1–10.

⁸⁰ Cf 2 Tim 4:3.

⁸¹ Cf *Adagia* I x 72, where, in expounding this proverb, Erasmus cites Jerome Ep 7.5, who affirmed that this was a common saying in his native land. Erasmus adds that Jerome 'refers to a bishop who is well adapted to the dishonest behaviour of his flock' (CWE 32 265), and so people get the leaders they deserve.

⁸² Cf Hos 4:9.

⁸³ Cf Luke 15:3–7.

scattered and forsaken.⁸⁴ Happy the people Jesus has deemed worthy of his look! His glance is not idle; his eyes are not harmful through witchcraft but salvific through divine power. He looked upon Peter when he denied, and Peter came to his senses and repented.⁸⁵ And when he first beheld Peter, giving him a new name, he presaged the solidity of his faith.⁸⁶ On the mountain he looked upon his disciples, and the heavenly teaching clung to their hearts.⁸⁷

What then, brothers? Let us take care to be sheep and put off all malice, pride and anger (none of which belongs in sheep) and with our prayers let us implore Jesus most kind, that he may deign to turn his eyes upon us, too. He is the good shepherd,⁸⁸ he will have mercy on us, and he will either send fit workers into his harvest, if only we ask this of the Lord of the harvest, as we read in Matthew,⁸⁹ or he himself will teach us, as Mark writes: 'And' (Mark says) 'he began to teach them many things.' [6:34] Nor did he only teach; in the wilderness he fed full with bread that entire multitude whom the tyranny of the Pharisees was letting die of hunger.⁹⁰

Even today Jesus does not stop teaching his followers, he does not stop feeding those who have left the cities and follow him into the wilderness. Long ago he poured out his spirit on his disciples,⁹¹ but the hand of the Lord has not been shortened now,⁹² the strength of his spirit in the hearts of the godly has not failed. That we may deserve to receive it, let us do what his disciples once did. Let us ascend to the upper room, removing our minds far from the squalid concern for transient things. Let us be in harmony, persevering with one accord in supplications if we want our prayers to be heard. Let there be for all the same voice, the same mind, the same endeavour.⁹³ Let us ask in the name of Jesus, and our heavenly Father will hear us.

With what divisions, with what controversies, are Christian people today in endless uproar? There is no tranquillity anywhere. Profane princes

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84 Cf Matt 9:36.

85 Cf Luke 22:61–2.

86 Cf Matt 16:18; John 1:40–2.

87 A reference, evidently, to the Sermon on the Mount; cf Matt 5:1.

88 Cf John 10:11.

89 Cf Matt 9:37.

90 Cf Mark 6:34–44.

91 Cf Acts 2:17.

92 Cf Isa 50:2.

93 Cf Acts 1:13–14 and the paraphrase on these verses, as well as the paraphrase on Acts 2:1 CWE 50 10 and 14.

contend in deadly wars; even leaders of the church are enveloped by the waves of war. The people are locked in deadly hatreds against one another. Moreover, in various ways even the soundness of the faith is corrupted; Christian peace is torn asunder. I am not pronouncing upon this or that faction: wherever there is discord, there the devil is. Who has ever seen between pagans tumults of war that have been more horrible or more long-lasting than those we have seen for some years now between Christians?⁹⁴

Not to examine the reason for that now, when has the ship of the church been so tossed by waves?⁹⁵ Why do we not investigate the causes of these evils, so that by understanding their source we might more easily cure this plague? In the Gospels I find the apostolic boat imperilled twice: once at night when Jesus was absent, as we read in the fourteenth chapter of Matthew: 'The boat' (it says) 'far out on the sea was being beaten by the waves.' [14:24] Yet what wonder is it that upheavals should arise in the Church if Jesus is not present there? Whenever the spirit of Christ is absent, the spirits of this world violently toss and batter the boat. What wonder there is no salvific counsel there, where the darkness is so great they do not recognize Jesus approaching, and are frightened at the approach of their saviour, supposing it is a harmful ghost! And unless Jesus, addressing them in a voice they knew, had bade them to be of good courage, they would have died of fright. It was then Peter judged it safer to be amid the waves with Jesus than in the imperilled boat. Let us imitate Peter's faith, and Jesus, returning to the boat, will immediately calm every storm.⁹⁶

Again, in the same Gospel, chapter eight, a boat is imperilled, this time while Jesus is present, but sleeping soundly. Mark even adds that his head was resting on a pillow, and goes on to say – not insignificantly – that he was sleeping thus in the stern of the ship. Do you want to hear how great the danger is because Jesus sleeps? He says: 'A great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was filling,' [Mark 4:37] or, as Matthew tells it, 'was swamped by the waves.' [8:24]

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94 For similar strictures against the wars between Christian European nations, and against the role played by the leaders of the church, see *Querela pacis* (written in 1516, published in December 1517), where Erasmus speaks of the wars of the 'past ten years' and the 'last twelve years'; cf CWE 27 305–9 and n98, where some of the wars are briefly listed.

95 The image of the church as a ship finds some basis in 1 Pet 3:20–1; it appears relatively early in Christian literature, frequently in association with stormy waters; cf Jean Daniélou *Primitive Christian Symbols* translated by Donald Attwater (Baltimore 1964) 58–70.

96 For the story see Matt 14:22–32.

Ambition is a horrible wind, greed is a pestilent wind, love of pleasures and other desires for worldly things are a ruinous wind. The winds arouse these emotions, so that the waves of war and discord flood into the church. As it happened not only was the boat containing the apostles imperilled, but also others that accompanied Jesus' boat. For Mark adds: 'And other boats were with him.' [4:36] But what does Jesus' sleep mean? Would that he were not so often asleep in the hearts of pastors who take their place in the stern, the most honoured place in the whole ship, where the skipper who controls the helm properly belongs.

What does the pillow placed under his head mean? Was it not he who said: 'The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' [Matt 8:20] But why does he say, 'has nowhere to lay his head'? Surely Jesus had lodgings, and it is likely that he had a couch on which to sleep. It is the person who has nothing in this world in dependence on which his mind finds its repose, but who is wholly intent on his desire for heavenly things – it is this person who has nowhere to lay his head.⁹⁷

For an ambitious person, how soft a pillow is the highest honour at last obtained by fair means or foul! To an admirer of riches, what a delightful pillow is an estate well established and handsomely increased! To those who perform the duties of office, acting not for themselves, but for others, to those who think episcopacy is a task, not a kingdom,⁹⁸ to such the pillow is not something that invites to sleep, but it is rather a rattle that does not let sleep steal upon one. We see some now so besmeared, I could nearly say drunk, with success in worldly things, that they seem to sleep not on a pillow but on a mandrake, as they say.⁹⁹ From this, no doubt, arises that dangerous tempest, since Christ sleeps in us.

In this great crisis, that extends to everyone, what, brothers, will be our plan? Ship-masters are accustomed to take the counsel of anyone at all in great storms; from where would we better take counsel than from the gospel? Distrusting our own supports, let us cry aloud to Jesus, let us din into his ears, let us pinch him until he awakens. He can and wants to be

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97 In the *Paraphrase on Matthew* there is some ambiguity about whether Jesus had a house; cf chapter 26 n25 below.

98 On episcopacy as a duty, not an office, cf the annotation on Rom 1:5 (grace and apostleship) CWE 56 18–19.

99 Cf *Adagia* IV v 64, where Erasmus cites numerous classical authors who refer to the power of the mandrake to induce sleep. Cf Apuleius, who speaks of the 'soporific mandrake, well known for inducing lethargy and for its effect of producing a sleep very like death' (*Metamorphoses* 10.11).

awakened thus. Let us say to him with a tearful voice: ‘Lord, does it not matter to you if we perish?’ Let us say with utmost confidence, ‘Save us, Lord; we are perishing!’ As he is easily entreated, he will hear his followers, and he will quickly calm with his own spirit the storm aroused by a worldly spirit. He will say to the wind: ‘Be still.’ He will say to the sea: ‘Be silent; cease to roar!’ What happened then? The wind ceased, and a great calm arose.¹⁰⁰ As long as the ship of the church is driven at the will of the winds, it is involved in the greatest crisis. And if ever calm is granted for a short time, a wind arises again from somewhere and stirs up the storm anew. If the south wind of greed grows quiet for a time, up comes the north-east wind of pride; if the west wind of pleasures becomes calm, the north wind of anger appears.

I have obtained this or that for which I was contending; soon another challenge will be thrown down for which I will undertake a new and bolder struggle. For worldly desires are boundless. These winds cannot be calmed unless Jesus rebukes them. Therefore let us all take counsel together for the tranquillity of the Christian name. Let us each cast aside personal desires. Let us look with harmonious hearts to those things that are worthy of a Christian spirit and profession. Let the people dispose themselves for the pursuit of true godliness and, with prayers unanimous as well as ardent, let them entreat Jesus Christ to turn the minds of our leaders towards the counsels of peace. Let the leaders, especially of the church, so direct the affairs of their councils that they strive with a pure conscience for nothing but that by faith, charity, godliness, harmony, by contempt for worldly things, by love for heavenly things, Christ might rule, flourish and reign as widely as possible.

Thus at last they will truly be great princes, if their authority serves the glory of the eternal prince and the utility of the Christian flock. Thus the people will be happy, if they obey such princes as though Christ himself. Otherwise, if we continue to exhaust our strength through civil wars, there is a danger that God, displeased by our sins, will send upon us some Nebuchadnezzar, who will teach us with harsher remedies to be wiser.¹⁰¹ God will protect those who are joined by harmony; their enemies will despise

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100 Cf Mark 6:51 (the wind ceased) and Matt 8:26 (great calm).

101 An allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar; cf 2 Kings 24–5. For the destruction of Jerusalem as a punishment from God for sins, see 2 Kings 24:3–4. Erasmus may intend an implied allusion to the Turks, who were threatening Europe, and four and a half years later won a signal victory over Christian forces at the battle of Mohacs; cf Ep 1754:34 and n12.

those who are separated by division. But harmony will never be achieved if every person wants to maintain an unyielding hold on his own right, nor will there ever be a firm and lasting peace, unless it is held together by true and solid principles. What is accomplished by terror and threats is not enduring. What is stitched together by human artifice and covert plans is not steadfast. Unless Christ is present in our counsels, even if evil is checked for a time, nevertheless it will soon break out with greater destruction to the world.

Farewell, reader. I added these things because my printer complained there would otherwise be some pages left blank, and I did not want them filled up with utterly worthless trifles.

In Basel, January 14, 1522

PARAPHRASE ON THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

Chapter 1

If mortals embrace with ardent desire a book produced by human effort, one that promises a plan for protecting or restoring health, or a way to increase personal wealth, or some other teaching that is advantageous to a merely worldly prosperity, with how much more burning desire should this present book be received by everyone, a book whose utility pertains equally to everyone. This book does not promise human prosperity, a thing that soon passes away; rather it teaches heavenly philosophy, which was given to the race of mortals by the heavenly teacher Jesus Christ. As the amazing reward of this philosophy, it promises not wealth, or power, or pleasures, but true and eternal happiness. Moreover, it shows everyone an easy and unimpeded pathway to this happiness, and it reveals the author, through whom salvation is prepared for everyone, apart from whom no one should hope for salvation.

Who is there, however uncultured or ignorant, who would not be excited by the certain hope of so great a good? This marvellous salvation¹ – which neither human effort, nor the laborious industry of philosophers, nor the superstitious religion of the gentiles, nor the meticulous observance of the Mosaic law has been able to provide – God, the creator, preserver, governor, and judge of all things seen and unseen, promised² long ago by

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1 This marvellous salvation] In 1535 only; previously 'this happiness'

2 promised] Added in 1535. Until then the entire paragraph except for the first sentence constituted a single sentence in the Latin without a main verb. The problem was apparently recognized but not solved in 1524, when a colon was placed after 'throughout the world'; again in 1534 a second attempt to correct the problem was made, possibly by an incompetent editor, by re-positioning the colon to follow 'obscurity stripped away.' In 1535 the problem was solved by adding 'promised,' and a colon placed once again after 'throughout the world.' See notes 3, 4, and 7 below.

the mouths of all the prophets whom he had inspired with his own heavenly Spirit. He promised it³ to the entire world, to be sure, but more particularly to the Jewish race, which was then a type of the Christian church that soon would be spread throughout the world. God indicated⁴ by the various veiled references of figures and by shadows, and as it were rehearsed,⁵ what he has now revealed openly to the world through his son Jesus Christ, the former obscurity stripped away. Acting on earth as an envoy⁶ of God the Father, the Son⁷ so served as messenger of this free happiness that he was at the same time the teacher of salvific philosophy, the author, pledge, and surety of the reward.⁸

By his own plan, secret and inscrutable to human minds, God permitted the race of mortals, which resembled in nature the first author of its lineage and was prone to wrong-doing,⁹ to be long enmeshed in false religions and the manifold vices of life and wicked desires. God permitted this so that, at this most desired time, a time appointed for itself by the divine wisdom that directs all things, everyone might embrace this truly salvific and efficacious philosophy, and so that they might do so with minds all the more thirsting and concordant when they had found that they could not attain true godliness and true happiness either by the advantages and supports this world promises as first and foremost, or by the many elaborate precepts of the philosophers, or by the countless forms of religion, or by the solicitous observance of the Mosaic law. Rather, the more vehemently they strove for innocence and happiness by relying on human supports, the more they were enmeshed in vices and desires.¹⁰

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3 'He promised it' is the translator's addition. See previous note.

4 'God indicated': in the Latin a participle only, 'indicating.'

5 'Rehearsed': *praeludens*, in the Latin a participle, 'rehearsing'; 'figures': *figurae*. On the language, commonly used by Erasmus to describe Old Testament history in terms of foreshadowing and rehearsal, see CWE 50 5 n6 and 6 n25.

6 'Acting as envoy': *legatum agens*. For the language see chapter 28 n18.

7 'The Son': in the Latin, a pronoun, 'who.'

8 Erasmus begins his *Paraphrase on Mark* likewise with the claim that the gospel is the answer to the philosophers' quest for happiness; cf CWE 49 13–14. The emphasis in the *Paraphrase on Matthew* on Jesus as teacher sharpens the significance of its allusions to classical philosophy.

9 Though the expression allows for ambiguity, it seems to imply the traditional doctrine of original sin. Elsewhere Erasmus stresses more heavily the responsibility of each individual for his or her actions; see eg, the annotations on Rom 5:12–16 CWE 56 137–70. On God's 'inscrutable plan' see chapter 28 n21 below.

10 Bédá had criticized this statement on the grounds that it denigrated the Mosaic law. Erasmus replied that the statement referred not only to the Mosaic law, but to the religion and philosophy of the gentiles, and insofar as it applied to

Accordingly, if the Jews – who ought especially to have embraced what is offered, since it had been promised to them so often and they had hoped for it through so many generations – if they alone reject so great a good that is extended free to all, and if they prefer to be the only ones without it rather than to hold it in common, there is no reason why they should attribute their destruction to anything but their own unwillingness to believe. It was to them, first and foremost, that the oracles of the holy prophets told what was going to come to pass. With their own eyes they saw Christ performing miracles; with their own ears they heard the gospel teaching. It was to them first that we announced the kingdom of heaven.¹¹

But all who are tired of their previous lives, as many as love true innocence, whoever desires a happiness that is true, genuine, and enduring, let all these receive with cheerful and eager minds this gospel, that is, this hoped for and joyous news,¹² whether they be Greek, Jew, Roman, Scythian, Gaul, or Briton. Just as God is not only the God of the Jews, but is equally common to all,¹³ in the way that the sun is common to the whole world,¹⁴ so Jesus Christ his Son came to save all, died for all, rose for all, ascended into heaven for all, sent forth his Spirit for all – rejecting no one either because of race, or age, or sex, or circumstance of life.¹⁵ By his death once and for all the sins of our former lives are washed away in the sacred font, and our sins, to pay for which that innocent one died once and for all, are not held to our account,¹⁶ no matter how terrible, provided we lead the rest

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the Mosaic law it referred only to the ‘carnal part’ of the Law; cf *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* LB IX 460A–C and *Supputatio* LB IX 565E–8E. Cf also chapter 27 n17 below.

¹¹ Cf Matt 10:5–10; on the oracles entrusted to the Jews cf Rom 3:1–2.

¹² Erasmus’ paraphrase on the Greek *εὐαγγέλιον* ‘gospel.’ Erasmus is paraphrasing here the title given to Matthew’s narrative in his Vulgate text, which translates the title in his Greek text. He notes in his annotation on Mark 1:1 that Mark begins his Gospel from the title (*initium evangelii*). In the annotation on Matt 1:1 (*evangelium secundum Matthaëum*) Erasmus gives the basic meaning of ‘gospel,’ ‘good news.’ In response to criticism from Bédā, he defined it as ‘news that brings joy’ (*Supputatio* LB IX 637B); cf CWE 49 13 n1. The *Paraphrases* on Matthew and on Mark both are introduced with an *exordium* consisting of an exposition of the meaning of the title. For the similarities between the two see n8 above.

¹³ Cf Rom 3:29–30.

¹⁴ Cf Matt 5:45.

¹⁵ Cf Gal 3:28.

¹⁶ ‘Held to our account’: *imputantur*; cf the annotation on Rom 4:3 (and it was considered) CWE 56 107: ‘*imputare* means to count to one’s credit, or to add to the account, generally with no pejorative connotation.’

of our lives according to the rule of Christ, that is, according to the gospel teaching.¹⁷ It is from baptism that one is reckoned a Christian. In order to manifest this, Christ himself will lend his free support as he will also bestow rewards on those who persevere. He does not demand from anyone the burden of the Mosaic law; only let there be present a living faith that both promptly believes what is proclaimed and awaits with unwavering trust what is promised.¹⁸ Eternal truth does not deceive. The God who promises great things does not disappoint. Moreover, no longer does¹⁹ human law prescribe, but Christian love will dictate how we should act.

Up to now, in truth, we have used the spoken word to hand down the gospel in the way that is most trustworthy, sharing with all what we have seen with our eyes, and what we have heard with our ears.²⁰ Since, however, there is a danger, as the story spreads further afield every day, either that it will be changed as it passes through many hands, or that the spoken word will be less credible than a book to some; additionally, because the written word reaches everyone more easily than the voice, I will include in this book the essence of the whole affair – what is enough to lead to salvation: the birth, teaching, miracles, death and resurrection.

First of all, I will recount the genealogy of Jesus Christ, taking as my starting point, not his earliest ancestor,²¹ but David and Abraham. I start with these either because their memory is equally renowned and celebrated among the Jews (for they particularly boast of Abraham as the author of their race, whereas king David, so greatly praised by the mouth of God,²²

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17 Erasmus articulates briefly a theology of the saving death of Christ in the paraphrase on Rom 3:21–9 CWE 42 24–5.

18 'Living faith' and 'unwavering trust' represent ideas central throughout Erasmus' paraphrases. On the terms *fides* 'faith' and *fiducia* 'trust' see Translators' Note CWE 42 xxxvii.

19 does] In 1522 and 1524 future tense 'will' [prescribe]; changed to present tense in 1534. Béda and the Paris theologians severely criticized what they perceived from the *Paraphrases* as Erasmus' denigration of the Mosaic law (cf n10 above). For Béda's critique of statements in this *exordium* to the paraphrases on Matthew see *Supputatio* LB IX 565E–8E; for the more broadly based critique of the Paris theologians see *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 853B–7F.

20 Cf 1 John 1:1.

21 In contrast to Luke, who traces Jesus' line back to Adam; cf Luke 3:23–37.

22 Cf eg 1 Sam 16:6–13; 1 Kings 9:3–5. The characterization here reflects Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 2.3 (on Matt 1:1) PG 57 27, speaking of David: 'Why then does he mention David? Since everyone spoke of him, because of his renown and because his death was not so long ago.'

is more fixed in their minds because his memory is still more recent), or because it was to these two above all that the Christ, awaited through so many generations, was promised in the prophecies of the Hebrew people, in which prophecies even those who fight against Christ have the utmost faith. For in the book of Genesis, God speaks to Abraham, promising that there would someday be born from his offspring one through whose free kindness not only the nation of Jews, but all the people of the entire world as well, would obtain a share in the heavenly kingdom along with Christ, since they have been received into the entitlements and love due to sons, not through circumcision, which had not yet been instituted, but through gospel faith.²³ 'In your seed,' he says (clearly meaning Jesus Christ), 'all peoples will be blessed.' [Gen 22:18] Furthermore, he says this to David in the mystic Psalms: 'Your own offspring will I set over your throne.'²⁴ [132:11]

I shall write this narrative especially for the sake of the Jews so that they do not evade the truth, for theirs is a rebellious nation²⁵ and slow to believe.²⁶ They have, it is true, been convinced by the authority of the oracles, in which they deeply believe, that the Messiah about to come had

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23 The statement reflects the argument of Paul in Rom 4:9-12, reinterpreted by Erasmus in his paraphrase on verses 11-12, where the faith that preceded circumcision included the belief that 'from his own seed Christ would be born, through whom all nations would gain this blessedness' CWE 42 28. This interpretation, however, strains the order of events as recorded in the Genesis narrative, where Abraham's faith reckoned as righteousness for his trust in the promise of descendants is described in Gen 15:4-6 (cf 17:6-7), circumcision is recorded in 17:9-14, and the promise of a blessing for all nations in 22:18 - after circumcision had been instituted.

24 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 1:1-2) PL 26 21C: 'He passes over all the others and calls [Christ] the son of these two [ie David and Abraham], because the promise concerning Christ was made only to them.' Jerome goes on to cite the promise from Gen 22:18 and from Ps 132:11, which Erasmus cites here. Cf Bede *In Matt expos* 1 (on Matt 1:1) PL 92 9B, quoting Jerome.

25 Cf Isa 30:9; Ezek 2:3-7. Similarly Ps Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 1 (on Matt 1:1) PG 56 612-13.

26 Cf Deut 1:30-3; Ps 78:22; Luke 24:25 and Rom 11:19-20. Here Erasmus addresses the question of the origin and purpose of the Gospel of Matthew. He was inclined to doubt the view commonly held that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew (obviously for a Jewish audience), then translated into Greek (annotation on 1:2 [*genuit Isaac*]). On this complex question see Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) CLXXVII-CLXXXVI, and for an oral tradition preceding a hypothetical Gospel written in Hebrew/Aramaic see xxxvii-xlviii. For Erasmus, the notion of an oral stage (cf the preceding paragraph, 'up to

been promised, but I write so that they do not look for an evasion, arguing that there is another saviour to be expected, and that Jesus Christ is not the one the prophecies had promised. For since they have minds blinded by their desires for earthly things, many of them, in accordance with their own carnal and crass passions, interpret the oracles of the prophets incorrectly: they were promising themselves some very powerful and magnificent king, invincible in forces, weapons, wealth, and similar supports of this world, who would lift his nation to riches, honours, and empire, and subject the entire world to the authority of the Hebrew people.²⁷

Although Christ is the Lord of all things, he did not come into the world to enrich with worldly goods one race only, from which, in respect to his human nature, he was about to be born. He came instead to lead all the nations of the world to true wealth that never perishes, to bless them eternally with heavenly goods, to conquer the tyranny of death by suffering and dying, to subdue his enemies²⁸ by kindness, to slay the monsters of vice and the rebellious inclinations of desires with the sword of the Spirit²⁹ and, after defeating those things which fight against the Spirit of God,³⁰ to confer upon us righteousness³¹ and innocence from his own spirit. Finally, he came into the world to claim for us a spiritual kingdom by means of spiritual weapons.

The Jews will have no reason to evade the truth hereafter, when they see that everything fits the one whose coming we know and preach, everything, that is, that the holy prophets, inspired by the heavenly Spirit, had predicted about him with great agreement in their sacred books so many generations before: his race, family, manner of birth, life, teaching, miracles, afflictions and humiliations, kind of death, burial, resurrection, ascension into heaven, the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, the miraculous tongues of the apostles, the conversion of the gentiles, and the rest of the things we have seen done afterwards, and daily see done by those professing the name of Christ. Finally, even the timing of his coming agrees with

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now we have used the spoken word') preceding the written work may have been inspired by Luke 1:2; see the annotation on the verse (*qui ab initio ipsi viderunt*).

²⁷ Cf Acts 1:6.

²⁸ his enemies] First in 1534; previously 'the rebellious'

²⁹ Cf Eph 6:17.

³⁰ Cf Gal 5:17.

³¹ For the Greek *δικαιοσύνη*, Latin *iustitia*, translated as either 'righteousness' or 'justice' and regarded as 'innocence,' see CWE 44 xvii and n40; see also CWE 48 242 n45 and CWE 50 7 n36.

their predictions. Not only were all these things predicted by the oracles of the prophets, they were even foreshadowed by the acts of the patriarchs. Since the Jews have the prophecies and the acts of the patriarchs, if they compare them with the events we announce, they will realize that they wait in vain for a Messiah other than the one we preach. He came once, mean and humble in the form and appearance of his human body, for thus Isaiah predicted he would come, by his death about to free everyone from the tyranny of death.³² He will also come again at the end of the ages, not now as saviour, but as judge of all the living and the dead. Now no one is excluded from his kindness; then no one will escape his judgment. But those who now do not scorn a gentle and easily entreated saviour will then with joy see the judge bestowing eternal rewards.

This, therefore, is the one true Messiah whose genealogy, in respect to the human nature he had assumed for our sake, will be recounted presently.³³ For through him there was about to arise a new nation, not carnal but spiritual, that would not so much fill the earth as heaven, and that would be propagated not by human seed but by gospel faith through the heavenly seed of the divine word. Abraham represented the founder and progenitor of this by a certain mystical type, who, when the law of circumcision had not yet been given, merited praise for righteousness,³⁴ not before men but before God, not from his observance of the Law, but from the sincerity of his faith, by which he had no doubt about any of the divine promises, though they went beyond the powers of nature. Because of his trust he has been called the father of many nations that believe³⁵ in the gospel of Jesus Christ according to his example.

Now although feeble in body because of age, he begot from his wife, who was likewise past the age of fertility,³⁶ the promised Isaac, who himself served as a type of Christ because he carried the wood to the sacrifice for which he had been destined.³⁷ Isaac was father of Jacob, who, although the

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32 Cf Isa 53.

33 will be recounted presently] First in 1534; previously 'is as follows'

34 See n23 above.

35 Cf Gen 17:5; Rom 4:11.

36 Gen 18:11; cf Rom 4:19-20.

37 Ps Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 1 (on Matt 1:1) PG 56, 613 likens Isaac to Christ on three grounds: because both were sources of joy, both were miraculously born from mothers who should not have been able to give birth (Sarah being too old, Mary too young), and both carried the wood for their sacrifice or crucifixion. For Isaac as foreshadowing Christ see the paraphrases on Rom 4:11 CWE 42 29 and Heb 11:18 CWE 44 248. In reading the genealogy of Matthew in

younger, nevertheless received the inheritance after his older brother had been excluded; even then he served as a type of the church, which was going to be gathered from the gentiles, and which, growing stronger every day since the exclusion of the Jews, gains possession by faith of the grace of the gospel, of which grace the Jews prove themselves unworthy by their faithlessness. For thus God says: 'I have loved Jacob and hated Esau.' [Mal 1:2-3] His name is frequently mentioned in the oracles of the prophets.³⁸ Jacob was father of Judah, who gave his name to the tribe from which it was predicted Christ would come, and under whose name the new gospel law was prophesied. For thus says Jeremiah: 'Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Judah and the house of Jacob.' [31:31] Jacob fathered not only Judah (although he chiefly deserved to be noted in this catalogue) but also Judah's eleven brothers, each of whom gave his name to a tribe of the Israelite nation.³⁹

Judah begot twins, Perez and Zerah, not by his lawful wife, but by his daughter-in-law Tamar, who was earlier married to Er, Judah's eldest. When Judah did not keep his word and in accordance with the dictate of the Law⁴⁰ marry her to Shelah, the brother of her dead husband, so desirous was she for a child that she dressed like a prostitute and veiled her face, and by this trick lay with Judah, her father-in-law. Afterwards, by disclosing the tokens she had received from him before she lay with him, she proved him the father of the twins even⁴¹ as he was calling for her punishment.⁴² This scheme was not without fault, but nevertheless the mystery that lies concealed below the story's unseemly surface is useful for the work of the gospel, in as much as Perez, too, was a type of the church and the synagogue, because he was born first, even though his brother, stretching forth his hand, was preparing to leave the darkness of the womb first.⁴³

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terms extensively of typology Erasmus follows a tradition that had emerged in Christian antiquity. For further examples see nn43, 45, 46, 49 below.

38 Cf eg Isa 41:8 and 44:1.

39 Cf Gen 35:22-6; Gen 49:2-48.

40 Cf Deut 25:5.

41 even] Added in 1524

42 Cf Gen 38:6-30.

43 Cf Gen 38:27-9. For the typology see Ps Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 1 (on Matt 1:3) PG 56 614-15 who also saw in the story of the birth of the twins a type of Israel and the church; likewise Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 3.3 (on Matt 1:3) PG 57 35. Erasmus here describes an important hermeneutical principle, that Scripture 'has its own Sileni,' ie that narratives that are on the surface ugly in fact contain profound spiritual truths: 'Under these wrappings, in heaven's

From Perez was born Hezron, from Hezron Ram, from Ram Amminadab, from Amminadab Nahshon, and from him Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz from Rahab who, even though she was not a Jew but a Canaanite, earned a place in the list of those who were rendered praiseworthy to God by their faith,⁴⁴ because she saved the spies sent by the commander Joshua and betrayed the city of Jericho. Delivered from the rank of prostitute, she was admitted and engrafted into the people of God, having married a Jewish husband,⁴⁵ foreshadowing even then that sinners and the races that are strangers to the worship of God should be joined to Christ as a reward for faith.

Boaz likewise had a son Obed by the Moabite Ruth who, renouncing as it were both her very homeland and her natural affections, preferred to be engrafted into the people of the Jews, that is, into those who profess the teaching of Christ.⁴⁶ Clearly, even then types and shadows were showing in anticipation that no people must be excluded from a share in the gospel, provided they manifest faith and minds eager for true piety. From Obed was begot Jesse, also called Jishai, whose name is mentioned in the prophecy of Isaiah regarding Christ: 'A shoot,' it says, 'will sprout from the root of Jesse.' [11:1] From him was born David, the man dear to God,⁴⁷ at once king and prophet, founder of the city of Jerusalem, renowned for the slaying of Goliath. At one time a lowly shepherd of a flock of sheep, he was later consecrated king of Israel by the will of God, after wicked King Saul was removed.⁴⁸ It was from his stock that the Hebrew race was awaiting the Christ to come as it had been prophesied by the men inspired by God. He, too, in many ways, portrayed a figure of his descendant, Christ.⁴⁹

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name how splendid is the wisdom that lies hidden' *Adagia* III iii 1 CWE 34 267. For a more extended discussion of the principle see the *Enchiridion* CWE 66 67-9.

44 Cf Heb 11:31 and CWE 44 250.

45 For the story of Rahab see Josh 2:1-21, 6:15-25; Erasmus infers the Jewish husband from Matt 1:5. For Rahab as a type of the gentile church see Ps Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 1 (on Matt 1:5) PG 56 618.

46 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 3.4 (on Matt 1:5) PG 57 36 shows how Ruth is a type of the church: having renounced her native land and her ancestral ways, she was desired by Christ.

47 Cf 1 Sam 13:14; Acts 7:45-6.

48 The story is told in 1 Sam 16-31, 2 Sam 1-5.

49 Ps Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 1 (on Matt 1:5) PG 56 620 shows in considerable detail how 'David was an image of Jesus Christ': like Christ he was beloved of his Father, was brave and powerful in war, and in his mercy and gentleness, he

David begot Solomon, the peacemaker and builder of the temple of the Lord.⁵⁰ He begot him from Bathsheba, whom he loved passionately, and whom he took as his wife after he had treacherously killed Uriah, her former husband.⁵¹ If you look only at the bare facts of the story, this was not without sin, but if, on the other hand, you examine the mystery, it was not done without a presentiment of the future.⁵² From Solomon was born Rehoboam, from him Abijah. From Abijah was born Asa, from Asa Jehoshaphat, from whom came Joram, while from him came Uzziah. From Uzziah was born Jotham, from Jotham Ahaz, from Ahaz Hezekiah, from him Manasseh. Amos was from the seed of Manasseh, Josiah was from the seed of Amos, Jechoniah and the rest of his brothers were from Josiah, just before the time when the tyrant Nebuchadnezzar burnt down the temple in Jerusalem, and carried the king and Hebrew people captive to Babylon.⁵³ These clearly are figures indicating the tyranny of the devil over the human race, and freedom restored by the kindness of Christ. In this context, when negotiations were already under way to restore the people of God to their rites and places, Jechoniah fathered Shealtiel, Shealtiel Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel Abiud.⁵⁴

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prefigured Christ. Even in his worst sin – adultery with Bathsheba – he represented the ‘mystery’ of Christ and the Church, for Christ in his heavenly home saw the beautiful church of the gentiles, desired her and had her.’ Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 1:1 PG 123 149B gives different grounds for calling David a type of Christ: ‘David in truth was a type of Christ. Just as David ruled after Saul, who had been rejected by God, an object of hatred, so Christ became incarnate and ruled over us, after Adam had been deprived of the dominion and rule that he held over all living things and demons.’

50 Solomon, whose name means ‘peacemaker’ according to Jerome *De nominibus Hebraicis* ‘Salomon’ CCL 72 138 (cf CWE 46 135 n34), made peace by means of his piety (1 Kings 3–15) and wise dealings (1 Kings 5:12). It is stated at 1 Kings 5:3–5 that Solomon could build the temple because, unlike David, he reigned in conditions of peace; cf CWE 50 54 and n51 where Solomon is called ‘a man of peace.’

51 Cf 2 Sam 11.

52 Cf n49 above.

53 Cf 2 Kings 22–4.

54 The ‘restoration’ refers to the return from Babylon to Jerusalem, an affair recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah. Here in the paraphrase on 1:11–12 Erasmus does not address the problem raised in his annotation on 1:11 (*Iechonias genuit Salathiel*), where he observes that unless the ‘Jechoniah’ of verse 12 is the son of the ‘Jechoniah’ of verse 11, there will be only thirteen generations in the final series listed in 1:12–16.

From Abiud sprang Eliakim, from Eliakim Azor, from Azor Zadok, from him Achim, from Achim Eliud, from Eliud Eleazar, from Eleazar Matthan, from Matthan Jacob. This Jacob was the father of Joseph, to whom Mary was married. She was the mother of the promised Jesus, Saviour of all, whom the Hebrews call the Messiah, that is, the Christ or anointed one. Because he was the king of all and also the high priest,⁵⁵ he alone by the sacrifice of his body placated God the Father, who was offended by the crimes of the human race, and having expelled the tyranny of death he opened the heavenly kingdom to all. Yet this was the marriage of a pure woman to a pure man, the marriage of the most chaste woman to a chaste man, both of whom were from the same tribe and family (namely, of David) in accordance with the prescription of the divine law⁵⁶ – so no one should suppose that this list of generations has no importance for showing Christ's origin.⁵⁷

If anyone wishes also to calculate the course of time that Daniel described so many years before by setting out divisions of weeks, he will find that here as well the presentiments of the prophets agree with the events as they turned out.⁵⁸ The sum therefore of the whole genealogy consists of

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55 Cf Heb 7:1–28; Rev 19:11–16.

56 Cf Gen 24:2–4; Gen 28:1–2.

57 Erasmus is referring to the question that could be asked, namely, why Matthew lists Joseph's lineage when Jesus is not his son. The answer is that in describing Joseph's lineage, Matthew is equally describing Mary's. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 2.4 (on Matt 1:1) PG 57 28 describes the law concerned: 'Not only was a man not permitted to take a wife from another tribe, he was even forbidden to marry outside his family, that is outside his kin.' Since it is unthinkable that Joseph would have broken this law, he must have married within his tribe and family, allowing us to conclude that Jesus' true parent, Mary, like Joseph, was from the house of David. So Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 1:18) PL 26 24A states in dealing with the same question: 'Joseph and Mary were from the same tribe. For he was compelled by law to take her as a kinswoman, and because he was enrolled with her in Bethlehem, they were obviously born from one stock.'

58 Dan 9:24–7. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 4.2 (on Matt 1:18) PG 57 42 explains that the purpose of the genealogy is to show that Jesus is the Christ predicted by the prophets: the computation of the generations shows that 'this is the one whom the prophet Daniel had prophesied would come after those many weeks.' Cf also Ps Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 2 (on Matt 2:1) PG 56 636 which says the birth of Christ fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel 'that Christ would be born after seventy years of weeks. For from that time to the reign of Herod there passed seventy years of weeks.'

three groups of fourteen, since if you count from the patriarch Abraham to David, the founder of a flourishing kingdom, you will find there are fourteen generations. Again, if you count from David to the loss of the kingdom, that is, to the Babylonian exile, you will find⁵⁹ fourteen. Again, if you count from then to Christ, the beginning and the end⁶⁰ of the new gospel generation and the new kingdom, you will find fourteen.

So far I have recounted faithfully the genealogy of Christ so that it may be evident to everyone that he is the very one whom the oracles of the prophets had formerly promised the world – for when so many proofs support a single conclusion it cannot seem to have happened by chance – and at the same time so that it may be evident that he was a true man who was descended according to the flesh from known ancestors. But though man born of man, he who had come into the world in order to redeem the human race by his death was nevertheless not born at all in the common and customary manner in which people are usually born. It was fitting that one who had come from heaven, who summoned to heaven, who taught and promised nothing that was not of heaven, who, moreover, after so many prophets and teachers was sent to make all things new once and for all – it was fitting that such a one should come forth into the world in a body that was indeed real, but nevertheless in a new way, and that the nativity of the man would be shown to be true, but in such a way that it seemed worthy of God. Indeed, Isaiah had prophesied that, since men were asleep because they had become accustomed to the common miracles of nature, God would produce a new miracle, and do so on the earth, so that it would be the more accessible to the senses of all mortals.⁶¹ He was born a true man and a mortal, but he was at the same time God and immortal. He was born as a man from a human being, but from one who was a virgin. He was born from the line of Adam, the founder of the human race, but without stain. He was born from a marriage, but in such a way that the work of conception was not that of the husband but of the Holy Spirit, who in an utterly ineffable way completed the formation of the unheard-of fetus from the substance of an inviolate virgin, as if in a temple sacred to the heavenly power. And by a wonderful plan, the Spirit so ordered the direction of this affair that it concealed from the ungodly something that could not be believed, and with most certain proofs persuaded godly minds of that which no mortal eloquence could have made believable.

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⁵⁹ you will find] Added in 1524

⁶⁰ Cf Rev 1:8, 17, 21:6.

⁶¹ Cf Isa 7:10-17; for 'new thing' see Isa 43:19.

It was, therefore, at the will of her parents⁶² (their minds guided by divine will) that the most holy young maiden – destined from eternity for so great a mystery as this, the future mother of Jesus – was betrothed to a man of approved goodness, named Joseph, of her own tribe, and lived with him in domestic companionship. Before they had consummated the marriage union (either because true goodness does not hasten to lust, or because God was regulating the matter in this way) she was discovered to be pregnant. This fact was made evident to her betrothed, who both loved her and was certainly not stupid, as day after day the girl's womb swelled greater and greater. For she neither fled her betrothed's sight as if suffering from a guilty conscience, nor revealed the secret that she had learned from the angel, either because she had no hope that he could as yet be convinced, or because she was keeping it for God to make it known in his own time. Therefore the conception was certain and true, betraying itself by the obvious and usual indications, especially to Joseph, who, because they were living together, observed more easily the bodily condition of his betrothed. The fetus had not had its origin in a husband's embraces, as the rest of womankind is accustomed to conceive according to the common law of nature, but it had been the product of the Holy Spirit who, through an intermediary – the angel Gabriel – had come down from heaven into the most holy temple of the virginal womb. The invisible strength of the Father's power had overshadowed the entire soul and body of the most holy virgin as though in a sort of embrace, and had made her pregnant without her losing her chastity.

Joseph, who was not yet aware of this great mystery, beheld the sure signs of his betrothed's pregnancy, and well knew that he had done nothing to the girl that could have made her pregnant. At the same time, he had learned that the character of his betrothed was such that the clearly defined suspicion of adultery did not fall upon her;⁶³ besides, true goodness is neither prone to suspicion nor quick to take revenge. At this time, therefore, he searched his mind for some way to safeguard his wife's life and reputation, and to commit to God the problem to which he himself could find

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62 Erasmus assumes a marriage arranged by Mary's parents (by tradition Joachim and Anne), as he explicitly states in *Institutio christiani matrimonii* CWE 69 308.

63 her] First in 1534; previously 'them.' Ps Chrysostom *In Matt hom 1* (on Matt 1:18) PG 56 633 states that Joseph concluded that the baby was the Holy Spirit's because he knew Mary's chaste and disciplined character: 'It was far easier for him to believe that a woman could conceive a child without the involvement of a man, than for him to believe that Mary could sin.'

no solution. From their intimate familiarity he had come to know the girl's spotless character, for the divine Spirit that had possessed her entire mind shone forth from her very eyes and face; it made itself known everywhere in her very step, bearing, and speech. Joseph had discerned something heavenly in her, something greater than human. Nevertheless, he saw that she was pregnant – and she had been away from home for some months while she visited her cousin Elizabeth;⁶⁴ in addition,⁶⁵ he reflected on the great weakness of her age and sex in other girls.

What whirling storms would another husband have stirred up here, especially with love provoking jealousy, the most violent of the mind's diseases!⁶⁶ But Joseph had been chosen to be a witness to the truth of the matter, so no one could accuse Mary's offspring of being either another woman's child or the result of adultery.⁶⁷ In the minds of everyone he was a man of known and tested goodness and prudence,⁶⁸ so no one could suspect either that he was so extraordinarily wicked that he would tolerate being his wife's procurer, or so foolishly tolerant that he would in his home feed and care for a woman and her child, knowing that the woman was an adulteress. There are none harsher towards unfaithful wives than those who are themselves guilty of many adulteries. Joseph, himself most innocent, is so far from being seized by a desire for revenge that he does not reproach

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64 Cf Luke 1:39–56.

65 in addition] Added in 1534

66 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 4.4 (on Matt 1:19) PG 57 44 also remarks on Joseph's lack of jealousy: 'Not only did he refuse to punish her, he was even unwilling to make an example of her. Have you seen a wise man who is also devoid of that tyrannical emotion? For you know how great a disease jealousy is . . . Yet Joseph was so free from that passion that he did not wish even in the least to harm the Virgin.'

67 Cf the *Gloss* (citing Origen) on 1:18: "'Espoused" . . . so that Joseph might be a witness of her chastity, defending her from the infamy of suspicion, and so that she would not be condemned as an adulteress.'

68 'Tested goodness': *spectatae probitatis*, an idiom from classical Latin commonly found in Erasmus' work (cf CWE 50 46 n7), used here in the paraphrase on 1:19 to explicate the sense in which Joseph was called a 'just man.' The explanation throughout the paragraph reflects Erasmus' thought in the annotation on the verse (*cum esset vir iustus*), where Erasmus recalls Aristotle to note that justice embraces all the virtues. For justice as innocence see note 31 above, and for the further definition of justice see the paraphrase on 23:23 below. The paraphrase also reflects Erasmus' annotation on the word *δειγματίσαι* in 1:19 (*nollet eam traducere*), in which he excoriated the tradition of medieval exegesis, and showed that the word meant 'to bring into public disgrace'; so also Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 8.

his wife even with words, so that no sadness should cast its shadow over the girl. Unspoken cares well up in his heart, and he devises a gentle kind of divorce by which he himself might be freed from the companionship of the pregnant girl without bringing any infamy or danger upon her. To this point indeed did God allow a very innocent man to be torn by conflicting deliberations, for this served to prove his faith. But it was now time for him to be freed from these vexatious thoughts, since he plainly deserved to learn the mystery on account of his extraordinary reverence toward a virgin dedicated to God; and on account of his well-tested earnestness in repressing the cares of his mind he seemed fit to keep in good faith a secret that was not yet to be made public on account of the perverse suspicion of the Jews. Behold, the angel Gabriel, who had announced the wonderful conception to the virgin when he appeared to her in a great light as she kept vigil – she was no doubt not unaccustomed to visions of this sort because of her more than angelic purity – the same Gabriel showed himself to Joseph while he slept, and, as he was troubling over some such thing even in his sleep, the messenger of the heavenly oracle said to him:

‘Joseph, son of David, what human suspicion torments your mind? Why do you toss and roll? Why are you restless? What divorce do you contemplate, or why do you want to be separated from a woman who has been joined to you with such great love, as well as by a connection of tribe and family? There is no other man worthy to be her husband, nor has she been intended in the plan of God for anyone but you. Acknowledge David the author of your stock, to whom was promised long ago what now begins to be fulfilled.⁶⁹ What is happening is entirely divine. There is no reason for you to fear that your wife’s womb, which is swelling without your having done anything, disgraces your marriage. You suspect she is pregnant and you are right, but she is not therefore to be removed from your household. Rather, you must join her to you all the more closely because you see that she is pregnant, she to whom you have been betrothed by the divine plan so that you can be a witness hereafter to the fruitful virginity found in your wife, and so that in the meantime she might be kept safe by your marriage against the suspicions and fierceness of the Jews. To them this mystery must not yet be revealed, since they are still neither worthy of it nor able to receive it. It will be made known to you so your wife’s innocence does not in the meantime suffer anything unworthy of it. For the fetus that is causing your wife’s womb to grow larger every day derives from no other mortal

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69 Cf Isa 11:1, 10.

any more than from you. The angel, the intermediary⁷⁰ for the divine embrace, announced, the Father overshadowed, the Holy Spirit prepared the womb, the Son of God filled it. All things are new because a new offspring will be born. It is because of heaven that your betrothed will give birth, and she will be even more chaste after she has given birth.⁷¹ She will give birth to a son, not for you, but for the world. In the meantime, you will be called his father, and you will be the girl's guardian rather than her husband. After the boy's birth, you will, like a father, give to him a name, not one of your choosing, but the name God ordained for him before the creation of the world. You will call him Jesus, that is, Saviour,⁷² for he is that Messiah, desired and awaited for so many ages, who according to the oracles of the prophets will free all of his people from their sins, not by the sacrifices of beasts, but by his very own blood.⁷³ Not content to have given freely so great a blessing, he will give us perfect and eternal salvation after we have been cleansed from the sins of our former lives.

'None of this, in truth, has occurred by chance or accidentally, but it has happened by divine plan. What I am narrating to you as things that have been done, God himself once promised to do, speaking through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, describing in a few words both the unheard-of novelty and the desirable consequence of this conception: "Behold," he says, "a virgin will conceive and give birth." [7:14] Here you have the novelty, for when have you ever heard it said that a girl has given birth, her virginity still intact?⁷⁴ Now learn about the consequence: he says, "and

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⁷⁰ 'Intermediary': *conciliator*, a word used in Late Latin in the sense of procurer

⁷¹ Erasmus finds the perpetual virginity of Mary foreshadowed in the prophecy of Ezek 44:1-3: the gate that was 'closed before the birth . . . after the birth . . .' *Explanatio symboli* CWE 70 291; the same Scripture provided a lesson for the *Liturgia Virginis Matris* CWE 69 87. Though Erasmus affirmed that 'no one would think that we would tolerate anyone' who did not accept the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, he did point out that the doctrine could not be proved from the Scriptures; cf *Modus orandi Deum* CWE 70 187-8. Cf also CWE 39 436 n42.

⁷² Cf CWE 44 xviii. The interpretation of the name 'Jesus' is found in Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 2.2 (on Matt 1:1) PG 57 26: 'The name Jesus is not Greek, but "Jesus" signifies in Hebrew what is in Greek σωτήρ, "saviour"'; also in Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 1:21) PL 26 25A.

⁷³ Cf Isa 53:4-11.

⁷⁴ Cf the *Gloss* on the word *virgo* (1:23): 'The Jews say this signifies a girl but not virginity. How then is it a sign?' Erasmus' use here of both *virgo* 'virgin' and *puella* 'girl' reflects his annotation on 1:23 (*ecce virgo*), where he recognizes that 'girl' is the normal translation of the Hebrew in Isa 7:14, but he justifies the

his name will be called Emmanuel, which in Hebrew means God with us.” For he alone will reconcile his people to God, and will render propitious the God who was angry; and dwelling among men, he will pour forth the superabundant blessing of God upon them. When they at length have experienced his efficacious teaching, the power of his miracles, the present energy and strength and force of the divine Spirit manifesting itself in a new way in those who have believed, rightly will they cry out “God is with us.” If you acknowledge this prophecy, and doubtless you do, accommodate yourself to this mystery and keep this secret.’

When the messenger of the supreme God had thus spoken, Joseph awoke from his sleep and cheerfully and eagerly obeyed the oracle. He set aside all plans for divorce, and entered into an even closer relationship with his wife so no thought of divorce could come to anyone. And now understanding that she was wholly dedicated to the heavenly power, he venerated the divine mystery in her, and did not dare touch one whom divinity had claimed for itself alone. He was there to serve her; he abstained from marital relations.⁷⁵ In the meantime that heavenly fetus grew in the virgin’s holy womb and, coming forth in its proper time from the virgin mother, it did not take away the virginity of the parent, but consecrated it. Then Joseph, just as he had been commanded by the angel, named the boy Jesus when, according to the custom of his race, he was circumcised on the eighth day,⁷⁶ to this degree fulfilling the role of father.

Chapter 2

You see how many things thus far accord with the oracles of the prophets. He was born from the very ancestors, tribe, and family whence prophecy

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LXX translators who adopted the Greek word for ‘virgin’; he argues that the Hebrew *alma* ‘girl’ is consistently used in Scripture for an unmarried girl, and that its root meaning suggests a girl ‘hidden away,’ ie unavailable to men, and, finally, that the prophet’s promise could function as a sign only if it implied some ‘unheard-of novelty.’ See Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 8. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 5.3 (on Matt 1:23) PG 57 57 also notes that in Scripture a virgin is customarily called a girl, and that only a virgin could have constituted an event so remarkable that it would serve as a sign.

75 Both Jerome and Chrysostom at this point in their exposition of Matthew claimed perpetual virginity for Mary; see Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 1:25) PL 26 25C–6A, and Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 5.3 (on Matt 1:25) PG 57 58–9. Erasmus follows the tradition.

76 For the circumcision see Luke 2:21.

had promised him. The reckoning of weeks agrees with Daniel's predictions concerning when he would come. The novelty of his birth also fits: he was born from a virgin, without any man's involvement. His name, too, agrees: a Saviour had been promised, a Saviour was awaited, 'Jesus' means 'saviour.' Why, even the name of the region and town agrees with the trustworthy witness of the prophets, for he was born not far from Jerusalem, in the little town of Bethlehem, the one in the region of Judea (for there is also a town of the same name in Galilee, in the tribe of Zebulun).¹ And he was born at a time when Herod, an Idumean by birth not a Jew, was ruling over the Jews, so that no one would doubt that the time had now arrived when the Messiah was to be born, because the patriarch Jacob many generations before had predicted this would happen: 'The sceptre will not depart from Judah and a ruler from his loins until he comes who is to be sent.'² Clearly this is the holy of holies,³ at whose coming every anointing of the Jews ought to have stopped.⁴

Now learn by what wonderful designs he became known to the world little by little. For he who had come to save everyone wanted to be manifest to everyone, so that he might both become known to the good for their salvation, and deprive the ungodly of any excuse of ignorance. He had been promised chiefly to the Jews, he was born from their race, to them first he

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- 1 For the Bethlehem in the territory of Zebulun in the region of Galilee, see Josh 19:10–16. The location and identification of Bethlehem in the paraphrase on 2:1 summarizes the discussion in the annotation on the verse (*in Bethlehem Iudae*), which had, with repeated additions, become extensive by 1535. That there are two Bethlehems is noted by Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 2:5–6) PL 26 26B: 'There is also another Bethlehem in Galilee,' and Bede *In Matt expos* 1 (on Matt 2:1) PL 92 12D: 'He called it "Bethlehem of Judah" to distinguish it from the other Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulun.'
- 2 Cf Gen 49:10. Erasmus follows the Vulgate reading here with its clear messianic reference. The reading of the passage is disputed. Compare the NRSV: 'The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him,' (alternate readings: 'until Shiloh comes' or 'until he comes to Shiloh' or 'until he comes to whom it belongs').
- 3 'Holy of holies': *sanctus sanctorum*; cf Exod 26:31–4 and Heb 9:1–14, where the Vulgate expression is *sancte sanctorum*. Cf also 1 Kings 7:50.
- 4 In ancient Israel prophets, priests, and kings were anointed (cf Exod 28:41, 29:7; 1 Kings 19:15–16). The primary reference here appears to be to the Davidic king, the 'Lord's anointed' (cf Ps 2:2, 89:20). The anointing oil imparted holiness to whatever it touched (Exod 30:22–33). It was in the holy of holies, the innermost room in the temple into which only the High Priest entered, that the presence of God was thought especially to dwell.

was proclaimed by the angels who sang: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to⁵ men of good will.'⁶ The shepherds, instructed by the angelic voice⁷ about the child who had been born, offered the first fruits of faith at the manger where the infant was born. By the secret inspiration of the Spirit, Elizabeth, Simeon, and the prophetess Anna recognized him.⁸ He showed himself first indeed to the poor and lowly, whom he knew were inclined to belief, for not easily would the proud acknowledge a humble man, the rich a poor man, the aggressive a meek man, those enslaved to the pleasures of this world a heavenly man.

Since he had been promised not only to the Jews, but also to the gentiles, or rather to all races of the world, immediately, in the very beginning, he wanted to become known to them as well, so that at the same time he might show that salvation had been offered to them also, and by their example goad the Jews to emulate their belief.⁹ He did not draw everyone to know him in the same way, but he enticed each one gradually, using things already believed and familiar.¹⁰ The Jews had faith in the prophets, they

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5 to] First in 1524; in 1522 'among,' also the reading of LB.

6 Erasmus cites Luke 2:14, in the first clause replacing the Vulgate's *in altissimis* with the popular *in excelsis* (cf chapter 21 n20), in the second following the Vulgate – against his own translation and determined belief that the passage should be construed 'peace on earth, good will among men.' See the annotation on the verse (*hominibus bonae voluntatis*). Erasmus' reading was hotly contested by Edward Lee; cf *Responsio ad annotationes Lei* CWE 72 126–7. Curiously, while here Erasmus adopts the Vulgate of Luke 2:14b, in his paraphrase on Luke ad loc he follows his own translation, and later found the paraphrase included among the censures of the Paris theologians; cf *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 875F–6A.

7 the angelic voice] First in 1534; previously 'the voice of the same ones'

8 For these details, see Luke 1:41–2 (Elizabeth), 2:25–35 (Simeon), and 2:36–8 (Anna).

9 Cf Rom 11:11–16 and CWE 42 64 and n3. Erasmus follows legend in identifying the Magi as 'gentiles'; cf nn20 and 27 below, and Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 12.

10 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 6.3 (on Matt 2:2) PG 57 127–8, speaking of the Magi: "'But why," you will say, "did he lead them forth by such a sight?" How should he have done it? Should he have sent prophets? The Magi would not have believed prophets. Should he have uttered a voice from above? They would not have paid attention. Should he have sent an angel? They would likely have passed him by too. Therefore using none of these means, but acting with supreme indulgence, God called them by something familiar, and he made appear a great star unlike any other . . . For since people freely follow what they find familiar, events were managed thus both by God and by the

were moved by signs and wonders, and he attracted them with the enticement of these things. The Persians and Chaldeans attributed great significance to the stars, as men most especially devoted to this philosophy, and from this skill they had promised themselves a certain miraculous restorer of the world. Therefore it was not a prophet or an angel that informed them of the birth of the boy, but a new and astounding appearance of a star – that is, the star that the prophecy of Balaam¹¹ had shown would arise from Jacob.¹² By popular report they had already learned that this king had been promised particularly to the Jews, a king not common and like the rest, but extraordinary and without equal, whose power, wisdom, and goodness¹³ surpassing that of any human being, the entire world was about to experience.

Accordingly, just as a wicked man becomes more wicked when he is given the opportunity and a wise man becomes wiser when the opportunity presents itself, so certain Magi (for it is by this name that the Persians call those recognized for the public profession of philosophy),¹⁴ travelled to Jerusalem to learn more accurately and for themselves what the star had as though through a dream taught them. They were undaunted by the length of the journey, for which the star was their guide. They made this journey either because the scribes and Pharisees, most learned in the Law and Prophets, dwelt there, or because they had come to understand that the king was going to be born not far from Jerusalem. As they were already certain that he had been born, they only inquired what place was blessed with so illustrious a birth. They judged that the birth of so great a prince could not be hidden among people who had for so many generations longed for him to be born, especially since he was not only born among them but even from them. But nowhere does Christ become known later and with more difficulty than in the wealthy cities, in the halls of princes, and among

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men God sent to save the world.’ Also, Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 2:2 PG 123 161C: ‘Since the Magi were astrologers, the Lord led them forward by means of a familiar object.’

11 of Balaam] Added in 1534

12 Cf Num 24:17, cited also by Nicholas of Lyra (on 2:1), who regarded the star to be the one foretold by Balaam.

13 Power, wisdom, and goodness had become standard attributes of God; see chapter 28 n20.

14 Cf the annotation on 2:1 (*in Bethlehem Iudae*): ‘The Chaldeans call “Magi” those whom the Greeks call “sophists” or “philosophers.”’ Bede *In Matt expos* 1 (on Matt 2:2) PL 92 12D: ‘The Magi are so named not for skill in magic but for a certain philosophy.’

those swollen with the public profession of wisdom. The Magi, however, were naive in these matters; they inquired simply and openly: 'Where,' they say, 'is he who was recently born king of the Jews? That he has been born we have learned by a sure sign. For while we were dwelling far away from here in the east we saw his star of astounding appearance. We saw the star and we felt its influence. Therefore, since we know that he is born for the good of all people, we, though foreigners, have travelled here to worship him and to present the first fruits of honour owed a new king, aware that those who have the favour of his divine power will be happy.'

While they were naively spreading their news wherever they went, word quickly reached King Herod. Now Herod had long been terrified by a report about the one who was going to be born, fearing that he would someday be driven as a foreigner from the throne he had seized, should a great prince arise from the race of the Jews. Herod was dreaming of an earthly kingdom only, ignorant of the fact that Christ was ushering in another kind of rule that extended to everyone. And so, after he had heard that the one whose birth he had feared had been born – and he had heard it from the Magi, men not at all to be dismissed either for their learning or for the show of their wealth – he was utterly confounded in spirit, as was the whole city of Jerusalem along with him, either fearing or hoping, some one thing, some another. But divine wisdom so moderated the dispositions and undertakings of mortals that the sincerity of the godly, on the one hand, and the frenzy of the ungodly, on the other, both illuminated everywhere the glory of Christ and added weight to the trustworthiness of incredible things. The star, guide of their way, had left the Magi for the moment as they were about to enter Jerusalem, and had done so for this reason alone, that their questioning might spread among the people the report that the boy had been born, without betraying the baby's resting place to the savage king.

Although King Herod, blind with envy and anger, was completely consumed with a desire for the death of the newborn boy, he nevertheless cloaked his ungodly cruelty in the appearance of godliness. He summoned into his presence in turn all the chief priests and the scribes of the Jewish people, whose peculiar responsibility it was, should something novel arise, to give responses from the oracles of the prophets and from the holy books because they professed exact knowledge of them.¹⁵ Clearly Herod

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15 In an annotation on 17:5 (*ipsum audite*) Erasmus refers to the scribes whom Herod had consulted: these were not scribes of just any kind, but a specific group of men who, when consulted, gave responses from the books of the

summoned all of these so that both their number and their authority should be conducive to belief. Therefore the king, all the more ungodly because he was feigning godliness, inquired of those who had been summoned, where, according to the oracular promises, Christ would be born. Since they were not yet raging with hatred against the Christ whom they had not seen, they answered unsuspectingly and without hesitation: 'In Bethlehem of Judah.'¹⁶ That their authority should have no small weight, behold, they had at hand the oracle of the prophet Micah: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you will arise a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'¹⁷

This was what the priests and scribes answered then, who later saw to it that the one who was resplendent with so many miracles and who was doing kindnesses to all should be killed. The king, already greatly upset by the report of the Magi, was utterly beside himself when he heard the prompt response, especially when the prophecy clearly promised a leader from Bethlehem who would rule the people from which he was born. So he sent away the priests and scribes, since he knew he could not deceive them, and he summoned the Magi into his presence secretly so the Jews would not suspect treachery. Discussing the matter as though he felt the same as they, he carefully inquired of them how long it had been since the star had first appeared to them, at whose mere appearance they had come on so great a journey to Jerusalem. His object was to vent his cruelty more surely on a single person. As godliness is not suspicious, the Magi did not conceal the information, not at all suspecting that he was so monstrous that he would be willing to rage against a newborn infant, or so insane that he would hope to stop with human plans what was divinely done.

After the Magi had disclosed the time, Herod in turn indicated the place he had learned from the scribes. Now that from these two pieces of information he had conceived a sure hope that the boy could be seized, he

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prophets, just as among the Romans in times of uncertainty answers were sought from the Sibylline books through the soothsayers.

16 'Judah': Erasmus follows the Vulgate of 2:5, which he corrected in his own translation to 'Judaea.' See his annotation on the verse (*in Bethlehem Iudae*).

17 Erasmus follows the Vulgate text of 2:6 rather than his own translation. But both his own translation and the Vulgate differed from the Vulgate of Mic 5:2. In his annotation on the verse (*et tu Bethlehem*) Erasmus dared to suggest that Matthew in quoting the prophet might have had a memory lapse. To some the suggestion appeared to threaten the authority of Scripture and was quickly and widely criticized; see the reaction of Johann Maier von Eck (Ep 769:43-68) and of López Zúñiga, as reflected in Erasmus' *Apologiae contra Stunicam* (1) ASD IX-2 84:503-16.

gave instructions to the Magi, who were about to go to Bethlehem of their own accord, to go on his behalf also, and with the greatest diligence to seek out the boy and, as soon as they had found him, to return to Jerusalem and to inform him about the entire matter – ‘So that,’ he said, ‘I too may go to the same place and,¹⁸ imitating you, worship him,’ pretending a very godly motive by no means abhorrent to the minds of the Magi. He wanted the boy to be made known to him first so he could get rid of him before the Jewish people were quite aware that he had been born. In the meantime God was taking care also that the Magi should return unharmed to announce the Christ to their own countries. Otherwise, if this hope had not deceived the sinful man, he would have vented his rage on the Magi themselves, who had brought such inauspicious news.

The Magi, in their devout simplicity, listened to the king and set themselves to go to Bethlehem.¹⁹ Now the star that had spurred them on deserted them for a time so that barbarians would be the first to announce the birth of the Christ,²⁰ whom the Jews²¹ later killed, after awaiting him for so many generations. Then after they had fulfilled this part of the divine plan, that marvellous star reappeared, and served their godliness so well that it identified not only Bethlehem but even the very hut, plain and lowly, and on this account difficult to find. Indeed, so near was it hanging over the head of the boy that it pointed out the infant they were seeking.²²

Therefore, when the star had begun to appear again, it dispelled all anxiety from their hearts. And now filled with sure hope as well as joy, disregarding any information humans might supply, they followed the celestial

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18 go to the same place and] Added in 1534

19 The translation corrects Erasmus' grammar, which makes 'simplicity' the subject of the plural verb 'set themselves to go.'

20 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 2:2-4) PL 26 26A: 'To the confounding of the Jews, the star arose in the east, so that they might learn of the birth of Christ from gentiles'; also Nicholas of Lyra (on 2:9): 'The star had disappeared so that through them the birth of Christ would be announced in the royal city.'

21 the Jews] First in 1534; previously 'they'

22 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 6.2 (on Matt 2:2) PG 57 63-5 likewise emphasizes the remarkable detail that the star descended to a point just above the hut, demonstrating that this was no normal star, like those astrologers study. Thus he writes (PG 57 65): 'Tell me, how did the star point out a place so small as a manger and a hut, unless it left that height and came down to this low realm, and stood over the very head of the child?' Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 2:2 PG 123 161C notes that this was a 'marvellous' star, not 'one such as we usually see, but a divine and angelic power,' and at *Enarr in Matt* 2:8-9 PG 123 165B-C notes the purpose of its descent: 'That star would not have pointed out Christ if it had not descended and stood just above the head of the child.'

guide, and saw as the palace of the new king a mean and paltry cottage, a mere stable.²³ Their sincere godliness was not at all shaken by this. They entered. They found the infant looking like any other; they found the mother exhibiting no sign of how extraordinary she was. All their furnishings attested to their poverty and simplicity. The Magi, who had not worshipped Herod, a man who exalted himself with royal pomp as he sat on his throne, prostrated themselves at the cradle of the crying child, and bending low worshipped one who could not yet speak. Not satisfied with this act of piety, they took from their bags the gifts intended for the child, from things the region of Persia was especially rich in: gold, frankincense, and myrrh, so that the one who was soon going to flee would not be without provisions. With these first-fruits of faith the nations that were far off²⁴ preceded the Jews,²⁵ who seemed nearest to God, and they consecrated Christ as theirs and dedicated themselves in turn to him, offering a new sacrifice in three kinds of things, already as though through a riddle professing that ineffable Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost – and at the same time recognizing in one man mortality, priesthood, and kingship.²⁶ For gold suits a king, frankincense a priest, and myrrh one who is going to die. He was born mortal, he made sacrifice on the cross, rising again he conquered, he reigns in heaven. Even after seeing so many miracles, the Jews killed a man they knew; the Magi saw nothing remarkable as far as their bodily eyes could perceive and they rejoiced that their journey was a success. But while they were considering whether they should return to Herod to satisfy his intent,

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23 a mere stable] *vile stabulum*, added in 1534. *Stabulum* can mean both ‘stable’ and a ‘stable-like hut.’ Though the image might reflect the birth narrative of Luke 2:6–7, it is used here to emphasize the lowly nature of the *tugurium* ‘paltry cottage’ or ‘hut,’ both Latin words giving vivid characterization to the Vulgate’s *domus* ‘house.’ Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 8.1 (on Matt 2:11) PG 57 83 notes that none of the outward signs of poverty – the manger, the hut, the poor mother – prevented the Magi from worshipping the babe they recognized as God.

24 Cf Eph 2:13.

25 Cf Matt 21:31.

26 Bede *In Matt expos* 1 (on Matt 2:11) PL 92 13C gives four possible interpretations for these gifts, the first of which is that ‘in gold is signified Christ’s royal dignity, in frankincense his true priesthood, in myrrh the mortality of his flesh.’ Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 2:11) PL 26 26B–C cited Juvencus to indicate the ‘sacramental nature of the gifts,’ signifying royalty, humanity, and divinity. The *Gloss* (on 2:11) suggested that ‘mystically’ the gifts could represent ‘faith in the Holy Trinity.’ For the many ‘symbolic meanings ... attached to these offerings’ see Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 13.

they were advised by a divine oracle in their sleep not to go back to Herod. It was not safe either for them or for the boy, and it was not expedient for a matter of such importance that was to be made known to the world in stages, each element at just the right time. They were not slow to obey the oracle, and they returned to their own country by another way to be the new heralds of the new king among their own people.²⁷

Care had now been taken that the Magi would not be harmed. Next, so that the serenity of mother and child would be ensured, and at the same time the impiety of Herod would – to the glory of Christ and as it deserved – be exacerbated more and more, the same heavenly angel who had sent the Magi away appeared to Joseph in his sleep, urging him, now that he was aware of the mystery, to take the mother and boy secretly into Egypt. Clearly this was done by divine plan so that region too, totally devoted to strange cults of the gods, while it gave hospitality to a fugitive, might be prepared for some of the first elements of true godliness by having contact and exchange with him. And so the angel addressed Joseph with these words: ‘Arise and take the boy and his mother and flee secretly into Egypt, and stay there until I return to you and advise you that it is time to return here, for Herod will leave nothing untried in order to kill the boy. Not that it would be difficult for God to save the boy by having Herod die suddenly if God so wished, but this sequence of events is more conducive to strengthening belief, for God wants the tyrant’s furore to serve his own glory.’

Joseph did not delay. Taking up the young mother and her child, he fled by night and brought them secretly into Egypt, where he stayed until Herod’s death. This did not, in truth, happen through human fear or chance. By the very evils that normally bring human affairs to ruin, God wanted his Son’s kingdom to be brought into being and established, so the world could not lay claim to any credit in a divine work. That you might more readily believe this, God, who wanted this to be done, predicted many generations before through the mouth of the prophet Hosea, that it would come to pass, saying: ‘Out of Egypt have I called my son.’ [11:1]

Meanwhile, when King Herod discovered that the Magi had in fact deceived him, now out of control with rage, he abandoned pretence and broke out into manifest madness: he sent out agents of his insanity, and

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27 That the Magi were ‘heralds of the new king’ may well be an inference from probability, but medieval legend made the ‘three kings’ missionaries in the East. For legends of the Magi see the article ‘Magi’ in *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* ed James Hastings (New York 1908) 2 100–1.

killed all the infants who were two years old or younger (basing his calculation on when the Magi said they had first seen the boy's star), both as many as were in Bethlehem itself, and as many as were in places bordering the town. Cruelty extended the time, expanded the area, until it encompassed all the boys, judging that by following this ungodly plan it was taking sufficient care to see that the one it wanted destroyed could not in any way escape. But the craftiness of mortals struggles in vain against divine plans. By these things an example was provided showing, on the one hand, what those who would believe in the gospel were going to suffer at the hands of ungodly princes and, on the other, what those kings would achieve who attempted to destroy by their cruelty the gospel faith, still tender and growing in the hearts of the godly. To be killed for Christ's sake is to be saved.²⁸ Herod had been given an opportunity to repent and not rage, if a passion for ruling had not blinded his mind. But while he for his part turned everything by his own wickedness into grist for greater madness, his malice made the justice of God shine brightly, in that it became well known to everyone that the innocent little boys had been massacred by his monstrous cruelty, and that he had earned the horrible death he later suffered.²⁹

Furthermore, so no one may doubt that it happened in this way by the direction of the divine plan, hear the oracle of the prophet Jeremiah, who by the foreknowledge of an inspired mind beheld as already done a thing that would come to pass many generations later. It says: 'A voice has been heard in Ramah, a voice weeping inconsolably, sorrowful and mourning. Surely it was Rachel weeping for her children, and she was not to be consoled, because they had all been taken away.' Rachel, who gave birth to Benjamin, that is,³⁰ 'son of her grief,' died soon after childbirth and was buried not

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²⁸ Cf Matt 10:38–9.

²⁹ Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 17.6.5–8.1 tells the story of Herod's disease – the 'internal fire,' the convulsions, the madness – and his death. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 9.3 (on Matt 2:18–19) PG 57 179–80 labours to place the slaughter of the children within a theodicy. He appeals to the divine economy and the way in which God's power is illuminated by 'opposites': '[God] generally fulfils his purposes [τὰς οἰκονομίας] through opposites, offering to us the greatest proof of his power. Thus he trained his disciples and prepared them to bring all things to a successful conclusion, arranging to obtain [οἰκονομῶν] opposites through opposites . . . From whippings, beatings, countless insults suffered, they emerged the victors over those who whipped and beat them.'

³⁰ Benjamin, that is] In all lifetime editions; in LB 'Benoni, whose name was later changed to Benjamin, that is'

far from Bethlehem,³¹ for which reason the prophet expressed, through the *persona* of Rachel, the grief of the mothers lamenting their sons massacred by Herod. Then, after a fitting death had removed Herod, once again the angel who had advised flight appeared to Joseph in his sleep and urged him to leave Egypt and to lead the boy and his mother back into the land of Israel. He said that the people who wanted the boy destroyed were now dead. Joseph, obeying the divine will in every respect, without delay brought the virgin mother with her sweet, sweet boy back into the territory of Israel. It was important that he first become known to the people to whom he had chiefly been sent, so that the unbelieving race would have no grounds by which they might with even any credibility cover up their ungodliness, saying that he was not their Messiah, but another one intended for the gentiles.

When Joseph entered the borders of his homeland and had learned there from a sure report that Archelaus, son of the dead Herod, had acquired half of his father's kingdom and was ruling in Judea in his father's place, fearful that the son had succeeded his father in cruelty as he had in kingship, he was afraid to travel there. Emboldened again by an oracle of the angel, on which he now entirely relied, he went into that part of Galilee that had come under the control of the tetrarch Herod, brother of the dead king.³² While the angel promised that everything would be safe here, love

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31 On Rachel's death, burial, and the naming of her son cf Gen 35:18–19. In fact, according to Jerome, it is Benoni (Rachel's name for her son) that means 'son of grief,' while Benjamin (Jacob's name for him) means 'son of the right hand' (cf *De nominibus Hebraicis* CCL 72 62 and the notes in RSV and NRSV).

32 According to Josephus, Herod the Great (who died in 4 BC) bequeathed to three of his sons the territories he had ruled. Archelaus received the kingdom of Judea, said to be half the dead king's territory, Philip and Antipas the rest. Philip received Ituraea and Trachonitis, Antipas, also called Herod (Luke 23:7–11), Galilee, and Peraea. Roman authority subsequently confirmed the sons in the territories designated in the will of Herod the Great (*Antiquities of the Jews* 17.8.1; 11.4). Philip and Antipas ruled as 'tetrarchs,' a term originally designating a 'ruler of a quarter,' though by the beginning of the Christian era it was used of any subordinate ruler (cf *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 3 839). Archelaus, who ruled as ethnarch rather than king, was notoriously cruel, and was consequently banished by Augustus Caesar in AD 6; his territory was then placed under a procurator (cf the articles 'Archelaus' and 'procurator' in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* 3 333–5 and 13 1117–18). Herod Antipas ruled his territory until AD 39, when he too was exiled on a charge of treason, and his territory was given to his nephew, Agrippa. It was this Herod Antipas, son, not brother, of Herod the Great who had the Baptist beheaded and before

for one's home also drew them; at the same time the divine wisdom was arranging that the Christ who had come for everyone would, through various opportunities, be shared out among many people. Bethlehem exulted in his birth; it was at Jerusalem that he was presented³³ and purified;³⁴ Egypt was blessed with such a guest. Nazareth had good reason to boast of so great a foster-son, for this was the home of his parent Mary,³⁵ where she had conceived her son. It was a humble and unknown village, in the region of Galilee, despised among Jews,³⁶ and for this reason a very suitable hiding place for the boy against Archelaus' savagery.

Meanwhile God was teaching us by this fact that in things that are accomplished by divine will there is no need at all for the supports of this world: wealth, power, party, nobility of birth. Rather, these collateral circumstances obscure the glory of God among men. That not even this happened by chance is shown well enough by the fact that prophecy had predicted already long ago that the Messiah would be called 'the Nazarene.'³⁷ That this came to pass is shown even by the very inscription that Pilate, who did not know the prophecy, ordered fixed to the cross: 'Jesus the Nazarene,

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whom Jesus appeared at his trial. Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 2:22) PL 26 28c had noted this. Erasmus found the Herods confusing. In his paraphrase on Acts 12:1 he mistook Herod Agrippa for his uncle, Herod Antipas (cf CWE 50 80 n1); in a 1527 addition to his annotation on that verse (*misit Herodes rex*) he noted that this Herod (ie Agrippa) was variously identified. In the list of corrections appended to the second edition of the *Apologia adversus monachos* he refused to touch on such difficult subjects as the Herods (Allen Ep 2095:83–5; cf Preface n24 above). However, in a 1535 addition to the annotation on Matt 2:18 (*ploratus et ululatus*) he correctly identifies Herod the tetrarch as the brother of Archelaus (see chapter 3 n19 below).

33 presented] First in 1534; previously 'circumcised.' Bédæ found the allusion to circumcision here a matter of gross ignorance; Erasmus thanked him in a less than congenial tone, and added that he had already corrected the passage for the next edition of the *Paraphrases*; cf *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* and *Supputatio* LB IX 460C–D and 568F–9D. The mistake was also censured by the Paris theologians; cf *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 881A.

34 For circumcision, presentation, and purification see Luke 2:21–3.

35 Mary] Added 1534; cf Luke 1:26–7.

36 Cf John 1:46. Similarly, the paraphrase on Luke 1:26 states of Mary: 'She dwelt in a small, unimportant town in Galilee, Nazareth, a people scorned by the Jews.'

37 In the annotation on 2:23 (*per prophetas, quoniam Nazaraeus*) Erasmus alludes to the fact that there is no prophetic statement in the Old Testament that obviously fits the evangelist's citation, but he points to the opinion of some who see a reference to Isa 11:1, inferred from the word 'shoot,' *netzer* in Hebrew.

King of the Jews.' [John 19:19] And it is from this that today those who profess Christ are called by many people 'Nazarenes.'³⁸ Nor is the name itself without hidden meaning: in the Hebrew language Nazareth takes its name from a flower, because it was here that the purest little flower, consecrator of all virginity, was conceived by a virgin.³⁹ In the same way in the Hebrew language Bethlehem means 'house of bread,'⁴⁰ and this was where that heavenly bread was brought forth, the eating of which gives eternal life.⁴¹

Here, therefore, he lived for some years, as an unknown, with his mother and his guardian (whose son everyone thought he was), until upon reaching the age of adulthood he now presented himself to the world by his teaching, miracles, death, and resurrection. In the meantime the boy seemed in no way remarkable or outstanding among other mortals, except that he daily grew in every kind of goodness and in heavenly gifts⁴² so that everyone expected something great from him. Meanwhile he was also extremely careful about observing the Law, so that he might not give malicious people any opportunity to disparage, but might satisfy everyone in every respect. For the time being, he preferred guiding the Jews to more perfect things through the observance of the Law, rather than alienating them from himself by showing contempt for the Law. Only once did he give an indication of his nature, when as a twelve year old he secretly left his parents in Jerusalem and was found in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and so questioning them in turn that he won everyone's admiration.⁴³ Already then, no doubt, his nature was longing for that for the sake of which he had been sent into the world. Yet just as this was the

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³⁸ Cf Acts 24:5.

³⁹ Cf Jerome *De nominibus Hebraicis* CCL 72 137 who says that 'Nazareth' means 'flower,' and associates the word with cleanliness. In the *Gloss* (on 2:23) simply 'offshoot or flower'; cf n37 above.

⁴⁰ Jerome does not gloss 'Bethlehem' in *De nominibus Hebraicis*, but explains the term as 'house of bread' in *Commentarii in Michaeum* (on Mic 5:2) PL 25 1197B. Likewise Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 2:1 PG 123 161A states: 'Bethlehem means "house of bread."'

⁴¹ Cf John 6:50–1. Cf the *Gloss* (on 2:1) 'Bethlehem ie "house of bread" because there was born the living bread that comes down from heaven.'

⁴² Cf Luke 2:40 and the paraphrase on that verse where Jesus' growth every day in strength of spirit, goodness, wisdom is said not only to be beyond his years, but to indicate that he is greater than man. Indeed, even as a boy 'a certain divine and wonderful grace gleamed forth from him, drawing everyone into the love of virtue.'

⁴³ Cf Luke 2:41–7.

praiseworthy act of an eager spirit, so waiting for the time prescribed by his Father attested to his moderation and obedience.

Chapter 3

It is worthwhile to hear now how our Lord Jesus Christ at last entered upon the work for which he had come. He did not suddenly thrust himself upon people who had no expectation. Before he began his work he wanted the hearts of all people to be prepared by his forerunner – John, son of Zechariah, known even to the Jews themselves and approved by them – so that what always was to be believed might be instilled in people's minds slowly and gradually. Consequently, when the time was approaching at which the eternal counsel had decreed that the whole world should be renewed by the teaching of Christ, John came forth. As the son of a priest and prophetess,¹ later² by the testimony of Christ himself judged to be more than a prophet,³ even his origin had offered the greatest hope about him.⁴ He came forth, not from the halls of kings, or from the ordinary company of men, but from the desert, where from boyhood he had led an angelic life,⁵ content with the most available and easily acquired food, clothed in a cloak made of a camel's hair and tied with a skin belt. His diet matched his

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1 On John's father, Zechariah, a priest cf Luke 1:5. John's mother was 'of the daughters of Aaron' (Luke 1:5), but Erasmus calls her prophetess apparently because Elizabeth was 'filled with the Holy Spirit' when Mary greeted her (Luke 1:41–5). In the paraphrase on Luke 1:41 Elizabeth speaks 'with prophetic inspiration.'

2 later ... himself] First in 1534; previously 'he himself by the testimony of Christ.'

3 Cf Matt 11:9.

4 Cf Luke 1:5–6, 11–23, and 57–79.

5 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 10.4 (on Matt 3:4) PG 57 188, comparing John with Elijah: '[Elijah] grew up in cities and estates, but right from the cradle [John] lived all his life in the desert ... He had no need of roof, bed, table, or anything like that, but exhibited in the flesh a sort of angelic life ... His physical appearance being such provided a symbol of ... repentance.' For John's early life in the desert see Luke 1:80. On the 'angelic life' cf the paraphrase on 4:1 below, where a life of solitude with prayers, abstinence and the diligent meditation on Scripture is called an arduous and angelic life; see also the *Paraclesis* Holborn 143:20. Erasmus may intend a cryptic allusion to the monastic life: Franciscans and Dominicans were respectively the 'Seraphic' and 'Cherubic' orders, attributions satirized in the colloquy, 'The Seraphic Funeral' CWE 40 1013:4–5; cf *ibid* 1000 n4.

dress, for he subsisted on the available provisions that the desert supplied: locusts and wild honey. This clothing, this diet, this place suited the herald of repentance. His amazing holiness so astonished the hearts of everyone that many thought he was the Christ,⁶ especially since many were convinced that the other one who had been thought to be the Messiah had perished in the slaughter of the infants at Bethlehem.⁷ And yet so far was he from laying claim to another's glory that he pointed out the Christ publicly to everyone,⁸ and stated that he himself was not worthy⁹ to untie the laces of his sandals.¹⁰

Even so he did not go forth to preach at his own instigation, but he was admonished by a divine voice that the time to serve as herald had now arrived, for he did not come to the task of preaching by some accident or by human assignment.¹¹ Rather, he was the one about whom Isaiah had prophesied so many generations before, saying that he would raise his voice preaching publicly in the wilderness; that he, the one going in advance, would prepare the hearts of men to receive the teaching of Christ; that he would render those who were persuaded to repent of their former lives capable of receiving the grace of Christ, the one to forgive everyone their sins through his own baptism;¹² that, the order of things now suddenly

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6 Cf John 1:19-20.

7 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 10.2 (on Matt 3:1-2) PG 57 186 also refers here to the slaughter: 'For the things that pointed to the Christ had become obscured, and seemed to many to have come to nothing because of the slaughter that had been carried out at Bethlehem.'

8 Cf John 1:29.

9 was not worthy] First in 1524; in 1522, erroneously, 'was worthy'

10 Cf John 1:27.

11 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 10.1 (on Matt 3:1-2) PG 57 185: 'That the son of Zechariah did not come to this of his own volition, but at the instigation of God, Luke makes clear, saying: "The word of the Lord came to him" [3:2], that is, the commandment [came to him].'

12 Both Chrysostom and Theophylact distinguish the baptism of John from that of Christ as Erasmus does here; cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 10.1-2 (on Matt 3:1-2) PG 57 185-6: '[John's baptism] did not offer forgiveness of sins, which was the gift of the baptism that was later given ... John exhorted them to confess and repent ... in order that they might later receive forgiveness more easily, for if they had not recognized their guilt, they would not have asked for grace, but if they had not sought grace, they would not have found forgiveness.' Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 3:5-6 PG 123 173C: 'Although they were baptized, nevertheless the baptism of John did not grant the remission of sins; but John proclaimed repentance alone, and he prepared for the remission of sins, which is to say,

reversed, those who were formerly swollen with the empty justice of the Mosaic law and with the foolish philosophy of this world would be cast down, whereas those who formerly seemed lowly and cast down, as well as useless, because of their ignorance and humble circumstances, would become enlivened and rich with heavenly goods; that the things that seemed difficult and encumbered through the harshness¹³ of the Law would become unencumbered and easy through faith and gospel grace; and that this salvation would be open¹⁴ not only to Jews, but to all the nations of the world. Isaiah, a most sure prophet of the Lord, had prophesied all these things, for the prophecy is: 'The voice of one crying in the desert: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled and every mountain and hill be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways will be made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'¹⁵

And now common talk and a sort of wind of rumour spreading secretly among the people about the Messiah to come, and, in addition, the consciences of the wicked (for there was no age more debased than this one), finally, a certain silent movement of the spirit – all these caused many to grow weary of their lives and to desire the one whose aroma, as it were, had somehow come to them, one who was going to renew suddenly the whole race of mortals and, having abolished their sins, claim them for the kingdom of righteousness. Therefore, while they were hurrying to John, not only from the city of Jerusalem, but even from all Judea, especially from the regions near the Jordan, John himself also went to meet their ready will, and what he had preached in the desert, he impressed on the now greater crowds at the banks of the Jordan: that by repenting of their former lives they should make themselves ready for the Messiah soon to come, and to the one about to bring salvation they should present themselves as capable of being healed. (Now, he is capable of being healed who acknowledges and hates his own sickness.) He said that already the kingdom of heaven was indeed pressing in¹⁶ and close at hand; that it was a very happy and

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he led the way to the baptism of Christ, with whom there is remission of sins.'

13 harshness] *asperitatem*, in 1522, 1534, and 1535; in 1524 *difficultatem* 'difficulty'

14 The future tense of the 1535 edition, *aperietur*, is probably a mistake; the translation follows the reading of 1522, 1524, and 1534: *aperiretur*.

15 The citation is from Luke 3:4-6, though the first sentence is also in Matthew. Luke's citation modifies somewhat Isa 40:3-5.

16 'Pressing in': *instare*, the word recommended for the Greek ἤγγικεν by Erasmus in his annotation on 3:2 (*appropinquabit enim*). Cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB)

desirable thing, but entry into it lay open only to those who are cleansed of earthly contaminations.

At this word, as a type of the cleansing of the heart's pollutions that was soon to occur, a great many people, condemning their former lives, and openly confessing their sins, were baptized in the Jordan. Thus it seemed good to the divine wisdom that John, who marked the divide between the Mosaic law that was now faltering and the grace of the gospel that was now coming to take its place,¹⁷ should by this sign play the role of precursor,¹⁸ not for washing sins away, a thing that was properly reserved for Christ, but for preparing people's hearts to be more receptive of the blessing soon to follow. This was done while Tiberius Caesar was now in his fifteenth year as ruler of the Roman Empire; while Pontius Pilate was governing Judea in his name; while Herod, brother of the deceased Herod, was tetrarch of Galilee, where Christ was staying; while his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis; while Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene; and while Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests.¹⁹ While, then, the territory of the Jews was divided among so many princes, there came forth a man who summoned all things to the rule of one prince.

At first indeed, when John saw not a few Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism among the crowds that were thronging to him, he was not unaware how haughty, fierce, and self-flattering this class of men was, because of their extraordinary (as they thought)²⁰ observance of the Mosaic law and the merits of the patriarchs, from whom they boasted their descent. For as they were envying and laying snares for the baptism of John that had become so renowned, they had sent a treacherous delegation to him in

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24-5 where the word is rendered 'fast approaching' – 'to capture the urgency of the Greek.'

17 Cf Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 3:4 PG 123 173B: 'John was the mediator between the old and new covenants.' Theophylact sees John's mediating role in his summons both to the Jewish people and to the gentiles (presumably the soldiers he addressed) to repent.

18 'Play . . . precursor': *praeluderet*; cf CWE 49 15-18 and CWE 50 6 n25. Jerome had designated John as the *praecursor* 'precursor' of Jesus; cf *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 3:1) PL 26 29A.

19 Erasmus takes this list of rulers from Luke 3:1-2, adding incorrectly, as in chapter 2, that the tetrarch Herod, in whose territory Jesus was living, was the brother of the deceased Herod (see chapter 2 n32). Archelaus, whom Joseph avoids in chapter 2, was exiled by Augustus Caesar in AD 6. Thereafter Judea was administered by Roman governors, the fifth of whom was Pontius Pilate (c. AD 26-37).

20 as they thought] Added in 1534

Bethabara²¹ (it was there that John was then baptizing), inquiring whether he was the Christ. If he said yes, they were going to object at once that the Christ was promised from the tribe of Judah, while it was well known that John was from the tribe of Levi.²² Furthermore, when John stated frankly that he was not the Christ, and that he was not even one of the prophets of old, who they supposed were going to return to earth, they proceeded to ask by what effrontery he promised through baptism the forgiveness of sins, a thing that was properly reserved for the Christ. He replied that there was a great difference between his baptism and the baptism of Christ that was soon to follow: by his baptism he only invited people to repentance and reformation of their former lives, by the baptism of Christ all sins would be pardoned.

Therefore, when he saw many of this class of men coming to baptism with the others, he stung their consciences with quite harsh words, so they would be moved all the more to penitence. He said: 'You sly and malicious race of men – surely not men but the off-spring of vipers, the murderers of your ancestors, cunning, and evil-minded toward all: up to now you have vaunted yourselves before men with the title of fathers,²³ esteemed because of a reputation for holiness and a false appearance of justice, and have negligently ruled, as though the Messiah were never to come. Who warned you that the consequent and inevitable punishment was drawing near, unless you had taken refuge in the remedy of penance with the others, so that²⁴ you now desire to be baptized with them like the sinners among whom you used to display some marvellous appearance of holiness? You perceived that your faith would be vain unless you had already secured yourself against impending divine vengeance with the remedy of repentance. For neither the good deeds of one's fathers nor the observance

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21 Bethabara] First in 1534; previously 'Bethany.' For this incident see John 1:19–28. The change of name in the later editions is explained by an annotation on John 1:28 (*haec in Bethania facta sunt*), where Erasmus cites in support of 'Bethabara' the authority of Origen and Chrysostom, and the fact that no town is known east of the Jordan with the name 'Bethany.' Erasmus concludes the note: 'If anyone thinks that the name of the place in which the action occurred is irrelevant, he should know that the evangelist thought otherwise'; cf chapter 8 n40.

22 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 11.1 (on Matt 3:7) PG 57 192–3 comments on the Pharisees' intent to deceive in this episode: 'Since it was everywhere known that the Christ would come from the village of David, but this man was of the tribe of Levi, by their questioning they were preparing a snare.'

23 Cf Matt 23:5–9.

24 so that] First in 1534; previously 'and'

of the Law frees one from eternal punishment, but the integrity of each person's life commends him to God. Therefore, after you repent of your former lives, henceforth so bear fruit with godly affections and deeds that they prove you have truly repented.

'Up to now, because of human carnality,²⁵ something has been conceded to figures and shadows, so that the human inclination to evil, hedged in by these barriers, might be constrained from falling into a worse condition. Up to now, with your phylacteries broadened,²⁶ with your prayers dragged out at length,²⁷ with your washings,²⁸ your frequent appeal to the name of father Abraham,²⁹ the most holy patriarch, with the monuments you build to the prophets, whose descendants you want to appear to be,³⁰ you have acquired for yourselves the appearance of holiness before men. Henceforth, since shadows vanish at the gospel light, your actions must reflect the genuine and true, if you want to obtain eternal salvation. For your former sins, a burnt offering is not now³¹ demanded from you, nor is the blood of a beast;³² only let genuine repentance be present, and he himself will freely pardon your guilt. Furthermore, the Messiah himself will instruct you in the fruits of true repentance if he finds you receptive to his teaching.

'In the meantime, lay aside your vain confidence and trust, and do not flatter yourselves thus: "We are holy, the children of our holy father Abraham." Abraham, a just man, will not profit his descendants at all, unless

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25 'Carnality': *crassitudinem*. *Crassus*, the adjectival analogue of the noun, is virtually thematic in the *Paraphrases*, and translators have sought to catch its precise nuance; see especially CWE 42 16 n9, 106 n8 (gross, burdensome), CWE 44 145 n31, 231 n10 (carnal, insensitive), CWE 48 32 n16 (thick-headed), CWE 50 13 n4 (intellectually sluggish, morally recalcitrant). In his *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 862B Erasmus contends that the term is not reproachful (*contumeliosus*), and he exemplifies the use of the word in various contexts; cf *Supputatio* LB IX 688B-D.

26 Cf Matt 23:5, on which see the annotation (*ut videantur ab hominibus*), where Erasmus exposes the hypocrisy of those whose dress is designed to catch the attention of unsuspecting women. The annotation traces the custom of wearing phylacteries to Deut 6:4-9 and Num 15:37-40, the latter referring to the 'tassels' or borders that provided the occasion for display. Cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 278-9.

27 Cf Matt 23:14 (cited as a variant in RSV, NRSV); Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47.

28 Cf Matt 23:25-6; Mark 7:4; Luke 11:39-41.

29 Cf John 8:39.

30 Cf Matt 23:29-30.

31 now] Added in 1534

32 Cf Heb 10:5-6; Ps 40:6-8.

they imitate the faith and obedience for which he is praised. The blessing that is now approaching was promised to Abraham. But to obtain it, a familial relationship, however close, is not enough. Whoever, distrusting God, depends upon the supports of this world, has fallen away from the family of Abraham. Henceforth the descendants of Abraham will not be judged by blood-relationship but by sincerity of faith. For this reason, God will not lack descendants of Abraham, upon whom to bestow the promised blessing, if you have deviated from the character of Abraham. Rather you may be certain, if you neglect the grace that has been offered, even from these stones can God raise up for his friend Abraham children far preferable to you.³³

‘Nor should the fact that the coming of the Messiah has been delayed thus far make you careless. The final trial presses near, everything is poised on the razor edge. One must either approach the kingdom of heaven with sincere hearts or one must receive eternal punishment. Salvation is here at hand for those who embrace it; punishment and incurable death are here at hand for those who reject it. The axe has already been put to the tree, not its boughs or trunk, but its roots, and it is about to cut through and with an irreparable wound, unless it produces fruit worthy of God. The moment of decision, impending and pressing, allows no hesitation. You must make haste, all hindrances cut away. Which of the two you want to embrace is still in your hands. The axe will not strike if you change your mind this moment. In a tree that exists in nature, it is long and very difficult to change the sap that gives the fruit its taste. Here the change is accomplished by the will alone. But just as salvation is open to all who hasten to it, so destruction is common to all who delay. Neither wealth, nor nobility of birth, nor wisdom will free anyone hereafter, as most people had persuaded themselves up to now.³⁴ Every tree that has not produced fruit – and not just any fruit, but

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33 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 11.2 (on Matt 3:9) PG 57 194: ‘Do you see how [John] disregarding the relationship of the flesh introduces a relationship based on faith?’ For the ‘spiritual’ relationship reflected in character see the paraphrases on Rom 4:11–13 CWE 42 28–9.

34 as most ... to now] Added in 1534. With the imagery, the sense of urgency conveyed, the options offered, and the place of the will in the paraphrase here in this paragraph, compare Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 11.3 (on Matt 3:10) PG 57 195: ‘That terrible things are near at hand he shows by saying “already,” and by putting the axe to the root ... He did not say “to the boughs,” “to the fruit,” but “to the root,” showing that if they are heedless they will suffer irreparable evils ... Whether it will cut is for you do decide: if you will convert and change for the better, the axe will be removed ...’

fruit that is extraordinarily good and worthy of the kingdom of heaven – is cut down and thrown into the fire.

‘Up to now God has endured and overlooked human sluggishness.³⁵ Error and ignorance warranted some leniency. The human race had been deaf to the law of nature; it was not so much benefited by the law of Moses. The threats of the prophets were scorned, their dreams were not heard. Now the one, after whom no one is to be sent, is at hand. In order that his coming should not surprise anyone, I am his harbinger. If you repent of your sins, if you acknowledge your sickness, if you receive the physician³⁶ with ardent prayers, then he will be present, a saviour to you all. For I am not the one you await.

‘I indeed baptize you, but only so that when he comes, you who repent will present yourselves to him as ready for teaching and healing. For he will be here soon, or rather he is already here. Though he comes after me in order of preaching, he is superior to me in every way, to such an extent that I, whom you judge to be of some importance, am utterly unworthy to act as his servant, that is, even to carry his sandals or untie the laces of his sandals.³⁷ I am nothing more than a herald, faithful indeed, and fulfilling the responsibility that God has enjoined upon me according to the oracle of the prophet.³⁸ He is the author and he brings with him all power, whether for pardoning sins or for bestowing all the virtues. Hasten, all of you, to his teaching, run to his baptism, for he will indeed baptize you with the efficacious baptism, not only with water, but with spirit and fire. With spirit he will transform you, with fire he will carry you off to heavenly realms. He will require from you nothing besides repentance that is sincere and without pretence. He will freely bestow his goods upon you if your misdeeds have genuinely displeased you.

‘Only be utterly without the pretence that will have no sway with him. Nothing escapes him, he fears no one. The case will be treated with severe

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35 Cf Rom 3:25. ‘Overlooked’ translates *dissimulavit* with the sense here of ‘pretending not to see.’ For ‘dissimulation’ in Erasmus’ thought see further chapter 20 n33 below.

36 Erasmus will repeat this image characterizing the respective roles of John and Jesus: John called upon people to repent, to acknowledge their disease in preparation for the physician, Christ. See the paraphrases on Mark 1:4 CWE 49 15 and Acts 19:4 CWE 50 116.

37 The paraphrase harmonizes two variants in the narratives of the Gospels, that John is not worthy to carry Jesus’ sandals (Matt 3:11) and that he is not worthy to untie them (Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; John 1:27).

38 A reference back to Isa 40:3–5 as cited in Matt 3:3 and Luke 3:4.

and unavoidable judgment. Henceforth there will be no middle ground: you will have to be either openly good or thoroughly bad. He will have no regard for pretended holiness. He has the winnowing-fork in his hand; he examines even the innermost recesses of people's hearts. Before him you must either be chaff or pure wheat. But in the meantime he has wanted it to be partly³⁹ in your hands which one you want to be. In vain will the chaff hide, mixed in with the genuine grain. He will clear his threshing-floor with precision, and he will lay up the wheat in his granary, but the chaff he will burn with an unquenchable fire. Therefore you must either strive with your whole heart for the highest virtue, so that you might deserve to be received into the eternal kingdom, or, if you spurn the goodness of God now offered, you must be⁴⁰ the worst of all people for the very reason that you reject such great salvation freely offered, and, in place of a heavenly reward, you are by your own fault sentenced to the eternal fires of hell.⁴¹

The people's hearts were so moved by the words of the most holy man that many who had up to now relied on the observance of the Law came to him trembling with fear, saying: 'If things are as you say, then what do you think we should do?'⁴² He encouraged them to pay attention, not to the rituals of the Law and the petty regulations of men, as the Pharisees are accustomed to do, but rather to the duties of love, saying: 'The first way to placate God is to do a kindness to one's neighbour without wanting a reward. Let the person with extra clothes share with the naked; let the person with extra food share with the hungry.' There also came to him tax collectors, a class of men the Jews detest because they are generally accustomed to rob the people, either at the pleasure of princes, or to satisfy their own greed. Terrified they asked what he thought they should do. He neither refused baptism to them, nor again did he enjoin them, whose

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39 partly] Added in 1534

40 must be] First in 1534; previously 'are'

41 'hell': *gehenna*. In an annotation on Matt 10:27 (*praedicate*), Erasmus follows Jerome in explaining that *gehenna* is a New Testament word ('first used by Jesus') coined from the Hebrew for 'valley of Hinnon.' In this valley was Tophet, a place known for idol worship and child sacrifice by fire; cf 2 Kings 23:10; Jer 7:31, 19:5-6, 32:35. The valley of Hinnon was associated with slaughter and death; cf Jer 7:32 and 19:6, and 2 Esdras 7:36. Erasmus states: 'It is used by the Gospel writers for the place where the wicked are tormented.' Cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 61-2: 'It is possible that Gehenna . . . was equivalent to hell in New Testament times, but there is no evidence for this . . .' Cf also chapter 8 n37 below.

42 Cf Luke 3:10-14.

practice had long been to seize other people's things, to give away their possessions.⁴³ Rather, that they might gradually come a little closer to the perfect teaching of Christ, he declared that they should not exact anything more from the people than the governor prescribed.

Finally, there came soldiers also, a violent and notorious class of men.⁴⁴ He did not drive these men away from him, by this very fact saying well enough to the Jews that Christ will not spurn any class of people at all. They did not confess, for to state that one is a soldier is to confess a Lerna of crimes.⁴⁵ They asked what counsel he could give them too. But he taught such untutored men what they must avoid so they might be less evil rather than what they should do to become completely good. He said: 'Do not misuse your weapons, which are to be wielded only against the enemy and⁴⁶ at your commander's order. Do not beat or strike anyone forcibly, since you have been hired to keep the province peaceful by your labour. And do not abuse your familiarity with governors, falsely accusing someone with a malicious charge in order to acquire base gain from this. Finally, be content with your pay, and do not defraud or rob anyone, for rulers pay salaries so there might be no need to seize the possessions of other people.' Thus with rather light precepts, according to the capacity of each, he prepared everyone for the Christ to come, in the spirit foreseeing Christ whom he had not yet seen with his bodily eyes.

Now the report had been spread widely in a variety of ways, first, gradually and in private or in secret through the angels, the shepherds, the Magi, the cruel anxiety of Herod, the prophecy of Zechariah, Simeon, Anna, then, most particularly through the open and most authoritative advocacy⁴⁷ of John.⁴⁸ It was a report that was growing daily to the extent that the wicked too, terrified with fear, were readying themselves for the announced coming of the Christ. Now, then, was the time for Christ himself to come forth into

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43 An allusion, evidently, to the story of Zacchaeus; cf Luke 19:8.

44 For Erasmus' rather dismal view of soldiers see chapter 8 n14 below.

45 That is, an unrelenting accumulation of crimes; cf *Adagia* I iii 27 *Lerna malorum*, CWE 31 258. Lerna was the place where the Hydra, the many headed dragon, dwelt. When one of its heads was cut off, two would grow in its place. Heracles killed it as one of his twelve labours by slashing off the heads and burning the necks with a torch before the new heads could grow.

46 and] Added in 1534

47 advocacy] *patrocinium*: the reading in all lifetime editions; in LB *praeconium* 'proclamation.'

48 For the allusions see Luke 2:8–18 (angels and shepherds); Luke 1:67–79 (Zechariah); Luke 2:25–35 (Simeon); Luke 2:36–8 (Anna).

the theatre of the world, where he would make known, not by somebody else's witnessing, but by his own miracles, what sort he was and how great, and would eclipse all the men by whose testimony he had previously been commended.

Therefore Jesus left Galilee where he had been living in obscurity up to now, and, about to do his Father's work, he departed his maternal home, Nazareth, and hastened to the Jordan where he would have a thronging multitude, gathered from diverse regions of Judea to witness what was said and done. Through the midst of the crowd of sinners, the one who alone of all people had been touched by no spot of sin,⁴⁹ rather who alone would take away the sins of the world, came to John like a sinner. He who alone sanctifies every baptism demanded baptism from him.

John was not yet totally certain that Jesus was the supreme Messiah, the Son of God, but nevertheless, noticing the marvellous goodness expressing itself in his very eyes, and his whole expression, his gait, he apologized for the preposterous⁵⁰ duty, honouring Jesus' dignity in the meantime with an uncertain statement. He said: 'It was only right that I, who am far below your divine powers, should entreat baptism from you. How has it happened that you should lower yourself⁵¹ so far as to ask to be baptized by me, when no one is freer from every sin than you?' These things were done thus at God's dispensation both that an example of the amazing modesty of Christ might be furnished us, and that it might be established for all by the testimony of John that Christ had asked for baptism not at all conscious of any evil in himself. For as he was circumcised, as he was purified in the

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49 Bédā found this statement objectionable because it implied that Mary was not sinless. In the *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* LB IX 460D-F Erasmus said that he had no intention of touching on the doctrine of the immaculate conception, since nothing could be demonstrated from Scripture. But in the *Supputatio* LB IX 569E-70B he declared that Bédā's accusation was nothing but a slanderous falsehood. For his part, he had never believed that the Virgin had been conceived in original sin. He affirmed that his own residual ambiguity would be eliminated when the church itself took an unambiguous stand on the issue, and he expressed the wish that Mary had as many imitators of her virtues as devotees who magnified her honour. For a brief review of the doctrine of the sinlessness of Mary see CWE 40 1020-2 n51.

50 'Preposterous': *praeposterum*; the word has its true Latin sense describing an inverted relationship, where what should come later comes first.

51 The language alludes to the 'humiliation of Christ,' a doctrine that was the focus of a bitter quarrel between Erasmus and his fellow humanist, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples. See chapter 16 n38 below, for the nature of the controversy.

temple with his mother, as he was scourged, as he was crucified, so was he baptized: it was for us that he endured all these things, not for himself.⁵² Accordingly, John declined the office of baptizer, steadfastly protesting his unworthiness and proclaiming the dignity of Jesus.⁵³ But Christ did not tarnish with any unseemly suspicion his innocence, a thing it was necessary for everyone to know and be convinced of. He said: 'Each part of this task has its own time. For now, permit me to seek baptism from you, and do not suppose that it does not befit you to baptize one who is, as you say, better than you. For me, at least, it is fitting that I, who want to draw everyone to me,⁵⁴ should fulfil all righteousness. Truly, he who teaches all, and teaches what is perfect, must not act in such a way that any (even the slightest) appearance of unrighteousness clings to his character. I must be all things to all people so I may win everyone to my Father.'⁵⁵ On hearing this, John went down into the Jordan with Jesus⁵⁶ and baptized him. In its form, this offers a salutary example of modesty in Christ, and of obedience in John, but in substance and effect⁵⁷ roles have clearly been reversed, for baptism hallows us, while Jesus hallowed baptism with the holy touch of his body.⁵⁸

In order to show at one and the same time what we must do after baptism, and what great happiness is bestowed through baptism, Jesus left the water with quick and lively step, as if the burden of sins had been cast off. In this he taught us that one must not linger in washings, nor return to them constantly when sins are again committed, but when the sins of one's former life are once and for all stripped away and buried in baptism, one must hurry to the duties of the spiritual life. With knees bent and hands raised to heaven, Jesus prayed⁵⁹ to his Father to grant that the task of saving

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52 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 12.1 (on Matt 3:15) PG 57 203: 'Since, therefore, I have fulfilled all the other commandments, and this alone remains, it, too, must be added. I have come to deliver from the curse arising from the transgression of the Law. It is necessary for me to fulfil the whole Law, deliver you from its condemnation, and so bring it to an end.'

53 of Jesus] The reading of 1534 and 1535; in 1522 and 1524 'of Christ.'

54 Cf John 12:32.

55 Cf 1 Cor 9:22. Erasmus here puts the words of Paul into the mouth of Jesus.

56 Jesus] The reading of 1534 and 1535; in 1522 and 1524 'Christ.'

57 effect] *effectus*, first in 1524; in 1522, probably incorrectly, *affectus*, 'disposition'

58 Cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 3:13), who explains that Jesus was baptized 'so that by the touch of his body he might confer upon the waters the power of regeneration.'

59 Cf Luke 3:21. On the posture cf Eph 3:14 (knees bent), 1 Tim 2:8 (hands raised), and *Modus orandi Deum* CWE 70 216 and 226.

the human race that he was undertaking would be happy and fortunate for all, and that God by his paternal authority would commend his Son to the world, lest John's authority should be of little weight, though this also for the time being was helpful to dull and untutored people.

And behold, the Father conferred authority on his Son in public with a vast multitude of people as witnesses. The heavens divided and revealed a wonderful light. In fact, John saw the heavenly Spirit in the visible form of a dove descend from heaven and sit on Jesus' holy head.⁶⁰ From the place where the dove had come, visible to the eyes, there came as well the voice of the Father, sounding in everyone's ears, saying: 'This is my dearly beloved Son, the delight of my heart, in whom I am very well pleased. Listen to him, the interpreter of my mind and the dispenser of my bounty unto you.'

Since Jesus was at this time still unknown to the multitude that greatly esteemed John, the visible sign of the heavenly dove was added, so that people might not think the voice referred to John, for coming from above as it did, the voice designated to the senses no one decisively.⁶¹ By sitting on Jesus' head it would point out⁶² to everyone, to whom the words pertained. Indeed, by that sign even John himself was now advised fully and with certainty that Jesus was the Son of God.⁶³ He later testified publicly that even earlier the Father had promised him this sign, by which he might recognize Jesus amid so great a crowd of people as the one who would baptize everyone with⁶⁴ spirit and fire. With these ceremonies the Lord

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60 Cf John 1:32–3.

61 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 3:16–17) PL 26 31A: 'The dove sat above Jesus' head lest anyone think the voice of the Father referred to John, not the Lord.'

62 'Point out': *ceu digito demonstraret*, literally, 'would point out as if with a finger.' The language evokes the conventional image of John pointing to Christ; see chapter 11 n21.

63 For John's uncertainty about Jesus see the paraphrase on John 1:31 CWE 46 30 and n117, and 31 n119.

64 with] In 1522 and 1524 Erasmus followed the Vulgate (and his own translation in 1516), which, in a literal translation, rendered the Greek *ἐν* in 3:11 by the Latin *in*. In the Greek of 3:11 the preposition is instrumental, 'by means of,' but in the Latin *in* is not so used; instrumentality is represented by the ablative without a preposition. In his annotations Erasmus had, as early as 1516, made an issue of the Vulgate's non-Latin use of this Greek construction, and in 1534 followed here in the paraphrase his own 'better Latin' rendering of this phrase by using the simple ablative without *in*. For his criticism of the Vulgate construction see the annotation on Rom 1:4 (in power) CWE 56 15–16.

Jesus was designated and consecrated 'our teacher':⁶⁵ whoever will follow his theology will be truly blessed.

Chapter 4

Even after making such a start, he did not jump straight into preaching, though his authority was handed down from heaven. Rather, he removed himself suddenly from the eyes of the crowd and withdrew to a solitary place, because a retreat from interaction with people both increases authority and sharpens desire. However, that spirit, the instigator of evils, particularly attacks those who have abandoned the desires of this world to practise the pure and heavenly life. It was this, therefore, that Jesus was silently teaching us when he sought out solitude,¹ and he did so not at anyone's urging, but moved by his own spirit. For a person who has been baptized has already put off bodily affections, and, made spiritual by regeneration, is led and moved² by the will of the Holy Spirit.³ Jesus did not think of Bethlehem, he did not go back to Nazareth, he did not return to his mother

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65 'Our teacher': *magister noster*, the standard term to designate professors of theology in the sixteenth century; cf Paul Grendler 'How to Get a Degree in Fifteen Days; Erasmus' Doctorate of Theology from the University of Turin' *ERSY* 18 (1998) 40–69, especially 63 n71, and *CWE* 48 61 n10. For the satirical use of the term see eg *Ep* 64:33 and the *Dialogue of the Two-Tongued* *CWE* 7 341 and nn38 and 39.

1 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 13.1 (on *Matt* 4:1) *PG* 57 209: 'Then especially the devil assails when he sees people isolated and alone,' and Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 4:1 *PG* 123 180B: 'But he is led into the desert so that he might show us that the devil then tempts us when he sees us alone and not aided by others.'

2 'Led and moved': Erasmus combines here the Vulgate of *Matt* 4:1 (*ductus est* 'was led') and *Luke* 4:1 (*agebatur* 'was moved'). He will incorporate the stronger expression of *Mark* 1:12 (*spiritus expulit eum* 'the Spirit drove him') in the next sentence, 'impelled and carried off by the Spirit.' Cf the annotation on *Luke* 4:1 (*agebatur* 'was moved'): 'He was led or moved, although elsewhere he is said to have been driven by the Spirit.'

3 The paraphrase recognizes the ambiguity of the text, where the Vulgate *spiritus* 'spirit' might refer either to Jesus' own spirit or to the Holy Spirit. The Greek points more clearly to the latter, as Erasmus claims in his annotation on 4:1 (*tunc ductus*). Béda charged Erasmus with both ignorance and blasphemy in the paraphrase here on 4:1, on what basis Erasmus could only guess – apparently because Béda deduced from the language of the paraphrase that there were occasions when Christ needed human counsel, and that Jesus, portrayed here as our model, put off 'human affections' in baptism. Such inferences, Erasmus

or his foster-father, but impelled and carried off by the Spirit, and following the example of the prophets of old,⁴ he sought the barren desert. Solitude invigorates the spirit of the Christian recruit, and sometimes it is safer to entrust oneself to wild beasts than to men. Baptism takes away all the sins of one's former life, but this does not mean that one who acts carelessly is safe from the treacheries of Satan. On the contrary, depraved desires threaten to sprout up again, especially in people who are untutored and recently initiated into Christ. Moreover, that wicked Satan, who envies human salvation as much as Christ eagerly desires it, incites desertion by means of unimaginable traps and snares, and as a result acquires a more tyrannical power over the lapsed than he had before when the person had been his own disciple.⁵

Christ shows that one must oppose these dangers with three things especially: with frequent and pure prayers; with avoidance of the crowd, avoidance of excess, and abstinence; and with diligent contemplation of Holy Scripture, so that idle solitude does not bring ruin.⁶ And since the devil is particularly accustomed to setting snares for those who are striving after this lofty and angelic life, Christ himself, like a master teacher, entered the palaestra and taught his own athletes how that malicious, crafty old fox must be overcome, and how little he can do against those who are sober and vigilant, and who trust in divine Scripture with all their heart.⁷ Meanwhile, the Lord Jesus also did this, so that this mystery might become known to the world gradually, in order that Satan might be kept in uncertainty not knowing for a fact that this was the Messiah until he saw his own tyranny overthrown – for Satan wanted to know whether Jesus was the Son of God, the one he had heard the Father honour with this title; this he

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said, were the product of either a feverish brain or a drunken man, or they were simply Satanic; cf *Supputatio* LB IX 570C–2B.

4 Cf Exod 3:1–6 on Moses; 1 Kings 19:4–8 on Elijah; cf n10 below.

5 An allusion, apparently, to 12:43–5

6 In the *Enchiridion* CWE 66 30–2 the 'armour of the Christian militia' against the cunning ambusher comprises prayer and knowledge of Scripture.

7 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 13.2 (on Matt 4:2) PG 57 210 had also likened Christ in his struggle with the devil to the athletic trainer who enters the palaestra to teach aspiring athletes the way to victory. But the image of the Christian athlete is rooted in the New Testament; see 1 Cor 9:24–7; 2 Tim 2:5, 4:7–8; Heb 12:1–2. For explication of the image see CWE 44 36–7 n12, CWE 50 55 n67, and CWE 66 27. The phrase 'sober and vigilant' echoes the Vulgate of 1 Pet 5:8; 'crafty old fox' renders *callidus veterator* – an inveterate practitioner of wily behaviour.

wanted to know for no other reason than to obstruct the redemption of the human race.⁸ At the same time Christ impresses upon us that no one is fit to preach the Gospel except the person who, having made trial of himself, is steady and strong against all worldly desires, against excess and things that go along with it – lust, ambition, greed – and against similar diseases of the mind⁹ with which the enemy batters and breaks down the minds of the simple, as if with battering rams.

Therefore when Christ, imitating Elijah and Moses,¹⁰ had fasted for forty days, (something that was far beyond human strength, though the Jews believed that men nevertheless had done so), eventually, in order to give obvious proof of human weakness, he did not conceal that he was feeling the pain of hunger.¹¹ For in accordance with the common nature of the human body a lack of fluids tortured his stomach with a sharp pain. When the scheming tempter sensed this, and now¹² supposing him to be hardly anything other than a man, however remarkable, he cast forth a hook baited with the enticement of vainglory, because it is by this that those who aspire to the heights are especially caught. He said: 'If you are the Son of God, what need is there for you to be tortured with hunger? Rather, tell

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8 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 4:6) PL 26 32A: 'In all the temptations the devil's purpose is to learn whether [Jesus] is the Son of God; but the Lord responds in a way that leaves the devil uncertain.' Similarly Nicholas of Lyra (on 4:3).

9 diseases of the mind] First in 1534; previously 'things'

10 Moses] In 1522 and 1524 Erasmus had added 'Daniel,' but he omitted the name in 1534 and 1535. For Elijah see 1 Kings 19:8; for Moses Deut 9:9. In the case of Daniel, Béda accused Erasmus of napping, for it is nowhere written in Scripture that Daniel fasted forty days. This, Erasmus replied, he knew very well, but he was simply following ecclesiastical tradition which associated Daniel with Elijah and Moses as heroes of the fast. See *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* LB IX 461C and *Supputatio* LB IX 572B-C.

11 On Moses see Exod 24:18 and 34:28, on Elijah see 1 Kings 19:8. Chrysostom, too, *In Matt hom* 13.2 (on Matt 4:2) PG 57 210 had cited the examples of Moses and Elijah, who had both fasted for forty days. Chrysostom likewise saw the fast as a focal point for the consideration of Christ's humanity – the assumption of flesh. But whereas Chrysostom pointed to the length of the fast, Erasmus pointed to the pain involved: for Chrysostom Christ fasted for no more than forty days, a period of fasting already sustained by Moses and Elijah, since a longer fast might have made 'the assumption of flesh seem unbelievable to many.' Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 4:2 PG 123 180C makes the same point: 'He fasted as many days as Moses and Elijah, for if he had fasted longer, the incarnation would have seemed an illusion.'

12 now] Added in 1534

these stones to be turned into loaves of bread for you. With a nod you can furnish yourself with what you want.' You¹³ may recognize this as the same ambusher who lured that first Adam into death by the enticement of food; but Christ, the later Adam, heavenly in spirit, so outsmarted the deceiving schemer that, on the one hand, he did not decline the name of the Son of God, while, on the other, he showed that he could not be overcome by hunger like an ordinary man. Indeed, to avoid any claim of personal authority for his reply, he cast before the devil a very well-known passage of Scripture, saying: 'It has been written in Deuteronomy that "man will not be nourished by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."' [8:3]

Outsmarted by this elusive answer, even the devil himself now used the words of Holy Scripture to do harm, and¹⁴ just as he had deceived the first parent of the human race using ambition as bait, promising him honour and immortality equal with the gods,¹⁵ he attacked the Lord with a similar stratagem: he took him to the holy city and set him on the highest pinnacle of the temple. He urged him to hurl himself headlong from the height if he truly were the Son of God, since he would suffer no harm, seeing that God himself had made this promise in the mystical Psalm: 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest by chance you strike your foot against a stone.' [91:11-12] But setting forth an opposing scripture, the Lord Jesus showed without further words how the devil perversely twisted the meaning of Holy Scripture. He said: 'On the contrary, it is written in Deuteronomy, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God."' [6:16] For Scripture exhorts us to be of good hope when the inescapable falls upon us, relying on divine aid, but not to throw ourselves headlong into danger without good cause. The wonderful powers of the godly are not proved by summoning dangers upon themselves, but by diverting the dangers that have come from the outside.¹⁶ It is not a godly thing to throw someone headlong into a river so that you may seem to be a great man for rescuing him, but it is godly to pull someone out

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13 You ... in spirit] Added (except for the word 'Christ') in 1534; previously 'Christ so outsmarted ...' This is the first of three additions in 1534 each of which compares the temptations of Christ to those of Adam; see nn14 and 18 below. For Christ as the second Adam see 1 Cor 15:22, 45-8, and Rom 5:12-21.

14 and ... stratagem] Added in 1534

15 Cf Gen 3:5.

16 The admonition against charging into danger is repeated in the paraphrase on 4:13 below; see also n26 citing parallels in Chrysostom and Theophylact.

who has fallen in by chance. Miracles are not to be performed for just any reason, nor in the presence of just anyone. In the presence of Herod, who wanted to see a miracle, Jesus did not deign even to speak, so far was he from being willing to offer a display of divine power to please Satan.¹⁷ Whenever inspired love urges such a display, whenever the glory of God requires it, then the force of the divine power should be expressed.

Now in order to teach his followers that they should not yield to a sense of security after one or two victories, but that, keeping watch at all times, they should show themselves ready for all of Satan's assaults, for a third time¹⁸ Christ endured the wickedness of the tempter. And just as the tempter had entrapped that first Adam with the bait of curiosity and greed, promising him knowledge of good and evil, so he set upon the second Adam, and carrying him from the pinnacle of the temple brought him to some very high mountain from where a free prospect, lying open far and wide, placed before his eyes all the kingdoms of the world and the amazing glory and pomp of each one. No doubt he had learned in his dealings with other men that there was nothing so ungodly and nefarious that men will not dare for the sake of power. Moreover, although God is the author and creator of all things that are in heaven and earth, and the devil has no right in them, except what he has corrupted, nevertheless, just as though he were the master of all things, the wicked one dared speak thus to the Christ: 'All these things will I give you if you will fall down and worship me.' O blind impiety! That wicked spirit promised what belonged to another, and sought a reward befitting God alone. But Jesus, who to this point bore calmly the insult to himself, did not bear the insult to his Father. He said: 'Depart from me, Satan; divine Scripture teaches something far removed from what you are prompting. It says: "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."' [Deut 6:13] And when the devil had tempted him in these and other ways, and found that the athlete was invincible against all his contrivances, at last he left him, twice frustrated in his hopes: first, because he had realized that Christ could not be defeated; second, because, although he had come to find out if he was the Son of God, he left somewhat more uncertain than when he had come.

Even though this contest was carried on only with God and the angels as witnesses, thereafter the Lord Jesus did not want his followers to

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¹⁷ Cf Luke 23:8-9.

¹⁸ for a third time . . . second Adam, and] Added in 1534; the previous construction was 'Now in order that Christ might teach his followers . . . ready for all of Satan's assaults, the devil carrying him from the pinnacle . . .'

be ignorant of it, that we might know how wicked the adversary is with whom we must contend, and with what rewards he stirs incautious minds, not that we might despair, but that we might be vigilant. Christ defeated him to show us that he can be defeated, and he demonstrated the way to victory. Finally, it was for us, not for himself, that he was victorious, and through us he will vanquish the same adversary if only we deserve to have him present with us. Through us the adversary will hear Christ say ‘Satan, depart,’ and he will fear the servants of the one who defeated him. Moreover, just as in the military service of men there are alternations, and labours are refreshed by leisure, hardships by pleasures, and after bitter conflicts victory is celebrated with festivals, so in Christ’s militia, harsh circumstances are always mitigated by a return to happy ones.¹⁹ After he had endured the wickedness of the impure spirit, at once the angels came and ministered to Christ the victor. This, clearly, is a picture that teaches us to bolster our hearts in times of adversity with the hope for happier times, relying on the goodness of God, who so guides all things that he in turn exercises us with the harsh things and proves the strength of his soldiers, while again he invites us with a certain consolation to rejoicing and thanksgiving. This is the triumph of Christians²⁰ who, with the help of God, are unconquered even in afflictions, and if some good fortune arises, they ascribe it totally to divine goodness and generosity. Thus it happens that they are not cast down in spirit by hostile fortune, nor do they become arrogant in more fortunate times.

Therefore, now that Christ had acquired enough authority and esteem, especially after John, as if entrusting him and commending him to his disciples, had pointed to him and said: ‘Behold the Lamb of God, behold the one who takes away the sins of the world’ [John 1:29]; and further, now that he had overcome the devil and was wholly filled with the Holy Spirit,²¹ nothing remained but to choose the time and place to begin his preaching. John had performed no miracle, content with preaching repentance only. Christ remained silent while John was preaching, so that no discord might arise be-

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19 For the sentiment, common in the *Paraphrases*, see chapter 2 n29 above, and the paraphrase on Acts 12:17 CWE 50 80–2 and n29. Cf also Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 4:11) PL 26 33A: ‘The struggle precedes so that victory might follow.’

20 On Christian triumph, see 2 Cor 2:14; Col 2:15; CWE 44 14 n11; CWE 50 57 n11; cf also chapter 26 n14 below.

21 Luke (4:14) records that after the temptations ‘Jesus filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee’ (NRSV).

tween their disciples, since they were still untutored and carnally minded, subject to human affections.²² Besides, it is the mark of a good teacher to lower himself to the capacity of those whom he is instructing. So only then did Jesus begin the task of teaching, when the report had been spread among the people that Herod the tetrarch had thrown John into prison, reaping the reward, no doubt, those usually receive who dare to admonish too frankly the princes of this world, and who prefer to say things that are corrective rather than things that are pleasing to hear. For John had admonished the tetrarch concerning his incestuous marriage by which he had taken for himself the wife of his brother Philip.²³ Sometimes even wicked princes are happy to have in their households men who are famous and commended for an exceptional reputation for goodness, not that they have any intention of obeying their counsels, but that they might seem to the unsuspecting populace to be acting on the advice of an upright counsellor when, in fact, they are acting from their own inclination. Indeed, in other less important matters Herod had frequently obeyed John's advice,²⁴ but here when it was especially important that he obey, he threw that best of men into prison to satisfy the lust of an impure dancing girl and the ignoble desire of her utterly scandalous mother,²⁵ and then he defiled his own birthday feast and the eyes of his nobles with the most cruel murder of so great a man.

Therefore, when Jesus heard this, he left Nazareth, not because he himself was afraid, but in order to teach his followers that danger should not be summoned willingly if it can be avoided easily, but that whenever it has caught one unexpectedly, it must be met with brave disregard.²⁶ Upon

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22 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 14.1 (on Matt 4:17) PG 57 218 provides the same interpretation of the respective roles of Jesus and John: 'Jesus did not preach before John, nor did he work miracles until John was cast into prison, lest otherwise the crowd be divided into factions. John did not perform miracles, so that in this way he might direct the people to Jesus, while Jesus' miracles drew them to him.'

23 Philip is designated the husband of Herodias in Mark 6:17 and in the preferred reading of Matt 14:3, though Luke (3:19) designates Herodias' husband simply as 'brother of Herod [Antipas].' This Philip was not, however, Philip the tetrarch, son of Herod the Great by Cleopatra, but another Philip, son of Herod the Great by Mariamne II. Salome was daughter of Herodias by this Philip. As Herodias was granddaughter of Herod the Great, Antipas was her uncle. See the article 'Herodias' in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 3 174-6.

24 Cf Mark 6:20.

25 Cf Mark 6:19.

26 On avoiding danger, compare Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 14.1 (on Matt 4:12) PG 57 217: 'Why does he depart again? To teach us not to approach temptations

leaving Nazareth he withdrew to Galilee of the gentiles, where Solomon had given twenty-five cities to Hiram, king of Tyre.²⁷ He went to the city of Capernaum, called 'Capernaum by the sea' because it is bounded by the lake of Gennesaret, within the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali, two tribes, that is, in the former of which is Galilee, and in the latter is Galilee of the gentiles.²⁸ By this image Christ was already then threatening, as it were, that, as the Jews rejected and persecuted the heralds of the gospel, the gospel would be brought to the gentiles.²⁹

So no one might think that this had happened by chance, Isaiah had already predicted this would come to pass when, under the inspiration of the prophetic spirit, he foretold: 'In the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, that border the shore of the sea, in the Galilee that is called "of the gentiles," the people who before this were living in darkness have seen a great and amazing light, and for those who before were dwelling in the thickest gloom, such as there is in the abode of the dead,³⁰ a light has dawned.'³¹ And so, in relation to time: when John stopped, Christ began, for at the brightest light of the gospel the shadows of Mosaic law disappeared

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wilfully, but rather to give way and avoid them. For it is not an offence if one does not thrust oneself into danger; the offence is not standing bravely when in danger.' Cf also Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 4:12-13 PG 123 184A: 'Jesus withdrew, teaching us not to thrust ourselves into danger.'

27 Cf 1 Kings 9:10-13.

28 Cf the *Gloss* (on 4:12-16): 'There are two Galilees, one of the Jews, the other of the gentiles, because gentiles inhabit it. Solomon gave this Galilee to the king of Tyre, who settled it with gentiles ... Capernaum is a town in Galilee of the gentiles, near lake Gennesaret, and lies in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali ... Galilee of the gentiles is in the tribe of Naphtali, towards Tyre, and is distinguished from the Galilee in the tribe of Zebulun.' Bede *In Matt expos* 1 (on Matt 4:14-16) PL 92 21D had described the historical-geographical setting similarly, but said that Galilee of the gentiles was 'across the Jordan.' Zebulun was west and south, Naphtali west and north of the Sea of Galilee. For the expression 'Galilee of the gentiles' see Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 39, who explain that what had formerly been the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali 'was then largely inhabited by Gentiles.' On the Sea of Gennesaret see chapter 8 n12.

29 Cf Acts 13:45-8; 1 Thess 2:14-16. Cf the *Gloss* (on 4:13): Christ spent time in both Galilees, but 'as a figure of those who were to be called from the gentiles, here [Matthew] mentions the Galilee of the gentiles.'

30 'In the abode of the dead': *apud inferos*; on the language cf chapter 11 n30 below.

31 Cf Isa 9:1-2. Erasmus paraphrases the text of Matthew, omitting, however, the phrase 'across the Jordan'; cf n28 above.

– in focus³² here are the types of the Law and the truth expressed by the gospel. In relation to place: at the first suffering of the holy herald reference is made to the gentiles, and the light that the Jews, blinded by desires, were not able to bear is depicted as about to depart to the idolatrous gentiles, though in such a way that it is not withdrawn from Jewish borders, so the trumpet of the gospel word might be heard by both. And yet in other respects that region was not a venue devoid of usefulness because of the suitability of its ports, and the many famous cities situated on the coast that were frequented even by foreigners engaged in trade.

Now let us hear the beginning of his preaching. So that he might not alienate those who were completely filled with admiration for John, Christ, when he succeeded John, began the undertaking with John's known and familiar teaching,³³ giving milk for a time to the weak, so that afterwards he might offer solid food to those now stronger.³⁴ This is no doubt the procedure of teachers who prefer to profit their listeners rather than show off before others. Now Christ's preaching was not only milder than John's (for there was no mention of an axe or of a winnowing fork or of fire that can never be put out),³⁵ but was also commended by the many kindnesses bestowed without discrimination on all who were hastening to him. Therefore Jesus also cried, as if imitating John: 'Come back to your senses, repent your former lives, for the kingdom of heaven is now at hand. And although the kingdom of heaven must be closed to no one, nevertheless it will lie open to none but those who are pure and seeking heavenly things and who cut away all their earthly desires.' What is simpler than this philosophy? Let every one lament his wicked deeds, and heavenly goods are present to all freely.

Now it was time for Jesus himself also to collect an esteemed band³⁶ of disciples, disciples whom he would have as intimate witnesses of all he did and said, and through whom he might teach others thereafter. Notice the

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32 in focus ... gospel] Added in 1534

33 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 14.1 (on Matt 4:17) PG 57 218: 'At the beginning he taught the very thing John had preached.' Chrysostom goes on to indicate, like Erasmus here, though in different terms, that Jesus accommodated his message to the capacity of his audience to understand.

34 Cf 1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:12–14.

35 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 14.2 (on Matt 4:17) PG 57 218: 'At the start he taught none of the troubling and severe things of which John had spoken – no axe, no tree cut down, no winnowing fork, no threshing floor or unquenchable fire.' For John's troubling preaching cf 3:10, 12.

36 'Band': *chorum*, evidently with overtones of its classical use to designate a select body, eg of philosophers, poets, etc.

sort of men he chose for himself: not philosophers, not Pharisees, not priests, not rich men. For he did not want the glory of the gospel to be tainted with any of the supports of this world. But as he was walking beside the sea that I have said borders the two Galilees, he saw two brothers, one of whom was named Simon, called also Peter, and the other Andrew; their father's name was John.³⁷ These brothers had earlier heard John the Baptist,³⁸ and they began³⁹ at his urging to follow Jesus. But after leaving them both, they returned to the craft by which they were accustomed to procure food for themselves.⁴⁰ And now they were busily engaging in their own work, casting a net into the sea. It was a good omen: for one thing, youth⁴¹ is more ready to receive new teaching; for another, there was the harmony of brothers assisting each other with shared purpose. In addition, there was the harmless craft of obtaining a meagre diet from the sea that is common to all. Finally, fishing itself suggested a new kind of fishing, not one that caught fish on twisted lines to be food for the stomach, but one that, with the net of the gospel message, caught people drowning in worldly cares and turned them to a desire for the heavenly life. And so Jesus interrupted the

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37 For 'son of John' see Matt 16:17; John 21:15.

38 Cf John 1:35–42.

39 began] First in 1534; previously 'had begun'

40 In order to harmonize the Gospel narratives Erasmus supposes a 'double call' of the first disciples. In John 1:35–42 the Baptist is still preaching when, at John's behest, Andrew leaves John and, with Peter, follows Jesus. In Mark 1:14, however, Jesus does not begin preaching until after John's incarceration, and then calls Peter and Andrew. The narrative of Luke suggests that Peter knew Jesus well before the call described in 5:11, for Jesus had already miraculously healed his mother-in-law (4:38–9). The solution offered here to these apparent discrepancies is that of Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 14.2 (on Matt 4:20) PG 57 219: the brothers had previously followed Jesus for some time when John the Baptist was still preaching, but had then returned to their fishing. It was to the second call that they responded with ready obedience. Likewise Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 4:19–20 PG 123 185A: 'See the obedient men: they followed him immediately. From this it is clear that it was their second calling. For they had been taught by Jesus before, then, after leaving him, they readily followed again upon seeing him.' Nicholas of Lyra (on 4:18) found yet another calling (the second of three) in the story of Luke 5:1–11.

41 youth] *iuuentus*; in 1535 only, *inventus*, apparently a printer's error. Though *iuuentus* may be used to describe anyone between the ages of twenty and forty, Erasmus evidently wishes here to portray these two as relatively young and still malleable. Their youth is perhaps inferred from the circumstances; Erasmus consistently portrays Peter as younger than Andrew; cf CWE 46 34 and n132.

men, who were intent on the needs of the body, and said: 'Follow me and I will teach you a craft that is certainly better than the one you learned from your father. Even so, you will not lose your craft, but you will exchange it for a better one, for I will make you hereafter fishers of men, so that you who now with cunning snare little fish to their destruction will catch people for their eternal salvation.' They recognized the voice of the man in whom they had once believed and whose gentle humanity they had come to know in familiar conversation.⁴² An energy added to the voice had its effect:⁴³ as soon as they heard the voice of Jesus calling, not only did they forget the fish, but they even left their nets in that place, just as they were, and without even bidding their family farewell,⁴⁴ they followed Jesus as he was walking there. As of yet they had seen nothing remarkable in Jesus, and even so they did not delay at all, nor did they worry about where they would get the necessities of life in the future. At a simple word they joined as companions the one who called, never to be separated even by death.

After moving on a little from there, Jesus caught sight of two other brothers, James and John, sons of Zebedee. The harmony of brothers and father was even more pleasing. They were all in one boat, working at the same task as Peter and Andrew, but they were delayed by nets torn from long use, evidence of poverty.⁴⁵ Therefore, as he passed by on his way, Jesus interrupted them as they were earnestly intent on their repairs and mending, and bade them follow him. Without delay, the young men of very simple trust left their nets at once and, not even thinking of their father, joined Jesus' company. John's preaching had disposed them to this, their eagerness of mind was deserving of this, to this were they drawn by the inspiring presence of Christ, who fully expressed the heavenly power that filled him. You see the beginnings of our philosophy by which God saw fit to save the whole human race. You see the pomp and ceremony of the gospel school. Accompanied by these few fishermen, uneducated, common, and poor, Jesus, himself a pauper, walked through all Galilee, preaching now

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42 An allusion to the disciples earlier acquaintance with Jesus.

43 For Erasmus' interest in the voice see CWE 46 146 and 199; CWE 50 27 n6, 58 n23, 104 n43.

44 Cf Luke 9:61-2.

45 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 14.2 (on Matt 4:21) PG 57 219: 'Notice how careful he is to suggest their poverty: he found them mending their nets; so great was their need that they were repairing the old since they were unable to buy other nets,' and Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 4:21 PG 123 185A: 'For they were poor, and because they were not able to buy new nets they were mending the old ones.'

not in unpopulated places or in the desert, but in their crowded synagogues, announcing that the heavenly kingdom long promised was now at hand. He did not frighten with the fear of hell as John had done, but he invited and enticed everyone with freely bestowed kindnesses. For wherever he went, he cured all the diseases of all the people, freely and without discrimination. He did not send anyone away, no matter how lowly and common, but with the same ease he overthrew every disease no matter how incurable. He did this so that he might at one and the same time prove by his miracles that his powers were greater than human, and win for himself by his free kindness the love of everyone, for we more freely believe in someone we love. Indeed, by kindnesses even wild beasts are won over. Yet no kindness is more divine than that of health freely⁴⁶ restored.

As a result of these deeds, reports of which spread throughout all Syria, it transpired that many people came even from faraway places, carrying their sick, who were suffering from various diseases and pains, and in addition demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics, whom doctors generally either do not undertake to cure or whom as a rule they try in vain to cure, the malady clearly surpassing their skill. But Jesus cured all without any difficulty, not with drugs prepared by humans, but by the heavenly power, by which he was able to raise even the dead. It was of virtually no account for one who was taking away the diseases of the soul to take away the diseases of the body. It was but a very little thing for one who had come to bestow eternal life on everyone to prolong the life of the body. Therefore there hurried together from all directions a huge crowd of people, not only from Galilee of the gentiles where he was dwelling, but also from the other Galilee that was beyond the sea, and from the region called the Decapolis because of the ten cities it encompasses.⁴⁷ Likewise, people came from Jerusalem and the rest of Judea and from places situated beyond the Jordan. Everyone hastens towards a kindness when there is need. Many are led by a fascination for what is new. Malice and the desire to lay snares drew some. Jesus draws everyone to him (so far as the matter lies with him), but few are fit for the heavenly philosophy, which he had especially come into the world to deliver. Concern for the body motivates people who rejoice to feed their eyes on novel spectacles, but the one who seeks things that

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⁴⁶ freely] Added in 1534

⁴⁷ 'Decapolis' is a transliteration of the Greek, which means 'The Ten Towns'; cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 43. For the geographical observations see n28 above. For the difficulties in defining the borders of Galilee see *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 2 879-81.

are perfect and far removed from popular affections, finds little pleasure in theatre of this sort.

Chapter 5

Seeing the crowd growing every day more densely packed with every class of person, Jesus stole away, as it were, from a low place that was easily accessible to everyone. When he had climbed a steep hill, he now began to play the role of the teacher of heavenly philosophy, indicating by the very height of the place that he was about to hand on nothing plebeian or lowly, but all the things that are exalted and heavenly. At the same time he was recalling the example of Moses who, we read, climbed a mountain when he was going to hand down the Law to the people.¹ The disciples whom he had particularly chosen for himself followed Jesus as he climbed; at the same time, the crowd was not prevented from following, if any of them were sufficiently eager and strong.

And so when he reached the top of the hill Jesus sat down, not out of weariness, but because he was about to teach difficult and more serious things that required an attentive listener. When the disciples understood this they surrounded him more closely so that none of his sacred teaching could be lost. Accordingly, when Jesus was about to inaugurate his divine and salvific philosophy, he did not begin from the golden seat of Jarcas,² or from the pretentious pulpit of the philosophers, or from the arrogant chair of the Pharisees, but from a grassy elevation. He turned his eyes not to the crowd but towards the disciples, and opening his sacred mouth he began to draw out the as yet unheard-of doctrines of the gospel teaching, which are far different from the opinions of all those who seem to the world exceptionally wise.³

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- 1 Cf Exod 19:20. With the tropological interpretation of the mountain height offered in the previous sentence compare Ps Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 9.1 (on Matt 5:1) PG 56 679: 'If you speak about the heavenly world, take your stand in heaven.' Also on the same verse Hilary *In Matt comm* PL 9 931C: 'Situated on the lofty height of the paternal majesty, he set forth the precepts of the heavenly life.' Similarly the *Gloss*.
- 2 Cf Ep 456:258–9, where Erasmus refers to 'the brahmins of philosophy Iarcas-like enthroned'; cf also *ibid* 259n where reference is made to Jerome's expression in Ep 53 (To Paulinus) 'Iarcas seated on his golden throne.'
- 3 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 15.1 (on Matt 5:1–2) PG 57 223 presents Jesus as a teacher of philosophy, with his disciples sitting immediately around him, while the crowd that had also followed him placed themselves farther away.

All self-professed teachers of wisdom promise happiness. Everyone, regardless of status or condition, seeks happiness. But in what things human happiness has been placed, on this question there is much controversy among philosophers, and much error in the lives of mortals.⁴ Since happiness is the goal and foundation of all wisdom, Jesus explicated this⁵ first, teaching paradoxes that are yet very true.⁶ By his miracles he established a basis for trust in his words⁷ – words beyond the range of belief – so that those who experienced the effectiveness of his power in healing the diseases of the body should also⁸ believe that his teaching, by which he cured the diseases of the soul, was true.⁹ Then¹⁰ only a few disciples heard these things and embraced happiness. Let everyone hear, for he has spoken to everyone, and everyone will be made happy.¹¹

All the sins of life arise from false opinions. Therefore one must strive before all things to remove such opinions. The most deadly disease of the mind is untameable arrogance that does not allow a person to be open to true teaching. Indeed, arrogance is the spring from which in general all the chief vices gush forth.¹² Accordingly, Jesus first remedied this, saying:

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4 Cf chapter 1 n8 above.

5 this] Added in 1534; previously implied by the context

6 'Paradoxes that are yet very true': the context may invite a contrast with the famous paradoxes of the Stoics. In the paraphrase on Acts 17:18 Paul is made to refer to these paradoxes, for a list of which as found in Cicero, see CWE 50 107 n20.

7 For miracles preceding the Sermon on the Mount see 4:23–4.

8 also] Added in 1524

9 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 15.1 (on Matt 5:2) PG 57 223 sets Jesus' miracles in the same relation to his teaching: 'He did not only heal bodies, he also restored souls, and then again returned from the care of souls to the healing of bodies ... mingling with his teaching through words the demonstration from his deeds'; cf also *In Matt hom* 15.2 (on Matt 5:4) PG 57 225 where Chrysostom notes that the miracles of Christ were essential to sustain the authority required when he demanded the radical inversion of values implied by the beatitudes.

10 Then] First in 1534; previously 'however'

11 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 15.1 (on Matt 5:1–2) PG 57 223: 'Let us hear with keen attention what has been said, for while his words were spoken to those there, they have been written for all people to come.'
The Sermon on the Mount (from here to the end of 7:27) is presented at the beginning in the evangelist's own words, later under the *persona* of Christ. See n25 below.

12 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 15.2 (on Matt 5:3) PG 57 225: 'Just as presumptuous arrogance is the source of all vices, so humility is the beginning of all philosophy.'

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Whose ears could have taken in so inconceivable a statement unless, after the many testimonies of John, of the Father, and of the dove, their authority had finally been commended and trust won by efficacious signs? Slender means, lowly birth, insignificant status, and adverse fortune make many people downcast and humble and dissatisfied with themselves. These people are indeed closer to gospel happiness if they follow willingly where fortune calls. In truth, this humility of spirit is located in one's disposition, not in external things. But from where does a person, who claims nothing for himself, who yields to everyone, who is dissatisfied with himself, and who neither casts aside nor hurts anyone, have a kingdom? Such a person seems closer to the servitude of an ass than to a kingdom. This kind of person is everywhere trampled upon, injured without recourse; he lives worthless and obscure, needy and destitute. Nonetheless, what Truth has said is true: theirs alone is the kingdom – but it is a heavenly kingdom.

Do you think that those who are cruel and violent rule? They live as slaves, they endure many tyrannies. They are tortured by greed, anger, envy, by the desire for revenge, by fear and hope. They are scarcely alive, so far are they from ruling. But whoever is free from all these cares – relying on his own innocence, on God, on the rewards of the future age – such a person scorns with a calm heart the things that are of this world, and pursues heavenly goods. Does he not obtain a kingdom far more beautiful and magnificent than the kingdom of tyrants?¹³ Lust does not rule him, neither does greed, or envy, or anger, nor do the other diseases of the soul. Armed with faith, whenever circumstances demand he commands diseases and they flee, he commands the waves and they grow calm, he commands demons and they depart. So powerful is the kingdom of the spirit, the spirit that distrusts itself and trusts God, that distrusts human supports and depends on heaven. These are the things – not a diadem, or unguent, or a bodyguard – that truly make a king, and at last summon one to share in the heavenly and eternal kingdom, where there will no longer be any rebellion. A worldly kingdom is got by violence and defended with cruelty; modesty begets the heavenly kingdom and humility defends and establishes it. The world judges as suitable for ruling a kingdom only those who, possessed of a noble spirit, assume a magnificent air.¹⁴

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13 Compare the portrait of tyrant as slave in Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 5.20.57–22.63, and the 'kingdom' of the person free from care with the portrait of the 'Wise Man' in Cicero *De finibus* 3.22.75–6.

14 Cf the portraits of the magnificent and the high-minded person in Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1122a–25a.

God principally raises up to his kingdom those who most of all cast themselves down.

Jesus continued and added to this a similar paradox: 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth as their inheritance.'¹⁵ Who are the meek? They are the people who do not use force against anyone, who after being harmed readily pardon the injury, who would rather lose something than fight for it, who regard harmony and tranquillity of mind more valuable than a large estate, who regard quiet poverty more desirable than quarrelsome riches. People of this sort are used to being thrown off their land, and so far are they from acquiring other people's property for themselves that they are driven even from ancestral holdings. This, however, is a new way of extending one's property: gentleness obtains more by giving freely than the seizure of others' goods acquires through lawful and unlawful means. The aggressive and cruel master does not possess even what he holds. The placid person, on the other hand, who would sooner give up his own things than fight for them, has an estate in as many places as he finds lovers of gospel gentleness. Everyone despises inflexibility; even pagans cherish gentleness. Then again, if the property of a meek person is lost, it is not a loss, but a huge gain: his field has been lost, but with his peace of mind intact. It is at a huge profit that one has sold his farm, if he has avoided upheaval and has preserved his peace of mind. Finally, should a meek person be cut off from everything, so much more certain will he be of possessing the heavenly land, from which he will not be able to be driven. The world laments as unfortunate those who, driven from their homelands, are forced into exile. But Christ pronounces those blessed who live in exile because of the gospel, for they have been enrolled as citizens in heaven. They have been driven away from the jurisdiction of one state, they have been thrown out of their houses, they have been cast out of their homelands, but the whole world is the homeland to the gospel man, and heaven is the surest home and most secure homeland to the godly.¹⁶

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15 In the paraphrase on 5:4-5 Erasmus follows the Vulgate in placing the beatitude of the 'meek' before that of the 'mourners.' From 1516 in his edition of the New Testament he adopted the order of his Greek text, which is now accepted as the correct order – 'mourners,' verse 4, 'meek' verse 5. See Metzger *Textual Commentary* 10, and Erasmus' annotation on Matt 5:4 (*beati qui lugent*).

16 The language suggests images from classical and biblical literature. For the world as 'homeland' see the portrait of the philosophic mind in Cicero *De legibus* 1.23.61, 'a citizen of the world'; for Christians as exiles, deprived of property, and whose true possessions are in heaven, see 1 Pet 1:1-5; Heb 10:34; on Christians as citizens in heaven cf Eph 2:19.

Commonly, bereavement is so pitiful a thing that some people, bereft of those they love, for example, of wife, parents, brothers, or children, sometimes take their own lives. And because of this, friends are summoned who soften the bitterness of grief with consolation.¹⁷ But blessed are those who mourn because of their love for the gospel, who are even torn from their loved ones, who see the people they hold most dear beaten and slaughtered on account of gospel righteousness, who, spurning the pleasures of this world, pass their lives in tears, vigils, and fastings. For to them will be present the heavenly Spirit,¹⁸ the secret comforter,¹⁹ who in the meantime will repay for a temporary grief an inestimable joy of mind to those who will soon be conveyed to eternal joys.²⁰ Human consolation frequently sharpens pain while it is busy trying to heal it. But the Spirit, the true comforter, so cheers inwardly the mind that has a clear conscience and is certain of the rewards of the future life, that people rejoice even in the most frightful bodily afflictions²¹ – so far are they from considering themselves unfortunate.

Everyone knows that hunger is a bitter thing, and that we should flee want with horse and ship.²² Everyone declares those people happy who have brilliantly increased and secured their personal wealth so that they enjoy it abundantly. Yet wealth heaped up however high does not satisfy the heart, nor should a person's happiness be measured by the fullness of his stomach. Whom, therefore, in this class does Christ pronounce blessed? He says: 'Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness.' Those things that feed and nourish the body, out of concern for which the common person

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17 In his *Paraphrases* Erasmus portrays the gathering of friends for consolation at the scenes of death, or apparent death, where the paraphrastic narrative reflects the tradition of consolation literature; cf eg the scenes at the bed of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:35-43 CWE 49 71-2), at the burial of Stephen (Acts 8:2 CWE 50 57) and at Dorcas' supposed death (Acts 9:36-43 CWE 50 68-9). The 'consolation' was a widely practised literary genre from antiquity, cf eg Seneca's *consolationes* to Marcia, to Polybius, and to Helvia. In his *De conscribendis epistolis* CWE 27 148-71 Erasmus offered examples of the 'letter of consolation.'

18 the heavenly Spirit] First in 1535; previously 'that heavenly Spirit'

19 Cf John 14:26-7.

20 Cf Augustine *De sermone in monte* 1.2.5 (on Matt 5:4) PL 34 1232: 'They, therefore, will be comforted by the Holy Spirit, who is called the Paraclete (that is, the Consoler) especially for this reason, that in losing the temporal they may enjoy eternal happiness.'

21 Cf Rom 5:3-5.

22 'With horse and ship': a proverbial expression; cf *Adagia* I iv 17.

is so pitifully tormented, should be sought with equanimity. Sometimes satiety torments the full more than their hunger was tormenting them, and after we have been satisfied the thirst and hunger soon return that must be relieved again and again. These things are everywhere present to the godly, who are content with a little and do not desire anything beyond what is necessary, or are not even anxious, for the one who both nourishes the little sparrows and clothes²³ the lilies is undoubtedly the one who supplies our needs.²⁴ But happy are they who transfer this hunger and thirst from bodily and perishable things to the quest for gospel righteousness, where what is hungered for, and what is thirsted for, is always present, and where fullness is blessed. Indeed, this very thing is part of happiness: to hunger for the bread of the soul, whoever eats whereof will live eternally; to thirst for the living water that will become in the one who drinks of it a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting.²⁵

The common person thinks that those who are helped by the kindness of another are happy, and they rejoice more with the one who has been helped than with the one who is helping. But I call blessed the merciful, who out of brotherly love consider another's misery their own, who are pained at the misfortunes of a neighbour, who shed tears for the calamities that strike other people, who feed the needy from their own wealth, clothe the naked, warn the erring, teach the ignorant, forgive the sinner – in short, who use whatever resources they have to lift up and restore others. For it is not an expense but a gain, since the person who is merciful and kind to his neighbour will indeed find God far more merciful towards him and God's kindness more bounteous. You have forgiven your neighbour for some small offence; God will forgive all your sins. You have put aside the revenge against your brother that is temporary; God will cancel for you a punishment that has no end. You have used your money to relieve your

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23 clothes] Added in 1534

24 Cf Matt 6:25-32 and Luke 12:22-31; for the little sparrows cf Matt 10:29 and Luke 12:6.

25 For these images of bread and water see John 6:58 and 4:14. Similarly Augustine *De sermone in monte* 1.2.6 (on Matt 5:6) PL 34 1232 cites John 4:14, though instead of John 6:58 Augustine cites John 4:34.

The paraphrase on Matt 5-7 reflects some ambiguity in the speaking *personae*. Up to this point the evangelist appears to have reported the words of Jesus, adding his own comment on them. From this point forward, however, the Sermon proceeds under the *persona* of Christ – though not without anachronisms, such as the references to 'Christians,' more appropriate to the *persona* of the evangelist.

brother's poverty; God will give you his own heavenly wealth. According to human reckoning the merciful grow poor exhausting their resources by their generosity, but before God they grow rich, since as their money boxes are emptied, the heart is heaped up with the fruits of piety.²⁶

The common person calls those bereft of their eyes unfortunate, and those who lack this most pleasing by far of the senses say that they are not alive, but that they are passing their time in darkness like the dead. So sweet a thing it seems to be to behold the light with one's eyes and to behold this most beautiful theatre of the world. But if seeing the sun with bodily eyes seems so desirable, how much happier a thing it is to behold God, the creator of the sun and of all things, with the eyes of the mind!²⁷ You have seen people jump for joy because it has fallen to them to be healed of their blindness and to behold the light.²⁸ They rejoice no less than if they had returned from the dead. By how much more are they blessed to whom it has been granted, when the mists of the mind have been removed, to behold inwardly God, the fount of all gladness, whom it is the height of happiness to see? What the sun is to unclouded eyes, God is to unclouded minds. What discharge or cataracts are to the eyes, sins are to minds.²⁹ Therefore blessed are they whose hearts are free from every stain and unimpaired, for to them it will be granted to see God, something more desirable than all the pleasures of this world.

Mortals generally judge those blessed who pass their lives in leisure, their affairs arranged just as they desire, with no one to trouble them. But in my judgment they are blessed who first have repressed in their own hearts the rebellion of all desires, and then are zealous to repair harmony among others also who are at odds with them,³⁰ not only not taking vengeance if any-

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26 For the theme expressed here of 'mercy begetting mercy' see *De immensa Dei misericordia* CWE 70 132–5. For the rules of pagan beneficence (ie beneficence according to human reckoning) see Cicero *De officiis* 2.15.52–4 and the rebuttal of Cicero's exposition in Lactantius *Divinae institutiones* 6.11.

27 'Eyes of the mind': derived from Eph 1:18, this is one of Erasmus' favoured metaphors; see eg CWE 46 121 and n2, CWE 49 103–4, 132–5, and CWE 50 64 n16, 85 and n29. With the contrast here between the two kinds of vision required to see the sun and its creator, compare Plato *Republic* 517A–C.

28 the light] In all editions except 1535, when the expression was mistakenly omitted.

29 Augustine *De sermone in monte* 1.2.8 (on Matt 5:8) PL 34 1232 draws a similar contrast between the effects of health and disease on physical and spiritual vision.

30 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 5:9) PL 26 34D: 'These are those who first make peace in their own hearts, then among quarrelling brothers. For how

one has injured them, but even of their own accord inviting to peace those by whom they have been injured. Should someone think this difficult, let him hear the reward: 'for these will be called the children of God.'³¹ What is more honourable than this epithet? Rather, what is more blessed? For this, indeed, is no empty title. He who is son must also be heir as well.³² Whereas a dissimilarity of behaviour gives evidence of a bastard, imitation of the father gives evidence of a true and legitimate son.³³ God freely pardons all sins, and invites all mortals by whom he had been offended to peace and friendship. Of his own accord he is gracious to all who come to their senses and repent. He recognizes as his sons only those who extend the grace of forgiveness to their brothers in the same way he has offered his grace to everyone. Fathers according to the flesh disinherit sons who do not agree with their brothers; thus will the heavenly Father disown the haters of peace and the authors of discord.

But since everywhere many people are base and shameless, there cannot be peace among all people without tolerating persons who are evil. It is a characteristic of the godly that they strive in every possible way not to have discord with anyone, whether good or bad. As far as possible everyone must be invited to love and harmony by friendliness, gentleness, and kindness.³⁴ The perversity of some people, however, is so great that they are even irritated by kindnesses, and they lash out at people who do them favours, attack people who benefit them, and consider as enemies people who want to save them. If peace cannot exist here between these, nevertheless those who desire peace will in the meantime be blessed, even though the ungodly persecute them solely because of gospel justice, which injures no one and helps all – for the very thing that gave the ungodly reason to love arouses their hate, and the very thing on account of which they ought to give thanks is the reason they respond with injuries.

Someone will say: 'Who would be able to love people who repay kindnesses with hatred and evil?' It is a difficult thing, I confess, but the reward for doing so is great. But what reward? Not an oak or laurel crown, not an ox or goat or³⁵ anything of the sort the world gives the victor in

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does it help to make peace among others when the vices in your own soul are at war.'

³¹ Erasmus quotes his own translation of 5:9b.

³² Cf Gal 4:7.

³³ That true sons imitate their fathers is a recurrent theme in the *Paraphrases*; see the references in CWE 50 49 n6; also the reference in CWE 48 139 n24.

³⁴ Cf Rom 12:18, 14:19.

³⁵ or ... contests] Added in 1534

human contests, but the kingdom of heaven. You must prepare for this wrestling match, my disciples, if the prizes of gospel happiness attract you. There is no reason why human cruelty should frighten you. No one will be able to harm you if you tenaciously hold on to justice. Persecution at the hands of evil people will not take away your innocence; instead, it will increase your blessedness.

Even in the midst of a storm of evils you will be blessed. When they curse you with dreadful oaths, when they attack you with every kind of evil, when they hurl against you every kind of disgraceful and criminal charge – and have lied to do it – not because of any fault of yours, but from hatred for me³⁶ (for it will be the height of crimes to be a Christian),³⁷ do not lament for yourselves as afflicted, rejected, defamed. Rather, rejoice and exult on account of these very things, because the more they vent their rage in persecuting you, the more the reward grows and accumulates that is stored for you in heaven by the Father.³⁸ God will turn their wickedness into your good;³⁹ the losses inflicted by them he will turn into gain; the dishonour inflicted by them he will turn into true and everlasting glory; the false assertions of wicked deeds he will turn into tokens and testaments of true piety; he will turn their curses into words of praise and congratulation, not only before him, whom it is quite enough to have pleased even if you should displease the whole world, but even in the meantime among your fellow human beings. For to be blamed by the ungodly because of piety is to be praised; to be crucified by those who hate God is to be crowned. You must not strive for glory among men, but glory of its own accord accompanies true virtue.

Do you want an easy and obvious example? What is holier or more venerable today than the memory of the prophets? And yet when they were alive people pursued them with every kind of evil; in the same way they will persecute you, too. They persecuted them through hatred of my Father; they will persecute you through hatred of me. These are brave and valiant acts, I confess, and beyond the reach of human mediocrity. Now it must be a remarkable thing that moves by its own force and draws the entire world, weighed down by weak fancies and vain desires. For who of them does not

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36 Cf Matt 10:22; Luke 21:17; 1 Pet 4:14–16.

37 For Christianity as a crime see Pliny *Epistles* 10.96 and 97, and Tertullian *Apolo-*
logy 2 and 4.1–5.

38 Cf Matt 6:20; 1 Pet 1:4.

39 Cf Rom 8:28 and its interpretation in the annotation on the verse ('work to-
gether unto good') CWE 56 223.

shrink from physical tortures? Who does not grow pale at impending death? Who, incited by terrible insults, does not become inflamed with the desire for revenge? Who would with impunity bear to have a good reputation undeservedly besmirched? But I demand even more of you: that you think yourselves blessed on account of these evils, that you treat with mercy⁴⁰ your blind persecutors rather⁴¹ than be angry at them, that you bless those who curse you,⁴² that you offer eternal salvation to those who work for your ruin. You will not exhibit this sublime and heroic virtue unless you arrive here by the stages I have set out before you.⁴³ If you utterly reject anger, if you expel the desire for revenge, if forsaking all the pleasures of this world you embrace a strict manner of life, if having utterly extinguished the desire for human possessions you thirst greatly for nothing besides justice and godliness, if you are so disposed that you desire to relieve the misfortunes of all, and you desire to serve the advantage of all, if you have a mind that is sound and free from all vices and depraved desires, neither looking to nor delighting in any thing other than God, if with peaceful hearts you everywhere desire to foster and repair harmony, then at last you will exhibit these qualities that other mortals are not yet able to attain even in their dreams.

Even so, those who will be open to healing, possessing hearts not utterly incurable, in astonishment at your tolerance as well as your goodness, will understand that these qualities are not feigned. They will perceive that these are not a matter of human strength and, moved by your example, they will reform. For I have chosen the few of you so that I can lead not one or two states but the entire world to the knowledge of gospel wisdom. It must be a lively and effective thing that can make savoury the lives of the entire human race, diluted and weakened by foolish opinions and

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40 treat with mercy] First in 1534, previously 'pity.' See next note.

41 rather] First in 1534; previously 'more'

42 Cf Rom 12:14 (bless those who persecute you), and the annotation on the verse CWE 56 337-8.

43 Exegetes commonly spoke of the beatitudes as steps or stages, eg Augustine *De sermone in monte* 1.3.10 PL 34 1233-4 had seen the beatitudes as a series of steps leading to perfection, to the 'contemplation of truth,' 'effecting a likeness to God.' Similarly the *Gloss* spoke of the 'seven steps' of the beatitudes leading to the summit, that which is perfect, to achieve the 'likeness of God.' Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 15.16 (on Matt 5:12) PG 57 230 in summarizing presents the beatitudes as a 'woven cord of gold' in which each beatitude is bound to the next until the cord is completed, and one is prepared to go forth to the struggle.

by the desire for transitory things.⁴⁴ I have chosen you, not to be merely average and passable, but to be the salt of the earth. One does not need a lot of salt, but salt that is effectual, so that it affects whatever it touches and restores flavour to what is flavourless. The earth is vast and still it gets its saltiness from a little salt that has been mixed through it. And you see a large quantity of food that is otherwise insipid and dull to the taste⁴⁵ made savoury when a little salt is added. Of course, in the great crowd of humanity one necessarily finds people who are average and scarcely even passable. In apostles, however, in bishops, in teachers, the lively and perfect vigour of gospel love should persist. Otherwise, if in your case, too,⁴⁶ your character has been made insipid by a love of praise, a desire for money, the pursuit of pleasures, lust for revenge, or fear of infamy, losses, or death, what will be left in the end to season the tasteless life of the multitude? Thus you will end up not only useless for seasoning others, but you yourselves will incur the greatest contempt from people, because you do not practise what you teach. For what is more contemptible than tasteless salt – salt that cannot be used even for fertilizing a field, since it makes the land barren if it is mixed through it? Thus men will wonder at you, even those who were barking at you out of envy and hate, if they sense that your teaching smacks of gospel vigour,⁴⁷ if they see that your whole life corresponds to your teaching. Having taken up this profession, you must either be of great use to everyone or of great harm to everyone; you must either gain great glory among men or extraordinary disgrace. But the disgrace that brings a bad repute upon the gospel is more to be avoided than death. Therefore you ought to be in every respect sincere and absolutely spotless so that the uncleanness of the multitude might be made to vanish by your purity.

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44 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 15.6 (on Matt 5:13) PG 57 231: 'The saying will apply not only to you, he says, but to the whole world. For I send you not ... to one people ... but to the whole world ... He showed that all human nature, corrupted by sins, had lost its savour.' Similarly Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 5:13) PL 26 35B: 'They are called apostles because through them the whole world was seasoned.'

45 dull to the taste] First in 1524; in 1522 'weak'

46 too] Added in 1534

47 'Gospel vigour': *vigorem evangelicam*; cf just above, 'vigour of gospel love.' Erasmus believed that *vigor* was a fundamental characteristic of early Christianity; cf Ep 1738:25–8, where in the preface to his edition of Irenaeus (1526) he notes that the bishop of Lyons more than one hundred years after the birth of the church still breathed 'the ancient power [*vigor*] of the gospel.' The use of the term in the paraphrase here with the analogy of salt suggests the connotation not only of 'power' but of liveliness and 'sparkle.'

Let your life and your teaching be such that they serve as a guide and a measuring stick of right living to all who observe you. Our world has a single sun, but it has such effective and abundant light that it shines from afar on all who dwell upon the earth. I have set you in an exalted position so that what you say and what you do will necessarily be spread through the entire world. If clouds obscure the sun, where will mortals get their light? If your teaching grows murky with errors, if your life is darkened by worldly desires, what will dispel the darkness of the multitude? You must take care, therefore, that there is no darkness in you, no folly. You will not be able to hide no matter how hard you try. Imagine that you are acting out a play in the theatre of the entire world, so that anxiety might motivate you to be cautious and alert.⁴⁸ In you a tiny failing will be like a terrible crime. You are like a city on a high mountain, visible to travellers far and wide. It cannot be concealed even if it should want to. Like it or not, the mountain with its high top that supports the city renders it conspicuous to all, so that it shows the way to travellers.

This is the nature of the gospel teaching: it does not allow its teachers to hide however much they themselves seek a retreat, fleeing public fame.⁴⁹ Moreover, why would that be hidden which was designed to benefit all people equally? Salt is used to add flavour, the sun has been given to shine on the world, a city is built on the peak of the mountain so it will be conspicuous to all, people light a lamp in their houses at night to provide light for all who live in the house, and they do not store a lighted candle under a bushel, but they place it on a candlestick, so that its light might more readily reach everyone and the benefit of a single light emanate to as many as possible. You, indeed, must not strive to acquire fame and reputation among men; only take care not to darken the light that I have lit in you, and to persevere on the candlestick where I have set you. It is impossible for salt not to season. It is impossible for light not to illumine. Therefore let your light – rather my light and my Father’s light – shine for all mortals,

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48 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 15.7 (on Matt 5:14–15) PG 57 232: ‘Again, “the world” – not one people or twenty states, but the whole world . . . He leads them on to a disciplined manner of life, teaching them to be contestants who live under the gaze of all, and perform in the midst of the theatre of the world.’

49 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 5:14–16) PL 26 35D: ‘He counsels confidence in preaching so that the apostles do not hide out of fear . . . but go forth in public with complete freedom.’ Similarly Augustine *De sermone in monte* 1.6.17 (on Matt 5:15) PL 34 1239–40 understands the light shining for all as the truth fearlessly preached.

so that as they contemplate your lives, in every respect pure and blameless and therefore clearly heavenly, they may glorify your heavenly Father to whom is owed all honour and glory. You will claim for yourselves none of all your good works or your miracles, however amazing, but you will transfer all glory and praise to the one who is the source of every deed that wins human praise. In the meantime, your only care will be to perform diligently and in good faith the service committed to you. In his own time God, whose glory you serve, will pay you an exceedingly great reward.

When you hear these new precepts – precepts that Moses did not hand down and the prophets did not teach – do not imagine that I am bringing forward something similar to what the Pharisees are accustomed to teach, for they so weigh down the Law with their own additions and human regulations that they reject and abolish what is of primary importance in it.⁵⁰ In no way have I come either to weaken the Law or to annul it through new precepts. Rather, I have come to complete and perfect the Law.⁵¹ There is not a single thing the Law prescribes that they can complain I have so far failed to observe. But if shadows yield when the light breaks forth, if I already make manifest by these very deeds what the prophets had predicted would occur, nothing is taken away from the Law, rather its perfecting comes to pass. The Law had its time, it had its honour, by means of types it foreshadowed what now is displayed to the world. It kept human desires in check through carnal ceremonies and precepts as if by a sort of barrier, so that people would not sink⁵² into every vice with impunity, and so they would be more ready to receive the gospel teaching now that what has been perfected is disclosed. Although⁵³ carnal and crude, it profited people this much: that they recognized their own sin.⁵⁴ Now without ceremonies the grace that washes sins away is given. The Law therefore suffers harm no more than if a living king himself follows his own painted image and deflects all eyes to himself, or if a feeble boy in the course of time grows

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50 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 16.1 (on Matt 5:21) PG 57 239 speaks similarly of the Jewish leaders making additions to the Law ‘that tended not to the better, but the worse.’

51 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 16.1 (on Matt 5:21) PG 57 239: ‘What he was going to introduce was an addition, but one that would increase not lessen virtue.’ Erasmus stresses the nature of the ‘addition’ in the paraphrase on 5:20, and on the verses immediately subsequent to it.

52 sink] First in 1524; in 1522 ‘fall’

53 Although] Added in 1534

54 For the Law as a restraint and a pedagogue see Gal 3:23–5 and the paraphrase on those verses (CWE 42 113–14).

into a mature man,⁵⁵ or if ripe fruit follows the leafing boughs and the foliage,⁵⁶ or if the rising sun obscures the moon and stars.

What the Law promised is now being made manifest, what it predicted is being done, what it foreshadowed is set out before the eyes of all, what it tried to accomplish but could not is now revealed in its fullness. The light is promised to all, but in such a way, nevertheless, that the Jews have no grounds for complaining about me. The grace⁵⁷ of the gospel was offered to them first; they will not possess it any less if they share what they have with many. Be assured, I do not invalidate⁵⁸ the Law in which the Pharisees' glory. So far am I from invalidating the Law that not even an iota, the least of the letters of the alphabet – why, not even a dot⁵⁹ – will be lost from the entire Law: such is the extent to which everything written in the Law must be fulfilled. But it would be foolish to await a future that is already present, it would be insane so to delight⁶⁰ in the shadows that you scorn the real things, so to cling to the imperfect that you spurn the perfect, so to embrace carnal things that you shrink from spiritual things, to become so attached to earthly things that you reject celestial things.

Among the Jews a person is regarded as contemptible and unobservant of the Law who disregards any of the things the Pharisees have added on their own, prescribing the washing of hands, pitchers, and vessels. Nevertheless these additions are so far from contributing anything to the perfection of the Law that they frequently keep people from its observance.⁶¹ But in the kingdom of heaven, which is more perfect by far, the person who breaks even one of the least of the precepts that I now add to the prescriptions of the Mosaic law⁶² will be regarded as least worthy and most con-

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55 Cf Gal 4:1-7.

56 For the image see the paraphrase on Rom 3:31 CWE 42 26.

57 The grace . . . with many] Added in 1534

58 'I do not invalidate': *non facimus irritam*. Erasmus follows his translation of Rom 3:31, where the Greek verb is *καταργέω* 'make of no effect,' 'abolish,' not, as in Matt 5:17, paraphrased here, *καταλύω* 'destroy,' 'abrogate,' which Erasmus translated *destruo* 'destroy,' 'tear down.'

59 Erasmus explains in an annotation on 5:18 (*iota unum aut apex*) that 'iota' stands for the Hebrew *jod*, 'the smallest letter, added so often it could seem to be superfluous.'

60 delight] First in 1534; previously 'take pleasure in'

61 Cf Mark 7:1-13.

62 Augustine *De sermone in monte* 1.8.20 (on Matt 5:18) PL 34 1239 also speaks of 'the [precepts] added to the Law to perfect it.' So also the *Gloss* (on 1:17) speaks of the 'fulfilment of the Law' as the commandments Christ added to the old Law so that one could achieve moral perfection. But the *Gloss* (on 1:17)

temptible, even though he teaches others to observe what he himself through his weakness does not fulfil. Indeed, so unworthy and contemptible will he be esteemed that, unless he improves, he must be utterly excluded from the gospel fellowship. On the other hand, whoever teaches that even the smallest points must not be neglected if they keep one from breaking the Law, and practises what he teaches⁶³ – such a person is to be admired indeed, and will be regarded as great in the kingdom of heaven. Yet in the synagogue those are regarded as distinguished who neglect things of this sort, judging it to be enough that they do not commit any of the offences for which the Law commands punishment, when meanwhile in the midst of the depraved desires of their minds they forgive themselves.⁶⁴ This is obviously the justice of those whom fear of punishment deters from wrongdoing. But the people whom love, whom the heavenly Spirit, impels to more perfect things, of their own accord keep themselves far away from every connection with wrongdoing. So far are they from injuring a person that they do not even bear ill will toward anyone.

To enable you to understand how great a difference there is between Jew and Christian, between a disciple of Moses and one of mine, I say to you unequivocally: if you fulfil whatever the Law prescribes, whatever the Pharisees fulfil (men who are now thought to possess a sort of absolute justice and think so themselves), but you add nothing further of a more perfect kind, so insignificant will you be in this religious profession that in the kingdom of heaven not even the right of admission is to be given.⁶⁵ This profession is so superior that those who hold first place among the Pharisees will not even have last place here. Come now! So that it may become clearer how much I am adding to the justice of the Pharisees, and how my justice

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also noted that Christ fulfilled the Law in perfecting in himself what the Law had prefigured; cf the paraphrase just above, where the old Law is presented as ‘types [foreshadowing] what now is displayed to the world.’

63 That the teacher should practise what he preaches, a view that receives emphasis throughout this chapter, is, for Erasmus, a fundamental principle of Christian education; cf CWE 50 5 n8. On ‘exclusion from the gospel fellowship’ cf Augustine *De sermone in monte* 1.9.21 (on 5:20) PL 34 1239–40, who surmises that since only the great enter the kingdom of heaven, perhaps those who neglect the ‘least of the precepts’ will not even ‘be in the kingdom of heaven.’

64 Cf Matt 15:16–20. See the paraphrase on Rom 2:12–29 CWE 42 20–2, where the contrast affirmed here is drawn out at greater length.

65 For the principle that love achieves more than law see the paraphrase on Rom 13:8–10 CWE 42 76.

does not contradict the precepts of the Law but rather supports them, let us consider the matter with a few examples.

You have heard how our ancestors were once commanded: 'You shall not kill,' [Exod 20:13] but if someone kills, after being judged and convicted, he will be punished.⁶⁶ Therefore one seems to have satisfied the Law as long as one has not killed anyone and one has escaped the threats of the Law. One is apparently both just and innocent and one will be received into the synagogue. Now hear how much I shall add. For I tell you: whoever is even⁶⁷ angry⁶⁸ at his brother will be liable to judgment. The sublimity⁶⁹ of our profession extends guilt so that in the New Law the unrestrained impulse of the heart for revenge is equivalent to murder in the Old. For being angry is the first step to murder. The angry man, indeed, has not yet completed the murder; nevertheless he has begun already to move in that direction.⁷⁰

And so, he who has wished his brother ill has at that moment committed a serious offence before God his judge. Suppose that he does not soon regain control over his raging mind, but that unrestrained anger breaks forth into words that do not indeed strike a brother with some specific reproach, but sadden him nevertheless by an obvious indication of scorn – as if he should say 'racha,' or something similar that shows malevolent intent. In this case, inasmuch as he is closer to murder, he will not only be liable to judgment, leading to a punishment that is fairly light (though equal to a Jewish⁷¹ homicide), but he will also be liable to the council where sentencing must be even more severe. Moreover, if the surging impulse of the heart has broken forth to such an extent that he strikes his brother with an insult that is now direct and pointed, and calls him 'fool' or some such thing,

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66 Exod 20-1 does not provide for a process of justice in case of homicide, but cf Deut 16:18-20 and 17:8-13.

67 even] Added in 1534

68 Erasmus follows the Vulgate (and the preferred reading, cf NRSV) in the unqualified 'angry,' rather than his own text and translation, 'angry without a cause.' In his annotation on 5:22 (*qui irascitur fratri suo*) he explains that while he found the more expansive expression in some Greek manuscripts, he thought it was added by some rather bold person who wanted to mitigate the otherwise severe saying – precisely the reasoning of modern criticism; see Metzger *Textual Commentary* 11.

69 The sublimity] First in 1534; previously 'For the sublimity'

70 Cf the annotation on 5:22 (*qui irascitur fratri suo*): 'common anger . . . is a movement of the mind toward avenging pain – the first step to homicide.'

71 Jewish] Added in 1534

he will now be liable to the most severe penalty, that is, the punishment of hell. In so many ways is a person implicated who has not yet progressed as far as murder. In fact, whoever falls away from brotherly love is bordering on murder.⁷² Whoever has wished ill out of anger has not yet drawn his sword, but has struck by intent. Whoever has spoken an insult in anger has struck with the tongue, and would perhaps even kill if he were not afraid of punishment. Thus the gospel law, which punishes someone simply for being angry, does not contradict the precept of the Law, 'You shall not kill,' but removes and keeps one farther away from the act the Law commands to be punished. A person is better protected against committing murder if he has completely removed from his heart anger and hatred, the roots indeed from which murders sprout.⁷³ Whoever, therefore, has obtained for himself gospel love, that wishes well upon even those who are wishing ill, that repays injury with kindness,⁷⁴ this person has no need at all of the threats

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72 In a 1519 addition to his annotation on 5:22 (*qui dixerit fratri suo racha*) Erasmus thought it 'reasonable' to suppose that Christ distinguished three stages of emotional response in a hostile situation: 'the first step is to become angry, the second to indicate an emotion by some inarticulate sound, the third to break out into open reproach.' The problematic 'racha' represented the second step. A 1527 addition reiterates: 'The Lord set out examples, first, light anger which has not yet determined to seek revenge, then a more serious anger represented by "racha," while the fiercest anger, represented by the word "fool" is very close to homicide.' Erasmus followed a long tradition of exegesis on this passage. Augustine in the *De sermone in monte* 1.9.23–4 (on Matt 5:22) PL 34 1240–1, to which Erasmus refers in the 1519 addition to his annotation, had identified the three stages of culpability as Erasmus does here, and Nicholas of Lyra (on 5:22) had explained the gradation similarly: '... first anger in the heart, then an indistinct expression of contempt [ie Racha], finally, a distinct reproach ... as when one says "fool."' In his debate with Bédac in the *Supputatio* LB IX 578F–9A Erasmus repeated the interpretation of the verse as in the paraphrase here. His interpretation of 'racha' was disputed in an abusive work that circulated privately under the title *Racha*, to the great distress of Erasmus. See Ep 1719:39–56 and n14. See also Erika Rummel *Erasmus and his Catholic Critics* (Nieuwkoop 1989) 2 110–13. Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 61 agree that the 'epithet is in any case derogatory,' but suggest that it may mean 'rebel' rather than 'fool.'

73 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 16.5 (on Matt 5:22) PG 57 245–6 shows by a similar argument that the New Law of Christ does not contradict but complements the law of Moses: 'Are the commands "do not be angry" and "do not kill" opposites, or is the latter rather the end result of the former? Clearly murder is the result of anger ... For the person who is not incited to anger will stay much farther away from murder, and the one who checks his anger will be much more likely to restrain his hand. For anger is the root of murder.'

74 Cf Rom 12:14–17.

of the Mosaic law to avoid murder. The ultimate limit of hate is murder, the ultimate limit of love is wishing well even to one who murders.

Among the Jews, indeed, he seems godly and religious who, while plotting mischief against his brother, brings some gift to the altar – even though no sacrifice is acceptable to God without brotherly concord; hence for you the first care ought to be for peace and mutual harmony. But if, due to the weakness of human nature, some offence has arisen between brothers, stop what you are doing and give your attention to restoring harmony. Thus, if by chance you are preparing to offer some gift to God near the altar and at that point it occurs to you that there is some discord between you and your brother, whether because he offended you, or because some mutual offence has soured the friendship, do not delay, do not put it off, but leaving the gift at the altar itself, hurry home and see to it that first of all the sweetness of friendship between you and your brother is restored. With this done, you will return to the altar to complete your sacrifice. Thus no gift is more acceptable to God than agreement among people. God does not suffer any loss from a gift delayed; much danger threatens on both sides from harmony that has broken down, since injuries harboured beget hate, and⁷⁵ from hatred murder is born. But⁷⁶ no service is acceptable to God that love does not commend.

Now if you say to me: 'I have done nothing wrong; let the other person who was the source of the offence first seek reconciliation,' I will not listen. He who is commanded to love even his enemy will not be aggrieved to restore friendship, even a friendship broken by the fault of another. Of your own accord pardon the injury and lighten the sorrow of your brother who thought you were angry with him. You will not experience God's kindness if your neighbour does not perceive your kindness toward him. Your gift will have no grace in the eyes of God if the grace of good-will does not exist between you and your brother. If harmony among people is so important to God that he allows himself to be cheated for a while of a gift ready to be offered so that harmony might be restored,⁷⁷ how much more just is it for a human being (whose concern it is) to regain peace and friendship at some personal cost.

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75 and] In LB, but in none of the lifetime editions; here, added in English by the translator.

76 But] First in 1534; previously 'and'

77 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 16.9 (on Matt 5:23-4) PG 57 250: 'What could be more gentle than these words, "Let my worship," he says, "be interrupted in order that love might remain among you."' "

Perhaps someone will be found who is so unjust that he will happily drag you into court without cause, intending also to make trouble unless you pay him off. And now with minds inflamed on both sides, an action is brought, they hurry to the judges. You ask, 'What should I do in these circumstances? Should I pursue my right through the laws?' If you will take my advice, on the way there you will hurry to settle the matter with your adversary, whether on fair or unfair terms. By concluding the matter with him on terms however unfair, you will still have made a profit. Some money will be lost, but the most precious things by far have been saved: peace and friendship. Peace of mind has been saved which, suppose it has been bought with all your wealth, has been bought cheaply. One has to consult advocates and notaries, run constantly hither and yon, solicit the favour of judges, and both do and endure many things that are unworthy of you. And since nothing is more precious than time, think how much time has had to be wasted. Therefore see what a considerable gain you have made if you conclude the dispute swiftly, whereas you will meanwhile be unsure of the outcome if you put the matter to a judge. That person does not always come off better whose case is better; indeed, there is a danger that your adversary will win and hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the public official, who will lead you to prison. Once you have been thrown in jail, the opportunity to settle the matter with your adversary will then be lost, and not only will you have gained physical suffering and disgrace, but also you will not have your freedom until you have paid to the very last penny the full sum your adversary was seeking – although you could have settled the dispute with him for less, while he was still more mellow and less angry. Thus in restoring friendships, do not peevishly calculate which of the two is more at fault. Only take care that concord be unbroken, even giving up some of your rights.

Thus far I have given an example concerning love and hate, in the first of which is the root of all gospel piety, in the second, the root of all ruin. But murder has for its next-door neighbour adultery, and no love is more binding than that found in marriage. Therefore on this subject, too, let us consider what the Law enjoined upon your ancestors and how much I am adding. In the book of the Law⁷⁸ they were told only: 'You shall not commit adultery; if you do, you will be stoned by the people.'⁷⁹ And so,

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78 'Book of the Law': *tabulis*. Erasmus uses the Vulgate word for the 'tablets' on which the Ten Commandments were written; cf Exod 32:15-26 and 34:1.

79 Cf Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18; at Lev 20:10 and Deut 22:20-4 the punishment is death; also John 8:5.

thus far among the Jews whoever has stayed away from another man's wife, content with his own, has been regarded as holy and blameless. But according to the gospel law that I am delivering, it is not only the man who violates another man's wife by a base act, and entwines body with body, that commits adultery, but so also does the man who looks upon another man's wife with unchaste eyes. For just as a person who is angry with his brother is close to murder, so a person whose mind is already impure, whose eyes are adulterous, tends to adultery. The husband has no reason to summon you to pay the penalty for adultery, but God, in whose eyes a person has committed a shameful act once he has willed it, has reason to condemn you for adultery. Therefore what anger is to murder, lust is to adultery; and what saying racha or fool is in the case of murder, this in the case of adultery is the same as feasting the eyes and by their enticements seducing another man's wife to an immoral act.

Here a man of the flesh will say, 'Who can restrain himself from lusting at least in his heart for what he loves?'⁸⁰ Rather, who will love the wife of another man – at his own peril and with injury to her husband – if he is so disposed that he not only does not want to harm any innocent person, but even strives to pay back kindness for evil to those who have injured him? 'I cannot keep my eyes closed,' he will say. Rather, it is better to pluck out your eye than through it to suffer the loss of godliness. No part of the body should be so dear to a man that he would not rather cut it off than forfeit any of the true goods of the soul because of it. One must so hasten to the summit of gospel perfection that whatever has kept you from attaining it must be thrown away immediately, however sweet and lovable it may be. It is a gain to acquire the pearl of gospel love⁸¹ through the loss of anything, no matter what. Accordingly, if by chance your right eye becomes an impediment to you as you hasten to this goal, do not consider how dear your eye is, but consider how much more precious is the thing it keeps you from, and without delay pluck out the eye that obstructs you, throw it away, and hurry on to where you were aiming when you began. When the whole man is threatened with death, it is preferable to regain the health of the rest of the body by the loss of one limb. Hereafter you will live one-eyed. But what of it? Is it not more desirable to live out your life with one eye, than to perish with neither eye torn out? No limb of the

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80 On 'man of the flesh' cf 1 Cor 3:1-3. A more generalized *persona* raises the same question at this point in Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 17.1 (on Matt 5:27-8) PG 57 256: "'But how is it possible," one asks, "to be free from lust?"'

81 Cf Matt 13:45-6.

body is dearer or more necessary for many uses than the right hand. Who denies this? And yet if it should keep one from hastening to these heights, on which hangs the salvation of the entire person, cut off the right hand that obstructs you, cast away the burden, and hasten unhindered to the goal for which you set out. In this decisive moment it is more advantageous to have lost one part of the body, no matter how dear, than to rush with your entire body into the destruction of hell. If people approve of this when the body alone is at risk, how much more must this be done whenever the moment of crisis involves both soul and body.

I have said these things to instruct by analogy. I do not mean that we are to conclude from this that a person should himself cut off parts of his own body, since the nature of the limbs is not evil, but their misuse must be condemned. I am speaking about the limbs of the heart, for the heart also has its own harmful limbs, and it is a godly act to cut them off as quickly as possible.⁸² When a limb of the body is cut off, there is, beyond the torment, the further injury that the part cut off can never be restored. But when the harmful limbs of the heart (for example, hate, anger, lust, ambition, and greed) are cut off, not only is the heart not permanently damaged, it is even more perfect with these unnatural and harmful parts cut off. Besides, the brief pain of amputation is followed by a pleasure that does not end.

I will speak more clearly so that you may better understand what I intend. The limbs of the mind are the emotions.⁸³ Now there are certain emotions that by their very nature lead to impiety. These are, for example, anger, hate, envy, covetousness. If any one of these begins to sprout in the heart, it must be cut off immediately, for an evil is cut off both more easily and more safely at its nascent stage. Then again, there are emotions that are not exactly evil in themselves, but nevertheless sometimes given the

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82 This idea is also found, without, however, the graphic phrase 'limbs of the heart,' in Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 17.3 (on Matt 5:29) PG 57 258: 'He has enjoined this, not speaking of our limbs – far from it; for he nowhere said that blame belongs to the flesh, but everywhere accusation is laid against a perverse will.' For the need to interpret such radical injunctions as tropes, see chapter 18 nn10 and 11. Compare the somewhat similar representation of sacrifices as emotions to be slain, ie pride and lust to be rooted out of the heart, in the paraphrase on Rom 12:1-2 CWE 42 69 and n4.

83 'Emotions': *affectus*. This word is translated variously, often 'affection,' 'feeling,' and 'disposition.' For a discussion of the word see *Responsio ad collationes* LB IX 997D-8B, and the annotation on Rom 8:7 (because the wisdom of the flesh) CWE 56 204 n4. For the Greek *πάθη*, for which the plural *affectus* was thought to be broadly equivalent see *De taedio Iesu* CWE 70 58-9.

right opportunity lead one away from what is best. These are, for example, love of one's native land, devotion to one's wife, children, and parents, or to other family and friends, or concern for one's reputation. If these limbs serve well a person who is hastening to gospel perfection, there is no reason to amputate. For my teaching is not in conflict with natural feelings, but it restores nature to its own purity. If, however, by some unfortunate circumstance your affection for a parent or wife or children obstructs you from pursuing gospel piety, and drags you back to the world, cut away that harmful piety.⁸⁴ Just as a man who cuts away harmful thoughts does not cut out his very heart, the place where thoughts are born, but the depraved desires, so a man who begins now to look at another man's wife with the same chaste affection with which he looks at his sister or daughter has succeeded in tearing out the offending eye, so that it is replaced by the eye of a dove.⁸⁵ And a man who, with the hand by which he used to rob people, now works to relieve the need of others has indeed succeeded in cutting off his thieving right hand, so that it is replaced by a generous hand.

Come now, and let us consider another example. The Mosaic law allows a husband offended by some fault in his wife to dismiss her at his own discretion. He has only to give a certificate of divorce to the wife he has repudiated, thereby enabling her to marry another man and depriving himself, as her former husband, of any right to claim back the woman he has cast off.⁸⁶ Accordingly, the husband who has divorced his wife for any reason at all has satisfied the Law, provided he has given her a certificate when she leaves. He will not be judged an adulterer, nor will anyone point to her as an adulteress. Although⁸⁷ the Law desired that the friendship and concord between spouses would last forever, yet aware of the hardness of the Jews' hearts, it allowed divorce,⁸⁸ so that nothing more heinous might be committed – poisoning, for instance,⁸⁹ or murder.⁹⁰ But among those who

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84 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 17.3 (on Matt 5:29) PG 57 258 interprets the offending eye as 'our attachment to a loved one.' Likewise Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 5:29-30) PL 26 39A-B, who notes that the parts of the body mentioned in these verses stand for the *affectus* 'emotions'; cf n83 directly above, and chapter 18 n10 below.

85 Cf Song of Sol 1:15 and 4:1 for the 'eyes of a dove'; for the innocence of a dove Matt 10:16.

86 Cf Deut 24:1-4.

87 Although] First in 1534; previously 'yet,' which construed harshly with the 'yet' in the next clause

88 Cf Matt 19:8.

89 for instance] Added in 1534

90 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 17.4 (on Matt 5:31) PG 57 259 also records the reasons

profess the New Law, I want marriage to be something holier and more inviolate. For whoever divorces his wife – unless she is an adulteress (for she has stopped being his wife if she has had sexual relations with another man)⁹¹ – forces her into adultery, since if she marries another man she will marry not a husband, but an adulterer; and he who marries a woman who has been thus repudiated does not marry a wife, but an adulteress. The Mosaic law does not punish any of these, but the gospel law condemns them. Even so the New Law does not contradict the Old, for the Mosaic law allowed husbands the right of divorce so they would not vent their rage in more heinous ways against the wives they hated. Nevertheless it restricted this license with the certificate of divorce so they could not divorce secretly, nor would they rashly demand back the wives they had divorced whenever they pleased.

Now the Law did not dare to demand more in marriage, because it did not dare to enjoin the things I have taught above. For a man endowed with gospel gentleness will easily either correct his wife's behaviour or put up with it. But when will one who has peace even with his enemies seek separation from his wife? When will one plot death for his wife if he neither grows angry when he has been injured, nor wishes anyone ill when he has been offended? Or how will one who tolerates being struck down even by his enemy not endure a wife joined with him in domestic companionship? But if the Law is designed to make marriage sacred and does not grant divorces indiscriminately, then I have not abolished the Law but I have assisted it inasmuch as I want no divorce, except in the case of unfaithfulness, which contradicts the very nature of marriage,⁹² since

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for the Old Testament 'bill of divorce': in particular it protected the woman from any claim her husband might make upon her. Chrysostom then adds that the commandment was also given 'to avoid another far worse villainy. For if he had commanded that the detested woman be kept, the husband who hated her would have killed her – such was the race of the Jews.' Cf Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 5:31 PG 123 197B–C: 'Moses decreed that, if someone hated his wife, he should be divorced from her, lest something worse occur.' Likewise Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 5:31–3) PL 26 39c. Theophylact in the passage cited explains in addition that the bill of divorce prevented remarriage to the same man.

91 Béda was offended by this evidently false statement, but Erasmus complained that Béda could evidently not appreciate a common figure of speech; cf *Supputatio* LB IX 573E–4C; see next note.

92 Béda found this statement, like the one marked by the previous note, 'manifestly heretical' because both statements seemed to say that a marriage no longer existed when one of the parties had committed adultery. Erasmus thought Béda's comments close to blasphemy, and defended his paraphrase:

marriage has been instituted so that a woman once bound to one husband might bear children for him alone and obey him alone. The woman who has given herself to another man has already turned away from her husband. Accordingly, in a marriage between Christian spouses serious offences will not arise,⁹³ and in the case of minor offences neither he nor she will seek a divorce, but one will be reconciled immediately if something happens through human weakness.⁹⁴

Hear now another thing also. You have heard that your forbears received from tradition the simple precept that they should not swear falsely, but if they did take an oath they should discharge it, inasmuch as they were now responsible to God, and not only to a human being.⁹⁵ Hence among the Jews only perjury is punished; one who cheats his neighbour without committing perjury is not punished by the assembly.⁹⁶ But the gospel law does condemn and punish⁹⁷ such a person, for in order to protect you more completely from perjury, the gospel law utterly condemns all oath swearing. As a result it is now not permitted to swear either by God or by those things that are commonly thought of as having less binding power, that is, either by heaven since it is the throne of God, or by earth since it is his footstool,⁹⁸ or by Jerusalem because it is the city of the great King, that is, of the one who created and directs all things.⁹⁹ Nor should you swear, as the

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God had said that in marriage 'two become one flesh'; adultery results in 'one flesh' becoming two, thus contradicting the very nature of marriage. And yet, though a 'divorce' may have been effected, Christian grace looks for reconciliation, and so forbids another union; cf *Supputatio* LB IX 573B-E.

93 will not arise] First in 1534; previously 'do not arise'

94 For Erasmus' repeated attention to the problems of unhappy marriages and to the question of divorce see the colloquy 'Marriage' CWE 39 306-27 and the comprehensive note 16 on pages 321-3, where Craig Thompson reviews canon law on divorce, identifies the major Erasmian literature on the subject, and summarizes Erasmus' line of argument in the long annotation on 1 Cor 7:39, where Erasmus makes the case for permitting divorce in some situations.

95 Cf especially Num 30:2; also Lev 19:12 and Deut 23:21.

96 by the assembly] Added in 1534

97 and punish] Added in 1534

98 Cf Isa 66:1.

99 Cf the *Gloss* (on 5:35): 'Whoever swears by anything created owes the oath to him who created and rules such things.' Cf also Augustine *De sermone in monte* 1.17.52 (on Matt 5:33-7) PL 34 1256, who explains that perjury is forbidden because 'created things ... are ruled by Divine Providence' and 'God controls all things in a manner beyond the capability of human speech.'

barbarians do, by another's head,¹⁰⁰ over which you have no authority, but which is sacred to God who has created all things as he wished, whereas you are not able to make one black hair white, nor one white hair black. Since all things are sacred to God the creator,¹⁰¹ to swear by anything at all ought to be a matter of scruple.

Yet what need is there for any swearing among people not one of whom is distrustful thanks to his integrity, or desires to deceive thanks to his honesty (even if this could be done with impunity), especially in respect to those things for which they profess contempt?¹⁰² Therefore a simple statement ought to be holier and more binding among you than an oath can be among the Jews, however solemnly it is sworn. For since among you there should be nothing on your lips that is at odds with your thoughts, there will be no other use for words than to indicate to one another what is on your minds. In contracts there is no need to add oaths or curses or anything similar that serves through fear to bind the one who promises, and serves to give confidence to the one who demands the promise. Two words, yes and no, are quite enough to say that you will do what you have, with a simple statement, pledged to do, and that you will not do what you have promised not to do. For the one person is no less bound by a simple, unadorned word than is a Jew who swears by everything holy, and the other has no less reason to trust than if an oath had been interposed. But if anything is added to these simple words, it necessarily comes from sin.¹⁰³

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100 'By another's head': *per caput alterius*. Erasmus' text and translation agreed with that of the Vulgate *per caput tuum*, the accepted reading of the phrase in 5:36. The allusion to the 'barbarians' may be a reference to 1 Chron 12:19, where Philistines appear to swear by their heads.

101 Nicholas of Lyra (on 5:36) also explained the prohibition by appealing to the doctrine of creation: 'Everything created is a divine work; hence whoever swears by anything created swears by God.'

102 Erasmus implies that oaths are taken either because of distrust on the part of the one for whom the oath is made, or because of the desire to deceive on the part of the one who takes the oath, neither of which is appropriate to a Christian. The paraphrase here follows closely the thought expressed in a 1519 addition to the annotation on 5:37 (*his abundantius est*): 'What is the point of swearing if no one wishes to defraud even if he could do so with impunity, while no one, judging another on the basis of his own heart, distrusts anyone. For the person who is truly Christian, far from wanting to cheat, actually looks to the advantage of another at his own expense.'

103 'From sin': *ex vitio*. Erasmus avoids here the Vulgate's *ex malo* (his own translation also). He observes in his annotation on 5:37 (*his abundantius est*) that the theologians had found in the Vulgate expression a means of circumventing the

For either he who swears thinks ill of the one for whom he swears, or he who demands the oath has no trust. Neither is befitting you whom I want to be perfect in every way. And so although I absolutely forbid swearing, I do not abolish the law that forbids perjury, but I render the law more complete, and I move people farther away from that which the Law punishes.¹⁰⁴

You have heard what the Law has allowed our forefathers to do in avenging an injury: 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,'¹⁰⁵ it says. For it knew that their hearts were eager for revenge. Therefore it restrained the lust for revenge to the extent that from the decision of the judges a wrong would be compensated with punishment in kind, and he who had poked out someone's eye lost an eye, and he who knocked out someone's tooth was punished with the loss of a tooth. This was because if the punishment for an injury had been left to the inclination of the injured person, it would happen frequently that a person would take a life to pay for a knocked out tooth. Therefore the Law intended that punishment should not go further than was fair.¹⁰⁶ Now I do not break this law, I strengthen it, since I teach you that

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straightforward meaning of the text: the evil of distrust (see previous note), not the evil of swearing, the evil of the penalty, not the evil of the guilt (*culpa*). *Vitium* gave the words an unmistakable moral significance. On *vitium* see further chapter 24 n11 below. Augustine *De sermone in monte* 1.17.51 (on Matt 5:33-7) PL 34 1255 qualifies, acknowledging that the oath cannot be placed among 'good things,' but recognizing that because of 'distrust' it can be considered necessary.

¹⁰⁴ Erasmus found in the rigorous and exclusive command of Jesus not to swear at all a provocative challenge to contemporary practice, a challenge he emphasized both here in the paraphrase and in his annotation on 5:37 (see preceding note). Both annotation and paraphrase were challenged, the former by Edward Lee, the latter by Noël Bédard. In both cases Erasmus responded that the words of the Lord were indeed categorical, but they did not absolutely forbid swearing in every case. See the *Responsio ad annotationes Lei* CWE 72 87-9 and the *Supputatio* LB IX 575C-6C. When, later, the Paris theologians also censured Erasmus' position, he pointed to this paragraph in the *Paraphrase* to show that he considered the absolute prohibition appropriate only for 'perfect Christians,' and that even for them violations may arise that will require oaths; cf *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 835D-E.

¹⁰⁵ Cf Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21.

¹⁰⁶ Augustine *De sermone in monte* 1.19.56-7 (on Matt 5:38) PL 34 1258-9 explains the Law in the same way: 'These words ["an eye for an eye"] signify due measure: revenge is not to go beyond the injury received.' Augustine goes on to point to the degree to which the New Law surpasses the Old: one does no harm even when harmed, but 'turns the other cheek.' For a similar, but modern, exposition of this text see Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 68.

absolutely no vengeance should be sought for injuries however grievous, nor should any abusive word be repaid with an abusive word, or any hurt with a hurt, or an injury with an injury.¹⁰⁷ So absolute is my teaching that if someone strikes your cheek with a blow – which seems an intolerable affront indeed to the average person – far from slapping him back you should rather offer your other cheek to be struck, and should prefer to bear with patience a double injury than to retaliate. And if someone drags you into court to deprive you of your shirt, you should not even think of contesting with him, but the more quickly give him of your own accord a coat besides. Again, if some troublesome person attempts to make you accompany him somewhere for a mile, walk with him two miles rather than begin to quarrel with him. As a result of this friendliness and tolerance the person who is disposed to do harm will not be provoked to more violent measures, and you will be delivered from the nuisance more quickly than if wrong should proceed from wrong, and a little wrong become big, a single wrong be made manifold. Besides, you will not lose your peace of mind, and perhaps by your goodness you will make for yourself a friend out of an enemy.¹⁰⁸

This is a difficult thing for you to do. One must strive for these things with all zeal, scorning in the meantime the more trivial things that other mortals spend their entire lives either acquiring and increasing or avoiding. Such people, we sometimes find, forfeit heavenly goods even while they are looking for the trivial things, and not even here do they live pleasantly, as they heap up troubles upon troubles for themselves, and involve themselves in various grudges and animosities. By having contempt for these things, which neither make people godly if they are present nor ungodly if they are lacking, you will not only avert hatred, but also procure for yourselves love and kindness, and win trust and respect for your teaching. And so,

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107 Bédā seized upon this statement to suggest that Erasmus' paraphrase denied the right to judicial punishment and legitimate war. Erasmus replied that the paraphrase did not condemn appropriate punishment, whether administered by nations, parents, school teachers or clergy; he was speaking rather about the intention to harm; see *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* LB IX 462E-3B; *Supputatio* LB IX 576C-F.

108 Chrysostom also notes this ethical commonplace *In Matt hom* 18.2 (on Matt 5:39) PG 57 266: 'Nothing restrains the abusive so effectively as patient endurance by the abused; not only does this prevent further violence . . . it makes out of enemies not only friends but even servants.' Cf also Augustine *De sermone in monte* 1.19.56 (on Matt 5:38-42) PL 34 1258: 'Perfect peace is to have no desire at all for such revenge.'

if someone troubles you about a garment or a vessel or something similar that he covets enough to take it from you, rather than let him plot against you in other ways, give it to him when he asks, and you will at one and the same time conquer him with kindness and free yourself from trouble. Again, if someone asks you for a loan, do not hesitate to give it, even if nothing is likely to come back to you – not only not the interest, but not even the principal. For he who lends money for interest does not so much share of his own wealth as hunt for another's. Even if you should never get it back, why would you be unwilling to give someone a loan to whom you should have given as a gift what you have in abundance and he lacked? Thus by your example people will learn that they should utterly disdain these things for the sake of which they themselves both do and suffer everything.

Take now also this precept that is regarded as the chief one in the Law:¹⁰⁹ 'You shall love your neighbour [Lev 19:18] and hate your enemy,' it says. It demands kindness, but only towards those who are kind and well deserving, whereas it allows us to bear ill will towards those¹¹⁰ who injure us.¹¹¹ You see¹¹² how I do not take anything away from this precept, but how much I add to it. For, not satisfied merely with kindnesses shared among friends, I require you, the followers of my teaching, to love your enemies as well, and not only not return the hatred of those who persecute with hatred, but even to incite them to love through kindnesses. If they are so savage that they refuse to yield to your kindness, but assail you without stopping and attack you with curses and evil deeds, even so do not change your heart in the midst of these afflictions; quite otherwise, you should even¹¹³ pray to God for such people so that they might return to their senses.

As you practise this goodness upon everyone, both good and evil, you will show that you are genuine children of the heavenly Father, who

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109 Cf Matt 22:35-40.

110 those] This is the first of twenty instances in the *Paraphrase on Matthew* where in 1534 Erasmus changed the Latin *is* to *hic*, both demonstrative pronouns meaning 'this.' The translation makes no attempt to register the slight distinction.

111 Béda and the Paris theologians thought this statement denigrated the Law. Erasmus defended his paraphrase: the Law did not command hatred, it merely conceded hatred, or allowed it, to those who were yet imperfect; cf *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* LB IX 577A-8C; *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 856D-7F.

112 You see] Plural indicative in 1534 and 1535; previously the singular imperative

113 even] Added in 1534

in his desire to save everyone¹¹⁴ bestows so many good things upon the worthy and unworthy. He allows his sun to be enjoyed in common both by those who worship him and those who despise him, and he allows his rain to be useful equally to the just and unjust, with his kindness calling the evil to return to their senses, inspiring the good to give thanks. The same kind of behaviour will declare that you belong to the heavenly Father, and they will believe that your teaching comes from him, if they see in you his outstanding goodness. Otherwise, if you love people who are loving, if you treat well those who have treated you well, if you are kind to those who are kind, you have avoided wrongdoing but you have not merited praise. Not to repay kindness is ingratitude, detestable even among pagans and tax collectors, whose practices are infamous even among the common people. To respond with love to one who is loving is a natural act, not an act of gospel virtue. If you are obliging and friendly towards family, or towards your own people only, while you do not deign even to greet others, as though they were foreigners, what do you do that is remarkable? Do not pagans do as much? Those things are commonplace; they do not show that you are good, but only that you are human. Those things cannot seem exceptional that are found also among the evil. Therefore I want you to be perfect, and by a certain wonderful light of goodness to resemble your heavenly Father who, although omnipotent, nevertheless by his own goodness benefits all, expecting no reward from anyone. He is mild and merciful to everyone although he¹¹⁵ could exact vengeance immediately if he wanted to.

Chapter 6

I have made clear in which respects you must surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees if you want to be my disciples. I will now show what you must avoid when you seem to do things they do. For there is a certain silent disease that actually¹ spoils all the good things the Pharisees do,² so that they merit no praise at all before God. To help the needy with

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114 to save everyone] First in 1535; previously 'that all be saved'

115 he . . . wanted to] First in 1535; previously 'he can exact vengeance immediately if he wants to.'

1 actually] *vere* in 1534 and 1535; in 1522 and 1524 *ferē* 'quite' or 'generally'

2 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 19.1 (on Matt 6:1) PG 57 273 begins his first homily on chapter 6 in a similar way, showing how vainglory is a disease that spoils

kindness is a holy thing. To converse with God through pure prayers is a godly thing.³ Fasting is a devout thing. By an ostentatious display of these actions the Pharisees lay claim to a reputation for a certain outstanding holiness before men, although they displease God, who looks not upon the appearance but upon the heart.⁴ They deserve this displeasure because their hearts are corrupted by vainglory. They hunt after popular favour rather than a good conscience before God, and while they seek to obtain an empty reward, they are cheated of the only thing worth seeking. This bane, creeping in underground, as it were, secretly sets its snares even for those who seem to have progressed to a certain point in the racecourse of virtue.⁵ Therefore, I want you to be careful and wary that when you do some godly deed you do not prefer to do it in public rather than alone – simply to be seen by people, in order to pursue human praise and glory. One should do good always, whether others see or not, because God, from whom you await your reward, is always looking upon you. Otherwise, if you are trying to win praise among men by your good works, you lose your reward before the heavenly Father.

Not that good deeds must always be concealed. But one must not act out a play for human viewing, like actors performing a play on the stage, whose only desire is to please the eyes and ears of the people. Yet a person who conforms to the judgments of the crowd cannot always pursue what is best. For you must be of service to others in such a way that you entice them to your standard of conduct, not that you descend to theirs. The proper praise follows true virtue of its own accord even when it is not sought; in fact that alone is true praise when it arises without being sought or desired. Besides, the very glory that arises from good works must be ascribed in its entirety to God: you will displease him as soon as you please yourselves, claiming for yourselves what is wholly the result of his generosity.

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virtue: 'Only after [Christ] had introduced them to philosophy did he undertake to remove the disease that subsists along with [virtue]. For this disease does not arise at random, but after we have admirably fulfilled many of the commandments. It was necessary therefore first to implant virtue, and then to remove that disposition of mind that threatens to spoil its fruit.'

3 Cf Pabel *Conversing with God* 35: 'In Erasmian terminology prayer is . . . a colloquy or conversation with God.' Pabel cites this passage from the paraphrase on 6:1 to demonstrate that the term *colloquium* 'conversation' is Erasmus' choice to designate 'prayer.'

4 Cf 1 Sam 16:7.

5 For the image of the race see 1 Cor 9:24–6; Gal 5:7; Heb 12:1.

Consequently, whoever of you is a follower of the gospel law, when by your generosity you prepare to allay the needs of the poor, do not do what is commonly done by the hypocrites, that is, those who are actors, wearing paint and masks. They seem generous and merciful, but they are at heart both cruel and greedy. For their neighbours' misfortune does not move them at all; but, desirous of glory, they purchase popular favour with a little money, though they would give nothing at all if they were alone and spied a brother even dying of hunger.⁶ And so, whenever they give to the poor, they do not seek out solitude, but they go out to the public meeting places and the streets, just as if they are going to perform a play, and they call the multitude to their spectacle with the blast of a trumpet, at one and the same time reproaching the wretched for their misfortune and seeking from men a very foolish sort of glory for themselves.⁷ Do you want to hear what they gain? However much the audience applauds, with God they have lost the reward for their good deed, for God measures a godly work from the sincere disposition of the heart. A person⁸ who has done a kindness to win glory has sold, not bestowed it. But when you confer a kindness you must be so far from the disposition of such people that not even your left hand knows what your right hand is doing. Furthermore, so far must you be from desiring a human spectator that if possible not even you yourself will know that you are doing what you are doing correctly. And, as though you have forgotten your deed, you will not ascribe to a person the kindness you have bestowed, nor will you flatter yourself because you have given, but you will only rejoice in secret that a needy person has been revived. What then if people do not know, or rather if not even the one who is helped knows the author of the kindness? It is enough for you that you have as witness the Father whose eyes absolutely nothing escapes. He will lay up a reward for you, even if you receive no thanks from people.

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6 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 19.1 (on Matt 6:2) PG 57 275 also describes the cruelty and heartlessness lying concealed beneath acts of charity: 'The mind was meditating inhumanity and cruelty. For they did not [give alms] out of pity for their neighbours, but so that they themselves might enjoy glory; it was an act of extreme cruelty to look for esteem while another was perishing of hunger, and not to relieve another's misfortune.'

7 For Erasmus' definition of hypocrite see chapter 16 n3 below.

8 A person . . . bestowed it] First in 1535, through an alteration in the position of the comma; previously 'He who, to win glory, has made a gift, has sold, not bestowed, a kindness.'

Similarly, when you pray to God, do not follow the manner of the hypocrites who, whenever they pray, delight in standing in the public meeting places and in the corners of the plazas, for no other reason than to be seen by those from whom they hope to win praise for their holiness. Let them please themselves, let them please others with such vainglorious prayers. I tell you this: they already have their reward, namely, what they were striving for. Yet what is more hollow than this reward? And do they, for the sake of a counterfeit and false little bit of glory, cheat themselves of so happy a reward God would have repaid had they offered before his eyes the pure and faultless sacrifice of their prayers? But you, do the opposite. When you pray, flee the crowd, enter the solitude of your bedroom, and with the door shut, in secret utter your sincere prayers in the presence of the Father. It is enough that you have as witness of your piety the one from whom nothing is hidden. He will give you an eternal reward.

I have set forth these things in rather plain terms⁹ in order to make a point. For it is not wrong on occasion to bestow a kindness while people are looking, or to pray in a crowd of many people. But¹⁰ it is when the work of love is not corrupted by any feeling of human vanity that your left hand does not know what your right hand is doing. It is when you address God with a sincerity of mind such as might be if no one were looking on that you are concealed in your bedroom. A person who is praying in a large company, but who would pray just as energetically, perhaps, indeed, even more ardently, if he were alone, prays in a secret closet. For the right hand and the left hand, or the private place in the bedroom, consist not in things, but in dispositions.

This, too, is something you must avoid while you pray: it is the disposition of mind that moves God,¹¹ not the noise from one's lips, nor does it

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9 'In rather plain terms': *crassioribus exemplis*; on this rendering of *crassus*, see Robert D. Sider, 'In Terms Quite Plain and Clear: The Exposition of Grace in the New Testament Scholarship of Erasmus,' *Erasmus in English* 15 (1987-8) 21-3.

10 But . . . that] First in 1534. Slight differences in previous editions suggested a slightly different emphasis from that in 1534 - in 1522: 'For it is not wrong on occasion to bestow a kindness while people are looking, or to pray in a crowd of many people. Still, your left hand does not know what your right hand is doing when the work of love is not corrupted by any feeling of human vanity'; 1524 is identical to 1522 except for the subjunctive verb, 'your left hand would not know.' The 1534 text also sharpened the parallelism between the two *exempla* ('work of love' and 'addressing God').

11 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 19.1 (on Matt 6:1) PG 57 274 observes the importance of intention: it is not simply the act itself but the will that matters.

matter how long, or how sonorous a prayer is, but how eager¹² and sincere the disposition.¹³ Therefore, stay far away from the example of the pagans, who go through long and verbose prayers as if with set formulaic expressions, just as though they would obtain nothing if they did not weary God with their most verbose loquacity, constantly and emphatically repeating the same things, and outlining with a wordy enumeration what they want and when, and how they want what they want presented to them – though they often pray for harmful things.¹⁴ Only the best things must be sought from God, not everything, and one must pray frequently rather than long, with attention more than verbosity, finally, more with the heart than with the voice. Further, one should not pray with a set form of words in the manner of the gentiles,¹⁵ but to whatever extent the heat of the mind and spiritual ecstasy¹⁶ have prompted. The Father indeed loves to be asked, not in order to be informed of your needs by a long prayer, but to be moved by your godliness to grant what the lazy and negligent do not deserve to receive;¹⁷ besides, he knows what you need even before you ask.¹⁸

Consequently, just as your life, so too your prayer should distinguish you from pagans. If you want a model of gospel prayer prescribed to you,¹⁹

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12 'Eager': *ardens*

13 The *Gloss* (on 6:6-7) persistently locates prayer in the interior dispositions: 'We pray to God in inward faith and love, not with the noisy clamour of words . . . We deal with God not in words, but with the intention of the heart, with unalloyed affection.' Cf Pabel *Conversing with God* 42: 'Prayer does not ultimately consist of words, but of desire, for it is desire (*affectus*) that moves God, not noisy lips.'

14 Erasmus interprets as mockery the irony implicit in the description of gentile prayers in 6:7, a mockery that culminates in the observation that for all their efforts gentiles contrive to ask for the wrong things. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 19.3 (on Matt 6:7) PG 57 278 had interpreted the verse similarly.

15 in the manner of the gentiles] Added in 1534

16 'Spiritual ecstasy': *raptus in Deum*, literally 'the rapture unto God'; on *raptus* 'carried off, swept away' see CWE 50 15 n22, 71 n15, 131 n19.

17 Erasmus could not understand Bédā's objection to this statement – perhaps his critic thought God should not be presented in anthropomorphic terms as one who can be 'moved.' But Erasmus reminded Bédā that Scripture abounds in such tropes; see *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* LB IX 463C-D.

18 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 19.4 (on Matt 6:8) PG 57 278: 'If God knows our needs, why must we pray? – Not to instruct him, but to move him, and by the frequency and insistence of our prayers to become his friend.'

19 This paraphrase on the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13) is tripartite in form: a central panel expresses the thought as a prayer directed to God, as in the biblical text; this is framed by two panels expressing the significance of the thought for the one who prays. Each of the panels is, in its own way, an

receive one that is worthy, one by which you, as true and sincere children, in harmony through brotherly love, may address the heavenly Father who is common to all equally;²⁰ from whom, though he supplies you with everything, nevertheless those things that are of use for the heavenly life should chiefly be sought.²¹ For as he is the most beneficent of beings, he will add the other things even of his own accord, a bonus, as it were, to his children's prayers. There must be nothing more important to you than the glory of the one to whom is owed all glory in heaven and on earth. To belong to his kingdom is to have conquered the tyranny of the devil; to submit to his will is to rule. From his free generosity comes everything that nourishes and invigorates people's souls for gospel perfection. However, he will not hear you unless you are in harmony, nor will harmony easily endure unless you forgive each other your mutual offences – and human beings cannot pass their lives without offences, however much they are striving towards perfection. With this harmony you will be protected by your Father's help against the wicked tempter, if you are vigilant, and beseech assiduously the aid of our Father, who is best of all, against the worst of all beings. Anyone who does not belong to this company will address the Father in vain with the form I am about to hand down, any one, that is, who neither fears nor loves God, who lives for himself, who serves his own glory more than the glory of God, who gapes after worldly riches and power, who prefers to pursue that which delights his soul rather than the things that are pleasing

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exposition of the Lord's Prayer, thus offering, in effect, a triple exposition of the Prayer. There were precedents for the form, however much Erasmus accommodated the traditional structures to his own purposes. Cyprian, whose *Opera* Erasmus had edited in 1520 (cf Ep 1000) had written his exposition in a markedly tripartite form (Erasmus had cited Cyprian's *De dominica oratione* in a 1522 addition to his annotation on 6:13 [*quia tuum est regnum*]). Augustine *De sermone in monte* 2.11.38 PL 34 1286 added to his long disquisition a brief exposition correlating its petitions with the seven gifts of the Spirit and the seven beatitudes, thus effecting a triple exposition, and the *Gloss* followed Augustine, giving prominence to each of the three expositions. For the Lord's Prayer elsewhere in Erasmus, see the more expansive paraphrase in *Precatio dominica* CWE 69 59–77 analysed in Pabel *Conversing with God* 109–54; for a brief but effective exposition see *Querela pacis* CWE 27 309–10; for the wide applicability of the Lord's Prayer see *Modus orandi Deum* CWE 70 206–8.

20 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on 6:9) PL 26 42C: 'By saying "Father" they confess that they are children.' Also the *Gloss* (on 6:9): 'When we say "Father" let us think of our adoption . . . when we say "our" let us be reminded that we are brothers . . . We say "Our Father" because he is common to all.'

21 Cf the *Gloss* (on the expression 'in heaven' 6:9): 'Let us seek heavenly things.'

to God, who strives after earthly rather than eternal things, who values²² the endowments of the soul less highly than bodily advantages, who has discord with his brother, who through luxury and pleasures is careless in the face of Satan's snares.

This is the form: Our Father, you have begotten us, once unhappily begotten from Adam, now a second time from heaven.²³ You have prepared in heaven an everlasting kingdom and inheritance for us, who must be raised above earthly things. You yourself are said to live in heaven because, although you fill all things,²⁴ you have no earthly impurity or weakness. Grant that through us, who are pure and spotless by your kindness, your name may become renowned and glorious among human beings.²⁵ For whatever is rightly done by us is not our glory, since it is your gift. Let Satan's tyranny be destroyed so that your kingdom may grow ever stronger day by day,²⁶ a kingdom that endures not by its resources or the protection of its guards, but by modesty, chastity, gentleness, tolerance, faith, and love, so that, once vices and wicked desires have been cast aside, your heavenly virtues may exert their own force among human beings. And just as in heaven all things have been made peaceful and there is no creature that does not obey your commands, so on earth let there at last be no one who does not obey your most holy will, while even now everyone practises (as far as the weakness of human nature allows) what will come to pass to perfection in the life to come.²⁷ Nourish, Father, what you have begotten. Provide for us so that we might not lack the bread of your heavenly teaching, in order that, by its

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22 who values . . . bodily advantages] First in 1534; previously 'who values bodily advantages less highly than the endowments of the soul' – probably a mistake

23 'A second time from heaven': alluding to John 3:3, Erasmus combines the two possible meanings of the Greek word *ἀνωθεν*, which he discusses in an annotation on John 3:7 (*et nasci denuo*): 'Chrysostom noted that the Greek word has two meanings; it can mean "again" . . . or "from above."' Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 19.4 (on Matt 6:9) PG 57 278 also interprets 'Father' in terms of our redemption, adoption, and inheritance. Cyprian, too, *De dominica oratione* 9 (on Matt 6:9) CCL IIIA 94 had stressed that the term 'Father' implied that the Christian was 'the new man,' 'born again.'

24 Cf Jer 23:24; Eph 4:10.

25 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 19.4 (on Matt 6:9) PG 57 279: 'Deem us worthy to live a life so pure that, through us, all will glorify you.'

26 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on 6:10) PL 26 43A: 'He asks that the devil may cease to rule in the world . . . that God may rule in each person.'

27 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 19.5 (on Matt 6:10) PG 57 279: 'He has asked us to desire the life to come, and to hasten to it, but in the meantime, while living here, to demonstrate a manner of life like that of those above.'

daily consumption, we might be strengthened and become mature, and invigorated to fulfil your commands.²⁸ And when sometimes you have been offended by our transgressions,²⁹ do not turn away from us, but by virtue of your clemency forgive us the transgressions that we commit against you through our weakness, so that we might have peace with you.³⁰ In the same way we too nourish mutual harmony as we, among ourselves, forgive each other our mutual sins. When your favour is upon us, we fear nothing, and strengthened by concord we are more steadfast against the common enemy. If it is possible, do not, we pray, hand us over to the enemy to be tempted, for we know his malice, we know his wickedness and craftiness. But if you allow us to fall into temptation in order to test the constancy of our hearts, free us, O Father, who are best of all, from that worst of all beings.³¹ May your goodness will that these prayers be fulfilled.³²

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28 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 6:11) PL 26 43B-C, who offers somewhat ambiguously two interpretations of the petition for bread: either the daily bread that nourishes, or the *panis supersubstantialis*, that is, the 'living bread that came down from heaven' (John 6:51). Cyprian *De dominica oratione* 18-19 (on Matt 6:11) CCL IIIA 101-2 had accepted a double interpretation: Christ the bread of life in the Eucharist, and the bread that sustains our daily lives. Augustine *De sermone in monte* 2.7.25-7 (on Matt 6:11) PL 34 1280 listed three interpretations: all the things needed to sustain life, the sacrament of 'the body of Christ,' or 'the divine precepts about which we should think and which we should put into practice each day'; similarly the *Gloss* (on 6:3) adding that the bread ought also to refresh us through faith and charity. For the ambiguity of the Greek ἐπιούσιον in 6:11 see Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 76.

29 'Transgressions': *delicta*. In his paraphrase on 6:12 Erasmus avoids the terms that proved to be controversial in his translation: in the paraphrase here *ignoscere* and *condonare* ('forgive') take the place of the Vulgate's *dimittere* and Erasmus' *remittere* (also 'forgive'), while *delicta* 'transgressions' takes the place of *debita* 'debts' (both in the Vulgate and Erasmus' translation). *Remittere* and *peccata* ('sins' - as in the Vulgate of Luke 11:2) appear later, however, in the paraphrase on 6:14-15. See the annotations on 6:12 (*et dimitte*) and on Luke 6:37 (*dimitte et dimittetur vobis*) and CWE 48 6 n13. For *delicta* see CWE 44 169 n29, CWE 48 6 n13, and CWE 56 163 n14.

30 Cf Rom 5:1.

31 Erasmus may intend to recall the story of Job handed over by God to Satan to test his faithfulness (cf Job 1:8-12, 2:3-6). Cyprian *De dominica oratione* 26 (on Matt 6:13) CCL IIIA 106 refers specifically to the testing of Job. Augustine *De sermone in monte* 2.9.34 (on Matt 6:13) PL 34 1284 maintained that God delivered persons to Satan to be tempted either to punish them for their sins, or 'according to the Lord's mercy, to prove and try them.' The *Gloss* (on 6:13) noted that no one can be 'approved' without being tested.

32 Following the Vulgate Erasmus does not include in paraphrase the *coronis* of the Lord's Prayer ('For thine is the kingdom' etc). He included it in his own

Therefore, see how many things this brief prayer embraces, so that one is necessarily perfect who has uttered the prayer rightly, that is to say, who has spoken with his mouth in such a way that heart and disposition correspond. First, it teaches you to be totally dependent upon no other source than the heavenly Father to whom you owe your creation, to whom you owe your redemption from sins, to whom you owe whatever virtues you have. He is called Father so that you might understand that he is merciful and kind. He is said to be in heaven so that you might lift your hearts there, having forsaken the goods of this world. You call him ‘yours,’ so that no one might claim anything as his own since whatever one has comes in every case from the beneficence of a single being; and in this respect there is equality between kings and servants.³³ You desire only his glory so that no one on earth might for any reason ascribe to himself any praise, for it is from this that arrogance and conceit commonly arise. You long for him to rule, so that he may be obeyed, not you. The virtues that work through you are his; the teaching that you will hand on to others from me is his. It is not enough to continue steadfast in the good things of the Father, unless you make daily progress towards the better, and for this purpose you request from him that wonderful bread. This he wants you to seek daily since it is bestowed daily, and he wants you to seek it from him so that you might be reminded that all good things come from him. Finally, so that you might be more careful not to fall away at any time from the love of a Father so kind, he warns you of that wicked Satan who is always laying snares for the godly, to drag them back into his tyranny.³⁴

Accordingly, before you address the Father with this prayer, consider whether you truly desire what you are seeking, and whether you are fit to be heard by the Father when you pray for these things. Carefully examine first whether you have harmony with your neighbours. Your Father will treat you as you treat your neighbour. He will not recognize as a son anyone who is not in agreement with his brother. If you will forgive those who

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translation since he had found it in ‘all the Greek texts’ he had collated (annotation on 6:13 [*quia tuum est regnum*]), though he thought it likely that it had been added from liturgical practice. Modern scholarship agrees; cf Metzger *Textual Commentary* 13–14.

33 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 19.4 (on Matt 6:9) PG 57 278–9: ‘He says “our” Father, offering prayers for the common body . . . he eliminates the inequalities in human affairs . . . no one has anything more than another, the rich than the poor, the lord than his servant, the ruler than the ruled, the king than the soldier . . .’

34 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 19.6 (on Matt 6:13) PG 57 282 notes that by ‘evil’ here, the devil is meant.

do you wrong, your heavenly Father will also forgive the wrong you have done against him. If, however, you are hard and implacable towards others, your Father will not forgive you your sins. You are not willing to forgive your fellow slave,³⁵ against whom you in your turn have sinned at some time, and you ask that your misdeed be forgiven by God, with whom there can be for you no counterbalancing of mutual trespasses?

You understand how different your almsgiving must be from the almsgiving of the Pharisees, and your prayers from their prayers. Now hear how different your fasts must be from their fasts if you want them to be pleasing to the Father and profitable to you. What commends our fasting to God is not abstention from food, but rather the pure disposition of a heart that longs to please God alone. Accordingly, whenever piety urges you to fast, be unwilling to imitate those who give the appearance of fasting but do not really fast.³⁶ They wear the mask of fasting with a distressed look on their faces, although in fact they do not have in view that for which fasting ought to be undertaken, namely,³⁷ either to placate God or to discipline the body, so that the spirit might be freer to devote time to sacred things. By this pretence they seek the empty praise of those for whom with contempt for God they put on this performance. They cloud their faces to look wan and sad, so that by the very condition of their bodies it might be obvious to people³⁸ that they are fasting. Be assured of this, there is no reason why they should expect a reward from God for those good works, for they already have their reward, having got what they were pursuing through fasting.³⁹

But you, whenever you fast, look instead as if you are not fasting, and with your head perfumed and your face washed, look cheerful, so people will not realize you are fasting. Do not consider unprofitable the fasting that escapes people's notice. It is enough for you that your Father sees, the one from whom nothing is hidden. He who sees in secret will store up for you a solid reward in place of the empty praise of mortals. All the same, I am not saying these things because it is wrong for some people to know that

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35 Cf Matt 18:23–35.

36 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 20.1 (on Matt 6:16) PG 57 286 lamented those he knew who put on the appearance of fasting but did not really fast.

37 namely] Added in 1534

38 to people] First in 1534; previously 'to all'

39 Erasmus looked upon the church's dietary regulations with a critical eye. See *De esu carnum* ASD IX-1 19–50, and the colloquy 'A Fish Diet' CWE 40 675–762, and especially 708 nn242, 243, and 713–17, where Erasmus imputes to the character 'Eros' what is evidently his own unhappy experience with fasting.

you are fasting, but because the mind ought to shrink from the desire for praise. When you fast not simply to be seen by someone else, it is then that no one sees you fasting. When you fast with the attitude that you would just as gladly fast if nobody saw you, it is then that God alone sees you fasting. The average person does not pay attention to these things, and while he hunts for certain little visible rewards among men, he cheats himself of the invisible and true good that God bestows for things rightly done.

The same thing happens to those who with high anxiety heap up for themselves and store away riches and bury them in the earth in order not to lose them – though this itself is to lose them. The one who has rightly spent his riches is the only one to place them safely. Besides, what you have buried is of no use to you, and it is exposed to worms, rust, and thieves, so that now you get no return from it except the terrible worry of acquiring it and keeping it safe. You must not acquire those things either with anxiety or to excess and, when you have acquired them or fallen upon them by chance, you should readily give them away whenever someone is in need, or at least use them to supply what nature requires, not to serve either extravagance or a disease of the soul. Nonetheless, most mortals apply all their cares to this pursuit, as if poverty would make them miserable, while riches would make them happy. And while they chase after these goods that are false and that will soon desert their masters, they desert the eternal goods that render people truly happy and that cannot be snatched away.

You, on the contrary, hastening with all desire to the things that are best and perfect, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven so that you might be made truly rich; the protection of these riches will not torment you with anxious concern. Neither worm nor rust destroys such riches, nor do thieves dig them up and steal them away, hazards to which human riches are subject. The Father himself will keep safe for you the riches that you have deposited with him, and your mind will not cling to the ground, weighed down by sordid cares, but it will be transported⁴⁰ to heavenly things once it has disregarded these more lowly and transitory things. Where a man's treasure is – the one thing he loves above all – there will his heart be also. Therefore, those who have piles of wealth buried in the earth do not think lofty thoughts. They do indeed walk about here and there, but their minds dwell in the pit to which their money has been committed. Now if the mind

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40 'Transported': *rapietur*; cf n16 above. Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 20.3 (on Matt 6:22) PG 57 290: 'Already, even here you have this reward, that you will be transported to the heavenly world, your mind set on heavenly things, your concerns directed there.'

has been corrupted by the disease of either vainglory or greed, everything that is done is necessarily defective. Thus, the most important thing is to discern what must be sought most of all, and what it is that truly provides what we seek.

Moreover, what a lamp is to a house, what an eye is to the body, so is the mind to a person.⁴¹ If the light of the mind is not weakened by the darkness of false opinions and wicked desires, if the eye of the mind directs its vision only to the true goal, whatever is done in one's life is pleasing to God. Then everything is conducive to heaping up happiness, just as surely as a very bright lamp keeps one from stumbling into things in a house. If your eye is clear and sound, it gives light to all the members, and no part stumbles or wanders, naturally because the eye is leading. By contrast, if the eye of your body has become diseased, no part of the body performs its function correctly; for if the very part we use to make judgments is flawed, we will judge nothing rightly. Accordingly, if the part that has been given to be the light within you has turned to darkness, how great will be the darkness of the remaining parts that do not have light in and of themselves! If reason has been blinded by desires, and if it judges fortunate what is ruinous, and thinks most desirable what either ought to be condemned or regarded with disdain, into what darkness will the entire man be carried off by ambition, lust, greed, folly, anger, envy, hate, and the other perturbations of the mind that are by nature dark! Therefore let your eye be clear and sound so it may look upon what is best, and let it also be without a flaw⁴² so it may look⁴³ upon these things alone, or chiefly.

But do not suppose that they are to be heard who, dividing themselves between God and men, between earth and heaven, follow eternal things –

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41 Similarly Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 20.3 (on Matt 6:22) PG 57 290: 'What the eye is to the body, such is the mind to the soul.' Nicholas of Lyra (on 6:22) also explained the expression as referring to the 'eye of the mind,' which, through right intentions, guides human endeavours. Cf the 1519 addition to the annotation on the verse (*lucerna corporis tui*): 'A comparison is intended between the eye of the body and the eye of the mind (*mens*): the eye is to the body of a living creature as affection (*affectus*) is to the soul.'

42 'Without a flaw': *simplex*. In an annotation on Matt 6:23 (*si oculus tuus nequam*), Erasmus states that the eye that is *simplex* 'is not defective (*vitiatus*) in any way, for example, by discharge or rheum or disease.' For the diseased (*vitiatus*) eye see just above, 'if the eye of your body has become diseased'; also the paraphrase on Mark 2:8 (the eyes of your mind are diseased) CWE 49 33. For the 'clear eye' as a mind free from flawed judgment see Ep 1053:556.

43 so it may look] First in 1534; previously 'and let it look'

but in such a way that they refuse to despise the things of the temporal realm. All they achieve is this: while they pursue both, they obtain neither. Just as this heavenly philosophy promises huge rewards, so it demands the whole man. Among people you will not find two of such agreeable manners that a single servant is able to satisfy them both. Thus it happens that the servant must leave one of them or he will satisfy neither. If the masters differ from each other in character, and stand over against each other with any serious animosity, the slave must not only leave the one, if he wants to be acceptable to the other, but sticking by the latter he must even hate the one he left. If on the other hand he wants to abandon the second for the first, he must transfer all his love and obedience to that one and neglect the one he left. But what things are so starkly opposed as God and Mammon? How will one person serve the two when their commands are so different? God commands you to give your wealth to the needy, Mammon orders you to seize other people's possessions by any means, fair or foul. God commands you to have regard for your brother in danger, Mammon orders you to live for yourself. God commands sobriety, Mammon teaches excess. In vain, therefore, will you delude yourselves if you believe the impossible to be possible: that at the same time you are serving both God and Mammon. Each person is the servant of the one to whom he is earnestly devoted. You see how wealth totally takes possession of those who go to such trouble to acquire it, who are so anxious to protect and preserve it, and who suffer such great mental torment if they lose it. What do they not suffer for it? What do they not do? He who has sold himself to such slavery cannot be a servant of God. God requires the entire person; he does not allow a partnership with so sordid and disgraceful a master, nor does he put up with dividing a slave in half and sharing him with his enemy.

The common run of rich people is accustomed to excuse the disease of avarice under the pretext of human necessity. 'With these things,' they say, 'one takes care of hunger and nakedness.' So say they who do not depend totally on God, but who trust in their own help. I want you to be free from this anxiety also, so that nothing as a result of this care should divert you from the desire for better things.⁴⁴ Nature's requirements are content with very little, and there is easily at hand from any number of sources what is sufficient for⁴⁵ the kind of people I want my disciples to be.

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44 Chrysostom *In Matt homi* 21.2 PG 57 296 introduces similarly the exposition of 6:25: 'In case they should object, "What then? If we divest ourselves of everything, how shall we live?" Christ offers a splendid response.'

45 for ... to be] Added in 1534

Either the liberality of good people will be available to help, or the work of one's hands will supply what relieves necessity. Finally, if neither of these suffices, the Father will not forsake his own: to all souls longing for heavenly things, especially those without anxiety, he who bestows the greater things will add these less important things. And so, do not store up for the distant future, do not be tormented with anxiety about providing the food essential to life, about providing the clothing that covers the body and protects from the severity of the cold. Is not life more precious than food? Is not the body more precious than clothing? Will he who has given the things that are so much better, and who has given them to those who are free from care, be reluctant to nourish with these less valuable things and to protect what he has given?

If you seek an example, turn your eyes to the other living beings, created for your sake by the one who created all things. Does anything he created lack its own food? Consider the birds of the air: they do not sow, they do not reap, they do not hoard up in barns worried about the future; they live from day to day free from all anxiety; they take what comes to them with cheerfulness. Nevertheless, your heavenly Father provides food for them all; will he then forsake you whom he values so much more than the little birds? But if he cares about you, as he certainly does, is not your anxiety pointless? If he abandons you, what will your anxiety profit you? Just as he gave a body at his own pleasure, so at his own pleasure will he also give the means to live. Do you want to see how useless is anxiety of mind concerning things of this sort? What person is able by anxiety, however great, to add one cubit to the stature of his body? In fact, our bodies, without even any thought on our part, grow gradually and steadily to the size prescribed by God. If you cast away care you will have a body no shorter, if you are tormented with care you will have one no taller. Accordingly, the one who makes the body grow and become stronger, without any anxiety on your part, will also provide for your nourishment without the anxiety that calls you away from caring for the things that are not obtained without our anxious attention. Hence it is foolish to be concerned and afraid that you will lack food, since you see that it is freely supplied to the birds.

Now so that provision for clothing the body might not worry you, consider the lilies that sprout and grow in the fields without any attention from human beings: they do not toil, they do not spin. But who is it that provides them with clothing as he has seen fit? Who but the heavenly Father? And he provides in such a way that the most magnificent and wealthy King Solomon, even when he most vaunted the splendour of his riches, was never clothed like any one of these scorned and despised lilies – I do not mean the lilies that are in the gardens to which people

give some attention, but those that arise in the meadows of their own accord, for human attention can provide nothing to compare in elegance with what the providence of nature itself offers. If your Father clothes the grass with such great splendour – grass that is lowly and soon to pass away, grass that today flourishes in the fields, but tomorrow is harvested and dried to be thrown into the oven – why do you have such little faith in him that you suppose you will lack clothing? When he has bestowed upon you much more excellent things, when he has created you for immortality, and has prepared you especially for the glory of his name, why do you suppose that you will lack the kind of clothes that should be sought out of need, not for adornment? You have God as your Father, who provides with such great beneficence even for the little birds, which lack reason, and who provides for the little flowers and the grasses, which lack sensation.

Accordingly, when you see that he values you so highly that he has imparted to your body, arranged with marvellous foresight, a soul that is rational⁴⁶ and similar to the minds of angels;⁴⁷ that he thinks you worthy of the title of sons;⁴⁸ that by his freely given love he has chosen you out of all⁴⁹ – you by whose faultless lives and unadulterated teaching he might become known and glorious among the entire race of mortals, you whom he has destined to an inheritance of eternal life;⁵⁰ when you see this, cast away that worry about lowly and sordid things that makes you say, anxious and trembling: 'What shall we eat or what shall we drink or with what shall we be clothed?'⁵¹ Those are the words of pagans, not Christians, for pagans

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46 Cf Theophylact, who had also pointed to the superiority of rational human beings over the irrational creation as a reason for the former to trust in God, *Enarr in Matt* 6:30 PG 123 210B: 'You, he said, are rational; for you [God] has fashioned a soul and a body.'

47 An echo perhaps of Luke 20:36 (cf Matt 22:30); but the comparison of humans as rational beings to divine beings was a common Renaissance theme; cf eg Shakespeare *Hamlet* II ii 299–304. Cf also the *Enchiridion* CWE 66 41, where Erasmus claims that 'we can soar past the minds of the angels.' The sequence here of a marvellously fabricated body, a rational soul, and a mind like (or superior to) the angels is represented in a much expanded form in the *De immensa Dei misericordia* CWE 70 102–4.

48 Cf Luke 20:36 and 1 John 3:1.

49 Cf Eph 1:4–5; John 15:19.

50 Cf Eph 1:12–14; 1 Pet 1:2–5.

51 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 22.1 (on Matt 6:28–30) PG 57 299 notes the emphasis in verse 30 on 'you' ('will he not much more clothe you'): '... you to whom he gave a soul, for whom he fashioned a body, because of whom he made the

either do not believe that God exists, or do not believe that he cares about mortals.⁵² They have not learned that there is another preferable life to which every concern must be directed. They do not rely upon the help of God, they place human happiness in bodily things, and so they acquire with great anxiety the resources that satisfy the need for food and clothing or the other bodily conveniences. They exult with joy when they obtain these things, they are weak with fear when danger threatens, they are distressed by sorrow and sometimes hasten to take their own lives when these things are snatched away. Fixed by these concerns upon things that will pass away, they neither live a pleasant life here, nor are they able to lift up their minds to the pursuit of heavenly goods.

What human father is so undutiful that he does not provide his children with the necessities of life? You have a Father so rich, so kind, so caring, that he meets the needs of all, enriches all things, forsakes nothing however small and insignificant, and do you fear that he will not supply his children with the resources one must have to live?⁵³ Put this care upon him. He knows that you need all these things, for he is not so hard that he takes away the necessities from those who are doing his work. But someone will say: 'What, then? Shall we not acquire with the work of our hands that by which we might support our wives, our children, and ourselves? By which we might alleviate the need of the poor?' By all means, but without anxiety; for people double their misery, at one and the same time toiling in body and anxious in mind. They sow, but with anxiety that what they sow might not sprout up; they reap, but with anxiety that a soldier or a robber might carry off what has been harvested before it has been stored in the barn; they store it in the granary, but with anxiety that some blight might spoil the grain, or that a fire might be started and destroy it. Finally, since they have an eye set on plenty rather than present need, they both heap up for the distant future, as if it is certain that they are going to live for a long time, and they never have enough. And so, work if circumstances warrant it, but work without anxiety. If money comes your way without fraud and apart from business dealings,

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whole visible creation ... has done so many good things, and has given his only-begotten Son.'

52 The latter was the view of the Epicureans; see CWE 50 107 and n20. Cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 6:32): 'The gentiles, who deny divine providence in human affairs, are excessively concerned about these things.'

53 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 22.2 (on Matt 6:32) PG 57 302: 'What father is there who is so negligent that he does not provide his children with the necessities of life? Thus, for this reason, too, God will provide in every way ...'

accept it, but in such a way that its care does not at all hinder you from the work of the gospel.⁵⁴ You are doing something too important to be, with any propriety, diverted by the care for insignificant and transient things.

Let your first care be for that good compared to which those things are of no importance. The kingdom of God must be established, that is, the gospel teaching by which one attains the heavenly inheritance. I have chosen you as its heralds and promoters, and I have shown you the extraordinary virtues you will need to carry out this work, that you love your enemies,⁵⁵ and that you pray for the salvation of those who work for your destruction. Because these are the highest things, and will not fall to you from the Father without your own deep concern, you must seek them first. The other less important things that pertain to the necessities of this life, your most excellent Father will freely add as a bonus without any care on your part, so that you might give thanks on two accounts for his munificence: both because he furnished you with those highest things for which you were striving, and because he has added the less important things without your anxious striving. He does not want you to be weighed down with cares that make you more distressed, but do not make you better. This work that you undertake is so arduous that it requires the entire mind, and a mind unimpeded and free from the other cares. For this reason, as though living from day to day, be content with the things at hand, and do not be tormented by worry for the future, like most people who make things twice as bad for themselves: while, on the one hand, they are leaving nothing undone to satisfy present needs, they are, on the other, tortured with fear of the future. Receive with thanksgiving what the present day has brought. What tomorrow may offer, leave it to worry about itself. If it brings something good, you will not be dangling in hope; if it brings something bad, you will not anticipate the suffering through fear of coming misfortune. This life has its own afflictions; there is no need to double them with fear. For it is enough to bear them when they are present, without letting fear also render them present to us before they happen. Time allots these things and turns them about in the lives of mortals, mixing happy with sad.⁵⁶ Nevertheless

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54 Like Erasmus here, exegetes qualified the scriptural absolute of verse 31, 'do not worry'; cf Augustine *De sermone in monte* 2.17.57 PL 34 1294-5; also Nicholas of Lyra: 'Not that one should not be in some measure concerned, but he wishes to exclude that immoderate concern that springs from the gentile error.'

55 your enemies] First in 1534; previously 'even your enemies'

56 A recurring theme in Erasmus; cf eg the paraphrase on Acts 4:22 CWE 50 36, also the paraphrase on Matt 4:11 and n19 above.

everything will be turned to good⁵⁷ for you if concern for the heavenly kingdom wholly possesses you, content regardless of what may happen.

Chapter 7

There is another way in which I want you to be far removed from the conduct of the scribes and Pharisees. Although they forgive themselves when they have committed the gravest sins, nevertheless towards a brother who sins they play the part of most unmerciful judges, unjustly blaming even the things that are right, interpreting perversely what is in doubt, and exaggerating what is trivial;¹ last of all, if they see someone fall into some really serious sin, their design is more to destroy than to cure. They look for a reputation for justice from this too: that they rage with great haughtiness against the failings of others, though they do this neither through love for their neighbours (whom they prefer destroyed rather than reformed, and publicly disgraced rather than improved), nor through hatred of vice, since they indulge their own far more serious sins. But your judgments, if there are any, ought to savour of gospel love. Gospel love pardons easily; it is not suspicious of anyone without reason; it views in a positive rather than a negative light whatever is open to a better or worse interpretation; through its own leniency it tolerates many things; it prefers to heal rather than to punish;² aware of its own weakness, it becomes the same sort of judge when others do wrong as it should like to find in others when it sins. Finally, it does not take on an air of haughtiness in rebuking the misdeeds of others, if it is aware of similar or even greater misdeeds of its own, acting as censor and judge of itself before it chides or admonishes another.³

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57 Cf Rom 8:28 and Erasmus' annotation on the phrase CWE 56 223.

1 Nothing in the biblical text suggests that Jesus is referring to 'the conduct of the scribes and Pharisees.' But Erasmus may be adapting Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 23.1 (on Matt 7:1) PG 57 308 who had begun his exposition of this chapter by locating in 'the Jews' the flaw Erasmus ascribes to the Pharisees: 'He seems here to be hinting at Jews who, though harsh accusers of their neighbour for the slightest, least important thing, paid no attention to the great sins they were committing.'

2 Cf 1 Cor 13:4–7.

3 In this paragraph Erasmus may intend an allusion to the harsh and judgmental character of some sixteenth century bishops, as well as to monks. For clergy and monks see the *Enchiridion* CWE 66 74 and 22. For Erasmus the ideal bishop is a gentle pastor and a servant; see CWE 50 22 and n89 and CWE 44 18–19, 58–9.

Sometimes it befalls the haughty⁴ that the precedent of an unjust judgment falls back on its very authors, and they in turn find others to be such censors of their lives as they have been of others' lives. Consequently, do not judge others, that you might not be similarly judged by others. Otherwise they will exercise against you the sort of judgment you have exercised against others, and they will measure out to you the measure you have used for others. For just as favour provokes favour, and clemency provokes clemency, so slander provokes slander, and rage provokes rage. He who has slandered a neighbour will himself be more gravely maligned. For no one rages more fiercely against a neighbour's failings, however minor, than those who themselves are soaked in far worse vices. This one publicly ridicules his brother because he wears a garment without a cincture⁵ when he himself is completely drenched with envy. There is nothing another will not say against his brother because, overcome by the weakness of the flesh, he has taken a concubine, when he himself is totally enslaved by greed and ambition. Another curses his brother because he drinks a little too much, when he himself harbours in his breast so many murders, so many poisonings, is so blind to his own swollen tumours, and is so very keen to see a little wart on another.⁶ Yet what kind of distorted judgment is this? Everyone should be a very acute judge of his own wrongdoings, more lenient in the faults of others; it is appropriate for everyone to have eyes for his own faults, and not to be prying in the same way into other peoples' faults. And everyone ought first to be physician to himself, before he applies his hand to another.

But you, why do you see the mote in your brother's eye, when you do not see the beam that is in your eye? Or with what effrontery do you say to your brother 'Let me take the mote out of your eye' when, meanwhile, you yourself have a beam in your own eyes? You hypocrite, you who seek praise for holiness among men, not from your own good deeds, but from

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4 it befalls the haughty] First in 1534; previously simply 'it happens'

5 An allusion, apparently, to monastic costume. Erasmus often criticizes the compulsive concern the monastic orders had with matters of dress; cf eg the *Moria* CWE 27 131; also Epp 447:679-89 and 858:474-81, and *Psalmi* CWE 63 259. For his own unhappy experience due to costume see Ep 296:181-218.

6 Erasmus anticipates the biblical image of the mote and the beam that follows, but in the classical imagery of Horace *Satires* 1.3.38-40. With the examples here in the paraphrase on 7:2, which invite unavoidably an allusion to the sixteenth century context, compare those offered by Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 23.2 (on Matt 7:3) PG 57 309: the monk criticized by a greedy rich man for superfluous dress, or the man who dines well criticized by the perpetual drunkard.

other people's evil deeds, first cast the beam out of your eye and then, with your eye now clear and cleansed, examine whether there is a mote for you to cast out of your brother's eye. Just as it is by the eye that we judge the things that are of the body, so it is by the mind that we judge the things that are of the mind. Accordingly, that by which we judge another's fault must itself be without fault. And he who undertakes the responsibility of teaching others must first teach himself; he who prepares to pronounce judgment upon others must be a judge of himself; and he who wishes to admonish others must be an admonisher of himself. Certainly these things pertain chiefly to those who hold authority over the people.

Yet although I want you to be quick to do kindnesses to everyone, tolerant towards those who inflict injuries upon you, open and candid towards those who fall through human weakness, and, finally, so disposed even towards the perverse that you prefer to correct rather than destroy them, nevertheless I do not want the mystery of gospel wisdom revealed to the worthy and unworthy without distinction. Indeed, if the Jews value their holy things so highly that they keep dogs, an unclean animal,⁷ away from them, and if the rich value their large pearls so highly that they do not cast them before swine (for if they were to do otherwise, they would be regarded as insane), you who possess the things that are truly holy and that surpass all pearls however precious,⁸ beware that you do not cast the gospel riches to the unworthy. Those are dogs who in their wholehearted devotion to profane things shrink from things that savour of sanctity; those are swine who, completely immersed in obscene pleasures, curse the pure and chaste teaching of the gospel. To dogs, rotting corpses and stinking vomit are more pleasant than any seasonings and spices; a swine prefers mud to jewels.⁹ Therefore, one must not thrust the secrets of heavenly teaching upon those who display their contempt for sounder instruction so openly that there seems to be no hope of fruit.¹⁰ Invited by the opportunity, they

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7 Cf Lev 11:27.

8 Cf Matt 13:46.

9 For the comparisons see 2 Pet 2:22 (cf Prov 26:11). For 'dogs' as 'those devoted to profane things' see Rev 22:15; cf also Phil 3:2. For swine as those immersed in pleasures see the paraphrases on 2 Pet 2:21-2 CWE 44 119 and Luke 15:16 where the husks on which the swine feed are the 'world's empty pleasures' CWE 48 78.

10 Like Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 23,3 (on Matt 7:6) PG 57 311, Erasmus interprets the 'holy things' as 'teaching,' the dogs and swine as those who live godless lives and pass their time in riotous living. Cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB)

may become even more wicked than they had been before, and this may lead to the same result that will follow if someone should cast pearls before swine or that which is holy to dogs. Not only will dogs not revere a holy thing, but when they have been aroused by your action, they will also leap upon you and tear you with their teeth, and swine will trample precious gems with their feet like old rubbish. So a dog does not become holier by the holy object, but desecrates it; and a swine does not become more embellished by jewels, but defiles their purity. Thus persons of incurable malice deride sacred teaching as folly when they come to know it, they misrepresent it as being ungodly, and they make trouble for those who have handed it on.

Therefore, it is to the eager, or at least the curable, that the gospel philosophy is to be communicated. And it is not to be entrusted in its entirety immediately to everyone, but as each person has offered evidence of his progress, so are the more arcane elements to be disclosed.¹¹ Just as these excellent goods must not be communicated by you to just anyone, so they do not extend from God the Father to the lazy and idle. He gives these things, but only to those who eagerly demand them; he does not withhold them – from those, that is, who seek them in earnest; he grants admission to this treasure-vault, but only to those who boldly knock. Therefore seek from the Father neither gems nor gold, but these true and invaluable riches of the soul. Ask, I say, and what you ask for will be given. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. Your Father is rich and kind, he denies no one, he does not begrudge anyone his riches, but he wants their value to be acknowledged. However, he does not acknowledge the person who demands with little zeal. Therefore, whoever seeks in the proper manner receives, whoever searches eagerly finds, whoever knocks insistently on the door will have it opened to him. Moreover, one seeks rightly who seeks things that bring salvation and seeks them with a faith

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84, who interpret 'pearls' as 'religious truth,' but point to *Didache* ix, where 'pearls' are interpreted as the Eucharist.

- 11 In his paraphrases on the dominical saying about the mystery of the kingdom hidden in parables (Matt 13:11-12; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10), Erasmus rationalizes and de-mystifies the nature of the arcane knowledge in the Matthean and Markan passages – the learner is taught what is appropriate to his stage of development – though in the Lukan paraphrase the mystery appears predominantly as a gift to the initiates from which outsiders are to be excluded. For Matthew see 13:11-12 below, for Mark *CWE* 49 57, and for the view represented in these paraphrases 1 Cor 3:1-3 and Heb 5:12-6:3.

that trusts; one searches rightly who searches with unflagging zeal; one knocks in the proper way who arouses the divine goodness through godly works.

If you do not immediately receive what you are seeking, still do not lose faith in the kindness of your Father.¹² He will give when there is need, and as much as is needed, if only you persevere. For God responds as readily to the entreaties of his sons as a father does to those of his children. Among you what father is so inhuman that if his child asks for something useful – bread, for instance – he does not give him what he seeks, but instead of bread he hands him a stone? or if, for victuals, he should ask for a fish, offers a serpent instead of a fish? Certainly you would refuse if the child were asking for a stone or a serpent or a thing that was otherwise harmful. You, therefore, though inclined by nature to evil and in other respects also generally evil, still fulfil your moral duty in this respect, that you know how to give useful things to your children – doing so by the impulse of nature, not through virtue; how much more will your heavenly Father do this, who is good by nature?¹³ Will he not give his good things to you, his children, if you have stirred his benevolence with your ardent and steadfast prayers?

Moreover, since it would be prolix to lay down rules for every single thing pertaining¹⁴ to social intercourse, which is hurt or helped by insults or favours reciprocated in turn, I will give a general rule whose force has been implanted in everyone by nature.¹⁵ There is no one of sound mind who is not well disposed towards himself, but the common run of people is so directed by self-love that it seeks its own welfare at the cost of

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12 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 23.4 (on Matt 7:9) PG 57 312 notes that the examples in verses 9–10 are given to reassure those who may lose faith when they do not receive what they ask for.

13 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 7:11) PL 26 47C: '[In this verse] he calls the disciples evil – unless under the *persona* of the apostles the whole human race is being condemned.' Erasmus here somewhat ambiguously appears to recognize that human nature is corrupted but not totally corrupted by original sin, inasmuch as the same nature is capable of doing good. Cf the annotation on Rom 5:12 (in whom [or, in which] all have sinned) CWE 56 139–51; also *De libero arbitrio* CWE 76 23–4, 83–4, and *Hyperaspistes* 2 CWE 77 468.

14 pertaining] Added in 1535; previously omitted apparently by mistake

15 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 23.5 (on Matt 7:12) PG 57 314: 'Here he brings all things together in a brief statement, showing that virtue is compendious, easy, and known to all ... implanted in everyone by nature.' See n17 below.

another's woes. You must not do likewise. Rather, prove yourselves to be towards others the kind of person you would like others to be towards you. There is no one in the grip of ignorance who does not want to be instructed. There is no one who, when he falls into error, does not want¹⁶ to be admonished lovingly and in secret rather than to be publicly exposed. There is no one in need who does not want to be relieved; no one wants his good name disparaged; no one wants to be cheated. Therefore, from this common feeling that has been placed in every mortal, let each one determine what sort of person he should be in relation to his neighbour. He should not do to another what he would not want done to himself; he should do to another what he would be glad to have done to himself. This is the sum and substance of all that the Law and the Prophets teach. If someone, either through lack of leisure or ignorance of letters, is unable to read through these texts, at least everyone has within himself a rule by which to guide his actions, provided he prefers to obey reason rather than his desires.¹⁷

If these things seem difficult to those who love this world, if you see the great majority of people following in the opposite direction, do not let anything unsettle your mind. Access to the best things is difficult. Be more concerned about where the way leads than whether it has an easy entry. Imagine two gates, the one narrow, to which the only access is by a narrow path, a path that soon leads to eternal life; the other wide and open, to which a broad road offers access to everyone, but a road that soon leads to eternal ruin. Enter, then, by the narrow gate and choose rather to make your way with the few to eternal life than with the many to eternal destruction. Since the broad way restrains no one with the laws of piety, since it attracts with the things that delight the bodily senses, and that caress the desires of the mind, it easily entices many people to itself; however, after they have been charmed for a short time, it sends them through the wide gate into unspeakable calamities, and those who have been deceived by false goods it hands over to true evils.

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16 does not want] First in 1524; in 1522 'wants,' *non* omitted by mistake

17 Cf the notion in classical antiquity of the *communis sensus*: a moral sense, inherent in everyone, leading, under the guidance of reason, to appropriate action; cf eg Cicero *De oratore* 2.16.68 and *De republica* 3.22.33. See also the *Ratio* Holborn 264:13-15, where Erasmus speaks of 'images imposed on the minds of both the godly and the profane.' The classical expression, used in this paragraph, is rendered by 'common feeling.'

By contrast, how narrow is the gate that leads to life, how constrained the way! For it offers nothing to soothe the flesh; it is harsh to many. It immediately casts in one's way the things that are burdensome even to nature: poverty, fasting, vigils, endurance of wrongs suffered, chastity, sobriety. This gate does not receive those who are swollen with the glory of this world; it does not receive people who are puffed up with pride; it does not receive those who are bulging with extravagance; it does not receive those who are laden with the baggage of riches; it does not receive those who are dragging along with them other resources of this world. It receives only the naked, and those who have been freed from all the desires of this world, and those who have, as it were, stripped off their bodies and been rarefied into spirit. From this it follows that it is found by the few because it is only beheld by cleansed eyes to which spiritual goods are manifest.

You, however, are in no danger from those who make their way towards death, sporting with lust, excess, pride, greed, and the other desires, and laughing their insane laugh – for to follow them is not error but madness. Rather, it is against those who become your companions, having the appearance of godliness,¹⁸ though they are its enemies, that you must be on your guard. They talk of God the Father, the gospel teaching, the kingdom of heaven. Their clothing is plain, their faces are pale with fasting, their bodies are emaciated, they pray at length, they give to the poor,¹⁹ they instruct the people and interpret the holy books, and they come to you under the guise of these things, as if clothed in the skin of a sheep, though beneath they are ravenous wolves and manglers of the gospel flock.²⁰ There would be no problem distinguishing a wolf from a sheep if each spoke with its own voice and came wearing its own skin. But what are you to do when a wolf, pretending to be a sheep with a sheep's wool, with a sheep's voice, creeps into the sheepfold, not to become a sheep, but to tear the sheep to pieces more cruelly. The wolf changes his voice, even professes the name

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18 Cf 2 Tim 3:5. Erasmus adopts the interpretation of Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 23.6 (on Matt 7:15) PG 57 315–16: the false prophets are not heretics but those who put on 'the appearance of virtue.' Chrysostom promised easy detection: false prophets are unwilling to endure the toil of the narrow way; cf the paraphrase just below (on 7:16).

19 Cf the *Gloss* (on 7:15), commenting on the appearance of righteousness put on by some: 'They fast, they pray, they give alms ...'

20 With this almost undisguised attack on monks and monasticism compare Erasmus' comments in the *Enchiridion* CWE 66 20–3, and the *De contemptu mundi* 12 CWE 66 172–5.

of Christ, professes the gospel doctrine, but only in order to sprinkle the poisons of his heresy on the unwary. He feigns the works of godliness so he can more effectively use the simplicity of others for his own desires. Therefore you must take care to beware of these ones, you whom I have chosen as the guardians and shepherds of my flock.

You will easily detect the illusion in their pretences if you look more closely, not at name and clothing, but at the deeds themselves that reveal a dishonest mind. For even if they teach well, nevertheless they do not practise the very thing they teach. It is the produce peculiar to each tree that by its taste reveals the root. If you observe their lives and character more attentively, you will find them to be self-pleasing, everywhere serving their own advantage, arrogant, vindictive, envious, disparaging, thirsting for glory, often both devoted to their bellies and acting completely in their own interests, rather than in the interest of the flock or of the gospel. I have set out what the fruits of the gospel tree are,²¹ namely, a heart that is foreign to all pride; a heart that is gentle and not at all striving after revenge; a heart that has contempt for all the pleasures of this world; a heart that has contempt for wealth and hungers and thirsts for gospel godliness; a heart that is prompt and ready to do good to all; a heart that is free from all desires, looking only to God; a heart that rejects no affliction provided it promotes the gospel teaching; a heart that for its good works looks for no reward in this world – neither glory, nor pleasure, nor riches; a heart that wishes well even to those who bear ill will, and that strives to do good even to those who do harm. Only the one who really and truly displays these fruits is a gospel tree.

Accordingly, those who boast that they are prophets and recommend themselves with this claim, those who with their religious apparel pose as sheep, whereas in disposition they are wolves, must be judged by their own fruit. Do not look at the boughs and the bark. They are often identical on the wild and the tame, on the wholesome and the poisonous. The fruit when it is tasted indicates the kind of sap that runs in the tree. If in these you see greed, arrogance, envy, lust for revenge, hypocrisy, and other things of this sort that are diametrically opposed to the fruits of the gospel mind, do not suppose that any good fruit will come forth from these same trees. Who of us is so insane as to gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles, that is, the sweetest fruits from rough and bitter shrubs? It is the same thing

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21 Erasmus now recapitulates, recalling especially 5:1-11, which include the beatitudes.

with people. The tree that is truly good and that produces sweet juice in the root of the mind puts forth good fruits.

By contrast, a truly bad tree, no matter what kind of leaves it has, no matter what sort its bark, nevertheless produces bad fruit. These things cannot be reversed, since nature is clearly against this. Neither can a person with an upright mind keep from expressing by his actions the integrity of his disposition, nor again can a person with a corrupted mind display those things by his actions that prove a man truly good. If with illusions and the appearance of holiness he sometimes deceives unwary people, he is not able to deceive God at least. Accordingly, let those who are good because of their disguise take care to abandon their deception and become good. For it is possible in our world for a bad tree to become a good tree.²² But if a person perseveres in perverse pretence, he should fear that he will suffer from a vengeful God that which the unfruitful tree suffers from its cultivator. What does it suffer? It is cut down and cast into the fire. Thus, in the kingdom of God whoever either brings forth no fruit, or produces fruit unworthy of his profession, unless he changes his mind and repents, will be cast into eternal fire.

Therefore, by this sign will you tell them apart, namely, by their fruits, and if you detect evil ones among them, you will remove them from the care of the flock, you will not receive them into the kingdom of heaven, and you will regard them not as Christians but as enemies. This is not to hurt them, but to be careful that they do not harm the flock by being mixed in with it. There is nothing more harmful than ungodliness to which the false appearance of sanctity adds credibility and authority. Not everyone who professes me with words only will be considered worthy of the kingdom of heaven, for it is not the name that makes a Christian, but the life. Nor will I immediately acknowledge as disciples those who address me with the pious-sounding words 'Lord, Lord,' when they really serve very different lords: Mammon, the belly, ambition. Whom then will I deem worthy of the kingdom of heaven? Those who are truly divorced from earthly desires and obey from the heart the will of my Father who is in heaven, whose will I am proclaiming to you. For whatever I teach you is from him.

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22 Erasmus may be referring to the process of grafting; compare the paraphrase on Rom 11:16–24 CWE 42 65–7. The thought, however, evidently reflects Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 23:7 (on Matt 7:17–18) PG 57 316: 'Christ does not say that a bad person cannot be changed, and a good person cannot fall, but that as long as one perseveres in evil one cannot bear good fruit. A bad person can change and turn towards virtue.'

On the day when rewards are allotted to each according to his merits, and the sheep are separated from the goats²³ – not now by human judgment that is often deceived, but by divine judgment – on that day my name will be so far from benefiting those who are lacking my spirit and deeds that not even the things that now cause them to have a sort of divine and superhuman aspect will profit them. When they see that eternal life has already been prepared for those who have followed the gospel teaching, and thus proven themselves to be my true disciples, and again, when they see that eternal punishment has been prepared for those who will be removed from the company of the true disciples, many will come terrified with fear, and they will long then to be acknowledged before God,²⁴ although before the people they pretended to be distinguished and outstanding disciples of Christ and heralds of the gospel. They will say to me: 'Lord, Lord, do you not recognize your servants? Did we not through your name predict the things that are to come? Did we not cast out demons through your name? Did we not raise the dead through your name? Did we not drive out poisons and expel diseases through your name? Did we not work many other wonderful and amazing²⁵ miracles through your name, and by these deeds glorify your name? With so many proofs have we shown that we are yours, and now you do not acknowledge us?' Then they will hear such a response from me: 'Indeed, I have never acknowledged you, not even at the time when you were doing those things. I hear "Lord, Lord," but I have never sensed the heart of faithful servants in you. I hear my name being mentioned repeatedly, but I have never discovered my spirit in you. I hear of the miracles done through my name, but I do not hear of those particular and peculiar fruits by which a disciple of Christ is truly recognized. Accordingly, since not even then were you mine when under my name you were hawking yourselves before the people but were serving the devil under the pretence of professing me, depart now from me and go to him from whose spirit you have drunk, whose will you have obeyed.'

Regardless of the name under which one has acted, whoever has done an injustice will not be a sharer in my kingdom. Just as a tree's fruit cannot have a superior taste unless the root has superior sap, so a building, however

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23 Cf Matt 25:31-3; 'goats' (here, and normally in English translation of the Greek *ἐρίφια* in 25:33 [AV, DV, RSV, NRSV]) renders *hoedos* (*haedos*) 'kid,' 'young goat,' as both Erasmus and the Vulgate translate it. Cf Luke 15:29 and the paraphrase on it CWE 48 86.

24 Cf Matt 10:32-3; Luke 12:8-9.

25 many ... and amazing] Added in 1534

magnificent from the outside and rising however high, will not be strong unless it rests upon a strong and solid foundation. Whoever has drunk of my spirit,²⁶ that is, unadulterated affection, and looks only to the glory of God, is a tree with a good root. So a person who does not rest upon the insubstantial things of this world, but upon the true goods of the soul, and who perseveres in these things constantly, wisely builds an edifice that will never crumble.²⁷ Accordingly, whoever hears my words, and does not merely hear them but lets them sink into his innermost affections, so that he expresses what he has learned through his actions, that one, I say, is like a thoughtful and prudent man who, in order to construct a solid and strong building, first of all looks to find a solid and unmovable foundation to which to entrust a substructure that will withstand all the assaults of storms. To be sure, when the sky is serene any building whatever stands easily, but winter proves a structure's strength. At one time the force of the rain falls and strikes upon it, at another time the rivers swollen by rain shake it with their mighty onrush, then again the fury of winds pounds against it, and yet, though buffeted in so many ways, it stands unmoved. Why is this so? Because it rests upon a solid foundation. The builder foresaw that these storms would arise, and for this reason set it upon solid rock; with its support he had no fear at all of those assaults.

On the other hand, whoever hears my words, but only hears them, and neither transfuses them into his affections, nor expresses them in actions, is like an imprudent builder who does not foresee the coming storms and places his building upon sand, obviously a shifting and utterly untrustworthy foundation. Later there rushes upon the house the force of the rain, the violence of the floods, the blast of the wind, and the house is wrenched away and removed from its foundations and falls with a great crash. Why is it so? Because the structure was indeed splendid in appearance, but it was resting on a useless foundation. Let your first care therefore be for the foundation. Fasting, almsgiving, prayers, squalid clothing, and, finally, miracles, these are indeed like a splendid building. If, however, the heart of the one who does these things looks for the empty praise of people, or for gain, or pleasure, everything will come crashing down if ever the raging storm of temptations rushes against it. On the other hand a person, whose affection has been fixed on the teaching and promises of the gospel, and who awaits from God alone the reward for deeds rightly done, will stand firm and unbroken against all the injustices of evil persons, against the fiercest persecutions of the ungodly, against the scoffing and the snares of heretics,

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²⁶ Cf 1 Cor 12:13.

²⁷ The language may reflect the image of the wise builder of 1 Cor 3:10-15.

finally, against all the machinations of Satan, against death itself, until that day when perseverance, the conqueror of evils, wins its crown.²⁸

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at this new kind of teaching. They had heard nothing like it from the scribes and Pharisees who, if in their customary way they add anything to the Mosaic law in order to make themselves more admired by the people, usually issue some weak little ordinances about washing hands before eating, about washing the body after returning home from the marketplace, about washing cups,²⁹ about paying the tithe from a crop of mint and rue.³⁰ Jesus was not teaching anything of this sort, but since he had given evidence of his power with his deeds, he was likewise³¹ showing himself similar in his teaching, forbidding with authority what the Law had allowed, and demanding what the Law had not demanded. The Law had allowed divorce for any reason whatever; Jesus forbade all divorce unless adultery has been committed. The Law only forbids killing; Jesus demanded that no one should be angry with a brother.³² Thus he easily showed himself not only an interpreter of the Law, but its master, not its servant, but its author. There was, finally, a certain lively vigour evident in perfect teaching and sort of native power of truth that breathed upon a docile and simple multitude, which had found nothing like this in their own scribes and Pharisees.

Chapter 8

Having said these lofty things on the mountain, not to just anyone, but chiefly to his disciples and those who through ardour of spirit had been able to follow them, Jesus then descended to the lowliness of the commingling

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28 At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Erasmus' paraphrase reflects the change in voice from the *persona* of Christ back to Matthew's own. See chapter 5 n25.

29 Cf Mark 7:3–4.

30 Cf Luke 11:42.

31 likewise] Added in 1534

32 According to Erasmus, Bédæ called this statement 'thrice and four times heretical,' objecting that it was diametrically opposed to Scripture, since the Law forbade many other things as well. In reply Erasmus sneered at Bédæ as the 'proto-theologian,' and pointed out that he, Erasmus, was merely illustrating the fundamental principle that the Law was fulfilled in Christ, and he referred to his exposition of Matt 5:21–2 (*Supputatio* LB IX 578D–9C). His earlier response was less acidic: the statement referred to the Law as understood 'carnally' by the 'crass' Jews (*Divinationes ad notata Bedae* LB IX 463D–E).

crowd, in which were many who were sluggish, feeble, lame, and sick, and who had to be enticed to the pursuit of heavenly things even by physical blessings. Indeed, Jesus' healing of these people was an image of the very thing he was accomplishing through his teaching – curing the diseases of the soul. The one lent credibility and authority to the other: we are more willing to believe someone we love, and love is won by kindnesses; a person's speech easily has weight with us when we perceive that he is so powerful in deeds.¹ Consequently, after Jesus left the mountain and came to the plain, people came to him in various groups from all directions, so that the miracles he was to perform would have more witnesses.

Therefore, when a large audience of spectators had gathered,² behold a man came forth providing the occasion for a miracle. At the same time, Jesus was, by means of a sort of type, about to teach those suffering from leprosy of the soul from where and with what faith they ought to seek a remedy.³ For a man came forward whose body was infected with leprosy. This disease is regarded by the Jews as particularly abhorrent, and it is believed to be beyond the skill of doctors to cure. Judgment concerning this disease had been delegated to the priests, as though it belonged to the realm of the sacred, and with strange and varied observances the priests investigated whether someone was truly afflicted with leprosy.⁴ It was forbidden for the condemned to mix in normal society, as it was to touch someone contaminated with this disease.⁵ Therefore this man, condemned by the priests and unclean with unmistakable leprosy, dared to come to Jesus, the purifier of all. His yearning for health drove out shame; the already proven kindness of Jesus toward everyone added confidence; the many examples of others who had returned home healthy gave hope. And so, after he had fallen on his knees and worshipped⁶ Jesus, he said: 'Lord, if you are

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1 Erasmus gives a psychological turn to a theme found in Nicholas of Lyra (on 8:1) that the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is confirmed by the miracles described in chapter 8.

2 For images of the theatre, frequent in Erasmus, see CWE 49 38 and CWE 50 108. The image occurs at this point also in Chrysostom's exposition *In Matt hom* 25.1 (on Matt 8:1-2) PG 57 328.

3 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 25.2 (on Matt 8:3) PG 57 329 shows in the case of the leper that the healing of the body was a type of the healing of the soul.

4 Cf Lev 13.

5 Cf Lev 13:45-6; Num 5:1-3.

6 'Fallen on his knees and worshipped': The paraphrase here attempts to clarify the meaning of the Greek *προσκυνέω*, reflecting Erasmus' explanation of the word in his annotation on Luke 4:7 (*si procidens adoraveris*), where he

willing, you can make me clean.’ What would a proud Pharisee or a Mosaic priest do here? He would have abhorred the man as unclean, and he would not have deigned even to speak with him. But Jesus, presenting the image of the good shepherd, was delighted by the faith as well as by the great modesty of the man, who did not dare ask to be cleansed unless the very one who knows what is expedient⁷ was willing, though he nevertheless did not doubt that Jesus could if he would. Jesus did not reject the man as unclean, but stretching out his hand he touched him, in this respect, to be sure, violating the letter of the Law.⁸ He added a statement to show at once both the goodness of his will and the greatness of his power: ‘Since you indeed believe that I can if I will, I am willing: be clean.’ The moment these words were spoken, the man’s skin changed and the disease left him, as the people witnessed the event.

Then, in order to increase belief in the miracle, and at the same time to snatch from the priests the opportunity for charging falsely that he was assuming authority to judge leprosy, and that he wanted to take for himself the profit that customarily returned to the priests from those who were cleansed of leprosy, Jesus said to him: ‘In the meantime, see that you do not tell anyone that you are cleansed of leprosy.’⁹ For it is not your job to judge yourself,¹⁰ nor do I assume for myself what belongs to the priests. Therefore first go to a priest and show yourself to him, and if he who before

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notes that the Vulgate had expressed the Greek with two words, *procidens adoraveris* ‘falling down, worshipped.’ He writes: ‘The addition of *procidens* [‘falling down’] was intended to clarify. *προσκυνέω* is “to worship” but with a physical gesture.’

7 expedient] First in 1535; previously ‘expedient for each.’ For the image of the good shepherd see John 10:11.

8 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 25.2 (on Matt 8:3) PG 57 329 also alludes to Jesus’ violation of the Law, showing that it was deliberate: ‘Why, when healing him by will and word, did he add a touch of the hand? For no other reason, I think, than to indicate that he is not subject to the Law, but is set over the Law.’ The subsequent allusion to the goodness and power of God is commonplace in Erasmus; cf CWE 50 109 n36, and chapter 2 n13 above.

9 The appropriate offerings are stipulated at Lev 14:1–32. That the priests profited from the offerings may be inferred from, eg Matt 21:12–16, Mark 11:15, Luke 19:45–8, and John 2:13–16, on which see the paraphrase CWE 46 41–2 and n32.

10 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 25.2 (on Matt 8:4) PG 57 330 explains: ‘There was an ancient law that a leper who was cleansed should not assume authority for judging his cleanness, but he should show himself to a priest and present the evidence to him, so that on the basis of the priest’s judgment he might

had pronounced you leprous now pronounces you clean, then offer the gift that Moses commanded should be offered by those who, as it turned out, were cleansed of leprosy. Thus, later, they will not slanderously charge you on the grounds that you mixed with the crowd, and me on the grounds that I was not able to give true health. Their acceptance of the gift as if from a person who is clean will refute them if later out of hatred for me they begin to bring false charges concerning what has occurred. For if you were not leprous before, why did they remove you from the camp?¹¹ If you are not clean now, why did they accept the ceremonial gift from you as if from a cleansed person?' Jesus wanted the people to witness how much the leprous man's faith had profited him, and how Jesus had removed all of his disease with a simple word, so that they might hear his teaching with the same faith and be cured of their souls' diseases.

After he had taught the Jews by this deed that sincere faith is the easiest route to salvation, so next he taught in the case of the centurion that, provided faith worthy of the gospel is present, not even the gentiles have been precluded from salvation. Consequently, when he entered Capernaum, a town not far from the Sea of Gennesareth, within the border of Zebulun and Naphtali,¹² there came to him a certain centurion, one of a class of men the Jews abhorred on two grounds: first, because they were commonly¹³ uncircumcised and alien to the Mosaic law; second, because their way of life was generally disreputable. But our most excellent Jesus, who had come to heal everyone, did not reject even this man.¹⁴ The centurion made a request, saying: 'Lord, I have a servant at home who is very dear to me

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be included among the clean.' On being judged clean by the priest, see Lev 13-14.

11 'Camp': *castris*; following the Vulgate reading of Lev 13:46

12 The geographical details here correspond to those given in the paraphrase on 4:13, which, by defining 'Galilee of the gentiles,' provided the background for the theme that the gospel was passing to the gentiles, the theme that Erasmus has now introduced into the paraphrastic narrative of the centurion (8:5-13). Here Erasmus avoids the term 'Sea of Galilee,' reserving the term 'Galilee' to designate political boundaries: 'the sea that . . . borders the two Galilees'; cf the annotation on 4:15 (*Galilaea gentium*), where Erasmus calls the lake 'Gennesareth.' In his annotation on 14:34 (*in terram Genezar*) Erasmus notes that there were two names for the same lake, and that the region bordering the lake was called Gennesareth. Josephus *Jewish Wars* 3.10.7 says that the lake took its name from the name of the adjoining country.

13 commonly] Added in 1534

14 For Erasmus' consistently negative portrait of soldiers see the colloquies 'Military Affairs' and 'The Soldier and the Carthusian,' with Craig Thompson's

since he is faithful and useful because of his services. He is now confined to bed by paralysis – totally useless; and not only can he be of no use to me, but, now on the point of death, he is also severely tormented by the disease that is raging most cruelly. Moreover, this is the kind of disease that, while it is dangerous and harmful, also does not readily respond to the skill and care of doctors.’ Jesus was delighted by the faith of the man, who did not doubt that he was able to cure with a word even someone not there, and so that he might render the man’s exceptional faith and supreme humility more manifest to everyone, he answered: ‘I will come and heal him.’ To this the centurion said: ‘Lord, I am not a Jew, I am a centurion, and on both grounds detested by the Jews; I am therefore not worthy to have you come under my roof, and be defiled by my company. There is no need for you to be present in body, only say the word and – such is your power – my servant will be healed immediately. You have angels to whom you delegate duties of this sort. I draw this inference from my own circumstances.¹⁵ I have a prefect to whom I am subject, whose commands I obey, and he does not have to do everything himself. He has only to delegate with authority. I, in turn, have soldiers who are subject to my authority, through whom I perform tasks that are beneath me. I simply order and they obey my orders. I order one man to go somewhere and he departs; I order another to come and he comes. Then to my slave, over whom I have the right of ownership, I say “Do this, or that,” and without delay he does what he has been ordered. If my servants thus obey me, a worthless, puny man and a sinner, how much more would your servants obey your commands?’

Hearing these things, Jesus marvelled, not because he was unaware of the man’s faith, but to render him admirable to all. He turned to the Jews who were attending, and as though rebuking them for their disbelief, said: ‘I declare to you, up to now I have not found such great faith in my own Israelite people as I have found in this foreigner, who does not know the prophets, nor has he received our teaching, nor seen miracles.

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comments in CWE 39 53–63 and 328–43. ‘Our most excellent Jesus’ renders the Latin *optimus Jesus*.

- 15 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 8:9) PL 26 51C: ‘The centurion wanted to show that the Lord was able to do what he wished not only by his presence, but through the ministry of angels.’ Angels appear repeatedly in Matthew’s Gospel as ‘ministers,’ cf 4:11, 13:39–49, 18:10, and, especially appropriate to a centurion’s world, 26:53. For angels elsewhere as ‘servants’ see *Modus orandi Deum* CWE 70 193 and 176 and n233; also chapter 18 n12 below. For a compendious discussion on angels see *Ecclesiastes* IV ASD V-5 376:293–378:326; also CWE 50 82 n26.

You flatter yourselves that you are the sons of the patriarchs whom God loved,¹⁶ that you are God's special people¹⁷ to whom this salvation seems especially to have been promised.¹⁸ But I declare to you, many people will come from every direction, from the ends of the earth, people whom you abhor as foreign. They will break in¹⁹ through faith and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; and because of their gospel faith your fathers will acknowledge them as legitimate children, and they will summon them to their table as companions of eternal happiness. By contrast, the sons of the kingdom, who in respect to physical kinship are descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, will not be received into that happy feast because of their disbelief, but will be expelled into outer darkness, for they were previously unwilling to behold the offered light. There they will pay the penalty for their faithlessness, weeping and gnashing their teeth, understanding now too late what great happiness they have forfeited through their own malice. Envy will sharpen their pain, when they see foreigners admitted to the happiness and honour that was promised to them.' Such were the words Jesus spoke to the Jews. In order to raise confidence in these words by means of a miracle, he turned to the centurion and said: 'Go, and just as you have believed, so be it done to you.' By this he was clearly indicating that healing was not dependent on tribe or clan or on other claims, but on faith alone, which he found lacking in most Jews. The deed followed the word, for it was discovered that the centurion's servant had been suddenly freed from his disease at that very moment, so no one could suppose that it was done by coincidence or by the skill of the doctors. For just as no one is suddenly freed from leprosy in the normal course of nature, so paralysis does not suddenly leave a person.

Having performed these and other wonders, Jesus²⁰ withdrew from the crowd for a short time, and entered the house that Simon Peter and Andrew shared, accompanied by James and John.²¹ There he learned that Peter's mother-in-law was suffering from so severe a fever that she lay in bed. Asked to heal her, Jesus did not delay, but taking the woman's

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¹⁶ Cf eg Deut 4:37; Hos 11:1; Mal 1:2.

¹⁷ Cf Deut 14:2, 26:18.

¹⁸ Cf Isa 33:2, 62:11; also John 4:22 and the paraphrase on the verse CWE 46 58 and n42.

¹⁹ Cf Matt 11:12; Luke 16:16 – an image pervasive in Erasmus' work, cf eg CWE 49 94, CWE 50 7 n37, CWE 66 56, CWE 70 136.

²⁰ Jesus] Added in 1534; previously 'he,' implied in the verb

²¹ Cf Mark 1:29.

hand he raised her up and in an instant the fever was completely gone, her vigour and alacrity returned, so that she served them²² while they took their food. Thus, the fever left no trace of itself in her, whereas weakness and nausea persist for quite some time in those whom a doctor's skill has revived from the illness.²³ When night was now approaching, a densely packed crowd gathered at the door, hoping that he would resume his good deeds after he had eaten. When he came out they brought him countless people suffering from various diseases, including demoniacs. Casting out the spirits and driving out the diseases, he healed them all, here also living up to the meaning of his name.²⁴ There was no form of sickness so foul or so horrible that Jesus avoided it; there was no disease so violent or incurable that it did not at Jesus' command immediately leave the person. He healed them all with a word, he healed them all freely. In taking away without discrimination the diseases of the body he was doing what he was going to do in taking away sins, which are the much more horrible diseases of the soul. Clearly he had come into the world for this purpose, and this was what Isaiah, speaking of him many centuries before, had predicted would come to pass: 'He of his own accord has taken upon himself our infirmities, and he has borne our diseases.' [53:4]

When Jesus had perceived that even after the sick had been healed, and though night was fast approaching (for the sun had already set) the crowd did not go away, but from all sides became more and more pressed together, he directed his disciples to prepare a boat to take him across the lake, so that at least in this way he might be free from the crowd. When the others heard this they began to go home. But as Jesus went to the shore a scribe with a somewhat uncivil persistence followed him. He wanted to be received as a disciple of the man whom he had seen the crowd regard so highly because of his power in working miracles. He did not want this so that he might follow Jesus' teaching and life, but to win glory and gain for himself from Jesus' miracles.²⁵ Therefore he approached Jesus,

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22 'them' as in the Vulgate and Erasmus' translation; cf NRSV 'him'

23 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 8:14-15) PL 26 52B: 'It is natural that after a fever ends people are more weary and sluggish, and at the start of their recovery they continue to feel the ill effects of their sickness. But the health that is bestowed by the Lord renders one instantly well.'

24 On the name of the paraphrase on 1:21 above.

25 In Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 27.2 (on Matt 8:19) PG 57 346 the 'incivility' of this man – 'rash' and 'full of audacity' – is noted, while his apparent devotion is motivated by his lust for money: 'Seeing the many signs, and the gathering crowd, he hoped to make money from the great number of miracles, and for

and said: 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' His statement was worthy of a future disciple, if only his heart had matched the statement. He presented himself freely, he offered himself without condition, and he made no excuse for a delay. Now Jesus neither rebuffed the incivility of the man, nor reproached the insincerity of his intent, but he quietly advised him that he would not be a suitable disciple, nor would he himself be an agreeable teacher. For whoever has regard for the conveniences of this world would be foolish to attach himself to someone who neither had nor sought riches or glory or the kingdom of this world, but in his heart embraced the utmost poverty,²⁶ the utmost ridicule, the utmost affliction – to such a degree that he did not possess even the things that are available to birds and beasts. He said: 'Though foxes do not have houses, nevertheless they have dug-out dens in which to hide themselves; birds though they fly at will through the air nevertheless have nests for houses in which to rest; but the Son of man is so lacking in all the supports of this world that he has nowhere even to lay his head. If such a master is pleasing to someone, let him follow me if he wishes, but let him follow with his affection, not simply with the prints of his feet.' At this the man, knowing himself, declined.

Again, when one of those who had already heard this, and had heard of the extreme poverty of Christ, human weakness had its effect, and the man sought an opportunity by some pretext to escape from Jesus' discipline. He said: 'Lord, before I follow you entirely wherever you go, let me first return home to bury my father.' On the surface the excuse appeared to be godly, but Jesus wanted to teach that everything must be regarded as secondary to the work of eternal salvation, and that every delay here is dangerous.²⁷ He did not, therefore, allow the youth, a man of good intent, but weak, to be entangled under the pretext of godliness in the matter

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this reason he desired to follow him.' Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 8:19–20) PL 26 53A: 'Seeing the greatness of the signs, he wanted to follow the Saviour so that he might obtain profit from his miraculous works.'

26 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 8:19–20) PL 26 53A paraphrases Jesus' statement to the man: 'Why do you desire to follow me on account of riches and the profits of this world, when I am so poor that I do not have even a small place to stay and I have no roof?'

27 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 27.3 (on Matt 8:22) PG 57 348: 'Jesus forbade him this, not because he was ordering him to disdain the honour owed to parents, but in order to show that we must regard nothing as more compelling than heavenly matters ... and that with all haste we must lay hold of these things and allow not even the slightest delay ... [since] it is dangerous to abandon spiritual things even for a moment.'

of settling an estate, and, while concerned with an inheritance of the most trifling value, to forfeit his heavenly inheritance.²⁸ He said: 'On the contrary, since you have dedicated yourself to a heavenly life, you have no business now with your deceased father. There are plenty of others to bury your father. Let the dead bury their dead, and those who love earthly things commend them to the earth; let those who, though alive, are dead (and even buried) inter the dead in the earth. These are alive to men;²⁹ to God they are dead. Take care that you be alive, and separate yourself from the company of the dead, if you truly want to live.'

When, therefore, Jesus had dismissed the crowd, he boarded a boat, accompanied by his disciples. During the voyage there suddenly came up a storm, and the sea became so rough that waves covered the boat. In the meantime, Jesus was sleeping, resting his head on a pillow,³⁰ depicting by a sort of riddle the great danger that threatens human affairs whenever those who have assumed the position of Christ sleep, charmed by the goods of the world. But the disciples show from where one must seek help in these storms, for, overcome with fear, they roused Christ, woke him up, and said: 'Lord, save us, we are perishing.' They still believed that he was only a man, and they did not believe they were safe unless he was awake. Accordingly, wanting to render them fearless and unconquered against all assaults of evil, however horrible, Jesus rebuked their great fear, saying: 'Why are you thus afraid, men of meagre trust?'³¹ After you had seen so many miracles

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28 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 27.3 (on Matt 8:22) PG 57 348 includes 'settling the estate' among the evils from which the young man was to be rescued: 'For following the burial, it was necessary to examine the will, to distribute the inheritance, and to do all the other things that come after that, and so by wave after wave he was going to be pulled far away from the port of truth.'

29 These are alive to men] First in 1534; previously 'To us these are dead,' probably by mistake. On the sentiment expressed here cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on 8:22) PL 26 53B: 'If the dead bury the dead, our care should be not for the dead but for the living, lest in our care for the dead, we ourselves be called the dead.' Cf also Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 27.3 (on Matt 8:22) PG 57 347 who interprets the 'dead' here as 'unbelievers.'

30 For the detail of the pillow see Mark 4:38, and for its tropological interpretation in the letter 'To the Pious Reader,' see pp 25-6 above.

31 Erasmus follows closely his own translation (from 1519), *exigua praediti fiducia* 'endowed with little faith' for the Greek *ὀλιγόπιστοι* in 8:26. In an annotation (1519-1527) on the verse (*modicae fidei*) he observes, 'We are often forced to use the word *fides* "faith," since it is a word unalterably accepted by Christians. But *fides* in Latin suggests trustworthiness, not trust, which is *fiducia*.' The annotation was omitted in 1535 and appears to be omitted in Erasmus'

and heard my teaching, you should not have been frightened by anything, as if the help of God might anywhere desert you, if only your trust does not fail you – trust, which I see is not yet so great in you as it should be.’ After thus admonishing his disciples, Jesus stood up and, to show that he was Lord of all the elements, rebuked the winds and the sea, and immediately the storm grew quiet and an amazing tranquillity followed. It was done in this way, so it would be more obvious that it was not accomplished by human strength, but by divine power; for there is nothing more deaf or more uncontrollable than a troubled sea, and nevertheless at the Lord’s command it was suddenly turned into supreme tranquillity. Accordingly, the disciples and the others who were in the boat, very much astonished at so wonderful a thing, said: ‘Who is he to have such powers? For he exhibits something altogether greater than human, since not only diseases and demons, but even the winds and sea obey his commands.’ By this image our most excellent Lord Jesus taught us that, as often as the storms of temptations³² or of persecutions rage against us, we should seek help from no other source than from him. Every tumult will be turned into tranquillity, if only he is awake within us.

Therefore, when Jesus had crossed the sea and had come into the region of the Gerasenes, behold the occasion arose for a great wonder: there came up two men who had been subject now for a long time to the worst demons. The men either wandered through deserted places³³ or stayed among the tombs of the dead, which are often constructed beside the public road.³⁴ So great was the ferocity of these men that they could not be held by any chains but they broke all their bonds³⁵ and attacked travellers,

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Annotations on the New Testament: The Gospels ed Anne Reeve (London 1986). For a major attempt to explore the semantics of faith see the annotation on Rom 1:17 (from faith unto faith) CWE 56 42–5, but cf also the paraphrase on 23:23 and chapter 23 n32.

32 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 28.1 (on Matt 8:25) PG 57 351 interprets the storm as a lesson on withstanding temptation: ‘These events were allowed to occur as training for the disciples; they prefigured the temptations that would assail them.’ Cf the *Gloss* (on 8:25): ‘In our trials we must arouse Jesus by prayers.’ With Erasmus’ brief allusion to the Christological indications of the event, compare Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 28.1 (on Matt 8:27) PG 57 352: ‘His sleep . . . indicated that he was a man; the sea and the tranquillity showed he was God.’

33 Cf Luke 8:29.

34 In classical antiquity cemeteries normally lined the roads leading out of cities; cf OCD 307 ‘cemeteries.’

35 Cf Mark 5:3–4; Luke 8:29.

so that it was unsafe for anyone to journey that way. No one dared to bring them to Jesus, which, as I have recounted,³⁶ was done for some, but the silent power of Jesus drew them against their will. The impious spirits were tormented, and so unbearable for them was the divine power that, conscious of their guilt, they felt a certain new and hidden torment. Even before Jesus spoke to them they were afraid that the day had now arrived when they would be consigned to the depths of Tartarus,³⁷ to be afflicted with eternal punishments, and they would not be allowed thereafter to be troublesome to men. Therefore, torment and fear extorted from them against their will a cry witnessing to the divine power in Christ.³⁸ And so they cried out through the mouths of the wretched men: 'What have you to do with us, Jesus, Son of God? Surely you have not come here to torment us before it is time? We know what calamity deservedly awaits us, but allow us to win at least a reprieve. Surely that day will come to us in due time. We seek a delay, not acquittal.' Not far from where these things were taking place a large herd of swine was feeding. The demons, therefore, feeling themselves very hard pressed by divine power, and determined not to depart without working some mischief, begged Jesus, saying: 'If you absolutely will not allow us to remain in this abode, at least allow us to move from here into the swine, unclean and abhorrent animals.' As soon as Jesus had permitted them to do so – for it was enough for him to have regard for human salvation – the multitude of demons immediately departed into the herd of swine. And behold at once the entire herd, seized with madness, was driven headlong from the mountain into the sea, and perished there in the water.

Jesus allowed this so that he might at one and the same time show the extraordinary malice of the demons, and provide an occasion for spread-

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³⁶ Cf Matt 8:16.

³⁷ In the *Paraphrase on Matthew* Erasmus generally adopts the language of his translation for words commonly designating 'hell': in the Greek of Matthew γέεννα and ᾗδης, the former transliterated in Latin as *gehenna*, the latter rendered by *infern*. In 16:18, however, the paraphrase interprets *infern* as the *regnum tartareum* 'Tartarean kingdom,' while in 10:28 *gehenna* is amplified as *aeternum exitium* 'eternal destruction.' Here in the paraphrase on 8:29, where the language of hell is not found in the biblical narrative, Erasmus has used the classical *Tartarus*; cf the paraphrase on 13:14 and n18, and chapter 3 n41. For *Tartarus* elsewhere in Erasmus, see the paraphrase on Acts 2:24 CWE 50 19 and n70 and *Psalms* CWE 64 83–6.

³⁸ Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on 8:30–1) PL 26 54A notes that the demons' cry was not a willing confession, but was extorted from them; moreover, they believed the time had come when they were to be judged, and they feared the torments.

ing the report of the miracle,³⁹ for when the swineherds had seen this horrible spectacle they fled in terror; they entered the city of Gadara,⁴⁰ reported to the citizens what they had seen, what had happened to the demoniacs (men well known by report) to whom sanity had returned, and what had happened to the herd of swine. At their story consternation seized the whole city of the Gadarenes, who came out to meet Jesus, fearing that he might come to them. They saw that the swine had been destroyed, they saw the two men, naked before, now clothed, mad before, now sane, wild before, now so calm that they sat at Jesus' feet, acknowledging the author of their salvation. But since the people were dull in heart and evil, they feared Jesus' power more than they loved his goodness, and they considered the loss of the swine of more importance than the healing of the men. They came up to Jesus and begged him to depart from their borders. Yet if they had truly known him they would have begged him with all their might to deign to come into their borders, to do in their hearts what he had done for the two demoniacs. In fact, the character of their lives is revealed by the swine, for the demons demanded the swine as substitutes for the men. Therefore Jesus taught them nothing, content with frightening them. Nevertheless, he has taught us by this image that no disease of the mind is so fierce that one should despair of healing, if one approaches Jesus. For there are certain desires so unconstrained, uncontrollable, and indomitable that they drive the one they have possessed to poisoning, to murder, to parricide, and other unspeakable crimes. Sometimes they even impel a person to such a point of insanity that he takes his own life. No mortal art is able to cure these things; only Jesus is able to give health, if he will deign to come to them. Nor should any-

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39 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on 8:32-3) PL 26 54B-C: 'The Saviour permitted the demons [to enter the swine] to offer an opportunity to people for salvation, for when the swineherds saw this they at once announced it to the city.'

40 The manuscript tradition in each of the three synoptic accounts of this incident (Matt 8:28; Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26) offers three variants for the name of the place: the region of the Gadarenes, of the Gergasenes, of the Gerasenes (see Metzger *Textual Commentary* 18-19, where 'Gadarenes' is taken as the preferred reading). In fact, Gadara and Gerasa were two separate towns, both east of the Jordan, Gadara about six miles south-east of the Sea of Galilee, Gerasa about thirty miles south-east of the Sea (cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* [AB] 101). As his annotation on the verse (*Gerasenorum*) indicates, Erasmus was puzzled by the evidence at hand, though he thought it likely that Gerasa and Gadara were the same place. In his translation he followed his Greek manuscript which read 'Gergasenes'; in the paraphrase he opts for ambiguity: 'the region of the Gerasenes' just above, here 'the city of Gadara.'

one despair: Jesus will deign to come, if only they will in turn go to meet him.⁴¹

Chapter 9

Therefore, refusing to give something holy to dogs or to cast pearls before swine,¹ Jesus boarded a boat and again crossed the sea and returned to his own² city, that is, Capernaum, for it was there that he made his home at the time.³ When, therefore, he entered the house, many people rushed to him, among whom were even teachers of the Law from Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem,⁴ and sitting⁵ he taught them while the scribes and teachers sat before him. When so many had assembled that the house was now packed, and even the entrance court could not hold the huge crowd,⁶ certain people brought a man in the grip of a paralysis so complete that he was carried, along with the bed on which he was lying, by four porters – more truly a corpse than a man. Accordingly, since they knew that Jesus was within, and since entry was blocked by the crowd, they climbed onto the roof, removed some tiles, and through the hole let down the pallet

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41 Erasmus frequently warned against despair: see the paraphrase on Acts 2:37 CWE 50 22 and n88; also the *Enchiridion* CWE 66 109–10, and for a more extended discussion the *De immensa Dei misericordia* and *De praeparatione ad mortem* CWE 70 78–83 and 439–46.

1 Cf Matt 7:6.

2 his own] Added in 1534

3 The narrative of this chapter borrows heavily from the other Synoptic Gospels. That 'his own city' (9:1) was Capernaum and that Jesus made a home there is derived from Mark 2:1. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 29.1 (on Matt 9:1) PG 57 357 also takes the phrase 'his own city' as a reference to Capernaum; Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 9:1) PL 26 54D, however, says the city is Nazareth, and likewise the *Gloss* on the verse.

4 Cf Luke 5:17.

5 That Jesus was sitting might be inferred from the Lukan parallel (5:17), but Erasmus no doubt observed that in Matthew Jesus is represented as sitting when he teaches; cf 5:1, 26:55. In Acts speakers follow the tradition of Greek orators and stand (cf eg 1:15, 2:14, 13:16). In ecclesiastical history the *cathedra* of the bishop implies sitting as the appropriate posture of the teacher, but preaching encouraged standing. The paraphrases on Acts reflect the ambiguity (cf on 2:14 CWE 50 17 and on 16:32 CWE 50 104 where the jail is the *cathedra* for Paul as he instructs his catechumen). Here in Matthew the paraphrase imposes on the biblical text the posture of rabbinic authority.

6 Cf Mark 2:2.

on ropes along with the paralysed man before Jesus' feet.⁷ Jesus was not offended by the porters'⁸ brash insistence, but rather approved the intensity of their faith (although the faith of the sick man, who either ordered himself to be thus lowered or who allowed it, must have been no less intense).⁹ He turned to the one lying there, and so that he might again and again commend faith to those standing nearby, said: 'Be of good cheer, son, your sins are forgiven you,' first freeing from disease that part of him from which his bodily disease originated.¹⁰ Nevertheless, with unheard-of gentleness he called the man 'son,' a man sadly suffering in both body and soul; thus tacitly reproaching the Pharisees and scribes for their haughtiness and arrogance.¹¹

While the crowd was quietly marvelling, some of the scribes, who remembered that God said in Holy Scripture: 'I am the one who wipes away men's sins' [Isa 43:25], not daring to murmur openly amid so many admirers, were saying silently to themselves: 'He has blasphemed God, laying claim to the power of God, though he is a man.' But Jesus, who by forgiving sins had implicitly indicated to the scribes his divine power, also made plain the same power by a special sign, showing that what each person was thinking did not escape him.¹² For this reason he responded

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7 Cf Mark 2:3-4; Luke 5:18-19.

8 porters] First in 1534; previously 'servants'

9 Though Erasmus frequently draws the details of his paraphrases on Matthew from the other Gospels, in the case of this story he had a precedent in Chrysostom, who pointedly supplements the spare information in Matthew with the details from 'the other evangelists.' Erasmus also follows Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 29.1 (on Matt 9:2) PG 57 358 in going beyond the biblical text to make a point of commending the faith of the sick man: 'The faith of the sick man was important here, for otherwise he would not have allowed himself to be lowered in this way.' Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on 9:2) PL 26 54D states emphatically that the 'faith' was that of the porters, not the paralytic.

10 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 29.1 (on Matt 9:2) PG 57 359: 'He did not immediately turn to curing his body, which was visible, but . . . he first cured what was invisible, namely, his soul, by forgiving his sins.' Chrysostom also observes (*ibid* 357-8) how this story reflects the 'gentleness' of Christ; cf the next sentence in the paraphrase.

11 Cf the *Gloss* (on 9:2): 'The humble Lord calls him "Son" whom the priests disdained to touch.'

12 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 29.2 (on Matt 9:3-4) PG 57 359: 'He not only forgives sins, but even before this he exhibits something that belonged to God alone, namely, he reveals the secrets of their hearts,' and Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 9:3-4) PL 26 55B: 'Perceiving their thoughts, the Lord shows that he is God, since he is able to know the secrets of the heart.'

to the things they were saying to themselves in silent reflection.¹³ He said: 'Why do you resent kindnesses, and ponder evil in your hearts? Is it that, since the sickness of the soul, like its health, is not apparent to bodily eyes, you suspect that I am claiming fraudulently and promising people things I cannot provide? But which of the two seems to you the easier: to say to a person who is guilty of sins what I have just said: "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say to a paralytic whom you see utterly bound by disease, "Rise and walk"? Therefore, so that from the things you see you may believe that the things you do not see are also true,¹⁴ and that to take away disease and to pardon sins – both with a word – are both equally easy for the Son of man, I will give a sign obvious to everyone's senses. But if you see that these words I am now about to say are not empty but have present force, do not doubt that the Son of man has the power to forgive sins on earth, and to do so not by sacrifices or burnt offerings, but by a simple word.' At the same time he turned to the paralysed man and said: 'Rise, take up your pallet, and depart into your house so that those who know you have been sick and who were despairing of your health may see that you have suddenly been made so strong that you are not only able to enter on your own feet, when a little before you were carried by four porters, but, by a complete reversal of circumstances, you are even able to carry your bed, which just now carried you.' Without delay the deed followed the word. The paralysed man arose, and taking his bed upon his shoulders went away to his own house in a procession far different from that in which he had been carried out a little before.

When the crowds had seen what was so obviously a miracle, and understood clearly that it was not a matter of human but of divine power, they glorified God who had granted such power to men on earth, affirming that they had never seen any such thing¹⁵ done by those whom the Jews

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13 In an annotation on 9:3 (*dixerunt intra se*) Erasmus writes: 'The Greek phrase [εἶπαν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς] can be taken in two ways. It can be taken to mean they were murmuring among themselves, but it is more satisfactory to take it to mean that theirs was the silent speech within the mind, since [the text] goes on to say that Jesus knew their thoughts.' The paraphrase reflects the 'more satisfactory' reading.

14 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 29.3 (on Matt 9:6) PG 57 361: 'For he cures the paralysis of both substances [ie body and soul], and from the visible brings to light what is invisible.' Similarly Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on 9:5-6) PL 26 55B. The paraphrase also suggests Rom 1:19-20: 'God's power and nature though invisible are seen from the things God has made.'

15 Cf Mark 2:12.

regarded as their greatest men. But the scribes had been silenced in such a way that they were even more sharply stung by envy, clearly preferring their own glory to the glory of God, by which they saw that they were becoming eclipsed, since God's glory was, through Jesus, growing brighter day by day. For as the sun makes a lamp look dim, so divine glory makes the empty glory of human beings look dim and compels it to vanish. Thus, by resistance their spite served only to render Christ's glory more brilliant, for God knows how to use even the malice of mortals to his own glory. Therefore, in order to give way to the scribes' envy, Jesus left that place and returned to the sea, where he taught the crowd¹⁶ that was streaming to him from every direction.

Afterwards, as he was passing a customhouse, he observed there a certain tax collector, Matthew by name, who was also called Levi, son of Alphaeus.¹⁷ Now this class of men is completely disreputable, especially among the Jews, because they practise the craft of base gain and violent greed. Jesus, who before that had summoned Simon and Andrew, John and James, from an occupation that was lowly to be sure, but nevertheless legitimate, now called Matthew to himself in order to show publicly that he loathed absolutely no class of person (provided that one turns oneself to better things).¹⁸ He bade him follow. Matthew did not delay; he left his accounts incomplete, he left his profit, and began to follow Jesus, a tax collector suddenly turned disciple.¹⁹ For Jesus' voice had a certain remarkable energy,²⁰ and there shone in his face a certain hidden force by which he drew to himself those whom he wanted, as a magnet attracts iron.²¹ Then

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16 Cf Mark 2:13.

17 The names are drawn from all three synoptic Gospels: in Matt 9:9 the tax collector is called Matthew; in Luke 5:29, Levi; in Mark 2:14, Levi the son of Alphaeus.

18 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 30.1 (on Matt 9:9) PG 57 362-3 offered a similar comparison between the disciples called first and Matthew: the occupation of the former was rustic and lowly, that of the latter shameless and without respect, but no type of person was an embarrassment to Jesus, who came to heal all. The reasons for Jewish dislike of tax collectors evidently went beyond mere greed; see Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 105.

19 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 9:9) PL 26 56A also says of Matthew that 'he was suddenly changed from a tax collector into an apostle.'

20 For Erasmus' interest in the significance of the voice see the paraphrase on Mark 9:25-6 CWE 49 114, on Luke 23:46 CWE 48 222, and the references in CWE 50 27 n6.

21 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 9:9) PL 26 56A-B: 'Surely the very gleam and majesty of hidden divinity that shone even in his human face was able to draw to him at first sight those beholding it. For if this power is said to exist

Matthew asked Jesus to deign to take a meal in his house.²² Jesus was not reluctant to do this in order to teach his disciples that we must not avoid the company of ungodly men if there is some hope that they will be somewhat corrected by our companionship. Accordingly, Matthew produced from his stores a very magnificent and ample feast to which he summoned many of his own class, tax collectors and sinners, whom by his example and words he had led to admire and love Jesus.

It was with these people, therefore, that the Pharisees saw Jesus reclining at table along with his disciples. They were looking everywhere for grounds to bring false charges, and while they did not dare to accost him in case they might hear what they did not want to hear, they did attempt to turn his disciples away from him. They said: 'Why does your master, to whom you are attached as to one exceedingly holy, share a feast with tax collectors and sinners, men whom we avoid as untouchable? But like easily joins with like,²³ and we generally become like those with whom we live.' When Jesus overheard this statement, he acted as a protector on behalf of his disciples who were still weak, teaching that the heralds of the gospel are not corrupted by the company of sinners, with whom they sometimes associate with no other intent than to entice them to virtue. In any case, the Pharisees avoid tax collectors, who are commonly regarded as sinners, not to keep themselves from being corrupted by their wicked deeds, but to keep their reputation for holiness among men, although they themselves are worse than tax collectors. But people who possess gospel holiness seek out the company of sinners, not to obtain benefit from them, but to enrich them with godliness, and they do not enter their houses with any other desire than that which moves good doctors to enter the houses of the sick. For a faithful doctor will rightly spend his time with those who need a doctor's help.²⁴

And so, turning to the Pharisees who considered themselves just, although they were infected with very bad vices, he said: 'The reason I spend my time with tax collectors and sinners is that I am a physician of souls,

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in a magnet and amber . . . how much more was the Lord of all creation able to draw to him those whom he wished.' Erasmus uses the same simile in the paraphrase on Mark 5:20; cf CWE 49 68 and n13, with a reference to CWE 23 225:12-14.

²² Cf Luke 5:29.

²³ A *sententia* found elsewhere in Erasmus; cf eg CWE 66 41 and *Adagia* I ii 21; cf also Cicero *De senectute* 3.7.

²⁴ Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 30.2 (on Matt 9:10) PG 57 364: 'Likewise the doctor, unless he endures the putrid humours of the sick, cannot cure them of their disease.'

and I thirst for people's salvation. What purpose does it serve to busy oneself with the just, as you consider yourselves to be, since they have no need of a doctor. Those who need a doctor are the sick, and a doctor is useful to those who acknowledge their disease and show that they are ready to be cured. To loathe these people, therefore, is not holiness but arrogance, and to succour them is a sacrifice far more pleasing to God than any kind of sacrifice that is offered in the temple. This ought not to have escaped you who know the Scriptures in which God speaks thus: "I desire mercy rather than sacrifice." [Hos 6:6] In the same way in Isaiah he refuses your sacrifices;²⁵ nowhere does he refuse the service of mercy. If you have not yet understood this, go and learn what the word of God here means, and then, if it still seems right, find fault with what I have done, which does not conflict with your Law, but corresponds to the divine will. Why should I avoid the company of sinners, I who have come for this reason, to invite such people to repent of their former lives? Many people regard themselves as just. They should not be indignant if I withdraw myself from them, for they do not need my help, and it would be pointless, or rather an insult, to call to repentance those who have nothing to repent of.' With these words Jesus rebuked and in a way derided the haughty arrogance of the Pharisees who regarded themselves as just, although they were not.

Following this, some of John's disciples, who from a certain human feeling were a little envious of Jesus and boasted of their master John as of one who was more illustrious, joined the Pharisees in Jesus' presence.²⁶ They were not afraid to accuse him falsely to his face, saying that he treated his disciples too indulgently, and trained them less rigorously than John did his disciples, though he seemed to promise a stricter discipline. Now the Pharisees sought to obtain a reputation for holiness in the sight of the people by means of two things in particular: fasting and prayer. And so John's disciples asked Jesus: 'Why do we disciples of John and the Pharisees fast frequently and pray according to the traditions of our ancestors, who taught that prayers are commended by fasting, and yet your disciples do not fast as often?'

Since this manifest accusation attacked him and not his disciples, Jesus responded in a very kindly fashion, so that he neither criticized John's instruction, nor openly condemned the fasting of others, but only made

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²⁵ Cf Isa 1:11-17.

²⁶ Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 30.3 (on Matt 9:14) PG 57 366 also had explained that John's disciples were motivated by envy when they joined the Pharisees to ask this question. Cf John 3:22-30.

clear that the indulgence he exercised towards his disciples was not a mark of negligence but design, gradually to lead them to greater things. He was acting like a wise school teacher and a master skilled in fashioning youth who does not immediately discourage a young and tender age with subjects that are too hard, but entices it to the more difficult by things that charm.²⁷ From the testimony of John himself he derived an opportune response. For John bore witness about Jesus in the presence of those who supposed that he himself was the Christ, when he said: 'He who has the bride is the bridegroom, his friend is the attendant and rejoices greatly that he hears the bridegroom's voice.' [John 3:29] John was pointing out that Jesus was the groom who²⁸ the prophecy of the psalm had promised would come out of his marriage chamber like a groom, and that he himself was only the groom's friend. Reminding them, therefore, of this statement of John, Jesus said: 'Can the sons who are staying in the chamber of the new groom, where it is appropriate that everything be joyful, be afflicted with gloomy Jewish fasting, especially when the groom is present? In the meantime refuse to envy them their joy, which will not last long. Allow them by this indulgence to be led gently and agreeably to more perfect things. They now have their groom, and they are totally devoted to him; they have no free time to fast, and they are too delicate to bear it. They will meanwhile grow up, and the time will come when the groom will be taken from them. Then they will be stronger, and not only will they fast of their own accord, but they will be a match for even harsher things. The Jews place the supreme expression of religion in frequent fasting and wordy prayers. While these things must not be condemned if they do not lead to empty glory but to godliness, at the same time the gospel teaching looks to certain more valiant and more arduous things, for which I am gradually forming and fashioning my disciples.

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27 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 30.4 (on Matt 9:15-16) PG 57 367: 'He shows that it was not because of gluttony that they were not fasting, but from a wonderful design . . . the disciples have not yet become strong, but require much indulgence. They have not yet been renewed by the Spirit; in this condition one must not impose on them a weight of commandments.' Nicholas of Lyra (on 9:15) also contrasted the disciples 'still unformed and imperfect,' with the apostles after Pentecost, 'made new through the Holy Spirit.' This ancient interpretation is shaped in the paraphrase to fit Erasmus' doctrine of accommodation (cf CWE 50 xiii, 114 n32). The view articulated here may also reflect a principle of Erasmus' educational theory: that the young should be enticed to learning by gaiety and charm finds an important place in the prescriptions for education in *De pueris instituendis* CWE 26 337-9.

28 who . . . like a groom] Added in 1534; cf Ps 19:5.

‘Accordingly, my method of instruction is not the same as John’s. My teaching is new, and new instruction is needed for new teaching. A teacher should not be overly hasty; in time it will become obvious whose disciples have been instructed in a more manly way. Old things should not be mixed with new, for no one sews a patch of new and raw cloth on an old garment, because in this way not only is the tear in the old garment not repaired but, since the new patch does not adhere to the old, the hole becomes even larger and more unsightly. Neither do people with sense entrust new wine to old skins. If they do, a double mishap results, inasmuch as the wine spills out and the skins split open and are ruined. Rather, people pour new wine in new skins that can bear the force of the wine and that do not split apart as the new wine ferments. Thus it follows that both skins and wine are undamaged. I want my disciples to be completely new, and I so fashion them gradually for myself that hereafter, strong and steadfast, they will be able to bear the force of the gospel teaching. John did not dare²⁹ commit to old skins anything but old wine, fasting and the like. These are far removed from the things gospel people must do. I entrust the new wine of my teaching only to new vessels.’

While Jesus was saying this, there came to him a prefect of the synagogue by the name of Jairus,³⁰ who falling³¹ as a suppliant at Jesus’ knees, worshipped him and begged and implored him with utmost intensity, saying: ‘My only daughter, who is twelve years old,³² was already at the point of death when I left home,³³ and I am afraid that she may now be dead.³⁴ Come, I beg you, and lay your hand on her so she may get well and live.’

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29 did not dare] *non est ausus* in 1522, 1534, and 1535; in 1524 *non est adnissus* ‘did not strive to’

30 The name Jairus is given in Mark 5:22 and Luke 8:41.

31 falling] *accidens* first in 1534; previously *accedens* ‘approaching’

32 Cf Luke 8:42.

33 Cf Mark 5:23; Luke 8:42.

34 ‘Already at the point of death ... may now be dead.’ Erasmus simply omits the statement at 9:18: ‘My daughter has just died,’ and follows the story in Mark 5:21–43 and Luke 8:40–56 where the girl is close to death. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 31.1 (on Matt 9:18) PG 57 370 had tried to reconcile the two versions by saying that in Matthew’s account the prefect exaggerates for effect when he says she is already dead. Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 9:18–19 PG 123 229C–D includes Chrysostom’s solution as a possibility, but offers another that better explains Erasmus’ choice of words here: ‘He says his daughter is dead, though Luke says she has not yet died. He is either conjecturing because he had left her already breathing her last, or he is exaggerating his misfortune in order to elicit Jesus’ pity.’

As Jesus was open to doing kindnesses to all who asked in simple faith, whether they were poor or rich, Jews or outsiders, he rose at once and followed Jairus as he hurried home in the hope that he might find his daughter still breathing. The disciples along with a thronging crowd accompanied Jesus.

But, behold, on the way there arose the opportunity for a second miracle. A woman had joined the crowded mass of people. For twelve years now she was suffering from a haemorrhage; she had spent all her money on doctors, and had not found anyone who could cure her illness.³⁵ Thus she was twice wretched after poverty had been added to bad health. Although in her heart she had conceived an absolute trust concerning Jesus, yet on account of the foulness of her disease she did not dare entreat him before so many witnesses.³⁶ Therefore, as if to steal a blessing, she secretly approached from behind and touched the hem of his garment, for thus had she convinced herself: If I touch even the lowest edge of his clothes, I will be healed. As soon as she touched his garment, the bleeding ceased and the woman felt the health of her body restored.³⁷ In order to elicit from her a confession of the kindness done – for Jesus did not want such an extraordinary example of faith to go unnoticed, and at the same time he was teaching that the glory of God must not be concealed – he turned to the crowd and said: ‘Who touched me?’ When all there denied it, he said: ‘Nonetheless, someone has touched me, for I feel power has gone out from me.’³⁸ Here Peter and the other disciples, not understanding what Jesus meant, said: ‘Lord, you see the crowded throng pressing against you on every side, and you ask who has touched you when you are being touched by so many?’³⁹ Then Jesus, as though unaware of who had touched him, looked around as if searching with his eyes for the one who had given that clandestine touch.

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35 Cf Mark 5:26.

36 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 31.1 (in Matt 9:20–1) PG 57 371: ‘Why did she not confidently approach him? Because she was ashamed of her disease, for she considered herself unclean.’

37 According to Matt 9:22, the woman was healed only after Jesus commended her faith; Luke 8:44 states that the bleeding stopped as soon as she touched the robe; Mark 5:29, that it was then she felt her health restored.

38 Matthew omits the details of the drama that arises from Jesus’ question ‘Who touched me?’ Erasmus supplies this part of the story from the other synoptic Gospels. Here see Luke 8:45–6 and Mark 5:30–2.

39 Erasmus’ attribution of the question, not found in Matthew, harmonizes Mark 5:31, where it is posed by the disciples, with Luke 8:45, where it is posed by Peter ‘and those who were with him’ (Vulgate and Erasmus’ text, but cf NRSV.)

The woman, alone knowing it was she, saw that she had not escaped Jesus' notice, and setting shame aside, she fell at Jesus' feet, afraid and trembling, and confessed everything in ordered detail:⁴⁰ from what disease and for how many years she had been suffering, and how she had spent all her wealth in vain on doctors, and how she had convinced herself that she could be cured by a mere touch of his hem, and how the moment she touched it she felt her body healed. Christ wanted these things publicly disclosed, with the crowd as witness, not in order to shame the woman or win praise for himself in the sight of men, but to teach everyone by this example how very efficacious is an unshakeable trust;⁴¹ he wanted also by the woman's example to strengthen the faith of the ruler of the synagogue, which he knew was wavering a little,⁴² and at the same time to rebuke the Pharisees for their disbelief. So he consoled the woman who was anxious and afraid that Jesus might be angry and take back his blessing, saying: 'Be of good spirit, daughter. Your faith has procured your health. Go in peace and with a calm and untroubled heart. I want this blessing to be permanently yours – granted you filched it from me!'

While Jesus was speaking, some men came from the house of the prefect of the synagogue announcing to him that his daughter was already dead, and that there was no reason to continue to bother Jesus,⁴³ for they believed that Jesus was nothing more than some extraordinary physician who by his skill could indeed give health to a living girl, but not restore life to a girl who was dead. For that reason they judged it pointless to summon a physician, however excellent, for one already dead. Seeing that the girl's father was utterly overwhelmed by this news, Jesus consoled him, saying: 'Do not be alarmed; only have faith that your daughter will be well and she will be well.'⁴⁴ Your daughter's recovery rests with you.' When they had now reached the house of the prefect of the synagogue, Jesus did not allow the crowd to enter, or the disciples other than Peter, James, and John, and with

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40 Cf Mark 5:33; Luke 8:47.

41 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 31.1 (on Matt 9:20–1) PG 57 371: 'Why does he lead her into their midst? First, he frees the woman from fear, so that she might not be anxious, stung by the goads of conscience, since she had secretly stolen that blessing. Second, he corrects her because she thought she was being unnoticed. Third, he renders her faith known to all, so others, too, might emulate her.'

42 Cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 9:20): 'Christ performed the miracle . . . in order that through the miracle, the ruler of the synagogue would, on seeing it, acquire a sure confidence in his daughter's resurrection.'

43 Cf Mark 5:35; Luke 8:49.

44 Cf Luke 8:50.

them the girl's father and mother.⁴⁵ Now, all the relatives and friends were weeping and striking their bodies in the manner of their country, mourning her and wailing such things as they are most foolishly accustomed to do at the funerals of the rich and powerful.⁴⁶ Jesus ordered them to stop their grieving, for the girl was not dead, but sleeping. By this he meant, of course, that to others who could not raise her the girl was indeed dead; to him she was only sleeping, since for him it was easier to raise her from the dead than it was for the others to wake her from sleep. Since the prefect's family and friends did not understand this, they scoffed at Jesus, obviously knowing for certain that she was dead⁴⁷ since they themselves had seen her dying. Therefore, after he had forced the grieving crowd to leave the funeral, he himself, taking the girl's father and mother, entered the room where the girl's corpse was lying. Then, taking the young maiden's hand, Jesus said: 'Girl, rise.' At these words the girl arose and began to walk about, so that faith in the miracle would be more certain, for he not only restored her life in that moment, but also her strength and lively vigour.

Since utter amazement possessed the girl's parents, he commanded them and earnestly implored them not to tell anyone what he had done, not only that he, for his part, might avoid the suspicion of striving after glory (for this was especially important before leaders of the synagogue, who did nothing without a view to earning human praise), but that at the same time her parents might relate with greater credibility what he had done if, though they had been commanded to keep silent, they nevertheless told the Pharisees and leading men of the synagogue about the deed they had witnessed.⁴⁸ For he knew human nature, and he wanted to use it for

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45 Jesus allows three disciples and the girl's parents to accompany him into the house at Luke 8:51; at Mark 5:37-40 only the three disciples accompany Jesus to the house, and with the parents enter the child's room.

46 Nicholas of Lyra (on 9:23) notes that in antiquity the funerals 'of great persons' were accompanied by the customs mentioned here. On costly funerals see CWE 49 72-3 and nn28 and 30; also the colloquy 'The Funeral' CWE 40 763-95.

47 Cf Luke 8:53.

48 The command to keep silent is not found in the Matthean narrative, but is found in the parallel passages in Mark 5:43 and Luke 8:56. In his homily on Matt 9 (*In Matt hom* 31.3 [on 9:25-6] PG 57 373-4) Chrysostom speaks as though the command is part of the Matthean text: 'Consider not only the girl's resurrection, but that he also commanded that they speak to no one, and so learn humility and the renunciation of vainglory.' Cf the paraphrases on the parallel synoptic passages: in the paraphrase on Mark 5:43 the admonition to silence was given to encourage 'others' to 'herald the Lord's goodness' since they would do so less grudgingly and with more credibility than the ruler of

the good of others. As he was departing he ordered that food be given to the girl, clearly acting like a doctor and disguising the miracle before the others, though even this served to confirm faith in the miracle.

Then, after Jesus had left the house of the ruler of the synagogue and was returning to his own home, two blind men followed him, who had heard a report of his miracles, and from this had conceived the hope of being healed, especially since they had heard that he withheld his kindness from no one, no matter how lowly. Although they could neither see Jesus nor go to him, nevertheless with a great cry elicited from them by love of health and ardent faith they called to Jesus from a distance and, adding flattery to their prayers,⁴⁹ said: 'Have mercy upon us, son of David.' Jesus did not reply to them as he made his way, delaying the kindness so the miracle might be more evident: he was always doing this to call the Jews to belief, and in every way to accuse the Pharisees of disbelief by the facts themselves.⁵⁰ The centurion had faith, the woman had faith, those⁵¹ who carried the paralytic had faith, but the Jews and Pharisees had no faith and were even envious. When they had come to Jesus' house, the blind men, who had followed with unflagging hope, were admitted. Then Jesus, providing to others an example, first asked them for faith. He said: 'Do you believe that I am able to provide what you are seeking?' Without hesitation they said: 'We believe, Lord.' Then Jesus touched their eyes with his hand and said: 'As you believe, so let it be done to you,' not claiming for himself responsibility for restoring their sight, but imputing it to their faith, clearly showing that it is disbelief especially that renders us unworthy of the divine kindness, which in itself is accessible and at hand for

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the synagogue, or 'to teach us that we must shun human glory in rendering any favours' CWE 49 73; in the paraphrase on Luke 8:56 silence is imposed 'either to teach us not to look to human beings for glory from rendering favours, or to signify by this figure that private correction suffices for lighter offences.'

49 The 'flattery' *blandimentum* is, evidently, the ascription of the title 'Son of David' to Jesus. Nicholas of Lyra (on 9:27) regarded the ascription as a sign of the blind men's faith, and this may be the intent of Erasmus' preceding expression, 'a cry elicited . . . by ardent faith.' In this case, Erasmus rather cunningly portrays the motives of the two men as ambiguous. Cf the paraphrase on the parallel passage in Luke CWE 48 127.

50 'By the facts themselves': *rebus ipsis*; cf CWE 46 45 n5, 60 n57, 124 n24, 139 n53. Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 32.1 (on Matt 9:27–9) PG 57 377: 'The Jews are in no small measure culpable . . . because when they saw the miracles and witnessed events with their eyes, they acted in blind opposition.'

51 those . . . had faith] Added in 1534

all. As soon as Jesus spoke, the eyes of the blind men were opened so that they saw clearly. Here Jesus wanted to warn us by an image that although glory of its own accord accompanies something rightly done, nevertheless we must flee from it rather than pursue it; and so he sternly charged the blind men that no one should find out about this deed.⁵² But they, rejoicing in their new happiness, all the more spread the story of Jesus throughout that whole region among everyone who had witnessed their former blindness.

After the blind men had departed, there was brought forward another man, by far the most pitiful, who was subject to a demon that took away the use of his tongue, so that he was neither in possession of his mind, that he might hope for health, nor of his tongue, that he might ask. Since therefore he needed the help of another's faith, he was brought to Jesus. Without delay Jesus cast out the demon, and straightway the man who had been mute spoke. The crowds were astounded at the great swiftness with which Jesus' miracles were performed, a swiftness ready and at hand in the case of every kind of disease, no matter how incurable, and they were saying among themselves: 'No one has ever arisen in the nation of Israel who could perform so many miracles so easily.' By contrast, the Pharisees were blinded by their envy that was growing greater every day. Although they could not deny the things that Jesus did before everyone's eyes, nevertheless, in order to alienate from Jesus the minds of the multitude that held him in such high esteem, they falsely charged that he cast out demons, not by divine power, but with the help of Beelzebub, prince of demons. What could have been more demented than this slander? As if a demon could cast out a demon, or as if Beelzebub, enemy of the human race, would grant life to the dead, health to the sick, sight to the blind, or a tongue to the mute. From the demons generally spring those evils that Jesus, who pitied people out of his goodness, was taking away, preparing people through physical blessings perceived by the senses to be able to receive spiritual blessings.⁵³ But our most merciful Jesus, far from being offended by such malicious slanders, actually concerned himself all the more with the salvation of everyone, because he saw that the Pharisees, whose responsibility it was to be concerned for the salvation of their people, not only provided no help but even envied the good deeds of others.

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52 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 9:30) PL 26 59D: 'The Lord enjoined this because of his humility, fleeing from the glory of ostentation.'

53 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 32.2 (on Matt 9:34) PG 57 378 at this point contrasts the destructive activity of the demons with the beneficent work of Jesus.

And so Jesus, like a good pastor, was walking through all the cities and streets, eager to heal at one and the same time the souls and bodies of everyone, teaching in their assemblies and preaching the kingdom of heaven (into which only those who are free from all the diseases of the soul are received), and healing on the way every kind of disease and every form of ill health. Accordingly, when Jesus saw the crowds, now eager for salvation and a better doctrine, coming together from every direction and daily becoming larger; when at the same time he considered that the priests, Pharisees, and scribes, upon whom the people up to now had depended, were doing everything but save the people, and were all serving their own glory, not the glory of God, serving their own gain, serving their bellies⁵⁴ and their own pleasures (among whom if there was any religion it was feigned and pretended, with the result that it even obstructed true religion); when he considered that the people were indeed dull and unlearned, but were nevertheless able to be cured, since a person who needed to be healed in body followed with simple faith and gave glory to God, and though he did not yet understand the gospel teaching, still did not turn away from it; when he considered, by contrast, that the Pharisees and scribes, though they knew the Prophets and the writings of the Law, nevertheless, blinded by worldly desires, even struggled against the gospel teaching, then that most excellent pastor was touched by a feeling of pity,⁵⁵ because he perceived that the people were like sheep, wandering, scattered, deserted, lacking a shepherd and roaming heedlessly hither and yon.

Therefore, considering that among the Pharisees, who were acting as wolves⁵⁶ not shepherds, there was no hope for the flock and that the people had now in some manner been prepared by the miracles to receive the gospel teaching, he said to his disciples whom he had now collected in considerable number: 'I see a harvest great indeed, but I see very few labourers. The report of the gospel has been spread far and wide. The ardour of very many people who seem to be ripe for hearing the gospel philosophy has been aroused. But where are they who will undertake the work of

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54 Cf Rom 16:18.

55 'Was touched by a feeling of pity': *tactus est affectu misericordiae*, as also in his translation of the Greek verb ἐσπλαγχνίσθη 'he had compassion' [9:36 NRSV] in place of the Vulgate's *misertus est*. This was also the phrase Erasmus used to explain the Greek verb in his annotation on 9:36 (*misertus est eis*), noting that the Greek σπλαγχνίζομαι had more 'significance' than the Latin *misereor*. See further chapter 20 n37.

56 Cf John 10:12.

preaching and teaching? Where are the people who will teach purely and sincerely, striving for neither human glory nor profit, but delivering with the sincerity you see in me when I hand on the word? Surely it is not right to neglect so great a crowd of people now burning with desire for heavenly doctrine. What therefore remains for you except to ask the Lord of the harvest to thrust forth labourers into the harvest, even the idle and those who refuse?⁵⁷ The moment presses hard, and delay is not safe. I know you prefer to cling to me, but it is time for you to give some evidence of what you can do and that you put to use for the salvation of others what you have learned from me.'

Chapter 10

Accordingly, after climbing a high hill,¹ he bade those disciples who were accompanying him as special followers to come near. From these he appointed twelve principal disciples to whom, as the more learned and stronger, he had delegated the duty of teaching with authority, in order that they might teach the people, each in a different place, according to the example they had seen in their master. And so that the teaching of uneducated and lowly fishermen should not immediately be treated with contempt, he also gave them the power against all unclean spirits to cast them out with a word, and to cure every kind of disease and every defect of the body,² so that whatever they had witnessed Christ do in the name of the Father and in his own name, this they should do in the name of Jesus Christ, on whose behalf they were acting. For Jesus had begun in such a way that by healing grievous and incurable diseases – and no other good deed seems to human beings more divine – he enticed the unlearned to things that are of the heart. Now, that no one should attach himself to false apostles in place of the true apostles,³ these are the names of the twelve apostles whom Christ himself appointed. In the first place there was Simon, son of

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57 Cf Matt 20:1–7, 21:28–32.

1 Cf Mark 3:13.

2 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 10:7–8) PL 26 62B: 'That no one might disbelieve their preaching about the kingdom of heaven on the grounds that the men were rustic and unlearned, lacking eloquence and illiterate, he gives them the power to heal the sick, to cleanse the leprous, to cast out demons.' Similarly the *Gloss* and Nicholas of Lyra (on 10:1).

3 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 10:2) PL 26 61B: 'A list of the apostles is set down so that, outside of these, any future false apostles would be rejected.' Similarly the *Gloss* and Nicholas of Lyra (on 10:2).

John,⁴ who was also called Peter, together with his brother Andrew, for he called these first of all. Second, there was James, son of Zebedee, with his brother John; third, Philip and Bartholomew; fourth, Thomas, whose cognomen was Didymus,⁵ and Matthew the tax collector; fifth James the son of Alphaeus, with Judas, brother of James,⁶ who was also called Lebbaeus or Thaddaeus;⁷ sixth there was Simon the Cananaean, who was also called the Zealot,⁸ with Judas Iscariot, who afterwards betrayed his Lord. With such envoys – poor, unlearned, lowly, fishermen, sinners, and unknown⁹ – Christ set about to restore the whole world to the gospel philosophy, so that the world would not lay claim to anything in this glorious enterprise, as it might have done if he had begun this heavenly work with the learned, the powerful, the wealthy, and the high-born.

Now it is worth hearing what he commissioned them to do and with what provisions for their journey he furnished his envoys. But first he prescribed to them the boundaries of their preaching, and he forbade them to depart from Judea and travel either to the neighbouring gentiles or into the cities of the Samaritans, whom the Jews abhorred. This was not because Jesus considered any race of people abhorrent, but so that it would not look as though he had been offended by the Pharisees' insults and so out of revenge had sent his disciples away to foreign peoples; nor would he give the Jews an opportunity to complain that they had been spurned, and that the gentiles and the Samaritans had been preferred to them.¹⁰ At the same time,

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4 Cf John 1:42, 21:15–17; Matt 16:17.

5 Cf John 11:16, 20:24, 21:2.

6 brother of James] First in 1534; previously 'son of James.' Both Bédā and the Paris theologians challenged Erasmus on his earlier identification (*Supputatio* and *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 579D–80C and 881B). For Erasmus' recognition (and correction) of his error, see CWE 44 125 n1.

7 By identifying as a single person 'Judas the brother of James' and 'Thaddaeus' (who is in some manuscripts called Lebbaeus), Erasmus reconciles the apostolic lists in Matthew and Mark (3:16–19), with Luke's list (Luke 6:14–16 and Acts 1:13) which appear to disagree. Thus Matthew and Mark do not mention Judas, brother (or son) of James, while Luke makes no mention of Thaddaeus (or Lebbaeus). For the problematic nature of these names see CWE 46 173 n32; CWE 50 9 n71 (where Erasmus' solution is credited to Origen).

8 Cf Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13.

9 At this point Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 32.3 (on Matt 10:5) PG 57 381 likewise characterizes these missionaries: 'What sort of men were these twelve? They were fishermen, tax-collectors . . . and a traitor.'

10 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 10:5–6) PL 26 64A: 'It was necessary to announce the coming of Christ first to the Jews so they would not have a just

because he knew that the Jews in particular were going to rebel against the gospel, he did not want any excuse left to them, but he wanted it to be clear to everyone that they were removed from the kingdom of God by their own wilful perversity, and that the gentiles had been received because of their simple belief. 'From these, therefore,' he said, 'stay away for the time being, and go rather to the lost sheep of the Israelite people, so they might awaken again and return to salvation. They do not all share the Pharisees' malice. There are also among them sheep, straying innocently and through ignorance, who will recover their senses and hear the voice of the good shepherd without hesitation once they have been taught and warned.

'For the rest, you are to begin your preaching by imitating what you have seen me do. For it is not immediately helpful to the unlearned to open the deeper mysteries straight off; they must first be made ready so they might be capable of receiving more perfect teaching. First, therefore, preach only that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, so that they might repent of their old lives and make themselves ready for a new life. The first step toward righteousness is to abstain from sins, and the first step toward health is to acknowledge the disease. Moreover, lest you fail to gain credence – for you are teachers without a reputation teaching novel doctrines – create trust in your teaching by performing miracles, just as you have seen me do. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the leprous, cast out demons. Granted, these are the greatest of miracles, yet it is I who will make them yours, and they will win favour and authority with everyone. For the weak must first be enticed. Only take care that you do not misuse them either for empty glory or for profit. Just as you have received freely from me, so give freely. Do not taint your gospel ministry with even the slightest suspicion of glory or profit seeking.¹¹ People will judge you to be truly great only if they have observed that, though possessed of such great power, you are neither swollen with pride nor moved by the desire for gain, and that you boldly despise the things for which ordinary people do and suffer anything.

'I want you to perform this mission unencumbered, weighed down by no burdens, bound by no anxiety, so that you may be completely free for the mission with which you have been charged. You are teaching heavenly

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excuse, saying that they had rejected the Lord because he sent his apostles to the gentiles and Samaritans.' Likewise the *Gloss* (on 10:5).

- 11 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 10:7-8) PL 26 62c: 'Since spiritual gifts are always cheapened when they are offered for money, avarice is condemned . . . I, your master and Lord, have provided for you this [grace] at no cost; you, too, give it at no cost so that the grace of the gospel is not corrupted.'

things; refuse to be troubled by earthly things.¹² You have travel provisions worthy of your preaching, which teaches nothing lowly. Accordingly, when you are about to set out on your journey, do not weigh down your belts with gold or silver.¹³ In fact, do not carry with you even a wallet, like some storehouse, or a second tunic, not even shoes or a staff. He who is equipped with the sword of the gospel message¹⁴ is well enough armed. There is no reason for you to be anxious, pondering from where necessities will come to you in your destitution. Care only about the ministry with which you have been charged; the rest will be freely supplied to you by your heavenly Father.¹⁵ You are doing his work. He will not allow his workers to be cheated of their hire. The necessities are readily supplied to those who live from day to day and according to nature. There will be no lack of people to provide for you while these are the things you are performing, these the things you are teaching. Thus you will not be racked by concerns of this sort that diminish your authority and open you up to suspicion, neither will the people you teach be ungrateful towards you, since they receive from you far greater things.¹⁶ And you will not trouble anyone by begging, nor will anyone put you in his debt because of the benefit he has given you, since he has made an exchange for much better things more truly than he has given anything.

‘There is no need for you to find lodging at your expense in public inns, but into whatever city or village you enter, first ask whether there is anyone there who is distinguished by his upright life, and is eager for the heavenly kingdom, someone who is weary of this world, who with pious protests continually sighs for the promised Messiah; who by his guileless

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12 Cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 10:9): ‘The preachers of the divine word must be free from troubling cares.’

13 The Greek text designates three types of money: gold, silver, and bronze. In the paraphrase Erasmus omits ‘bronze.’ As he says in his annotation on the verse (*nolite possidere*) the Greek *χαλκός* could also stand for money in general. The paraphrase eliminates the ambiguity by omitting the term.

14 Cf Eph 6:17.

15 An allusion, apparently, to 6:25–34; Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 10:9–10) PL 26 62D–3A also alludes at this point to 6:34.

16 Cf the reasons given by Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 32.4 PG 57 382 for the injunctions of Matt 10:9–10 (make no provision etc): the apostles are thus free for their mission; God demonstrates his power in providing; by following these injunctions the apostles will forestall suspicion. Chrysostom goes on to note *In Matt hom* 32.5 (on Matt 10:10) PG 57 382–3 that the provisions thus received come not from begging; they are not a gift arising from generosity, but a payment for benefits received.

character,¹⁷ by his kindnesses to the poor, gives hope that he can progress even further. He will be a host worthy of you, and you in turn will be guests most welcome to him. When such a person is found, go into his house and do not change your lodging until the work of the gospel urges you to travel to another city. For neither will there be a need, nor will it be proper for you to change your host continually as if you are either fickle or looking for a more lavish table. Any house, any fare whatever, ought to meet the needs of gospel men. Your manners should be courteous and agreeable so you do not seem either arrogant or fawning. When you enter a house, first offer greetings, saying: "Peace to this house." Your prayer will not be in vain. Truly, if the house is worthy of this prayer, it will accept it immediately and without delay. If it refuses the prayer, you will lose nothing of your greeting, for what they disdainfully reject will return to you.

'So intensely do I want you neither to beg nor to fawn for the necessities of life that if any house is unwilling to receive you, or if any city is unwilling to have you as guests, and these do not of their own accord admit the gospel salvation that is freely offered, then I want you to leave the house you greeted and, as you are about to leave also the city you entered, to go into the streets and shake off even the dust from your feet. In so doing you will give public witness that so far are you from chasing after any earthly advantage from people who reject the gospel of God that you would not want charged to you even the most worthless dust that stuck to your feet.¹⁸ Remember here that what is holy must not be given to dogs, and that pearls should not be cast before swine.¹⁹ Only impress upon the ungrateful that, like it or not, the kingdom of God draws near, with great good to those who receive it, with utmost harm to those who scornfully reject it. Let those who reject the gospel message watch out. Woe to that city in which there is found no one who repents of his former life and wants to become better. I assure you of this, on the day of judgment the land of Sodom and Gomorrah will be treated more gently than that city, Israelite though it be. The greater God's clemency in calling them to repentance by so many miracles and so many kindnesses, the more severely will they be punished if they refuse.

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17 character] First in 1534; previously 'life'

18 Cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 10:9): 'That you did not come to preach for the sake of temporal advantage you will show by a manifest sign: you are not willing to carry away from this place even the dust that clings to your feet.' Similarly the *Gloss*.

19 Cf Matt 7:6.

'Leave it to God to punish them; you maintain gentleness against all injuries, and so desire to help everyone with good things that you do not repay an injustice even when provoked by evil.²⁰ It is enough that you have been furnished a means of benefiting everyone. Against the injustices of men I want you to be utterly unarmed, and I want you to conquer by means of no other support than that of patient endurance.²¹ Otherwise I could have made you people to be feared and dreaded, but this is not expedient for the gospel.²² For violence does not extinguish violence, nor injustice, injustice, nor insolence, insolence; rather are these extinguished by gentleness, leniency, and a readiness to be appeased. I know that the Pharisees and the men who are fierce because of the supports of this world are about to stir up many frightful things against you. But the only shield that is to be held out against them all is patience. You have no reason to fear; you are being sent out like sheep – unprotected, guileless, harmless – into the midst of wolves, but you are being sent by me. I should not want you also to be changed into wolves when you have been incited by their evil, but I want you to behave entirely in such a way that the wolves will be enticed by your mildness and be turned into sheep.²³ It is not a great achievement to take revenge on bad men, but to turn their hearts to the good is the greatest and most difficult task to accomplish. Accordingly, it is necessary that you combine these two things: the innocence of a dove²⁴

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20 Cf Rom 12:17.

21 Nicholas of Lyra (on 10:16) explained 'sheep' as those who do not defend themselves by means of arms. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 33.5 PG 57 394 demonstrates in his exposition of verse 22 the need for patience: 'Thus Christ exacts enduring patience from them.'

22 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 33.2 (on Matt 10:16) PG 57 389: 'I could ... have made you more fearsome than lions, but it was expedient [that you be harmless].'

23 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 33.1 (on Matt 10:16) PG 57 389: 'Thus especially will I show my strength, when sheep have overcome wolves, and though they are in the very midst of wolves they are not only not destroyed, but even convert the wolves. For it is a far stranger and more wonderful thing to change their will and refashion their disposition than to destroy them ... But if we are made wolves, we are overcome.'

24 'Innocence': *simplicitas*. In an annotation on 10:16 (*et simplices*) Erasmus explains that the Greek word ἀκέραιοι used in this verse has the sense of 'unmixed,' 'pure,' and that it is sometimes rendered by the Latin *sincerus*. He explicates the sense further by noting that 'the dove is a harmless [*innoxium*] creature, whose only defence is the swiftness of its wings.' The word clearly teased Erasmus and he returns to it in other annotations; cf the annotation on 1 Cor 5:8 (*et*

with the prudence of a snake. The innocence of a dove will ensure that in desiring to do good to all you injure no one, not even when provoked; the prudence of a snake that you do not offer anyone an opportunity to slander your teaching.²⁵ The chief point of your embassy is that the gospel should penetrate into the hearts of all. Therefore you must do nothing that on some plausible pretext could turn anyone's heart further away from the gospel teaching. Your teaching will arouse great tumults in the world; hence you must be the more careful that nothing can seem to arise through your fault. Nor indeed can it, if, freely sharing your goods with everyone, you maintain your gentleness and your zeal for doing good even toward people who are evil.

'Therefore, with people of this sort – rather more truly with wolves – one must act quite cautiously, and you must prepare your hearts against all kinds of evils, so they do not disturb you at all when they occur. For in the future they will drag you like criminals into their councils, and in their assemblies they will beat you with whips as being wicked men. Why, even as subverters of the state you will be brought before rulers and kings, not because of anything you deserve, but only because of me. Although I could prevent these things, I will allow all of them to happen, so that it may be manifest and clear to everyone that those perish through their own fault who have so hatefully rejected the salvation offered them, though they were enticed by so many miracles, by so many blessings, by teaching so easy of access, by your simplicity and gentleness.

'Accordingly, when you are brought forward, a few before so many, weak and unarmed before men of such power, uneducated before men of such learning, do not be concerned about how you are going to plead your case, being untutored and lacking experience with judges, laws, and the court. Here, too, I would not want you to flee to those defences by which the common run of men is accustomed to win in trials. They summon their

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nequitiae): 'Malice is the opposite of *sinceritas*, cunning the opposite of truth, that is, of *simplicitas* . . . As sincerity renders life morally clean, truth excludes all deceit.' A short annotation on Phil 2:15 (*et simplices*) extends the thought in the same direction: 'The Greek ἀκέραιος means "sincere," and "without alloy" [ie, without pretence, without deceit].'

- 25 Erasmus follows Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 33.2 (on Matt 10:16) PG 57 390 in interpreting the simplicity of the dove as the refusal to avenge the evils suffered. Both Chrysostom (*ibid*) and Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 10:17–18) PL 26 64C–D see the wisdom of the snake as its instinct to save itself by protecting its head (for Chrysostom, 'faith,' for Jerome 'Christ, head of the body'). Here in Erasmus, it is the 'teaching' that must be protected.

skilled and smooth-spoken advocate, they fawn upon the judges, they fall before their knees as suppliants, they buy favours with money.²⁶ Have nothing to do with such things. Only appear when you are summoned, and answer when you are ordered, so they might not charge you (deservedly) with obstinate disobedience, but answer simply and firmly, not with a considered oration, but with one that exhibits firm resolution along with prudence and modesty. Just as provisions will be everywhere present to you without anxiety on your part, so speech will be provided. To plan a speech anxiously is not characteristic of one who relies totally on divine assistance. Even to those who have thought out nothing beforehand, speech will be given at the appropriate time, not ornate speech, but wise and effective and worthy of the gospel.

‘It is not human work that you are doing but divine; you are not its authors but its instruments.’²⁷ It will not be you who speak there, but the Spirit of your Father will speak through your mouths. Therefore, relying on his assistance, there is no need to be troubled by any storm-winds of evil. For with such great tumults will the world rise up against my teaching that a brother, forgetful of brotherly love, will drive his brother to death; that a father, forgetful of natural piety, will charge his child with a capital crime; that a child, casting all reverence aside, will rise up against his father and mother²⁸ and inflict death upon the ones from whom he has taken the beginning of life. Why go on at length? You will become hateful to all because of hatred of my name. For this world, everywhere utterly corrupted by ambition, pride, greed, lust, and by the rest of the earthly desires, will not bear heavenly teaching that clearly opposes its desires. Why, it will be a more dreadful crime to be a Christian²⁹ than a parricide or poisoner.

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26 This brief but vivid outline of the features of a legal defence may recall the classic defence of Socrates who appeared to scorn the standard practices intended to sway the judges. See Plato *Apology*, especially 34C.

27 ‘Instruments’: *organa*. The word provides the central focus for the frequently repeated Erasmian notion that ministers of the gospel are merely instruments; cf CWE 50 65 n21.

28 and mother] Added in 1524 presumably to reflect better Matt 10:21 ‘parents,’ requiring the change, as the sentence continues, from ‘one’ to ‘ones.’

29 In explicating this passage Erasmus benefits from his knowledge of post-canonical literature. For ‘hatred of the name’ see Tertullian *Apology* 1.4; for the crime of being a Christian, see chapter 5 n37 above. See also 1 Pet 4:16, which indicates that at the time of the epistle’s composition one could suffer ‘as a Christian.’

The devil will use ungodly men to³⁰ stir up these disturbances against my gospel. But do not be discouraged. Divine wisdom will conquer both the wiles of Satan and³¹ human malice. Only do the work delegated to you with brave hearts and unshaken resolution, for whoever perseveres to the end amid these evils will be saved. There is no need for you, shaken by any terrors, to abandon the work of the gospel. There is absolutely no danger, unless you lack a spirit worthy of the gospel.

Although you must not provoke the wrath of wicked men, nor invite persecution, nor resist it strenuously, nevertheless, while the preaching of the gospel is still new, I grant you permission to avoid danger by flight, not only that you might be unharmed, but also that by this means word of the gospel teaching might be spread more widely.³² Accordingly, if ever they attack you in one city, give way to their madness and flee to another, which is far better than to cease from gospel work immediately in face of the violence of persecution. This alone should be your task now, to spread the story of the gospel through all of Palestine. For this, the persecutor will even be beneficial if he does not allow you to stay in one place for very long. The time will some day come when it will not be right to flee persecution.³³ Now the time is short³⁴ and one must make haste, for the kingdom of God is very near.³⁵ I assure you of this: before you have travelled through all the cities of Judea, the Son of man will already have appeared, and he will be with you in your danger. In him will there be set forth for you an example of the great sufferings the heralds of the gospel must endure – all of which, to be sure, ought to seem more bearable to you because you have seen me bear steadfastly every kind of disgrace and affliction. The disciple is not

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30 use ungodly men to] Added in 1534

31 both the wiles of Satan and] Added in 1534

32 Paul's escape from Damascus is justified in similar terms in the paraphrase on Acts 9:25. The idea, embodied in the proverbial 'flee to fight again,' is found in classical antiquity and in early Christianity; cf CWE 50 67 and n34, *Adagia* I x 40, and the *Enchiridion* CWE 66 109.

33 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 34.1 (on Matt 10:23) PG 57 399 also notes that the instruction to flee persecution is temporally limited: 'He speaks not of the later persecutions, but of those prior to the cross and passion.' Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 10:23-4) PL 26 65B-C limits the reference to 'that time,' but seems to include the primitive church. But Erasmus may have in mind the persecutions of the early church and the arguments against flight in persecution as articulated by Tertullian in *De fuga in persecutione* 6.

34 The expression is that of the Vulgate of 1 Cor 7:29.

35 Cf Matt 10:7.

to be preferred to his teacher, nor is the slave better than his master. It is quite enough for a disciple to equal his teacher; it ought to satisfy a servant to achieve parity with his master. If they so inflict upon me, the head of the household, such undeserved abuse³⁶ that they have called me Beelzebub – a most villainous insult – and have given the Son of God the name of the foulest demon,³⁷ what wonder is it if they dare the same against the household slaves?

I know that infamy seems to be a grave ill, and almost more bitter than death, but the ungodly bestow praise, they do not spread infamy when it is because of the gospel that they slander. They will say you are magicians, criminals, subverters, but these slanders will later be turned to your glory. At length your integrity will enlighten the world and everyone will praise it, cursing those who defiled you with false infamy.³⁸ Praise long repressed usually breaks out with greater splendour. Nothing has been covered which time does not uncover, and nothing has been hidden which will not someday be known. Direct your action to this end alone, that you do what is worthy of praise, not that you seek after praise. There is no reason, therefore, for you to be deterred by a fear of disgrace from freely preaching the gospel of the kingdom.³⁹ It contains nothing to be ashamed of or to be concealed. Quite to the contrary, even if you hear something from me in the darkness, proclaim it in the daylight, and if I whisper anything in your ear, proclaim

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36 abuse] First in 1534; previously 'insults,' a change made evidently to avoid the jarring repetition of 'insults ... insult.'

37 Cf Matt 9:34; Mark 3:22–7; Luke 11:15–20. Cf the annotation on Matt 10:25 (*Beelzebub*), where Erasmus explains the word 'Beelzebub' as 'the idol of the fly,' and characterizes it as the very basest kind of idol. The *Gloss* (on 10:25) offered a similar explanation. Cf also the annotation on Rom 11:4 (have bowed the knees) CWE 56 293.

38 Erasmus follows Chrysostom closely in his paraphrase on 10:24–6. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 34.1 (on Matt 10:26) PG 57 398–9 sees in these dominical sayings encouragement for the disciples, specifically that they will endure more easily their own sufferings, having observed the sufferings of their master, and knowing that time will prove the slanders of their persecutors false, and make conspicuous their own virtue: 'Why are you hurt when they call you sorcerers and deceivers? Wait a little while, and all will proclaim you the saviours and benefactors of the world ... while [your persecutors] will be called scoundrels, liars and slanderers.'

39 In the *Paraphrase on Acts* Erasmus frequently characterizes early Christian preaching as undertaken 'freely and boldly,' or, as just below, 'steadfastly'; cf CWE 50 90 and n94 and 113 n19.

it from the rooftops. Your⁴⁰ teaching does not know deception. It wants to be revealed in the sight of all, nor is it afraid of being known by anyone.

Perhaps there will be some who will treat disgrace and the other evils with contempt, but who would be able to disdain death? You would be right, it is true, to fear those wicked men, if they could kill the entire person. But you have no reason to fear them, for you know that the body is the most worthless part of a person, and that however fiercely they rage, they can in no way injure the soul, which is the better part of a person.⁴¹ They would do more harm by not killing those who yield to them than by killing those who scorn them. I will show you who is more to be feared: fear him who, just as he created the entire person, is likewise able to consign the entire person to hell,⁴² condemned to eternal death. Nevertheless, the body that the tyrant destroys for a time does not utterly perish, for it will be restored in the resurrection, vastly improved, but the same. To this extent, therefore, the body only is in danger, if, while you are steadfastly obeying my commands, it should happen to be killed. But if while obeying their commands you should abandon the work of the gospel, now it is not only your body that perishes (which, even if no one kills, nevertheless must die by the common law of nature), but also your soul will be consigned to the eternal fires. What difference does it make whether it is a persecutor or a disease or some other chance event that takes your life? Certainly it is more glorious to meet death on account of the gospel. Even though the death is violent, it will nevertheless not come before the appointed day; whenever it comes, it will not come apart from divine providence. From this it follows that you cannot avoid it if you try. God will not suffer you to be killed, until it is most expedient for you to die. Therefore drive every fear of this sort too from your minds. God will also take care of this, for it would not be difficult for him to grant you immortality, if it were not a greater thing to despise death than to flee it.⁴³

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40 Your] First in 1535; previously 'Our'

41 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 34.2 (on Matt 10:28) PG 57 400: 'Even if they kill you, they will not conquer your better part, though they try with all their might.'

42 On 'hell' cf chapter 8 n37.

43 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 34.2 (on Matt 10:28) PG 57 400: 'He permits them to die, bestowing upon them something greater . . . For it is a far greater thing to persuade one to scorn death than to pluck one from death. Accordingly . . . with a brief word he implants in them the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.'

'What is of less value than the tiny sparrows that can be bought two for a penny, the smallest coin? The sparrows are everywhere so numerous, and yet not even one of them perishes on the earth unless your Father wills and permits it. Are you, then, afraid that he would allow you to perish before your time, you whom of all people he chose for this work, you for whom, far from neglecting, he has even numbered all the hairs of your head? If the Father values you so much more than he does the countless sparrows, there is no reason for you to fear that people could do anything to you other than what has seemed right to him who continually cares for you. To him, therefore, leave the concern for your life and death, and do not let any fear of the evils that people can inflict upon other people deter you from publicly professing my name, however detested it is by the world. For whoever has scorned the reproaches of men and has professed me as Lord and teacher⁴⁴ in this life, him will I recognize as a servant and a disciple in the presence of my heavenly Father. On the other hand, whoever has been ashamed of me before men and has denied me, him too will I deny before my Father, who is in heaven. Yet this is not a delicate confession made at ease, for one does not confess me unless he shows by his life also that he believes in my words. Moreover,⁴⁵ he has denied me who lives in such a way that he prefers anything to me. Therefore what gain is there if someone loses that surpassing and eternal praise before the Father and the angels of the Father because of a fear here of an ignominy that is false, is not long-lived, and is not ignominy at all except among the ignorant and foolish, while with God it is true glory? It is gain to disregard those things and, having scorned them all, to hurry toward the eternal reward.⁴⁶ This will be rendered to the deserving in its own time. In the meantime a good conscience is a good portion of the reward. The profession of the gospel is not something easy or watered-down. The rewards are indeed great, but one must proceed toward them with unyielding exertions of the mind; they will not come to the lazy and idle. They must be claimed with a violent hand.

'Do you think I have come to sow peace on earth among men? The fact of the matter is far otherwise. By no means have I come to sow peace and harmony, but sword and war – not only civil, but a war that is even internal and domestic.⁴⁷ It is inevitable that great divisions will arise even among

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44 Cf John 13:13–14.

45 Moreover] Added in 1534

46 Cf Phil 3:8–14.

47 'internal and domestic': *intestinum et domesticum* – the expression is Ciceronian; cf Cicero *In Catilinam* 2.20, where it means 'civil war.'

those who are most closely related, since the gospel teaching will be hateful to most people, and since it demands for itself such an ardent passion that all human affections, however powerful, must take second place.⁴⁸ Again, those who passionately love this world will sooner rage against the people who are dearest to them than give up their habitual vices, while others, once touched by the fire of gospel love, will allow no affection to tear them away from that which they have begun to embrace. But happy is the dividing⁴⁹ that promotes what is sound, and cuts away what is rotten; happy is the sword that cuts away every harmful desire from the heart. Let this upheaval be charged to me, not to you, for I have administered a drug that has upset the whole body. Let it be understood, however, that those who out of hatred for my name wage war against their affections (that is,⁵⁰ against those who are most closely joined by the law of nature), have themselves to blame, not me, for it was possible for them to emulate⁵¹ those they persecute. I am offering salvation to everyone: if everyone embraces it there will be no division. The gospel in and of itself is, to be sure, an instrument of peace, but the sin of others stirs up dissension; a drug is inherently a health-giving thing, but sometimes stirs up a violent agitation in the body, while it is providing for the tranquillity of all the members. But it is expedient to cut away what is harmful, so that true and holy concord may endure all the more among the pure.⁵² This, then, is the sword I bring upon the earth, a sword that disrupts the harmony between father and son, severs the bond between mother and daughter – the tightest natural bond – and tears apart the harmony between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. No connection of nature or of friendship is so steadfast that this sword cannot break it apart. The sword of the gospel will, through a sudden enmity,

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48 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 35.1 (on Matt 10:34) PG 57 405: 'But describing the nature of the war, he shows that it is much worse than a civil war . . . Nor is it simply a war among members of a household, but it is between those who are most friendly and tied by the closest bond.'

49 Cf Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 10:34–6 PG 123 244C–245A: 'Concord is not everywhere good; there is a time when division too is good.'

50 that is . . . of nature] Added in 1534. For the affections interpreted as 'family,' 'friends,' see the paraphrase on 5:29–30 above.

51 'To emulate': *aemulari*. For this word in the language of Salvation History see CWE 42 64 n3 and 65 n1. For its broader significance in Erasmus see CWE 42 118 n14, and *Ciceronianus* CWE 28 379.

52 For the medical image see Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 35.1 (on Matt 10:34–6) PG 57 405: 'The physician saves the rest of the body when he cuts away the incurable part.'

sunder those whom household companionship had most closely joined to an individual.

'This war will extend up to the point where those people who are on our side will only disdain their enemies, but will not harm them, which, indeed, is in their power; they will even save them if they can. Their disdain will reach the point, not of arrogant scorn, but where they will disobey ungodly commands, after giving a respectful explanation. You must make every effort not to disturb the general condition of the state, not to fail in the duty that, by the law of nature, a son owes a father, a daughter owes a mother, a brother owes a brother, a husband owes a wife, a cousin owes a cousin, a friend owes a friend, and one family member owes another. I do not abolish the law of nature, rather I perfect it.⁵³ One must always obey public officials, unless their orders are wicked. They call a man to court, he must go; they demand an explanation, one must be given. However, they must certainly not be obeyed if they order someone to sacrifice to idols,⁵⁴ or if they command someone to stop proclaiming my name. Nevertheless they must not be provoked with insults, but one should supply an explanation in a reasonable manner why it would be better to obey God, prince over all, than human authority.⁵⁵ For it is right that the commandments of God should outweigh the commands of men. But if they prescribe things that are not right, things which, however, would not make persons ungodly if one obeys,⁵⁶ you must put up with your rulers, so that they might not be provoked and become enraged. Here are examples of this sort of thing: if they take clothing or money unjustly, cast someone into prison, or beat someone with whips. These things do not so much take away godliness as increase it by the event and bring renown to gospel virtue. In the same way, if a parent has some need, you must do your godly duty, even if the parent is a pagan and ill-disposed to the gospel. If the authority of the parent diverts one from the gospel, one must rather obey one's heavenly Father than one's earthly father. Nevertheless one's father is not to be harshly

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53 Cf Matt 5:17. Erasmus appears generally to take natural law for granted. In his debate with Luther, Erasmus repeatedly distinguishes it from the law of works and the law of faith; cf eg *De libero arbitrio* CWE 76 24-5 and n83; and *Hyperaspistes* 2 CWE 77 358 and 742. Cf chapter 15 n8.

54 By this allusion Erasmus draws the reader unambiguously to the early Christian context; cf Pliny *Epistles* 10.96.

55 Cf Acts 4:19, 5:29; 1 Pet 3:15.

56 one obeys] First in 1534; previously 'some obey.' With the paraphrastic admonition here compare that in the paraphrase on Rom 13:1-7 CWE 42 73-5.

rejected, but to be admonished gently and reverently not to fight against God.⁵⁷

'We must act in this manner also with others to whom we owe the duty of kindness by nature or civil custom. Someone will say it is hard to overcome such affections sown deeply within us by nature. But the profession of the gospel needs people who are strong and manly, and who will not be separated from their heavenly work by any affection. You will see me enter upon this path; whoever wants to be found among my disciples must follow me by the same path. The son who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Again, the father who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. But one does love someone more than me if, while he gratifies that person, he neglects my commandments. It is ungodly godliness so to indulge your human parents that you offend God your parent.

'Should it seem to be too much to prefer the will of God to every human affection,⁵⁸ then consider: since there is nothing dearer to a human being than life, unless a person disdains this too for the gospel's sake and, always ready for every kind of death and torture, takes up his cross and follows me every day, he is not a disciple worthy of me, his teacher. For just as a disproportionate love of parent or of child is more truly hate than love, since it is harmful to both, so a disproportionate concern for preserving one's life is the true destruction of life. One who has lost his life well has saved it; one who has saved it badly has lost it. A person, who by abandoning the gospel and denying me has satisfied his judge, escaped prison, escaped the cross, and avoided death, may appear to men to have gained his life; in truth he has lost his life. Again, he who boldly clings to the gospel, and bravely exposes himself to every danger and death, seems to men to suffer the loss of life, though he alone has gained it. The soul does not perish when one is killed for professing the gospel, but it is saved unto eternity. It perishes in truth if one bargains with ungodliness for a slightly longer stay in the body (though not even then does the soul live in the body, since it lives hateful to God).

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57 Cf Acts 5:39. Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 10:37) PL 26 68B notes similarly that Jesus' saying makes our obligations relative: we are to love our parents, but if we are forced into a choice between parents and God we must choose God.

58 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 10:40) PL 26 68C: '[Christ] makes affection subject to religion.'

'Nor is there any danger, if it should happen that you are abandoned by your parents, siblings, cousins, and friends, that there will be no one to supply you with lodging and food. The gifts with which I am furnishing you, and your integrity, will everywhere obtain for you houses, parents, sons, kinsmen, and friends. For you will have as many brothers and sons as you have disciples. Just as there will always be people who scornfully reject and persecute you, so wherever you go there will be people to restore you with sincere affection. And just as God, who considers himself scorned when you are scorned, will one day punish most severely the persecutors⁵⁹ (for you do not avenge yourselves but bless your persecutors),⁶⁰ so for those who restore you he will lay up a most ample reward on your behalf, even if you do not in any way repay the kindness. God does not want it imputed to you, but to himself, if any kindness has been conferred upon you through regard for the gospel. For whoever receives you receives me in whose name you are performing the mission, and whoever receives me receives my Father, who has sent me, and whose work I do. Therefore, since he is alike rich and kind, he will mete out a very ample reward for any kindness, however slight, that has been invested in you, so that they will not have spent their kindness upon you, but will have loaned it at interest. The person who has given owes more thanks by far than the one who has received. For it is a great gain to have exchanged a physical and temporary kindness for spiritual and perpetual riches. He who receives a prophet for no reason other than that he is a prophet, and that, as he was sent by me, he preaches the divine will and the divine promises, will receive the reward of a prophet – that is, he too will, himself, become a prophet. And he who receives a just man, not because he is his kinsman or because of any other human affection, but only because he is just according to the gospel rule, will receive the reward of a just man – that is, he too will, himself, become a just man. Has he not made a happy exchange⁶¹ who has given hospitality and has gained innocence? Poverty will keep no one from this gain: here the disposition of the giver, not the value of the gift, is weighed in reckoning the reward.⁶² Rather, he who has given a drink even of cold water, I will not say to me, but to any of the least of these, simply because he is my

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59 Cf Rom 12:19.

60 Cf Matt 5:44; Rom 12:14.

61 For the idea of the 'happy exchange' in Erasmus, see Robert D. Sider 'The Just and the Holy in Erasmus' *New Testament Scholarship* ERSY 11 (1991) 22.

62 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 1 (on Matt 10:42) PL 26 69B-70A: 'Someone else might argue, "Poverty prevents me, slender means keeps me from being hospitable."

disciple, I assure you, will not be cheated of his reward, for he too will himself become my disciple. And who is so poor that he cannot offer cold water to the thirsty? Just as it matters not how much is given, but with what disposition and in whose name it is given, so the standing of the one to whom a service is done does not matter. It is enough that he is my disciple for it to be credited to me as a great kindness done.'

Chapter 11

Now that Jesus had with commands such as these equipped his disciples for preaching the gospel, he left them to make trial of themselves apart from their master,¹ and departed from the mountain so that he, too, for his part might preach the gospel in the cities of the Jews. Thanks to the miracles he performed far and wide and his wonderful teaching, report of Jesus was spreading more and more every day throughout Judea and in the regions bordering the Jordan where earlier John had preached and had baptized Jesus. For this reason John's disciples, who had been somewhat envious of Jesus' renown for some time now (for they perceived nothing yet remarkable about him, while they supposed John was something greater than man),² brought word to John³ in prison of all the great accomplishments of the one whom a little earlier he had baptized in the Jordan, and for whom he had offered testimony before the people. Then John, a man of perfect sanctity, rejoiced that what he himself had predicted was now

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[Christ] has forestalled this excuse by a very easy precept, that we offer a cup of cold water with all our heart.'

- 1 Erasmus begins the paraphrase on Matt 11 by establishing, like Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 36.1 (on Matt 11:1) PG 57 413, a connection between the mission of the Twelve described in chapter 10 and Jesus' withdrawal at this time. Chrysostom writes: 'Since he had sent them, he withdrew, giving them room and time to do what he had bid them. For while he was present and healing the sick, no one would have wanted to go to them.'
- 2 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 36.1–2 (on Matt 11:3) PG 57 414 recalls the record of Scripture to show that 'the disciples of John were always jealous of Jesus,' and explains: 'For they did not yet know who the Christ was, but supposing that Jesus was a mere man and John more than man, they were resentful when they saw the renown of Jesus, while John was already in decline, as he himself had said.' Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 11:1–2) PL 26 69c also attributed jealousy to John's disciples.
- 3 That John receives the reports from his disciples is taken from Luke 7:18, a passage recalled by Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 36.1 (on Matt 11:2–3) PG 57 413.

happening: that his own reputation, which was greater than warranted, was declining, and that Jesus' renown was becoming more celebrated daily.⁴ He sensed his disciples' somewhat envious feelings, and in order to heal this infirmity of theirs, and to place, as it were, in the hands of Jesus those separated from himself, he sent to Jesus two men chosen from among his disciples⁵ to convey this message to him in his own words: 'Are you that Messiah whose imminent coming was spoken of, or are you not the one I had predicted, and do we await yet another?' John did this, not because he was himself still doubting, but to strengthen the hearts of his disciples and convincingly put an end to their exaggerated ideas about him.⁶ For if John had denied that he himself was the Christ, and if he had repeated what he had often said, that Jesus was the Messiah, his disciples would have attributed this to modesty, and they would have held him in greater esteem the more he humbled himself.⁷ But he knew that Jesus himself would heal this infirmity better. They went to Jesus and related the things John had commanded.

Now Jesus was aware that the evidence arising from deeds is surer than that which comes from⁸ words, especially when a person witnesses the

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4 Cf John 3:30: 'He must increase, while I must decrease,' quoted by Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 36.1 (on Matt 11:3) PG 57 413.

5 In both his text and translation of 11:2 Erasmus read 'two of his disciples'; the preferred reading does not specify the number, but Luke 7:19 reads 'two.' Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 36.2 (on Matt 11:2) PG 57 414 endeavours to show that John's purpose in this mission was to detach his own disciples from himself and to place them with Jesus. Cf n6 below.

6 That John was acting on his disciples' behalf, and was not expressing his own doubt or ignorance, is also found at Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 36.1 (on Matt 11:3) PG 57 413: 'It is clear that he did not send them because he was in doubt, nor did he ask because he did not know'; Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 11:1-2) PL 26 69c: 'He sent his disciples to Christ so that by this opportunity they might see his signs and miracles and believe in him, and, from their master's question, might learn for themselves'; and Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 11:2-3 PG 123 248D: 'He does not ask as one who does not know, but as one who wants to assure his disciples about the Christ through the working of miracles.' Similarly, Ps Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 27 PG 56 772.

7 The same explanation is given by Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 36.2 (on Matt 11:3) PG 57 414: 'If he had said, "Go to him, he is better than I," they would not have obeyed, since they were inseparably attached to him. For they would have thought he was speaking thus out of modesty, and they would have been even more riveted to him.'

8 that which comes from] Added in 1534

deeds for himself.⁹ So at first he said nothing in response, but in their sight performed many wonders, new and unheard-of – healing the sick, casting out unclean spirits, restoring the lame, opening the eyes of the blind.¹⁰ Then he said to them: ‘There is no need for me to proclaim who I am. Only go and relate to John what you have seen with your own eyes and what you have heard with your own ears: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the leprous are cleansed, the deaf hear, demoniacs are set free, the dead are brought back to life. Finally, in accordance with the prophecy of Isaiah, the poor and the lowly embrace the glad news¹¹ of eternal salvation that the headstrong and the arrogant spurn.¹² These things, I say, speak well enough of who I am. Blessed is he to whom, in his heart, the great success of the gospel gives no occasion for evil.’ Jesus added this, subtly and discreetly chiding the envy of John’s disciples, not in a way that shamed them in front of the crowd, but in way that caused them to acknowledge their own fault silently to themselves. Thus his response was perfectly tempered, so that he himself avoided the suspicion of arrogance, while he strengthened the faith of his own disciples, and corrected rather than publicly ridiculed the attitude of John’s disciples.

After they departed, Jesus turned to the crowd. To forestall their thinking anything about John that was unworthy of him, if they judged that he asked these things to answer his own doubts rather than to heal his disciples’ infirmity, he began to proclaim John’s praises most abundantly,¹³ in such a way nevertheless that he did not ascribe to him praise as the Messiah, but only praise that came very close, while still adding weight to John’s testimony about him. It was expedient that the people should feel as well disposed as possible towards John, who had testified so splendidly

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9 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 36.2 (on Matt 11:3) PG 57 415 explains why Jesus does not answer the question directly, but tells them to report to John what they heard and saw: ‘For he judged the testimony of his actions to be more persuasive than words, and less liable to suspicion.’

10 Luke (7:21) records that the miracles were performed in the presence of the messengers.

11 the glad news] First in 1534; previously ‘Jesus the messenger,’ *Iesum . . . nuntium*, perhaps a misreading of *letum . . . nuntium*

12 For the prophecy see Isa 29:18–20, 41:17–19, 61:1.

13 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 37.1 (on Matt 11:7–9) PG 57 419 likewise introduces Jesus’ words to the crowd with the explanation that Jesus wished to deter the crowd from any unworthy thoughts about John, ie that he had been rash or fickle.

that Jesus was the Son of God,¹⁴ that he was the Lamb that took away the sins of the world,¹⁵ that it was he who would baptize with fire and Spirit.¹⁶ For suspicion of deception did not fall on such a man, as though he had at first preached Christ falsely, neither did suspicion of inconstancy, as though later he had changed and began to doubt about the Christ. He said: 'Let no one be caught up in the suspicion that John was fickle. Otherwise, if he seemed to you to be the sort of man who changes his opinion in the manner of fickle people and calls into doubt what he had earlier affirmed, for what spectacle were you so recently flocking to the desert? Was it to see a reed shaken by the wind? For such he would have been if he now disagreed with himself and had become unlike himself. But the perpetual austerity of his entire life easily frees him from this suspicion. What, I say, were you then rushing into the desert to see? A man clothed all in silk? That was not a sight appropriate to the desert. People dressed in linen and silk belong in the palaces of kings, places suited to excess and the delights of life. Among these there is a place for inconstancy, a place for flattery. A person who eats locusts and wild honey, who is clothed with a camel's hair, and who is girt with a leather belt,¹⁷ is not open to such suspicion. Familiarity with the royal hall could not change his mode of life. That he did not know how to flatter, prison proves.¹⁸ But there must have been some great spectacle that drew you in such crowds into the desert. What, then, did you come¹⁹ to see? Some prophet? For prophets are generally accustomed to spend their lives in deserts. Here at least your hopes were not disappointed, for you saw not only a prophet, but something more excellent than a prophet.

'He²⁰ is the one about whom Malachi once prophesied that there would be a precursor of the already approaching Messiah, not only to promise the

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14 Cf John 1:34.

15 Cf John 1:29.

16 Cf Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16.

17 Cf Matt 3:4.

18 For John's presence at the royal court and his imprisonment see Matt 14:3-4; Mark 6:17-18; Luke 3:18-20. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 37.1 (on Matt 11:7-9) PG 57 420 also explained the reed and the palace as symbols of inconstancy, the palace because those who are 'subject to its delights and wanton excess become fickle.' Erasmus decries from a variety of venues the flattery of rulers; see especially the *Institutio principis christiani* CWE 27 245-53; also Ep 586:81-93, and the paraphrase on Acts 12:22-3 CWE 50 83.

19 'Did you come': *veniebatis*, though in his translation Erasmus rendered the Greek ἐξήλθατε, thrice repeated (verses 7-9), in each case by *existis* 'did you go out,' as did the Vulgate.

20 He] The reading in 1535; previously 'For he'

Messiah with an oracle from afar, but to point him out²¹ up close.²² The prophecy says: "Behold, I send my messenger before your face to prepare the way for you, the one soon to come."²³ I assure you of this, that John's excellence is so great that of all those brought into the world by women, there is no one greater than he (although he who is now regarded by many as the lesser in the preaching of the gospel is alone greater than John).²⁴ For he did not promise with obscure oracles a Messiah who would come some day, but he showed him already coming, and he preached that the kingdom of heaven was already at hand. Up to this time, people were waiting for the heavenly teaching, which the types of the patriarchs and the oracles of the seers had promised through certain riddles. Now John has so incited the minds of many to a zeal for the gospel teaching that, from the beginning of his preaching right to this day, even sinners and pagans break through to it by the violence of their faith, and snatch it by force, whether we will or no.²⁵ They refuse any longer to be excluded, they

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- 21 'Point him out': *digito ostendere*, literally 'point to him with his finger.' In his paraphrases Erasmus uses this image repeatedly of John, influenced perhaps by contemporary iconography, but also by the exegetical tradition that saw John as the one who pointed to Christ (John 1:29). See the paraphrases on Mark 1:1 CWE 49 14 and n9 and John 1:28-30 CWE 46 30, where the image of the finger is concealed in the translation. Cf chapter 3 n62 above.
- 22 With the contrast here between the ancient oracles promising the Messiah 'from afar' and John who points him out 'up close' compare Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 11:9) PL 26 71B-C: 'This is why John is greater than the prophets: while they had proclaimed that he would come, John pointed him out as having come, saying: "Behold, the Lamb of God."' Nicholas of Lyra (on 11:9) follows Jerome, noting that '[John] pointed him out with his finger.'
- 23 Matthew does not give the precise wording of Mal 3:1; nor does Erasmus quote Matthew exactly. The idea that the messenger will come soon is not in Matthew. Erasmus may have inferred it from Mal 3:1, but cf his annotation on 11:3 (*tu es qui venturus es*), where Erasmus explains that ἐρχόμενος is ambiguous and may either refer to the present or future 'coming' or may mean 'about to come soon.' The formulation 'about to come soon' is also found in the paraphrase on Mark 1:2; cf CWE 49 14.
- 24 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 37.2 (on Matt 11:11) PG 57 421 identifies Christ as the one who is 'least' and explains that he is 'lesser' than John both in age (ie younger) and in the 'opinion of the many' who thought him a 'glutton and a winebibber' and merely the son of Joseph. The *Gloss* (on 11:11) also explained 'lesser' as 'in the opinion of many,' 'greater' as 'preferred in the assembly of the saints.'
- 25 Cf the annotation on Matt 11:12 (*vim patitur*), where Erasmus defends the interpretation as found here in the paraphrase, and reviews briefly the exegesis of the passage in the Fathers, citing a passage from Hilary *In Matt comm*

refuse any longer to be detained in the shadows and riddles of the Old Law, sensing that the light of gospel truth is present, and that the thing that was foreshadowed in earlier books is now here, and that no other prophecy of the coming Messiah is to be expected. For all the types by which the Law had indicated that the Messiah would come, and all the oracles of the prophets, which were promising that the Messiah would come, stopped promising a future event as soon as John arrived. It is foolish to await what is present. Nothing remains but to seize with burning zeal what according to the oracles of the prophets is offered as now present.

‘That you may clearly see that there is for you no other prophet who will hereafter announce to you the coming Messiah, it was John that Malachi predicted would come before the Messiah, referring to him under the name of Elijah,²⁶ whom he resembled in his austerity of food and clothing, and in his candour in censuring kings.²⁷ Therefore if you accept John, believe that the Messiah, awaited for so many ages, is now here. You have seen his life, you have heard his testimony, you hear what I myself also say to you. If anyone has ears to receive the truth, let him hear. If anyone refuses to listen, let him blame himself for his destruction. We have left nothing undone to move the hearts of everyone. Nevertheless, I see that many are so stubbornly unbelieving that neither when frightened by John’s austerity nor when enticed by my civility and kindness do they accept the thing they have now awaited for so many ages, trusting the promises of the prophets.

‘What sort of generation shall I say this is? Or with what similitude would I be able to represent it? It seems like children sitting in the marketplace who cry out in the words of a popular song to their friends in the distance, thus: “With our pipes we played cheerful tunes, and you did not dance; we sang mournful songs for you, and you did not lament.” We have

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11.7 (on verse 12) PL 9 981 A-C, which is, in turn, cited in the *Gloss*. But see Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 137-9, who believe that the saying emerged from the disciples of John the Baptist, who regarded John’s death as an attack by violent men on the kingdom of God.

²⁶ Cf Mal 4:5.

²⁷ For Elijah’s Spartan existence see 1 Kings 17:1-7, 19:4-8; for his candour in censuring kings see 1 Kings 18:17-18 and 21:17-24, where Elijah confronts Ahab and prophesies the destruction of both Ahab and Jezebel. Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 11:14-15) PL 26 72C-D specifies similarly the likeness between John and Elijah: the austerity of life, the years in the desert, the rough raiment and the bold condemnation of royalty (Ahab and Jezebel); similarly Nicholas of Lyra (on 11:14).

attempted to achieve the same end in alternative ways.²⁸ Neither way has been successful with the captious and unbelieving. John, about to stir this nation to repentance with a mournful song, as it were, came forth noted for the austerity of his life, fasting and abstaining from all fine foods, taking no wine, and drinking water. Far from imitating him, there are those who say he has a demon. The Son of man has come forth as though with the more cheerful tune of the pipes, to stir this nation to the love of heavenly teaching. In order to entice the many by his companionship, he does not seclude himself in the desert, nor does he wear exceptionally rough clothing, nor eat exceptionally austere food; rather, accommodating himself to all and scorning the company of no one, he eats any food at all and drinks what is set before him. Once again people find grounds to slander, saying: "Behold, a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." Those who are not affected by austerity are usually won by soft words and affability. But this nation becomes worse at every opportunity. Every remedy turns into matter that encourages the disease. The more the ways in which it has been incited to salvation, the more evident it is to all that it has perished by its own malice. And the wisdom of God, by whose plan all these things are done, will win praise for justice from its own children when they see the ones who seemed great and just in the eyes of men rejected from the kingdom of heaven because of their disbelief. On the other hand, they will see sinners, tax collectors, harlots, pagans, the lowly and despised, admitted to eternal salvation because of their ready and eager faith.²⁹

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28 The argument of this paragraph follows the line of Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 37.3–4 (on Matt 11:16–19) PG 57 423–4, who observes that though John and Jesus walked in 'contrary' paths, they had the same end in view, ie that nothing should be left undone that was needed for salvation, since the two alternative ways appealed to different people. Thus the Jews can blame only themselves for their fate.

29 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 11:19) PL 26 73C had likewise understood 'wisdom' as the 'providence of God.' Erasmus follows his own text and translation (and the Vulgate) in reading 'children' rather than the preferred reading 'works,' for which see Metzger *Textual Commentary* 24. The fact that Erasmus wrote no annotation on the reading suggests that he was unaware of any variant, though the *Gloss* had quite specifically noted that 'works' was found in some manuscripts. In this paraphrase Erasmus leaves the meaning of 'children' somewhat ambiguous, but in the parallel Lukan passage (7:35), Erasmus explains wisdom's 'children' as 'those devoted to the wisdom of the gospel': 'The justice of God shines brightly for all "the children devoted to evangelical wisdom."' Cf the annotation on Luke 7:35 (*sapientia ab omnibus filiis suis*): 'The teaching of Christ had pleased all who were the children of wisdom.' On the

Here Jesus, as though marvelling at the unconquerable malice of some people, began (to the terror of others) to rebuke the cities where he had performed many miracles, and had cured people, and had taught so many things, and where nevertheless remorse had not driven the people to repent of their former lives. He said: 'Woe to you, Chorazin, woe to you, Bethsaida, because if the miracles that were done in you had been seen in Tyre or Sidon, cities you curse as pagan and ungodly, then, stung by remorse long ago, they would have done penance in sackcloth and ashes for their sins. Meanwhile, you flatter yourselves because you are of the race of Israelites, because you do not sacrifice to idols, because you do not indulge in excesses so openly and freely, because you worship one God, because you are the sons of Abraham, because you have the Law and the Prophets. On the contrary, unless you come to your senses and repent, all these things will become for you a heap of damnation. For I assure you of this, on the day of divine judgment, when each person will be judged by God, not by reputation but by merit, Tyre and Sidon will be treated more mildly than you. They will be punished more lightly because they have not been called to repentance as have you. And Capernaum, you who now proudly elevate your arrogant spirits all the way to heaven, you will then be pulled down even to hell.³⁰ You applaud yourself on the grounds that you are the patron of justice, and you abhor the inhabitants of Sodom,³¹ who in time past suffered a horrible punishment for their sins. On the day of judgment the judgment against even these will be milder than the judgment against you, for if the miracles that have been produced in you had been performed in Sodom, they would have appeased with penance the God they had offended, and their cities would still be standing to the present day.'

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meaning of the Matthean passage when either variant – 'works' or 'children' – is read, see Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 139–40. For the theme in Erasmus' work of the reversed roles of pagans and Jews as part of God's wisdom and plan see eg the annotation on Rom 11:33 (of the riches of wisdom) CWE 56 316–17.

30 'To hell': *ad inferos* rather than the Vulgate's *in infernum* in 11:23; for the language see CWE 50 19 n70, and cf chapter 3 n41, chapter 4 n30, chapter 8 n37 above, and chapter 16 n28 below.

31 'Patron of justice': *iustitiae cultrici*; 'inhabitants of Sodom': *Sodomae cultores*. The characterization of Capernaum as *iustitiae cultrix* fits the contextual theme of 'judgment' (*iudicium*), and recalls the story of Abraham's appeal for the inhabitants of Sodom based on the number of *iusti* 'just persons' to be found in the city (Gen 18:22–32).

When the disciples returned to Jesus from their preaching, and joyfully reported to him that their work had succeeded, he raised his eyes to heaven and, teaching us that our praiseworthy actions must be attributed to God, said:³² 'I give thanks to you,'³³ Father, you who are Lord of heaven and earth, and by whose wisdom all things are guided, because you have concealed this heavenly philosophy from those who are swollen with pride and haughty in the conviction that they possess worldly wisdom and prudence, and you have opened it to those who are insignificant, lowly, and, according to the estimation of the world, foolish.³⁴ Truly, Father, it is this way because so it seemed right to your kindness, in order to teach that those who are intractable and who trust in their own justice and in their own wisdom do not please you, and that those whom the world considers worthless and foolish are, because of their simplicity of faith, great in your eyes. Thus it has pleased your divine plan to condemn human wisdom and to draw good people to you by the lowliness of the gospel teaching.'³⁵ Then turning to those standing around him, he said: 'My Father is author of all these good things; it is he who has handed everything over to me. To know him and me is true happiness. But he enters only peaceful and unassuming hearts.'³⁶ This is an arcane philosophy, unknown to the world. No one knows the Son except the Father, no one knows the Father except the Son and any to whom the Son has been willing to reveal him. He does not reveal him to the proud and haughty. Teaching and miracles achieve nothing unless secret inspiration is added. But we regard as worthy of this only those who, utterly distrusting their own supports, entrust themselves entirely to divine goodness. Those who consider themselves wise are unworthy of this wisdom, those who consider themselves wealthy have no access to these riches, those who consider themselves well-born and powerful are

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32 For the return of the disciples from their mission as the immediate precedent of Jesus' prayer see Luke 10:17-22.

33 Erasmus follows his own translation rather than the Vulgate's *confiteor* 'I confess' for the Greek *ἐξομολογῶμαι*, explaining in his annotation on 11:25 (*quia abscondisti*) that the Greek represents a Hebrew word used idiomatically for 'I give thanks.' Cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 144, who note that the Greek word was used in the LXX as equivalent to 'give praise.'

34 Cf 1 Cor 1:26-9.

35 Cf 1 Cor 1:21.

36 For the peaceful and unassuming heart as the abode of the Spirit see the paraphrases on Mark 1:10 CWE 49 19 and Acts 1:14 CWE 50 10; the theme has precedent in Christian antiquity – cf CWE 50 10 n76; for peace as the fruit of the Spirit see Gal 5:22.

not admitted to these sanctuaries, those who consider themselves just are not fit for divine justice.³⁷

Here Jesus reflected upon the great calamity of the human race: that some were oppressed by poverty, others in turn were even more gravely vexed by a concern for money; that some were afflicted by diseases, others by old age; that some were tormented by love, others were even more grievously racked by hate; that many wandered about in various mazes of false opinions; that many were always being inwardly lashed by the knowledge of their misdeeds; and that there was no one to act as a faithful and effective pastor, though countless men were acting as priests out of pride, commending themselves by the name of Rabbi, and exacting tithes. Moved by pity, Jesus summoned them all to him, freely promising solace and relief to everyone, if only they would approach him with simple and sincere hearts, shaking off the yoke of this world, a yoke by far the most pitiful and troublesome, and receive the yoke of gospel teaching.

'Come to me,' he said, 'any of you who labour under afflictions, anxieties, or the knowledge of your sins; any of you who are weighed down by the burden of evils. I will restore you; I will give solace against every kind of evil. The riches, the honours, the pleasures of this world do not offer true peace of mind; the philosophy of this world, the religion of the Pharisees do not free us from troubling cares. The world has its own yoke, at first sight gentle, but in truth grievous and bitter.³⁸ First, shake it off, then³⁹ run to me, and willingly and eagerly place your necks under my yoke. Learn from me what alone and what truly calms the mind; learn from me from what fount springs that complete upheaval of mortals. Surely, it is a haughty and insolent mind, trusting in itself, trusting God but little. It is from here that ambition, desire for money, lust for revenge, animosity, envy, wars,

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37 For Erasmus it was a fundamental presupposition that the proud, haughty, arrogant, and self-confident are not admitted to the 'sanctuary' of divine wisdom; cf eg the *Enchiridion* CWE 66 34, and the *Ratio* Holborn 179:19-180:7.

38 In an annotation on Matt 11:30 (*iugum meum suave*), Erasmus offers a lengthy critique of the contemporary Church, which has weighed down the law of Christ, originally pleasant and light, with heavy and severe human regulations and dogmas added from the useless speculations of Scholastic theologians and the self-serving decrees of church officials. Additions that may have seemed godly at first have increased in number to become ever more oppressive and overwhelming. Erasmus adds: 'Long ago St Augustine in his letter to Januarius expressed vexation and grief that the church of Christ was so oppressed that the condition of a Jew was almost better than that of a Christian.'

39 then] Added in 1534

rebellions, and blasphemies against God spring forth. What could be more tumultuous, or what more turbulent, than these things? If you want to be freed once and for all from all evils, do away with the source of these things,⁴⁰ accept my teaching, imitate my life. Learn from me because I am meek and not at all haughty of heart. What I can do I have shown by miracles, and yet I strive after neither wealth nor honour, nor do I seek to gain any of the things⁴¹ the world regards as great and distinguished. I despise no one, no matter how lowly or sinful. I do not repay insults, I do not return curses for curses, I do not strike back when someone strikes me. I depend totally on the will of the Father. He will exact punishment from the wicked, he will lay up rewards for good deeds done. I yield all glory to him, I entrust every concern to him. I simply obey his will in all things. As far as I am able, I strive to do good to all, to harm no one. If you learn only this from me, you will perceive that those wretched tumults by which you are now ceaselessly driven will subside, and you will procure quiet and tranquillity for your minds, a peace that will abide with you even in the midst of the storms of evils raging around you. A meek and gentle heart is the source of all human tranquillity. Only submit your neck, trusting. There is no reason to fear my yoke. It seems hard and heavy to the disbelieving, but to those who trust the divine goodness with all their hearts, who have received the fire of gospel love, my yoke is soft and pleasant, my burden is light, for the sure hope of rewards makes the yoke pleasant, the inexpressible love towards God makes the burden light. But⁴² what is not sweet to one in love, if the conscience is clear and the mind devoid of every care, if there is an unshakeable confidence concerning the rewards of eternal life? What will arise to disturb or unsettle such a mind?

Chapter 12

One day, when Jesus was making his way through fields of grain, the disciples were goaded by hunger as they walked in front of the Lord, and so were plucking the ears, rubbing them between their hands, and eating the grains. The Pharisees, looking to find in any quarter a source for bringing

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40 of these things] Added in 1534

41 any of the things] First in 1534, previously 'anything'

42 But . . . such a mind] First in 1534; previously punctuated to read: 'But what is not sweet to one in love if the conscience is clear and the mind devoid of every care? If there is an unshakeable confidence concerning the rewards of eternal life, what will arise to disturb or unsettle such a mind?'

false charges, said to him: 'Do you not see what your disciples are doing, violating the sabbath? Why then do you not stop them from doing on the sabbath what is forbidden?' Here Jesus so defended his disciples that the Pharisees would not be able, all the same, to accuse him, as though he were the one responsible for their violation of the sabbath. At the same time he taught that such regulations ought to give way when a condition of need or some extraordinary advantage presents itself. For the sabbath and fastings and similar things had been instituted not for the bane of humanity, but its welfare. To the Pharisees, therefore, who were skilled in the Law, he offered an example from the Law, not of just anybody, but of one whom they themselves regarded as especially good and blameless.¹ He said: 'Why do you slanderously accuse my disciples, because they curb their hunger with something easily obtained? Or have you not read that David, a most holy man, driven by necessity, did something more daring?'² When in his flight from Saul he had come into the city of Nob,³ he ate the sacred loaves that they call the "loaves of presentation,"⁴ and not only he, but also his companions and servants. It is forbidden for anyone to eat of these loaves except the priests and Levites. However, when he was imperilled by hunger, neither was the priest afraid to provide him with the loaves, nor was David afraid to touch and eat them – just as though they were not sacred.⁵

'If you approve of what Abimelech⁶ the priest did, if you do not condemn what the prophet David did, why do you accuse my disciples of doing a thing that is far less serious? For how much – that is, how little – work is required to pluck the ears of grain one finds along the way, to re-

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1 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 39.1 (on Matt 12:3-4) PG 57 435 had also noted the special force of the exemplum: David, a prophet, was held in the highest regard, while the priest not only permitted David to eat, but actually provided the loaves for him (as in the paraphrase just below).

2 Cf Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 11:1-4 PG 123 260C: 'For out of hunger [David] dared something even greater.'

3 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 12:3-4) PL 26 76C also supplies the context for David's action: 'To refute the charge of the Pharisees, he called to mind the story of David, who when fleeing Saul came into Nob and, received by the priest Achimelech, demanded food.'

4 Translations vary: NRSV = bread of presence; NEB = sacred bread; AV = shew-bread; DV = loaves of presentation. Erasmus takes *panes propositionis* directly from the Vulgate of 1 Sam 21:6 and Matt 12:4. Cf the Septuagint: ἄρτους τῆς προθέσεως.

5 For the law cf Lev 24:5-9; for the story, 1 Sam 21:1-6.

6 Ahimelech in the Vulgate (Weber I 400) and modern English versions (NRSV), but Abimelech in the Septuagint.

move the kernels by rubbing the ears between the hands, and eat them? What of the fact that the Law itself somewhere commands that the sabbath be violated?⁷ For when on the sabbath priests in the temple slaughter cattle and work at a sort of butcher's stall, when they gather a pile of wood, when they light the fire, when they take off the skin, when they cut, when they cook, do they not profane the sabbath? The Law does not allow any work to be done, and yet sacred priests work at such sordid tasks in this sacred place on the sabbath. You know that these things are done, and you approve them on the grounds that they are of use to the temple. If the authority of the temple is so great that the work that is devoted to it does not violate the sabbath, I tell you this: there is here one greater than the temple. It would be more appropriate for those who minister to him to be absolved from the charge of violating the sabbath. If they who work in the Mosaic sacrifices do not profane the sabbath, much more must they be excused who serve the gospel which is more pleasing to God than any other sacrifice.⁸ He who instituted the sabbath is also able to abolish the sabbath, and he who instituted the sabbath instituted it for the sake of man; he did not, on the contrary, create man for the sake of the sabbath.⁹

Therefore, it is right that the observance of the sabbath should give way to people's advantage, not that a person should die for the sake of the sabbath. If so much importance is attributed to a sacrifice that those who assist it may violate the sabbath without punishment, why have you not also excused the person who by a needed kindness assists his neighbour on the sabbath? God indeed says that this sacrifice is of more importance to him than the sacrifice of a beast. For he says through¹⁰ the prophet Hosea: "I want mercy and not sacrifice, and"¹¹ the knowledge of God more than a burnt offering." [6:6] You profess skill in the Law, and yet this has been written in the Law. If you truly understood it, you would never have blamed innocent men for a trifling thing that is harmful to no one. For certain ordinances exist, not because they are in themselves good or bad, but because they

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⁷ Cf eg Num 28:9-10; Ezek 46:4.

⁸ Cf Phil 4:18. Like Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 12:5) PL 26 77A Erasmus explains that the sabbath is broken in the temple when the priests undertake the sordid tasks essential to preparing the sacrifice. Similarly Nicholas of Lyra (on 12:5). Cf John 7:22-3.

⁹ Cf Mark 2:27.

¹⁰ through ... Hosea] Added in 1534

¹¹ and ... offering] Added in 1534, completing the verse from Hosea - Matthew quotes only the first half.

are in some way conducive to godliness, and they do not so much supply sanctity as signify it, for example, the kind of food, the colour of clothing, or its style or material, fasting, holy days. In observing these things, one must not be so superstitiously strict that, on account of them, one either fails to do things that are always good in and of themselves, or does things that are in and of themselves always bad. Adultery, murder, disparagement, envy are evil and impious every day. Nevertheless those who practise the religion of the Pharisees abhor these things less than the violation of the sabbath. To help a neighbour in need is godly and holy every day; nevertheless, the Pharisees, on the pretext of keeping the sabbath, allowed a neighbour to be in distress.' Jesus Christ was eager to remove this most destructive superstition utterly from the minds of his disciples.

Accordingly, in order to impress even further the same thing upon everyone's mind with an obvious illustration, he left that place and returned to their synagogue; he wanted to have as witnesses those who he knew were particularly subject to this disease. And behold, immediately the occasion for a miracle presented itself there. For there was present in the crowd a man with a maimed and withered hand. The Pharisees, seeking a genuine basis for charging Jesus, were watching him to see whether he who had just before defended his apostles on a charge of breaking the sabbath would heal on the sabbath. Wanting to make it clear to everyone that their trickery sprang not from religion, but from envy, Jesus ordered the man with the maimed hand to come forward into their midst so that the defect might be obvious to all, and they might even be moved with pity toward an unfortunate man who carried about a limb that was dead and useless – and to a poor man the most necessary limb of all.¹² But before he healed the

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12 Erasmus has cautiously modified the report of Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 12:13) PL 26 78B that in the Gospel 'used by the Nazarenes and the Ebionites' the man was a *caementarius* 'a worker in concrete,' earning his living with his hands. The *Gloss* (on 12:13) followed Jerome in representing the man thus. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 40.1 (on Matt 12:9–10) PG 57 439 had emphasized the reason Jesus called the man into the midst: that by the pitiful sight the Pharisees would abandon their wickedness, and '... that he might evoke their pity.' But that Jesus called the man into the midst is a detail Chrysostom (without acknowledgment) and Erasmus following him have introduced from Mark 3:3 and Luke 6:8. Indeed, Erasmus appears to abandon the Matthean narrative when he goes on to make Jesus the interrogator (as in Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9). In Matthew (12:10) it is the Pharisees who ask the question of Jesus. Chrysostom had noticed the discrepancy, and both the *Gloss* and Nicholas of

man, not unaware of what the Pharisees were thinking, he asked them a question, saying: 'Is it lawful to heal a man on the sabbath? And is it more tolerable to you to do a man a kindness or an injury, to save a man or to destroy him? For he destroys who does not save when he can.' They all at the same time grew silent: they were afraid on the one hand that the people would think them cruel if they announced that it was unlawful to help an unfortunate man on the sabbath, on the other that they would lose their grounds for bringing charges if they replied that it was permitted. But while they were silent, Jesus himself loosened the knot of the problem at issue by offering an example. He said: 'Who among you will be found to be so strict an observer of the sabbath that if one of his sheep should be put at peril by falling into a pit on the sabbath, he would not immediately set to work and draw it out? If greed so effectively prevails with you that you prefer to break the sabbath rather than to lose one animal from your possessions, by how much more ought love be granted this, that you help a neighbour on the sabbath, for a neighbour is far better than a sheep?'¹³ Therefore, it is plain even to you judges that it is lawful to help a neighbour with a kindness on the sabbath.'

When Jesus sensed that their envy was mitigated not even by these words, and that they were unmoved either by the sight of the pitiful man, or by so obvious an argument, he cast his eyes about, full of indignation and lamenting the great blindness of their hearts,¹⁴ then turned to the man with the dry and shrunken hand and said, 'Stretch out your hand,' and as soon as Jesus said this he stretched out his hand, and it was no less healthy and supple than the other. The Pharisees were driven into a rage by such an extraordinary deed, since they saw snatched from them this opportunity to bring charges against Jesus.¹⁵ They departed from the synagogue and left

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Lyra (on 12:10) attempted to harmonize the two accounts. In the paraphrase here the Pharisees' question is internalized, and recognized only by Jesus' divine knowledge: he was 'not unaware of what they were thinking'; cf 9:3-4 and 12:25. It is Mark (3:4) who records the ensuing silence of the Pharisees.

13 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 40.1 (on Matt 12:9-10) PG 57 440: 'He knew they were avaricious rather than benevolent (φιλόανθρωποι).' Jerome, too, *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 12:11-12) PL 26 78A observed that the parable was intended to 'condemn the avarice' of the Pharisees. Cf the *Gloss* (on 12:11): 'He shows that they violated the sabbath through cupidity, he through love.'

14 For the look ('he cast his eyes about') cf Mark 3:5 and Luke 6:10; for the indignation and grief Mark 3:5.

15 For the Pharisees' rage see Luke 6:11.

the crowd, which they understood was very favourably disposed towards Jesus, and secretly entered into a plot with the Herodians to remove Jesus from their midst; for the Herodians also were in communication with John's disciples who were envying Jesus' glory.¹⁶ Now the will to commit murder was present, and nothing was lacking but a suitable opportunity.

Jesus, however, was not ignorant of their designs, and he withdrew from the place, so that he would not seem to have given enraged men any opportunity to take desperate measures. He could have repressed them in some hateful manner, he could have overcome them with miracles, he could even have destroyed them. But wanting to demonstrate gospel gentleness, he gave way to their fury, if by chance they might soften or repent. Yet he only partially gave way to them, for he still in other places imparted the heavenly doctrine to the densely packed crowds that accompanied him, and he healed as many sick or otherwise unfortunate people as were brought to him. For his time had not yet come:¹⁷ the gospel was not sufficiently published yet. Therefore he gave way, not out of consideration for himself, but to remove from them an opportunity for a terrible crime,¹⁸ and at the same time to teach that the gospel philosophy must be defended against rebels, not by inspiring fear, or by hurling insults, or by disputes, but with gentleness. Therefore, in order to keep the Pharisees from becoming more¹⁹ incensed as the report spread more widely, he ordered the crowds that were following not to make himself known. This was not done by chance, but it had already been foretold by the prophet Isaiah that this would happen. In Isaiah the Father describes his Son's victory, won with gentleness; he describes also the gospel salvation transferred to the gentiles because of the Jews' obstinacy, which has been well enough observed by everyone.²⁰ Here

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16 Matthew says that the Pharisees 'conspired against Jesus'; Mark that they plotted with the Herodians (Mark 3:6); the Pharisees and John's envious disciples are linked in the paraphrase on Matt 9:14–17. On the envy of John's disciples, see also the paraphrase on Matt 11:3–6. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 40.1–2 (on Matt 12:13–14) PG 57 440 notes both the Matthean and Markan version.

17 Cf John 7:6 and 13:1.

18 Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 12:15 PG 123 264D similarly presents Jesus' departure as an act of mercy: 'Jesus departed, because the time of his passion was not yet at hand, and also sparing them, so that they would not be subject to a charge of murder.' Similarly the *Gloss* (on 12:15).

19 more] First in 1535; previously 'more and more'

20 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 40.2 (on Matt 12:17–20) PG 57 441 offers a similar summary of the prophecy, pointing to the gentleness of Christ, the door opened for the gentiles, and the fate of Israel.

are his words:²¹ ‘Behold,’ he says, ‘my Son,’²² whom I have chosen before the rest; behold my beloved, in whom my soul has been well pleased; I will give him my Spirit, gentle and mild, and by its inspiration he will pronounce judgment, not only to the people of Israel, but even to all the gentiles. He will not do this by uprisings or by force, for he will not dispute or cry out against the contentious; nor will anyone hear his voice sounding in the streets in the customary manner of those who wage battles with their tongues. He will leave scope for unconquerable malice, but he will try to lead everyone to salvation. He will not give the wicked the occasion for incurable ruin, but he will save everyone if by any chance they will turn to better things. He will not spurn the feeble, he will not spurn the weak. He will cherish rather than crush those in whom there is any good hope. He will not break the bruised reed, and he will not extinguish the smoking flax until in the course of time truth conquers by itself, and the insanity of the ungodly has by their own fault burst forth to the point where all may understand that they have been repulsed and rejected deservedly. Then the gentiles will embrace his teaching, which was spurned by the Jews, and they will place their own hope in him whom the Jews refused to trust.’

It happened in the meantime that among the many whom he was healing there was brought to Jesus a man subject to a harmful demon that

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- 21 For Erasmus the identification of *personae* – especially the identification of the speaker (here God, the Father) – is an important key to biblical interpretation. See the *Ratio* Holborn 196:29–198:32, and for his use of the principle see the annotation on Rom 7:25 (the grace of God) CWE 56 195–7 and *Psalmi* CWE 63 9.
- 22 Erasmus follows his own translation in rendering the Greek *παῖς* in 12:18 as ‘Son.’ *Παῖς* can also mean ‘servant,’ and is so rendered in the Vulgate of Isa 42:1, to which Matthew here refers. The Vulgate rendered the Matthean *παῖς* by *puer* ‘boy,’ or ‘servant.’ Erasmus similarly translated *παῖς* in Acts 4:27 as ‘Son,’ and it was at this point that critics, notably Edward Lee and López Zúñiga, attacked Erasmus for his translation of the word. Zúñiga claimed that in avoiding the language of servitude Erasmus detracted from the full humanity of Christ, and so fell into the heresy of Apollinaris; cf *Apologiae contra Stunicam* (1) ASD IX-2 140:601–141:680, and 66:106–10; for Lee see *Responsio ad annotationes Lei* CWE 72 249–52. Erasmus also responded to both Lee and Zúñiga in a 1522 addition to his annotation on Acts 4:27 (*adversus sanctum puerum tuum Iesum*). In the annotation on 12:19 (*ecce puer meus*) he notes that ‘if it was anywhere appropriate to translate *παῖς* as “Son,” certainly “Son” was apt here, since [Isaiah] speaks of Christ,’ and in a 1522 addition he says further, ‘Among the Greeks there were some who were afraid to apply the word “servant” to the Son of God.’

had taken from the pitiful man at once his sight and power of speech. Jesus commanded the demon to depart: it departed, and immediately that man, thrice-wretched, was totally restored so that he both saw and spoke. The multitude was astonished at a thing so difficult, and now suspecting that he was the Messiah they were saying among themselves: 'Can this be the son of David whom the prophets promise?' When the Pharisees had heard the people say such things, they did not approach Jesus himself, from whom they had always departed in defeat, but they tried to turn the minds of the multitude away from their admiration of him. They said: 'It cannot be that this is the son of David as you suspect, for the son of David will come borne up by divine power. This fellow does not cast out demons with the help of God, since he is ungodly, a breaker of the sabbath, a glutton and a drunkard, and a companion of tax collectors,²³ but with the aid of Beelzebub, prince of demons.'

Although Jesus had not heard their statements, he nonetheless knew both what they were thinking and what they were saying in the presence of others. He therefore turned to the Pharisees with a response so controlled that he repelled their insane reproach with most manifest reason, but did not return their insults; rather, he lovingly invited them to embrace salvation. He said: 'Every kingdom that is divided with internal dissension must come to ruin, and every house at war with itself through internal discord must fall. But if Satan drives out Satan, and demon drives out demon, how will his kingdom endure? And since all demons are the enemies of human beings, thirsting only for the ruin of those whose salvation they wretchedly envy, how is it reasonable that they now so promote human salvation that demon fights with demon? If I now cast out demons with the power and assistance of Beelzebub, by whose assistance do my disciples, whom you acknowledge as your sons, cast out demons? For they also cast out demons,²⁴ but you are not meanwhile bringing false charges against them; me alone do you charge.

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²³ Cf Matt 11:19.

²⁴ Cf Mark 6:13. Erasmus follows Chrysostom in interpreting 'your sons' in 12:27 as Jesus' disciples; cf *In Matt hom* 41:2 PG 57 447: 'Wishing to show, therefore, that they had spoken only out of envy, he brings forward the apostles: If I cast down the demons as you say, much more do my disciples who have received that authority from me. But you have said no such thing to them. Why do you accuse me of this but bring no charge against them, though their deeds have their source in me?' Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 12:27) PL 26 79D-80A thinks 'your sons' may be either Jewish exorcists or apostles, and he is followed in this view by Nicholas of Lyra. Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 155 believe the reference here is to Jewish exorcism.

Nevertheless, it is from me that they have the power to cast them out, and so it cannot be that they overthrow the demons by the power of God, while I do so by the aid of Beelzebub, when they do it in my name. The reason ordinary men are able to do such extraordinary things is that they believe unfalteringly²⁵ that I overthrow demons by the power of God. Accordingly, their godly belief will condemn your disbelief, you who prefer to bring false charges when you could follow their example. If the facts cry out that I cast out demons, not by the help of a demon, but by the power of God,²⁶ you should have no more doubt that the son of David and the kingdom of God have come. You see that when those who profess the gospel invoke my name, the strength of their adversaries vanishes.

Therefore, just as there is agreement among the demons for the sake of destroying everyone, so I who have come to save everyone have no concord with the company of demons, but implacable discord. Up to now Beelzebub has exercised his tyranny over those who are subject to sins and have been delivered over to the slavery of evil desires. By taking away the sins of human beings, I crush the prince Beelzebub along with his retinue, and claim for God through innocence those over whom he was master through unrighteousness. This is being done by force, not by compact. The demons feel and confess the presence of a power to which they are forced to submit. Otherwise, how can someone enter the stronghold of a powerful man and steal his goods unless he has first overwhelmed the powerful master and has thrown him in chains? But now, with the man restrained who could have resisted, he will devastate the entire house and carry it off as plunder. The world is Beelzebub's house.²⁷ Since the whole world served ambition, excess, lust, greed, anger, envy, and the other harmful desires, through which he has his power, he claimed a kingdom for himself in the world. I, like the stronger man, have entered his kingdom and overpowered him, and claim for its true sovereign what he was unjustly holding as his own. Therefore there is no agreement at all between us. The rulers are different, the kingdoms are different, and they must not be united by any treaty. He who wishes to be enrolled in the kingdom of God must remove himself

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25 'Unfalteringly': *simpliciter*, ie 'wholeheartedly,' 'without alloy.' On *simplicitas* cf chapter 10 n24.

26 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 41.2 (on Matt 12:28) PG 57 447: 'That these [miracles] are being performed you yourselves know; that they are performed by the power of God the facts themselves cry out.'

27 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 12:29) PL 26 80c: 'The world is the house of [our enemy].'

from the kingdom of Beelzebub and fight against him in my camp. No one can be at peace with God unless he is at war with the devil. I follow on God's side, not the side of Beelzebub.

'Accordingly, he who is not in my camp is my enemy and opponent, and he who does not help me in gathering, opposes me by scattering. See that you join the better side. You are better advised to gain everlasting²⁸ salvation in the kingdom of God than to invite eternal death in the kingdom of the devil. Stop serving sin, and the devil will have no power over you. God will receive into the company of his kingdom those who have deserted the devil, and to those who repent and come to a better mind, God will not impute the sins of their former lives, however great their sins may be. Only see to it that no one, blinded by envy and subverted by malice, opposes the glory of God against his own conscience, and when he sees with his eyes that divine power revealing itself to the world by manifest signs and wonders, attributes these things to the spirit of Beelzebub. Accordingly, I assure you, whatever sin has been committed in word or deed will be forgiven men, provided they come to their senses and repent. God easily pardons what the weakness of human nature in some way makes pardonable. But if someone utters abuse against the Spirit of God, whose manifest power he has seen from the deeds themselves, he will not easily²⁹ find forgiveness. And whoever utters abuse against the Son of man, casting scorn upon him because of the weakness of his flesh, will be forgiven, because where a misdeed is mixed with error and ignorance there is no perverse and intentional malice.³⁰ But one who utters abuse against the Holy Spirit will not easily obtain forgiveness, either in this age or in the next.'

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²⁸ everlasting] Added in 1534

²⁹ 'Not easily': *vix*. The paraphrase on 12:31-2 qualifies the absolute statement of Scripture, 'will not be forgiven either in this age or in the one to come' [NRSV]. Erasmus believes this harsh judgment of Scripture is directed at 'perverse and intentional malice,' but the paraphrase leaves open the possibility that the Pharisees might be 'deterred from obstinate perversity.' In the paraphrases on the parallel passages of Mark and Luke the absolute exclusion defined by the dominical saying is retained; cf CWE 49 54 (on Mark 3:29) and CWE 48 29 (on Luke 12:10). In the *De immensa Dei misericordia* Erasmus notes at one point that 'the divine clemency' is always 'readily available ... God has not excluded [from forgiveness] any kind of crime'; at another he says, 'There are sins that are not forgiven in this life or the life to come'; cf CWE 70 113 and 126. Cf also the discussion on the 'mortal sin' in the annotation on 1 John 5:16 (*non pro illo*).

³⁰ Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 41.3 (on Matt 12:31-2) PG 57 449 similarly explains that the blasphemy against Christ will be forgiven because many did not know who Christ was, on account of his human nature.

Jesus said this to deter the Pharisees from obstinate perversity because, although they saw and understood that the things he was doing could only be done through the Spirit and the power of God, nevertheless, moved by envy, they were fighting against the glory of God and preferred to ascribe his miracles to Beelzebub, whose spirit they said thrust forth its power in Christ.³¹ He said:³² 'Since even common sense tells you that a tree is recognized by its fruit, why do you fault a tree when you cannot but approve its fruit? The miracles that I perform relieve human suffering; they hurt no one, nor are they introduced for empty ostentation or gain, but to offer kindness and to give assistance. No one can deny that it is a good thing to do kindness freely to those in distress. Then why do you say that what is good in itself springs from Beelzebub, who by your judgment too is totally evil? If you want to conceal the blindness of your mind, you must say things that are consistent. Now the things you are saying do not even hold together according to common sense.³³ Therefore, either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad. Either grant that I am impelled by a good spirit, if you will grant that my works are good, or say that my works are evil, so that what you say should appear probable: that I have the spirit of evil Beelzebub. But if my deeds are such that you can only grant that they are good, do not attribute things that are good to an evil author.

'Offspring of vipers, evil men sprung from evil forbears, draw a conclusion from your very selves. Is not your character revealed by what you say, and do not your works show what spirit you have? In envy at the glory of God, you slander his Spirit. From where do such harmful fruits come unless from an evil tree?³⁴ Just as a wild tree cannot produce mild fruits, and just as a tree of poisonous juice cannot bear healthful fruits, so how can you speak well when you are evil? Just as the fruit draws its flavour from

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31 The paraphrase on 12:32 is illuminated by the language of Nicholas of Lyra (on 12:31-2), who identified six causes that removed the sinner from the possibility of forgiveness, among them despair, obstinacy, envy of grace, active hostility to known truth. On the other hand the sins that may be forgiven are committed through ignorance and weakness.

32 He said] Added in 1534

33 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 42.1 (on Matt 12:33) PG 57 451 had, like Erasmus here, attempted to show how the saying was intended to confront the Pharisees' accusation on the grounds of logical consistency and common sense.

34 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 42.1 (on Matt 12:34) PG 57 451-2 explains the 'evil tree' as the source from which the Pharisees' slander has derived, a source which is ultimately located in their immediate ancestors: the Pharisees are men 'sprung from evil forbears,' and 'who possess a wicked spirit.'

the juice of the root, so speech arises from what has been concealed in the heart. Just as a good man produces good things from the good treasure of his heart,³⁵ so an evil man produces evil things from the evil treasure of his heart. Those whose hearts are filled with godliness and love speak words savouring³⁶ of what is in their hearts. Those whose hearts are filled with envy, pride and greed produce such speech as expresses by their mouths the disposition of their hearts. Men will be judged before God, not only by their deeds, but also by their words. Evil thinking is harmful only to the one who does the thinking, but evil speech pours into many people the poison of the heart. And so the tongue must be restrained not only from raving blasphemies, from reproaches and quarrels, from disparagement and obscenity,³⁷ but from absolutely everything that contributes no genuine utility.³⁸ Indeed, I tell you, men will render an account on the day of judgment, not only for obscenity, but also for any idle, frivolous, and useless word they have spoken. For there, in truth, words too will be accounted as deeds. From your words you will either be pronounced just, if good things have come forth from a good heart, or you will be condemned as unjust, if evil things have come forth from an evil heart. And here recognize the perfect justice of the kingdom of heaven, surpassing the justice of the Mosaic law, for the latter punishes only³⁹ manifest blasphemy against God, while the former will punish also an insult against one's neighbour, nor will it only

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35 Cf Luke 6:45.

36 savouring] *resipientia*, as in all editions from 1522 to 1534. The 1535 edition reads, evidently by mistake, *resipiscentia*, from *resipisco*, a verb Erasmus commonly uses to mean 'to come to one's senses and repent'; cf CWE 44 13 n5.

37 from disparagement and obscenity] Added in 1534, echoing Eph 4:29-31 and Col 3:8.

38 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 12:36-7) PL 26 82A likewise distinguishes between 'idle and frivolous words that contribute no utility to the speaker or the auditor,' and 'base and obscene' language. Throughout his life, but particularly in the context of his New Testament scholarship, Erasmus was sensitive to the power of speech both for good and ill. In the second edition of his New Testament the prefatory letter from Leo x was set in an artistic frame calling attention to *calumnia* 'slander.' The paraphrase on James 3:6-12 CWE 44 155-7 provided an opportunity to expatiate on the potential of the tongue for good and bad. In 1525 Erasmus worked the theme into a lengthy book; for the sombre circumstances in which he wrote the book, and for the 'dominance of *calumnia*' in it, see the introduction to *The Tongue* in CWE 29 250.

39 only] *modo* first in 1534; previously *non*, reading 'does not punish,' obviously a printer's error. For the punishment of blasphemy see Lev 24:16.

punish a harmful statement, but even one that is idle and vain. For the person who is useful to no one is a burden to the tree, not its fruit, and for this very reason is harmful, because he takes time and attention without profiting the listener, whereas the tongue has been given so that by it we might profit ourselves and our neighbour, and⁴⁰ by that organ celebrate the glory of God.'

When they heard these things, certain scribes and Pharisees, concealing their rage, approached Jesus with more ingratiating words, as though they would now become believers if he would perform for their⁴¹ sake some miracle worthy of themselves and of himself who was laying claim to the Spirit of God and was always speaking of his heavenly Father. 'Master,' they said, 'we are not common people, but educated men, and so we desire to see from you some extraordinary sign coming from heaven⁴² that will prove that you are dear to God and that you do what you do by his power.' But Jesus knew the crafty thinking and the obstinate malice of these men, who were seeking a sign only in order to gain here also a new opportunity for bringing false accusations – especially since it is easier to base false charges on things that are shown from heaven than on those things that are seen with the eyes, are heard with the ears, and are touched with the hands,⁴³ all immediately before one. Not tolerating such great perversity, Jesus responded as though he had turned away from them and was voicing outrage to himself, saying: 'O evil and adulterous nation, that boasts that it has God as its father, that brags about its ancestral founder, Abraham, though it resembles rather those who abandoned God and worshipped the golden calf, who raised a sedition against Moses, who murmured in the desert, who killed the prophets,⁴⁴ and though it shows that it has Beelzebub as its father, filled with whose spirit it rebels against the Spirit of God.

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40 and] Added in 1534

41 their] *ipsorum* first in 1534, referring unambiguously to the scribes and Pharisees; previously the reflexive *suam*. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 43.1 (on Matt 12:38-9) PG 57 457 understands that the Pharisees intend to trap Jesus by these 'more ingratiating words.' But Erasmus departs from Chrysostom in understanding Jesus' response as an aside (see just below); Chrysostom appears to have interpreted it as a reproach addressed to the scribes and Pharisees.

42 Cf Mark 8:11.

43 Cf 1 John 1:1. Nicholas of Lyra (on Matt 12:38) notes that the Pharisees asked for a sign from heaven because they were motivated by a desire to bring false accusations; likewise the *Gloss*.

44 Cf Exod 32:1-34 (golden calf); Num 16:1-35 (sedition); Exod 16:1-30 (murmuring); Jer 2:30, Matt 23:37, Luke 11:47 (killed the prophets).

It will not be given a sign from heaven to slander; it is unworthy of such a sign because it is totally attached to the earth. But the day will come when it will be given a sign from earth in order that it might be convicted and, if it refuses to be converted, perish. It marvels at the miracle of the prophet Jonah who was swallowed by a sea monster and returned alive after three days.⁴⁵ This will be sign enough even for them, to see the one they have killed by their malice restored to life by divine power. This miracle will soon be displayed to them, and they will malign it. For just as Jonah of his own accord handed himself over to death, and was swallowed by the sea monster, and was in its stomach for three days and three nights, then, given up by everyone, by the help of God was returned alive, just so the Son of man will be dead for three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.' By this riddle Jesus pointed to his death and his burial and his subsequent resurrection from the dead.

Jesus continued: 'What Jonah was to the Ninevites, this I am to you. He announced to them that divine vengeance and the destruction of the city were imminent unless they repented; I announce the same thing to everyone of you. But the Ninevites, whom you scorn as pagans and idolaters compared to yourselves, will rise in the divine judgment, and will show that you are deservedly condemned, if you are compared to them.⁴⁶ For although they were wicked, nevertheless, terrified by the prophet's threats, they submitted themselves to penance.⁴⁷ And behold, there is one here greater than Jonah, who preaches to you, but to no avail. The Ninevite nation was a stranger to the worship of God; Jonah came to them unknown and lowly. No one had commended him or had predicted his coming, he performed no miracles, he won no one to himself by an act of kindness, he made no great promises. He only threatened destruction, and he did not preach for more than three days. I, however, the one who was promised by the oracles of the prophets, and commended so often by the testimony of John, by the testimony of the Father; I, your fellow-countryman,⁴⁸ sprung from the very forbears you boast of; I, the one who has been teaching you for a long time now, testifying with so many miracles that my teaching is not groundless; the one who has aided so many with my free blessings, and does not

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45 Cf Jonah 1:1-2:10.

46 Similarly Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 12:41) PL 26 82D: '[they will condemn Israel] not by their authority to pronounce judgment, but by the comparison their example provides.'

47 Cf Jonah 3:1-10.

48 your fellow-countryman] First in 1534; previously 'a citizen'

thunder savage threats, but freely promises forgiveness of all sins, and offers the eternal happiness of the heavenly kingdom⁴⁹ – I am said to have the spirit of Beelzebub, I am assailed with deadly plots, so far are you from turning to penance.

Why, even the Queen of Sheba will rise in judgment, in reproach and condemnation of this generation, because at a report brought from far away, she left her kingdom and homeland, and set out on a long journey to King Solomon, not moved by any fear, but only by a longing for wisdom. Nor did she merely come to him, but she also brought with her great gifts. And behold, in this place there is one who is greater than Solomon. For what did Solomon do that was similar to the things you see me do, or what did Solomon teach that was similar? And while I am freely giving you the gospel teaching, by which you may be saved, you are heaping upon me every kind of abuse, preparing even more dreadful things besides against one who bestows kindnesses. But the greater the wonders and blessings that call you to repentance, the more dreadful are the punishments that await you if you do not soon come to your senses and repent.'

Moreover, what was going to happen to the Israelites, and into what total blindness their race would descend, and what calamities it would experience at the hands of Roman rulers, and how it would live in exile throughout the world, rejected, scorned by all nations,⁵⁰ Jesus preferred to indicate by a certain riddle, rather than to explicate it directly.⁵¹ So he introduced a

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49 In this paraphrase on 12:41 Erasmus appears to have woven together ideas found in the commentaries of Chrysostom and Jerome on the verse. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 43.2 PG 57 459 contrasts the ministries of Jonah and Jesus, noting the following: Jonah was a foreigner and unknown, Christ was a kinsman, sprung from the same forbears; no prophecies foretold the mission of Jonah, countless prophecies foretold Christ; Jonah performed no miracles, Christ many; Jonah threatened, Christ offered forgiveness and proclaimed the kingdom. Jerome *In Matt Comm* 2 PL 26 82D–3A notes the contrast in time (Jonah preached for three days, Christ for a long time), the people (Ninevites were pagans, Jews the people of God), the messenger (Jonah was a foreigner, Jesus a fellow-citizen), and message (Jonah proclaimed with words only, Jesus with words and signs). Jonah's 'three days' may be an inference from Jonah 3:3–4.

50 Erasmus follows a long Christian tradition that seemed to revel in tracing the unfortunate history of the Jews subsequent to the death of Christ. For early sources see CWE 50 9 n68.

51 Erasmus studies at some length in the *Ratio* Holborn 259:32–264:29 the use of *aeinigma* 'riddle' in the text of the New Testament. Likewise in the paraphrases on the parallel passage in Luke 11:24–6 Erasmus calls the parable a 'riddle'; cf CWE 48 14 and n38.

parable about a man subject to an evil demon: after the man has once been freed and restored to his senses, the demon, due to the man's own fault, returns,⁵² and the man then suffers far more grievously than he suffered⁵³ before. He said: 'When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, banished from his old lodging, it walks through dry and infertile places looking for somewhere to rest, but it finds none. Then it says to itself, I will return to the house I left. When it comes, it finds the house furnished and cleaned, but without its host. Then, seeing that there is room and that the house is not occupied by anyone else, not content to return alone it takes to itself seven other spirits worse than itself, and they all enter the house together and live there. So it happens that the man is tormented more grievously than he was before. So it will happen to this most wicked nation.' With this image Jesus was noting the unyielding malice of the nation of Israel, which repeatedly reverted to its old ways. It once served demonic sins and desires. It was in some manner freed by the Law and prophets, but it repeatedly returned to its real nature. It returned to idols, it sacrificed in the groves, it killed the prophets. It was corrected by the afflictions it suffered at the hands of the Pharaoh in Egypt, of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, and by various other calamities.⁵⁴ At last, though it had been summoned in so many ways by the Son of God, it not only renewed but even surpassed in many respects all the ungodliness of its forefathers, not only heaping every kind of abuse on a kind and innocent man, but even with false accusations driving him to the cross. From this a certain monstrous blindness even seven times more wretched than that of their forefathers seized their minds, and for this reason there is awaiting them a destruction far more dreadful than they have suffered to this point.⁵⁵

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52 returns] First in 1534; previously 'is received back'

53 suffered] First in 1534; previously 'had suffered'

54 For the story of Israel's defeat at the hands of foreign kings, understood as a consequence of idolatry, see eg 2 Kings 15-25; for the afflictions in Egypt see Exod 1-2. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 43.3 (on Matt 12:43-5) PG 57 460 had surveyed Israel's history as punctuated by sin and corrective suffering. He constructed a virtually identical narrative sequence: worship of idols and sacrifice to demons; the preaching of the prophets; the afflictions in Egypt and Babylon, and the suffering at the hands of Antiochus; and, much worse than the killing of the prophets, the slaying of the Lord.

55 The 'historical' interpretation of this parable in the paraphrase on 12:43-5 is summarily recapitulated in the paraphrases on the parallel passage in Luke (cf n51 above), but in Luke Erasmus pursues more insistently the tropological interpretation, applying the parable to the Christian who 'backslides'; cf CWE 48 14-15 and n39. The allusion to this parable in the paraphrase on Matt 4:1

While he was saying these things to the people, Jesus' mother came accompanied by some of his kinsmen⁵⁶ who wanted to meet him. But when they could not go to him because of the packed crowd that was even blocking the doors of the house, a message was passed on from one person to the next, and a man interrupting Jesus' preaching reported to him that his mother and brothers were there in front of the doors asking to speak with him. Jesus was displeased by this rudeness, and at the same time he wanted to teach that one must attribute very little importance to such affections, whenever one engages in the work of the gospel, but that a relationship of hearts, which is acquired by an affinity of virtues not of blood, and which extends much farther, should be more highly valued than physical relationship.⁵⁷ So he replied to the one who interrupted him: 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? I, who am occupied with heavenly work, do not acknowledge mother or brothers joined by affinity of flesh, but unrelated perhaps in spirit.' And stretching out his hand towards his disciples who were sitting nearby, eagerly and silently drinking in his salvific teaching, he said: 'If you truly want to know my kinsmen, and those⁵⁸ who are dearest to me, these people are my mother, my sisters, my brothers. Here there is no distinction of sex or age, no account of kinship. Whoever obeys the will of my Father, who is in heaven, this is my mother, this is my sister, this is my brother. I value greatly the affinity of spirits, not of bodies. Everyone is able to obtain this for himself. As each obeys God's will most of all, so is he most closely bound and dearest to me.'

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suggests yet another interpretation; cf chapter 4 n5 above. For the Erasmusian hermeneutic, which invited multiple interpretations of the parables, see chapter 13 n24 below.

56 'Kinsmen': *consobrini*; so Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 12:49–50) PL 26 85A, followed by the *Gloss* (on 12:47), rather than the Vulgate's *fratres* 'brothers,' though Erasmus does adopt the Vulgate's *fratres* in the paraphrase on verses 47–8 just below. On Erasmus' adherence to the tradition that made James and others Jesus' cousins, and thus maintained that Mary had been a virgin perpetually, see CWE 50 97 n41. Cf Jerome (ibid): 'All Scripture shows that *consobrini* are called "brothers."' On the tradition 'commonly held in both Eastern and Western Christendom' see Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 161.

57 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 12:49–50) PL 26 84C–D: 'He put the apostles before kinship so that we might, in the matter of affection, put the spirit before the flesh.' Erasmus had already stated the fundamental principle put forward here in a controversial annotation on 12:46 (*quaerentes te*), where he also considers Jesus' rather brusque attitude to his mother, for which see especially the paraphrase on John 2:1–5 (CWE 46 38–9).

58 those] First in 1534; previously, less emphatically, 'the ones'

Chapter 13

At the same time, when Jesus saw that the place could not hold such a large crowd, he left the house and went to the sea. When he arrived there he sat on the bank teaching the people who were yearning insatiably for his instruction. Then, when he saw that the multitude was so closely packed that it was pressing in on him,¹ in order to be freer from the crowd he boarded a boat and, using it as a stage, spoke from it to the multitude standing on the shore. In this way, the many people could see and hear him more easily, because the gradually rising sandy shore and the coast-line itself had the shape, as it were, of an amphitheatre. Since in that crowd there was much diversity of understanding, he related many things to them through the veiled references of similitudes.² He did so either because this kind of speech is customary for prophets, or because it is most advantageous for teaching and for prevailing upon the minds of the people (since a comparison taken from things that are very well known to all, even the uneducated, will make an immediate impression on anyone), or because by means of this enticement the things that are said both creep more pleasantly into people's minds and stick more firmly, or because this form of admonition generally gives less offence, since it publicly ridicules no one, but secretly censures each person's conscience by means of a picture.³

First of all, he told a parable by which he hinted at the fact that though many indeed were rushing together from every direction to the preaching

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1 him] First in 1534; previously 'Jesus.' As Jesus in this paraphrase forms the crowd into an audience as in a theatre, so does he in Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 44.2 (on Matt 13:1) PG 57 467.

2 similitudes] First in 1534; previously 'similitude.' Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 13:3) PL 26 85c also gives the varied capacities of the members of the crowd as a reason for Jesus' use of parables: 'The crowd is not of one understanding, but the disposition of mind is different in each person. Therefore he speaks to the crowd in many parables, so that they will receive different parts of his teaching, according to their various dispositions.' Similarly the *Gloss* (on 13:1).

3 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 44.2 (on Matt 13:3) PG 57 467 similarly describes the function of parables: 'Because his discourse was going to be hard to understand, he first rouses the minds of his listeners with a parable ... Nor is it only for this reason that he speaks in parables, but also to make his language more vivid, and to impress his words the more on their minds, and bring things before their eyes. The prophets do this as well.' For a more expansive statement on the function of parables see *Ratio* Holborn 259:32-262:11 (cf n24 below).

of the gospel, not everyone was bearing fruit, and that this happened, not through the fault of the teacher, but through the failure of those who were listening. Nor were all those that heard bearing equal fruit, but the fruit of the word that had been heard was greatest when anyone presented a mind devoid of worldly cares and desires. Therefore, having urged them to listen carefully, he related this parable. He said: 'A sower went out into his field to sow his seed, and as he was scattering it abroad some grains fell beside the path. Because the seeds remained exposed, the birds flew down and ate them. Again, other seeds fell on places that were rocky and rough, where the rocks kept them from being covered with deep soil, and they were unable to drive their roots more deeply. Soon, because of the heat of the sun, they sprang up into blades prematurely, because there was not much earth to keep them covered for the required time, nor were the roots deep enough to supply moisture. Again other seeds fell on thorny ground, and as the thorns grew they were choked and were unable to rise up into the more open air. Then, too, other seeds fell into good and fertile soil; these sprouted abundantly and brought forth fruit, not all equally, of course, but according to the richness of the soil: some produced a hundredfold, others sixtyfold, others thirtyfold, so that from one grain there grew an ear bearing one hundred grains, from another an ear that bore sixty, from another one that bore thirty.' After saying this, Jesus did not at that time clarify the veiled allusions of the riddle, but he left them to each to interpret in reflection. He only urged that those who had perceptive ears should not hear the parable listlessly.

At another time, however, when the disciples had Jesus alone, they came to him and asked why he spoke to the people through the enigmatic representations of similitudes. Jesus replied to them in this way: 'Because the people show that they are not sufficiently ready for the truth to be revealed, for some of those mixed in the crowd not only are not made better by the truth, but are even incited by it to become more wicked. Therefore, the message I set before them is fashioned according to the state of mind they bring to listening.⁴ They refuse to understand the things that are most obvious; I veil my message with obscurity to incite them in this very way to the desire for learning and inquiry. You, on the other hand, who accept with eagerness and sincerity what is given, are worthy to become sharers in certain more hidden truths of gospel philosophy. For to the one who has it be will given, so that he might have abundantly, but the one

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4 On 'the state of mind' cf the citation from Jerome, n2 above.

who has nothing, far from having anything added, will even be deprived of what he seemed to have. In other circumstances it is cruel to deprive one in need; in this case, since need arises from the fault of the needy person, it is just to take away what the ungrateful person has.⁵ As if casting seeds of some sort, we freely offer certain rudiments of heavenly philosophy, clearly according to the capacity and sincerity of people's minds. Surely the person who drinks in these rudimentary things with an eager mind invites us to entrust more to him. By contrast, the person who spurns and rejects what is freely given, and who turns it into an opportunity for greater malice, is he not fittingly deprived of what he was not fit to possess?

'This is why I speak to them through the veiled references of parables, seeing that they will hear the revealed truth either with no fruit or even to their own detriment. Through their perversity it happens that though they have eyes and behold manifest signs, nevertheless, blinded by envy, they do not see what they are looking at; and although they have ears and hear the irrefutable truth, nevertheless, when they hear they do not hear, nor do they understand what they hear, even if they comprehend. Truly in them is fulfilled what Isaiah once predicted: "You will hear with your ears and you will not understand, and you will look with your eyes, and still not see. For the heart of this people has become hard, and they have become deaf in their ears, and they have shut their eyes, lest they should at some time see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts, and at last turn to me, and I should heal them." [Isa 6:9-10] Unfortunate indeed, therefore, are these, but they must not be pitied, though they are most pitiful, for they knowingly and⁶ willingly summon destruction upon themselves and reject salvation. By contrast, your eyes are blessed because they see what I am doing; your ears are blessed because they hear what I am saying; your hearts are blessed because they understand the will of my Father. That⁷ is no common happiness: surely many prophets, and many just and holy men, longed to see what you see, but it was not theirs to see, and longed to hear what you hear, and it was not given them to hear. But

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5 Cf Chrysostom, who explains in a similar way the justice of 13:12 *In Matt hom* 45.1 PG 58 471: 'The saying is obscure and manifests an ineffable justice. It means something like this: when a person manifests eagerness and zeal, he will be given all the things that come from God, but when a person lacks eagerness and zeal and does not contribute his own resources, he is not given the things that come from God.'

6 and] Added in 1534

7 That] First in 1534; previously 'it' implied in the verb

these did somehow, as in a dream, perceive that there would come to pass what you are hearing and seeing right before you. Therefore, since your simple sincerity and your eagerness to know merit this, hear the meaning of the parable that I related about a sower casting his seed.

‘There are three kinds of people in whom the seed of the gospel message either produces no fruit, or does not complete the growth of the new sprout. The first of these is indeed the most barren of all. These are the people who hear the words of heavenly teaching carelessly and listlessly. They do not let them sink into their minds, nor do they fix them in their thoughts so they might put down roots there, but having minds that are not protected and fortified by any pursuit or care, and are not armed by any precepts against the assaults of vain thoughts, they let what was sown be crushed and trampled at any opportunity. Knowing this, the evil one, who lies in ambush and envies strong beginnings, immediately sends against the soul some transitory cares to destroy the seed before it grows into green stalks or puts down roots, so these people are no better off than if they had not heard. They are the ones represented by the image of the seed that fell beside the road; on the road there come and go both men and beasts, that is, cares of any kind at all, affection for relatives by blood and by marriage, the care of public office, loves, hatreds, suspicions, and other things of the sort. These things drive the gospel message out of the mind almost before it has been received.

‘Again, there is another kind of person who with his ears receives the gospel message, as though it were a seed, and eagerly lets it sink into his mind, planning to guide his life according to its rule. He does not, however, fix it deeply in the marrow of his mind, but in typical human fashion takes lightly – as a sort of passing whim – what he does. Consequently, he nurtures the seed that he has received for a little while until it grows into blades, and he gives a certain hope of gospel godliness: he abstains from the great sins, and begins to shine forth with ordinary virtues; but if any storm of persecutions should arise, and if, because of the profession of the gospel, exile and prison should threaten, as well as torture, death, and other things that require a firm and unshakable strength of mind, then, as if at the intense heat of the sun, they dry up and die.⁸ The stony ground was the type of this kind of person: it received the seed, it is true, and produced blades, but it was not able to protect them with moisture against the heat of the sun, since the stones did not permit them to extend their roots more deeply.

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8 In all editions the subject changes from singular to plural here.

'There is still another kind of person who eagerly hears the gospel message, lets it sink deeply enough into his mind, and keeps it for a long time. But when his mind becomes entangled by the intricate cares of this world, especially the concern for riches, then, overwhelmed as though by very dense thorns, it cannot follow freely what it loves. Because it does not allow the thorns that are clinging together, tangled with one another, to be cut down, the fruit of the seed sown perishes. This kind of man was represented by the image of the seed received by soil that was covered over with thorns and briers.

'But the seed that was received by the good earth represents those who hear the gospel message, inwardly recall it, and fix it in their thoughts, who so transfer it into the affections of their hearts that they are willing to forsake it not even by death, and who untangle themselves from the affections and from sordid worries about riches that do not allow the mind to be free; rather, they give themselves up entirely to the breath of heaven. For minds such as these the seed of gospel teaching is not unfruitful; yet just as the same wheat does not produce equally good fruit in just any kind of soil, but prospers with more or less increase in proportion to the fertility of the ground, so the fruit of godliness grows the more abundant in proportion to the godly desire and capacity of those who hear the message.' By this parable Jesus taught us with what eagerness we must receive the word of heavenly teaching if we desire fruit to come from it.⁹ Jesus interpreted these things for his disciples in private.

Now to return to the sequence of the foregoing discourse, the Lord Jesus related also another parable to show that one must beware of another bane if one wants to store pure and unspoiled wheat in one's barn. The rest of the evils only harm the seed that was recently sown or just sprouting into blades; this evil destroys the crop already sprouted and mature. This bane is when Satan, who was unable to destroy the seed of gospel doctrine either by idle and fleeting thoughts, or by the tumults of persecutions, or by concerns for wealth, honours, and similar things through which human life is distracted, now attempts by means of false apostles and impious bishops and heretics to corrupt heavenly teaching to accommodate their own evil desires, as they twist it with deceitful interpretation, and mix true things with false, the sound with defective.¹⁰ The parable goes like this: 'The

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9 The paraphrases on this parable insist on 'eagerness' as an essential characteristic of every learner; for the same principle elsewhere see eg the paraphrase on Acts 10:39 CWE 50 73 and n43.

10 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 46.1 (on Matt 13:24-30) PG 58 475-6 links the two parables together in a similar way: 'There he speaks about those who were

kingdom of heaven is like the householder who, since he was a good man, had sown good seed in his field. While the family servants were sleeping, there came secretly a certain enemy, who wanted to harm the householder. Since that enemy¹¹ was not able to take away the seed by night, because it was already planted safely in the ground, he set about doing harm by craft: he scattered useless cockle seed and mixed it with the sown wheat. With this done he went away. At first no one noticed the treachery. But when the seed had now emerged as blades, and the stalks were weighed down with ears, then at last the cockles that were sown with the wheat began to appear, their difference now obvious. Then the slaves, at a loss to imagine how this had happened, came to the householder and said: "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then did the cockle get mixed in?" The master, surmising an author of the injurious act, said: "An enemy has done this, a man who so wishes me ill that he takes pleasure in doing me harm, even if he gains no advantage for himself." Then the slaves said, "Do you want us, then, to go and gather the cockles, and clean the crop?" The master said: "By no means, lest by chance while you pluck out the cockles you unwittingly uproot the neighbouring wheat. Allow the wheat to grow along with the cockles until harvest time. Then I will make it the responsibility of the harvesters that before they harvest, they first gather the cockles that are mixed in, and put them separately into little bundles as fuel for the fire, and then store the pure wheat in my barn."

Again, Jesus wanted to indicate through a similitude that the gospel philosophy, which was at first contemptible in appearance and lowly – planted, as it were, through the ignominy of the cross and a few uneducated men – would gradually grow strong by the force of truth until it occupied the whole earth and embraced every class of people.¹² And so he presented a riddle of the following sort, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard that a man took and sowed in his field. In itself

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inattentive ... here about the assemblies of heretics ... That parable says that they did not receive [him], this that they received also corruptors. This is the clever method of the devil, to mix error in with truth ... Since he was able neither to pull out what was well rooted, nor to choke, nor burn the young sprouts, he laid his plot with a different kind of deception, inserting his own seeds in with the other.'

11 that enemy] *Is* added in 1534; previously 'he' implied in the verb. In 1522 and 1524 'While ... harm by craft' is printed as a single sentence; the correction was made in 1534.

12 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 46.2 (on Matt 13:32) PG 58 478: 'The disciples were the weakest of all, the least of all people, and yet through the great force in them [their proclamation] spread through the entire world.'

the seed is indeed the smallest among all the leguminous plants. But when it sprouts up it surpasses in greatness every kind of garden herb, and rises to the size of a tree, so that birds nest in its branches.' Again, Jesus impressed the same thing on them, indicating subtly how the power of the gospel teaching, creeping in secretly, and spread by a very few apostles, would transform the entire world into its own nature, and just when it seems absorbed and obliterated then especially it exerts¹³ its own power. He said: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast, a small amount of which a woman concealed in three measures of flour and left there until the small lump gradually affected that entire quantity of flour, and drew it into its own nature.' All these things Jesus discussed with the people under the veil of parables, and he did not at that time say anything to the people except in parables, so that by the obscurity of his speech he might at one and the same time arouse their minds to a desire for learning, and still not give an opening to those who were hunting for a chance to bring false charges. This, too, the prophetic oracle had once predicted, saying:¹⁴ 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things that have so far been hidden since the creation of the world.' [Ps 78:2]

Then Jesus sent the crowd away and went home, and the crowd did not follow, since it did not understand what he meant, and he had given no opportunity for false charges.¹⁵ Then, when he was alone at home, his closest disciples came to him asking him to explain to them the parable about the cockles mixed with the wheat. For since the parable about the seed sown with various results had been explained, they divined well enough by themselves the meaning of the mustard seed or the hidden yeast. Jesus, not at all annoyed, told them in a clear manner. He said, 'The good householder who sowed the good seed is the heavenly Father; the field in which he

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13 exerts] First in 1534; previously 'will exert.' Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 46.2 (on Matt 13:33) PG 58 478: 'Just as yeast when it is added is not destroyed but transforms the whole into its own nature, so it will happen with the preaching of the gospel.' Chrysostom later notes *In Matt hom* 47.2 (on Matt 13:44-6) PG 58 483 that the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast both refer to the force (*δύναμις*) of preaching. Erasmus makes the claim elsewhere also that after the Resurrection the 'truth of the gospel,' by inconspicuous permeation, within a few years conquered the world; cf eg Ep 1381:283-91 and 381-9; also the preceding note.

14 saying] Added in 1534

15 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 47.1 (on Matt 13:36) PG 58 481 notes similarly that the scribes (not the crowds) left Jesus because they found no opportunity to attack him, and Jesus left them because they did not understand.

sowed is the entire world, not just Judea. The wheat that sprang up, a good crop from good seed, are those people who, as a result of gospel teaching, become worthy of the heavenly kingdom, making their lives and their deeds correspond to what they profess. The bad cockles, which are mixed in with them from the bad seed, are wicked people who profess the gospel teaching insincerely. The enemy who secretly mixed in his own seed by night – from which arises perverse teaching – is the devil. The slaves who want to collect the cockles before the time is right are those who think that false apostles and heretics should be removed from our midst by the sword and by death, though the householder does not want them to be destroyed, but to be tolerated, if by chance they might come to their senses and repent, and be turned from cockles into wheat.¹⁶ If they do not repent, let them be saved for their judge, to whom they will pay the penalty some day.

The time for harvest is the consummation of the age. The reapers are the angels. Therefore, in the meantime, evil persons mixed with the good must be endured, since they are tolerated with less harm than they could be removed.¹⁷ But when that final time comes, when the good will be separated from the bad, when each will receive his reward according to his deeds, then the Son of man, judge of all, will send his angels, who will purge his kingdom, and he will not let any offence remain there, since the good will not then be able to help the bad, nor will the bad be allowed any more to trouble the good. He will gather those who, when they were living among the good, preferred to be harmful to them rather than to become better

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16 In Matthew the cockles do not have the potential to become wheat; however, Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 46.2 (on Matt 13:24–30) PG 58 477 refers twice to the possibility ‘that many of the cockles will be changed into wheat.’

17 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 46.2 (on Matt 13:24–30) PG 58 477 also uses this parable to argue against the killing of heretics: ‘He does not prohibit restraining heretics, stopping their mouths, curbing their freedom of speech, breaking up their meetings, rejecting their compacts, but he forbids killing them.’ Erasmus’ paraphrase on this parable proved to be particularly troublesome for him, since it was read as an argument against the right of authorities to ‘use the sword’ against heretics. Bédā had objected to it (*Divinationes ad notata Bedae* and *Supputatio* LB IX 464A–C, 580C–3F); likewise the Spanish monks (*Apologia adversus monachos* LB IX 1054B–60F); while the Paris theologians condemned it (*Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 904F–6D). Gerard Geldenhouwer, after he had turned to the Reformers, attempted to expose Erasmus’ views on the punishment of heretics, which led Erasmus to respond with his vitriolic *Epistola contra pseudevangelicos* (1528); cf CEBR 2 83–4 and Allen Ep 2219:11n.

by their companionship, and he will gather them together apart from the others and deliver them to the fire of hell. There, for their short-lived and false pleasures, they will be afflicted with never-ending torments, removed from the threshing floor of the church and hurled into the pit of Tartarus,¹⁸ that is, into the kingdom of their father, where repentance now too late and useless will wring weeping, wailing, and the gnashing of teeth from these wretched souls. Then those who have sprung from good seed and have persevered to the end, though here they seem lowly and are afflicted by the wicked, will gleam like the sun in the kingdom of their Father, with every humiliation of mortal life set aside. Because in either case these things are of the greatest importance, they must not be heard carelessly. They pertain either to the everlasting happiness, or to the everlasting destruction of all. Accordingly, whoever has an ear that is not deaf and stopped up by the desires of this world, let him hear so that he might flee eternal torments and obtain immortal life.'

In addition, in order to kindle the minds of his disciples all the more to thirst for gospel godliness, he introduced two other similitudes, by which he taught that the profession of the gospel is not a thing to be sought lightly or with ordinary desire, but that, neglecting everything else, we should undertake this one thing with unqualified zeal, and obtain this supreme good at the cost of all goods. Although this is not easily accessible for anyone, nevertheless once it has been found, a person possesses the greatest happiness. And though in the meantime it hides from human view, and does not reveal itself, nevertheless the person who possesses it is quietly contented with himself, serenely awaiting that day when the happiness that is now concealed will thereafter be brought forward into the open. He said: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field. Should someone find it by chance, he does not boast about it to others in case someone might seize it before him, but rejoicing inwardly and congratulating himself, he sells all of his possessions, amasses as much money as he can, then goes off to the owner of the piece of land and buys the field in which he knows the rare treasure is hidden; and he thinks himself fortunate who, stripped of many ordinary possessions, has been enriched by a single, but extraordinary (albeit unknown), piece of land.'

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18 On 'Tartarus' see chapter 8 n37. Here, for the Greek *ἡ κάμνος τοῦ πυρός* 'fiery furnace' (13:42) Erasmus translated *caminus ignis* 'fiery furnace,' and paraphrased as both *incendium gehennae* 'fire of hell' and *specus tartareum* 'pit of Tartarus'; for the same Greek and Latin expressions in verse 50 below, Erasmus paraphrased *forax ardens* 'burning furnace.'

He said: 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant for whom fine pearls were a source of great delight. When he came upon one that was extraordinarily fine, he immediately sold all his possessions and bought it. Nor did he think he was made poorer because he now had nothing of his original wealth. On the contrary, only then did¹⁹ he think himself wealthy when he was aware that he secretly possessed a pearl that, however small, nevertheless surpassed the value of all those possessions.' To these parables he added yet another, not unlike the one about the wheat and cockles,²⁰ exhorting his disciples (whom from fishers he had made apostles, that is, fishers of men) to strive to attract as many people as possible to the gospel profession. They should not immediately cast away and destroy the bad mixed with the good but, if after everything has been tried those refuse to repent, they should deliver them to their own judge to punish. He said: 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a large fishing net cast into the sea, which, spread widely, envelops and catches all kinds of fish. When the fishers have now realized that it is full, they then pull it to shore, and sitting now on dry land they select the good fish and store them in vessels, but the bad and useless ones they throw away. In the same manner it will happen at the consummation of the world. The angels will go out to examine what the gospel net is hauling in. They will no longer allow the bad to be mixed with the good in the same net, but they will judge each one according to merits, not profession. They will remove the bad from the company of the good; the latter they will store up for their Lord, the former they will throw into the burning furnace where there will be intolerable torture – the kind that weeping and gnashing of teeth usually attest.'

When he had spoken these words, Jesus asked his disciples whether they had understood all these things well enough, for he wanted to fix these sayings more firmly in their minds. When they replied that they had understood, he added yet another parable through which he implicitly advised them that these and many such things must be learned and kept in the storehouse of the memory, so that at every opportunity they might be able to produce them straightway, whether the hearer must be enticed by rewards

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¹⁹ did] First in 1534, previously 'does'

²⁰ Both Erasmus and Chrysostom invite a comparison between the parable of the net and that of the tares. But Erasmus stresses the similarity – both point to the mercy of God, though judgment follows for the hard of heart; Chrysostom points to the difference between the two – the tares is a parable of mercy, the net a parable of terrible judgment. Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 47.2 (on Matt 13:47-8) PG 58 484.

or frightened by a fear of punishments. The heart of a gospel teacher must be a sort of vault and treasury, rich and opulent, from which he may easily draw forth various things, now from the books of the Old Testament, now from the gospel philosophy, according to the need of his audience.²¹ The teacher must not always say the same things, or in the same way, and everyone is not moved by everything. There is need, therefore, of a sort of rich treasury furnished with every kind of learning.²² The parable goes like this: 'The scribes of the Jews, when consulted, find their answers in books. But if anyone wants to be a learned scribe in the kingdom of heaven, it is not enough that he cite old things, unless he cites also new things, similar to a sort of wealthy householder who lacks nothing in his treasure-store to satisfy everyone, whether a person desires new things or prefers the old.'²³

When Jesus had sufficiently instructed both the people and his disciples with such varied parables as these,²⁴ he went into his home city, that is, into Nazareth; his intent was to spread the gospel teaching more widely by constantly changing location. He had not initiated his preaching there so he would not be seen to grant any importance to human affection;²⁵ nevertheless, he did not want his home city passed over, for he

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21 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 47.3 (on Matt 13:52) PG 58 484 interprets the 'treasure' as the 'divine Scriptures.' In his interpretation of 13:44 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 PL 26 94C had interpreted the 'treasure hidden in the field' as either the 'Holy Scriptures' or as the 'Word incarnate.'

22 Cf the use of the commonplace book prescribed by Erasmus for those who would be effective teachers: *De ratione studii* CWE 24 672-5; *De copia* CWE 24 635-48, and *Ratio* Holborn 291:13-294:35.

23 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 13:52) PL 26 95C-D, who interpreted the 'scribes' as the apostles, 'who sealed the words and precepts [of the Saviour] in the fleshly tablets of the heart . . . and possessed the wealth of the householder, bringing forth from the treasury of their doctrines things new and old, so that whatever they proclaimed in the gospel they would establish from the words of the Law and the Prophets.'

24 The paraphrases on this chapter reflect the imaginative energy of Erasmus in his interpretation of parables. In the *Ratio* Erasmus associates parables with various forms of similitudes, and in that context shows the range of interpretive methods that can enrich the reader's understanding of the parables; cf Holborn 259:32-266:4 and 279:35-283:2.

25 On familial affection and relationships in the work of the gospel kingdom cf the paraphrase on 12:48 above; also the representation of Jesus' attitude to Mary in the paraphrase on John 2:2-4 CWE 46 38-9.

wanted to teach that one must bestow blessings on all. Therefore, having entered their assemblies,²⁶ he began to teach them as he had taught others. The fact that this was his home city hindered the work of the gospel, though it ought to have aided it, except that the common crowd preferred to envy rather than to favour the known and familiar, whereas it foolishly marvels at the exotic, judging something to be magnificent just because it has come from far away.²⁷ When, therefore, Jesus was here recognized by some who knew the humble circumstances of his family and the poverty of his parents, as well as the trade by which Joseph, commonly believed to be his father, supported his wife and step-son – the trade they knew Jesus, too, had entered – and since they had never heard that he had been instructed in letters, they murmured thus among themselves: ‘From where does he have such exceptional wisdom or the power to perform miracles? Is this man not Jesus the carpenter, the son of the carpenter Joseph? Is not his mother the little woman called Mary, poor and of no account among us? Are not his kinsmen²⁸ among us: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Do not all his nearest kinsfolk dwell among us? How is it then that he returns to us, suddenly become someone else, a teacher and a man mighty with miracles? Does he think we do not know who he is?’ Thus Jesus’ family connections and humble lot in life was an obstacle to those who surmised that he was an ordinary human being – suspecting nothing else – and to those who on account of the original lowliness of his life envied his new renown.

Jesus, however, censuring their judgment, a judgment that was insensitive, too much the common one of people, by which a man is judged not on the basis of his virtues but on his possessions and the nobility of his birth, said to them: ‘A prophet is nowhere more disdained than in his own country, and in his own family, and among his own kinsmen.’

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26 ‘Assemblies’: *conciliabula*. Erasmus follows evidently the Vulgate’s ‘synagogues’ (plural) rather than his own translation ‘synagogue’ (singular). He was able, therefore, to broaden the meaning of the word to the more general ‘assemblies.’ Cf his annotation on 6:2 (*sicut hypocritae*), where he notes that the word signifies those gatherings that take place in streets, town squares, and in the market place. He calls attention again to the word in annotations on 6:5 (*synagogis*) and 10:17 (*in consiliis*).

27 A commonplace found early in Christian literature; cf Tertullian *De cultu feminarum* 1.7.1–2. Nicholas of Lyra (on 13:57) similarly explains the psychology of envy arising from the success of a home-town boy.

28 ‘Kinsmen’: *consobrini*, again for the Vulgate’s *fratres*; cf chapter 12 n56.

Whereas elsewhere he had found a ready faith, and had become distinguished through his many miracles, here he was not able to perform any, except that he healed²⁹ a few sick people by laying on his hands.³⁰ This was not because his power had been diminished or his will changed, but because their disbelief stood in the way. Just as a doctor cannot aid a sick person who refuses medicine, not because the skill of the doctor is ineffective but because the sick person is at fault, so, since miracles are granted in response to faith, disbelief thwarts the ability to perform them by one whose power is not otherwise lacking unless the fault of another obstructed. And so³¹ as though reproaching them for their malice, he said: 'What is happening to me is not new. The same thing once happened to the most holy prophets Elijah and Elisha,³² whose tombs you now venerate.³³ For when it had not rained for three years and six months, and as a result a great famine fell upon that entire³⁴ region, Elijah, being in danger from hunger, was commanded to go only to a foreign widow, the widow of Zarepath in the territory of Sidon, though there were many widows in Judea. Received by her, he found faith and performed a miracle. Moreover, while Elisha was living, there were many lepers in the nation of Israel, and yet none was cured of his leprosy but Naaman alone, a Syrian whose faith as it were compelled a miracle from the prophet.'

Chapter 14

Meanwhile Herod, tetrarch of Galilee, son of the man who had slaughtered the boys of Bethlehem,¹ had heard a rumour about the teaching and about the miracles and wonders of Jesus. The opinions of the multitude concerning Jesus varied: some said he was Elijah, some Jeremiah, some another of the

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29 healed] First in 1534; previously, 'had healed'

30 That Jesus performed a few healings in Nazareth is added from Mark 6:5.

31 And so . . . malice] First in 1534; previously, 'And reproaching them for such great malice'

32 These references to Elijah and Elisha are added from Luke 4:25–7. The stories of the miracles mentioned here are told at 1 Kings 17:1–16 and 2 Kings 5:1–14.

33 Cf Matt 23:29.

34 entire] omitted in 1524 only

1 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 48.2 (on Matt 14:1) PG 58 488 also at this point distinguishes this Herod from his father, who 'had killed the children' at Bethlehem. On Herod the Great and his sons see chapter 2 n32.

ancient prophets,² nor were there lacking those who declared that he was John, who, restored to life, had now become more powerful. Herod derided such people³ and said: 'John's head I⁴ cut off, and how do you think that he is alive, and not only alive, but also mighty with miracles?' Soon when many people had informed him of the frequent and remarkable wonders so that the rumour could no longer appear groundless, he said to his domestics: 'This man about whom they tell such marvels is not Jesus, who perished long ago, killed by my father among the multitude of Bethlehem boys, but he is John, who has risen from the dead, and for this reason now become more godlike, grows famous by his miracles.' Now Herod had arrested John the Baptist and had cast him into prison, though he held the man in high esteem, and undertook not a few things on John's advice.⁵ However, this good will of the tyrant turned into hatred because of an incestuous woman, whose favour, won by shameful indulgence, had more weight with the king than the authority of John. For Herod, augmenting the fraternal antipathy, had married Philip's wife, Herodias – while Philip was still alive, and by whom Herodias had a daughter.⁶ John unhesitatingly⁷ admonished the king

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- 2 For Elijah or another prophet see Mark 6:14–15 and Luke 9:8. Jeremiah is an interpretive addition, following, apparently, Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 48.2 (on Matt 14:2) PG 58 488, who, in citing Luke, names Jeremiah.
- 3 Herod's derision is an imaginative but characterizing touch perhaps derived from Luke 23:6–11, but also reflecting Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 48.2 (on Matt 14:2) PG 58 488–9: 'It is probable that at the first, when people said that this was John (and many said so), Herod had denied, and said, as if boasting of his achievement, "I killed John . . ." But when the rumour persisted he himself said what many were saying.'
- 4 I] *ego* added in 1534, emphasizing the pronoun, and reflecting more precisely the biblical text of Luke 9:9, cited by Chrysostom (see previous note).
- 5 Herod's regard for John is noted at Mark 6:20; thus Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 48.2 (on Matt 14:2) PG 58 489: 'Mark says that Herod held John in great esteem, even though he was reproached by him.'
- 6 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 14:3–4) PL 26 97A, followed by Bede *In Matt expos* 3 (on Matt 14:3–4) PL 92 70D claimed that Herodias' father, Aretas, in order to spite his son-in-law, Philip, with whom he had become angry, took his daughter away from Philip, and gave her to Herod Antipas, since the two brothers had become enemies. In fact Jerome and Bede have confused the complicated relationship. Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus; Herod Antipas had divorced the daughter of Aretas to marry Herodias. Cf the articles 'Herod Antipas' and 'Herodias' in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 3 160 and 174–6; also Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 175–6.
- 7 'Unhesitatingly': *libere*. Erasmus attributes to John the fearless courage of a preacher of the gospel who speaks without flinching; cf chapter 10 n39 above.

that this was an unlawful marriage, because his brother was alive and so was the daughter he had fathered. The Mosaic law, on the other hand, commanded that a brother should take the wife of a brother who was dead, if it happened that he died without children.⁸

Herod, loving the woman more passionately the more the love was forbidden, was extremely offended by this candour, so much that he would have killed him if he had not feared an uprising of the people, among whom he knew John was in great favour, because he both had baptized many,⁹ and had many disciples, and many believed he was the Messiah. Certainly there was no one who did not think him a man of prophetic spirit and singular¹⁰ sanctity. But later a debased extravagance and an insane partiality towards his niece drove out this fear. For when in accordance with pagan custom he was celebrating his birthday,¹¹ an occasion upon which no festive pleasures were spared, the daughter of Herodias, still a girl, danced with lascivious gestures before the royal table, and it so pleased Herod, now grown hot with wine, that he swore that there was nothing he would not give the girl should she ask, even if she demanded half his kingdom.¹² That she might not waste so great an opportunity, and might presently take advantage of this lust of the royal breast, the girl consulted with her mother about what she should request. The mother, afraid that the king, some day reconciled

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8 Deut 25:5; cf also Lev 18:16, 20:21. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 48.3 (explaining Matt 14:4) PG 58 489–90 also thought it important to explain the law from which this tragedy had arisen.

9 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 14:5) PL 26 97B: 'Herod feared an uprising of the people on account of John, for he knew that John had baptized many people in the Jordan, but he was overcome by his love for his wife; it was because of his passion for her that he had disregarded the divine precepts.'

10 singular] Added in 1534

11 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 14:6) PL 26 97B–C notes that 'we find [in Scripture] only two who celebrated their birthdays, Pharaoh and Herod, alike in impiety.' But by 'pagan customs' Erasmus may have in mind Roman practices. Like a Roman, Herod celebrates the anniversary of his birth by holding a banquet. On the Roman customs for celebrating birthdays, including banquets and gift giving, see J.P.V.D. Balsdon *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (New York 1969) 121–2. It appears that the person celebrating the birthday may sometimes have given his guests presents. Ovid refers to the custom of asking for a gift on one's birthday when he writes: 'If I am obliged to ask for something on this day,' *Tristia* 3.13.25. Martial 10.27 describes the host giving an extravagant dole to the guests at his birthday banquet.

12 Herod's offer of half his kingdom is added from Mark 6:23, as in Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 48.3 (on Matt 14:9) PG 58 490.

in heart with John, might break off their incestuous marriage, persuaded her daughter to ask for just one thing: that without delay the head of John the Baptist should be given to her on a platter.¹³ After the consultation with her infamous mother, the girl came forth into the feast and, with everyone waiting to hear what she would ask for, demanded that the head of John the Baptist should be immediately given to her on a platter – as though her mother¹⁴ would value this dish more than half a kingdom. When the king heard this demand, which exceeded all hope, he feigned a sorrowful look,¹⁵ and cloaked¹⁶ his cruelty with the obligation of his oath, especially because he had sworn the oath with so many guests as witnesses. And so,¹⁷ in order not to be seen as either fickle or a perjurer, he ordered done what the girl desired. Immediately guards¹⁸ were sent into the prison, the head of the most innocent man was cut off, it was brought forward on a platter, it was given to the girl, and the girl handed it to her mother, who had been the architect of this entire drama.¹⁹ These were the auspices by which that

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13 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 14:8) PL 26 98A provides a similar glimpse of what Herodias was thinking: 'Fearing that Herod might sometime repent, or become a friend to his brother Philip, and dissolve their unlawful marriage, Herodias advised her daughter to ask for John's head right there at the feast.' Cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 14:6): 'Herodias feared that, due to the preaching of John, Herod would repent and send her back to his brother ... therefore she was devising a way to kill John.'

14 her mother] Added in 1534; in 1522 and in 1524 the grammatical construction suggested that it was the daughter who 'would value this dish.'

15 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 48.2 (on Matt 14:9) PG 58 489 takes at face value Matt 14:9 (also Mark 6:26) that Herod was genuinely saddened to be bound by his word to kill John, adding that the wicked king's sorrow for John shows that 'Virtue is a thing that wins admiration and praise even from the wicked.' Erasmus, however, shares the harsher opinion of Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 14:8) PL 26 98A, who says of Herod: 'A concealer of his thoughts, a contriver of murder, he wore a sad face, but was joyful in his heart.'

16 cloaked ... of his oath] First in 1534; previously 'using as his excuse the obligation of his oath'

17 and so] Added in 1534

18 'Guards': *spiculatores*, a detail from Mark 6:27. *Speculator* was commonly used in Latin to refer to 'scouts' who also constituted a general's bodyguard. Its use in the paraphrase here may seem curious, but the word had a special place in the New Testament text; it appears in the Greek text of Mark as a loan word from the Latin, *σπεκουλάτωρ*, a word peculiar to Mark in the entire Greek New Testament. The Vulgate had adopted the Latin form, and Erasmus followed suit. In the paraphrase on Mark 6:27, however, Erasmus avoids the word: 'the executioner (*carnifex*) is dispatched' CWE 49 82.

19 For the image see Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 48.3 (on Matt 14:9) PG 58 491: 'It is

happy birthday of Herod was dedicated; this was the reward given a man who was summoning to honourable acts; this was the spectacle that fed the eyes of the guests whom the king had judged worthy of his table. Thus an incestuous woman took precedence over the head of John. Then John's disciples carried his body away and buried it.

When Jesus had learned of this monstrous crime from the report of John's disciples (for as a human being he allowed them to report as if he did not know about it, though he had known beforehand, even before it was done)²⁰ he boarded a boat so that he might depart into some deserted place, removed from the crowd. In this he was indeed giving the appearance of human fear, but in fact he was removing from the wicked king the opportunity to add homicide to homicide,²¹ especially since Jesus' time had not yet come.²² At the same time he was teaching us that one must sometimes yield to the furore of princes, lest they become exasperated by good deeds, and both injure the innocent and make themselves more wicked.²³ One is permitted to avoid the wicked who are prepared to do wrong in order that one might be permitted to benefit the good. And Jesus' departure indeed made evident the extraordinary faith of certain people. For as soon as it was heard that Jesus was avoiding the cities and living in the desert (out of fear of Herod, so they thought), they themselves left the cities, went into the desert, and, since they were not able to come by boats or wagons because of the rough terrain, followed on foot the one who was concealing

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she who was the architect (*ἀρχιτέκτων*) of all these evils, she who constructed this drama.' Preceding this vivid expression Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 48.3 PG 58 490 described at some length the analogy between the biblical event and a play, noting the 'Satanic theatre' and the 'corrupted spectators.' For Herodias as the 'architect of the drama' see Mark 6:19, and Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 176 (on 14:3).

20 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 49.1 (on Matt 14:13) PG 58 496 likewise here raises the question of Jesus' foreknowledge: 'Why did Jesus not withdraw before they reported [John's death]? – for he certainly knew what had happened before it was reported. It was that in all things he might demonstrate the truth of the "economy."'

21 The explanation that this was an act of wisdom and mercy rather than fear is also in Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 14:12-13) PL 26 99A: 'He was not acting out of fear of death, as some think, but he was sparing his enemies, that they should not add murder to murder.' So also the *Gloss* (on 14:13).

22 For the expression, see John 7:6; the words here represent Erasmus' own translation there. Cf chapter 12 n17.

23 Cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 14:13): '[Jesus] wanted to show that sometimes one must yield to human malice.'

himself in hidden retreats. Nor were they deterred either by the difficulty of the journey or the danger of fasting, so much had they now begun to hunger for the gospel teaching.²⁴ When Jesus had become aware of this, he came forth from his hiding places and met those who were eager, whereas he had withdrawn from the ungodly. When he saw also gathered there a great multitude of people who had brought with them many suffering from various diseases, he was moved with pity; and, having recognized their faith from the difficulty of their journey, of his own accord he healed as many as were sick.²⁵

So great, however, had the eagerness of the multitude been that, although they brought with them into the wilderness very many sick children and women, they nevertheless brought with them²⁶ no provisions.²⁷ Accordingly, when night was now approaching, and their stomachs were pinched with hunger, the disciples advised their instructor that night was at hand, that the crowd was large, and that it was now more than time to take food; he should send the people away so that, spreading out into the nearest villages, they might buy their food, each person for himself. The disciples did not yet have a sufficiently full understanding of Jesus, despite having seen so many miracles (for thus it seemed right to the divine wisdom to fashion them gradually to perfection, so that their confidence in the things done should be stronger, and that the divine wisdom might at the same time teach them by what means they might cure the infirmity of others).²⁸ And so to make the miracle more manifest, Jesus responded: 'There is no need for them to go anywhere. You yourselves, rather, give them food to eat.' Then the disciples, as though forgetting everything they

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24 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 14:12–13) PL 26 99c also takes the fact that the people travelled under their own power as an indication of their zeal: 'The people followed him on foot, not on beasts of burden, not on other means of transport, but by the toil of their own feet, thus showing the ardent resolve of their hearts.'

25 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 49.1 (on Matt 14:14) PG 58 497: 'On this occasion he does not demand their faith, for the fact that they have come, have left their cities, have sought him keenly and remained with him in spite of gnawing hunger, demonstrates their faith.'

26 brought with them] First in 1534; previously 'brought along'

27 Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 14:13–14 PG 123 298A also remarks on their travelling on foot and without provisions: 'That they follow on foot and without food is a sign of their faith.'

28 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 49.1 (on Matt 14:15) PG 58 497 notes the apostles' inability to understand Jesus even after witnessing so many miracles, 'for they were still imperfect.'

had seen, did not even come to their senses at this statement; and yet in their response, which was indeed stupid, their weakness brought into light the magnitude of the miracle.²⁹ They said: 'Shall we give supper to so many people? Though we are thirteen in number, we ourselves have very few provisions, in fact only five loaves of barley bread³⁰ and two fishes. Granted, they may not despise this meal, but how will what is scarcely enough for the few of us be enough for them?' Then Jesus commanded that whatever there was be brought to him. The disciples did not answer back 'And so, you are killing us off with hunger, if you give them the little we have'; they simply obeyed and brought forth all their provisions. Here Jesus was about to present the gospel banquet, in which just as there must be no extravagance, so it is fitting that there be equality for all, and so he ordered everyone to recline on the grass, sitting together in groups of fifty,³¹ so that the number of banqueters should be more evident; at the same time they imitated the manner of those who, when about to give a feast for many people or bestow a dole,³² divide the multitude into companies so no one should either go without or get too much.

This done, Jesus was then indeed about to be the master of the feast. The one who had come to feed their souls would feed their bodies also, so that even by this act he might teach his disciples that food will be lacking absolutely nowhere for those who, intent on the work of the gospel, pay no attention to the matter of provision. He took the five barley loaves and two fishes in his hands: first, he was showing everyone with what food apostolic envoys should be content; then, he was making vividly apparent the sincere trust of the multitude who, although they saw how little food there was (and they knew how many thousands there were), nevertheless, when they had been commanded to recline, did so. And so, Jesus, as host, holding the bread and fish in his hands, raised his eyes to heaven, indicating that whatever is needed for human uses comes from the heavenly Father; and after praising the Father's kindness, he broke the loaves and at the same time the fishes. These he handed to the disciples with the intent that they should serve them to the multitude, advising them by a kind of

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29 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 49.1 (on Matt 14:17) PG 58 497 alluding to Mark 8:17 also observes the stupidity and blindness of the disciples.

30 Only John [6:9] specifies that the loaves were made from barley.

31 The people sit in groups of fifty at Luke 9:14; at Mark 6:40 they sit in groups of fifty and one hundred.

32 'dole': *sportulam*; generally used in classical literature to denote the food or money a Roman patron gave a client; cf Juvenal *Satires* 1.95; 3.249; Suetonius *Nero* 16; Martial 10.27.3 (where the *sportula* is given to those attending a birthday banquet, as in n11 above).

riddle³³ what sort of teachers they should be who feed the souls of the simple with the word of God. For just as Christ, looking unto heaven, indicated that everything he taught emanated from the heavenly Father,³⁴ so apostolic men, whenever they saw the people attentively listening to them with their simple trust, were to bring forth³⁵ only what they had received from Christ. They were not to set out for the people various delicacies from the kitchens of worldly philosophy, or from their own inclinations to bring out human teachings, but they were to give the people simple gospel teaching, just as they had received it from their instructor, and they should divide it up just as he had broken it with his own hands. It is from a provisioning of this kind only that many people are refreshed, and at the same time glory is returned to Christ, not to the one who distributes the food.³⁶ Do you ask about the outcome of the feast? The disciples without delay distributed the food, the people without hesitation ate, one and all, not to excess, but to satiety. This feast, with its many guests, was so far from lacking anything, that when the meal was completed the collected scraps filled twelve baskets. Moreover, the number of men was five thousand, not counting women and children.

Now Jesus wanted to teach that when one has satisfied the needs of the stomach, one should hasten not to lewdness or sleep, but to prayer, and that solitude is especially well-suited for prayer.³⁷ So when the banquet was finished, he compelled his disciples (for unwillingly were they separated

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33 On the 'riddle' cf chapter 12 n51 above.

34 Cf John 15:15, 17:6–8, 14.

35 were to bring forth] *promerent* first in 1534; previously *proponerent* 'were to set out.' In this and the contextual sentences Erasmus adopts language strongly associated in classical Latin with providing a meal, or hosting a dinner: *apponerent* 'should serve them,' *promerent* 'to bring forth,' *deponerent* 'to bring out,' though *proponerent* 'to set out' belongs familiarly in contexts of exposition and proclamation. The change here to *promerent* in 1534 avoided the close repetition of *proponerent* and strengthened the hosting image. The interlinear *Gloss* (on 14:19) interprets the words 'he gave his disciples the five loaves' allegorically as the apostolic understanding and exposition of Scripture.

36 The paraphrases on this narrative in all three synoptic Gospels (cf Mark 6:32–44; Luke 9:10–17) as well as on the Johannine equivalent (6:1–13) interpret the story as admonition on the pastor's obligation to feed the flock, to 'preach the word.' They anticipate a central focus in Erasmus' late work the *Ecclesiastes* (1535), and reflect his understanding of *sermo* 'word' as central to the gospel. On this cf CWE 46 77 n15 and 83 n50; also in that volume, references to *sermo* in the Index of Greek and Latin Words.

37 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 50.1 (on Matt 14:23) PG 58 503 emphasizes the importance of solitude for prayer: 'Why does he go up the mountain? To teach us that isolation and solitude are advantageous when one is to pray to God.'

from their beloved Lord) to go to the sea and cross over before him, saying that he would follow after dismissing the crowd. Although they were torn away from him against their will, the disciples nevertheless did not murmur, they did not make the excuse that night was at hand, they did not ask when he would follow, they simply obeyed his commands.³⁸ So the disciples departed, Jesus dismissed the crowd that he had in every way satisfied, and then went up a mountain to pray there alone – for so he had taught his disciples to pray.³⁹ Accordingly, Jesus spent a good part of the night alone on the peak of the mountain. In the meantime, while their Lord was absent, the disciples found themselves in danger as they rowed on the waves, for as soon as they had advanced out upon the sea a contrary wind arose, and the boat was being hurled dangerously by the swollen waves. Night doubled their fear. What were they to do? Peril was pressing hard, nor was he present whose help they might entreat. Jesus⁴⁰ left his disciples in this danger for almost the entire night in order to harden them⁴¹ gradually against all fears,⁴² and to teach them that divine aid will never fail those in peril, even if it should come a little late.

Then at last in the fourth watch of the night, when the disciples were almost despairing and were already now losing heart, Jesus came, not in a boat, but walking upon the water. When through the darkness they saw someone walking and did not quite recognize Jesus, they were even more terrified, and said amongst themselves that it was a spectre they were seeing, not a man. For the common lot of sailors believe apparitions of this sort portend imminent death to those sailing.⁴³ Hence such great terror

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38 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 14:22) PL 26 101C-D notes the reluctance of the disciples to be separated from their Lord.

39 Cf Matt 6:6.

40 Jesus] Added in 1534; previously implied in the verb

41 them] Added in 1534; previously understood from the preceding 'disciples'

42 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 14:25) PL 26 102B observes that the expression 'fourth watch' shows that the apostles were in danger the whole night. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 50.1 (on Matt 14:24) PG 58 504 describes Jesus' purpose in leaving the disciples alone in the storm for so long: 'He leads and guides them gradually and by stages to greater trials, that they might bear everything bravely.'

43 Cf the nautical phenomenon of 'St Elmo's fire' which sailors in antiquity regarded as a sign of the Dioscuri: if the twins appeared together the sailors took it as a sign of a prosperous voyage, but if only one of the twins appeared, shipwreck was portended. The phenomenon interested Erasmus; cf his annotation on Acts 28:11 (*cui erat insigne castrorum*); also the colloquy 'The Shipwreck' CWE 39 352:1-24 and nn4 and 5, and *Parabolae* CWE 23 242:33-5.

came upon them that, having become, as it were, deranged, they cried out for fear. Jesus, however, did not allow them to be in danger any longer, but spoke to them immediately so they would recognize by the sound of his voice the one they could not see in the darkness.⁴⁴ He said: 'Be of good courage, it is I, do not be afraid.' At this word their courage at once returned. Peter, indeed, who always burned with a certain singular love for Jesus,⁴⁵ believing that nothing at all that Jesus bade was difficult to do, said: 'Lord, if it is you, bid me to come to you over the waters.' He was not surprised that Jesus was walking, but he thought that if Jesus so willed, the same was permitted to him.⁴⁶ Jesus, molding and shaping Peter's weakness in every way to the strength of perfect faith, said: 'Come.' At this word Peter without delay jumped out of the boat and began to hurry to Jesus, he too walking on the water. And as long as his faith did not waver at all, the liquid element lent its support to him. But when he took his eyes off Jesus for a little while, he began to heed the violence of the winds, the tumult of the waves, and his own weakness, and again he was afraid. He began to sink, and was in danger of drowning. The violence of the winds gave rise to fear, fear gave rise to danger, a lack of faith gave rise to fear,⁴⁷ and the magnitude of the danger again revived the spark of faith. Now almost overwhelmed by the waves, he cried: 'Lord, save me; I am perishing.'⁴⁸ Jesus, teaching his disciple the lesson that the peril he was fearing was not from the waves or the winds that before were accommodating him, but from a weakness of trust, with outstretched hand took hold of him and raised him

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44 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 14:27) PL 26 102C: 'From the sound of his voice they were able to recognize that it was he speaking to them in the darkness of the night.'

45 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 50.1 (on Matt 14:28) PG 58 505 also notes: 'No one loved Jesus as much as he'; cf also John 21:15–17, and the paraphrase on Matt 16:16 with n22 below. Commenting on the same text Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 PL 26 102D noted Peter's 'most ardent faith'; so also in his comments on verse 30 (PL 26 103B).

46 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 50.1 (on Matt 14:28) PG 58 505 had also seen in Peter the twin virtues of love and faith, and explains Peter's request in terms of faith: [Peter] gives proof not only of his love but of his faith. He believed not only that [Jesus] could walk upon water, but that he could bring in others also.'

47 Erasmus apparently wishes to express the ambiguity of the cause of fear: an external impulse (the violence of the winds) and an internal motive (lack of faith).

48 Peter's cry here echoes that of the disciples in Matt 8:25 'Save us Lord, we are perishing' (NRSV). Here in the biblical text of Matt 14:30 Peter says only, 'Lord, save me' (NRSV).

up, saying: 'O you who trust me still so little. Why were you hesitating?⁴⁹ It is not enough to have faith that is ardent and temporary: faith must be constant and enduring. You must not consider how great the danger is, or what your strength is able to bear, but what I am able to offer one who believes.' Then as soon as he stepped in the boat, the winds grew quiet. Those who were in the boat, who had witnessed so amazing a wonder, sensing that there was something in him greater than human, fell down at his feet and worshipped him saying: 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

When they reached shore, he went into the region of Gennesaret where formerly he had performed many miracles. Upon recognizing that the one they had seen before was again present, the people sent word throughout the region that Jesus was there, so they could bring to him any sick they might have. For now from the earlier miracles their faith had increased. Therefore coming together from every direction they brought to Jesus all those suffering from diseases, asking him to permit them to touch even the hem of his garment, if it was a burden to touch or address each individually. So great was the strength of their faith; nor did their faith deceive them: as many as touched were healed.⁵⁰

Chapter 15

The greater the glory these deeds brought to God, the more the Pharisees burned with envy, because they saw their own glory, by which they had thus far promoted themselves before men, cast in the shadows by these events. They hunted everywhere for slanderous accusations, but the more they attacked Jesus the more they exposed their own blindness, so obvious that even the people saw it. Therefore several Pharisees of Jerusalem (for there they were the most arrogant)¹ approached Jesus together, so that

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49 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 50.2 (on Matt 14:31) PG 58 506: 'Showing that it was not the force of the wind, but the weakness of faith that had brought the change, [Jesus] said, "Why did you hesitate, you of little faith?"'

50 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 50.2 (on Matt 14:34–6) PG 58 507 also observes that time had not lessened the faith fostered by the earlier miracles, but had increased it, for the people now believed healing would come simply from the touch of Jesus' garment.

1 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 51.1 (on Matt 15:1) PG 58 509 notes the greater arrogance of both the Pharisees and the scribes who came from Jerusalem: 'The ones from Jerusalem were worse than the others, as they enjoyed greater honour, and were full of arrogance'; likewise Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 15:1–2 PG

their number might add credibility to their false charge. Furthermore, although Moses had forbidden anything to be taken away from or added to the words of the Law,² the Pharisees, in order that they might seem to be not only interpreters of the Law, but also its authors,³ had added certain frivolous things of this sort: 'Let no one take food with unclean hands' (by 'unclean,' however, they meant 'unwashed,' as if the hand might contaminate the food or the man, or as if the fluidity of water might remove the pollutions of the soul); also, 'Let no one who has returned from the market-place and mingled among the indiscriminate crowd take food, unless he has first washed his body' – just as if contact with people might pollute a person, or as if a person who is washed is pure; again, that their pots, cups, bronze kettles, stools, beds, and other household belongings in daily use should be washed frequently.⁴ With many silly and frivolous things such as these they used to burden the simple masses, and they required so much importance to be granted to these things that for the sake of these petty little injunctions they sometimes neglected the things that God had enjoined.⁵ Consequently, because they did not have the violation of the Mosaic law as grounds to strike at Jesus' disciples, the Pharisees reviled their instructor because he allowed the disciples to neglect petty human regulations – not that the disciples cast scorn on these regulations, though they were worthy of scorn, but intent on serious matters, they sometimes considered them of little importance.⁶

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123 304D: 'Although all the regions had scribes and Pharisees, they were more highly honoured in Jerusalem. For this reason they were extremely envious, as they were more in love with glory.'

- 2 Cf Deut 4:2. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 51.1 (on Matt 15:1) PG 58 509 draws the same connection to Mosaic law: 'It is clear that the priests added many new regulations, even though Moses had forbidden – invoking great fear and many threats – that anything be added or subtracted.'
- 3 Again, Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 51.1 (on Matt 15:1) PG 58 510 speaks in similar terms: 'They were willing to be the more feared, on the grounds that they, too, were lawgivers.'
- 4 For the pollution of the market-place see Mark 7:3-4; for the list of utensils see Mark 7:4, where cups, pots, and bronze kettles [NRSV] only are mentioned.
- 5 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 51.1 (on Matt 15:1) PG 58 510: 'So far had they gone in their disregard for the Law that their own precepts were observed, while the commandments of God were violated.'
- 6 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 51.1 (on Matt 15:2) PG 58 510-11: 'They did not do this [ie disregard the traditions] on purpose, but they looked upon such traditions as superfluous, and gave their attention to the things that were necessary.'

The Pharisees, therefore, came to Jesus and said: 'Why do your disciples not observe the ordinances of their ancestors? For they do not wash their hands when they are about to take food.' Christ, not tolerating so malicious a charge concerning something of no significance, hit back with a very severe countercharge:⁷ 'On the contrary, with what effrontery do you, who misrepresent these trifles, place such importance on petty human regulations that contribute nothing but burdensome superstition, and on account of which you violate even the greatest precept of God? God, confirming the law of nature,⁸ not frivolously commanded that each of us should honour his father and mother and support them with assistance, promising a long and happy life to anyone who does so, threatening death to anyone who does otherwise.⁹ But you, in order to turn to your own gain what was to be spent helping parents – for you have at heart your own greed – you teach men that it is holier and better to enrich the temple with gifts than to aid needy parents; and you point out distinctly the trick by which sons may mock parents who entreat aid: they should speak thus to a father or a mother: "Consider as bestowed upon you the gift I offer the temple, since that which is offered to God, our highest parent, has been rightly invested, and a son's godliness will profit also the parents." And by this artifice, under the pretext of false godliness, against the precept of God, a father is forsaken so the priests might be better off. You reap the advantage; the parents get nothing but words. And you disguise an ungodly act with the appearance of godliness.¹⁰ But what is more arrogant than to prefer your

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7 Nicholas of Lyra (on 15:3) also noted that Jesus' reply was a 'countercharge,' referring to an adage familiar to Erasmus, 'As though driving out a nail with a nail' (on which see CWE 48 28 n4).

8 For the 'law of nature' in the thought of Erasmus see especially *De libero arbitrio* and *Hyperaspistes* 1 and 2 CWE 76 24-5, 272-3, 275-6, and CWE 77 734-8; see also the paraphrases on Rom 2:14-15 CWE 42 20-1, and on Mark 7:10 CWE 49 91. The concept of natural law was articulated in classical antiquity; for a representative expression see Cicero *De republica* 2.22.33, also the *De conscribendis epistolis* CWE 25 134, where Erasmus associates the concept with Stoic philosophy. See also chapter 10 n53, and, on the *communis sensus*, chapter 7 n17.

9 Cf Exod 20:12, 21:17; Lev 20:9; Eph 6:2-3.

10 In this paraphrastic interpretation of 15:5 Erasmus follows in outline the explanation offered in his annotation on the verse (*munus quodcumque est*) where (from 1519) he accuses priests and monks of similar hypocrisy in the sixteenth century. This is also the interpretation of Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 15:4-6) PL 26 106A-C. Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 184 confirm in general Erasmus' interpretation.

own regulations to the commandments of God, and on the pretext of these regulations to nullify the most holy commandment of God? It was unfair to burden the people with petty regulations of this kind, when they were already burdened more than enough with the burden of the Law. To do away with divine law, which corresponds to nature itself, through inventions of your own is an impiety not to be endured. Such, of course, is that counterfeit religion of yours, which is nothing less than it seems. Hypocrites, not unworthily did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: "This people honours me with their lips, while their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching doctrines that are the precepts of men."¹¹

When he had thus spoken, Jesus, as though turning from the Pharisees who were only watching for an opportunity to bring false charges, bade the crowds to approach more closely, saying: 'Listen and understand how frivolous are the things that are prescribed to you by the Pharisees, who are anxious about the slightest things and neglectful of the greatest. By an inverted judgment they place the essence of godliness in external matters, as for example in choice of foods, and they neglect the things that are of the heart. They abhor unwashed ladles,¹² and neglect impure hearts; they are constantly washing hands and skin, and allow the heart to be polluted with all manner of vices. What enters the mouth does not make a person unclean, but what proceeds from the mouth makes the person unclean. It does not matter what food you eat,¹³ but with what intent you eat it.' With these words it seemed that Jesus had given the Pharisees a just cause for slander, because he abolished the food restrictions prescribed by divine law.¹⁴ (In fact, in this matter the disciples did not differ from the Pharisees, judging it a grave crime to eat common foods¹⁵ – a belief Christ had not yet

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11 With a minor exception Erasmus cites the Vulgate of Matt 15:8-9, where the text, based on the Septuagint, differs considerably from the Vulgate (and the Hebrew) of Isa 29:13. See his annotation on verse 8 (*labiis me honorat*).

12 'Ladles': *cyathos*, a Greek loan word well attested in Latin. A *cyathos* was used to draw wine from a *crater* (mixing bowl) to a drinking cup.

13 This statement is based not on Matthew but on Mark 7:19: 'He declared all foods clean.' The fundamental principle articulated in this sentence finds frequent and varied explication in the apostolic literature; cf eg Rom 14:6-23; 1 Tim 4:3-4.

14 For the law of clean and unclean foods see Lev 11 and Deut 14:3-21.

15 For the expression 'common foods' see Acts 10:14-15. Erasmus thought this sense of the word reflected Hebrew idiom; cf his annotation on Acts 10:15 (*tu commune ne dixeris*): 'The Jews call things that are unclean and unholy "common."'

condemned). Nevertheless Jesus was pointing out that these things are not inherently good or bad, but become one or the other through attendant circumstances. As such they must be considered of less importance than the things that are always and by their own nature righteous or wicked.¹⁶ He was further indicating that the time was now at hand when the precepts of the Law such as were instituted for a particular time, and that did not so much produce holiness as point to it, were now beginning to be cast into shadow, and would soon pass away utterly under the gleaming light of the gospel.¹⁷ The disciples, not yet understanding this, approached their Lord and privately warned him about the danger: 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended by your statement about food not polluting anyone, even though they pretended otherwise?'

Now Jesus wanted at last to teach that obstacles raised by shameless persons and taken from things of no importance must be courageously regarded with disdain, along with their authors – especially since, if you comply with such people, you only serve to nourish their malice, not without harm to the simple who, trusting in observances of this sort, neglect in the meantime the pursuit of true godliness. Therefore Jesus replied in this manner to his disciples, who had even themselves been somewhat offended:¹⁸ 'Every plant not planted by my Father will be plucked out by the roots. Every custom and practice devised by men of themselves and for their own gain and glory, not for true godliness, will perish. Such practices savour of the earth and are carnal; they have been given for a time to restrain the license of coarse and insensitive people.¹⁹ The gospel law is spiritual and

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16 This division of moral action into good, bad, and indifferent finds an analogy in classical Stoic thought. See the exposition of Cato in Cicero *De finibus* 3.15.50–16.54.

17 The passage suggests Erasmus' view expressed elsewhere that the precepts of the Law lost their force only gradually, allowing for a time of accommodation for Jews deeply committed to the Law; cf the *Ratio* Holborn 199:14–200:30, and especially 199:14–17 with its image of the shadows disappearing under the approaching light of the gospel, the sun not yet risen, though the sky was growing light in the early dawn.

18 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 51.3 (on Matt 15:12–14) PG 58 514 suggested that the disciples, too, were offended by Jesus' words.

19 Nicholas of Lyra (on 15:13) interprets the 'plant not planted by the Father' as traditions devised by men that do not accord with the law of God. Cf the paraphrase on 5:17–18 above, where the 'carnal' part of the Law, ie its ceremonies and precepts, are said to have been given for a time as a restraining force, but, as here, the ceremonies and precepts of the Law are not clearly distinguished from the 'human regulations' added.

heavenly; it is not located in things that are visible, but in the affections of the heart. Therefore one's foremost concern must be for the latter, for apart from these those visible things are good for nothing except empty ostentation. Accordingly, after you have begun to profess this heavenly philosophy, you have nothing to do with falsified Pharisees, who promise absolute holiness through such observances, in which there is either no piety or as little as possible. They boast that they are teachers of and guides to true religion, though they themselves do not know on what true religion depends. Hence they are blind, leaders of the blind. Now if a blind man is guide of the way for a blind man, what will happen except that both will fall into a pit together? They do not know what they teach, and make disciples of fools and dullards. And so farewell to the foolish Pharisees and their foolish and inept regulations. You, for your part, be concerned with those things that make a person truly pure and impure, that is, that pollute or cleanse the heart rather than the body.'

Because of the superstition he absorbed from his forefathers, Peter was not yet convinced that regulations of this sort could be disregarded without risk. At this discourse, then, since he did not dare further to resist the words of Jesus, he politely asked that Jesus deign to explain what he had said obscurely in the presence of the people about the things that enter and exit the mouth.²⁰ Wanting with a little rebuke to sharpen the zeal of his disciples, who ought by now to have been more skilled in interpreting parables and in conjecturing one thing from another, Jesus said: 'Are you, too, still lacking understanding? Do you not understand that the food that is taken up in the hands, whether they are washed or unwashed, enters the mouth, goes down into the stomach, then the grosser part is expelled through the bowels into the privy? These things are corporeal, and they affect nothing but the body. They neither help nor harm the soul unless they are misused; and when you misuse them, it is not the fault of the foods but of the person misusing them. But the things that proceed from the mouth are the things people say. Speech arises not from the stomach but from the heart. Now what is in a person's heart is either pure or impure in the true sense of these terms. It is there that harmful thoughts, by which they prepare snares for a brother, have their source; likewise murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, fraud, deception, envy, arrogance, disputes, false testimonies, and blasphemies. Even if these things do not issue

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20 Cf Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 15:15 PG 123 308c: 'Since Peter knew that the Law prohibited the promiscuous eating of all foods, and yet feared to say anything to Jesus . . . he feigned ignorance and asked for an explanation.'

forth from the mouth, nevertheless they make a person impure and odious in the eyes of God. If they do issue forth, like a foul odour from a putrid sewer, just as they show a person to be impure, so by their contagion and effluence they pollute others also. Moreover, whether you take food with washed or unwashed hands, provided you take it for its natural use, it does not make a person unclean. Neither does a drink taken from an unwashed cup pollute a person, provided you take it with moderation to satisfy your need, and not to excess. Similarly, to sit on an unwashed seat does not defile one's soul just as a washed seat does not add purity to the one who is sitting on it. Although the Pharisees superstitiously teach and observe these silly absurdities, nevertheless they have no dread for the things by which the soul is truly polluted. They set in motion a plot against the one who has done them a kindness, they suborn false testimonies,²¹ they disparage the good repute of their neighbour, and they look to their own glory with such concern that they envy the glory of God, slandering the works that are done by his Spirit and attributing them to Beelzebub.²² They would have to abhor these things if they wanted to seem truly pure. But what kind of inverted holiness is this, to have hands that are washed and a mind as well as a tongue polluted with so many crimes?

This said, Jesus left that region and entered the borders of Tyre and Sidon, as if prophesying by that very act that the Jews, because of the superstitious regard for their Law, would drive out the gospel teaching, which the gentiles were going to claim for themselves²³ through the sincerity of their faith; for the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon were idolaters. Jesus set out for this region, not to preach as he had done in Judea, for that time had not yet come, but to hide. For he entered a house desiring to hide, but rumour betrayed him as he hid.²⁴ This was a concession to the

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21 Anticipatory allusions to the fate of Jesus; cf eg Matt 22:15 and Mark 3:6 (a plot); Matt 26:59-61 and Mark 14:55-8 (false witnesses).

22 Cf Matt 12:24.

23 Cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 15:21): 'Spurning the error of the Pharisees, Christ went over to the gentiles to show from the devotion of the gentiles that the rejection of the Jews was just.' Similarly the *Gloss*.

24 For Jesus' attempt to hide see Mark 7:24. This detail is used by Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 52.1 (on Matt 15:21-2) PG 58 518 to explain the fact that Jesus was now going to gentiles, although earlier he had commanded the disciples (10:5) not to take their mission to the gentiles: '[Jesus] did not go there to preach; this we can infer from Mark's statement that though he hid himself, he did not go unnoticed.'

unconquerable malice of the Jews, so they could not complain that impious and profane nations had been preferred to them. Accordingly, he wanted the miracle he did there to seem not something he had pursued, but occasioned by chance and nearly extorted. Therefore, when the report had widely circulated that Jesus was present – for his fame spreading gradually had gone beyond the borders of Judea – a Canaanite woman, who had come out from her own territory,²⁵ did not dare approach very near to Jesus, lest an unclean woman should seem to contaminate a clean man. And from a distance²⁶ with a pitiful cry she addressed him: ‘Pity me, son of David,’ telling him that she had a daughter at home who was piteously vexed by a demon. Here Jesus, the one full of pity and easily entreated, who was usually open and accessible to all, so disdained the woman entreating him and crying out because of the pain in her heart that he did not deign a response, in outward appearance expressing, no doubt, a certain Jewish arrogance, because the Jews regarded the Canaanites, old enemies and idol-worshippers, as accursed, and they thought themselves contaminated if they mixed with them even in conversation. The apostles, too, were still of this disposition at that time. However, by acting thus Jesus intended to reveal to everyone the woman’s most steadfast faith, as well as to rebuke the Jews for their most obstinate disbelief, and at the same time to teach us

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25 Some exegetes read the text to mean that the woman came out from her own territory to meet Jesus. This action, they noted, revealed her ardent desire; or, interpreted allegorically, the woman represented the gentile church that came out to meet Christ, who had come out of Judea; cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 52.1 (on Matt 15:22) PG 58 519. Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 PL 26 109B–C assumes that the woman came out of her own territory: ‘She knew to call him “Son of David” because she had already come out from her own territory, and by the change of place and faith, left behind the error of the Tyrians and Sidonians.’ Modern translations read the text to mean ‘a woman from that region came out’ (so NRSV, cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* [AB] 186 and the note on 15:22 pointing to Mark 7:24–5.) While in his translation Erasmus renders the phrase somewhat ambiguously, here in the paraphrase he favours the reading of Chrysostom and Jerome.

26 That the woman kept her distance is contrary to the parallel narrative of Mark (7:25), where she bows at Jesus’ feet, but appears to be an inference from Matt 15:23–5, where the narrative indicates that the woman kept shouting ‘after them,’ then came and knelt before Jesus. So Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 52.2 (on Matt 15:23–5) PG 58 520: ‘When she saw that she was gaining no support she embarked on a shameless course of noble impudence. Before this she did not dare to come into his sight, for [Scripture] says, “She is shouting behind us.” But when it was right for her to give up her hesitation and come forward, then she comes closer and bows before him ...’

how much relentless prayers poured forth from a humble heart avail with God.²⁷

The woman, however rebuffed, did not stop. Her pain and her faith made her relentless. She followed from behind, she cried out with a sorrowful voice: 'Pity me Lord, son of David.' The disciples, who did not yet understand what was happening, and having a sense of shame at the unrelenting cry of a foreigner, rather than feeling pity, appealed to²⁸ Jesus, asking not that he pity an unfortunate woman, but that he send an unrelenting woman off with some reply. And so Jesus made a reply, harsher than the former rebuff, in order to render more and more wonderful the constancy and modesty of a foreign woman and by her example to rebuke the Jews for their arrogance. He said: 'I have been sent to no one except the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' For on this ground too, that they were the nation of Israel, the Jews congratulated themselves exceedingly. Far from being wearied by so many rebuffs, the woman dared to approach Jesus even more closely, and falling at his knees, she said: 'Lord, help me.' She did not rebut what Jesus had said, but she attempted to wear him down with repeated prayers. She did not plead a 'right,' she demanded only mercy. Jesus was satisfied not even with this, and still continued to test the unassuming insistence of the woman. He said: 'It is not right to take the children's bread and to throw it to the dogs,' by 'bread' designating the gospel fruit that depends on faith, by 'children' the Jews who glory in God the Father, by 'dogs' the foreigners, alien from the religion and the worship of God. Who of the Jews would not have been irritated by such an insult? The woman, however, neither refused the name dog, nor envied the Jews the honorific title of children, but calling them even masters whom Jesus had called children, she embraced the reply, offensive in appearance, and from the very response by which she seemed to be utterly rebuffed, she grasped an opportunity so that she could not be

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27 Nicholas of Lyra (on 15:23) and the *Gloss* insist that Jesus did not act with disdain (Nicholas) or arrogance (the *Gloss*). Erasmus' accent on disdain modifies this traditional reading to bring surprise and dramatic verisimilitude to the paraphrastic narrative, though in the end the apparent disdain on the part of the always merciful Jesus is seen to have its beneficent purpose – in the words of Nicholas (*ibid*), 'that the woman's faith and devotion might be made evident to the disciples from her perseverance in prayer.'

28 'Appealed to': *interpellant*. Erasmus includes this word in the language of prayer, imagining the action it portrays as the intercession of a mediator; here, therefore, it may be used with some irony. See the annotation on Rom 8:26 (the Spirit makes request) CWE 56 222; also the *Modus orandi deum* CWE 70 154-6, and Pabel *Conversing with God* 37. But *interpello* also has the sense of 'interrupt,' which, if less apt, would not be inappropriate here.

denied.²⁹ She said: 'I do not deny that the Israelites are children and that we are dogs, and this is the very reason that I must not be utterly rejected. I do not snatch away from them their own soft and delicious bread, which they eat reclining at their father's table. I seek only what masters are accustomed to give their dogs. The table of such people is rich; it is enough for me if I get the crumbs that fall from their tables.' Then Jesus, marvelling at the untiring constancy of a foreigner, said as if won over: 'Woman, I cannot any longer refuse your prayers. Great is your faith, which compels me. Let it be done for you as you wish.' It was soon discovered that at this very moment her daughter had been freed from the demon.

When Jesus had performed this one miracle (as if by compulsion) within the borders of the people of Sidon and Tyre – a miracle performed to provoke his own people – he returned to Judea, to show how much more well-disposed he was towards his own people than towards foreigners, if only they could have been won over by kindnesses. He came to the lake, called the Sea of Galilee, and there having ascended the mountain, he sat down; by the remoteness and difficulty of the place he wanted gradually to advance the faith of his disciples to the point of constancy. Soon many companies of people were flocking to him, bringing with them the dumb, blind, lame, disabled, and those subject to various other diseases. So huge was the multitude of sick that they cast them down at Jesus' feet. Jesus well enough perceived their faith even from the difficulty of their journey, and he cured them all so quickly that the crowd that had come was completely astounded when it saw that one had received sight who just now had been blind, that one was speaking who had been dumb, that one was walking properly who had been lame, that one had sound limbs who had been disabled. And they glorified the God of the Israelite people who had deigned to honour their nation with such great kindnesses.

This gratitude of the people made Jesus freely heap kindness on kindness. He knew that the multitude was remaining with him now for the third day (so great was their eagerness for Jesus),³⁰ if they had brought any provisions with them, these were long since used up, and that many were suffering from hunger; in addition, he knew that the journey was long, and

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29 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 52.2 (on Matt 15:27) PG 58 521: 'Do you see the prudence of the woman? How she did not dare to talk back, nor did she envy the praise of others? . . . He called them children, she called them masters; he called her a puppy, in response she spoke of the privileges of a puppy.'

30 Nicholas of Lyra (on 15:32) likewise explains that the crowd 'was so eager to hear the word and see the miracles of Christ' that it remained in the desert for three days.

there were no villages or towns close by. Accordingly, he called his disciples to him and said: 'I feel pity for the multitude. It is now three days since they joined me here in the desert, and they have nothing to eat, and I do not want to send them away hungry in case they faint on a journey too long to be completed by people who have been without food.' With these words he reminded his disciples of the earlier miracle in which he fed several thousand people. The disciples, however, still untrained and forgetful of earlier events, answered, anxious and confused, as though they had been ordered to feed so great a crowd of people: 'From where, then, are we to procure bread enough for so great a multitude?' The disciples' simplicity and forgetfulness made the magnitude of the miracle conspicuous.³¹ It was for the disciples, therefore, in their despair, that Jesus went through the trouble of a miracle. He asked them how many loaves they had. They replied: 'Seven and a few small fish.' Immediately he ordered them to sit on the ground. Taking in his hands the seven loaves and the fish, and raising his eyes to heaven, he then gave thanks to the Father, broke the bread, and handed it to his disciples, and they distributed to the people. All ate until they were full: in fact, far from anyone not having enough, they actually filled seven baskets with the left-overs they gathered up. The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children. Such and so many were the remarkable miracles performed on the mountain. But Jesus, in order not to inflame the people with too much admiration for him (especially since these corporeal benefits were provided only to win authority for the gospel teaching, by which souls are cured and nourished), sent the crowd away, and went by boat into the land of Magadan.

Chapter 16

While he was there, again there came to him certain Pharisees and Sadducees, differing indeed in party, but united in laying snares for Jesus.¹

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31 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 15:32) PL 26 111C: 'He calls the disciples and tells them what he will do . . . so that from the conversation they might understand the greatness of the miracle.'

1 Exegetes did not miss the irony in the fact that hostile parties joined together to tempt Jesus; cf Origen *Comm in Matt* 12.1 (on Matt 16:1) PG 13 973B; likewise Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 16:1 PG 123 313D–16A: 'Although the Pharisees and Sadducees differ in their beliefs, they nevertheless conspire against Christ.' Elsewhere, Erasmus elaborates the difference between the Pharisees and Sadducees, which he calls 'parties'; cf eg the paraphrase on Acts 23:6–10 CWE 50 133.

They craftily asked him to produce some sign from heaven, as though thereafter they would believe him if he did so, whereas they were looking for nothing else than an opportunity to bring false accusations against him. When Jesus observed that, after so many miracles had been performed, they were still persevering in their malice, he groaned in his spirit,² and said: 'You hypocrites,³ who express one thing with your mouths, while concealing another in your hearts, in less important things you know how, by watching the sky, to predict what the next day's weather will be. When you see the sun setting, you say: "Tomorrow will be fair, for the sky is reddish." Again, when you see the sun rising in the morning, you immediately declare that there will be a storm that day because the sky is gloomy and red. By looking at the character and face of the sky you know how to divine whether it will be a suitable time for travelling, sailing, sowing, or reaping, or for other things that pertain to the activity of the body; and are you so stupid and half-asleep when it comes to knowing the time that brings the salvation of souls? You have the Scriptures, you see the things that are done, you observe that the world is being renewed, and do you still not understand that the time predicted by the prophets and awaited for so

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- 2 Cf Mark 8:12. The introductory sentences in the paraphrase on chapter 16 appear to reflect Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 53.2 (on Matt 16:1-4) PG 58 528. Recalling this verse in Mark, Chrysostom comments: '[That lover of the human race] deems [his questioners] unfortunate because they suffer from an incurable disease, tempting him after such a great demonstration of his power. They sought him out not that they might believe him, but that they might attack him . . . Since they did not seek him out in order to believe, he calls them elsewhere "hypocrites," because they said one thing, but in their hearts thought another.'
- 3 Erasmus printed a Greek text with the word ὑποκριταί 'hypocrites' here in 16:3, and it appears in his translation, though it is not found at this point in the 1527 Vulgate nor as a variant in Weber 2 1550. Apparently borrowed from the parallel passage in Luke (12:56), the word is found in AV but not in DV or in modern bibles such as RSV, NRSV. (Indeed, all of 16:2-3 may be spurious; cf Metzger *Textual Commentary* 33.) Erasmus frequently elaborates the negative connotation of the word, especially in the sense of designing pretence as here, sometimes with a not too covert allusion to religious figures of his day, especially the monks. See the paraphrases on 6:2 above, Luke 12:1-4 CWE 48 26-7, and 1 Tim 4:2-3 CWE 44 24, where the paraphrase speaks of Essenes, a synonym for monks; cf CWE 44 24 n2. However, in his annotation on 6:2 (*sicut hypocritae*) Erasmus explains the word 'hypocrite' as derived from actors performing a play for viewers. On the other hand, Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) reject the meaning 'actor' for the word in Matthew; for their study of the word see CXII-CXXIII.

many ages is at hand? From a single sign you declare that it will be fair or stormy; from so many signs that you see every day do you not understand what is at hand? If wonders could have made you better, long before now would you have believed in me. Now you demand a sign in order to be made worse. O depraved and adulterous nation, degenerating far from its ancestors, by whose titles it commends itself! It asks for proof from heaven – deceitfully, in order to cavil at the proof, though one day it will be given proof it will dread, not carp at. In the meantime it will be given only a portent from the earth, which will frustrate all their attempts when they see brought back to life the one they thought was dead and buried. What happened to the prophet Jonah seems to them a wondrous event. A similar wonder will be given to them, but one more marvellous.’ By this riddle the Lord Jesus was indicating that those⁴ must first kill and bury him who considered him nothing other than a man, and that soon by divine power he would live again.⁵

These, then, Jesus left behind along with their blindness, and crossed the lake by boat.⁶ His disciples, however, had forgotten to provide themselves with loaves of bread before boarding the boat. In fact, they had only a single loaf of bread on board. Therefore, in order to jog their memory, Jesus said: ‘Be unceasingly on guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees’; he was, it is evident, covertly reproaching their Jewish superstition, because they considered it of great importance to eat these or those foods, although they had been taught before that a person is not polluted by the things that enter the mouth.⁷ This said, the disciples, although not understanding what he meant, were nevertheless reminded that they had forgotten to place provisions aboard the boat. Since, therefore, they were

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4 those] Added in 1534; previously ‘they’ implied in the verb. ‘Bury’ here must be figurative: Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea (cf 27:57–60).

5 ‘Would live again’: *revicturum*. The annotation on Rom 14:9 (he died and rose again) CWE 56 376–8, though primarily concerned with a textual variant, suggests that Erasmus followed an exegetical tradition in stressing that Christ not merely rose again, but lived again.

6 With the insinuation here in the paraphrase that Jesus’ departure was an act of moral judgment on the Pharisees, compare Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 16:5) PL 26 113A: ‘Leaving behind the scribes and the Pharisees, whom he had addressed as an “evil generation” ... with right [Jesus] crossed the lake ...’

7 For the allusion see Matt 15:11. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 53.3 (on Matt 16:5–7) PG 58 529 observes that by the remark of verse 6 Jesus wished to jog the memory of the disciples, and intended to reproach them ‘because they were still distracted by Jewish ablutions and by the observance of food regulations.’

worried about this, Jesus reproached them, complaining about their slow-wittedness: men so often taught by words as well as by deeds that anxiety about food must be utterly cast out of the mind were still distracted by a concern for such things. He said: 'You who have such little trust in me, why is your mind tormented by this worry, that you forgot the bread, as if we would lack anything even if you did not provide it? Or did I not teach that the kingdom of God must be sought before everything else, and that these things are, of their own accord, to be added?'⁸ Have you not already seen on two occasions⁹ that so great a multitude did not lack food? After you have been taught and instructed in so many ways, do you still not understand, do you still not remember? Do you still have hearts blinded by such cares, and in the manner of the Pharisees do you not see what you behold with your eyes, and is what you hear with your ears just as though you did not hear it?¹⁰ That recent event, at which you were not only witnesses, but also ministers, when five thousand people were filled to satiety with five barley loaves and two fish – has this slipped your mind? Although the number of guests was so large, although provisions were so few, how many baskets did you fill with the scraps from that meal?' They replied, 'Twelve.'¹¹ 'Again, when you distributed seven loaves and a few fish and four thousand men had eaten their fill, how many baskets did you fill with the leftovers?' They replied, 'Seven.'¹² He said,¹³ 'Why do you not yet recognize the nature of my words, which you refer to a concern for corporeal things, whereas they have in view minds rather than bodies? You should have by now conjectured for yourselves the meaning of the riddle I was relating, that one must beware the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. I had already taught that it does not matter what food we eat; I had already stressed in many ways that those who carry out the gospel mission must utterly cast off such sordid cares.'

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8 Cf Matt 6:33. Erasmus interprets the narrative with some ambiguity: in the first instance Jesus rebukes the disciples for clinging to petty regulations, but the rebuke also extends to their continuing care for provisions; so also Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 53.3 (on Matt 16:11–12) PG 58 530: 'He led them away from Jewish observances . . . and delivered them from their obsessive fear of sometime having too little bread, and from their concern over hunger. Of all these things they were to take no notice.'

9 Cf Matt 14:13–21 and 15:32–8.

10 For the questions in this sentence see Mark 8:17–18.

11 Cf Mark 8:19.

12 Cf Mark 8:20.

13 He said] Added in 1534

By this little rebuke the disciples were made more attentive, and understood that Jesus had meant that one must earnestly beware the teaching of the Pharisees that contained nothing sound, but was corrupted by ambition, greed, envy, and the other vices, since the gospel teaching savours of nothing of that sort. For one is infected more than fed by the Pharisees' teaching, and one must remain attentively alert and on guard for the very reason that they are accustomed to deceive the unwary with a false appearance of godliness, though their teaching is pure poison to true godliness.¹⁴

When he had now come into the region of the city of Caesarea, which the tetrarch Philip had so named in honour of Caesar, imitating his brother Herod who had changed the name of what was formerly Strato's Tower to Caesarea,¹⁵ Jesus wanted to make trial of his disciples to find out how much progress they had made as a result of the many words they had heard and the miracles they had seen, and to learn whether they had a more elevated understanding of him¹⁶ than did the common person. Therefore he questioned them, saying: 'Who do men say the Son of man is?' They said, 'Some say "John the Baptist"' for thus the Herodians had supposed,¹⁷

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14 Erasmus appears to extend the meaning of 'leaven' beyond 'superstition' to include all 'teaching' that is not 'sound.' Jerome *Comm in Matt* 2 (on Matt 16:12) PL 26 114A had contrasted the 'leaven' of the Pharisees (understood as heretical teaching) with the 'true and sound teaching' with which the people of God were fed.

15 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 16:13) PL 26 113C–14C includes this information, rightly identifying Philip as brother of Herod Antipas and son of Herod the Great, who built Caesarea, formerly called 'Strato's Tower.' On the transformation of Strato's Tower into the city of Caesarea by Herod the Great see CWE 50 69 n2. For Erasmus' confusion over the Herods see chapter 2 n32 above. One may conjecture that here the confusion arose from a too rapid reading of the Jerome text.

16 of him] *de ipso* in 1534 and 1535; clearer than *de se* in 1522 and 1524. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 54.1 (on Matt 16:13) PG 58 532–3 observed that it was only now, after the disciples had heard Jesus' teaching and seen his miracles, that he asked them about his identity, 'in order to raise them . . . to a more elevated understanding, and so that they might not descend to the same low opinion as the multitude.'

17 That it was the 'Herodians' who identified Jesus as John the Baptist is apparently a conjecture based on 14:1–12. From his annotations we may gather that Erasmus was somewhat uncertain about the identity of the Herodians: 'soldiers of Herod,' or 'ministers of Herod,' or 'a sort of party' (annotations on Matt 22:15–16 [*ut eum caperent*] and Mark 8:15 [*a fermento Herodis*]). The picture is enlarged in the *Paraphrase on Mark*, where they are portrayed as skilled in conspiracy: 'No one knew this art better than the Herodians.' They are

'some "Elijah"' because he had been carried away, and for this reason they now were supposing that he would appear according to the prophecy of Malachi,¹⁸ 'some "Jeremiah"' because he was a type of Christ,¹⁹ and because it was said about him: 'Behold I have established you today over nations and kings so you might pluck out and scatter and plant,'²⁰ things that truly were to be completed in Christ.²¹ When Jesus heard this response, in order to elicit a more certain and more elevated confession he said: 'As for you who ought to know me better, who do you say I am?' Here Simon Peter, as the one who was most loving of Jesus, responded on behalf of all, inasmuch as he would be head of the apostolic order:²² 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,' not proffering a suggestion, but confessing with certain and undoubted knowledge that he was the Messiah promised by the prophets, in some unique way²³ the Son of God.

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in some manner the people of Herod who are ignorant of Scripture, 'being unwilling to believe in the resurrection of bodies' (like the Sadducees); also people who 'observed imperial law'; cf respectively the paraphrases on Mark 3:6, 8:15, 12:13–14 CWE 49 48, 102 and 145. In the paraphrase on 22:15 below, they are supporters of the opinion that it is right to pay taxes to Caesar. It is probably in the sense of 'people of Herod,' 'followers of Herod' that the term is used here, with an implicit allusion to the narrative of 14:1–12; cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 16:14), who identifies the people to whom the disciples refer here as 'followers of Herod.' The identity of the Herodians remains a matter of debate; cf *Encyclopedia Judaica* 8 384, but see Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 272: 'supporters of the family of Herod the Great.'

18 Cf 2 Kings 2:1–12 (Elijah carried away), Mal 4:5–6 (Elijah returned).

19 The typology may be illuminated by Nicholas of Lyra (on 16:14), who explains the inclusion of Jeremiah: 'because of his patient endurance in adversity.'

20 A citation from Jer 1:10, abbreviated.

21 Erasmus fails to paraphrase the last part of 16:14, 'or one of the prophets.'

22 For Peter as 'the most loving' see John 21:15–17; see also the paraphrase on 14:28 above. For the characterization see Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 54.1 (on Matt 16:15–16) PG 58 533, who notes that Peter, always fervent, mouthpiece of the apostles, coryphaeus of the apostolic chorus, alone answers, though all were asked; also Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 16:16) PL 26 116B–17A: 'Peter responds on behalf of all the apostles.' Compare the similar characterization of Peter's primacy in the paraphrases on Acts 2:14 and 5:29 CWE 50 17 and 43; and for the correlation between Peter's primacy and his surpassing love, see the paraphrase on John 21:15 CWE 46 223.

23 in some unique way] *singulari ... quodam more* in 1534, 1535; in 1522, 1524 *singulari ... quodam amore* 'through a certain unique love.' After the publication of the 1524 edition of the *Paraphrases*, Bédæ called Erasmus' attention to the phrase, reading *amore*, suspecting evidently that the expression compromised orthodox trinitarianism. Erasmus, in response, blamed the printer, and

Jesus was delighted by a confession so ready and assured, and said: 'You are blessed, Simon, son of John.'²⁴ This declaration did not come to you from a human impulse or impression, but the heavenly Father by secret inspiration brought it to your mind. For no one has an appropriate understanding of the Son except at the prompting of the Father, who alone knows the Son.²⁵ And that you might not bestow on me gratuitously the honour of such splendid testimony, I in turn affirm that you are in truth Peter, that is, a solid rock, not wavering this way and that according to the various opinions of the crowd;²⁶ and upon the rock of your confession²⁷ I will build my church, that is, my house and palace, which, resting on an immovable foundation, I will so fortify that no force of the Tartarean kingdom²⁸ will be able to take it by storm.²⁹ Satan will attack you with many engines, he will

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said that he had meant *more*, not *amore*, for he had wanted to bring out the full force of the Greek article in the expression *ὁ υἱός* 'the Son' – not just any son; see *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* and *Supputatio* LB IX 464D-F and 583F-5D. (But for the phrase *singulari quodam amore* used of Mary, and for the similar phrase *peculiari quodam amore* used of Peter see the paraphrases on John 12:3 and 18:10 [CWE 46 149 and 199], translated respectively 'with an extraordinary love' and 'with the special love.') Erasmus defended himself in similar terms against the censure of the Paris Faculty of Theology (*Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 915E-16A), and cited the passage in its corrected form to demonstrate to the Spanish monks his Trinitarian orthodoxy (*Apologia adversus monachos* LB IX 1026D-E). For Erasmus' interpretation of the Greek article with reference to the expression 'the Son' see his annotation on John 1:1 (*erat verbum*); cf also Ep 373:138-40.

24 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 16:17) PL 26 117B notes that Peter is called 'son of John' (cf John 21:16).

25 Cf Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22.

26 Cf the *Gloss* (on 16:18): 'I do not say that you will be called, but that you are, Peter, because of the strength of your faith and the firmness of your confession.'

27 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 54.2 (on Matt 16:18) PG 58 534: '... on this rock ... that is, on the faith of your confession'; cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 16:18): '... on this rock, the rock that you have confessed, that is, on Christ.'

28 'Tartarean kingdom': *regni tartarei*, for the Greek *πύλαι Ἀδου* (16:18), *portae inferi* (VG), 'gates of Hell' (DV, AV), 'powers of death' (RSV), 'gates of Hades' (NRSV); in his exposition Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 16:18) PL 26 118A had equated the *portae inferi* with Tartarus. Erasmus had followed the Vulgate's *portae inferi* in his translation of the Greek, and this is reflected in the paraphrastic expression just below, *regnum inferorum* 'kingdom of the lower world.' For the language see chapters 11 n30 and 8 n37.

29 In the annotation on 16:18 (*quia tu es*) Erasmus explains that Peter is called a rock 'because he was solid in his profession of faith, and was not moved this

rouse against you a cohort of ungodly spirits, but with my protection my building will stand unassailable, only let this confession of yours remain firm. The church is the heavenly kingdom, the world is the kingdom of the devil. There is no reason for anyone to feel any fear from this, provided he is Peter, that is, similar to you. To you I will hand over the keys of this heavenly kingdom, for it is fitting that he who is first in profession of faith and in love should there be first in authority. In the meantime, that kingdom of heaven is indeed on earth, but in communion with heaven, on which it depends. Accordingly, whoever is still bound by sins belongs to the kingdom of the lower world and cannot enter into³⁰ the kingdom of heaven. But he will enter if, having confessed before you what you have confessed, he is freed from his sins by baptism. Thus having you as his guide, and you to unlock the door, he will enter the kingdom of heaven. This is my particular power, to forgive sins, but I will impart this power to you in some measure so that, since you have received my keys, what you loose on the earth before men will be loosed also in heaven before God. On the other hand, what you bind on the earth will be bound also in heaven. For God will approve your judgment, as it has originated from his Spirit.³¹

This said, Jesus bade his disciples to keep this exalted belief about him to themselves for the time being, and not to reveal to any of the others that he was the Messiah. He had first to go through the sacrifice of the cross, and to make clear the reality of his human nature; thereafter, his divinity had to be demonstrated through his resurrection and the Holy Spirit.³² Although Peter's statement was praised by Christ as the statement of those who were now making progress and gradually rising to more perfect things, nevertheless they were still dreaming about a certain kingdom not

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way or that by the fickleness of popular opinion.' It was 'on this rock, that is to say, that solid profession of faith' that Christ would build his church. Craig Thompson has discussed the significance of the paraphrase on this verse for our understanding of Erasmus' view of the primacy of Peter; see CWE 40 734 n98.

30 into] Added in 1535

31 Both the *Gloss* (on 16:19) and Nicholas of Lyra interpret the keys in terms of the knowledge to judge and the power to admit. Erasmus returns to the interpretation of the keys in the paraphrases on 18:18 and 21 below.

32 See the annotations on Rom 1:4 CWE 56 10–27, where Erasmus shows how in the Pauline text Christ's divinity is demonstrated by the resurrection and the Holy Spirit. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 54.3 (on Matt 16:20) PG 58 535 argued similarly: in spite of Jesus' many miracles, it was only through the cross and resurrection that an unwavering faith in the divinity of Christ could be established.

altogether unlike a worldly one.³³ Because of this Jesus promised Peter the right to the keys obscurely and as if in a riddle, and did not bestow them immediately. For Peter was not yet capable of using them while he was insufficiently instructed by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. For this reason Jesus recalled them to the mystery of the cross and his own death – the mystery by which that kingdom was to be acquired, when the devil had been conquered and sins abolished – so they would be less troubled in mind when they saw happen the events they knew were going to come a little later. They had preferred to boast in that powerful and sublime Son of the living God, but they only can boast in him who have not been offended by the lowliness of that very one.

Therefore Jesus began to prepare his disciples for the storm that was drawing near, telling them that he must first go to Jerusalem, and that he must suffer many evils from the scribes and Pharisees, and also from the chief priests. Then he must also be killed, but on the third day he would live again. Although the disciples, who were still carnal, did not understand this statement very well because they judged these things unworthy of one who had shown by so many miracles that he was the Son of God, nevertheless they did not dare to ask their Lord what he meant by ‘dying and rising again.’ So Peter, whom a certain special love for his teacher always made bolder than the rest, led him apart from the other apostles as if to speak about something more intimately.³⁴ Chiding him and abhorring the mention of death and afflictions, he said: ‘Good gracious, no! Lord;³⁵ these things will not befall you, since it has been placed within your power to keep

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33 Cf Acts 1:6 and the paraphrase on it CWE 50 7.

34 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 54.3 (on Matt 16:21–2) PG 58 536: ‘They were afraid to ask . . . for they did not know what “rising again” meant . . . Therefore, while all the others were troubled and perplexed, it was once more the fervent Peter who dared to speak about this.’ Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 16:22–3) PL 26 119A also attributes Peter’s response to the exceptional ardour and love he had for Christ.

35 ‘Good gracious, no! Lord’: *Propitius esto tibi*; Erasmus borrows the phrase here directly from his own translation. The Greek is characteristically translated ‘far be it from you’ (Vulgate *Absit a te domine*, ‘Be it far from thee, Lord’ [AV]). But Erasmus in his annotation on 16:22 (*absit a te domine*) indicates that Jerome gives the real meaning ‘Be more gracious towards yourself,’ that is, do not say something so ill-omened about yourself. Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 16:22) PL 26 123C further explains that Peter is speaking in response to having just heard something he cannot bear, and that his ears cannot accept, that the Son of God will die.

them from happening.’ For although Peter, by the inspiration of the Father more than by his own understanding, pronounced Jesus to be the Son of the living God, he was nevertheless far from understanding the mystery of that pronouncement: that Jesus would redeem the human race by his death and would make evident to the world the efficacy of divine power by his resurrection.³⁶ Therefore, in order to correct this feeling in his disciples, Jesus turned and, looking upon his disciples, who he knew were feeling similarly (although Peter alone had dared to chide his Lord), said to Peter: ‘Get behind me, Satan. Stop opposing the will of my Father.’³⁷ It is for you to follow me, not to go before. Now you set yourself against me, desiring to obstruct what for the sake of the salvation of the human race both my Father wants to happen and what it is right for me to do. You want to be a partner in the kingdom, and you oppose me as I hasten of my own accord to the cross so I might claim this kingdom for my Father. The path on which you see me going is the one on which you too must make your way to the kingdom of heaven. You do not yet discern the things that are of God but, guided by human affections, you fight against the divine will. Do not, therefore, stand in the way as a useless advisor, rather, following from behind, play the part of a pupil, not a teacher.’

When Jesus had checked Peter’s ill-timed impudence with these words, he turned to all the disciples, and began to explain at some length what he had said to Peter, ‘Walk behind me.’ He said: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple and a sharer in the kingdom of heaven, let him follow my footsteps. Just as he sees that I, treating with scorn all the goods of this world, am giving freely even my life for human salvation and for the glory of my Father, so he must renounce all human affections, ready for every kind of death for the gospel’s sake; and let him also, himself taking up his own cross, follow me as I go to the cross. To suffer thus is to be blessed, to be treated thus with ignominy is glorious, to be killed thus is to gain life.

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36 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 54.3 (on Matt 16:22) PG 58 536: ‘[Peter] knew that [Christ] was the Son of God, but what was meant by the mystery of the cross and resurrection was still not clear to him.’

37 This sentence is a paraphrastic elaboration on the word ‘Satan’; cf the annotation on 16:23 (*vade retro Satana*) where Erasmus explains ‘Satan’ as a Hebrew word meaning ‘adversary,’ and adds that Peter is called ‘Satan,’ not because he is the devil, but because he is opposing the will of God. Cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 16:23): noting that ‘Satan’ meant ‘adversary’ Nicholas explained that Peter ‘in some way by his rebuke wished to obstruct the salvation of the human race.’

I know that nothing is dearer than life, nonetheless each person must lose his life if he wants to save it, for lose it he will unless he has lost it. One who loses his life because of the gospel loses it to his own gain; he truly loses it who, having abandoned the gospel, looks to the welfare of his temporal life and throws away eternal life. Is anyone so foolish that he would want to gain the entire world at the cost of this brief corporeal life? What good is wealth if the one who comes into possession of it himself dies? Thus it is madness to put such great store in one's affections, wealth, or even in one's very body (soon to perish anyway, even if no one should kill it) that for the sake of human beings one should suffer the loss of eternal life; for without eternal life, having the rest is all in vain. Nothing, therefore, should be so dear to anyone that one would be willing to lose one's soul as an exchange for gaining something. For one can somehow make good the loss of the rest of these things; the loss of one's soul is irreparable.

'He who loses his life for my sake does not lose it but loans it to me; he will regain it with interest when the majesty of my kingdom appears. There is no reason to be downcast in mind because I have shown that many bitter things must be endured because of the gospel. These will come to an end quickly, and eternal glory will follow short-lived ignominy, for the Son of man, whom you will see treated with contempt by everyone and regarded as a worm,³⁸ will come at some time in another form, about to show everyone the majesty and glory of the Father, his attending angels surrounding him. Then the one who had been judged and condemned here with an ignominious death will act as judge of all, both the living and the dead, and he will render to each the reward for his deeds. Then those who considered their lives here more important than me will be sentenced to eternal death, but those who for a time and for my sake disdained the life of the body will be granted eternal life. Now is the time for battle, then will be the time for rewards. Then indeed this happiness will be made complete when it seems right to the Father, for it is not for you to know the time.³⁹ Meanwhile, nevertheless, some taste of this glory will be given. For you may be sure: there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man showing the majesty of his kingdom, as far as it can be observed with bodily eyes. Certainly before death they will see the

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38 Cf Ps 22:6-7 and Isa 53:3-5, passages interpreted of Christ's crucifixion. Erasmus appealed repeatedly to these verses from the psalm to make his defence against the charges of Lefèvre d'Étaples; cf the *Apologia ad Fabrum* CWE 83 42 and 45, and chapter 3 n51 above.

39 Cf Acts 1:7.

kingdom of God making its power manifest and already conquering little by little all the power of this world.⁴⁰

Chapter 17

After six days, wanting to show his disciples in some way, as through a dream, the form in which he would some day come as judge of the world,¹ Jesus chose three of the disciples, Peter, James, and John his brother, and having led them up a very high mountain far from the sight of men, he was transfigured in their presence. His face radiated light like the sun, and his garments shone with a certain snowy whiteness the like of which no fuller on earth is able to give.² At the same time there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, speaking with him about the glory of the death he was about to undergo in Jerusalem. Thus it seemed right to Christ that the apostles should be strengthened by these authorities whom all Jews regarded most highly, that they should not suppose that he wanted to abolish the Law, since Moses stood by him, or the Prophets, since Elijah was there, and that they should not abhor as disgraceful his death, which such great men were proclaiming glorious.³

The apostles saw these things as if they had just awakened from sleep, for their eyes were heavy;⁴ for mortal weakness did not grasp the great-

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40 Erasmus offers here a double point of reference for this prophetic statement: the transfiguration, and the evangelization of the world by the apostles – for an elaboration of the latter theme see Ep 1381:283–416.

1 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 17:2) PL 26 121D–2A also relates the form of the transfigured Christ to that of Christ in his second coming: ‘He appeared to the apostles as he will appear in the time of judgment . . . The Lord was transformed into that glory with which he will come hereafter in his kingdom.’

2 For the image of the fuller see Mark 9:3.

3 For the Law and the Prophets see Matt 5:17; for the colloquy about ‘[Jesus]’ departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem’ (NRSV) see Luke 9:31. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 56.1–2 (on Matt 17:1–3) PG 58 550–1 also explains the presence of Moses and Elijah: their presence showed that Jesus had not abolished the Law nor claimed for himself the Father’s glory, and it showed the glory of the cross, which the disciples feared, and so raised their spirits. Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 17:3) PL 26 122C: ‘[Moses and Elijah] point to the Law and the Prophets, who frequently spoke of the passion of the Lord and his resurrection.’

4 For the drowsy apostles see Luke 9:32. Interpretation of the Lukan passage is somewhat problematic. NRSV translates: ‘Now Peter and his companions

ness of the vision. The disciples were therefore terrified and astonished by a spectacle so incredible, and Peter, not yet sufficiently in possession of himself, but completely ravished by the pleasure and majesty of the sight, a majesty that seemed so far removed from any mention of death, said: 'Lord, let us build here three tabernacles:⁵ one for you, another for Moses, a third for Elijah.' This seemed to Peter better advised than to be killed at Jerusalem. Peter had not yet finished speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed the apostles so they would not be engulfed by the sublimity of the spectacle. And behold, the voice of the Father sounded from the cloud, bearing witness about his Son in the very words with which he had given witness to him after he had been baptized in the Jordan: 'This is my dearly beloved⁶ Son, in whom my soul is pleased; listen to him.' When the disciples had heard this voice – full of divine majesty and beyond the endurance of human ears – they fell forward on their faces, and were even more frightened. They were afraid for their lives because they had learned that God had said: 'No man shall see me and live.'⁷ But Jesus, having returned to his earlier form, touched them with his hands so they would not suspect he was an apparition, and in his usual and recognized voice he consoled them, saying: 'Arise, and do not be afraid of anything.'

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were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake ...,' but an alternative translation is given for the second clause, 'but when they were fully awake.' Joseph Fitzmeyer S.J., *The Gospel according to Luke (I–IX), Introduction, Translation and Notes* Anchor Bible (New York 1981) 791 renders 'But Peter and his companions had been drowsy with sleep; rousing themselves ...' Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 56.3 (on Matt 17:4) PG 58 553, who interpreted 'sleep' as the 'torpor' that resulted from viewing the spectacle, 'just as the eyes are darkened from excessive light.'

5 'Tabernacles': *tabernacula*, as in both Erasmus' translation and the Vulgate. In modern translations the Greek *σκηνας* here is rendered variously ('booths' RSV; 'dwellings' NRSV). The word is used in the Septuagint for the tent in the wilderness, and for the holy of holies, the sanctuary; but Erasmus offers no indication in his annotations on this passage of the kind of structure he envisions.

6 The words of the heavenly witness recorded in 3:17 and 17:5 are identical both in the Greek and in Erasmus' translation; they differ somewhat in the paraphrase (for *dilectus* Erasmus writes *unice dilectus* at 3:17, at 17:5 *unice carus*). The paraphrase on 3:17 above explicates in particular the meaning of *dilectus* 'beloved' by the phrase *delicium animi mei* 'the delight of my heart.' Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 56.4 (on Matt 17:5) PG 58 554 also alludes to the voice that spoke at the baptism in the Jordan; likewise Nicholas of Lyra (on 17:5).

7 Cf Exod 33:20.

Then, when they had recovered their wits and raised their eyes, they saw no one there except Jesus alone, looking as he had when he had come up the mountain.

While they were coming down the mountain, before they returned to the remaining company of disciples, Jesus instructed them not to tell anyone about the things they had seen until the Son of man had risen from the dead, for before that time the report would neither gain credibility nor produce results.⁸ And indeed the disciples kept it to themselves, deliberating among themselves what Jesus had meant when he said 'after he rose from the dead.'⁹ Their hearts were so heavily veiled that the statement they had heard so often did not sink into their understanding.¹⁰ However, a certain doubt had taken hold of their minds because they had seen Elijah standing by Jesus, and they put their question before him as they made their way. They said: 'Why is it, then, that when the scribes teach the coming of the Messiah, they are accustomed to say, on the authority of Malachi, that before the Messiah comes Elijah the Tishbite will come?'¹¹ Now, he did not precede your coming, but only today was he seen on the mountain.' To this Jesus replied: 'Elijah is indeed going to come as Malachi said, and in accordance with the prophecy he will precede my coming and will restore all things, after a remnant of the Jewish race has turned to the gospel, so the whole nation might not be condemned. This advent will be in the future, when I shall come again in the majesty of my Father, about to render a reward to each one according to his deeds. And yet a certain Elijah has preceded even this present advent of mine, one whom they scorned as much as me, and they did not treat him as he deserved, but did whatever pleased them. Nor will they treat the Son of man more gently.' Then the disciples understood

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8 So also Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 56.4 (on Matt 17:9) PG 58 554: 'The greater the things said about him, the more they elicited unbelief . . . After [the disciples] had received the Spirit . . . whatever they said could easily be believed.' Cf Jerome *Comm In Matt* 3 (on Matt 17:9) PL 26 123C: 'He does not want this made known among the people, lest its magnitude prevent belief.'

9 For the disciples' deliberation see Mark 9:10.

10 For the imagery and sentiment see Mark 6:52; Mark 8:17; and 2 Cor 3:15.

11 For the prophecy see Mal 4:5-6; for Elijah as Tishbite see 1 Kings 17:1. Erasmus here follows Chrysostom closely: in erroneously ascribing the adjective 'Tishbite' to Elijah in the prophecy of Malachi; in associating the two Elijahs with the two advents of Christ, the Tishbite with the second; in explaining the mission of the second Elijah to be that of leading the remnant of Jews to believe in Christ, and so to 'restore all things'; cf *In Matt hom* 57.1 (on Matt 17:10-13) PG 58 557-9. For the Jewish remnant in history see Rom 11, especially 11:5.

that he called John the Baptist Elijah because of the similarity of their lives and because of their unrestrained boldness¹² in criticizing kings.

When Jesus now came to his disciples, he saw a huge crowd around them and scribes in heated discussion with them.¹³ The people, who were wondering where Jesus had gone, ran to him and greeted him. He asked what they were disputing among themselves. Then someone from the crowd replied: 'Master, I brought my son to you. He is miserably tormented by an unclean spirit: whenever it seizes him the boy is dashed to the ground, sometimes he is thrown into fire, occasionally he is driven into the water, he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and wastes away.'¹⁴ Since you were not here I asked your disciples to cast out the demon, but they were unable.' Whereupon Jesus, in order to cure everyone's disbelief, cried out as though full of indignation: 'O unbelieving nation, how long will I dwell among you in vain, how long will I endure your intractable ways? Despite all the miracles I have performed, I am getting nowhere.' At the same time he ordered the boy to be brought to him in order to make the miracle more obvious and remarkable to all. When he had been brought forth and had been seen by Jesus, there immediately, in the sight of everyone, the spirit seized him: he was thrown upon the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth, a pitiful sight to behold. Then Jesus, in order to make the magnitude of the evil even clearer, asked the father how long it had been since such a plague had begun to torment the boy. The father said: 'From infancy – and not without risk to his life, for it has frequently driven him, now into fire, now into water, in order to destroy him. I know it is a terrible disease; still, if you are at all able to help, have pity on us.' Hearing the words 'if you are at all able' Jesus, with an implicit rebuke for the weakness of his faith, as though any disease were more potent than divine power, said to him: 'Do not ask what I am able to effect, but consider whether you are able to believe. If you trust confidently and fully, there is nothing so difficult that it cannot come to pass for the one who believes.' When at this statement the father had conceived trust and a more certain hope, he replied, crying out with many tears: 'I believe, Lord, but if still my trust

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12 'Unrestrained boldness': *libertas*, on which cf chapter 14 n7 above. For the allusions see 1 Kings 17:1-7, 18:1-46, 21:17-24 (Elijah); and Matt 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29 (John the Baptist).

13 For the scribes see Mark 9:14.

14 Although this story appears in all three synoptic Gospels, it is found in detail only in Mark (9:17-27), from where, accordingly, Erasmus takes many of the details found here in the paraphrase.

falls short in any respect, supply from your goodness what is lacking, and help my unbelief.¹⁵ Meanwhile, when Jesus saw a crowd of people flocking together for a show, eager to see whether Jesus would succeed where the disciples had not, he threatened¹⁶ the unclean spirit, saying: 'Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not fall upon him again hereafter.' With a wail, the spirit left the boy, but not before the boy was so violently shaken and so terribly twisted that he lay as if dead, and many affirmed that he was dead; so tenacious was the force of the evil. But taking the boy's hand, Jesus lifted him to his feet, and he arose. Just as the father believed with difficulty, so the boy was healed with difficulty.

Meanwhile, a certain sadness took possession of the hearts of the disciples, who were afraid that through some fault they had lost the power to perform miracles, whereas before they had boasted that even the demons obeyed them.¹⁷ In the presence of the multitude, then, they were silent with shame; but when Jesus had entered the house, they came to their master and asked him: 'Why were we not able to cast out this demon since this power was once given to us by you?'¹⁸ In order to strengthen the trust even of his own disciples – for this trust needed to be so great that it could sometimes be an aid even to another's lack of trust¹⁹ – Jesus said: 'The weakness of your faith was partly to blame. Not only was the force of the disease dreadful, but the father's faith was wavering, and your faith was not so strong that it could be a match for both of those difficulties. For faith is somewhat weakened by human affections and spoiled by the leaven of vain-glory. But if you were to have faith like a mustard seed, nothing would be so arduous that it would not be immediately accomplished with a word, for

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15 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 57.2–3 (on Matt 17:14–16) PG 58 561, like Erasmus here, gives a major place in his exposition to the details provided in Mark 9:20–3, exploiting them to teach lessons in faith. Like Erasmus, Chrysostom regards Jesus' words in Mark 9:23 as a rebuke to the father.

16 'Threatened': *comminatus est*. Erasmus adopted this arresting image from the Vulgate of Mark 9:24. For his translation of the parallel passages in both Matthew (17:18) and Luke (9:43) Erasmus accepted the Vulgate's *increpavit* 'rebuked.' In all these passages the Greek is ἐπετίμησεν.

17 The seventy make this claim at Luke 10:17. Nicholas of Lyra (on Matt 17:19) observed that since the disciples had already cast out many demons, they were afraid that now there was some fault in them.

18 The power to cast out demons was given to them at 10:8. It is in Mark (9:28) that the question is posed after Jesus had entered the house.

19 Chrysostom, in the passage cited in n15, had also argued that a sufficiently strong faith on the part of one person could compensate for the lack of faith on the part of another.

the mustard seed, though it is little valued and small, nevertheless, when ground, releases its natural sharpness, and when planted in the soil grows into a sprawling tree. Even if you should say to a mountain "Move yourself from there and go to some other place," it will do without delay what it has been told to do. But the kind of demon that was in possession of the boy is not cast out unless faith is strengthened by prayer and fasting.²⁰ The inherent force of the evil was tenacious, and now through length of time the evil had become nature. Against corruptions of this sort one must fight with fastings that subject the weakened body to the spirit, and with prayer that obtains divine assistance.' With these words Jesus taught that dreadful and long-habituated defects of the mind must be driven out by the more drastic remedies.

Jesus was now staying in Galilee. In order that he might more securely fortify the minds of his disciples so that they would not be overly disturbed by his death, he repeated again and impressed upon them that the Son of man must be betrayed into the hands of men, that he must be killed by them, and that on the third day he would rise from the dead. This statement greatly troubled the minds of the disciples, who so loved their master (although with an affection that was still in some way carnal) that they could not bear to hear a single word about his death. They were not yet able to understand that Moses and Elijah had called the death of Jesus 'glory,' and that that death would bring forth salvation for the entire world.²¹ But just as they were saddened at the mention of his death, so they ought to have been delighted at the mention of the resurrection; nevertheless, they were so horrified by this reminder of his suffering, that they clearly did not grasp what it was to die and then to return to life on the third day. They were supposing it was in every way better not to die, since anyone who was able to return to life after death could take it upon himself not to die.²²

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20 The Vulgate and Erasmus' Greek text both include the sentence about prayer and fasting; the sentence is now regarded as spurious (Metzger *Textual Commentary* 35 and 85), and is omitted from modern translations (eg RSV, NRSV).

21 Cf Luke 9:29-31, where Moses and Elijah 'appeared in glory and were speaking of [Jesus'] departure.' Erasmus appears to follow Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 58.1 (on Matt 17:22) PG 58 565 in stating that Moses and Elijah had called the death of Jesus 'glory.'

22 Erasmus' exposition of Matt 17:21-2 is similar to that of Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 58.1 (on Matt 17:22) PG 58 565-6, who stressed the great grief of the disciples because of their love for their master, and attributed their sadness to their lack of understanding - and this in spite of the remarkable events they had witnessed, having heard Moses and Elijah specifically call the death of

When he had come to the city of Capernaum, the men who were exacting taxes in the name of Caesar, afraid to address Jesus because of the authority he had already acquired for himself by his miracles, went up to Peter,²³ who they saw was usually closest to him, and said: 'Does your master pay the didrachma tax?'²⁴ Since Peter did not have any money, nor did he want to insult the tax collectors, he answered that he did pay, for to this point even Jesus had paid the taxes of this sort. And when they had now entered the house, for Jesus had a dwelling²⁵ there, Peter felt troubled and had it in mind to speak to Jesus about paying the tax, for he had promised and did not have anything to give. Then Jesus, who was not unaware of what Peter was turning over in his mind, anticipated his question, and said: 'Simon, what do you think? From whom are kings accustomed to take tax or tribute, from their own children or from others?' Peter said, 'From others.' Then Jesus said, 'Consequently, the children are free,' covertly hinting that he, as Lord of the earth and sea and of all things, owed tax or tribute to no mortal king, and that his disciples as children of the kingdom were not obligated either. Nevertheless, he wanted to teach that in things of this sort that do not work against godliness sometimes one must obey men of this kind, so that they do not, through provocation, offend in more serious ways.²⁶ So Jesus added: 'Nonetheless, so that we might not

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Jesus 'glory' (see previous note). They did not know that his death would be brief, or that many good things would arise from it; nor did they understand the resurrection that was to come.

23 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 17:24) PL 26 127A: 'Because of the greatness of his miracles, those who were exacting the tax did not dare ask him for payment, but they went to his disciple.'

24 In the paraphrase on Rom 13:6 (CWE 42 75), Erasmus alludes to this Matthean passage, and interprets the tax as a tax to 'Caesar.' Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 17:24) PL 26 126C-7A had so regarded it. But the precise nature of the tax remains open to question; cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 212-14.

25 'Dwelling': *domicilium*; cf the paraphrase on 9:28 above, where the blind men are admitted to Jesus' *aedes* 'house.' The paraphrases on these verses seem to imply that Erasmus supposed Jesus had a house of his own in Capernaum; cf similarly the paraphrase on John 1:39, where the disciples see the *domicilium ubi habitabat Jesus* 'the dwelling where Jesus lived' CWE 46 33-4. Cf also chapter 26 at n25, below, where the paraphrase indicates that neither Jesus nor his disciples had a house. But cf the annotation on Mark 6:9 (*calceatos sandaliis*) ASD VI-5 386:904-7.

26 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 58.1 (on Matt 17:27) PG 58 567 pointedly notes that Jesus anticipated Peter's question, for he knew what Peter was thinking, then explains Jesus' words as a claim by Jesus to be the son of the celestial king, and king himself, and therefore owing tax to no one. However, having made clear

be a stumbling block to them, go to the sea and take the first fish that comes to you. Opening its mouth you will find a stater' (that is, four drachmas).²⁷ 'Take it and give it to them for me and for you.' By this deed Jesus showed at one and the same time both his own power, as a result of which he was subject to no one, and his modesty, as a result of which he was willing to make a concession to those whom it is better not to provoke merely for the sake of insignificant and unimportant matters. For truly one who is thus able to give is greater than one who owes, and yet when he gives what he does not owe he shows that it is sometimes better to yield your right than to contest your right with wicked people, especially in such things as affect wealth but do not injure godliness. The world also has its own order, which must in no way be upset because of an opportunity for gospel freedom.

Chapter 18

These things thus accomplished, a certain human affection and the goad of envy and ambition stole into the hearts of the apostles. They had heard about the kingdom of heaven; they had seen the three apostles led apart from the rest up into the mountain; they had heard that the keys of the kingdom of heaven had been handed over to Peter and that it had been said to him: 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona,' [Matt 16:17] and 'Upon this rock I will build my church' [Matt 16:18]; they observed him speaking about certain things with the Lord in a quite intimate way, even rather presumptuously;¹

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his claim to kingship, Jesus makes a concession to the weakness of earthly magistrates, lest they be offended. In his annotation on 17:25 (*praevenit illum Iesus*) Erasmus credits Jerome with a similar view. However, the emphasis on the Christian's responsibility to make concessions to placate rulers is Erasmusian; cf the paraphrases on Rom 13:1 CWE 42 73–5 and on 1 Pet 2:13–17 CWE 44 91–2.

²⁷ The words in parentheses may be read either as the words of Jesus or as an explanation by the paraphrastic evangelist. In his annotation on 17:25 (*praevenit illum Iesus*) Erasmus notes that the *στατήρ* 'stater' was the equivalent of four drachmas, and 'since each person was required to pay a didrachmon [two drachmas], Jesus asked Peter to pay a stater to cover both Peter and himself.' But on the money-values see Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 211.

¹ Patristic exegetes saw the role given to Peter in the story of the tax (17:24–7) as a sign of the special favour bestowed upon him. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 58.2 (on Matt 18:1) PG 58 568 points to the 'outstanding honour' just given to Peter, and adds as other indications of Peter's preferential position the keys granted to him, his intimacy with Christ, and his freedom of speech. Chrysostom (*ibid*) also notes the resentment of the other disciples. Similarly Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on 18:1) PL 26 128A–B: 'Because they had seen the same tax paid for Peter

and now they had seen him preferred to the other apostles in paying a tax, and in a certain way made equal to Christ. So they were a little envious of Peter, to whom first place in the kingdom of heaven seemed destined, although he was younger.² Therefore they approached Jesus and asked who would rank first in the kingdom of heaven.³ For they were still dreaming about such honours as we see in the courts of princes. In order to remove utterly this disposition from their hearts, Jesus called a boy to him and placed him in the midst of the disciples, a little child and still foreign to all feelings of ambition and envy, simple, pure, living under the guidance of nature alone.⁴

He said, 'Have no doubt about it: unless a person has been changed completely and has absolutely cast away all such affections, and has been transformed into the demeanour and simplicity of this child, he will not in truth be received into the kingdom of heaven – so completely out of place it is to seek preeminence. Accordingly, whoever humbles himself, and is made like this child, will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven for the very reason that he is the least. In fact, he who is by his modesty least is by his virtue greatest. Princes love those who are like them, and among princes a person is more esteemed if he wins precedence after others have been cleared out of the way. I delight in people like me.'⁵ In the courts of this

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and Jesus, from the equal price they thought that Peter, who had been placed on a par with the Lord in the payment of a tax, had been preferred to all the disciples.' For Theophylact see n3 below. On Peter's presumptuous speech cf 16:21-3; on his intimacy with Christ cf the paraphrase on 16:22 above.

- 2 In the paraphrases on 4:18 and 22 above, Peter and Andrew, James and John are all said to be young men. For Peter as younger than his brother Andrew see the paraphrase on John 1:40 CWE 46 34 and n132.
- 3 For envy as the motivation for the disciples' question cf Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 18:1 PG 123 337A: 'Because the disciples saw that Peter had been honoured by Christ (for he was honoured by paying the prescribed stater for Christ and himself), human motives prevailed, and, moved by envy, they approach and ask the Lord in an oblique manner: Who is greater?'
- 4 This idealistic view of the goodness of the unspoiled child is also expressed by Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 58.2 (on Matt 18:2) PG 58 568: 'He set a child in their midst, urging and persuading them by this very sight to be lowly and simple. For a child is free from envy, vainglory, the love of being first, and possesses this greatest of all virtues, simplicity and lowliness.' Erasmus' optimistic view of childhood is reflected in *De pueris instituendis* CWE 26 312-13, a passage that may recall Cicero's recognition of the *bonitas naturae* 'natural goodness' in some children; cf *De officiis* 1.32.118.
- 5 The imagery of prince and court may derive from 20:25-8. In his exegesis of 18:1-5 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 58.4 PG 58 570-2 indulges in a long excursus on the lowly origin and unhappy life of princes; Erasmus keeps his

world a prince considers it an insult to himself if someone insults one of his nobles, and he interprets a kindness conferred on others as one conferred on him. But so great is my favour toward the lowly and simple that whenever anyone has received one of these for my sake, I want the benefit bestowed counted as bestowed on me – just as if one had received me.

‘On the other hand, whoever has injured or offended any of these little ones who trust in me and completely depend upon me will pay a penalty more terrible than if, with a millstone tied to his neck, he were drowned in the depths of the sea. For what is more wicked than to harm those who wish no one ill, who envy no one, who prefer themselves to no one, and who love everyone equally? Alas, it will be unfortunate for the world because of the temptations and stumbling blocks⁶ it sets for similar little ones. Human perversity is the reason stumbling blocks inevitably arise.⁷ There will be those who, moved by envy and hatred, will persecute those who do good, curse those who bless, and kill those who bring eternal salvation.⁸ Yet these stumbling blocks will indeed work for the good of those who meet with them, or rather, for the good of the entire world.’⁹

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characterization of life at court brief, pointed, and germane to the Matthean text.

6 Throughout verses 6–9 the Greek noun τὸ σκάνδαλον and, more persistently, the verb σκανδαλίζω appear repeatedly. In paraphrase these words are interpreted by the Latin *laedo* ‘injure,’ ‘harm,’ *offendo* ‘cause to stumble,’ but most frequently by *offendiculum* ‘stumbling block.’ In his annotation on 16:23 (*scandalum es mihi*) Erasmus marvels at the attraction early Christians had for the Greek words Latinized as *scandalum*, *scandalizo* found in the Vulgate, and he explains *scandalum* as an obstacle over which one stumbles and falls.

7 In this paraphrase Erasmus avoids the problems of ‘necessity’ and the ‘origin of evil’ that some Greek exegetes saw in the words of 18:7, ‘it is necessary that offences come.’ At this point in his exposition Origen defends free will *Comm in Matt* 13.23 (on Matt 18:7) PG 13 1157A, while Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 59.2–3 (on Matt 18:7) PG 58 575–8 engages in a long disquisition, finding in verses 6–7 a platform for the discussion on the origin of evil. But Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 18:7) PL 26 129B dismissed the problem of ‘necessity,’ explaining that the expression meant only that scandals were inevitable, and he attributed the cause of scandal to the ‘vice’ within each person. Nicholas of Lyra (on 18:7) proposed that the ‘necessity’ was not absolute but arose from the desire to live in a worldly fashion and fulfil one’s own will.

8 Cf Matt 5:10–11, 24:9.

9 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 59.1 (on Matt 18:7) PG 58 574–5 discusses similarly the origin and usefulness of stumbling blocks: ‘Stumbling blocks come because [certain] people behave in a vicious way, and labour under an incurable disease . . . Why, you will say, does [God] not remove them? Why must they

Nevertheless, it will be unfortunate for the person who is to blame for the stumbling block. Accordingly, let those who long to enter the kingdom of heaven carefully avoid creating stumbling blocks for little ones, but rather let them help each other in turn.

‘It is not enough to take care that one person does not become a stumbling block to another; one must also take care not to create a stumbling block for oneself. When a person is a stumbling block to himself, then he is truly a stumbling block. Therefore, no affection should be so dear to a person that he does not cut it away immediately if it should be a stumbling block to him as he hastens on toward the kingdom of heaven. Of such consequence is this that if your hand or your foot, each without doubt a limb essential in the highest degree, should be a stumbling block to you, it must be cut off and cast away. It is better for you to be received into eternal life maimed or lame, than to be cast into the eternal fire whole, with hands and feet sound. The eye is a part of the body that is not only necessary for its uses, but also most pleasing to a person. Nevertheless, if it should by chance be a stumbling block to you, pluck it out and cast it away. It is more to your advantage to be admitted into eternal life blind than to be thrown, whole and with both eyes undamaged, headlong into the flames of hell.’

In saying these things, Jesus did not mean that any part of the body must be cut off, but that all affections must be cut off that distract us from attending to our eternal salvation.¹⁰ A friend whom you can scarcely live

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be tolerated? ... Stumbling blocks, as I have said, arouse and make sharper and more acute not only the one who has been on his guard, but the one who has fallen and quickly rises again, and for this reason comes through more cautious and harder to ensnare. And so if we keep watch, we reap from this no small gain.’ Origen *Comm in Matt* 13.23 (on Matt 18:7) PG 13 1156B-7A had found the source of stumbling blocks in the demonic spirits that induce individuals to cooperate in their malicious work, especially when they have been deprived of their cult – perhaps an allusion to pagan magistrates who persecute. Cf the annotation on Rom 8:28 (work together unto good) CWE 56 223, where Erasmus favours the interpretation that affirms that ‘evil things are, for the saints, an aid to ultimate happiness,’ an interpretation he follows in his paraphrase on the same verse CWE 42 50.

¹⁰ Cf the paraphrase on 5:29-30 and n84 above. Erasmus argued that scriptural injunctions that seem absurd and appear to command the impossible are to be interpreted spiritually, or to be understood as hyperbole. See the discussion in the *Ratio* Holborn 270:15-33 and 276:33-278:17. See also the annotation on Matt 5:39 (*praebe ei et alteram*). In the paraphrase on the parallel passage in Mark (9:43-7) the ‘limbs to be cut off’ are the affections (for example, family members) that keep one from one’s evangelical duty CWE 49 118.

without is just like a hand to a man; the father you lean upon is like a foot; the wife or son whom you dearly love to hold is like an eye.¹¹ Therefore, just as nothing should be so precious and so magnificent to a person that it should divert him from the kingdom of heaven, so no one, however poor, obscure, and lowly, is to be despised, but rather is to be helped to progress to better things.

'You have an example. See, therefore, that you do not despise any little ones such as these. Although they have been cast down before the world, nevertheless they rank high with God. I tell you for a certainty: the angels, who as ministering servants take care of them, contemplate assiduously the face of the Father in heaven.¹² From this it is possible to guess how great they are before God since to them he has given such guardians and guides.¹³ They are, indeed, inexperienced, they are able to falter, they can be deceived, but their simplicity warrants help not punishment. For the Son of man has come into the world not to destroy anyone, but, so far as it lies in his power, to save everyone.¹⁴ But many people do not want to be saved, and they persecute the one who wants to save them. They are the ones the

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11 The parts of the body to be cut off and cast away are interpreted to mean one's friends and relations by Origen *Comm in Matt* 13.25 (on Matt 18:9) PG 13 1160–1: 'And it is possible to use these terms also for our nearest relations, who are like our limbs, through the close ties either of family or friendship . . . Let us cut off from ourselves, as a hand or a foot or an eye, a father or mother who wants us to do things contrary to godliness, and a son or a daughter who does the utmost to keep us from the assembly of Christ and from the love of him'; also Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 59.4 (on Matt 18:9) PG 58 578: 'He does not say these things about bodily limbs, far from it, but about friends, about relations whom we regard almost like indispensable limbs.' Making the same point, Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on 18:8–9) PL 26 129C–D states generally: 'Therefore let every affection be cut away and every relationship cut off . . . Neither brother, nor wife, nor sons, nor friends, nor any affection that can exclude us from the kingdom of heaven should be preferred to the love of the Lord.' Both the *Gloss* (on 18:7) and Nicholas of Lyra (on 18:8) interpreted the passage similarly.

12 For angels as ministering spirits see Heb 1:14, the paraphrase on which recalls Matt 18:10; cf CWE 44 216; cf also chapter 8 n15 above.

13 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 59.4 (on Matt 18:11–14) PG 58 579 observes that the value of these insignificant brothers can be measured by the fact that they are entrusted to the angels. But Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 218 suggest that the angels were the representatives of the 'little ones' in the heavenly courts, and as representatives had access to God.

14 Cf John 3:16–17; an allusion to the name 'Jesus' as in Matt 1:21, may also be intended.

world looks up to as great. They are distinguished in authority, they abound in wealth, they excel in erudition (as it seems), and they are commended by an amazing illusion of false sanctity. It is indeed not right to provoke them gratuitously, but they must be courageously defied if, anxious for their own power, they suppress the power of God; if, looking out for their own glory, they envy the glory of the gospel; if, serving their own gain, they stand in the way of the good of all; if, while they vaunt their own worthless erudition, they corrupt the gospel teaching; if, under the pretext of false religion, they set about to extinguish true religion; if they should be puffed up by good deeds. They ought to blame themselves for their own destruction.

‘This should be our endeavour: that we not allow to perish any of the small and weak who go astray in such a way that they are curable, more like sheep than wolves. From your own sense draw a conclusion about how greatly God (who is by nature good) desires that no one should perish, for he created all people to be happy. If one is a true and faithful shepherd, the owner of a hundred sheep, and if from so many a single one gets lost, will he not leave the other ninety-nine in the mountains and go out to find the one that has wandered from the flock? He is distressed with so great a longing for the one that is lost that he exposes all the rest of the flock to danger.¹⁵ But if he happens to find it, I tell you for a certainty, he will rejoice more for the sheep that has been recovered than for all the rest that were not lost. Accordingly, if a shepherd – a human being – is so disposed towards his flock, which he only possesses but did not also create, how much more is it the will of my Father¹⁶ in heaven that none of these little ones should perish whom he has created, for whom he is so concerned that he has set his angels over them for their protection, and to call them back to salvation gave up his only Son? Therefore let stumbling blocks that divide brotherly peace be completely absent from your companionship, but let mutual love be present, by which each of you may in turn lovingly correct the mistakes of the others, should any be made.’¹⁷

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15 Similarly Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 59.5 (on Matt 18:12–14) PG 58 580: ‘The safety of so many was not able to overshadow the loss of one.’

16 ‘My Father’: though ‘my’ is a well attested reading in 18:14 (Metzger *Textual Commentary* 36), Erasmus in both his text and translation follows the Vulgate ‘your,’ which is also the preferred reading. But ‘my Father’ here may have come, inadvertently or not, from the ‘my Father’ of 18:10, where, however, the paraphrase neglects entirely the possessive adjective and reads ‘the Father.’

17 For the admonition to mutual love, frequent in the Epistles, see eg Rom 12:10; for the admonition to correct one another, Gal 6:1.

Now this will be the manner of correction: if your brother commits some act against you that deserves censure, do not immediately leap to revenge, nor again allow him to perish by your silence, while he sins with impunity as though one intoxicated with his own affections, but first try as gentle a remedy as possible that does not inflict upon your brother any unpleasantness – not even a feeling of shame. Go unaccompanied to him when he is alone, and without arbiters undertake to settle the matter between yourselves. If he still does not acknowledge his fault, show him and lay before his eyes how far he has wandered from the duty of brotherly love. Let your admonition be such that it makes clear that you are seeking nothing other than his salvation and the mending of the former friendship. If he is so ready for healing that he returns to his senses at this private admonition, there is no reason for you to avenge or publicly disgrace him. It is enough for you to have gained your brother. In the meantime you have taken thought for your own gain too, for you were about to lose a friend; God was about to lose a soul. But if the disease is too serious to be cured by this very light remedy, you must not utterly lose hope, nor should you immediately turn to extreme remedies. If he will not listen to you alone, go to the man again, taking along one or two people, either that he might be corrected by a limited sense of shame (not going so far as outright disgrace), or that he might be able to be convicted by the testimony of two or three people. If he is so intractable that he is moved neither by shame¹⁸ nor by fear of judgment, refer the matter to the congregation so that amendment may come, either through the consensus of the people, or the authority of those who preside over the people. But if he is so incurable that he cannot be corrected by private and brotherly reproof, or by the cognizance and consensus of two or three others, or by shame at the public exposure of his offence, or by the authority of the leaders, leave him to his disease.¹⁹ Let him be cut off from the familiar fellowship, and let him be regarded as if he were a pagan or tax collector. Among you let this be the harshest punishment, imposed only that a brother might through shame come to his

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18 Compare the role of 'shame' in the paraphrastic narrative here with that in the exegesis of Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 18:15–17) PL 26 131A–C: the offender is addressed privately so that he might not lose his sense of shame and so remain in sin; but when all else fails, and he is not able to be saved by 'shame,' then he is to be publicly abjured so that he might be saved by opprobrium.

19 Chrysostom, too, says such a person is sick with an incurable disease; cf *In Matt hom* 60.2 (on Matt 18:17) PG 58 586.

senses when he sees that he is shunned by everyone, or at least might not infect others with his contagion, as he would if he mingled with the flock.

‘There is no reason why anyone should say to me, “The judgments of your kingdom are watered-down and weak.” Rather, they are most severe, if anyone obstinately despises them. Human laws kill only the body when they punish a horrible crime with death, and sometimes they kill the person God might not condemn; also they only kill, they do not correct, since nothing is left to be corrected. But that condemnation of yours, though it proceeds slowly towards punishment, is most severe for the very reason that eternal punishment from which there is no escape awaits the condemned person unless he repents. God sometimes absolves the person Caesar condemns, while at other times God condemns the person a prince absolves. A prince leaves the person he absolves in a human community to make yet others like himself, and he removes from the human community the person he kills, not only not healing him, but even making it impossible for him to be healed. These human judgments are more necessary than praiseworthy. But your²⁰ sentence removes the incurable person so that he cannot infect people who are well; yet it is possible for him to repent, because yours is the power to save, not destroy. Nevertheless, the people you let live will not sin with impunity. Eternal punishment awaits them, with God as their judge, whose sentence will confirm your sentence, unless the person condemned has come to his senses and repented.

‘Indeed, the person who seeks not revenge, but rather the correction of his brother; who is prepared to forgive an injury done to him; who is concerned about his brother’s salvation; who, though he himself has been hurt, goes of his own accord to the sick person to heal him; who, though rebuffed time and again, nevertheless does not stop imparting the remedy; who does not trust in his own judgment but takes along one or two persons, not for revenge, but for healing – God will confirm the sentence of the person, since it originates from the gospel spirit, and God will never rescind the sentence unless the condemned person condemns what he did. Therefore, although your judgment does not in appearance have the harshness of the tribunals of princes, nevertheless it is more to be feared than their sentence, which often strikes down the best and sets the most wicked free. To be condemned by God is a fearful thing – and God condemns whomever you condemn, when you agree with sincere hearts. For the judgment you make by the spirit of God is not your judgment, but the judgment he makes

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20 ‘Your’: *vester* – plural; the reference is to the judgments of the apostles, ie the church.

through you. If, however, you have condemned someone by a human spirit, it is now a human judgment, not God's, and he who has been expelled from your fellowship by your sentence is not forthwith a stranger to the fellowship of heaven. The force therefore of your authority lies in your affections, which God alone beholds. Surely these are the keys that I will give to Peter when he confesses me, keys by which what has been bound on earth will be bound also in heaven, and what has been loosed on earth will be loosed also in heaven. Although that power especially suits the leaders, nevertheless I will give it to everyone, provided only there is consensus – not human consensus, but consensus in my name.²¹

'Why, I will go even further: not only will your consensus prevail in forgiving and condemning transgressions if you agree among yourselves and with me, but if even just any two people in the world are found who are truly in harmony with my spirit, that is, who are not moved by human affection, but in harmony love the things that are of God – they will obtain from my Father in heaven whatever they have sought. So much does the Father love an evangelical and holy concord. Therefore, since you have so much influence with that prince who can do all things, there is no reason to repent of your power, even if to human eyes you seem weak and powerless. One does not immediately obtain from Caesar what is sought, nor would he have the power to provide whatever is requested, for he can neither drive away a fever nor restore speech to a mute. But nothing is so lofty or beyond belief that my Father will not provide it for you if you seek it from him in concord.'

Peter had been listening to these things with keen attention, supposing that what Jesus had said about the power to condemn and absolve pertained especially to him. So a question arose in his mind, because by saying 'after the third attempt to correct, let him be to you as a pagan and tax collector' Jesus seemed to prescribe a fixed number of times after which a sinner was not to be received into grace, even if he repented. It was on this subject, therefore, that he approached Jesus for more precise teaching. He said, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother if he sins against me, and

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21 Cf *Apologia adversus monachos* LB IX 1066F–7D and 1068B–D, where the objection of the Spanish monks – that Erasmus understood the 'power of the keys' to reside in a 'consensus of wills' seems to refer to this passage. For the central place of 'consensus' in Erasmus' ecclesiology see James McConica 'Erasmus and the Grammar of Consent' in *Scrinium Erasmianum* ed Joseph Coppens (Leiden 1969) 2 77–99.

after how many wrongs will he be refused forgiveness? After the seventh?' Peter proposed this number, as if it were very large, since Jesus mentioned only a third correction.²²

Then showing that, in the acts that are committed against us, we must be most ready to forgive, Jesus said: 'I do not say that one must forgive up to the seventh offence, but up to the seventy times the seventh,' indicating that no number must be prescribed for Christian forgiveness, but whenever a sinner repents, the offence must be sincerely forgiven: Jesus was removing utterly all lust for revenge from the Christian heart.²³ In order that no one would consider this to be hard and unfair, Jesus used a similitude to teach that it is very fair, for this is not so much clemency as it is compensation. Sometimes we sin against our neighbour, each of us against the other, but much more frequently and more grievously against God. Whenever we offend, our sin against God is the more grievous by the very fact that the one against whom we sin is the greater, and greater, too, are the benefits we have received from him.²⁴ If we are loath to forgive a brother his offence, whose sin is far less grievous, we would not deserve to obtain pardon, either from a neighbour or from God, who pardons a sinner even a thousand times

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22 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 61.1 (on Matt 18:21-2) PG 58 588-9 had connected this passage to the preceding passage in a similar way: since Jesus had ordered the offended brother to make a triple attempt to reconcile the offender, Peter thought he was 'saying something big' when he proposed 'seven times.' For the unrepentant offender, at least, Jesus had prescribed a fixed number of times.

23 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 61.1 (on Matt 18:21-2) PG 58 588-9: '[In saying "seventy-seven times"] Jesus does not set a number here, but he denotes what is infinite and perpetual and forever.' Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 18:22) PL 26 132C states that Jesus' figure of 490 times (from the reading 'seventy times seven') means 'that one should forgive every day a sinning brother more times than he can possibly sin.' Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 18:21-2 PG 123 344D states that forgiveness should have no limit: 'When he said seventy times seven, he did not limit forgiveness with a number. For it is absurd to sit and count up to 490 . . . but he means here that forgiveness should be infinite.'

24 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 61.1 (on Matt 18:23-8) PG 58 589 explains that Jesus added the parable (that immediately follows) so that his teaching on forgiveness would not seem onerous, and then points to the contrast between sins against human beings and sins against God: 'Do you see what a great difference there is between our sins against human beings and against God . . . This is due both to the difference in the persons involved and to the frequency of the sins . . . Nor is it only from this that our sins become more serious, but also from the kindnesses and the honour we enjoy [from God].'

if only he comes to his senses. This is especially so since God forgives us our transgressions on this principle, that we, challenged by his example, should be compliant with our brother and open to his entreaties.

‘Therefore,’ he said, ‘the kingdom of heaven is like a rich and powerful man, who, since he had a large household, thought he should look into accounts with his slaves. When he began to balance the accounts, one slave was found to owe him ten thousand talents. Accordingly, since the sum was greater than the debtor could pay, the master commanded that the slave, his wife, his children and whatever he possessed be sold so that from the combined price he could satisfy his creditor. But the slave fell at the knees of his master humbly entreating him, and said: “I beg you, give me the opportunity, and in the course of time I will pay you back everything.” Then the master pitied the slave who was begging and lying prostrate, and granted him more than he sought, for not only did he not take him to court, but he even forgave him the entire sum. When the slave who was now free had got out of his master’s sight, he met by chance a fellow slave who owed him a small sum of money, a hundred denarii, to be precise. Forgetting his master’s clemency towards him, he immediately laid hands on the other slave and began to haul the poor man off, saying: “Pay what you owe.” That slave, falling at the knees of his fellow slave, entreated him with just so many words as he had spoken in entreating his master: “Be patient with me and I will pay it all back to you.” But the creditor was unmoved by the entreaty and rebuffed the suppliant and led him away to prison until he had repaid what he owed.

‘Then fellow slaves who had seen the master’s wonderful clemency towards his slave, when they had seen such great cruelty of a fellow slave against his fellow slave, were moved with great indignation, and informed the master of the whole affair. At this the master, his anger kindled, called back the slave whom he had forgiven everything. He said: “You wicked slave, did not I, your master, forgive you so great a sum for no other reason than that you begged me as a suppliant? Was it not right, therefore, that you, a slave, forgive a fellow slave a little money, and pity a suppliant, as I pitied you? Surely my recent gentleness towards you ought to have taught you gentleness towards your fellow slave.” Forthwith the master, angered implacably, handed him to the torturers to be kept in prison until he repaid the whole sum previously forgiven. Your heavenly Father will deal with you according to this comparison. Every one of you is indebted much more to him, against whom everyone frequently transgresses. Human beings also sin against human beings, though in much less serious ways. But unless each pardons his brother for the less serious offences committed against him and pardons him sincerely, not only will the Father not forgive you for

the more serious offences committed against him, but he will even revoke the pardon he had given.'

Chapter 19

When with these words Jesus had prepared his disciples to show kindness towards the simple and leniency towards those who transgress, he left Galilee and withdrew to the borders of Judea, across the Jordan, as if going to meet his imminent death, which the Pharisees were secretly devising. Huge crowds followed him there as well, bearing with them the sick in all their variety, and he cured them there. And once again the envy of the Pharisees broke out afresh, when they saw so many wonders and the multitude's attachment to Jesus. They assailed him skilfully and treacherously, seizing their opportunity from a statement in which he had earlier taught that a man must not divorce his wife.¹ Therefore they tried to catch him on the horns of a dilemma:² whether it is lawful to divorce a wife for any reason. If he replied that it was lawful, he would be seen to contradict himself, since he had taught that divorce was not permitted; if he said it was not, he would be seen to oppose the Mosaic law that allows a man to give a certificate of divorce for any reason and to put away his wife. But Jesus so moderated his response that he neither violated the authority of Moses, nor recanted his own teaching, and by the authority of the Law he shut the mouths of the Pharisees, those experts in the Law.

He said: 'Have you not read that when God created the human race he originally established marriage on the principle that one man would be joined to one woman by an indissoluble bond? He fashioned male and female from the same matter,³ so that by their embrace the human race should

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1 Cf Matt 5:31–2.

2 'Horns of a dilemma': *cornutum problema*; cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 19:1–3) PL 26 133D: The scribes and Pharisees asked a question 'so that they might as it were catch him out by a horned syllogism (*cornuto syllagismo*).' Jerome described the dilemma in much the same way as Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 62.1 (on Matt 19:3) PG 58 596–7: If Jesus said divorce and remarriage were permitted, he would contradict what he had already said [Matt 5:31–2]; if he said it was not permitted, he would contradict Moses. Chrysostom also notes the treachery in the question of the Pharisees, who gave no indication that they intended to use Jesus' earlier statement to catch him in a contradiction.

3 'Matter': *massa*; for the importance of this Latin word as a theological term meaning 'a cohering or inclusive mass' see CWE 56 152 n3. For the story of creation to which Erasmus here alludes see Gen 2:7, 18–24.

be propagated. Then making manifest the indissoluble bond of husband and wife, God, not Moses, but the very creator himself, added:⁴ “For the sake of this mutual love a man will leave his father and mother and become one with⁵ his wife.” So close, indeed, will the union be that those who had been two before will somehow be made one person from two. Thus, once joined in marriage they are not now two, but a single body, so that it would be as unnatural to separate a wife from her husband, as it would be to cut a limb from the body.⁶ Therefore what God has joined together once and for all with so tight a bond, let no one separate.’

Here the Pharisees, thinking they had now been given the opportunity to catch Jesus, said: ‘If God intended this to be as you interpret it, then why did Moses make it lawful for a husband to cast off his wife for any reason whatever, provided he give her a certificate of divorce?’⁷ By what effrontery did Moses dare to permit what God did not want to be done?’ Jesus replied: ‘He did not permit you to do this because it was right by nature but, knowing the hardness of your hearts, he allowed a lighter evil so you would not commit a graver one. Just because a person prefers divorce to murder does not mean he approves of divorce.’⁸ Nor does the certificate

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4 Erasmus follows closely his own translation rather than the Vulgate of Matt 19:5, which refers to Gen 2:24. See the annotation on 19:5 (*et dixit propter hoc dimittet homo*) which raises the question of the identity of the speaker, God or Christ. Though in the annotation Erasmus recognizes that the speaker in Genesis might be either Adam or the author of the historical text, here in the paraphrase the speaker is emphatically declared to be God. In this Erasmus follows Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 62.1 (on Matt 19:6) PG 58 597, who observes that in Genesis it is the Father who speaks, and so in this citation Jesus sets the Lord above Moses and the law of nature above the Mosaic law: ‘If you bring forward Moses I speak to you of the Lord of Moses . . . and this is the older law.’ For the importance of identifying the *persona* in a biblical text see chapter 12 n21 above.

5 ‘Become one with’: *agglutinabitur*. Erasmus follows his translation of Matt 19:5. In an annotation on the verse (*et adhaerebit uxori suae*) Erasmus says the Greek word is metaphorical, conveying the image of two things glued together so they seem to be one thing.

6 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 62.2 (on Matt 19:6) PG 58 597: ‘[Divorce] is an unnatural act because one flesh is cut in two.’

7 Cf Deut 24:1–3.

8 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 19:8) PL 26 134C–D attributes Moses’ ruling on divorce to abuse and to murders that were occurring: ‘When Moses saw that, because of the desire for second wives who were richer or younger or more beautiful, first wives were being killed or mistreated, he preferred to accede to divorce rather than to let hatred and murders persist.’

of divorce make divorce right, but it is a witness to your hardness, you who get rid of a wife for any trifling reason; and it looks out for her in relation to her new husband, since it takes from you the right to call back the woman you divorced.⁹ But from the beginning, when human malice had not yet increased, and when the nature of mortals had not yet been infected by so many vices (for there was not such fierce hatred that poisonings or murders were feared), there was no license to divorce. Now that the gospel teaching is renewing and perfecting the integrity of nature, the same law will not be relaxed. Moses desired the same thing I teach, but your character, which was too inclined to murder, kept him from daring to demand this of you.¹⁰

‘I, who do not invalidate the Law, but render it more absolute, tell you flatly that what you commonly do, namely, divorce your wives for any reason you please, is an impious act,¹¹ being outside the mind of God and the will of Moses. Simply because you do something with impunity does not make the action right. There are many things that are shameful in God’s eyes that are not punished by human laws. Know, therefore, that whoever puts away his wife for any reason whatever and takes another wife, such a person commits adultery himself¹² and likewise gives to his wife an occasion for adultery – unless, perchance, the woman he is divorcing deserves the divorce on the grounds of adultery. For a wife who has given herself to

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⁹ Cf Deut 24:4.

¹⁰ The paraphrase on 19:8 paints an ugly picture of the ‘hardness of heart’ that drew a concession for limited divorce. In his paraphrase here Erasmus does not flinch from following the absolutism of the Scripture for persons whose hearts have been restored to their original integrity. But it was in an annotation on this phrase (*ad duriciem cordis*) that Erasmus had in 1516 proffered the suggestion that just as other absolute precepts of Christ had been softened by the church to accommodate the weakness of human nature, so the church’s regulations against divorce might be relaxed to alleviate the inescapable suffering of badly matched couples – a position represented dramatically in the 1529 colloquy ‘A Marriage in Name Only’ CWE 40 842–59. The explosive reaction to Erasmus’ suggestion of 1516 led Erasmus in 1519 to eliminate his discussion of the point from his annotation on 19:8, and move it to his extended treatment of divorce in the annotation on 1 Cor 7:39 (*liberata est a lege, cui autem vult, nubat*). For Erasmus on divorce see further chapter 5 n94 above.

¹¹ ‘Impious act’: *nefas*, whose meaning Erasmus explicates in the two phrases that follow: ‘outside the mind of God and will of Moses’

¹² himself . . . for adultery] Added in 1534. These words are probably added from 5:32 (causes her to commit adultery NRSV). Though some witnesses add the clause in 19:32, it is found neither in Erasmus’ text and translation nor in the Vulgate. For the textual witnesses see Metzger *Textual Commentary* 38.

another man has already ceased to be a wife and has deprived herself of matrimonial rights, since the flesh has been divided that God wanted to be one and undivided.¹³ But if a man who has divorced his wife for the reasons you frequently divorce yours enters into a union with another woman, that is not marriage but adultery. And when a man marries a woman who has been thus divorced, he marries not his own wife but someone else's, and for this reason he does not contract a marriage, but commits adultery.¹⁴ Now the sum of these evils falls back on the head of him who divorces: first, he is harsh and severe, who was neither able to bear his wife's offence nor willing to mend it; then, also, he gives the woman, who has been cast out of his house and who is not able to live without a husband, a reason to commit adultery.'

Having heard these words, the disciples said to Jesus: 'If this is the situation for husbands, that they are not able to be freed from a wife if she is displeasing, it is better not to marry, since it is harsh servitude to endure at home a woman who is peevish, quarrelsome, drunken, or annoying because of some similar vice.'¹⁵ Certainly Jesus did not disapprove of his disciples' response, for he wanted them to be free from the servitude of marriage for the sake of preaching the gospel.¹⁶ But he hinted that it was not prudent to avoid marriage unless one has so strong a mind that one can completely abstain from sexual intercourse. There are very few people, however, who

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13 Cf Matt 19:5; Gen 2:24. Bédā objected to this statement, and the Paris theologians condemned it on the grounds that it appeared to leave room for a second marriage. But Erasmus replied that the expression means only that a woman who commits adultery is unworthy of the benefits of marriage; cf *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* and *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 464F–5B and 843B–4A.

14 This sentence paraphrases a sentence found in the Vulgate and in Erasmus' text and translation of 19:9; its presence is not well supported by the textual evidence, and it is omitted in modern bibles (cf eg NRSV). For the textual evidence see Metzger *Textual Commentary* 38–9.

15 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 19:10) PL 26 135B elaborates similarly: 'It is a heavy burden if one cannot divorce his wife except for fornication. What if she is drunken, prone to anger, of bad character, extravagant, gluttonous, unrestrained, quarrelsome, foul-mouthed?' Cf also Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 62.3 (on Matt 19:10) PG 68 599: 'If this is the case ... it is easier to oppose our natural passion than a difficult woman.' Cf the portraits of the unpleasant wife in *De conscribendis epistolis* CWE 25 147 and in *Adagia* II ii 48.

16 Here virginity serves the purpose of evangelism, in contrast to Chrysostom on the same verse *In Matt hom* 62.3 PG 58 599, for whom virginity is an end in itself. See nn19, 22, and 23 below.

can do this, because physical passion is so universal that there is no other feeling more vehement or unconquerable than this.¹⁷ Therefore, although one has more freedom if not bound by marriage, it is nevertheless safer to be held fast within the bars of marriage than to be polluted by promiscuous intercourse. Consequently, though hinting at what is best and drawing people to it by the reward of freedom, Jesus did not dare to demand what in a certain way exceeds human strength. He said: 'Not everyone has the capacity to receive'¹⁸ this word, but only those to whom this has been divinely given, who are possessed by such great ardour for gospel holiness that they freely and willingly disregard even this passion. Celibacy, however pure, wins commendation only if it has been taken up out of a zeal for gospel godliness.¹⁹

'There are three kinds of eunuchs. First, there are those who are born thus, who through the fault of a rather cold nature or from some hidden disposition of nature are averse to marriage.²⁰ Then there are those who have been castrated. Their chastity merits no commendation because it originates from necessity, not from the desire for virtue.²¹ But the gospel has its eunuchs, too, clearly blessed, who neither are impotent by nature nor have they been castrated; rather, they have emasculated themselves for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,²² not by amputating part of their body, but, out

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17 This and the previous sentence evoked from Béda the charge that Erasmus was the patron of incontinence, particularly because he affirmed that 'very few' can withstand the force of physical passion. Erasmus countered that he had in many places sung the praises of virginity and chastity; see *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* and *Supputatio* LB IX 465B–C and 585F–9F. See further n19 below.

18 'Has the capacity to receive': *capaces sunt*, as in Erasmus' translation. In his annotation on 19:11 (*non omnes capiunt*) Erasmus notes that the Greek *χωροῦσιν* 'make room for' refers implicitly not to intelligence but to affections; the point at issue is not whether the word is understood, but whether it can be accommodated – find a place – in the heart.

19 Erasmus' guarded ambiguity here on marriage reflects attitudes expressed elsewhere. His *Encomium matrimonii*, published in 1518 (later incorporated into the *De conscribendis epistolis* [1522]), aroused bitter controversy; for this and for Erasmus' long interest in the subject of marriage see CWE 83 xxxiii–xlii.

20 'Are averse to marriage': *abhorrent a re uxoria*; cf Terence *Andria* 829.

21 Nicholas of Lyra (on 19:12) said that the chastity of the castrated was not praiseworthy since it was the result of violence; Nicholas, indeed, saw nothing commendable in the chastity of the 'frigid' unless they affirmed their condition by an act of will.

22 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 62.3 (on Matt 19:12) PG 58 599 similarly contrasts those who are 'eunuchs' by necessity and those who have voluntarily devoted themselves to virginity. That the former receive no commendation should spur

of their love of the gospel, by overcoming the desire for the pleasures of marriage.²³ You see the palm of victory set in your midst: let the willing contend, and the one who trusts his own strength; let the one who is able carry off the prize. The favour of the superintendent of the games²⁴ will not fail those who contest bravely and of their own accord.²⁵

Since he had been speaking about virginal purity and about the sublimity of heroic virtue, which fall to few people, an example was opportunely offered illustrating at one and the same time absolute purity and the highest modesty, without the latter of which virginity does not merit commendation. There were some parents there who wanted to bring their children to Jesus so that he might place his hands upon them and pray for them. They thought that just as they had seen diseases vanish at his touch, so the touch of Jesus would preserve them from diseases, accidents, demonic possession, and the other evils from which children often perish.²⁶ But although the disciples had heard so many times about utmost modesty, nevertheless they had not yet completely cast aside human affections. Thinking it unworthy of the greatness of their Lord to be detained and wearied by the audacious presumptions of mothers and infants,²⁷ they pre-

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on the latter in their endeavour since they are promised 'crowns.' In Erasmus' paraphrase here the exhortation to chastity is guarded: the palm of victory – the reward and the crowns – is there, but only for the one who can 'trust his strength.'

23 Here, too, Erasmus qualifies Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 62.3 (on Matt 19:12) PG 58 599, who had contrasted self-emasculation with the banishment of depraved thoughts, to which, he said, the passage intended to point. For Erasmus sexual desire is renounced for 'love of the gospel.'

24 'Superintendent of the games': *agonotheta*; on this word see CWE 44 37 n12, and CWE 66 27 n25.

25 For the image of the Christian athlete see eg 1 Cor 9:24–7; 2 Tim 2:5, 4:7–8; Heb 12:1–2; for the multitude holding palms, Rev 7:9; for these themes in Christian literature see CWE 50 55 n67. The imagery here extends the metaphor found in Chrysostom (see n22 above).

26 Cf Origen *Comm in Matt* 15.6 (on Matt 19:13) PG 13 1269B: 'Perhaps ... the intention of those who were bringing their infants and children to him was this: they thought that when Jesus had touched their infants and children and his power had been put in them by this touch, no calamity or demon or whatever could touch any of these Jesus had touched.'

27 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 19:13–14) PL 26 141B also speaks of the disciples' feeling that the persistence of the parents would make Jesus weary: 'Not yet having the fullest faith, the disciples suppose that the relentlessness of those who were bringing forward their children wearied him, as it would a man.'

vented those who wanted to approach. Jesus noticed this, and to fix even more deeply in the minds of his disciples gospel modesty, which despises no one, however lowly,²⁸ he said: 'Allow the children to be brought to me, and do not prevent them from coming to me. Truly, those who are like these children please me the most. Although the world holds them in disdain, nevertheless I deem no others worthy of the kingdom of heaven. What nature grants children, godliness must manifest in you, if you want to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven.'²⁹ Therefore the children were led to Jesus, and he placed his hands on them, imparting to the little ones a hidden power through the touch of his body – and because of their parents' simple faith.

This done, he departed from that place, teaching by this very act that we must give sufficient attention to the small and weak, but by no means should we remain there; rather, we should hasten to more perfect things. And behold, after he left the children, a young man came up who spoke about perfection. Now just as in the case of the children Jesus had set before his disciples an image of simplicity and modesty, so in the case of this young man, who was eager indeed for perfect godliness, but burdened by riches, he shows visibly how difficult it is for those who serve riches to strive toward the perfection of gospel godliness, and how much readier they are for the gospel work who possess nothing or as little as possible of this world – although poverty and wealth lie not so much in one's possessions as in one's affections. He was a young man possessed of a religious mind,³⁰ but since he had heard from Christ some new precepts he came to Jesus and falling to his knees³¹ asked him, saying: 'Good teacher, what good

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28 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 62.4 (on Matt 19:13–15) PG 58 600: 'Why did the disciples drive the children away? Out of regard for Jesus' status. And what did he do then? In order to teach [the disciples] to be modest and to trample down worldly pride, he received [the children] and embraced them in his arms, and promised such as these the kingdom of heaven.'

29 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 62.4 (on Matt 19:13–15) PG 58 600–1: 'If we wish to be the heirs of heaven, we must make every effort to possess this virtue [ie modesty]. This is the culmination of philosophy . . . this the angelic life.'

30 Erasmus portrays the young man as sincere, well intended, eager to gain the 'honour of perfection.' So Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 63.1 (on Matt 19:16) PG 58 603–4 defending his portrait against interpreters (like Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 [on Matt 19:16] PL 26 136c) who thought the young man had come to tempt Jesus. Cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 232: 'Mark depicts the young man as a lovable character (x 21), but in Matthew no such attractiveness is to be discerned.'

31 Cf Mark 10:17.

deed³² shall I do to obtain eternal life?’ The young man called Jesus good, seeking his favour by flattery, since, in spite of his words, he supposed him to be nothing other than a pure man, albeit excelling the rest. Then, when he asked about the good, he did not think about just any good, but about a certain exceptional good that would merit eternal life.³³ No mortal is absolutely good, and no human work is so good that it merits the reward of eternal life.³⁴ Jesus, therefore, wanted to stimulate the young man to think about him in a more sublime way; to arouse him so that he might turn him away from a reliance on his own works, and to stir him rather to locate the hope of his life instead in the gracious beneficence of God, who is by nature good and freely kind towards all. Accordingly, Jesus answered in this way: ‘Why do you call me good, or why do you ask me about the good? Still, if you desire to be admitted to eternal life, observe the commandments.’ The young man asked which commandments they were, for he had heard him teach that the commandments of the law of Moses were not enough to attain the kingdom of heaven.³⁵ In order to take away from everyone

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32 In his paraphrase on 19:16–17 Erasmus follows primarily the Vulgate, secondarily his own translation. In 19:16 his own text and translation corresponded to the Vulgate in reading ‘Good teacher, what good deed . . .,’ differing from the preferred reading ‘Teacher, what good deed’; in 19:17 the Vulgate read, ‘Why do you ask me about the good; God alone is good,’ which is also the preferred reading, but in his text and translation Erasmus read, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.’ For the textual problem see Metzger *Textual Commentary* 39–40; for Erasmus’ discussion of the problem see his annotation on 19:17 (*quid me interrogas de bono*).

33 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 63.1 (on Matt 19:16) PG 58 603–4: ‘What was the advantage in Jesus’ reply? . . . To teach the young man to avoid flattery . . . and to persuade him to seek . . . what is truly good.’

34 Bêda and the Paris theologians saw in this statement a ‘Lutheranizing’ denigration of good works. Erasmus objected that everywhere his published books demonstrated his respect for ‘works,’ but his response to the faculty of Theology is revealing: ‘If in making a calculation anyone wishes to assign to grace what is owed to grace, so small a portion will be left to the human person that pious people prefer to ascribe the whole to grace.’ Cf *Divinationes ad notata Bedae*, *Supputatio*, and *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 465D, 589F–90D, 885E–6D.

35 Cf Matt 5:20. Bêda and the Paris theologians found in this statement a denigration of the Mosaic law. In his responses *Divinationes ad notata Bedae*, *Supputatio*, and *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 465D–E, 590D–1B, 858A–9F, Erasmus distinguished the carnal from the spiritual understanding of the Law, which, indeed, served as a step towards evangelical perfection, but he noted that even for one with a ‘spiritual understanding,’ faith and char-

reliance on the Law, Jesus responded: 'You shall not kill, shall not commit adultery, shall not steal, shall not give false testimony. Honour your father and mother, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.' Delighted, the young man said: 'I have observed all of these since childhood.'³⁶ What, then, beyond this do I lack?' He was expecting Jesus to say that nothing was lacking. But the Lord, showing how great a difference there is between Jewish justice and gospel justice, between a good Jew and a good Christian, said: 'If you want to be perfect, go and sell all that you possess, distribute the money among the poor; you will not lose your wealth, however much you disperse it among the many. To disperse thus is to store up, for in place of earthly riches you will have a better treasure in heaven. When you have done this, come now unencumbered – and destitute – to follow me who am also destitute.'

When Jesus said 'If you want' he showed that the endeavour is an arduous one, but he added the reward, 'you will have treasure in heaven.' Next, he urged him to the pursuit of perfect godliness: 'Come, follow me.' When the young man heard these words, he went away, dejected and sad at heart because he was the owner of many possessions, and he considered it hard to relinquish them all at once. He longed to obtain eternal life, he sought to gain the honour of perfection, but the thorns of riches overwhelmed this affection, like the good seed.³⁷ And so, full of sadness he went home, not at all understanding that Jesus did not condemn riches, but the affection and love and concern for riches,³⁸ feelings to which those who

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ity must be present for eternal life: 'I never meant that before the light of the gospel Jews could not be saved by keeping the commandments, provided hypocrisy was absent and faith and charity present in a measure appropriate to the time – for the faith that sufficed for them would not have sufficed at a later period' (LB IX 859D).

36 'Since childhood' is added from Mark 10:20.

37 For the image here, which alludes to Mark 4:7 and parallels, see Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 19:22 PG 123 355B: 'For he felt a longing, and the earth of his heart was deep and fertile, but the thorns of his wealth were strangling.' Similarly Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 19:22) PL 26 137C: '... he had many possessions, that is, thorns and thistles that choke the dominical seed.'

38 Like Erasmus just above, Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 63.2 (on Matt 19:21) PG 58 605 had pointed to the relationship between the arduous endeavour and the reward – the latter offered as a palliative to the former. But Erasmus, again like Chrysostom, exculpates riches, locating the problem of riches in the person, not the thing: 'In saying "How difficult it will be for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven," he was not blaming riches, but those who are held back by them.' From an early point in the history of its interpretation this

possess riches are almost inevitably subject. Christ did not intend that riches should always be given up, but that they should, all the same, always be scorned – and also given up if at any time they divert us from gospel godliness.

After the young man departed, Jesus turned to his disciples (for he had produced this scene so they would never regret their poverty or be possessed by a love of money) and said: 'How difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven,' meaning that the pursuit of wealth and the pursuit of the gospel philosophy make an uneasy fit. For the latter requires the entire person, while the former lays claim to almost the greatest part of a person. To make the difficulty seem even greater, he added this, saying to the astonished disciples: 'Why, I tell you further: it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom of heaven, for the gate is low and narrow, and it does not admit camels that are weighed down with loads of riches.'³⁹ Thus did he signify the rich misers for whom riches are a burden more than something useful, as they bear their load of riches for others rather than for themselves. Because the apostles did not understand this comment very well, it brought a certain sadness to their hearts. It pained them that so many people were to be excluded from the kingdom of heaven because of wealth.⁴⁰ Therefore, since the disciples were in great perplexity about the meaning of Jesus' statement concerning the camel and the eye of the needle, they asked him: 'If this is the case, then who can be saved? How rare among mortals is the person who can either throw away the riches he has, or not hope for riches if he does not have them?' Jesus looked upon them, and in order to relieve the sadness they had begun to feel, he showed that the rich too have

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narrative was problematic for the church, leading some exegetes to mitigate its harshness, among them notably Clement of Alexandria in *Who Is the Rich Man That Is Saved*, for an analysis of which see L. William Countryman *The Rich Christian in the Church of the Early Empire: Contradictions and Accommodations* (New York 1980) 47–68.

39 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 19:24) PL 26 138B, who recalls the 'camels of Midian and Ephah' laden with rich gifts passing through the gates of Jerusalem, and adds, 'We shall see how even those camels, to whom the rich are likened, when they have laid down their heavy burdens of sin . . . are able to enter through the narrow gate [Matt 7:14].'

40 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 63.2 (on Matt 19:25–6) PG 58 606: 'Why were the disciples upset, since they themselves were very poor? . . . Because it pained them that others would not find salvation . . . They needed to be consoled, so Jesus . . . said, "What is impossible for mortals is possible with God."'

some hope of getting into the kingdom of heaven. He said: 'For men this is impossible, just as it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, but for God nothing is impossible. He alone changes the hearts of the rich so that they are even eager either to throw away what they possess or to possess their wealth as if it belonged to all, not to themselves, always prepared to relinquish it if at any time the work of the gospel demands it. Why should those who are not reluctant to sacrifice even their lives find it difficult to show disdain for riches?'⁴¹

Jesus' words to the young man, 'Sell what you possess and follow me,' brightened the prospects a little for Peter. Though he had not been rich, nevertheless he had gladly left what he had, a boat and nets, and had followed the Lord. He said: 'Lord, behold, we have done what you were demanding of the young man – we have left all and followed you. What, therefore, will our reward be?' Now Jesus wanted to show that this uncommonly glorious deed is open not only to the rich, but also to the poor, that is, to anyone who gladly regards whatever he possesses as abandoned for the sake of the gospel, since the value of this virtue is judged more from the disposition of the one who gives up his possessions, than from the magnitude of what is given up. Jesus did not challenge Peter's statement, which was⁴² a little too grand for his circumstances,⁴³ but teaching that insignificant things readily given up are to be repaid by a not insignificant reward, he said: 'Of this I assure you: in the age to come, when the dead come to life again, and a reward is given to each according to his merits, the Son of man will sit on the seat of his majesty, having laid aside the humility you now see. Then you, who for my sake have given up nothing except your boat and nets – but have done so with such intent that for my sake you would have abandoned your wealth however great it was – and in destitution have followed me who am also destitute, you fishers, too, if

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41 For Erasmus' view of wealth see the colloquy 'The Godly Feast' CWE 39 196:11–202:31, the paraphrases on Luke 16:1–13 CWE 48 88–94, and on James 2:5–7 CWE 44 148; cf also the paraphrase on Acts 2:44–5 CWE 50 25.

42 which was] Added in 1534

43 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 19:27) PL 26 138c notes the 'grand confidence' of Peter's claim: 'We have left everything [to follow Jesus]: he was a fisherman, he had not been rich, he sought his food by hand and craft.' Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 64.1 (on Matt 19:27) PG 58 609 imagines Jesus asking in an almost humorous vein: 'What is this "everything," blessed Peter? your rod, net, boat, your craft? Is this the "everything" you are talking about?' But Chrysostom goes on to maintain that Peter asked the question on behalf of the poor, so that the poor, too, who have no possessions, might have hope of perfection.

you persevere, will then share my honour as you now share my afflictions, and you will sit on the twelve seats and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. For though they are born from the same stock, skilled in the same Law, and invited by the same miracles and blessings, they will by no means be able to be led to believe,⁴⁴ whereas you, lowly and uneducated, at a simple bidding immediately left even those things by which you sustained your life.

Not to you only will this reward come, but whoever for the sake of professing my name has left his house, his brothers or sisters, his father or mother, his wife or children, his fields or any other possessions, far from losing what he has given up for my sake, will, rather, be lending it on interest with great profit. Even in this world,⁴⁵ he will receive one hundredfold for the things he has abandoned, and in the resurrection he will possess eternal life. In place of the fleeting and cheap possessions he has abandoned, he will in the meantime even here possess that precious pearl⁴⁶ of the gospel mind whose value is not to be measured by any of the commodities of this world. In place of the one house that has been left, the teaching of the gospel will open up for you very many homes throughout the world; in place of a single farm, many farms will serve your needs; instead of a single father or mother, you will have as parents all the elderly men and women you have converted to the gospel profession. You will have as brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, all the people of your age or younger that you have led by your preaching to eternal life. They will provide support everywhere and of their own accord if you have need of anything, and their affections will far surpass those whom blood kinship alone has joined to us. For the kinship that derives from the gospel fellowship is closer than a relationship of flesh and blood, and one whom piety has united loves more earnestly than one whom birth has connected.

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44 Compare the explanation of Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 64.2 (on Matt 19:28) PG 58 610: the tribes of Israel will be condemned because they 'were nurtured by the same laws, customs, and institutions [as the apostles], but the Jews said they were not able to believe Christ because the Law prevented them from receiving his commands,' hence the 'Son of Man' will bring forward the apostles, who did believe, and will condemn the Jews. Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 19:28) 139A: 'You will sit . . . condemning the twelve tribes of Israel, because, though you believed, they were unwilling to believe in him.'

45 'In this world': the expression is not found in Matt 19:29 but in Luke 18:30. Chrysostom, however, *In Matt hom* 64.1 PG 58 610 had included the Lukan phrase in his citation of Matt 19:29.

46 Cf Matt 13:45–6.

To this ample enough reward will be added also the reward that is of all the greatest: that in place of the things that will soon pass away, you will possess eternal life. I do not say these things because the gospel profession teaches that those people are to be scorned whom nature has joined to us, but that affections of this sort must be disregarded whenever they divert us from the work of eternal salvation.

This great happiness has been set before all people equally. There is no distinction of fortune, condition, age, or person. However, in the reckoning that will be made by God, the fair judge, many will hold the last places who now seem to hold the first places. By contrast, many who now from a human point of view seem lowly and worthless, will be first there. A prostitute will be preferred to a scribe, a tax collector to a Pharisee, a pagan to a Jew, a poor man to a rich man, a farmer to a king. Those who seemed to be closest to the kingdom of heaven will enter last, and those who seemed far off will enter first. Pagans by their faith will take precedence, the synagogue because of unbelief will be removed.⁴⁷

Chapter 20

Since what he had related¹ about the ‘first and the last’ seemed to be a riddle, he explained his statement by means of a parable,² by which he made clear that people had been called to the cultivation of justice in different ages,³ and yet the reward of eternal salvation was the same for all who cultivate justice, provided that those who have been called laboured diligently in the vineyard of justice. For those who were called in the time of Christ get no less than those who were called in the time of Abraham or Moses or David.

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47 Cf Rom 9:30–2.

1 he had related] First in 1534; previously ‘he had said’

2 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 20:1) PL 26 140B makes the same connection between the preceding chapter and this: ‘The parable, or similitude, of the kingdom of heaven is understood in the context of what preceded . . . “Many of the first will be last, and the last will be first.”’

3 ‘ages’: *aetatibus*; the word is understood to mean both the ages of history (the reference of Erasmus’ next sentence), and the times of a human life (the reference of the subsequent sentence). Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 20:1–12) PL 26 141A–B and Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 20:1–7 PG 123 360C–D set out the times of history and the stages of life as separate, alternative interpretations of the parable. Origen *Comm in Matt* 15.34 PG 13 1349C–52A gives only the historical interpretation; Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 64.3–4 PG 58 613 only the ‘stages of life’ interpretation.

And those who are drawn to the practice of the gospel as old men get no less than those who were so drawn as boys or young men.⁴ The same coin of eternal life is given to all.⁵ Nevertheless those who have come more recently seem to be more honoured because the generosity of the Lord puts them on a level with those who had come before. The Jews were called earlier, and yet the gentiles who were called later were not only granted equality with them, but were even given precedence over unbelieving Jews.⁶

The parable goes like this. He said: 'The kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who at the break of dawn went out to the public places to hire workers for his vineyard. Finding several, he contracted with them to do a day's work each man for a single denarius, and he sent them into his vineyard. He went out again about the third hour, and when he saw some men in the marketplace standing idle, he said to them: "You too go into my vineyard and I will pay you what is fair." He went out again about the sixth hour and again at the ninth hour, and did exactly as he had done at the first and third hours. Again going out at the eleventh hour, the day now nearly done, he found some other men in the marketplace and said to them: "Why do you stand here idle the entire day?" They said: "Because no one has hired us." He said to them: "You too go into my vineyard." Then as night fell the master of the vineyard ordered his steward: "Call all the workers and pay them their wages: starting with the last hired, come finally to those hired first." Therefore, the first to be called were the ones who had come last, that is, at the eleventh hour, and who had laboured in the vineyard the smallest part of the day. Each of them was given a denarius. When those who had been called at the break of dawn realized this, they reckoned that, since they had entered the vineyard so much earlier, they would receive a higher wage in proportion to the length of time they had worked. But a denarius was given to each of these as well. When they saw that between themselves and the late-comers there was equality of reward without parity of time, they went away murmuring against the master of the vineyard,

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4 Erasmus deplored Bédā's impudence in challenging these first sentences in the paraphrase on chapter 20. Bédā thought they extolled grace at the expense of works. Erasmus confirmed his orthodoxy by pointing to his paraphrastic expansion of the parable after verse 15, where the language of 'effort' and 'perseverance' is undeniable; cf *Supputatio* LB IX 591B-E.

5 'Coin': *denarius*, as in the Greek of 20:2; cf Origen on the verse *Comm in Matt* 15:34 PG 13 1352A: 'The denarius is, I think, the coin of salvation.'

6 Nicholas of Lyra (on 20:8-9) identifies the 'last' as the gentiles who in the primitive church came to the faith last 'at the eleventh hour,' while the Jews for the most part remained in unbelief.

saying: “The men who came at the eleventh hour worked for only one hour, and you have given them a wage equal to ours, when we have both persevered in our work for the entire day, and have endured the midday heat, while they came just before evening when the day with its heat was already cooling down.” But the head of the household responded to one of them on behalf of them all: “Why, friend, do you envy my kindness to others? My free generosity towards others does not harm you, for I do you no injury. Did I not contract with you that you would receive a denarius for a day’s work? You have done the work, you have the wage agreed upon, you have no further business with me. Take what is owed to you and go. You were brought here as a hired hand to perform work, not to prescribe to me what I may do. It suited me to give this man the same wage as I gave you. What you have is not diminished if his lot is enhanced as a result of my generosity. Shall I not be at liberty, because of you, to do with my money as I please? Is your eye twisted with envy because you see me being kind to whomever I please?”⁷

Jesus introduced this simile because he wanted to impress on their minds that God, who is by nature kind to everyone, by various ways and in various ages, does not cease from summoning all mortals to the cultivation of true piety. The reward for those who diligently cultivate true piety is eternal life, from which no one is excluded – no one, at least, who listens when he is called. Even though this reward is not owed in any way to our merits, but rather to the divine beneficence, still, it does not come to us without our effort – although we also owe to the one who calls the fact that we undertake the practice of godliness and persevere in it until the evening ends the day.⁸ Those who have been called but refuse to go into the vineyard cheat themselves of their own reward. Now although among the saints there is neither envy nor murmuring against God, nevertheless

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7 In his annotation on 20:15 (*an oculus tuus nequam est etc*) Erasmus notes a textual problem, which results, he says, in two alternative ways of rendering the text: 1/ May I not do whatever I wish [even] if your eye is evil (= may I not do whatever I wish because of you)? 2/ May I not do whatever I wish, or does my kindness twist your eye with envy? Erasmus rather subtly incorporates both alternatives into the paraphrase. On ‘twisted with envy’ *livore torquetur* cf Horace *Epistles* 1.2.37.

8 Erasmus reflects here a fairly traditional line of thought on the ‘kinds of grace’; see eg *De libero arbitrio* CWE 76 31–2, *Hyperaspistes* 2 CWE 77 340; and for the doctrine exhibited more broadly in the *Paraphrases* see Robert D. Sider ‘In Terms Quite Plain and Clear: The Exposition of Grace in the New Testament Scholarship of Erasmus’ *Erasmus in English* 15 (1987–8) 21–3.

with statements of this sort he described the highest honour that was paid to those who are last, namely that they were allotted the first place in reward. This distinction is so extraordinary that someone might justly feel envy. Even the good Jews at first murmured against the gentiles: the latter were descended from idolatrous ancestors, were utterly foreign to the Mosaic law, and, finally, were uncircumcised, and yet they were suddenly regarded as equals of the Jews in the grace of the gospel, and were admitted to the same salvation, though they were weighed down by no burden of the Law; the Jews, on the other hand, long-time practitioners of the Mosaic observances, were in no way preferred to pagans who were admitted to the profession of the gospel, though only recently their lives had been utterly ungodly.⁹ More, then, was forgiven the gentiles, but this was no reason why the Jews should find fault with God, since they too were permitted to attain that happiness. If they prefer to envy rather than to imitate,¹⁰ let them impute it to themselves that they are rejected on account of their unbelief while the gentiles, because of the promptness of their faith, obtain what the Jews believed was owed to them alone.¹¹ Let him therefore make haste immediately, whoever has been called; otherwise, he will be called in vain unless he makes an effort to be also chosen; and all are called, but few deserve to be among the chosen. Accordingly, with this ending Jesus concluded the parable at the very point from which he had begun: 'Thus they will be last who were first, and first who were last. For many indeed are called, but few are chosen.'¹²

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- 9 The reluctance of Jews in primitive Christianity to accept gentiles is inferred from such passages as Acts 11:19–24, Acts 15:1–12, Gal 2:1–14. Nicholas of Lyra (on 20:11) alludes also to the story of Cornelius (Acts 10–11) and the murmuring of the Christians Jews against the gentiles because 'the gentiles had received grace just as the Jews (cf Acts 11:2, 15:11).'
- 10 For this precise contrast see the paraphrase on Rom 10:19: '[The Jews] prefer to envy the gentiles . . . rather than imitate their faith' CWE 42 62. The contrast is suggested also in the annotation on Rom 10:19 (I will move you to jealousy) CWE 56 288 (cf n2), where Erasmus draws out the ambiguity of the Greek *παραζηλώω*, and in the paraphrases on Rom 11:13–14 CWE 42 65.
- 11 In this and the preceding sentence Erasmus articulates in summary form the primary thrust of the argument in the paraphrases on Rom 9:14–32 and 10:8–21 CWE 42 55–62.
- 12 Erasmus did not question the authenticity of Matt 20:16b ('Many are called but few are chosen') though it is regarded as doubtful here; cf RSV, NRSV and Metzger *Textual Commentary* 41. For Erasmus' interpretation of the logion see the paraphrase on 22:14 and n6 below.

After this, having dwelt a while in Galilee, Jesus began to move closer to the place of his death, travelling toward Jerusalem.¹³ Since he had already instructed his disciples in many ways about scorning riches, about disregarding parents and kin, about chastity, about singularly unassuming conduct, and about the rewards that were awaiting them even in this life,¹⁴ he took the twelve apostles aside privately, as though he had regarded them as the chosen, and worthy to be entrusted with the mystery of the cross, which the crowd had not yet been able to grasp. And yet he did predict his death to the people too when he spoke about Jonah and about destroying the temple and rebuilding it in the three-day period; but he predicted it in such a way that they did not understand what he said until after they had seen it done.¹⁵ To the disciples, as to the stronger, he had already repeatedly¹⁶ laid open the mystery of his cross, speaking plainly. But since people easily forget things that are unpleasant to hear, and do not readily let sink into their hearts what is abhorrent to the mind, the Lord Jesus, in order to strengthen

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13 The paraphrase seems to strain the geography; Jesus had already left Galilee at the beginning of the previous chapter (as in the biblical text [19:1]). In the biblical text of 20:17 there is no mention of Galilee.

14 All of these themes are implied in the narrative of Matt 19, as well as elsewhere in the Gospels. For the 'rewards awaiting disciples in this life' see the conclusion to the Lukan parallel to Matt 19:29: '... will receive manifold more in this time' (Luke 18:30). Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 65.1 (on Matt 20:17) PG 58 617: 'Jesus did not all of a sudden go up to Jerusalem, but first ... spoke to his disciples about poverty ... virginity ... modesty ... rewards.'

15 For the allusions see Matt 12:38–40 (sign of Jonah); John 2:19 and Mark 14:58 (temple destroyed). The paraphrase on 20:17–18 follows closely the exposition of Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 65.1 (on Matt 20:17–18) PG 58 617, who attempted to explain why Jesus took the disciples 'apart by themselves,' and why he once more spoke of his death. With respect to the latter question, Chrysostom said that because the prediction of death was unpleasant, the disciples were inclined to forget it, while Jesus thought it necessary to brace them against the coming storm; to the former question Chrysostom responded that the situation of the disciples required clarity so that they would be prepared for Jesus' death, but Jesus could not speak thus to the crowd, since it would have been too deeply disturbed by the news. Yet (Chrysostom continued) Jesus did, in fact, though not so clearly, announce to the crowd his death when he spoke about the sign of Jonah and the destruction of the temple and its reconstruction in three days. He spoke thus so that they would, after his resurrection, recall his words and realize that he had suffered willingly and with foreknowledge.

16 Jesus speaks to his disciples about his 'sufferings' in eg Matt 16:21, 17:12 and 22; Luke 17:25.

his disciples for the impending storm, laid open for them even more clearly and distinctly, that not only death was drawing near, but mockery and affliction, which are often more grievous than death itself. He said: 'Behold, we are approaching Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and scribes, who have long since been laying snares for him.¹⁷ They will not stop the accusations against him until they force upon him a sentence of death, and they will hand him over to the gentiles to mock him, beat him, spit upon him, and to fasten him to a cross; and yet after he has died and been buried, he will rise again on the third day.'

Meanwhile, since James and John, the sons of Zebedee, had heard that the keys of the kingdom of heaven had been given to Peter, had heard also about the honour of the twelve seats,¹⁸ they secretly instigated their mother to appeal¹⁹ to Jesus on their behalf in order to obtain for themselves, too, some position of distinguished honour. They were still unformed and dreaming of certain human things,²⁰ inasmuch as they supposed the kingdom and the honours would come immediately upon Jesus' resurrection because he had said he would rise on the third day.²¹ Their mother fell on her knees in reverence before Jesus, begging him not to deny her request. When he asked her what she wanted, she said: 'Direct that my two sons sit, one at your right hand, the other at your left, in your kingdom.' Jesus turned to the sons, who he knew had urged on their mother, and replied to them:²² 'You do not know what you are asking. Talk about the kingdom delights you, a kingdom that is far different from anything you are dream-

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17 For the snares see Mark 3:6.

18 Cf Matt 16:19 (keys) and Matt 19:28 (twelve seats).

19 'To appeal': *interpellare*; on this word cf chapter 15 n28 above.

20 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 65.2 (on Matt 20:22) PG 58 619 gives a similar account of the disciples' limited understanding: 'They were still imperfect, the cross lay ahead, and the grace of the Spirit had not yet been given . . . It is clear, therefore, that they were not seeking something spiritual, or had any idea of a higher kingdom.' Chrysostom also notes (*ibid* on verse 21) that the two disciples made the request because they were near Jerusalem, and thought the kingdom was already appearing.

21 Cf Matt 16:21; Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 20:21) PL 26 142C–D attributes this idea to the mother: 'Because the Lord had said, "And on the third day he will rise again" their mother thought that Jesus would reign immediately after the resurrection.'

22 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 20:22) PL 26 143B gives the same explanation for Jesus' response to the sons: 'The mother asks, and the Lord speaks to the disciples, because he understands her entreaties arose from their wishes.' Cf the explanation in Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 241–2.

ing of, but at the present time our talk must rather be about affliction and the cross, for it is by these that we make our way to the kingdom. You demand the prize too hastily; you must first undertake the contest.²³ I have already revealed what I must bear. Are you able to drink from the cup from which I am going to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism with which I must be baptized?²⁴ Not yet knowing the limits of their strength, but out of their eagerness to get what they were asking for, they replied with temerity more truly than with courage: 'We are able.' Now Jesus indeed understood that they said they were ready to imitate his cross, but regarding the reward (since they did not understand what they were asking for, and since it was irrelevant at the time), he said that it was not his to give to them, but that this honour would fall only to those to whom it had been granted by the Father to earn first place through exceptional virtue; he intended, no doubt, to encourage everyone to strive for the highest things. He said: 'You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit, one at my right hand, one at my left, is not mine to give to these persons or to those, but this will fall to those to whom it has been given by my Father. As each has contended, so will each carry off a reward.'²⁵

When after some time the other ten heard these things, they were angry at the two brothers for demanding a special status for themselves. They had not yet received the Holy Spirit; they were still being led by certain human feelings: they were ambitious and envied one another. Jesus allowed his disciples to be subject to these feelings for some time, so that he might utterly remove them from the hearts of all who would succeed to the duties of the apostles.²⁶ They were glad to think that the request of James and John had been rejected by the Lord, not because James

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23 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 65.2 (on Matt 20:22) PG 58 619: 'Do you see how [Christ] immediately undercuts their presuppositions ... when ... he says: "You are talking to me of honour and crowns; I am talking to you about the contest and the sweat"?'

24 Cf Mark 10:38.

25 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 65.3 (on Matt 20:23) PG 58 621 also returns here to the imagery of the games, explaining that though the master of the games may have the power to bestow the prize on anyone he likes, in fact, he must observe the rules; to anyone asking for privilege he would say: 'It is not mine to give; the prize is for those for whom it has been prepared by their labour and sweat.'

26 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 65.4 (on Matt 20:24) PG 58 621-2 points to the later records to show that the affections the apostles experienced now were subsequently wholly removed after the Pentecost event.

and John were dreaming of certain carnal things, when it was a question of a spiritual kingdom, but because they had sought an honour greater than they deserved, honours that some thought were owed rather to themselves.

Therefore, just as Jesus checked the ambition of those who were making foolish requests, because they did not know what sort of thing they were asking for, so he curbed the envy and resentment of the other disciples that welled up from the same spring of ambition.²⁷ Thus he revealed that there is a huge difference between the nature of the worldly kingdom and the nature of the gospel kingdom. In the worldly kingdom the weaker is oppressed by the tyranny of the stronger; in the gospel kingdom primacy is nothing other than the utmost zeal for doing good to all. In the former, it is the most arrogant person who seems to be the greatest; in the latter, no one is more submissive in spirit than the one who especially deserves to be first. To fix this teaching in the minds of all, he called the other apostles also to him and said: 'You know that those who hold preeminent power among the gentiles exercise domination and tyranny over²⁸ the people they rule, and those who have the primacy exercise their power against their subjects. They look to their own authority to the detriment of the people, and they do not care about things that profit the multitude, but about things that enhance their own fortune and glory. It is not appropriate that it should be so among you. Among you, whoever wants to hold preeminence, let him be a minister to all, not holding office for himself, but for the people over whom he presides. Among you, whoever wants to hold first place, let him be the servant and the most lowly of all, for he does not assume the first place

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27 Cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 20:24-5): 'They were still carnal . . . Here, then, Jesus, taking advantage of the occasion instructed his disciples in humility, so that just as he checked the ambition of James and John he might also curb the resentment of the others.'

28 'Tyranny over': in an annotation on 20:25 (*principes gentium dominantur eorum*) Erasmus emphasizes the significance of the prefix *κατα-* in the Greek word *κατακυριεύουσιν*, which does not simply mean 'they dominate' but 'they dominate against,' and could well be rendered in Latin with the prepositions *in* or *adversus* 'against' or 'over.' The brief characterization of tyranny that follows reflects Erasmus' strictures elsewhere against tyranny; cf eg the *Institutio principis christiani* CWE 27 222-32. The literary tradition on the subject of tyranny reaches back to classical antiquity, but was particularly active in the Renaissance; see C.R. Thompson *The Translations of Lucian by Erasmus and St Thomas More* (Ithaca NY 1940) 41-3. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 65.3 (on Matt 20:25-7) PG 58 622 had called the desire to dominate a 'tyrannical passion.'

for any other purpose than to serve the advantage of all, chasing after neither honour nor gain. If this seems hard to you, look at me. Although I am your lord and master²⁹ and (as you truly profess) the Son of God,³⁰ nevertheless I do not claim authority for myself, nor do I use my power for my own advantage. But I have come to serve the advantage of all, and to such an extent that I am not reluctant to lay down my life, so that by the loss of one life³¹ I might redeem many. Therefore, among those who share this disposition, there is no reason why any one should canvass for office, nor is there any reason why anyone should envy the rank given another. For who would envy someone who strives only to profit someone else, even at the cost of his own life? Even if preferment is conferred on them, they do not claim it for themselves but surrender it to God.'

Now when Jesus along with his disciples left Jericho, a huge³² crowd of people followed him. And behold, two blind men were sitting by the road. They had sensed from the noise that the multitude was immense, and when they inquired what was happening, they learned that Jesus was near and was coming their way. Because they could not see him (though even if they had seen him they would not have been able to approach because of the crowd), they called upon Jesus with a loud voice, saying: 'Lord, pity us, Jesus, Son of David.' Jesus pretended not to hear³³ their cry so their faith and ardour would be more obvious to all.³⁴ Seeing that Jesus did not

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29 Cf John 13:13–15.

30 Cf Matt 16:16.

31 'Life . . . life': in the paraphrase for the Latin *vita* and *anima* respectively; in the Vulgate and in Erasmus' translation (20:28) *anima*, for the Greek *ψυχή*. Erasmus had to answer to Bêda for the ambiguity of language in the paraphrase; cf *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* and *Supputatio* LB IX 465E and 591E–2C. On the language of redemption cf chapter 26 n36 below.

32 huge] Added in 1534

33 'Pretended not to hear': *dissimulavit*. In the *Ratio* Holborn 195:33–196:12 Erasmus, speaking of the variety of approaches in Jesus' teaching, notes that 'in some cases he speaks in a sort of pretence' [*dissimulat*], and Erasmus illustrates with two examples from Matthew's Gospel – the story of the tribute in 17:24–7 and of the tax to Caesar in 22:16–22. On the 'dissimulating Christ' see Jacques Chomarat *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Erasme* (Paris 1981) I 658–62.

34 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 66.1 (on Matt 20:30) PG 58 625 explains that Jesus remained silent 'so their fervour might be made apparent.' Chrysostom also emphasized their evident faith: '[Christ] did not ask, as he did with many, whether they believed, for their shouting and the advance they made sufficed to make their faith clear to all.'

respond at all to their cry, and suspecting that it was annoying to him that two blind and public beggars³⁵ thus bawled in to his ears, the crowd shouted at them and told them to be quiet. But with their unwavering trust in Jesus, who they had heard was beneficent to all, they cried out even more loudly, repeating: 'Lord, pity us, Son of David.' When Jesus had rendered their faith quite conspicuous to all, and had taught us by their example that we must bombard the ears of God with fervent zeal and unwavering determination if we want to obtain something, he stopped (for they were not able to follow except only with their cry) and bade them to come to him. At the sound of his voice, they came. Jesus asked them what they meant by so great a clamour, and what they meant to obtain from him. Jesus was not ignorant of what they wanted, but he wanted the disability that afflicted them to be made known to everyone by their own acknowledgement, so that the credibility of the miracle would be better established.³⁶ 'Lord,' they said, 'we want you to open our eyes.' Since they said this with great emotion, they showed that their blindness was most distressing to them; indeed, he is very close to the light who is weary of his own blindness. Then Jesus touched their eyes, showing by his very countenance and eyes the feeling of pity, a feeling that befits every gospel person in grieving for others' misfortunes.³⁷ At once their eyes were opened and they saw, and together with the others they followed Jesus. Thus by his touch Jesus heals the mind blinded by worldly desires, and light is given so that we might follow his footsteps.

Chapter 21

As he proceeded towards Jerusalem, Jesus took great care to fix in his disciples' minds that he was going to his death knowingly and willingly, and

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35 'Public beggars': *mendici publici*. Erasmus distinguished the 'public' beggars from the 'beggars' of the mendicant orders; see the colloquy 'Beggar Talk' CWE 39 562–70.

36 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 20:32–3) PL 26 146A: 'He asks, as though he did not know what they wanted, so that from the clear response of the blind men their affliction might be known to all, and his power recognized from the healing.'

37 'Showing . . . misfortunes': These two clauses paraphrase and define the Greek *σπλαγχνισθεῖς*. Somewhat surprisingly, in his translation of the word in 20:34 Erasmus adopted the Vulgate's *misertus*; cf chapter 9 n55. For the 'look' as expressive see chapter 26 n91.

that no one would have hurt him if he had wanted to resist. It was for this reason that he had so often impressed on them that he must go to Jerusalem and there meet his death.¹ Sometimes he seemed to withdraw from danger,² he did so, however, not out of fear but to save himself for the time prescribed by his Father. In the event, when the time had come,³ not only did he not hide, but of his own accord he thrust himself forward, and did so in such a way that by the novelty of his display he stirred the minds of the entire city against him.⁴ He did not cease in the meantime from performing miracles, nor did he cease from preaching the truth; why, he inveighed even more freely against the Pharisees' way of life, and cast the money-changers out of the temple – actions he knew must the more exceedingly anger them. Because he invited them to himself with kindnesses, he did not make them guiltless, but even gave them the capability of doing what they wanted to do.

Consequently, nearing now the city of Jerusalem, he came to the Mount of Olives, where he thought he should prepare for his coming a novel procession,⁵ by which he derided in a certain way the pride of this world⁶ and offered his disciples, as yet still weak, some solace by this spectacle so that they might bear their Lord's death with more restraint. Therefore from this mountain he dispatched two of his disciples and said: 'Go into the

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1 Cf Matt 16:21, 20:17-19; Mark 10:33-4; Luke 18:31-3.

2 Cf Matt 12:14-16; Mark 3:6-7.

3 'In the event, when the time had come': *quod cum id temporis adesset* first in 1534, taking *quod* as an accusative of respect – 'in respect to which,' 'in the event'; previously, *quod cum tum adesset* 'When which [this time] had then come.' The expression may be intended as an echo of John 7:6 and 8.

4 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 66.1 (on Matt 21:1-5) PG 58 627 introduces his comments on Matt 21 by explaining why, when Jesus had previously always entered Jerusalem without pomp, he now makes a most conspicuous entrance: 'The prior occasions were at the beginning of the ministry (*οἰκονομία*), when he was not well-known and the time of his passion was far off. Hence he mixed with the people indistinguishably then, or rather hid himself . . . But after he had given sufficient proof of his power, and the cross was at hand, he thrust himself forward more manifestly, and more conspicuously did all the things that would inflame them.' Similarly Ps Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 37.1 (on Matt 21:1) PG 56 834 says that Jesus had often entered Jerusalem without ceremony, but that this time 'he entered with such glory so that he might inflame their hatred against him the more, because the time of his passion was here.'

5 The omission of the name of the town 'Bethphage' (21:1) may be accidental; Erasmus was undoubtedly aware of it, since in preparing his text and translation of Mark 11:1 he had corrected the Vulgate text, which had omitted it.

6 Cf chapter 26 n14 below.

village that is opposite you, and as soon as you enter you will find there an ass tied, and with her a colt upon which no one has yet sat.⁷ Untie both and bring them here to me. If anyone says anything to you, asking why you are untying them, or where or to whom you are taking them, just answer that the Lord has need of them. At this word they will immediately allow them to be led away.’ These things were done partly so that they would know that nothing was unknown to him, and that he had the power to command whomever he wanted and whatever he wanted if he had wanted to use his power;⁸ and partly so that the Jews would recognize that he was the Messiah from the very fact that they saw that this novel entrance had once been predicted by the prophet Zechariah.⁹ For he prophesied thus: ‘Tell the daughter of Zion: Behold, your king is coming to you, gentle and humble, sitting upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’¹⁰ The disciples departed and found everything as Jesus had foretold them. Immediately at the mention of the Lord the beasts were let go, though the Lord was not present, nor did the disciples manifest any authority. The owners did not know, to be sure, but nevertheless they sensed that it was the Lord of all who was ordering this. So their Lord might sit more comfortably,¹¹ the disciples spread their cloaks and thus set him on the back of the colt,¹² which served as a type of the gentile race:¹³ this race was unclean and was

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7 For the colt not yet ridden see Mark 11:2 and Luke 19:30.

8 The expression of thought points to 26:53, but the interpretation of events points to Chrysostom; cf next note.

9 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 66.2 (on Matt 21:1-5) PG 58 627: ‘From this [ie that the animals were released at the Lord’s command] he teaches the disciples that the Lord was able to prevent the Jews, even against their will, from attacking him ... but this was not what he wanted ... In addition ... he would fulfil the prophecy [of Zechariah].’

10 ‘Beast of burden’: *subiugalis*. The paraphrase here on 21:5 follows closely Erasmus’ translation of the verse, which, indeed, he adopted without variation from the Vulgate, including the word *subiugalis*. In the next sentence, however, he adopts the classical *iumenta*. For the citation see Zech 9:9.

11 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 21:6-7) PL 26 147C also states that the disciples spread out their garments ‘so that Jesus might sit more comfortably.’

12 That Jesus sat upon the colt reflects, evidently, the influence of the parallel narratives of Mark and Luke, cf Mark 11:7; Luke 19:35. The Matthean narrative seems to imply that Jesus sat on both animals. See next note.

13 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 21:4-5) PL 26 147B acknowledges that on a literal interpretation Jesus could not have sat on both the colt and the ass; one must therefore resort to the allegorical interpretation in which the ass represents the Jews, while the colt on which Jesus sat is the gentiles: ‘The ass that was the beast of burden – that had been tamed and had borne the yoke

wickedly serving all evil desires, but when it was covered by the virtues of the apostles,¹⁴ and the Lord Jesus Christ was received on its back, it ceased to be unclean,¹⁵ it ceased to serve former vices, and became the beast of burden of the one who cleanses and sanctifies all things.¹⁶ The ass¹⁷ is the mother of the colt because salvation is from the Jews. She was tied to the letter of the Law,¹⁸ and was bare of gospel virtues, but at the Lord's command they are both untied and are covered with apostolic garments.¹⁹ The apostles did not yet understand these things, but this, which would be understood only later, was now being signified.

When Jesus had now come to the foot of the mountain, a huge crowd came out from Jerusalem to meet him. So great was the good-will of the crowd, too, that many covered the road by strewing their garments upon it; others spread on the road branches cut from trees. Moreover, bands of people going before and following cheered and cried out these words from the prophecy of the psalms: 'Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.' Others cried: 'Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming.' Others cried:

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of the Law – is understood to be the synagogue; the colt of the ass, lascivious and free, the gentile nations.' Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 66.2 (on Matt 21:1-5) PG 58 627 seems untroubled by the the presence of the two animals: Jesus sits on the ass to represent humility; he sits on the colt to represent the salvation of the 'unclean gentiles.' Both the *Gloss* (on 21:7) and Nicholas of Lyra adopt the allegorical interpretation of ass and colt. Cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 251-2 who suggest that the two animals in Matthew's story arose from a misunderstanding of Zech 9:9.

- 14 Theophylact acknowledges that according to the historical sense, the garments were strewn on the path to honour Christ (so Erasmus below), but according to the allegorical sense he advises *Enarr in Matt* 21:8-9 PG 123 369B: 'Learn that after the apostles laid on their garments (that is, their virtues) the Lord then sat upon them. For unless the soul has been adorned with apostolic virtues, the Lord will not ride upon it.' Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 21:6-7) PL 26 147C also suggests that the apostolic garments may represent, among other things, the teaching of the virtues.

- 15 For the colt as a type of the 'unclean gentiles' see n13 above.

- 16 Cf Eph 5:26, evidently echoed here.

- 17 The ass ... garments] Added in 1534

- 18 Cf John 4:22: 'salvation is from the Jews' (NRSV); on the ass as a symbol of the Jews, and as yoked to the Law, see n13 above.

- 19 Cf Nicholas of Lyra (on 21:7) for whom the ass is the Jewish people 'who labour under the Law.' The *Gloss* (on 21:7) interpreting the apostolic garments as the divine precepts, adds that the people who had been bare were now adorned through the apostles, and had Christ as the one who rode upon them.

'Blessed is he who is coming, the king of Israel,'²⁰ and they praised God for the miracles they had seen Jesus perform. The Lord Jesus, who had always lived as a humble man, allowed this much honour to be shown him in order to make clear that the glory of this world would have been his, had he not preferred to spurn it rather than to embrace it – a choice made so that it might seem more disgraceful for those who professed to be his disciples to pursue a thing he spurned, though deserved by him alone. And yet this honour was appropriate for the coming of one who by his death was about to redeem the entire world.²¹ Accordingly, when Jesus had entered Jerusalem in this novel procession, all the city was stirred by the unusual spectacle, saying: 'Who is this?' The crowds that were accompanying him responded: 'This is the prophet Jesus who was born in Nazareth, a city of Galilee.' To them this seemed a splendid attribution,²² though it was far beneath his greatness, for the people still could not suspect that he was more than a man; and Christ had deliberately regulated his life in such a way that he would not publicly disclose his divine nature, since he would have convinced people in vain if they had afterwards seen him submit to death.

Amid this uproar, therefore, Jesus entered the temple and began immediately to exercise a sort of sovereign authority there. For when he saw that the temple had the appearance of a market and forum – some people selling, others buying, and money-changers sitting at their business – he was outraged by the disgraceful indignity of the situation, in accordance

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20 Erasmus takes the cries of the 'others' from Mark 11:10 and John 12:13, but cf also Luke 19:38. The evangelists cite Ps 118:25–6. For the expression '[Hosanna] in the highest' Erasmus here in the paraphrase follows the Vulgate's preferred reading *in excelsis* found in both Mark and Luke, though in his own translation he renders the expression in the parallel passages in all three synoptics *in altissimis* (so the Vulgate of Matt 21:9). Likewise in the nativity account of Luke 2:14 Erasmus follows the Vulgate of Luke by translating *gloria in altissimis deo*, not as is commonly found in popular iconography *gloria in excelsis deo*. Cf chapter 2 n6 above.

21 Erasmus may intend by this sentence a paraphrase on the word 'Hosanna,' following Jerome, who wrote *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 21:9) PL 26 149B that the word 'signifies that the advent of Christ is the salvation of the world.' In his annotation on 21:9 (*Osanna filio David*) Erasmus explains the word by citing Symmachus' translation, 'I earnestly entreat you, Lord, save me.' Albricht-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 252 explain the word similarly.

22 Nicholas of Lyra (on 21:11) cites Deut 18:15 and Acts 7:37, adding that since this was the prophet foretold by Moses, he deserved esteem. For the esteem implied by the attribution of the term 'prophet' see especially 23:29–30; also 13:57, 11:9, 14:5, and 21:26.

with that statement of the prophet: 'Zeal for your house has consumed me' [Ps. 69:9], and making a whip from ropes, he drove out of the temple all who were buying and selling, together with their merchandise. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and poured out their money on the ground; he scattered the seats of those who sold pigeons, offering as the just cause of his indignation a passage from Isaiah, who says in the *persona* of God: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.'²³ By this act Jesus was signifying something very different. For it did not disturb him so greatly that the temple was profaned with merchandise: oxen, sheep, goats, and doves; but he wanted to show that greed and gain would be a deadly bane to his church, of which the temple, whose religion was soon to be abolished, was a figure. For the temple that has been dedicated to sacrificing spiritual victims to God is turned into a den of robbers when the people are robbed under the pretext of religion and priesthood.²⁴ Nothing can be holy and uncorrupted where the pursuit of money rules, and this evil becomes intolerable when it is committed under the roof of the temple, when thieving is covered by the shadow of religion.²⁵ Against no class of men did Jesus vent his anger more passionately, but he has reserved for himself the authority to cast out such men when the time seems right.

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- 23 Several details from the narrative derive from John: the quotation from Ps 69:9 (John 2:17), the whip fashioned from cords (John 2:15), and the money of the money-changers 'poured out' (John 2:15). Erasmus correctly identifies the citation from Isa (56:7), but does not mention, even in his annotation on 21:12 (*mensas numulariorum*), that Jesus' response, 'You have made it a den of robbers,' echoes Jer 7:11. For the *persona* of the speaker see chapter 12 n21.
- 24 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 21:13) PL 26 150A–2A explains at length how the priests used the sacrificial system to extort money from the poor, and how the temple became a den of robbers; in this context he defines 'robber' as the 'person who chases after gain from religion' (cf 151B). The Latin *templum* is widely used by Erasmus to mean both 'temple' and 'church' (cf CWE 50 26 n5); the ambiguity encourages the reader to see here an allusion to the church of the sixteenth century.
- 25 Erasmus makes no attempt to explain here how the devotees were robbed, but cf the paraphrase on John 2:14 CWE 46 41–2 where he does offer an explanation: tradesmen and Levites conspired to sell the same animal more than once, while the money-changers took 'a dishonest profit . . . not much different from usury'; cf CWE 46 42 n32. Nicholas of Lyra (on 21:12) offered a simpler explanation: the priests appointed people to sell sacrificial animals to travellers from afar, and money-changers to lend money to the impecunious. See Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 255.

Then there came to Jesus in the temple the blind and lame – people whom the law prevents from entering the temple,²⁶ whereas the temple of Jesus receives all who hasten to wholeness. The blind came so that with their vision restored they might see Jesus whom they heard so extolled. The lame came so that following his footsteps they might reach the kingdom of heaven.²⁷ All, therefore, who came to him, he healed. At these events the chief priests and scribes ought at last to have come to their senses, yet they burned all the more with envy when they saw the people everywhere showing their approval with such eagerness, and²⁸ his present power in curing the lame and blind, his authority in throwing merchandise out with no one daring to resist, the children even crying out in the temple: ‘Hosanna to the Son of David.’ Taking offence at these things, they warned Jesus to restrain the clamour: otherwise he would seem to acknowledge such great honour, of which they judged him unworthy. It was rather for them to extol him more grandly since, distinguished by birth and skilled in the Law and in the oracles, they were capable of understanding from the many miracles they saw that he was the Messiah, the one they had awaited so many centuries. Now, from natural instinct, or rather by divine inspiration, children were giving voice to something they could not, by reason of their age, understand.²⁹ Accordingly, blind with envy and reeling with anger, they said to him: ‘Do you hear what these are saying?’ But Jesus, ready to shut their mouths by the testimony of Scripture, said: ‘Have you never read: “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise?”’³⁰ Do you therefore want me to shut the mouths that God has opened to praise his glory? I say to you, God will not allow your envy to silence his praises; far from it! For if the children were silent, these very stones would cry out – but you are harder than stones.’³¹ Leaving them with their envy, Jesus departed from Jerusalem and sought out Bethany. And there he stayed.

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26 Cf Lev 21:18.

27 Erasmus wavers between a literal and a figurative interpretation of the healing of the blind and the lame. The *Gloss* (on 21:14) interpreted the event ‘mystically’: ‘Jesus draws sinners to himself to illuminate the blind with knowledge, and to direct the lame into the way of righteousness.’

28 and] Added in 1534, presumably omitted in error in 1522 and 1524

29 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 67.1 (on Matt 21:16) PG 58 633 also contrasts the children who shout the truth without understanding, and the men who were deranged and mad.

30 Erasmus cites the Vulgate of 21:16 which is identical with the Vulgate of Ps 8:3.

31 Cf Luke 19:40.

In the morning, when he was returning to the city, he began to be hungry on the way. Since he had seen a fig tree beside the road, he hurried to it as if he were hoping to find food, but when he reached it, he found nothing on it except leaves. Accordingly, as though he were vexed because he was disappointed in his hope, he cursed it, saying: 'Let no one hereafter see fruit from you forever.' When the disciples returned by the same way, they saw that the fig tree Jesus had cursed had dried up with its leaves fallen off, and they marvelled, and said to him: 'Behold, the fig tree that you cursed has already dried up.' Jesus had allowed this to happen in order constantly to impress faith upon his disciples, because he knew that unless faith attended, his death, too, would be unfruitful for mortals. For he greatly thirsted for the salvation of the human race,³² and now he wanted his time of death to come. But although he found the form of religion³³ among the Jews, he did not find the fruit of faith³⁴ for which he was especially hungry. To the disciples, therefore, who were astonished by the sudden withering of the fig tree, he responded in this way: 'Why do you marvel at something unremarkable: the withering of a fig tree? The power of faith can do greater things. If you have strong and unwaivering faith, you will not only do what you saw happen to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain: "Remove yourself from that place and go into the sea," what you have ordered will immediately take place. And whatever you ask in your prayers you will obtain, provided trust is present.'

Now when Jesus entered the temple and was teaching the people, the chief priests and certain of the elders of the people, who could not bear that he was with impunity holding sway right in their own realm, came up to him and said: 'By what authority are you doing those things? Or who gave you this power?' Since no human had entrusted this authority to him, it remained that he would say that it had been entrusted to him either by God or by Beelzebub.³⁵ If he said from God, he would indeed have spoken

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32 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 21:18) PL 26 153B, explaining Jesus' approach to the fig tree, suggests that 'either he was showing the reality of his human nature or he was hungry for the salvation of believers.' Similarly Nicholas of Lyra (on 21:18).

33 For the 'form of religion' cf 2 Tim 3:5. Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 21:18–20) PL 26 153B–4A describes in detail the 'fruitless form' of religion among the Jews.

34 For Chrysostom, too, 'the "fruit" [of the tree] was faith'; cf *In Matt hom* 67.1 (on Matt 21:19) PG 58 634.

35 The accusation that Jesus' power came from Beelzebub is found at Matt 9:34 and 12:24; Mark 3:22; and Luke 11:15. Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 21:23)

truthfully, but he would only have provoked them. For they did not ask in order to believe what they were able to perceive from the situation itself, but to bring false charges. Therefore, not unaware of this fact, Jesus repelled the question with a question, like driving out one nail with another.³⁶ He said: 'I too will ask you something and if you answer me then I will answer your question. The authority by which John baptized, from where did it come to him, from heaven or from men?' They deliberated among themselves what they were going to reply, for they saw that the question was two-pronged, and that they would inevitably come down on one prong or the other. They were thinking: 'If we say from heaven, he will immediately say to us: "Why then did you not believe him since he preached the kingdom of God and offered testimony about me?" If we say from men, we must fear an uprising of the people because they are all convinced that John was a prophet.' Therefore, so they would not be caught, they replied that they did not know. Then Jesus said: 'Neither will I tell you from where I have this authority.'

Since a simple and obvious question could not elicit a confession of the truth, Jesus posed another in the form of a riddle, so that they would inadvertently condemn themselves. He said: 'What do you think about the matter I will now set forth? A man had two sons. Going to one he said: "Son, go and work in my vineyard today." He replied impudently, "No, I won't." But the same son, soon feeling regret, went into the vineyard. The father in like manner went to the other son and said: "Go and work today in my vineyard." He readily replied: "Of course, sir, I am on my way," and yet he did not go. Of the two, then, which seems to have satisfied the will of his father?' Not understanding where the argument was going, they responded: 'The first son, who soon thought better and went into the vineyard.' Then Jesus turning the parable back against them said: 'Really and truly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots are going into the kingdom of God before you. With their impious lives, these were formerly rebels against God, but then feeling penitent, they immediately obeyed the gospel teaching.³⁷ You who by title and profession are the people of God,

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PL 26 154C quotes Luke 11:15 at this point and states: 'For when they say: "With what power are you doing these things?" they are doubting that it is from the power of God, and they want it understood that what he does is of the devil.'

³⁶ Cf *Adagia* I ii 4 and CWE 46 161 n12.

³⁷ Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 67.3 (on Matt 21:32) PG 58 636 also emphasizes the transformed lives of the harlots: 'They did not continue to be harlots after they entered [the kingdom], but they believed and obeyed, and so entered cleansed and transformed.' The paraphrase offers an exposition of the Greek

and who said long ago and say today: “All things whatever that the Lord has said we will do,” [Exod 19:8]³⁸ and who always have the precepts of God on your lips,³⁹ and “the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord,”⁴⁰ summoned in so many ways – you are unable to be moved to repentance. For John came showing you the way of righteousness, and that the divine anger was imminent, and the axe was at the roots of the tree, unless you were to come to your senses and repent immediately. You saw the tax collectors and harlots obey him, deplorable people in your judgment. You could not be called to repentance either by the singular holiness of John, or his salutary teaching,⁴¹ or threats, or the example of tax collectors and harlots. Thus it happens that by their faith they snatch the kingdom of God away from you,⁴² while you, vainly professing God with your mouth, are excluded because of the unbelief of your heart.⁴³

He added a second parable, equally covert, by which he tacitly reviewed and set before their eyes the extraordinary ingratitude of those who, invited by God’s many blessings, not only did not repent, but even cruelly killed the prophets, one after the other, who had been sent so they would some day repent as a result of their preaching.⁴⁴ Not content with this, they were going to kill the Son of God last of all, and this after he had been cast out of the vineyard, indicating incidentally the place where he was to be crucified. By this discourse he showed both that their unconquerable malice was unworthy of forgiveness, since nothing had been overlooked that could have called them to a better state of mind,⁴⁵ and also that he was about to suffer nothing from them that he did not know beforehand.

The parable goes like this: ‘There was,’ he said, ‘a householder who planted a vineyard, and encircled it with a hedge, and dug a basin in it for

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verb μετεμελήθητε (21:32); cf the annotation on 2 Cor 7:10 (*stabilem*), where Erasmus cites Valla for the distinction between the nouns μετάνοια (a mind changed) and μετμέλεια (a concern [*cura*] changed for the better). Cf Albricht-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 263.

38 This text was cited also by Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 67.2 (on Matt 21:28–31) PG 58 635 in his homily on this passage.

39 Cf Exod 13:9; Deut 6:6–7.

40 Cf Jer 7:4.

41 or his salutary teaching] Added in 1534, except for ‘his,’ which previously was construed with ‘threats.’ For the divine anger and the axe see 3:7–10.

42 For the image of violence see 11:12 and the paraphrase on that verse.

43 An ironic allusion, evidently, to Rom 10:8–10.

44 Cf Luke 11:47–50; Matt 23:31 and 34.

45 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 68.1 (on Matt 21:33–42) PG 58 639: ‘This parable points to many things: . . . that nothing had been overlooked that contributed to their care . . . that their crime deserved no forgiveness.’

collecting the new wine squeezed from the clusters of grapes. In it he constructed a tower for guarding the vineyard, and what was laid out so beautifully he contracted⁴⁶ to tenants with the understanding that they should cultivate it in good faith, rendering the fruit to the proprietor. This done, he travelled abroad. When harvest time approached, he sent his servants to receive the fruit from them. But not only did the tenants not give the fruit they owed; they even laid hands on the servants, and beat some of them, killed others, and stoned yet others. When he learned of this, the householder did not immediately demand their punishment, but, expecting them to come to their senses, sent a greater number of servants to them than he had sent before, hoping that, under the constraint of the large number of servants, the tenants would do their duty. But these, too, they treated just as harshly as they had treated the earlier ones. The head of the household endured even this villainy, and finally, so that he might win them with his mildness, sent to them his own son, saying to himself: "Although they have viciously attacked my servants, nevertheless they will respect my son at least, when they see him come." But the more the tenants were called to repentance, the more they were incited to savagery. In fact, upon seeing the son, so far were they from respecting him that they soon entered into a plan to kill him, saying: "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and we will take possession of his inheritance." At once they laid hands on him, dragged him outside of the vineyard, and killed him. When, therefore, Jesus said, 'the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' The Pharisees replied: 'He will kill those miserable men miserably, and he will put his vineyard in the care of others who in good faith will render the fruit in its proper time to the lessor.' Thus were they deceived by the riddle into condemning themselves with their own mouths, pronouncing that they were worthy of punishment because of the invincible depravity of their hearts, and that the gentiles were rightly to be received into the grace of the gospel, since they were going to cultivate the vineyard with better faith than Jews had cultivated it.

After this, Jesus hinted that he indeed, condemned and rejected through their perversity, was going to die a miserable death, but that by his resurrection through the power of his Father he was to become illustrious throughout the entire world, and that he would be of such solid substance that whoever should strike against him would bring death upon himself. To indicate this in a way that would offend less, he cited a prophecy from

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46 contracted] First in 1534; previously 'contracted it'

the Psalms, saying: ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The very stone that the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner? This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.”’ [Ps 118:22–3] In this he signified that they were building a synagogue, but with Christ cast out, without whom no building is strong; nevertheless, the one rejected by them would be a very precious stone in the church of the gentiles. To this Jesus added: ‘Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of heaven will be taken away from you because you scorn what has been offered, and it will be given to another race that will bring forth fruits worthy of the gospel. And just as this stone will bring salvation to those who obey the gospel, so it will bring destruction to those who fight against it through their unbelief. For whoever strikes against this stone will be broken. Again, the one upon whom it has fallen will be crushed.’

At last the chief priests and scribes understood from the end of this discourse that the previous parables too, through which they had been tricked into pronouncing sentence on themselves, had been directed against them. For that reason their madness became so inflamed that they would have laid hands upon him then if they had not been afraid of the people, because Jesus was held in great esteem by many and was regarded as a prophet.

Chapter 22

Jesus again added another similitude in order to fix more deeply in the minds of the Jews that it was because of their own stubborn malice that they were being rejected from gospel salvation, and that the gentiles were going to possess what the Jews had rendered themselves unworthy to possess; also that no one is excluded from the kingdom of God, but the Jewish nation had the honour of being called first of all, and called enticingly, not to sad or sordid things, but to a wedding, that is, to honour, to delight, and to the freedom of the gospel. And not only had they been invited by the prophet John and by Christ himself, but even after his death they were to be called by the apostles; also the heralds of the gospel would not turn to the gentiles until they had for a long time suffered many taunts and punishments among their own people in return for their kindness – so that the people who spurned God’s kindness, so often offered, could blame no one because they were later punished with many calamities.¹

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¹ This introduction to the parable appears to echo the introduction of Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 69.1 (on Matt 22:1–6) PG 58 647–9: Upon the Jews was

The similitude goes like this: 'In relation to you,' he said, 'the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a certain king who, about to hold a wedding feast for his son, sent out his servant to invite many people to his son's wedding. But the people, on this single invitation, refused to come. Then the king sent several servants, who invited them even more earnestly to hurry to the wedding feast that was now ready, and who addressed them with these words: "Behold, the feast has been prepared, my bulls and fattened calves are killed, and all the rest has been made ready. It remains only for you to come so that these should not have been made ready in vain." But they again disregarded the one who invited them. When the servants who were issuing the invitation insisted, each made a different excuse:² this one had to visit a farm he had recently purchased, that one had to inspect the cattle he had bought, another had a newly wedded wife from whom he could not bear to be separated. Now inasmuch as these men had given their preference not to a feast that was so happy, but to some cheap and sordid cares arising from perishable things, their insane folly affected only themselves. Others, however, added cruelty to ingratitude for, after they had inflicted many insults upon the royal servants who had invited them repeatedly to so great an honour, at length they even killed them. When the king heard what they had done he was extremely angry, his spurned gentleness no doubt turning into fury. He sent his guards and killed those murderers, and not content with that he set their city ablaze with fire.' Jesus said this much telling them beforehand in a covert way of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem.³

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bestowed the honour of being called first, not to something sad and harsh, but bright, full of joy, a feast of delicacies (649). God had patiently invited them over the course of many years, by all the prophets, by John, by Christ (648), and even after Christ's death they were called for a period of forty years by the apostles, whom they tortured and killed. In their senseless arrogance they refused to heed the invitation, so the gentiles were called, Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews scattered (see n3 below).

- 2 Matthew speaks in general terms of a 'farm' and 'business,' but the 'excuses' as presented in the paraphrase here are taken from the more dramatic narrative of Luke 14:18-20.
- 3 Exegetes commonly understood the parable to refer to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem; cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 69.1 (on Matt 22:7) PG 58 649: 'Moreover, with these words he predicts the things that were done under Vespasian and Titus'; Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 22:7) PL 26 160A: 'We should understand the armies to be either the avenging angels or the Romans, under the generals Vespasian and Titus, who slaughtered the people of Judea and burned the rebellious city'; and Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 22:1-7 PG 123 385B:

Next, he gave a hint that the gentiles were everywhere to be called⁴ to the gospel, inasmuch as they were better than the Jews: 'Then the king said to his servants: "The wedding feast is ready, but since those who have been called have shown that they are unworthy of the feast despite the fact that I had prepared it especially for them, hurry in every direction through the crossroads and public squares, and whomever you find – worthy, unworthy, weak, maimed, blind, lame – call them without distinction to the wedding feast until my house is full." The servants departed and gathered an indiscriminate multitude, assembled from all places, and the feast was filled with guests.'

After this, because he had previously shown that the Jews were going to be severely punished for afflicting and at length killing the apostles who called them so often, Jesus hinted that grievous punishment also awaits those who, once they have professed the gospel life, return to the squalor of their former lives.⁵ He said: 'The king entered to see the guests reclining at the feast, and among them he saw one who was not wearing a wedding garment. He said: "Friend, how have you entered here when you do not have a wedding garment?" But the man was embarrassed and said nothing. Then the king ordered his servants to bind him hand and foot, to remove him far from the feast, and hurl him into the deepest darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth: the dignity and splendour of the feast transformed into the most despicable prison, extreme pleasure into extreme torment. Moreover, although many are called, few are chosen. All are called freely, but only those are chosen who obey the call and right to the end respond to the divine kindness towards them, persevering in the pursuit of gospel godliness.'⁶

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'But the king sent his armies, that is, the Romans, who destroyed the disobedient Jews, and burnt their city Jerusalem.' See n1 above.

4 to be called] *vocandas* in 1534 and 1535; in 1522 and 1524 *vocatas* 'called.' Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 22:8-10) PL 26 160B understands the passage to refer to all of the gentiles, a diverse group, among whom were those who were very good, better than the Jews in that they 'did through nature what the Law required [Rom 2:14], while the Jews disobeyed the Law they were given.'

5 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 69.2 (on Matt 22:11-13) PG 58 650-1: 'Just as those [invitees] showed their arrogance by not attending, so do you, too, by coming to the table with a corrupt life, that is, with filthy garments.'

6 Origen *Comm in Matt* 17.24 (on Matt 22:14) PG 13 1548C defines the 'chosen' as those who live well, 'transformed by the renewing of the mind,' while the 'called' are those who are careless and 'conformed to this world.' Here, however, Erasmus may have in mind rather the exegesis of this verse that he

When the Pharisees perceived that it was they who were being censured by these parables, far from being goaded to repentance, they thought only of killing Jesus. So great are the evils of envy and ambition. They possessed the will to commit murder, but they lacked the opportunity. They did not fear God, the avenger of such crimes, but they feared the people.⁷ They decided, therefore, to take a different route, and to accomplish the deed by a hidden stratagem so that the unpopularity of the deed should be diverted to Caesar and Caesar's prefects.⁸ Accordingly, for the present at least, they went away, hiding their anger. But taking counsel together, they agreed that Jesus should be caught by his answer to a question to be posed by people secretly put up to the job, and he should become liable to princes, so that he would be put to death by them as guilty of treason and as the author of sedition, the case not involving the Pharisees at all. This was their stratagem. Since Judea had now begun to be a Roman tributary, Augustus put king Herod, the son of Antipater, in charge of collecting the taxes.⁹ On this matter opinions differed. To some it seemed improper for a people dedicated to God to pay tribute to idolatrous princes; this was the opinion of those attached to the Pharisees. Again there were those who supported

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found in Origen's *Commentary on Romans*, and which he cites in his annotation on Rom 1:1 (called an apostle) CWE 56 6 (cf 7 n14), where the 'elect' are those who persevere to the end and so receive a reward. Similarly Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 22:14) PL 26 161B: 'In the [parable of the] wedding banquet it is not the beginning but the end that matters.'

7 Here the paraphrase looks back to Matt 21:45–6.

8 The sequence of events and some of the details – the politically coloured stratagem, the 'people secretly put up to the job' – derive from the parallel narrative in Luke 20:19–20, from which Chrysostom also constructs some of his exegesis; cf eg *In Matt hom* 70.1 (on Matt 22:15) PG 58 655: 'Because they feared the crowd, they did not dare arrest him, and they entered on another path to get him by making him out to be guilty of political crimes.'

9 In his annotation on 22:15 (*ut eum caperent*) Erasmus gives a similar account of the historical background to the question put to Jesus. What Erasmus says there and here is reminiscent of Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 22:15) PL 26 162A–B and consistent with Josephus, cf *Antiquities of the Jews* 17.13.5–18.1.1: on the banishment of Archelaus in AD 6 Herod the tetrarch was given Galilee, while Judea was attached to the province of Syria and placed under a procurator, who began to tax the Jews. Cf also Josephus *Jewish Wars* 2.8.1. In fact, Augustus had confirmed Herod the Great in his rule, and while Judea continued to pay tribute to Rome, he had given Herod unlimited authority in internal affairs, including finances (cf the article 'Herod' in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* 8 379). For the Herods see chapter 2 n32 above. The reference here is to Herod the Great, son of the Idumean Antipater.

Caesar and said that it was right to pay the tribute. The defenders of this opinion were called Herodians¹⁰ because Herod was in charge of collecting the tribute. There had been, however, a little before this two men, Theudas and Judas, who publicly maintained that the Jews, a people devoted to God, did not owe tribute to any pagan prince, and they were therefore punished as insurrectionists.¹¹ Now the Pharisees were hoping that Christ, promoting religion rather than the pagan and impious Caesar, would pronounce with customary boldness against the Herodians, that they must not pay tribute to Caesar; hoping also that the Herodians would then convey this to Herod,¹² and that Jesus would receive the same punishment as Theudas and Judas before him. However, if he pronounced that tribute should be paid, they would then slanderously charge him with fawning upon ungodly princes, while favouring divine religion less.

Therefore, they secretly incited some of their disciples to entice him into their net with feigned flattering speech while the Herodians and a packed crowd of men were present; thus the exchange would not lack witnesses.¹³ So great was their blindness that they did not rest, though strategies to catch Jesus had been tried in vain so often. Nor were they ashamed of the inconsistency in now calling him 'teacher' when before they had

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10 On the Herodians cf chapter 16 n17 above.

11 These historical events are introduced at this point in Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 70.1 (on Matt 22:17) PG 58 655: 'They were now paying tribute, since their state had been incorporated into the Roman empire. Therefore, because they had recently seen Theudas and Judas executed for plotting rebellion, they desired to place [Jesus] too under suspicion of the same thing'; and Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 22:16–22 PG 123 389AB: '[They asked the question in this way] so that if he said that it was not right to pay tribute to Caesar, they would arrest and kill him, just as they did to the followers of Theudas and Judas, who said that one should not sacrifice in the name of Caesar.' Erasmus here follows his patristic sources (and the account in Acts 5:36–7) in associating Theudas and Judas, in that order. Josephus, on the other hand, places Judas at the time of the 'introduction of taxation' (probably the census under Quirinius in 6 BC [see the article 'Theudas' in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 528]), and Theudas much later, during the time when Fadus was procurator of Judea (AD 44–6); cf *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.5.1. Cf CWE 50 45 n60.

12 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 70.1 (on Matt 22:17) PG 58 655 describes the Pharisees' intentions similarly: 'They preferred that he say something against the Herodians. Therefore they sent their disciples to prompt him to this by their presence, so that they might deliver him to the governor as a subversive.'

13 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 70.1 (on Matt 22:16–17) PG 58 655: 'They interrogated him in the presence of the crowd so that they might have more witnesses . . . Observe the flattery and deceit.'

falsely accused him of having the spirit of Beelzebub.¹⁴ And they praised his candour extravagantly, so he would not be afraid to offend the Herodians. They said: 'Teacher, we know that you are truthful, and that you neither flatter anyone, nor lie about anything, but that you teach with great boldness what is pleasing to God, not what seems right to men. For you do not fear any mortal, nor with you is there any regard for persons. Therefore, tell us what you think is right: Is it lawful or not for the Jewish people, who are devoted to the religion of God, to pay a tax to Caesar or not, and shall we pay it hereafter or shall we not?'

To show that he was not deceived by their cunning flattery Jesus so regulated his reply with his amazing wisdom that he made himself liable to neither party. Instead, he pointed out to both parties what had more to do with their salvation: that they should certainly pay the tribute of godliness to God, the highest Prince. He said: 'Why are you putting me to the test, hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax.' They were trying to ensnare Jesus with his own words; he in turn would ensnare them with their responses. They presented, therefore, a coin that had on it the image and official name of Caesar. In order to make it clear that he had not come to bring forward laws concerning things that have nothing to do with godliness, things that may, according to circumstances, be done either rightly or wrongly, he looked at the coin – as though he, who was treating heavenly things, recognized all too little the letters and images of that sort – and asked whose inscription and whose image it was.¹⁵ They answered: 'Caesar's.' Then Jesus said: 'Render, therefore, to Caesar whatever is Caesar's, but, more importantly, render to God the things that are God's.' By this he indicated that it does not at all stand in the way of godliness if someone who is devoted to God gives tribute to a profane prince, even if the tribute is not owed; such a person prefers to submit rather than provoke. This is so especially of those things that make one poorer, not ungodly. Other-

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14 For the accusation cf 12:24. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 70.1 (on Matt 22:17) PG 58 655 alludes to John 10:20 (many were saying, 'He has a demon'). Chrysostom, however, contrasts the accusation 'he has a demon' with the flattering assertion, 'we know that you are true'; Erasmus, on the other hand, notes the flattery in the designation 'teacher.'

15 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 3 (on Matt 22:20) PL 26 163B, who attempts to explain the apparent ignorance of Jesus: 'Jesus was certainly able to know whose image was on the coin, but he asks them so that he can make an effective response.' Christology presupposed that the God-man knew everything; hence the ignorance implied by Jesus' question required explanation. On the dissimulating Christ see chapter 20 n33.

wise, if what the prince exacts makes us ungodly, it is no longer Caesar's tribute but the devil's.¹⁶ When they heard this response they marvelled, first, because they understood that their treacherous plan had not been concealed from him, and next, because of his astonishing prudence for which human craftiness set traps in vain.¹⁷ They marvelled, it is true, but they were not changed. Leaving him, they stopped provoking him, since they could not defeat him, but they did not stop hating the one they ought to have loved.

Therefore, when the Pharisees and Herodians had departed, the Sadducees accosted him. Among the Jews, this party is less sophisticated and less learned,¹⁸ differing from the Pharisees in that they deny that there is a resurrection, and going so far as to believe neither that there are angels, nor that spirits exist apart from bodies: they suppose that what is not seen does

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16 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 70.2 (on Matt 22:21) PG 58 656 elaborates the verse in the same way: 'When you hear, "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's," understand that this only means things that do not harm godliness; so that if they do harm godliness, the tribute and tax are not Caesar's but the devil's.' The position Erasmus articulates here in paraphrase – that Christians acknowledge the authority of their rulers in everything except what 'makes us ungodly' – is established elsewhere also; cf the paraphrase on Rom 13:1–4 CWE 42 73–4, and the annotation on Rom 13:1 (those, however, which are from God) CWE 56 347. But Erasmus' more customary interpretation of this dominical saying is found in his paraphrases on the parallel passages in Mark and Luke: we owe tribute to Caesar, but we owe our soul, our mind, to God, since this is the image of God. In this interpretation Erasmus follows a long line of Christian exegetes, extending back at least as far as Tertullian; cf CWE 48 165 and n32 and CWE 49 145–6 and n9. It is also the interpretation that is given in the annotation on Matt 22:25 (*reddite igitur Caesari*), added in 1519, and in the *Ratio* Holborn 258:21–3.

17 In this paraphrastic narrative of 'temptation' the language of cunning, deceit and treachery invites comparison with the language of the paraphrase on Matt 4:1–11 (the temptation of Christ). There the devil is called the *insidiosus tentator* 'the scheming tempter' and *dolosus insidiator* 'the deceiving schemer'; here the tempters speak with *insidiosa blandiloquentia* 'cunning flattery,' devise a *dolosum commentum* 'a treacherous plan,' and *tendunt insidias* 'set traps.' Cf the language in the parallel passage in the paraphrase on Luke 20:20–6 CWE 48 163–6. In his annotation on Matt 4:3 (*accedens tentator*) Erasmus suggests that the Greek *πειράζων* 'tempter' could have the sense of 'dissimulator.'

18 For the Sadducees' ignorance of Scripture see the paraphrases on Mark 12:24 and 28 CWE 49 146, 147 and 146 n14. Nicholas of Lyra (on 22:29) observed that the Sadducees' error arose from their ignorance of Scripture, but Nicholas acknowledged that the Sadducees did not receive the writings of the prophets; cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 273.

not exist.¹⁹ Since they had heard that Christ had frequently made mention of eternal life and a future age and the resurrection of the just, they accosted him to test whether he agreed with the Pharisees, or taught things he himself opposed, so that they might either snipe at him if he contradicted himself, or mock him if he agreed with the Pharisees. Therefore they set him this problem, saying: 'Teacher, Moses proclaimed this law: If a man takes a wife and then dies without children, the brother of the dead man is to marry the widow left by his brother, and joining with her, he is to raise up a posterity for his dead brother.'²⁰ Now there lived among us seven brothers, the first of whom took a wife, then died without children. The next oldest brother married her, and he also died without children. So likewise it happened to the third and fourth brothers, on up to the seventh brother: all died without children. At last, the woman, who had been married to the seven brothers, also died. In the resurrection, then, who of all the brothers will have her for his wife, for she cannot be shared by all, and all were equally married to her?

Jesus deigned to respond to this question, since it arose more from ignorance than from malice.²¹ For truly a person who errs out of ignorance deserves to be taught, but those who inquire out of pure malice are not worthy of an answer. He said: 'You err, you who read the Scriptures but do not understand them. You imagine that there is nothing beyond the corporeal things you see, and you do not know the power of God, who is more wonderful in the things that are not seen. Here where people are born and die in alternating succession, marriage provides for the propagation of the human race. But when mortality will now be swallowed up and people will be spiritual (as the case will be in the resurrection, which will render us the same indeed, but changed),²² no man will take a wife, nor will any woman marry. For there will be no need for coition there, where there will be no

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19 Cf Acts 23:8: 'The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit' [NRSV]. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 70.2 (on Matt 22:23) PG 58 657 also describes the belief of this 'sect of the Jews': 'They say there is no resurrection, or angel or spirit; they are of a ruder mentality, and acknowledge the existence of material being only.' Cf CWE 50 31 n5 and 133 n7.

20 Cf Deut 25:5.

21 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 70.2 (on Matt 22:28) PG 58 657 also notes Jesus' manner here: 'Observe how he answers them in the manner of a teacher. For even though they had come to him with malicious intent, nevertheless the question really arose out of ignorance.' For the distinction between malice and ignorance in assessing culpability see CWE 49 146 n14

22 For the thought here cf 1 Cor 15:35–54.

death. Yet those who particularly²³ belong to the resurrection of the just²⁴ live without matrimony just as the angels of God live in heaven, already here practising²⁵ as far as they can what they will be in the resurrection. They would rather beget souls for God than bodies for the world.²⁶

After this, silently noting that their absurd question arose from a false conviction that led them to believe there was no resurrection, he did not disdain to pluck out this opinion also from their minds, and showed them that the resurrection too is drawn from the books of Moses, with whose authority they had attacked Jesus. He said: 'But why do you hold to a wrong opinion about the resurrection of the dead, as though Moses did not openly teach this too, whose writings you read with dull hearts and little attention? Have you not read what God said in the writings of Moses: "I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob"? If these men had entirely perished with the death of their bodies, he would not say that he *is* their God, but that he *was* their God. If he is their God, certainly their souls are alive, and they too, themselves, in some manner entire, are alive through the hope of the future resurrection. God is life, and he is not the God of the dead, who have ceased to exist, but the God of the living.' So he taught them that there is indeed a resurrection, but that it is not such as they imagined it to be when they proposed the foolish question about the seven brothers. When the people saw that he had stopped the mouths of all with his wise answers, they marvelled at his effective and ready teaching.

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23 particularly] Added in 1534

24 On the phrase 'resurrection of the just' cf Luke 14:14, in the paraphrase on which Erasmus implies that the 'just' are those who assist 'every need of one's neighbour' CWE 48 64.

25 'Practising': *meditantes*. Erasmus frequently speaks of practising in this world the future life in heaven; cf eg the paraphrase on Rom 14:17 CWE 42 81: '... we must practise those things which can be carried with us into that heavenly life.' See CWE 44 188 n6 for an exposition of this thought, especially as a transformation of the '*meditatio mortis* of medieval piety.' Cf n26 immediately below.

26 In an annotation on 22:30 (*sed erunt sicut angeli dei*) LB VI 116E–F Erasmus explains that the resurrection can in a sense be regarded as already existing in present time: 'Hereafter the resurrection will be made manifest in us; in the meantime, the business of the resurrection is accomplished in us.' Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 70.3–5 (on Matt 22:30–2) PG 58 658–62 finds in this passage a point of departure for a description of the life of celibates, 'who neither marry nor are given in marriage ... but for the most part live as though without bodies,' thus approximating the life of angels (70.5 PG 58 660).

It did not displease the Pharisees that he silenced the Sadducees, especially on a subject about which they held diametrically opposed views. Consequently, when the Pharisees saw that the Sadducees had been rendered speechless, and their ignorance of Scripture even cast in their teeth, the Pharisees regrouped, as though recovering their courage, and secretly incited a certain expert in the Law to accost Christ with an obviously learned question,²⁷ so that he might either accuse Christ of ignorance or himself carry off praise for his erudition. He said: 'Teacher, what is the chief and greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus wanted to show that the very people who were extolling themselves with their profession of the Law were farthest away from observing its greatest²⁸ commandment, since they were totally consumed by envy and hatred of their neighbour and by the rest of the vices, which have no affinity at all with sincere love.²⁹ He also wanted to show that no one loves God who is unjust towards his neighbour. He therefore replied: "'You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and your³⁰ whole soul and your whole mind.'"³¹ This is the first and greatest commandment. Yet no one truly keeps it unless one also keeps the second that is similar to it, since the one depends on the other: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." For whatever the entire Law commands, whatever the Prophets teach, this is all comprised in these two commandments: whoever loves God with his whole heart will neglect nothing that he has commanded, and he who loves his neighbour as himself will neither steal, nor commit adultery, nor give false testimony, nor covet another person's things. In sum, he will do nothing to another person that he does not want done to himself.³²

Then³³ the Pharisee, from a tempter now very nearly become a disciple, added: 'You have spoken truly and correctly, teacher, that there is one

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27 With the dramatic representation of the details in this paraphrase on 22:34-5 compare Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 71.1 PG 58 661: 'Because he had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees came to the attack again ... putting forward a lawyer ...'

28 greatest] Added in 1534

29 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 71.1 (on Matt 22:36-7) PG 58 661: '[By his response Christ] shows that they had come because they had no love, they were consumed by envy, overcome with jealousy.'

30 your] Added in 1534

31 For this and the subsequent commandment see Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18. Erasmus cites from the Vulgate New Testament.

32 Cf Matt 7:12, where the 'Golden Rule' is said to be 'the Law and the Prophets.'

33 For the remainder of this account, Erasmus paraphrases Mark 12:32-4, to which Chrysostom also refers *In Matt hom* 71.1 (on 22:37-40) PG 58 662.

God, and that there is no other besides him, and that he alone above all things must be loved with all our strength, and that all our affections must be directed to him alone, and that to love one's neighbour as one's self is greater than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.' Seeing that he had responded wisely and was not continuing to ensnare him, Jesus said to him: 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' For the Pharisee understood what was best, he only failed to follow with his heart the knowledge in his head. Meanwhile, Jesus silently stung the conscience of certain of the Pharisees who were instigating a deadly plot against him. For that reason, although they had only asked about the most important commandment, the observance of which they falsely claimed for themselves, he added of his own accord the second as well about loving one's neighbour. They did not yet suspect that Christ was God, yet they could not deny that he was at least their neighbour and one deserving their good will, against whom nevertheless they were devising what no one would want to happen to himself.

A larger crowd of Pharisees then convened. As they had put Jesus to the test with many questions, he in turn now proposed a question for them too, hinting – obscurely, to be sure, and in a riddle, which he left for the apostles to explain later in their own time³⁴ – that he had not only the human nature they saw and against which they were going to vent their rage, but also a divine nature, which they could have inferred to some extent from his very deeds, if envy, hatred, ambition, greed, and the other vices had not blinded their minds.³⁵ Therefore he asked those gathered together what they thought about the Messiah, whose son he was, that is, from whose stock he had sprung or would spring.³⁶ Without hesitation they answered: 'David's.' Whereupon Jesus said: 'Then what does it mean that David, inspired by the heavenly Spirit, calls him Lord in the mystic psalm when he is his son? For thus it is written: "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." [110:1] How is it maintained, if the Messiah is the son of David, that the father calls the son Lord?' No one there could loosen this knot, since they were still unable to entertain any notion about the divine nature of the Messiah:³⁷ just as Christ according to the human body was the son of David, so he was according

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34 An allusion to the exposition of Ps 110:1 in New Testament literature; cf Acts 2:34-5; Heb 1:13, 10:12-13. The passage is echoed also in 1 Cor 15:25.

35 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 71.2 (on Matt 22:42) PG 58 663 likewise finds Jesus' question motivated by the fact that the Pharisees saw only his human nature, and it was now time to speak of his divine nature.

36 or would spring] Added in 1534

37 of the Messiah] First in 1534; previously 'of Jesus'

to his divine nature the Lord of all, not only of David. After this no one dared to approach him with questions, since they saw the plots meant for him were rebounding on their own heads.³⁸

Chapter 23

Jesus had silenced the Pharisees many times while the multitude looked on. Accordingly, in order that he not utterly undermine their authority with the people over whom they presided as teachers, he taught that the Pharisees must be heard indeed, but not imitated. Although it is especially fitting that one who undertakes the office of teacher win confidence in and respect for his teaching by the integrity of his life, nevertheless there is no advantage in utterly condemning, because of the wicked life of a teacher, teaching that is itself salvific. The reverence that the character of such people does not merit must be given to the author, whose precepts they are reciting. God's law is not polluted if it issues from the mouth of a wicked teacher; though it is indeed useless to the teacher, it nonetheless profits the one who receives instruction.

Turning away, therefore, from the Pharisees, in whom he saw no hope of leading a purer life,¹ Jesus spoke to the crowds and his disciples in this way: 'Of themselves the scribes and Pharisees betray themselves to you – how corrupted they are in heart, how invidious, how greedy, and how desirous of vainglory. Yet one must listen to them because of the authority of their office. They occupy the seat of Moses, whose law they teach. What they teach is holy, for their doctrine is not their own but another's; their lives, however, differ vastly from their teaching. Accordingly, the things they prescribe to you based on the authority of Moses observe and do, but in the meantime² beware that you do not conform your character to their lives. If they were living as they teach, it would be right to imitate

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38 on their own heads] First in 1534; previously 'on their heads'

¹ Erasmus begins the paraphrase on this chapter in much the same way as Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 72.1 (on Matt 23:1) PG 58 667 had begun his homily, saying that Jesus turned to speak to the crowd 'when he had imposed silence on the Pharisees . . . when he had shown that [the Pharisees] suffered from a disease with no hope of a cure.' Chrysostom continues with the theme Erasmus has just broached: the wickedness of a teacher does not invalidate his teaching if it is good. Christ did not remove corrupt teachers from their position; he left no room for disciples to disobey.

² in the meantime] Added in 1534

them in every way. Now they do not practise the things they teach. With the greatest severity they demand from others more than the entire Law,³ while they indulge themselves. Towards others they are austere, towards themselves very lenient.⁴ They bind up heavy and unbearable bundles of commandments and place them upon the shoulders of others, while they themselves do not deign to touch these burdens with even a finger. With their regulations they weigh down the Law, onerous enough by itself, in order to procure for themselves a reputation for learning and sanctity. If they perform any act according to the precept of the Law, they do not do it from the heart, but to win praise and popular favour.⁵ They are actors, and, as though masked with a false image of religion, they act out a play in order to be seen by men.⁶ Now a person does not keep the Law unless he fulfils what the law-giver intended; yet⁷ what our Lawgiver chiefly requires is a sincere heart. As for the Pharisees, whatever they do, they do it to strive after an empty reputation for holiness among the rabble. After the precepts of the Law had been published God added: "You will bind them on your hand, and they will be steadfast before your eyes." [Deut 6:8] Clearly he meant that one must never forget the precepts of God, but that all the actions of one's life must conform to their rule;⁸ yet the Pharisees,

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3 Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 23:4-5 PG 123 396C also notes the burden imposed by the Pharisees, who 'handed down traditions even beyond the Law.'

4 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 72.1 (on Matt 23:4) PG 58 668: 'He speaks of a double villainy, that they are merciless in demanding zealous purity of life from their subjects, and allow themselves great freedom to do as they please.'

5 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 23:6) PL 26 168B similarly indicts 'teachers of false religion who chase after popular favour'; cf n22 below.

6 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 72.2 (on Matt 23:5) PG 58 669 also likens the scribes and Pharisees to actors, saying that it is vainglory that 'removes them from God; it makes them contend in another theatre, and they perish. For everyone plays the kind of role that reflects the nature of the audience he strives to please' (ie spectators given to laughter want the actor to assume a humorous role; audiences given to piety look for 'actors' who play the 'holiness' role). The language of the paraphrase here reflects the language that elsewhere in the *Paraphrase* characterizes hypocrites: actors, wearing masks, striving for glory and popular favour; cf the paraphrases on 6:1, 15:6, 16:27 and chapter 16 n3. In this way Erasmus anticipates the repeated characterization in the biblical text below of scribes and Pharisees as 'hypocrites' (23:13, 23, 25, 27, 29).

7 yet ... heart] Added in 1534. 'Our Lawgiver' renders the Latin *is* 'this one' referring to *legislator* just preceding.

8 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 23:6) PL 26 168A: 'When the Lord had given the precepts of the Law through Moses, he added: "You will bind these on your hand and they will be steadfast before your eyes." The sense is: Let

utterly neglecting to observe the divine commandments, vaunt themselves with a false display before the people. They walk about wearing broad phylacteries, they proceed along with wide and magnificent fringes. They display the precepts of the Law inscribed upon these, although the precepts are nowhere evident in their lives.⁹ Yet these things ought to have been inscribed on their hearts;¹⁰ it was right that they be expressed by their lives. Thus would they be pleasing in the eyes of God, for whom alone our lives, are, as it were, a sort of play. But with disdain for God as spectator they chase after the most sordid praise among the ignorant multitude.¹¹

‘Although it is everywhere right for a teacher to exhibit extraordinary virtue by his character, words, and even by his very countenance, Pharisees nowhere do anything else than what is most vain and scarcely even worthy of a human. If they are invited anywhere to dinner, there, like children eager for approval, they are very pleased with themselves because they are given the more honoured place. In synagogues and public meetings they love the honour of the first seat. When they spend time in the market-place, they rejoice at being greeted with honour. Their crests rise whenever they hear people utter that magnificent title Rabbi, as if either¹² they alone are worthy of the honour, or they alone know anything, though they are least before God by the very fact that to themselves they seem greatest, and especially foolish by the fact that they regard themselves especially wise.¹³ Honour is owed to God alone, for he alone is truly great and to be glorified; praise for wisdom is owed to God alone, for he alone has authority. Whatever of these things is to be found in human beings is only a sort of shadow compared

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my precepts be in your hand in order that they might be fulfilled by your deeds; let them be before your eyes so that you meditate on them day and night.’

9 Erasmus describes the phylacteries and fringes in his annotation on 23:5 (*ut videantur ab hominibus*). The fringes (or tassels), he says, were bound with sharp pins deliberately designed to prick and thus to remind the person of the Law; the phylacteries, bound on forehead and hand, contained parchments on which the Law was written. He adds, ‘Would that this kind of actor were not so omnipresent among Christians, compared to whom the Pharisees could seem straightforward and sincere.’ For the fringes (NRSV; tassels RSV) see Num 15:38-9, for the phylacteries, Deut 6:8, and cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 278-9.

10 Cf Jer 31:33; also Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 23:6) PL 26 168C: ‘The Pharisees did not understand that these must be carried in one’s heart, not on one’s body.’

11 For the theatre image see n6 above.

12 either] Added in 1535

13 Cf Rom 1:22.

to the greatness of God, and even the shadow of greatness has its source in the generosity of God. Accordingly, if men bestow some honour on men because of the gifts of God that are judged to be in them, a person to whom honour is granted ought not to claim it for himself, but he ought to ascribe it totally to God, from whom he has it totally and freely, if he has anything good.

‘But you, my disciples, I would not want you to be like them. Rather, mindful of my example and teaching, avoid the arrogant nomenclature of wisdom, and do not be pleased with yourselves if someone calls you Rabbis, that is, our masters.¹⁴ There is but one person for whom this name is truly suitable, the teacher you have in common. Inasmuch as you are devoted to him, you are nothing other than co-disciples and brothers to one another, among whom mutual love renders all things equal. Nor is it right for one person to put himself before another, but our rivalry is quite different: that each should yield honour to the other, and that each should outstrip the other in service.¹⁵ Accordingly, you should not call anyone on earth “master,” since whatever salvific doctrine you have you owe entirely to God. Whoever teaches rightly has God as the source of his teaching.¹⁶ Whoever truly makes progress does so through the inspiration of God. Neither should you hereafter grant the honorific name of father to any man on earth, once you have professed your heavenly Father – to whom in truth you owe both your life and whatever you have, and upon whom you depend totally – so that no one, consequently, may claim for himself the honour that is owed to God alone. No one should render to a man what is owed to God alone.¹⁷ To him alone, all praise, honour, and thanksgiving must be transferred. If someone teaches well, let it be the wisdom of God in him that is praised and that expresses and communicates itself through him. If someone treats his father with care and concern, let it be the goodness of God in him that is praised; it is God’s goodness that provides for you through him.’

The Lord Jesus did not say these things because it is ungodly to address a teacher with the name ‘teacher,’ or to greet a parent with the name ‘parent,’ but by these words he was striving to remove utterly from the

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14 ‘Our masters’: *magistros nostros*; for the significance of this expression see chapter 3 n65: an allusion to the sixteenth century professors of theology seems implied in what follows. ‘Rabbis’ here translates *Rabbinos*.

15 For the ‘rivalry’ in ‘honour’ and ‘service’ see Rom 12:10 (in honour mutually anticipating) and the annotation on the verse CWE 56 333.

16 Erasmus appears to combine 23:8 and 10 in the paraphrase. In his annotation on 23:8 (*unus est enim vester magister*) he notes that verse 10 duplicates verse 8, and says that some Greek manuscripts ‘do not repeat the expression.’

17 Cf Matt 22:21.

hearts of his disciples the ambition characteristic of the Pharisees, who were claiming for themselves what was God's, and who were demanding honour from the people for teaching what was not theirs but God's, as if they themselves were the authors and not rather ministers. Further, he noted¹⁸ either the simplicity or the flattery of the people that extolled them with excessive praises, as if they owed more to men than to God. Since, however, he understood that it is from ambition of this sort that the plagues and ruinations of congregations arise, he finished his speech with this statement: 'He who is greatest among you shall be the one who serves you. For what he has, he has received from elsewhere, he has received it freely, and he has received it in order to impart it to others. Hence, the greater one is through the divine gifts, not the more arrogant will he be, but the more solicitous to share them – and the more submissive, so that arrogance should not destroy once and for all what divine kindness has bestowed. He transfers all glory to its author, God, claiming nothing for himself besides the assiduity of a lowly minister.¹⁹ He is truly great who is in his own view least, and one who in his own judgment is great, at that point begins to be least in the eyes of God. But if someone vaunts and exalts himself because of the free gifts of God, he is stripped of those things of which he makes himself unworthy, and from the greatest becomes the least. By contrast, he who humbles himself, acknowledging and exaggerating his own weakness, and either concealing or bringing forth for the utility of the brothers the gifts of God by which he is great, this person, already great, becomes greater as a result of increased gifts, since his very modesty stirs up the divine generosity.'

After this Jesus turned to the scribes and Pharisees and publicly and with great candour inveighed against their malice, threatening them with divine vengeance, in order that they might either through shame come to their senses and repent, or through fear of punishment turn to better things and, dropping the pretence of holiness, begin to be observers of gospel godliness. He said: 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: although you profess skill in the Law and on this account in some manner hold the keys to the kingdom of heaven,²⁰ not only do you not yourselves enter,

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18 he noted] Added in 1534; previously the verb in the sentence had been omitted.

19 'Minister': *ministri*, a term Erasmus applies elsewhere to apostles, eg Paul, to suggest humility. For the characterization see the paraphrase on Rom 15:19 CWE 42 85–6 and the annotation on the same verse ('of wonders in the strength of the Holy Spirit') CWE 56 407–8. Thus, just above, 'the one who serves' renders the Latin *minister*.

20 For the image of the keys see the parallel in Luke 11:52.

but you shut the door on others who want to enter, people for whom you ought to have opened the door; and you get in the way of those who of their own accord are ready to enter and whom you ought to have spurred on when they delayed. Although you perceive that the gospel light is now present, nevertheless for the sake of your glory and your gain, you still hold the people back in the shadows of the Law, keeping them from the truth. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites;²¹ under the pretence of religion you devour the houses of widows, whom you deceive with the false appearance of holiness. In pretence you say long prayers in public when meanwhile you have in view only the plunder you take from foolish women,²² who believe meanwhile that you are conversing with God.²³ Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you traverse lands and seas trying to entice any single one of the gentiles to profess observance of the Law. Although the gentile has been enticed by the hope of learning religion, your superstitious teaching and perverse morals not only do not make him a pure worshipper of God and an heir to the kingdom of heaven, but even more polluted as a Jew than he had been as a pagan, and even more liable to the punishment of hell than you are. For it usually happens that students for the most part even surpass their evil teachers.²⁴ Woe to you, blind guides who, though professed teachers, do not know what you teach, clearly wandering from the goal of the Law, and twisting everything only to your gain.²⁵ For you say: "Whoever has sworn by the temple of the Lord is not held by his oath, but he who has sworn by the gold that is in the temple is indeed held by his oath" – by an inverted judgment valuing more

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21 Erasmus paraphrases 23:14, a verse that appears in his Greek text and the Vulgate, and which he accepted without comment in the annotations on the chapter. The verse is regarded as an interpolation; cf Metzger *Textual Commentary* 50.

22 Jerome *Comm In Matt* 4 (on Matt 23:6) PL 26 168B similarly indicts 'teachers of false religion . . . who chase after profits from women.' That Erasmus has the monks of his own day in mind is evident from his annotation on 23:14 (*orationes longas orantes*): 'Would that this passage would amend certain people who with similar art devour the houses not only of widows but of virgins, old men, young men, farmers, even princes . . .'

23 'Conversing with God': on this expression see Pabel *Conversing with God* 35.

24 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 73.1 (on Matt 23:15) PG 58 673 makes the same point about the influence of bad teachers: 'When a pupil sees such teachers he is rendered worse. For he does not stop at the worthlessness of his teacher . . . but he even surpasses it, thanks to the inclination to tend to the worse.'

25 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 23:16–22) PL 26 170C: 'The Pharisees are charged with doing everything for gain, and not out of a fear of God.'

highly, not the things that are holier in themselves, but the things that are more pleasing to your greed.²⁶ Otherwise, answer me, fools and blind men, which is holier, the gold that has been added to the temple for the sake of adorning it, and that is turned into your gain and into the stuff of your excess, or the temple itself, whose sanctity causes the gold, that elsewhere is considered profane, to be regarded there as holy?

‘Likewise, you say: “He who has sworn by the altar is not held by an obligation, but he who has sworn by the gift that has been placed on the altar is held by his oath.” O blind teachers, what should be esteemed more highly, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift itself? For the gift is holy only because it is placed on the holy altar. Here by an inverted judgment you want the gifts to seem holier than the altar because the gifts accrue to your advantage, while the temple and altar have been constructed for the worship and glory of God – and these are of no concern to you. What else do you do with your petty fabrications but overthrow the law of God that prohibits all perjury?²⁷ Just as, by your interpretation, you overthrow the commandment about honouring one’s parents, so here you teach perjury.²⁸ It would be perfect righteousness not to swear at all;²⁹ nevertheless, if a person swears by any thing that is regarded as holy by the person to whom he makes his oath, he is a perjurer unless he actually does what he swore to do. Whoever swears by the altar swears also by the things that are on the altar. So whoever has sworn by the temple swears also by God who dwells in the temple. Whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and consequently by him who sits on it. Whoever swears by another’s head³⁰ swears by a thing sacred to God, and over which he who swears has no power.

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26 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 23:16–22) PL 26 171A: ‘They did all this not out of a fear of God, but out of a desire for riches.’ Jerome explains how the gold and the gifts were made to accrue to the advantage of the priests: ‘If one had sworn by the gold and the money that had been offered to the priests in the temple, he was at once compelled to pay that on which he had sworn’ (170D). For the distinction in oaths described in 23:16 see Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 280.

27 Cf Matt 5:33; Lev 19:12; Num 30:2; Deut 23:21–3. Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on 23:16–22) PL 26 170D–1A observed the distinction made: ‘If one swore by the altar [and did not keep his word], no one held him guilty of perjury; but one would be held guilty of perjury if he swore falsely by the gift [ie by the sacrifices].’

28 Cf Matt 15:4–5, and the paraphrases on these verses above.

29 Cf Matt 5:34.

30 ‘By another’s head’: *per caput alterius*, as in the paraphrase on Matt 5:36; cf chapter 5 n100.

‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: you exact even the smallest things that pertain to your profit, though they are of the least importance to true godliness. Such is your superstitious adherence to rules that in extorting tithes you collect a tenth of even the cheapest herbs – mint, rue, dill, and cumin. In the meantime, you regard as nothing the things that are of the greatest importance, upon which true justice³¹ depends, namely, judgment, mercy, and trustworthiness:³² judgment, that you do not inflict an injury on anyone;³³ almsgiving, that you aid the oppressed and needy; and trustworthiness, that you do not deceive anyone by swearing falsely. Such things the Law requires as matters of the greatest importance, whereas the others it added as though of very little importance, for the sake of these. These important matters, therefore, should above all have been given serious attention, if it did not seem right to neglect those trivial matters.³⁴ If you were keeping all the precepts perfectly, it could appear to be religion. But now, when you neglect the things of which righteousness consists while you carefully attend to the precepts that are least important, this is not religion, but hypocrisy – rather it is the ruin of religion. Before tithing was instituted, integrity, kindness, and trustworthiness were nevertheless required, and were the grounds for the praise for righteousness.

‘O blind leaders, with your religious priorities reversed,³⁵ you strain out a gnat from your drink while you swallow down a camel, scrupulous about the smallest point and negligent in the greatest. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because of your misdirected concern over cleanliness. For you cleanse with frequent washings cups and plates and candlesticks, which, since they are external things, do not pollute a person’s heart,

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31 ‘Justice’: *iustitia*, in contrast to *iudicium* ‘judgment.’ On ‘perfect justice’ cf the paraphrase on 1:19 and n68 above.

32 ‘Trustworthiness’: *fidem*. The sense is determined by the definition that follows, but cf chapter 8 n31. In the previous sentence ‘rue’ is added from Luke 11:42.

33 A variation on the standard classical definition of justice; cf eg Plato *Republic* 335A-D and Cicero *De officiis* 1.7.20. But cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 73.2 (on Matt 23:23) PG 58 675, who interprets ‘judgment’ as ‘justice’ (δικαιοσύνη) understood as ‘the absence of fraud,’ ‘mercy’ as ‘human kindness’ (φιλανθρωπία) understood as ‘almsgiving,’ and trustworthiness as ‘truth’ (ἀλήθεια).

34 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 73.2 (on Matt 23:24) PG 58 674: ‘These laws were imposed because of mercy and judgment; they are of no value by themselves. Though the small [ie the laws] were given for the sake of the great [ie mercy etc], they disregarded the great, and attended only to the small: the important matters did not follow the trivial but vice versa.’

35 ‘With your religious priorities reversed’: *praepostere religiosi*; cf chapter 3 n50. Likewise, in the next sentence ‘misdirected’ represents *praepostere*.

yet what is internal, namely, your heart, you leave uncleansed. To drink from an unwashed cup does not pollute a person's heart, but to drink wine acquired by fraud, and to drink to excess, not according to need, does pollute the heart. You constantly wash the body and the things of the body, and you do not cleanse your heart, impure and polluted by plunder, lust, and the rest of the things that are truly filthy.³⁶ Pharisee – you, I say, I address you, blind Pharisee – you who by your title and dress vaunt yourself as a teacher of the people: blind man, first take care of what alone is relevant to the matter in hand. If you like real cleanliness, clean first what is internal, and then, if you are so inclined, clean the things that are external: body, clothes, pitchers, cups, plates, seats, and other household things. Otherwise, to make a show of cleanliness in external things after neglecting the things that alone render us clean or unclean before God – this is not cleanliness but hypocrisy, and truly fatal to cleanliness. By your petty regulations you corrupt the minds of simple people, so that relying on cleanliness of an external kind, they neglect the things that, even alone and by themselves, are what they ought to have cared about.

‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: you are so far from true cleanliness that you are more like tombs that have been whitened and with their shining white plasterwork exhibit a false cleanliness on the outside, but within are full of the bones of corpses and every kind of filth. So also you, with your verbose prayers, broad phylacteries, wide fringes, with your pallor and fasting and similar pretences, seem outwardly religious and unblemished, while your hearts everywhere gush with pretence, and drip with every kind of vice. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because for a false display of holiness you build up magnificently the tombs of the prophets and adorn the tombs of the just, whom your ancestors killed. Pretending that you applaud the virtue of those who were slain, and detest the cruelty of those who killed them, you say: “If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would never have consented to the killing of innocents,” though you are now undertaking more horrible things against the one who surpasses the prophets, and you will one day set yourselves against those who will open the way of eternal salvation to you.³⁷ Since

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36 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 73.2 (on Matt 23:25) PG 58 675: ‘He speaks here not about cup and plate, but about soul and body: by the outside he means the body, by the inside the soul.’

37 The paraphrase here anticipates the prophecy of verse 34; an allusion is intended, apparently, to the resistance to the new Christian movement chronicled in Acts.

you are of this disposition, you make it absolutely clear you are the true children of those who killed the prophets, by whom they were boldly³⁸ warned. You would have been no better than they if you had happened to live in their day.

'Come, then, prove yourselves worthy of your ancestors, and make good whatever extreme cruelty failed them, so that nothing is lacking. They killed the prophets, you kill the one whom the prophets predicted. O snakes, offspring of vipers, sons of murderers, murderers yourselves,³⁹ since you are of such invincible malice, since you are not open to correction either by any blessings, or miracles, or words kind or stern, or promises, or threats: even if you escape the judgment of men for the time being, how will you flee the judgment of hell? You heap this judgment on yourselves all the more because you are not deterred by the accursed crime of your ancestors from a lust for killing. So many prophets have been sent, many of whom you have killed. Finally, I myself have come, and you well know what you are undertaking to do against me. Not content with this, that it may be the more evident to all that you are most deserving of the most horrible condemnation, behold I again will send you other prophets, wise men and scribes, who with the greatest leniency will call you back from that cruelty of yours to a better mind, nor will the murders of earlier times be charged against you if at their preaching you repent.⁴⁰ And yet you will not spare them, but some of them you will kill with the sword, some you will destroy with stones, some you will crucify, some you will whip in your synagogues;⁴¹ far from receiving them, you will persecute them from city to city, until you compel them by your incurable malice to go to the gentiles.⁴²

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38 'Boldly': *libere*. Erasmus adds once again the expression that especially characterizes the divinely sent messenger; cf chapter 17 n12 above.

39 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 23:32-3) PL 26 172C: 'You have made good whatever was lacking in them ... They killed the prophets, you the one the prophets predicted ... Murderers, you are the offspring of your fathers, murderers, too.'

40 For the promised leniency see Acts 2:37-9, 3:17-21.

41 James was killed with the sword (Acts 12:2); Stephen was stoned (Acts 7:58); according to tradition Peter was crucified (cf John 21:18-19); whippings in the synagogue may allude to Paul (cf 2 Cor 11:24).

42 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 23:34) PL 26 172D-3A also relates this prophecy to the apostles' mission to the gentiles: 'This can also be referred to the disciples ... [their enemies] persecuted them from city to city, driving them out of Judea, that they might move on to the gentiles.' Cf Acts 8:1, 11:19, and 13:46-7.

'By these acts you will so provoke the anger of God against you that whatever murders were committed by your ancestors – from the first murder when Cain killed Abel, his brother, up to the killing of Zechariah, the son of Barachiah, whom you killed between the temple and the altar,⁴³ not deterred from murder even by the holiness of the place – the punishment for these acts that had been delayed will be poured out onto your heads, you who have not only repeated the cruelty of all your ancestors, but have even surpassed it.⁴⁴ Therefore the calamity to come upon you will be so extraordinary⁴⁵ that the whole world will perceive how great has been the cruelty of this race against all the best men, and how stubborn its rebellion against God, who with such great leniency was tolerant for so long, and invited you so often with such great kindness to better things.'

This said, the most merciful Lord Jesus, who because of his goodness did not want anyone at all to perish, contemplated the city of Jerusalem's

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43 Erasmus noticeably avoids any attempt in the paraphrase to identify the Zechariah named here. In his annotation on 23:30 (*si fuisset non esset*) he addresses the problem at some length, citing the opinions of Origen and Jerome, even adducing apocryphal legends. He regards the question as 'very troublesome' to which no satisfactory answer had been given. He thinks the most realistic opinion considers Zechariah to be the son of Jehoiada the priest slain by Joash (2 Chron 24:20-2), but the name of the father is wrong – unless Zechariah and Barachiah are two names for the same person. Nicholas of Lyra (on 23:35) had surveyed the problem in similar terms. Cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 282, who think it 'more reasonable to assume that this Zechariah was a person of whom otherwise we have no knowledge.'

44 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 74.1 (on Matt 23:34) PG 58 680 elaborates on the surpassing cruelty of the Jews: 'Moreover, he said these things showing that it was not to be thought surprising if he were killed by the descendants of bloodthirsty, deceitful and treacherous men, who surpassed their forbears in their shameless deeds . . . For he showed that their crimes were more shameless both because they committed them after their forbears, and because their offences themselves were far worse, although they boasted that they would never have committed such acts as their forbears committed.'

45 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 74.2 (on Matt 23:36) PG 58 681: 'To the punishment he attaches an unspeakable severity, saying that they of all will suffer the weightiest punishments; nonetheless they became no better through any of these things'; and Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 23:35-6 PG 123 405A: 'He says that all the blood unjustly shed will come upon the Jews then alive. For they will be punished more than their fathers were, because they were not brought to their senses by the examples of their fathers.' For the nature of this extraordinary punishment see chapter 12 n50 above.

pitiful destruction now impending (for all things were present to his eyes); and he contemplated at the same time the Jews' unconquerable stubbornness, by which they were about to turn divine leniency into fury.⁴⁶ And so he deplored in a lamenting speech the devastation of the Jewish race, hinting at his second coming, and that then at last the Jews would repent and acknowledge the Christ⁴⁷ whom they now denied, although it was to their advantage rather to confess their saviour now, sent by God, and likewise to sing from their hearts the hymn they resented being sung by their children: 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'⁴⁸ He said: 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who have been sent to you, how often have I attempted to gather your children, as an anxious hen fearing for her chicks gathers them under her wings and comforts them, and you have refused. I have done everything possible to save you; you, in contrast, have done everything to bring ruin upon yourselves, and to prevent your salvation. But whoever has once been given the freedom of the will cannot be saved against his will. Your will should have corresponded to my will. Behold, now pitiful calamity hangs over you. You will leave your dwellings deserted. You will be left to your blindness until you someday come to your senses and repent, instructed even by so many evils. For I say to you, hereafter you will not see me until the time comes when, seeing me with eyes of faith, you will say: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," – the one who now you falsely claim has come in the name of Beelzebub.'⁴⁹

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46 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 74.3 (on Matt 23:37) PG 58 682 elaborates on the point that Jesus is here at once merciful and about to inflict punishment: 'This is the manner of speaking of one who pities her and is unhappy, and loves her very much. For as if dealing with a beloved, who, though always loved, had scorned her lover, and who is therefore to be punished, he now defends himself as he is about to inflict the punishment.'

47 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 74.3 (on Matt 23:39) PG 58 683: 'By this he also hinted at his resurrection, as well as his second coming, and he showed to them who were utterly unbelieving that they would then, at least, worship him.' For the ultimate conversion of the Jews see Rom 11, and the paraphrases on Rom 11:25-32 CWE 42 67-8; see also Phil 2:10-11.

48 Cf Matt 21:9. Erasmus echoes Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 23:39) PL 26 175B-C, who observes that Jesus addresses the Jews, whose children sang the *Benedictus* as he entered Jerusalem: 'Let the Jews now confess the blessed one who comes in the name of the Lord, and they will see the face of Christ.'

49 Cf Matt 12:24.

Chapter 24

In order to show also by a sort of image that the temple and the entire religion of Jewish law must soon be abolished, Jesus left the temple and began to go away.¹ Since, however, the disciples had heard some mention of devastation, they pointed out to the Lord the massive structure of the temple, a building so marvellous it seemed intolerable that it be destroyed, its construction so strong that it seemed impossible to destroy it.² Jesus answered: 'Do you see all this?' he said, 'You may take it for certain that nothing of all this is so well-fortified or beautiful or holy that it is not to be demolished and scattered so completely that not even a single stone will remain cemented with³ another.' Having said this, Jesus went to the mountain that is called the Mount of Olives. While he was sitting there with the temple in view, there came up to him the four disciples⁴ whom he had called first of all, Peter, James, John, and Andrew, intending to learn with more certainty something about the time of the great calamity that was coming. For they supposed that soon after the devastation of the city of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple Christ would come again in his majesty.⁵ In order to make his disciples more vig-

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- 1 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:1) PL 26 175C also notes the symbolism here: 'When the Lord withdrew from the temple, all the edifices of the Law and the structure of the commandments were . . . thrown down.'
- 2 For the 'mention of devastation' cf Matt 23:37-9. For the formulation of thought cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 75.1 (on Matt 24:1) PG 58 685: 'Since he had just said, "Your house is left desolate," and had forecast in their presence countless evils, the disciples, upon hearing these statements, came to him as though in amazement, pointing to the beauty of the temple, and questioning whether so much beauty, such a massive structure, such indescribable artistry, would be destroyed.'
- 3 'Cemented with': *cohaereat*. Erasmus evidently wished by this vivid image to elucidate the full force of the Greek verb *καταλύω* 'break up,' 'loosen,' 'dissolve,' 'destroy' (24:2). Similarly in the paraphrases on the parallel passages *haereo* (Mark 13:2) and *abhaereo* (Luke 21:6) serve to explicate the verb *καταλύω*.
- 4 Chrysostom, too, *In Matt hom* 75.1 (on Matt 24:3) PG 58 686-7 had referred to the Markan narrative at this point to note that it was not all the disciples who asked about the time of the end, but only Peter and John, 'who had greater faith.' In fact, Mark (13:3) specifies the four disciples mentioned in the paraphrase.
- 5 In the biblical text of Matt 24:3 the disciples raise two questions: the time ('when will this be?') and the sign ('what will be the sign?'). At this point the paraphrase raises only the question of 'time,' apparently taking its cue from Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 75.1 (on Matt 24:3) PG 58 686-7, who says that in

ilant, Christ so moderated his discourse that while he was unwilling for them to know the time of his final coming, nevertheless by describing the evils he made them watchful and ready for their onset.⁶ So the disciples said: 'Tell us, when will the things you are predicting come to pass? And by what sign will we be able to know that your coming and the end of the age are imminent?' Jesus did not respond to the point of their question; instead he turned to the things that would prepare their hearts for perpetual vigilance on behalf of the gospel.⁷ He said: 'I will surely come, but see that no one deceives you with lies about my coming. There will come many who will lay claim to my name, and who will say that they are the Christ, and they will find foolishly credulous people to deceive. The upheaval of all things will show that the end of the world is already approaching. You will hear of wars and various rumours of wars – the reports, as happens, more horrible than the events themselves.⁸ Do not let these events throw you forthwith into dismay so that you suppose the end time is at hand. Such disruption must, indeed, appear, but it will not immediately be the end of evils. This storm will range more widely. Not only will Jerusalem be destroyed, but the entire world will be filled with wars and slaughters. Nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom will contend with kingdom, and people will suffer the largest portion of the evils at the hands of people. But God also, the avenger, will add his own punishing lashes: plague, famine, and in various places earthquakes. Not even these things will demonstrate the end of the world; they are only the preludes to evil, an evil giving birth as it were to that last storm of the doomed world.

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Luke (21:7) there is only one question, the one about Jerusalem, 'because the disciples supposed that the advent of Christ would come at the time [of the destruction of Jerusalem].' However, Erasmus soon goes on to include in his paraphrase both questions as found in Matthew.

6 Erasmus anticipates here the thought of 24:36–44; for vigilance as the rationale for ignorance cf verse 42, the paraphrase on Acts 1:7 CWE 50 7–8, and next note. Like Erasmus Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 75.1 (on Matt 24:4–6) PG 58 687 sees the description of evils as a means of instilling vigilance; cf next note.

7 'Vigilance on behalf of the gospel': *vigilantiam evangelii*; cf eg Luke 12:37; Eph 6:18; Rev 3:2. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 75.1 (on Matt 24:4–6) PG 58 688 similarly explains: 'He did not answer this question [of time] straight off, but first he told them of things more pressing and more important to learn . . . He spoke about the evils that were approaching, already at the door. Wherefore he also made them ready for the struggle.'

8 The characterization of the reports as overblown is a standard literary topos; cf the well-known description of *fama* in Virgil *Aeneid* 4.173–88.

‘You will not, meanwhile, be free from such evils, for in this general upheaval they will drag you into various afflictions; in the end they will even put you to death. In the meantime you will be hated, not only by Jews, but by all nations, not because of your misdeeds, but because you profess my name.⁹ Meanwhile, many people, taking offence at the evils and overwhelmed by their sufferings, will fall away from the profession of my name, and one person will betray another, a relative will betray a relative, a friend his friend, and those whom nature had joined by bonds of love will pursue one another with mutual hatred.¹⁰

‘Indeed, there will be another kind of evil, even graver: false prophets will arise, and false teachers who, pretending that they proclaim my gospel, will be working in the interest of their own glory, their own gain, their own stomachs. In place of my Spirit, they will implant in their disciples the spirit of Satan; instead of the kingdom of heaven, they will teach the kingdom of this world. By their devices they will ensnare even those whom torments were unable to overcome, for no enemy is more dangerous than the familiar – and counterfeit – friend. Amid these evils, one will not expect much consolation from one’s brothers and friends, for as the multitude of sins¹¹ abounds, the love of many will grow cold.¹² Nevertheless, there will be no danger for you, provided that with an unwavering and courageous heart you endure to the end. No force of evils will be able to destroy anyone except the one who loses heart. I will allow neither you to perish, nor the gospel to be suppressed. Rather, by these tumults the robust strength of the gospel will increase more and more, and the storm of evils will not be able to do anything else to you except to make your godliness more proven and esteemed. For the end of the world¹³ will not come before this gospel of

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9 On suffering not for misdeeds but for the name cf 1 Pet 4:14–15.

10 Mark (13:12) and Luke (21:16), but not Matthew, speak of the hostility specifically of relatives.

11 See the annotation on 24:12 (*quoniam abundabit iniquitas*), where Erasmus explains that it is the ‘magnitude of the iniquity’ that leads to coldness of love. For the phrase ‘multitude of sins’ see 1 Pet 4:8, where the relation between love and sins represents an inversion of that expressed here. ‘Sins’ translates *vitia*; *vitium* is ‘a flaw in the soul’ (CWE 44 xvii), a term that negotiates the distance between *iniquitas* ‘wickedness’ (Vulgate and Erasmus’ translation for the Greek *ἀνομία* in 24:12) and the Petrine *peccata* ‘lapses’ (also both Vulgate and Erasmus for the Greek *ἁμαρτία* in 1 Pet 4:8). On *vitium* cf chapter 5 n103 above.

12 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 75.2 (on Matt 24:12) PG 58 688: ‘Worst of all, they will not have the consolation of love.’

13 ‘End of the world’: *mundi finis*. Thus far in the paraphrase on chapter 24 various expressions with *finis* (representing either *συντέλεια* or *τὸ τέλος*) have des-

the kingdom of heaven is preached through all the kingdoms of the world, and has covered all nations, so that those who do not want to obey will not be able to claim ignorance as an excuse.¹⁴

‘When this has happened, then will come the consummation of the world; if you are seeking the sign of this event, learn it now. When you see an abominable idol that will try to overthrow utterly the gospel religion – the idol about which Daniel once prophesied to you, saying: “And for half the week the sacrifice and libations will cease, and in the temple there will be an abomination of desolations until the consummation of time”¹⁵ – this abominable idol, I say, when you have seen it placed in the temple, that is, in the citadel of holiness,¹⁶ let whoever reads the oracle of the prophet understand; his words are mystical and require a spiritual

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ignated the end-times: end of the age, end of the world, end of evils, the end. However, Erasmus begins the next paragraph with the expression *mundi consummatio* ‘consummation of the world,’ representing the Greek τὸ τέλος of 24:14. In the annotation on Rom 10:14 (for the end of the Law is Christ) CWE 56 277–8 Erasmus notes that τέλος can mean “consummation” and “perfection,” not “destruction.” Thus in the paraphrase on Matthew 24 Erasmus may wish to reflect both the finality of the world and the role of the end-times in Salvation History. Cf *Psalmi* CWE 63 175. Cf also chapter 27 n45 below.

14 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 75.2 (on Matt 24:14) PG 58 689 refers here specifically to inexcusable Jewish obstinacy: ‘And for this reason, Jerusalem is destroyed after the gospel has been preached throughout the world, so that those contumacious people might have not even a shadow of an excuse.’ Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:14) PL 26 177A, like Erasmus, speaks generally: ‘The sign of the Lord’s coming is the gospel preached throughout the world, so that no one should have an excuse.’

15 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:15) PL 26 177B introduces this citation from Dan 9:27 in his exposition of verse 15. Erasmus here follows closely the Vulgate.

16 ‘In the citadel of holiness’: *in arce sanctitatis*. The phrase may be a description of the temple, or it may refer to the inner sanctum of the temple. Cf the annotation on 24:15 (*A Daniele*): ‘Some interpret this of the statue of Hadrian that, right to the time of Jerome, stood on the very spot where formerly the holy of holies had been.’ Jerome had said as much in *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:15) PL 26 177C, but had suggested as well that there may be an allusion ‘to the statue of Caesar that Pilate placed in the temple.’ Nicholas of Lyra (on 24:15) says that the prophecy ‘was fulfilled when Hadrian set up his statue in the place where the ark of the covenant had stood.’ The *Gloss*, like Jerome, offered both possibilities. Cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 295: ‘Matthew . . . refers to the temple . . . Whether the *abominable sacrilege* refers to actual idolatry, or to the entrance of the Roman imperial eagle standards into the temple area, is immaterial.’

reader.¹⁷ Therefore when this storm assails, let those who are in the cities of Judea leave their towns and flee into the mountains, and let those who are on the rooftops of buildings leap down, not go down to take any of their belongings with them from their houses. As for those whom that time overtakes in the field, let them not run back into the house to get their clothes, for that will be no time to be concerned with possessions. The important thing is to take thought for one's life by swift flight. Possessions can be recouped; a life once lost cannot be restored. Likewise, it will be a time of woe for women who are pregnant, and for those who are nursing at the breast in those days. For neither will pregnant women be able to cast away the burden of their wombs to expedite their flight, nor will those who are nursing babies be able to cast away their children, as they do their money and clothes, since they love their children more dearly than themselves.¹⁸

Those of you whom neither home nor possessions nor children will delay must only pray that it is not your lot to have to flee in winter or on a sabbath, for you will have to flee both quickly and far. Winter, because of the cold and the shortness of the days, is inconvenient for travellers, and on the sabbath the observance of the Law prevents you from fleeing far.¹⁹ The affliction will then be severe, such as has never occurred from the foundation of the world to the present day, or will be hereafter. But if the

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17 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:15) PL 26 177B makes a similar comment: 'When we are called to understanding, the statement is shown to be mystical.' On 'mystical' and 'spiritual' cf CWE 44 216 n12 and CWE 63 xxv–xxxiii.

18 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 76.1 (on Matt 24:19) PG 58 694 elaborates on the horrible scene in quite similar terms: "'And woe to those who are with child and to those who are nursing their young"; the former because of their sluggishness, and their inability to flee easily, weighed down by the burden in their wombs; the latter because of the bond of affection for their children and their inability to save their nursing babes. For it is easy to scorn money, a light matter to provide it and the same goes for clothing, but who can simply abandon the things nature gives.'

19 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 76.1 (on Matt 24:20–1) PG 58 695: 'Not in winter, because of the difficulty of that season; not on the sabbath day, because of the authority of Law,' and Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:20) PL 26 178B: 'Because in the former case the harshness of the cold prohibits travelling to secluded places and hiding in the mountains or in the wilderness, while in the latter they either break the Law if they want to flee or risk death if they remain.' For the law on sabbath observance see Exod 16:29. In the paraphrase on Acts 1:12 Erasmus defines a sabbath day's journey as two miles (CWE 50 9 and n63); in his annotation on 24:20 (*hyeme vel sabbato*) he implies that it is a 'few stadia.'

calamity were also to be as long-lasting as it will be violent, no one would be left alive. Indeed their malice warranted utter destruction, but for the sake of the elect, however few, those days will be shortened.

'In this general confusion, while my coming is awaited, care must be taken that no one is deceived by the craftiness of impostors. For there will arise many false Christs who will boast that they are the Christ, though they are not – they are, rather, my adversaries: those who say they are prophets, though they are not, but rather are teachers of errors.²⁰ They will not only be equipped with deceit and the false appearance of holiness, but they will imitate my power by displaying wonders and magical tricks, and with so many marvellous deceptions they will claim for themselves my position and role that even the elect, if it should be possible, will be led into error.

'Therefore, you who have been warned, beware, for I have foretold this in order that you might beware. If, then, at that time they say, "Behold,²¹ Christ is in the wilderness," do not go out; "Behold, he is in the inner rooms," do not go in; "Behold he is in this or that place," do not believe it. His advent will not be lingering and lowly, such as you have seen this advent to be, but it will be unexpected and will suddenly embrace the entire world with the splendour of its majesty.²² For as the lightning shining from the east flashes in a moment all the way to the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man. There is no reason to fear that in a disorder so great you will not be with me. Wherever there is a corpse, there eagles also gather. The head will not be without its members.²³ The heavenly bodies too will feel the magnitude of this calamity. The sun will be darkened and the moon will

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20 Cf Rev 2:20. Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:24) PL 26 179A suggests that we may understand here a reference to heretics who 'on the reputation of false knowledge fight against Christ.'

21 Behold] Added in 1534

22 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 76.3 (on Matt 24:27) PG 58 697: 'Lightning appears in a single instant throughout the whole world. So will that coming be, evident everywhere at once because of the splendour of the glory'; cf also Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:27) PL 26 179B: 'The second coming of the Saviour is to be revealed not in lowliness as the first, but in glory. Hence it is folly to look in a small or hidden space for the one who is the light of the whole world.'

23 Erasmus will apply this rather striking interpretation of 24:28 to its Lukan parallel in his paraphrase on Luke 17:37. The interpretation was well established in the exegetical tradition, for which see CWE 48 116 n29. Erasmus frequently recurs to the image of 'head and members' to express the relation between Christ and his church; cf eg the annotation on Rom 1:4 ('from the resurrection of the dead of Jesus Christ') CWE 56 19-20; also the paraphrase on Eph 4:15-16.

not give its light (naturally, since the moon borrows its light from the sun, which will now be darkened). The stars will fall from heaven, and the very powers of the heavens will be shaken as though in danger of destruction. Then amid the thickest darkness there will gleam from heaven the sign of the Son of man, the sign, I say, by which he has conquered Satan and has trampled down all his tyranny; the sign by which Satan boasted in vain that he had conquered.²⁴ When they look at this, the nations of the entire world will beat their breasts:²⁵ the Jews when they see the one they have pierced, gentiles when they see the majesty of the cross they had mocked.²⁶ For they will see the Son of man, whom they now despise for his lowliness, coming on high in the clouds of heaven with huge companies of angels, with the highest majesty and glory. Then he will send out his angels who with the sound of a trumpet will gather all his elect from the four winds, from the highest peak of heaven to its very end.²⁷

‘But it is not mine to determine in advance exactly when these things are to be. Nevertheless, from the evils I have recounted, you will be able to conjecture, as though from prefaces,²⁸ that the time is not far off. As the fig tree indicates in advance by certain signs that summer is drawing near, that is, when as the gentle breezes blow from the west and the boughs now grow soft, it puts forth buds and, in a manner, labours to bring forth

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24 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 76.3 (on Matt 24:30) PG 58 698 also understands the ‘sign’ to be the cross shining in the darkness more brightly than the rays of the sun. Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:30) PL 26 180A–B understands the sign as either the cross or the ‘victory flag of the triumphant one.’ Cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 298: ‘The test of faith is to see all this [Christ’s exaltation] in The Man’s *standard*, the cross.’

25 breasts] in 1534 and 1535; previously ‘bodies’

26 For the allusions see John 19:37 (they pierced) and Matt 27:27–30, 39–40 (they mocked). At this point in their exposition the former is cited from Zech 12:10 by Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 76.3 (on Matt 24:30) PG 58 698, and by Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:30) PL 26 180A–B, who also refers to John 19:37.

27 The paraphrase essentially follows the Vulgate and Erasmus’ translation, ‘from the height of heaven to its very end.’ From his annotations on 24:31 (*a summis caelorum* and *ad terminos eorum*), it appears that Erasmus understands the Greek ἀπ’ ἄκρων . . . ἕως ἄκρων to mean ‘from the very top to the very bottom,’ but he does not elucidate with a cosmological picture.

28 ‘Prefaces’: *prooemiis*, a term borrowed from the language of rhetoric where it was used to designate the introduction to a speech. So Quintilian 4.1.1. The word is found at this point in Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:32–3) PL 26 180c: ‘Believe that all these things come as *prooemia* “prefaces,” and *praecursores* “precursors.”’

leaves,²⁹ so you also, know that when you have seen all that I have predicted, the coming of the Son of God³⁰ is near. Of this I assure you: this generation will not pass away before all the things that have been predicted will come to pass. Heaven and earth will perish before my words are found to be vain. For you, therefore, it is enough to know the signs that presage the day of my coming so it will not overtake you unaware. But it is not for you to search out the precise day and hour when the Son will come, since this has not been given even to the angels of heaven to know, and even the Son of man does not know.³¹ The Father has reserved this for himself alone.³² Thus it is to your advantage always to be ready. That day will come suddenly and unexpectedly to others. Similarly, in the days of Noah a flood had, for some years,³³ been predicted to the people; nevertheless thinking that it would never come, they were eating, drinking, arranging marriages, taking wives up to the last day when Noah went into the ark; nor did they believe that there was going to be a flood until they saw the flood now upon them, and all perished who were unwilling to follow Noah's example and prepare themselves against that day.

Just as then the few who were taken into the ark were saved, while the rest, left outside, perished, so when the time comes those who are going to perish will be separated suddenly from those who are to be saved. Two men will be labouring in the same field, companions alike in wages and work: one of them will be taken, the other will be left. Two women will be grinding at the same mill: one of them will be taken, the other will be

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29 For the image see Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:32) PL 26 180C: 'When ... the bark is in labour to bring forth leaves.'

30 In Matt (24:33) and Mark (13:29) the subject of the verb is ambiguous – either 'he' or 'it'; Luke (21:31) specifies that 'the kingdom of God' is near. Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 297 understand 'he'; so also NRSV.

31 Both Matthew (24:36) and Mark (13:32) read only 'the Son.' Erasmus may intend the 'Son of man' to contrast here with 'the Son of God' just above (cf n30), the latter expression connoting unlimited authority, the former, the limitations of Christ's human existence. The paraphrase on this verse was challenged by Bédā, and the Paris theologians were certain that Christ, even 'according to his humanity,' knew the time of the final judgment. Erasmus insisted that in the then-current dubious state of scholarship he was unwilling to say anything other than what the Gospel itself said; cf *Divinationes ad notata Bedae et Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas* LB IX 455E-6B and 882B-F.

32 Cf Acts 1:7.

33 The Bible does not specify such a period of time, but the delay was a tradition already in canonical writings; cf 1 Pet 3:20. Cf the paraphrase on Luke 17:27, where the Flood 'was postponed,' CWE 48 114.

left. Indeed, even of two people sharing the same bed, one will be taken, the other will be left.³⁴ For it is not a work, or a place, or a kind of life, but disposition that will make a person blessed.³⁵ Accordingly, since these events are without a doubt going to occur, and it cannot be known for certain on what day they will come, always be watchful, lest that day catch you unprepared. If people keep watch so that their money is not lost, how much more watchful must you be that your soul does not perish. What householder is so negligent that, if he knows a thief is going to sneak into his house during the night, he would snore the entire night and allow his home to be broken into? You therefore must be watchful your entire life, for you are sure the day will come when you are not expecting it. You must live in such a way that, whenever that day comes, it will find you doing your duty so that you can immediately be taken to your reward.

‘Would not a wise and faithful servant do the same if his master, about to travel abroad, placed him in charge of his household, to give the other members of the household their food at the proper time? The master does not specify when he will return home so that the servant may not be remiss in doing his duty, but whenever the master returns, will not the servant be happy if the master finds him doing his duty? I assure you that, having tested his trustworthiness, the master will dare to entrust greater things to the servant, and he will place him in authority over all his possessions. On the other hand, if an evil and unfaithful servant says in his heart: “The master is away for a long time and perhaps will never return,” and in this hope he begins to beat his fellow servants and, neglecting the household, drinks and eats with drunkards, how unhappy will he be when his master comes on a day he was not expecting and at an hour he did not suppose he would return! Not only will he be relieved of his office, but the master will even cut him in half,³⁶ and join his portion with the hypocrites who

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34 The image of ‘two people in one bed’ is added from Luke 17:34.

35 The sentence is clarified by Erasmus’ response to Bédā in *Supputatio* LB IX 592D–3A, where he defines *affectus* ‘disposition’ as *pietas animi* ‘godliness of heart,’ ie godly devotion at the centre of one’s life. He concludes his response: ‘I know what annoys Bédā: he wants us to believe that it is those who abstain from fish who will be saved, that it is those who live in his college who will be heaven-dwellers, again, those who wear the vestments of St Bruno or St Francis ...’ Cf also *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* LB IX 466A.

36 ‘Will cut him in half’: *dissecabit eum medium*. In his brief annotation on 24:51 (*et dividet eum*) Erasmus notes that the Greek word διχοτομήσει means quite simply ‘cut into two parts.’ He evidently wished here in the paraphrase to keep the biblical image as stark as possible, perhaps even with the savage story of

hold the title of a gospel functionary, though by their very deeds they fight against the gospel.³⁷ There, in place of his foolishly sweet pleasures, because of which in his drunkenness he had not watched for the coming of the master, he will be punished with unbearable torment, his laughter turned into weeping, his songs into the gnashing of teeth.'

Chapter 25

Jesus wished to fix deeply in his disciples' minds that one must not be remiss or sluggish in this life, but by the assiduous cultivation of godliness and by kindnesses towards one's neighbour, one must make ready the provisions for the journey into the future life – for in the resurrection we will seek too late if we have not made preparations while there was time.¹

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Samuel and Agag in mind (1 Sam 15:33), but in his paraphrase on Luke 12:46, where the same Greek word is found, Erasmus points to the metaphorical character of the image: '[... the master] will separate and cut off from his household [that servant], and will not think him deserving of accommodation in his house, but will count him among the rest of the unfaithful ...' CWE 48 41. Jerome *Comm in Matt* (on Matt 24:51) PL 26 183B–C discounts the literal reading: 'When he says he will cut him in two, it is not that he will cut him with a sword, but that he will separate him from the company of saints and put him with the hypocrites.' Bede *In Matt expos* (on Matt 24:51) PL 92 106C followed Jerome: '... he will divide him, that is, will separate him from the fellowship of the saints and place him with the hypocrites.' The interlinear *Gloss* (on 24:51) explained the Latin *dividet eum* 'will divide him' as meaning 'separate him from the fellowship of faith,' but Nicholas of Lyra understood the expression to mean that he 'will separate the soul from the body in death,' adding that such a person will 'share the portion of the hypocrites' inasmuch as he will 'join the condemned.'

37 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 24:51) PL 26 183C: 'I have often said that a hypocrite appears to be one thing, when in fact he is another; the man in the field and the man at the mill seemed to do what a churchman does, but the outcome revealed a very different will.'

1 Earlier commentators interpret this parable, as Erasmus interprets it here, as a call to acts of charity. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 78.1 (on Matt 25:1–5) PG 58 711 introduces his discussion of the three parables of Matt 25 by recalling the last parable of Matt 24 (45–51), and framing all four together as exhortations to charity and good works. But Chrysostom argued that where the other parables concerned charitable acts in general 'as though we cannot be saved in any other way,' the parable of the bridesmaids spoke specifically 'and with greater force' of almsgiving. Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 25:6–13 PG 123 425A–B interprets the parable of the ten as an admonition to good works in general: 'While it is God

Accordingly, he added a parable about ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.² 'Now, five of them were foolish: they did not think to provide themselves with oil sufficient to last until the coming of the bridegroom, because they had convinced themselves that the bridegroom would not come so suddenly that they would not have an opportunity to obtain oil from somewhere. The wise maidens, however, knowing that the time when the bridegroom would come was uncertain, took with them along with their lamps oil in vessels also, from which to replenish the lamps when they went out; in this way, they could not be caught unprepared. Now when the bridegroom delayed his departure for quite a while, all the maidens began to feel drowsy and at length they fell asleep. But in the dead of the night there suddenly arose the cry of servants calling them out to the meeting: "Behold, the bridegroom is here, go out to meet him." Then, when all the maidens had been awakened, they trimmed their lamps. When the foolish maidens saw that it was necessary to go out suddenly in the middle of the night and they did not have any oil, since their lamps were now going out, they asked the wise maidens to share some of their oil with them. But they replied: "We are afraid that what we have will not be enough for you and for us."³ Rather go to the oil vendors and buy for yourselves from them.' In the meantime, while they went to buy oil, the

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who gives the lamp and the light, the wise virgins put in oil through good works, but the foolish virgins allow their lamps to run out of oil. They are therefore shut out because they do not have good works, by which the light in them is kindled. For unless we do good works, the light of God that is in us is extinguished.' For Jerome see n6, below.

- 2 Earlier commentators also saw in the parable of the bridesmaids a clear allusion to the future resurrection and judgment, and to the necessity to prepare for it by acts of charity; so Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 78.1 (on Matt 25:26-8) PG 58 712 and Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 25:6-15 PG 123 423C-D. Likewise Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 PL 26 185C-D, commenting on 25:10, where the maidens, gone to buy oil, miss the bridegroom: 'The time for buying was past, and with the coming of the day of judgment there was no room for repentance . . . It is not the time to accomplish new works, but they are compelled to give an account of the past . . . After the day of judgment, no opportunity is left for good works and justice.' At this point the explanatory narrative given under the *persona* of the evangelist yields to the voice of Jesus who tells the story of the parable. There is, however, some ambiguity since the expression 'five of them' presupposes the introductory explanation of the evangelist. Cf chapter 5 n25 above.
- 3 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 25:9) PL 26 185B: 'The reply of the maidens reflected their fear, not their avarice.'

bridegroom came, the maidens who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and soon the door was shut. At length the foolish maidens came also and beat on the door and said: "Lord, Lord, open to us." The bridegroom answered them: "Truly, I do not know you." Therefore, you be vigilant, following the examples of the wise maidens, the faithful servant, and the provident householder,⁴ and in good time prepare for yourselves a supply of good works,⁵ because you do not know the day and hour of his coming; when he has suddenly appeared, there will not then be more time for doing good work, but the reward will have to be conferred upon each for what has been done in the past.⁶

Jesus added yet another parable, spurring his disciples to the unending pursuit of good works so that they would not allow the teaching and gifts they had received from him⁷ to be unproductive as a result of their negligence, but would by their zeal and care turn them to the advantage

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4 For the exegetical tradition that interpreted these parables as companions of n1 above.

5 Erasmus addresses the subject of good works in various contexts. Even before Erasmus knew Luther, Luther had, through George Spalatinus, challenged Erasmus on his doctrine of 'works,' complaining that he confined to 'ceremonies' the 'works' that could not justify, whereas Luther insisted that 'good works' of any kind whatever were useless as a means to justification (Ep 501:49-76, December 1516). The issue inevitably arose in the debate between the two that was initiated by Erasmus' *De libero arbitrio* (September 1524), where Erasmus claimed some merit for good works CWE 76 27-33. In the *Paraphrase on James* (December 1520) the biblical text of James 2:8-26 afforded Erasmus an opportunity to insist on the complementary nature of faith and works: God will punish those who, having received God's mercy, do not engage in acts of love and works of mercy toward fellow human beings CWE 44 148-53. In the *De immensa Dei misericordia* (September 1524), a more positive note is struck: God rewards those who engage in acts of 'mercy or almsgiving': 'Is it not a full reward if, in return for taking in a pauper, the Lord receives you into the kingdom of heaven?' Cf CWE 70 132-4. See the paraphrase on verses 34-6 below.

6 For the interpretation of the parables as an urgent appeal to accomplish good works before that Last Day of reckoning see the citation from Jerome in n2 above; also Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 25:13) PL 26 186B: 'Because none of us knows the day of judgment, the parables are told so we may earnestly make ready for ourselves the light of good works, lest the judge come while we do not know.' Likewise Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 25:6-15 PG 123 425A: 'For after death there will be no time for repentance and labour.'

7 from him] In 1522 and 1524 ambiguously 'from him' or 'from themselves'; in 1534 and 1535 unambiguously 'from himself.'

of their neighbour.⁸ They would thus prove themselves worthy of greater gifts, inasmuch as what they had received according to their own measure and capacity⁹ they had invested for the profit of their master, who delights to be enriched by such gain. He said: 'A certain man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted them with his property, not to squander it on themselves, but so that thereafter they might return a profit to their master from whom they had received their capital. To one he gave one talent, to another two, to yet another five, as he judged each suitable. This done, he immediately set out upon his journey. Accordingly, the servant to whom five talents had been entrusted did not delay, but immediately went away and lent at interest the money he had received, and he did this so often that at length the interest equalled the original principal, and the five talents became ten. In the same manner, the servant entrusted with two talents so employed them that the interest equalled the original principal. Then the one to whom a single talent had been given, out of laziness went away and buried in the ground the talent he had received, judging it to be enough if he repaid the principal to his master.

After a lengthy sojourn, the master returned and demanded from his servants an accounting of outlay and receipt. The servant who had received five talents came forward and from the interest returned another five, rendering his account thus: "Master,¹⁰ you had given me principal of five talents as my share; behold, I have gained as much from them." The master praised the diligence of the servant and said: "Well done, good and faithful servant. Since I have found you to be faithful in a matter of little money, I will entrust more to your faithfulness: enter into the joy of your master." After him there came forward also the servant to whom the master had entrusted two talents, and when he was asked to render his account he said: "Master, you had entrusted me with principal of two talents as my share; behold, I have added as much again from the interest." The master praised the diligence of this man also, and said: "Well done, good and faithful servant, since in a little matter you have proven to me your faithfulness, I will

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8 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 78.3 (on Matt 25:28–30) PG 58 714 interprets the parable similarly: 'The person who has received the gift of word and teaching for use, and does not use it, will lose the gift . . . Since we know this, let us offer our money, zeal, patronage, everything for the advantage of our neighbour.'

9 Erasmus adapts the interpretation of Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 25:14–15) PL 26 186C, who explains that each of the servants received an amount of capital 'according to his capacity.'

10 Master] Added in 1534

hereafter entrust to your faithfulness greater affairs: enter into the joy of your master."

Finally, the servant who had buried in the ground the talent he had received came forward also, and when he had been asked to give his account did not merely fail to acknowledge his culpable indolence, but doubled the offence of duty neglected by even accusing his master of harshness and excessive greed.¹¹ He said: "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, that you gather a harvest where you have not sown, and collect profit where you have not scattered cash.¹² Accordingly, fearing that you would be furious with me if the principal by some chance had been lost, I went off and buried your talent in the ground. I preferred to do this rather than to risk the principal while chasing after interest. Behold, you have what is yours. If I do not deserve praise for profit added, I have at least taken care that the principal be safe." The master, throwing this statement back into his face,¹³ said: "Wicked and lazy servant, you knew, as you say, that I am eager for gain, that I gather a harvest where I have not sown, and collect proceeds where I have not spent money. So much the more was it necessary for you to put my money in the hands of the bankers. For I who look for profit where I have spent no money would certainly have come and demanded my money with interest, that is, I would have reaped where I had sown. It was my capital not yours. As a servant you owed your diligence to your master." Then he turned to the other servants and said: "Take the talent away from this useless servant and give it to the one who has ten talents." When the servants were surprised that he ordered it to be given to the one who already had an abundance, the master said: "So it will be in the case of riches of this sort. Whoever has, is worthy to receive more so that he will possess in abundance, but whoever out of laziness¹⁴ makes no profit for himself will even be stripped of what he was seen to have, since he is unworthy. Accordingly, remove that useless servant from my eyes and cast

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11 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 25:24-5) PL 26 187D: 'This servant invited the charge not only of sloth and negligence, but of insolence also. He should simply have confessed his indolence . . . but in fact he actually slandered the owner.'

12 The image suggests the influence of Luke 19:21b.

13 Jerome also notes the retortion *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 25:26-8) PL 26 188A: 'What he thought he had said in his own defence is turned into the charge against him.'

14 Chrysostom also saw in the contrasting examples of the good and the wicked servants a moral contrast between diligence and laziness, cf *In Matt hom* 78.3 (on Matt 25:28-9) PG 58 714.

him away into the outer darkness. There, instead of his master's joy which he was unwilling to earn, he will experience torture with weeping and the gnashing of teeth.'"

With such parables the Lord Jesus spurred his disciples, both by the greatness of the rewards and by the fear of punishments, to pursue gospel godliness and to do good to one's neighbour, and he deterred them from idleness and from presumptuous wrong-doing. He did the same thing much more clearly in his last story where he set vividly before their eyes the majesty of his coming,¹⁵ the separation of the good from the evil who now live mixed together in the Church,¹⁶ and the differing merits and the differing rewards of each group, in a word, the complete picture of the Last Judgment. Aware that the day of his death was near, he described these events so that the disciples, instructed by so many narratives, would not grow at all despondent because of his disgraceful death on the cross, but would mitigate the present sufferings by contemplating the happiness to come, and the present disgrace by the glory to come;¹⁷ they would not, moreover, wish for or attempt revenge upon the wicked, who they knew must in that judgment be punished according to their deserts with eternal torment. He said: 'But when the Son of man, whom you will soon see most lowly and most despicable, comes with his majesty, the companies of all angels attending him, then as judge of all he will sit on the throne of his majesty, and all the nations of the earth will be called into his sight. No one, no matter how exalted or lowly, will be able to escape that judgment. The verdict will not be based on human conjectures, but on the unerring judgment of God, to whose eyes all things are conspicuously clear. First he will separate the good from the evil, just as a shepherd who is about to count his flock divides the

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15 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 79.1 (on Matt 25:31) PG 58 717 introduced his discussion of the parable, as Erasmus does here, by comparing the narrative style: '... in this parable he treats [the same subject] more clearly and forcefully ... with more frightening details ... he [Christ] shows himself revealed ... on his throne of glory ... shows heaven emptied of its denizens.'

16 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 79.1 (on Matt 25:32) PG 58 717: 'Now, indeed, they are not separated, but all are mixed together; then will come the separation.'

17 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 79.1 (on Matt 25:31-3) PG 58 717: 'Since the cross was close at hand, which seemed a shameful thing, he arouses his hearers, and brings a court of justice before their eyes, and sets the whole world before them.' Likewise Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 25:31-3) PL 26 189A notes that after revealing the scandalous events of the passion 'he rightly shows the glory of the triumph, to compensate the coming scandals with the reward of the promise.'

sheep from the goats; he will place the sheep, that is, the innocent and the beneficent, at his right, but he will place the goats, that is, the guilty and the evil-doers, at his left. And so, with the whole race of mortals divided into two groups, as a just judge he will offer to both an explanation of his judgment, so the good will know on account of what services they merited such happiness, and the wicked will hear on account of what faults they merited eternal punishment.

'Greeting the group on his right with a serene and happy countenance, he will say: "Come, my friends, you whom the world, it is true, regarded as despicable and accursed, but whom my Father regards as honoured and praiseworthy. In place of the evils you suffered for my sake, receive now the inheritance of the heavenly kingdom, which God, who foreknows all things, has by his divine counsel prepared for you before the world was created. It seemed right to repay with this great reward the services of your love towards me, so you would not think that they had come to nothing. For in times past when I was hungry you gave me food, when I was thirsty you gave me drink, when I was a stranger and needed shelter you took me into your homes, when I was naked you clothed me, when I was sick you visited me, when I was in prison you came to me to provide comfort. You shared with me whatever you had; now I in turn share with you the entire kingdom that I have in common with my Father."

When they hear these things, the just, who perform the works of godliness in such a way that somehow they do not know they have done them, will reply to him, saying: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food, when did we see you thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you under our roof, or when did we clothe you when you were naked? When did we visit you when you were sick, when did we go to you when you were shut up in prison?" Then the king will openly acknowledge that whatever has been expended on any one of those whom the world has regarded as most despicable because of their poverty and lowliness, this he wants reckoned as spent on himself. In fact, so far was he from holding them in contempt that he deemed them worthy of the honour of being called brothers.¹⁸ He will say: "I say to you for a certainty, that although I, who am the Lord of all things, was not in need of anyone's help, nevertheless inasmuch as you have out of regard for me done those things to any of the least of these my brothers, you have done them to me."

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¹⁸ The 'honour' is implied by 25:40, but cf also Matt 12:49, cited by Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on 25:40-5) PL 26 190A.

‘Then with a dreadful expression¹⁹ he will turn to those who stand on the left, and he will pronounce a frightful sentence: “Depart from me, you whom the world applauded, but who were accursed to my Father and to me. Go into the fire that is never to be extinguished, that was prepared from the creation of the world for the devil and his angels, to whom you preferred to cling rather than to me. For when I was hungry you did not give me food, when I was thirsty you did not give me drink. I was a wanderer and in need of shelter and you did not take me in, I was naked and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then these also will reply to their judge in as many words as the just had replied: “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to you?” Then the king will reply to them too: “Whatever kindnesses were denied to any one of those who though least according to the world are nevertheless my brothers, these kindnesses I consider to have been denied to me. In those persons was I in need, in them I wanted to be restored.” When that verdict has been delivered, a verdict from which there is no appeal, those on the left will go into eternal fire, but the just will enter eternal life.’

Chapter 26

And so Jesus completed the discourses of this kind. By them he was strengthening in so many ways his disciples’ spirits against the impending afflictions, so they would not be utterly dejected when they soon saw their Lord dragged off to an ignominious punishment. Then, at last, he dared to disclose to them openly¹ the day and manner of his death, the thought of which he hammered into the minds of his disciples so that when they

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19 The ‘dreadful expression’ contrasts with the ‘serene and happy countenance’ in the paraphrase on verse 34. Observations on facial expression and on the eyes as a reflection of character and a medium of messages conveyed are obvious ways of adding dramatic force and verisimilitude to the paraphrastic narrative. Sometimes this occurs in the paraphrases without warrant from the biblical text, as here, sometimes a detail from the biblical text is accentuated to give added significance to a look or an expression; cf eg the paraphrase on 26:74 and n75 below, and chapter 12 n14 above. Erasmus notes similarly significance in the voice; cf eg chapter 9 n20 above.

1 Cf the paraphrase on 22:41 where Jesus merely ‘hints’ at his coming ignominious death; cf also the paraphrase on 16:21 where Jesus’ words, though clear enough, are not understood clearly by the disciples.

witnessed it they would not become so terrified that they would lose heart entirely, as one does at something absolutely unexpected.² Such would be the case especially when they understood that it was of his own free will that Jesus went to his death (which he otherwise could have avoided), and that he could not be killed before the day arrived that he had appointed for his own death, which was the day of Passover. Now the Hebrews celebrated this day with great devotion, renewing the yearly remembrance of the day when once among the Egyptians, after smearing lamb's blood on their door posts, they were set free by the angel of death and crossed the Red Sea unharmed. In remembrance of this event, every year they sacrificed an unblemished year-old lamb;³ they called the celebration *phase*, from the passing over of the angel, and from their having happily passed over the sea.⁴ But this was an image of Jesus Christ, who would redeem with his most holy blood the entire world from the tyranny of sin, he who alone of all was free from the blemishes of sins.⁵ Privately warning his disciples of this, Jesus said: 'You know that after two days the Passover is to be sacrificed, and on that day the Son of man will be delivered up to be crucified.'

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2 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 82.1 (on Matt 26:26) PG 58 737 ascribes a similar motive to Jesus' words during the last supper: 'By these mysteries he reminds his disciples of his death, and during the feast he speaks of the cross, rendering his suffering easier to bear by repeating the prediction. For if, after so many deeds and predictions, they were confounded, what would they not have suffered if they had heard nothing of these things?' Cf also chapter 25 n17.

3 Cf Exod 12:1-6.

4 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 26:2) PL 26 190C: '*Pascha*, which in Hebrew is called *Phase*, is not so named from the passion as many suppose, but from the passing over, because the destroyer, seeing the blood on the doorposts of the Israelites, passed over and did not strike them.' Jerome's explanation had become traditional; cf the *Gloss* (on 26:2). Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 79.3 (on Matt 26:2) PG 58 720 explains Πάσχα as a memorial of the 'ancient kindnesses done in Egypt.' In the *Paraphrases* on each of the Gospels Erasmus introduces the word *Phase* as 'Passover,' playing in various ways on the meaning of the term. For the allusion and for the word in the exegetical tradition see CWE 46 41 n30, 76 n8, 148 n61; CWE 48 183 n2; CWE 49 156 n1. Chrysostom in his interpretation of verse 2 (*ibid*) notes that Jesus' words were intended to show that 'a mystery was taking place, that the festal assembly would lead to the salvation of the world' (similarly Erasmus in the next sentence of the paraphrase).

5 Bédā objected to this statement, but Erasmus referred his readers to his earlier discussion (cf chapter 3 n49); cf *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* and *Supputatio* LB IX 466A and 593A.

Therefore when that holy and happy day drew near, celebration of which was appropriately prepared for with godly works,⁶ the chief priests and elders⁷ gathered, by whose authority the people's fury ought to have been restrained, if any had arisen.⁸ They gathered in the courtyard of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, for it was the priests in particular who had conspired against Jesus, because they were afraid that if he went unchecked they would lose their financial gain and their authority. Accordingly they decided there on an impious plan to lay hands on Jesus and kill him, not publicly or by force, but by stealth. Since, then, the leaders agreed in wicked concord about the murder, they debated about the time. Although they were thirsting eagerly for innocent blood, mad with envy and hate, nevertheless they resolved to put off the murder to another time, because the day that was especially festive and holy to the Jews was close at hand. They were afraid that, if they fell upon him on the day when people were accustomed to meet together in large and close-packed crowds, they might cause a riot, since more than a few of the people held Jesus in the highest regard, for they had seen his miracles, had heard his wonderful teaching, and had noticed his incredibly gentle manner. The leaders feared the people though they did not fear God;⁹ they were not afraid of polluting the holy day with murder though they had not dared to eat leavened bread. Satan put forward this plan to them, for he desired to hide the sacrifice that would bring salvation to the world;¹⁰ but in the divine plan it was resolved otherwise: it was not fitting to slay secretly the sacrificial victim which the Father wanted to be offered, not for the salvation of the Jewish race only, but for the salvation of the entire world as well.

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6 'Godly works' would undoubtedly include the preparations necessary to celebrate the festival, but beyond this the phrase invites a contrast between the woman with the alabaster flask and the conspiratorial priests who plot murder (26:3-13).

7 elders] First in 1534; previously 'elders of the people,' as in the biblical text.

8 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 79.3 (on Matt 26:3) PG 58 720 notes a similar inversion of the role of the religious leadership: 'Intent upon lawless deeds, they go to the chief priest, desiring to receive authority to act from the one by whom they ought to have been impeded.' So also Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 26:2-5 PG 123 436B.

9 Cf Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 26:2-5 PG 123 436B: 'Intent on committing unholy murder, they fear not God but the mob.' Compare Chrysostom in the next note.

10 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 79.3 (on Matt 26:5) PG 58 721: 'The devil did not want him killed during Passover, so that his suffering would not come to light; [the priests and elders] did not want it in case there would be unrest. And notice that they did not fear things divine, or that their defilement would be greater because of the season; but they feared everywhere only things human.'

Now when Jesus was in Bethany (in the vicinity of Jerusalem¹¹ where he was to be crucified), and was reclining at table in the house of a certain Simon called the leper, a woman came to him holding an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment, and breaking the jar¹² she poured the ointment on his head. When the disciples saw something of such value poured out all at once, they murmured indignantly. For they knew that Jesus was not at all accustomed to use luxuries of this sort, and that it would have been more in accordance with his own inclination if the woman had presented the alabaster jar unbroken,¹³ so that they might have sold the ointment and have aided the poor with the money. They said: 'Why throw away something so precious? It could have been sold for a great price and that sum given to the poor.' Such were the words of the disciples, who did not understand with what intent Jesus permitted this. It was not that he was taken with such luxuries, but he wanted his death to be adorned with this honour, a death that he was about to suffer not through any necessity, but of his own accord for the salvation of the entire world. For although he conducted himself most humbly throughout his entire life, nevertheless when it came to his death – the means by which he was going to conquer the devil – he glorified it with some magnificence. This was why he was carried into Jerusalem that one time with a triumphal procession,¹⁴ and then, as if foreshadowing the honour of his burial, why he was anointed with ointment; why also he wanted to be buried, after his death, in a new tomb cut out of stone, and to be wrapped in a clean burial cloth, and to be interred with the care given a noble man.¹⁵ For the corpses of the rich and the distinguished are

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11 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 80.1 (on Matt 26:6) PG 58 723–4 also marks the geography, 'Bethany is about fifteen stades from Jerusalem,' and thinks the place is noted because its proximity to Jerusalem demonstrates that Jesus went willingly to his death, since he knew he had enemies in Jerusalem. In what follows Erasmus, too, affirms that the death was undertaken freely, but sees in the Bethany event Jesus' desire to adorn his death.

12 Cf Mark 14:3 for the breaking of the jar.

13 'Unbroken': *integram*, feminine with *alabastrum*; similarly just above, 'breaking the jar' *fracta alabaastro*. The feminine is unexpected, since in all editions the word is neuter in Erasmus' Greek text and Latin translation of Mark 14:3, where the gender is discernible, as also in his paraphrase on that verse. In literature the Greek word is, however, found in all three genders.

14 Cf Matt 21:6–11. The image here, recalling the 'triumph' of a victorious Roman general contrasts with the language in the paraphrase on 21:1–11, where Erasmus speaks of a 'novel procession, by which he derided the pride of the world.' For the image of the triumph in Erasmus and for its origin in Roman life see CWE 48 147 n45; also CWE 44 14 n11 and CWE 50 57 n11.

15 For the details see 27:58–60.

customarily smeared with expensive ointments, either out of respect, or to protect the body against decay. But since he knew he would return to life before his friends made this show of respect, he allowed the pomp of burial to be displayed before his death, clearly so that in many ways he might fix the thought of his death in the minds of his disciples, and he might lessen its horror by means of this honour. Therefore when the disciples, unaware of these things, murmured about the expense, Jesus restrained them, saying: 'Why are you troubling this woman? She has rendered to me, who am about to die, a godly service. It is inappropriate for you to envy me this final honour. You will always have with you the common poor, for whom you may perform good works; you will not always have me. This ointment has not been wasted, but this woman, as if¹⁶ with a presentiment that I am soon going to die, has anticipated my burial with this service, and has poured out on one still alive what is usually poured out on the dead. Do not, then, disparage her piety, a piety that is so pleasing to God that hereafter, when the gospel of my death is being preached throughout the world, at the same time mention will be made of this woman who anticipated my burial with a godly and holy service.'

Although this statement had checked the indignation of the others who had simply made a mistake, unaware of the mystery,¹⁷ nevertheless it did not at all please Judas Iscariot who had feigned concern for the poor, when gain was dearer to his heart. For he carried the purse, and he was in the habit of stealing from what was given by Jesus' generous friends to be distributed to the poor.¹⁸ From this source he gradually increased his

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¹⁶ as if] Added in 1534

¹⁷ 'Mystery': *mysterii*, a term frequently used by Erasmus. He explains the word repeatedly throughout his annotations, where the basic meaning of the word, 'something secret or hidden' is extended in various ways: 'not to be imparted to the profane' (*mysterium regni* Mark 4:11), 'known to few and to be shared only with the initiates' ('brothers this mystery' Rom 11:25 CWE 56 308), 'to be venerated above all in silence' (*sacramentum* Eph 1:9). Erasmus explores the potential of the word for practical Christian living in his admonitions in the *Enchiridion*: 'carry about in your heart the mystery of the cross,' 'follow the mystery of the cross,' 'reproduce the mystery of his burial' CWE 66 73 and 82. See also n22 below.

¹⁸ The details that Judas carried the purse and stole from it are supplied from John 12:6. 'Jesus' generous friends' is perhaps inferred from Matt 27:55. The allusion to John 12 suggests that Erasmus identifies the story found in John 12:1–8 of Mary, Lazarus' sister, with the story here in Matthew, and so accepts the traditional identification of the two women, thus making a single Mary the hero of both (and of the story of the sinful woman in Luke 7:36–50). Between

wealth. He was, therefore, totally addicted to the most loathsome disease of greed, and wanted to compensate for what he judged he had lost in ointment with the price he would get for betraying the Lord.¹⁹ So he went to the chief priests and magistrates, who he knew had conspired with resolve to murder Jesus and were only waiting until Jesus could be seized without causing an uproar. To accomplish this no one was more suited than one of the men who were closest to the Lord, and who knew without fail where Jesus was accustomed to resort, for he had his own retreats for prayer.²⁰ Among that most select band of twelve, men whom Christ had taken to himself first of all,²¹ there was found one to whom ungodly gain was dearer than so gentle and kind a Lord – so great a curse is greed if it completely possesses one's heart. But Jesus wanted to indicate by this image that there would be some who, corrupted by the desire for money, would betray the gospel message, and that this wicked deed would proceed especially from those who, as leaders of ecclesiastical religion, seemed to know the mysteries²² of their Lord; so familiar are they with their Lord that by false interpretation they betray his teaching to profane and ungodly magistrates who are looking for nothing else than the destruction of gospel truth. Judas, then, having gone to the magistrates, said: 'What reward will you give me

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1517 and 1519 the question had become a very public matter of debate between Bishop John Fisher and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, the former insisting on the traditional view, the latter distinguishing the women in the three accounts; cf Epp 766:26n and 936:9n. Though Erasmus advised Fisher in the debate, he 'made no very explicit pronouncement on the subject' (Guy Bedouelle in CWE 83 xxv). In fact, in none of his annotations on these passages or on the Markan parallel (14:3–9) does Erasmus discuss the question of the woman's identity. See the paraphrases on John 11:2 and 12:3, where the conflation of details unobtrusively invites the traditional view (cf CWE 46 139 and n1; 149 and n6). Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 314 admit that the 'connection' between the incidents remains 'unclear.'

19 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 26:15) PL 26 192D–3A: 'The unfortunate Judas wanted the price [he would get] for his teacher to compensate for the loss he believed he suffered from the wasted ointment.'

20 Cf John 18:2.

21 With the emphasis in the paraphrase compare Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 80.2 (on Matt 26:14) PG 58 727: '[The evangelists] could have said quite simply that he was one of the disciples, but now they specify, "one of the twelve," as though to say, "one of the inner circle of those chosen according to merit."'

22 'Mysteries': *arcanorum*, elsewhere also used to designate 'mysteries'; cf CWE 50 99 n64. The negative association here with the 'profane' as the sentence continues is characteristic of the mysteries; cf n17 above.

if I deliver him into your hands?’ And they contracted with him for thirty denarii. With so small a fee was he able to be hired for a most enormous crime! So little value was placed on the precious blood that sufficed to redeem the entire race of mortals!²³ Therefore greedy and longing for the promised money, Judas from that very moment looked for the chance to betray Jesus.

When the first day had arrived of the seven, during which it was the practice for Jews to abstain from leavened bread even after the eating of the Passover lamb,²⁴ the disciples came to Jesus, saying: ‘Lord, where do you want us to prepare for you the feast to celebrate Passover?’ So poor were they that neither he nor the disciples had a house of their own to go to.²⁵ But in order to show that the entire matter was mystical, and that it happened neither by chance nor by necessity, but that all things were done with foreknowledge and by divine plan, Jesus responded to them: ‘Go into the city and soon after you have entered a man will come up carrying a jar of water. Follow²⁶ him, and wherever he enters, you enter, and say to the head of that household: “The teacher says: My time draws near. In your house I am celebrating the Passover with my disciples.” He will show you a large and well-furnished upper room. There prepare the Passover.’²⁷ The disciples went away and found everything as Jesus had foretold to them, and in the place he had bidden them they prepared the feast for him.

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23 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 26:15) PL 26 193A also deplores the bargain: ‘Judas handed Jesus over as though he were a worthless slave.’

24 For the seven days of unleavened bread (days of *azyma*) see Exod 12:15-19; also CWE 50 80 n7 and 121 n8.

25 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 81.1 (on Matt 26:17) PG 58 730: ‘It is clear from this that he had neither a house nor a lodging-place, neither did the disciples, I suppose. Otherwise, they would have asked him to stay there. But they who had renounced everything had no house,’ and Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 26:17-19 PG 123 441A: ‘For neither he nor they owned a house.’ Cf Matt 8:20. But cf chapter 17 n25 above, where the paraphrase implies that Jesus did have a house in Capernaum. For Peter’s house in Capernaum see 8:14.

26 Follow] In 1522 and 1524 the present imperative *sequimini*; in 1534 and 1535 the future indicative *sequemini*, used as an imperative

27 Reference to the water-bearer and the householder is found at Mark 14:13-14 and Luke 22:10-11; reference to the upper room is found at Mark 14:15 and Luke 22:12. In the Vulgate of Mark and Luke the room is ‘large and well-furnished’; in Erasmus’ text and translation of Mark the room is ‘large, well-furnished and ready.’ On ‘my time draws near’ cf n55 below.

Towards evening Jesus went there and, about to partake of the feast, he reclined²⁸ with his twelve disciples. And now while they were eating, Jesus said: 'One of you will betray me.' He said this to show clearly that absolutely nothing escaped him, and so that at the same time the conscience of his betrayer thus stung might turn to repentance.²⁹ When they heard this statement, a great sorrow seized the hearts of all. Each one had suspected himself and was in despair, aware of human weakness.³⁰ Therefore, desiring to be freed from this sorrow, they began one after another to ask: 'Can it be I, Lord?' Then in order to strengthen in some way the others who were nearly overcome with grief and to strike Judas' conscience more sharply, if by chance he could be moved to repentance, Jesus pointed out the author of this deed with a surer sign, and at the same time reminded him of the closest familiarity that ought to have called him back from such insane wickedness. He said: 'He who has dipped his hand in this dish with me, and is not only a table-companion but even a sharer of my dish, this is the one who will betray me; and instead of returning the kindness that befits familiarity he will commit acts worse than those that befit an enemy, though the sharing of bread and salt usually joins even strangers by a pact of friendship.'³¹ That these things should indeed befall the Son of man – this was appointed by the Father, this was predicted by the prophets.³² Nevertheless, woe to that man by whose crime the Son of man is betrayed. Divine wisdom, it is true, makes use of his ungodly act for the salvation of the human race. But he is no less guilty on that account, since he was led to this crime by his own malice,³³ while I have done everything possible to heal

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28 'Reclined': *accubuit*, reflecting the Roman manner of dining by reclining on couches positioned around a *mensa* 'table'

29 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 26:21) PL 26 194A also notes that just as Jesus had predicted his passion, so he predicts his betrayer, and does so to invite Judas to repentance; cf n34 below.

30 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 26:22) PL 26 194A-B exonerated the eleven: they knew they were not guilty, but 'they feared their own weakness,' and in sorrow asked about the sin they had not committed.

31 For sharing salt and bread as an act of friendship see *Adagia* I vi 10 and IV ix 80.

32 Cf Ps 41:9.

33 With the thought expressed here compare Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 79.3 (on Matt 26:3-5) PG 58 721 regarding the priests and elders: 'Even though [God] made the greatest use of their wickedness for his own purposes, they were not therefore without blame, but they were deserving of a thousand torments for being of such a disposition.'

his soul.³⁴ And so, unless he repents, the cruellest punishment awaits him for committing a deed so impious, so that it would be better for him never to have been born.' This speech had the power either to cure an unprincipled person through shame or to deter a wicked person through punishment; but so far was Judas from being corrected by it, that, even adding impudence to the crime, he asked the Lord as if conscious of no evil: 'Surely it is not I, Rabbi?' Here, not forgetting his gentleness, Jesus replied: 'You have said so,' intimating rather than stating plainly that it was he; pretending to suspect, concealing that he knew.³⁵

During this, the last supper Jesus shared with his disciples before his death, he instituted that most holy symbol of his death, so that there would be continually renewed among them an everlasting memorial of his immense love by which he did not hesitate to expend his life to redeem³⁶ the race of mortals. In this way the memory of his divine sacrifice could not at some time slip from our minds, how for us he, as the purest Lamb, the new and true Passover, sacrificed himself on the altar to God the Father, whom he rendered by his blood no longer angry, but favourable towards us, he himself paying for our wrongdoings the price that was owed

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34 Chrysostom stresses Jesus' efforts to correct Judas; cf *In Matt hom* 82.1 (on Matt 26:26–8) PG 58 737: 'Even though Christ knew everything, he did not prevent Judas [from coming to the mysteries], so you would learn that he omits nothing pertaining to correction. Therefore both before and after this he often warned him and restrained him with words, deeds, fear, service rendered, threats, esteem and honour, but nothing rid him of so grave an illness.' Cf Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 26:23–5 PG 123 441D and 444A: 'He rebukes the betrayer openly, for when he rebuked him privately he was not corrected. For this reason he reveals the betrayer . . . so that even thus he might be corrected.' Nicholas of Lyra (on 26:20–4) also shows the ways in which Jesus attempted to 'call the traitor back' from his crime.

35 On the dissimulating Christ cf chapter 20 n33. Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 81.2 (on Matt 26:25) PG 58 732 had stressed at this point not only the crime of betrayal, but the shamelessness of the question asked by one conscious of his guilt, and the remarkable meekness and gentleness of Jesus in replying merely 'You have said so.'

36 'Expend . . . redeem': *impendere* . . . *redimendo*; Erasmus plays on the imagery of redemption, understood as a ransom or purchase: *impendere* 'to expend'; *redimere* 'to buy back.' The language is evidently intended to place the interpretation of the words of institution first within the theological orbit indicated by the language of Matt 20:28 (= Mark 10:45), where the words 'to give . . . a ransom' (δοῦναι . . . λύτρον) are translated (ER and VG) by *dare* . . . *redemptionem*, and in the paraphrase (20:28) become *impendere* . . . *redimam*; cf chapter 20 n31; also n40 below.

for our sins. He consecrated this mystic symbol³⁷ with the two things by which a friendship has, since long ago, customarily been bonded among persons, so that the love by which Christ laid down his life for his people might unite us also, who even ourselves frequently eat from the same loaf of bread and drink from the same cup. At the same time he recalled by a certain spiritual image the rites of the Mosaic law, according to which no expiation from sins occurs except through the blood of the sacrificial victim,³⁸ and he signified, furthermore, that he was consecrating the new covenant of the gospel profession with a mystery of that sort.³⁹ For when Moses had read out from the roll containing the commandments of the Law, and the people had replied: 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient,' [Exod 24:7] he took from the bowl some of the blood of the victims he had slaughtered, and sprinkled the people with it, saying: 'This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.' [Exod 24:8] All these things, in fact, pointed by means of certain figures and foreshadowings to this most holy sacrifice, by which the Lord Jesus, of his own accord handing his body over to death and pouring out his blood, was about to atone for the sins of the whole world, freely reconciling to God anyone who professed this covenant of the new testament. Before he sacrificed this victim, he wanted this covenant to be commended to the minds of his disciples by means of certain mystical signs, so that they would understand that his death was not a common or futile sacrifice, but an effective sacrifice for expiating sins, not only those of the Jews, but those of all races and ages.

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37 On 'symbol' cf CWE 50 24 n115 and CWE 70 242-4. On 'mystic' *arcanum* cf n22 above; also chapter 24 n17. Erasmus' paraphrastic elaboration of the events at the Last Supper enlarges the scope of the word 'mystic' from its characteristic use in the interpretation of Scripture to include all signs that point to Christ and his saving work. For Erasmus' theology of the Eucharist, with bibliography, see CWE 48 188 n15, and n40 below.

38 Lev 17:11; cf Lev 16.

39 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 82.1 (on Matt 26:26-8) PG 58 738-9 explicates this scene similarly, showing how the Old Covenant foreshadows the New: 'He was the one who gave the Old Covenant, which was an outline and sketch of the New . . . He gives the reason for the passion, namely, the remission of sins. He calls it the blood of the New Covenant, that is, the contract, the promise, the New Law . . . And just as the Old Covenant had sheep and calves, so this has the Lord's blood. Then he points out that he is going to die; for this reason he both mentions the covenant and recalls the former one, for that, too, had been consecrated by blood.'

Now the death of Christ was not to be repeated. In order, then, that so great a blessing could not possibly slip some day from people's minds, or that people could not possibly forget the most holy covenant made once and for all, along with the author of their salvation, he ordained that among those who profess the gospel law memory should be renewed by frequent communion of the holy bread and the chalice.⁴⁰ He wanted this sign to be holy among his soldiers⁴¹ and to be so venerated that, just as an abundance of divine grace would be bestowed upon those who take the body and blood of the Lord purely and worthily, so those who took it unworthily would summon weighty damnation upon themselves.⁴² Accordingly, Jesus took the bread in his hands and, after he had offered the sacrifice of praise to God,⁴³ broke it and distributed⁴⁴ it to his disciples, saying: 'Take, eat, this is my body.' Then he also took the cup in his hands, and when he had given thanks to the Father he drank first, and then offered it to them, saying: 'Drink from this cup, all of you. For this is my blood, the blood of the new covenant that will be poured out for many for the remission of sins. As often as you do this, do it for the remembrance of me.'⁴⁵ For as

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40 As a preface to his paraphrase on 26:26 (immediately below) Erasmus has offered an exposition (starting from the preceding paragraph) of the significance of the Eucharist, beginning with the concept of ransom, and moving on to the idea of a New Covenant imaging the Old, hence an act of remembrance, recollection and memorialization effected by the 'mystic symbol' (cf n37 above). That the supper should be continued as an act of remembrance is an injunction imported from Luke 22:19 (cf n45 below). In all these respects Erasmus found a model in Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 82.1 (on Matt 26:26–8) PG 58 738–9, who saw in the 'mystery' the definitive expression of the fulfilment of the Old Law in the New (738), though Chrysostom goes on (739) to expound the Supper in relation to the Passover events rather than the covenant. On the memorial character of the Eucharist cf the annotation on 1 Cor 11:24 (*in meam commemorationem*) and on Luke 22:19 (*in meam commemorationem*).

41 Apparently a reference to the *signum* 'sign' or *symbolum* 'symbol' used as a means of identification among soldiers. See eg the annotation on Mark 14:44 (*signum*), the *Explanatio symboli* CWE 70 242, and the colloquy 'An Examination Concerning the Faith' CWE 39 423:10–11 and n17. For the image of the Christian soldier see 2 Tim 2:3; Eph 6:11–17, and the *Enchiridion* CWE 66 26 and n18.

42 Cf 1 Cor 11:27–30.

43 Cf Heb 13:15.

44 Erasmus stresses the notion of distribution in his annotation on 26:26 (*accipite et comedite*) and 1 Cor 11:24 (*quod pro vobis tradetur*), where he explains, 'the bread distributed among many is the symbol of concord.'

45 The 'remembrance' clause is found only in Luke among the Synoptics, and only after the bread (22:17–21); in 1 Cor 11:24–5 after both the bread and wine; for

often as you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you will proclaim the Lord's death until he comes,⁴⁶ not then as saviour,⁴⁷ but as judge. In the meantime another sacrificial victim for our sins will not have to be awaited since this one alone suffices for abolishing the sins of the entire world. And I tell you, after this I will not eat from this loaf until I eat it with you, a loaf made complete in the kingdom of my Father,⁴⁸ nor will I drink further from this fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.' The most merciful Lord did not exclude the betrayer Judas from this sacred symbol; his purpose was that Judas should be corrected by such great gentleness. But since he received the sign of the covenant when he had treachery in his heart, he departed more polluted than when he arrived.⁴⁹

When they had sung a hymn for the praise of God, they arose and went to the Mount of Olives. This place, Jesus knew, was very well known to the betrayer, so that he would not seem to want to hide as if afraid of death,⁵⁰ but of his own accord he withdrew to a lonely place, so that

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the clause 'as often as you do this' see 1 Cor 11:25. 'He drank first' represents the Latin *praebibit*, a somewhat rare word in classical Latin, but attested in the sense of 'to pledge (by taking the first sip and passing the drink to the person pledged)' OLD. There is no specific indication either in the synoptic accounts of the Institution of the Lord's Supper (Matt 26:26–9; Mark 14:22–5; Luke 22:14–20) or in the tradition reported by Paul (1 Cor 11:23–6) that Jesus drank first, nor do the paraphrases on the parallel verses in Mark and Luke repeat the observation made here (CWE 48 189, CWE 49 160). See, however, the paraphrase on Luke 22:17, where Jesus first 'poured an offering,' then 'held out the cup.' Cf CWE 48 189 and n17.

46 Cf 1 Cor 11:25–6.

47 'Saviour': *servator*. Bēda disapproved; Erasmus justified the use of *servator* on the grounds that it was good classical usage, and was found in orthodox writers. See *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* and *Supputatio* LB IX 466B–C and 593B. Cf also CWE 44 xviii, CWE 48 191 n24, and CWE 50 87 n56.

48 Possibly an interpretation of Luke 22:15–16. In the Synoptic Gospels at this point (Matt 26:29, Mark 14:25, Luke 22:18) Jesus speaks only of the 'fruit of the vine.'

49 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 82.1 (on Matt 26:26–8) PG 58 737 on Judas: 'His sin became greater both because he approached the mysteries in such a spirit, and because, after having approached them, he became no better, either from fear, from the benefit, or from the honour.' For Jesus' intent to correct Judas, see n34 above.

50 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 82.2 (on Matt 26:30) PG 58 740: 'Making himself conspicuous, so he might be arrested and not seem to hide, he naturally hurried to a place known to Judas,' and Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 26:30 PG 123 445C: 'He goes to the Mount of Olives, and not somewhere else, so he might

his enemies could catch their prey without creating a disturbance among the people. There he again foretold to his disciples that they would soon be deeply troubled when they saw the cruel suffering of their Lord. But to prevent them from becoming utterly dejected, he consoled them with a prophecy and with his imminent resurrection, simultaneously indicating the time and the vicinity where they would see him again. He said: 'You will all be thrown into confusion this night on my account, for thus God the Father has predicted through the mouth of the prophet Zechariah: "I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."⁵¹ But there is no reason for you to despair.⁵² Death will confound you, but the resurrection soon will console you. For I will rise on the third day, and when I have risen I will go before you into Galilee. There I shall appear before your eyes.' Jesus allowed all his disciples to fall into this distress in order to teach them by this very circumstance how desperately feeble is human nature, how foolish it is for one to trust in oneself, so that through their own experience they might learn to give support to the weakness of others also. And so Peter, not knowing himself sufficiently well, with a certain human and transitory courage, denied that Christ's prediction, based on the prophecy, would come to pass, and, what was more rash, he put himself alone before all the others. He said: 'Though everyone is thrown into confusion on your account, still I will not be shaken.' Jesus said to him: 'What are you saying, Peter? You alone of all will not be upset?⁵³ Why, I tell you for a certainty: before the cock crows twice⁵⁴ this night, you will deny me three times.' Not even so did Peter recognize his weakness, but replied insistently: 'Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you.' The

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not seem to flee. For he does not withdraw to an unknown place, but to one known to the Jews.'

51 Erasmus cites the Vulgate of Matt 26:31, which slightly modifies Zech 13:7.

52 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 26:31) PL 26 196B sees in Jesus' prediction solace for despair, and encouragement to repent. Similarly the *Gloss* (on 26:32) and Nicholas of Lyra.

53 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 82.3 (on Matt 26:33-5) PG 58 741 notes the rashness of Peter's affirmation here, which contradicted both prophecy and Christ: 'What are you saying, Peter? The prophet has said, "The sheep will be scattered"; Christ has confirmed the prophetic word – and you deny?' In the paraphrase on 26:31-4 Erasmus uses various words with a *turb-* stem: *turbo*, *conturbo*, *perturbo*, *perturbatio*, translated here variously: confound, throw into confusion, distress, shake, upset. They function as an explication of the Greek *σκανδαλίζω*, on which see chapter 18 n6 above.

54 'Twice': from Mark 14:30

other apostles also imitated Peter's temerity, though they too would have denied Christ if they had been caught in an inescapable situation like the one Peter faced.

Then knowing that the time drew near when the last storm would come, Jesus led his eleven disciples (for Judas had left the supper) into an estate⁵⁵ called Gethsemane. He asked eight of them to remain here, though they were reluctantly separated from their master, whom they loved deeply indeed, but nevertheless with an affection still human. He said: 'Wait here while I go into my accustomed place and there pray.' He did not dare make these, as the more feeble, witness his agony, lest they should become disheartened.⁵⁶ But he took with him three only, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, so that he would now have as witnesses of the ultimate final human weakness those whom he had brought to the mountain as spectators of his majesty,⁵⁷ and at the same time might teach that, whenever we are assailed by a storm of such evils – evils too dreadful for human strength to bear – we should commit ourselves totally to divine support, utterly distrusting ourselves. The dread of death, if ever it has taken hold of anyone, is more bitter than even death itself. Therefore, it was this that began to assault Jesus then, and he felt an astonishing grief and sadness of mind.⁵⁸

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55 For Judas' departure see John 13:30. 'Estate' here represents the Latin *villa*. Though in his translation Erasmus followed the Vulgate in translating the Greek χωρίον as *villa*, he acknowledged in his annotation on 26:36 (*in villam quae dicitur Gethsemani*) that the Greek really meant 'place' and that according to Jerome Gethsemane in Hebrew meant 'valley (Latin *valles*) of abundance,' and was located at the foot of the Mount of Olives. On the expression 'knowing that the time drew near' cf John 13:1 and chapter 14 n22.

56 Bédæ found in the words 'did not dare' *non ausus est* Christological implications so serious that he thought they 'breathed forth open blasphemy.' Erasmus replied that the phrase was a trope, just as we use tropes when we say that God is angry, or repents, and he appealed to Chrysostom as an author who had, in effect, at this point ascribed to Christ fear for his disciples (cf next note). See *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* and *Supputatio* LB IX 466C–D and 593C–4A.

57 The reference is to the transfiguration: Matt 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–10; Luke 9:28–36. Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 83.1 (on Matt 26:36–8) PG 58 745: 'Why did he not take all the disciples with him? That they might not be disheartened. But he took only those who had been witnesses of his glory.'

58 Erasmus' belief that Jesus felt truly human emotions in Gethsemane sparked a debate with John Colet in 1499 when Erasmus was in Oxford. The essential points Erasmus made in the debate are found in Epp 108–11, greatly enlarged in the *De taedio Iesu* (CWE 70). Erasmus understands that the purpose of such suffering was exemplary and didactic, but while here in the paraphrase on

For he did not want his mental torment to be hidden from his chosen friends: he wanted them to see clearly that he was truly human, subject alike to the affections of the body and the mind.⁵⁹ He said: 'My soul is sorrowful even to the point of death. Remain here and keep watch with me, for this time demands not sleep but vigilant and earnest prayer.' Then, proceeding a short distance from the three disciples, Jesus bowed his head, turned his face to the earth, and thus prostrate prayed to his Father saying: 'My Father, if it is possible, remove this cup of death from me,⁶⁰ for I feel the affection of my body shrinking back violently from death. Nevertheless, let it be done not as I want in accordance with the feebleness of the body, but as you want for the salvation of the human race.' After he said this prayer he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter: 'Really! you who just now boasted that you would die with me, could you not keep watch with me even one hour? I am keeping watch and praying on behalf of you all. You all,⁶¹ keep watch with me and pray to the Father

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26:37 the lesson to be learned is one of 'trust,' in Ep 109:96–141 and in the *De taedio Iesu* CWE 70 64–6 the emphasis is upon Christ's example of gentleness, patience and obedience.

59 Erasmus concludes his argument in Ep 109 (cf preceding note) by stressing that the sadness of Christ in Gethsemane demonstrated his human nature: 'The more obvious were the signs he gave of dread, the clearer was the proof of his truly human nature, and the more cogent was the example of obedience he set.' Both Nicholas of Lyra and the *Gloss* (on 26:37) noted similarly that Jesus began to be sad 'to show the reality of his human nature,' but the *Gloss* adds that he was saddened also because of the rejection of the Jews and the overthrow of Jerusalem (cf next note).

60 In the debate with Colet Erasmus specifies that the 'cup' was death itself; Colet, appealing to Jerome, argued that the cup was rather the 'agony of witnessing the guilt of the Jews in causing [Christ's] death' Ep 108 intro; cf Ep 111:60–8. Here, too, in the paraphrase Erasmus disagrees with Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 26:39) PL 26 198B, who explained: 'That cup is the Jewish people, who cannot have the excuse of ignorance if they kill me, since they have the Law and the Prophets, who prophecy of me every day.' Similarly the *Gloss* (on 26:39) identified "'this" cup' as the 'Jewish people,' and explained that the words 'if it is possible' were spoken 'not from fear but from mercy, lest the Jews, who do not have the excuse of ignorance, kill me.'

61 Though Jesus has addressed Peter, the plural verbs (in both the Greek and the Vulgate) show that he includes all the disciples in his strictures here, a point Erasmus emphasizes, following Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 83.1 (on Matt 26:40) PG 58 745. Like Erasmus, Chrysostom had also shown that Jesus' question implied an allusion to the disciples' boast that they would die with him; similarly Jerome (see next note).

that you may not fall into temptation and be overcome. Victory comes to none but the vigilant. The spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak. Therefore, if the flesh is not to overwhelm the spirit, one must be vigilant and the spirit must be supported by divine aid.'

After thus rousing his disciples, Jesus again went away, and again prayed to his Father in much the same words: 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to pass from me unless I drink from it, your will be done.' Then he returned again to his disciples and again found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, inasmuch as their sorrow had made them twice as sleepy.⁶² And so leaving them, for a third time he went away to pray alone for his disciples, since the weakness of the flesh was overwhelming them; and for the third time he prayed with⁶³ the same words so that he might teach us that we must pray persistently and earnestly whenever the storm-winds of temptation threaten, for then the angels are present and add strength to the spirit.⁶⁴ He soon returned to the disciples and reproached them for their untimely sleepiness when the time demanded the highest vigilance, saying:⁶⁵ 'The storm is now here that will find you unprepared and for that reason no match for it. Now,' he said, 'sleep and take your rest. Behold, the hour is here when the Son of man, though innocent, will be betrayed into the hands of the wicked. Therefore rise; let us go to meet the approaching evil. Behold, he who betrays me is near.'

Jesus had not yet finished speaking, and behold there came Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, who a short time before followed Jesus as his leader, but now had become the leader of a criminal band, more criminal himself. Following him with swords and clubs was a huge crowd of attendants whom the chief priests and elders of the people had sent so that Jesus might be taken without creating a disturbance among the people. For

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62 Among the Synoptics only Luke (22:45) indicates that the disciples' sleepiness was caused by grief. Chrysostom, on verse 43, *In Matt hom* 83.1 PG 58 747, also credits their sleepiness to grief; likewise Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on 26:40) PL 26 198B-C: 'Peter, who had just said, "Even if all are offended, I will not be offended," now cannot overcome his sleepiness due to his profound grief.' Cf the interlinear *Gloss* (on 26:40): 'They were unable to overcome sleep through grief.'

63 with] Added in 1534 through a change in grammatical construction

64 The allusion to angels reflects the text of Erasmus and the Vulgate of Luke 22, which included verses 43-4, recounting the appearance of a strengthening angel. The preferred reading omits the verses; see Metzger *Textual Commentary* 151.

65 saying] First in 1534; previously 'for'

although they had decided to defer this crime to another time, nevertheless, when chance offered the advantage of a traitor, they changed their mind.⁶⁶ For that reason⁶⁷ Judas had chosen both night and a place where Jesus was accustomed to pray with few people. Finally, lest they should, perhaps, make a mistake about his identity, the betrayer had shown them the sign by which they would recognize Jesus. He said: 'The one I shall kiss is the man. Seize him.' Therefore, Judas Iscariot went ahead and approached Jesus as if to greet him, saying: 'Greetings, Rabbi,' and at the same time he kissed him, a custom once practised out of respect and obligation when people greeted. But in order to offer his disciples the perfect model everywhere of gentleness,⁶⁸ Jesus neither thrust the wicked disciple back from the kiss, nor rebuked him for his madness, but with a kind word he pricked his conscience, saying: 'Friend, why have you come?'⁶⁹ – for he had approached with a kiss, as though he was going to relate some news. At this sign the crowd ran up and laid hands on Jesus and held him.

At this uprising the disciples became quite unnerved, a state Jesus allowed them to fall into in order to remove utterly from their hearts every desire to avenge and defend him. Indeed Peter,⁷⁰ either because he was everywhere more impetuous than the rest, or because he had made certain grand promises about himself,⁷¹ would not be seen to fail his Lord, so he drew his sword and struck Malchus,⁷² the slave of Caiaphas, and cut off his right ear⁷³ (though Jesus so moderated the blow that it was a light wound, and, however bad it was, he soon mended it, restoring the ear).⁷⁴ Peter had

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66 Cf Matt 26:5; cf also Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 79.3 (on Matt 26:3–5) PG 58 721: 'Nevertheless, seething with anger, they afterwards changed their design. For although they had said, "Not on the feast day," when they found a betrayer they did not wait on occasion, but they killed on the feast day itself,' and Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 26:2–5 PG 58 436C: 'They did not want to kill him on a feast day, but when they found the betrayer, they killed disregarding the crowd.'

67 I.e., to avoid a disturbance among the people

68 On the exemplary gentleness of Jesus in these events cf nn35 and 58 above.

69 Erasmus follows the Vulgate and his own text and translation. Modern bibles read, 'Friend, do what you are here to do' (26:50 NRSV).

70 The disciple is not named in the Synoptic Gospels at this point; he is identified as Peter at John 18:10.

71 Cf Matt 26:33–5.

72 The slave's name is supplied from John 18:10.

73 Luke 22:50 and John 18:10 state that it was specifically the right ear that was cut off.

74 For the ear restored see Luke 22:51.

erred out of a pious love for his Lord, and he had derived the error virtually from the words of Jesus, words, however, that he had misunderstood. For Jesus had asked them to sell their tunics and to buy swords, and when they had replied that they had two swords he said that was enough.⁷⁵ Supposing that he⁷⁶ was speaking about an iron sword, though Jesus meant a spiritual sword,⁷⁷ they had taken the swords with them from the supper, intending to defend their Lord if circumstances warranted or if he commanded it. In order, therefore, to tear this disposition completely out of the minds of every disciple, he rebuked Peter sharply. He said: 'Put your sword back in its place. Those who settle affairs by the sword perish by the sword, for their vengeful retaliation turns back upon their own heads. We have no need of that defence since we conquer with better outcome through endurance than through killing. Otherwise, do you think that I would be lacking a garrison if I wanted such defence? Would I not be able to ask my Father, and in place of twelve disciples he⁷⁸ would send to my aid twelve legions of angels? But it is as my Father has determined, as the prophets have predicted, and none of these things is happening by chance or without design.' Then Jesus turned to the crowd and said: 'Now armed with swords and clubs you come out to arrest me, and yet when I was daily sitting among you in the temple, teaching and healing the sick, you did not lay hands on me. Now in the dead of night you seek me when I am silent and in a remote place.⁷⁹ All these things, however, are happening, not through your violence, but at the direction of the divine plan, about which the writings of the prophets have

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75 The conversation about the two swords is recorded in Luke 22:36–8, where it is said to take place after the Supper.

76 he] *illum*, specified in 1522, 1524 and 1534; in 1535 omitted without affecting the translation, perhaps an error

77 This is the fundamental solution Erasmus gives to the interpretation of the Lukan passage in his long annotation on Luke 22:36 (*sed nunc qui habet saccum*). In preparation for the new mission to preach the gospel that the apostles will receive, let one who has purse or bag sell it, or, if these are lacking, let him sell his cloak to buy a sword, not the sword of plunderers, but the sword of the divine word that is sharper than any two-edged sword. For Erasmus' relation to the exegetical tradition on this Lukan passage see CWE 48 195–7 and nn36, 37, and 39.

78 he ... my aid] First in 1534; in 1522 and 1524 *mihi* occurs twice: *is mihi ... mitteret mihi auxilio*, probably an accidental duplication, but could be read 'he would send to me for my aid.'

79 Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 84.2 (on Matt 26:55) PG 58 753 had also given force to the biblical details by noting Jesus' silence (in contrast to his public speaking), and the time – 'the dead of night.'

since long ago uttered oracular predictions.’ On hearing this the disciples saw that there was no hope, since Jesus was offering himself up to death, and they forsook their Lord and fled.⁸⁰

The crowd was not mollified even by the recollection of the teaching and kindness of Jesus, and they led him captive to the home of Caiaphas the high priest where the scribes and elders had gathered. While the other disciples out of terror had fled in every direction, Peter alone,⁸¹ although he had not succeeded in a fight, still could not cast off altogether his concern for his Lord whom he loved very much. At the same time, he did not have the courage to remain close to Jesus, but followed, albeit at a distance, and finally through the darkness entered unrecognized into the courtyard of Caiaphas. Then,⁸² when he was inside, he sat among the servants, warming himself at the coals,⁸³ so that since he was not able to defend Jesus, he might at least see the outcome of his trial, for Peter still harboured some hope in his heart.

Now the chief priests and the whole council, in order to give some show of a legitimate trial, were eager to instigate false witnesses against Jesus, but such was his innocence that it was even difficult to lie about him in a way that would lend the falsehood some semblance of truth. Although many false witnesses had come forward, in fact their very own testimonies refuted them; so badly concocted were they that not even those judges and that circle of bystanders regarded them as suitable. At last two false accusers came forward who said: ‘He said “I am able to destroy the temple of God, and restore it in three days.”’ They had taken the opportunity for this lie from the words of Christ who had said: ‘Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up,’⁸⁴ clearly meaning that he indeed must be killed by

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80 Similarly Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 84.2 (on Matt 26:56) PG 58 753: ‘When he was arrested, they stayed, but when he spoke to the crowd they fled. They saw that escape was no longer possible, since he had freely given himself up to them, saying that this was according to the Scriptures.’ But note just below: the disciples fled ‘out of terror.’

81 Erasmus chooses to disregard the evidence of John 18:15–16, where ‘another disciple’ also follows Jesus. Cf the paraphrase on those verses CWE 46 201. For love as a motivating factor in Peter’s behaviour cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 26:59–60) PL 26 201C: ‘... either through the love of a disciple, or eager to see the [outcome]’; also Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 84.2 (on Matt 26:58) PG 58 754, who explains Peter’s behaviour as due to his ‘fervent love.’

82 Then] First in 1534; previously ‘at length’

83 The detail of Peter warming himself at the fire is added from Mark 14:54 and Luke 22:55.

84 Cf John 2:19.

them, but that within three days he would come back to life. These words had not been understood, and the witnesses even distorted them to make the matter more offensive. For Jesus did not say 'I am able to destroy,' but 'you destroy,' nor had he said 'I will rebuild' but 'I will raise up,' alluding to his body that was to die and would be restored to life.⁸⁵

Since this testimony seemed to have some weight, and nothing more suitable was found, the high priest rose up and, simulating the appearance of a fair judge, as though he were going to grant Jesus the right to defend himself, said: 'Do you make no reply to these accusations that are brought against you?' But Jesus remained silent, knowing that whatever he said would be seized upon and used in a false accusation. Then the high priest, wanting to force from Jesus some grounds for condemning him – for his madness made any delay tedious⁸⁶ – said to him: 'I adjure you by the living God to tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God.' This question posed by the ungodly pontiff⁸⁷ was cunning. If Jesus had denied that he

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85 Exegetes explained carefully the misconstruction of Jesus' words; cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 84.2 (on Matt 26:61) PG 58 754: 'But he had not said "I destroy," but "you destroy," and he was speaking not about the temple, but about his own body'; also Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 26:61) PL 26 201D–2A: 'The Lord had spoken about the temple of his body ... The Saviour had said, "Destroy this temple"; they changed it and said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God." He said, "You destroy" not "I" ... Then they changed it to: "And after three days I will build it again (*reaedificare*)" so that he seemed to have spoken specifically about the Jewish temple. But the Lord, to indicate a living and breathing temple, had said: "In three days I will raise it (*suscitabo*)."' To build (*aedificare*) and to raise (*suscitare*) are not the same'; similarly Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 26:61–3 PG 123 456B: 'Really they were false witnesses. For Christ did not say, "I am able to destroy," but "Destroy." And he did not say "the temple of God," but "this temple," that is, my body. And again he did not say, "I will build" but "I will raise up."' This 'critique' of the distortion of the witnesses became traditional and is found in the *Gloss* and in Nicholas of Lyra (on 26:61).

86 Jerome *In Comm Matt* 4 (on Matt 26:62) PL 26 202A–B notes the madness of the high priest who was overcome by anger and determined to force a response 'to find in whatever Jesus said an opportunity to accuse him.'

87 'Pontiff': *pontificis*. Throughout the *Paraphrase on Matthew* Erasmus customarily designates the priests by the Latin *sacerdos*, thus *principes* or *primores sacerdotium* 'chief priests' and, exceptionally in this *Paraphrase*, *summus sacerdos* translated just below as 'the chief priest.' Here in the paraphrase on 26:63, however, and twice subsequently, when the noun is qualified by a pejorative adjective Erasmus writes *pontifex*. Cf CWE 50 32 n19. *Summus sacerdos* is attested in early Christian literature as a term for 'bishop' (cf eg Tertullian *De baptismo* 17.1).

was the Son of God, the high priest would have exclaimed: 'Then why do you claim to be what you are not?' If he had affirmed that he was, the high priest would have charged him with blasphemy. If he had remained silent when entreated with an oath, it would seem that he had shown contempt for God and the authority of the chief priest. But what sort of man was this who was making his demand with an oath? He was a villainous pontiff who had bought his annual position from Herod;⁸⁸ and while he was making his entreaties 'by God,' he was attacking the Son of God. Nevertheless, as though deferring to the official dignity the high priest bore, when asked whether he was the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus responded: 'You have said so,' thus confessing that he was what he was, but in a way that still avoided any hint of arrogance. And he added words that ought to have called the wicked pontiff back from the crime he had embarked upon, saying: 'Nevertheless, I tell you this, hereafter you will see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming with majesty in the clouds of heaven.' He was hinting that he who was then lowly and condemned by ungodly men, would one day come with divine power as judge of the entire world.

At these words the high priest was even more incensed, and to make Jesus' crime look more dreadful, by a feigned show of religious zeal, he tore his garments and said: 'He has uttered blasphemy. He appropriates for himself divine honours, although he is a man. What need is there for witnesses beyond this? Behold, now you have heard his manifest blasphemy. What is your will?' They replied: 'He deserves death.' Then they began to rage with mockery against him as though legally condemned, all of which Jesus endured most gently, in order to offer to his disciples a perfect example of tolerance. They spat in his face, and, covering his face with a veil,⁸⁹ they struck him with their fists. Again, others slapped his face, saying: 'Prophecy to us, Christ, who is it that struck you?' They reproached him with these insults because he had wanted to be regarded as the Messiah, and because he had been honoured by the people with the title of prophet.

Meanwhile, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, contemplating the sad spectacle from a distance and awaiting the outcome of the affair,

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88 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 26:57) PL 26 201B had noted that Caiaphas had bought his position from Herod. In the *Paraphrase on John*, next after Matthew of the *Paraphrases* to be published (February 1523), Erasmus will observe again that the office of chief priest was 'up for sale and purchased annually' (on John 11:47 CWE 46 147). For the exegetical tradition that repeatedly affirmed this, see CWE 46 147 n55. For the high priest as a political appointee at this time, see *Encyclopedia Judaica* 8 474. Caiaphas was appointed by the Roman procurator Valerius Gratus (ibid 5 19).

89 For the veil see Mark 14:65.

not daring to approach closer in case he should be recognized by the servants.⁹⁰ A maid recognizing him came up to him and said: 'You also were a follower of the Galilean.' Here Peter, paralysed with fear at the words of the maid and forgetting those grand words with which he had said to the Christ: 'Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you,' denied his Lord in the presence of all, saying: 'I do not know what you mean.' And immediately a cock crowed. As he was preparing to leave, another maid saw him just in the doorway; betraying him to the servants who stood there, she said: 'This man too was with Jesus of Nazareth.' Again he denied, swearing that he did not know the man. A little later some of those who were standing there, recognizing Peter, said: 'You, too, certainly are one of them, since not only your face but even your speech betrays you as a Galilean.' Then still more terrified Peter began not only to deny any knowledge of Jesus, but even to invoke solemn curses upon himself if he knew the man. And immediately the cock crowed again. After this Jesus looked upon him, and speaking to him, with his eyes rebuked him.⁹¹ Then at last Peter came to himself and remembered what Jesus had predicted to him when he boasted of his own strength: 'Before the cock crows twice⁹² you will deny me three times.' But since, terrified with fear, he had sinned through human weakness, not through premeditated malice, he deserved mercy. Christ allowed this to happen in his chosen apostle so that no one should despair of forgiveness, however gravely one has erred, provided one comes to his senses and repents, and washes away the blemish of his heart with tears. For Peter, who had, as it were, lost control of himself, at Jesus' look instantly repented. And he went outside and wept bitterly.⁹³

Chapter 27

And so the overseers of religion spent that night engaged in these ungodly and cruel activities. Then, when day drew near, the chief priests and elders of the people again entered upon a plan to deliver Jesus to death.

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90 Cf Jerome *In Matt Comm* 4 (on Matt 26:69) 203A: 'Peter sat outside to see the outcome of the affair. He did not come closer to Jesus in case the servants should become suspicious.'

91 The detail that Jesus admonished Peter with a look is supplied from Luke 22:61.

92 For 'twice' see Mark 14:30.

93 For the stages of repentance represented here see CWE 44 13 n5; for the place of tears, the paraphrase on Mark 1:4 CWE 49 16. Peter is cited as an example of victory over despair in the *Enchiridion* CWE 66 109 and the *De praeparatione ad mortem* CWE 70 439, 445; cf chapter 8 n41 above.

Accordingly, they bound him and handed him over to Pontius Pilate, the governor, so he might take punitive action against a condemned man. Hereupon Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was now condemned, and that they were pressing on to deadly action. Moved¹ by repentance, he returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders of the people, saying: 'I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood.' Surely this man's confession ought to have moved the leaders' hearts. He acknowledged that he was prompted to act by the disease of greed, and he acknowledged that the man he betrayed was innocent. But they, utterly savage and thirsting for nothing else than innocent blood, replied: 'What does it matter to us whether you have betrayed a guilty or an innocent man? See to it yourself.' Judas, now repenting his gain, wanted to annul the agreement, but their cruelty could not in any way abate.² Judas therefore, throwing the silver pieces at their feet, withdrew and heaped upon his impious crime a graver crime.³ He acknowledged the magnitude of his crime, but he did not acknowledge the magnitude of divine mercy. Peter wept bitterly and obtained mercy. Judas also wept, but with a mind despondent more than changed. On this account he departed and hanged himself, and burst open in the middle and his bowels poured out.⁴

Hence there was again a consultation among the chief priests, who dealt with all issues in a common council so that their cruelty would be better known to everyone. They deliberated to what purpose they might invest the thirty pieces of silver that Judas had cast at their feet. Preposterously⁵ religious – for they had no religious scruple against killing an inno-

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- 1 Moved] *actus* in 1522, 1534, and 1535; in 1524 *tactus* 'touched' – perhaps an error. Both Erasmus and the Vulgate had translated the Greek μεταμεληθείς (27:3) by *paenitentia ductus* 'led by repentance.' On the paraphrastic substitution of *actus* for *ductus* see chapter 4 n2 above; for the verb μεταμέλομαι cf chapter 21 n37.
- 2 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 27:3-4) PL 26 204B understands Judas' return of the money as an attempt to undo his crime – 'as though it were in his power to change the mind of the persecutors. Although he changed his own purpose, he did not change the outcome of the original intent.'
- 3 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 27:5) PL 26 204C: '... to his prior crime he added the sin of suicide.'
- 4 For Judas' suicide by hanging see 27:5; for his bursting open (the result of a fall, not of hanging) see Acts 1:18. On the Latin tradition that attempted to combine the version of Matthew and Acts in the narrative of Judas' death, see CWE 50 11 n90.
- 5 'Preposterously': *praepostere*; in its etymological sense denoting an inversion of proper order; cf the paraphrase on 15:11 above: *praepostero iudico* 'inverted

cent man, and one to whom they owed so much – they said: ‘It is not lawful to put this money back into the corbona’⁶ (that is, into the temple’s treasury-chambers, which they wanted to be regarded with much religious devotion) ‘for it is blood money, and the sanctity of the temple must not be polluted with blood.’ At the same time they revealed their guilty consciences, acknowledging him to be innocent whose betrayal they had bought. Accordingly, in order that all might share the crime, they assembled in council and bought the field of a certain potter with the money – for pious uses, no doubt – so that strangers might be buried there, as if they would make right their present crime by this service. Nevertheless, they hurt their reputation by doing this: in no other way could they have better publicized their impiety,⁷ for the deed has so entered popular legend that even today that field is called in Aramaic ‘Akeldama,’⁸ that is, ‘the field of blood.’ This did not occur by accident, for Jeremiah had predicted that this would happen: ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set, a price that some of the sons of Israel had set, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.’⁹

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judgment’; on *praeposterus* cf chapter 3 n50 above. On ‘preposterously religious’ see chapter 23 n35.

6 ‘Corbona’: *corbonam*; Erasmus adopts the Vulgate, which had Latinized the Greek κορβανῶν of 27:6. Cf the ‘corban’ of Mark 7:11, the paraphrase on Matt 15:5–6, and Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 341.

7 So also in Chrysostom the chief priests betray their guilty consciences; cf *In Matt hom* 85:3 (on Matt 27:11) PG 58 760–1: ‘Again do you see that they are condemned by their own conscience? Because they knew they had bought a man’s murder, they did not put [the coins] in the corbona, but they bought a potter’s field for the burial of strangers. This, too, was evidence against them and proof of their treachery. For the name of the place proclaims more clearly than a trumpet their bloodthirstiness. And they did not do this simply, but called a council so that everyone should be responsible for the criminal act.’ Cf also Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 27:7–8) PL 26 205A: ‘Without intending to do so, they left a perpetual memorial to their ungodliness through the purchase of the field.’

8 ‘Akeldema’: for the name see Acts 1:19. ‘Aramaic’ translates *Syris*, literally ‘in Syrian.’ Erasmus commonly speaks of ‘Syrian’ to designate ‘Aramaic.’ In his annotation on Acts 1:19 (*et notum factum est*) he said the word was ‘Hebrew,’ but challenged by Zúñiga, he indicated that by Hebrew he had meant ‘Aramaic’; see *Apologiae contra Stunicam* (1) ASD IX-2 140:591–9 and 592n.

9 Erasmus follows exactly the Vulgate of 27:9–10 in this citation. The difficulties presented by the passage have been apparent from early Christian times. The citation does not correspond precisely to any biblical passage, but images from Zech 11:12–13 are prominent, while the influence of Jer 32:5–15 and 18:2–

Therefore, while Jesus was standing before the governor as a defendant, they insistently accused him of many things, saying nothing for the moment about blasphemy, about his having violated the religion of the temple, and about the coming of the Son of man, since they knew that Pilate, a stranger to religious concerns of this sort, would not be very impressed by such matters. Instead, they pressed other fabricated charges that would be able to kindle the heart of the governor against Jesus.¹⁰ They said: 'We caught this man subverting our nation, and forbidding us to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that he is Christ the King.'¹¹ When he heard mention of the word 'king,' since this seemed to pertain to Caesar, Pilate asked Jesus: 'Are you the king of the Jews?' To avoid appearing insolent by saying nothing at all, Jesus said: 'You are saying so,' not altogether denying that he was a king, but nevertheless adding that his own kingdom is spiritual not worldly,¹² so that this kingdom had nothing to do with Caesar or Herod. Although the accusers again insisted, Pilate, who wanted to elicit from Jesus some response that would enable him to be set free, said: 'Do you not hear what dreadful accusations they hurl against you?' To this Jesus said absolutely nothing, leaving the governor quite astounded that an innocent man, in danger of his life, should remain silent with such great gentleness.¹³

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3 also seems apparent. Erasmus' long annotation on 27:8 (*ager ille Acheldemach*) outlines some of the attempts to explain the difficulties, beginning with the views of Origen. Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 27:9–10) PL 26 205B had stated quite bluntly that the citation was not from Jeremiah. Cf Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 341.

10 Likewise, Chrysostom says that the chief priests and elders tailor the charges to suit Pilate's court: *In Matt hom* 86.1 (on Matt 27:11) PG 58 763: 'When they saw that Pilate was not concerned with matters of their law, they changed to charges that pertained to the state.'

11 Cf Luke 23:2. For Pilate's disregard of matters pertaining to Jewish law, see John 18:29–31.

12 Cf John 18:36; also Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 86.1 (on Matt 27:11) PG 58 763: 'He confessed that he was a king, but a heavenly king.'

13 With the portrait of Pilate and the characterization of the Jews in this paragraph compare Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 86.1 (on Matt 27:12) PG 58 763: 'The governor marvelled at this, and truly it was worthy of admiration, that he displayed such great modesty and silence ... for they accused him ... goaded by jealousy and envy ... Pilate asked again, "Do you hear what accusations they bring against you?" He spoke thus because he wanted to set the defendant free.' Cf also Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* 27:11–14 PG 123 461C: 'Pilate marvelled at the Lord, both because he scorned death, and because, although he was eloquent and had much to say in his defence, he did not answer, but disdained his accusers.'

Perceiving¹⁴ from Jesus' expression and demeanour that there was no basis for any suspicion that he aspired to rule, Pilate said to the chief priests and their associates: 'I do not find this man guilty of any offence deserving death.' This made them all the more insistent, and they said: 'He is subversive, he has stirred up the people with his teaching, wandering through all Judea, starting from Galilee even to this place.' Pilate realized that Jesus was innocent and that the priests and scribes were goaded by envy in undertaking this case. For this reason, he was looking for an opportunity to clear Jesus, or at least to get him out of his court, and when he heard the name Galilee, he asked where Jesus was from, and when he learned that he came from the part of Galilee that Herod ruled, he sent him on to Herod, who was by chance then in Jerusalem.

When Herod got sight of Jesus he rejoiced greatly. For quite some time he had been possessed by a passionate desire to see Jesus, because of the stories of strange and wonderful events that had spread about him. Accordingly, he was hoping that in his presence, too, he would perform a miracle. But though Herod questioned him about many things, Jesus made no answer at all; he had not come in order to satisfy the curiosity of princes, but to see to the salvation of humanity. When in Herod's presence, too, he was accused on many grounds and he made no answer, Herod with his retinue spurned him, and in mockery clothed him in a white robe and sent him back to Pilate. From this occasion Pilate and Herod were made friends, though before this there had been dissension between them.

And so Pilate summoned the chief priests, the magistrates and the people, and declared that he had found in Jesus none of the many crimes with which they were charging him, but that even Herod had sent him away as if guiltless, something he would not have done if he had judged him guilty of any capital offence. In order, however, to placate the envy of the Jews, he said: 'I will chastise him and send him away.' But when he got nowhere with this proposal, he looked for another opening by which to free Jesus.

It was a custom among the Jews that on the holy day, for religion's sake, the governor should release to them one of those who were being kept in prison. Now, he was holding in prison at that time a certain notorious and

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14 Beginning here and continuing through the next two paragraphs, the paraphrase follows the narrative of Luke 23:4–16, and offers in these paragraphs significant points of comparison with the paraphrase on the Lukan verses. Somewhat strikingly, in both *Paraphrases* Herod in mockery places upon Jesus a 'white' robe ('elegant robe' Luke 23:11 NRSV); see CWE 48 209–11 and n15.

infamous robber called Barabbas, whose very name he knew was hateful to the people. Having, therefore, assembled the Jews before him, he asked which of the two they wanted him to deliver up to them, Barabbas or Jesus, hoping they would want Jesus to be freed in preference to a robber of such infamous and noted violence.¹⁵ Moreover, while the governor was sitting before the tribunal, his wife sent someone on her behalf to tell him not to pollute himself with the blood of an innocent man, for that night she had been troubled with horrible visions on account of Jesus. This happened, not without design, but by divine direction, so that there would not be anyone from whom Jesus did not have testimony of his own innocence, for it was extremely important that it be evident to all that this death had, without cost to us, been offered as the price to redeem us.

When the people wavered, in doubt which of the two they would rather have released to them, it was through the persuasion of the priests and elders that they asked for Barabbas and for Jesus to be killed in his place. Such was their judgment, such was the gratitude of the people, such was the sham religion of the priests and elders. It was a matter of religious scruple for them that they should not enter the praetorium of Pilate so that they might eat, undefiled, the paschal lamb,¹⁶ yet they had no religious scruple against driving to death with such great madness a blameless man, one whose merit was conspicuous from so many miracles and kindnesses.¹⁷ And so Pilate again asked which of the two they wanted to be released, Barabbas or Jesus. They cried out: 'Barabbas.' Again Pilate: 'Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?' – he was hoping that they would be content with some particular¹⁸ penalty that was milder. But they cried out in a great concert of voices: 'Let him be crucified!' Horrible as this kind of punishment was, it was above all shameful. Again Pilate: 'Shall I crucify an innocent man? What has he done to deserve it? I find nothing in him worthy of capital punishment. I shall, then, have him beaten and

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15 Nicholas of Lyra (on 27:15) gives the same exonerating explanation of Pilate's motives in offering the people the choice between Barabbas and Jesus.

16 Cf John 18:28. In following John at this point, Erasmus disregards the inconsistency with the Matthean narrative in which the Passover meal has already been eaten.

17 Cf *Supputatio* LB IX 566A, where Erasmus exemplifies the devotion of the Jews to the 'carnal part of the Law,' while they neglected the 'spiritual part': 'Such was the religion of the Pharisees, who did not dare to enter the praetorium, though they were not afraid to kill a man who was both blameless and the author of the Law.'

18 some particular] First in 1534; previously 'some'

discharged.¹⁹ At these words the madness of the crowd was even more inflamed as they cried: 'Away with him, away with him, crucify the man.'²⁰

Realizing that with all his attempts he was getting nowhere, but was only inciting all the more²¹ an uproar among the people, Pilate absolved Jesus before he condemned him, for in the presence of the people he took water and washed his hands, saying: 'I am innocent of the blood of this just man. You are the authors of his death, not I; upon your heads will fall the vengeance for innocent blood.' The ill-fated Jews were not deterred by this statement, but one and all shouted out together: 'Let his blood come upon us and our children.' They invoked death on themselves and their descendants. Christ, however, more merciful to them than they were to themselves, refused no one forgiveness, provided each repented. For many later adored the cross of Christ who then in the crowd had shouted: 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him.'²² And so, overcome by their unrelenting madness, Pilate released to them Barabbas, instigator of sedition and a murderer, and one who even before his trial had been condemned by the judgment of all, but Jesus he handed over to be crucified when he had scourged him in accordance with Roman custom.²³

Then the soldiers of the governor, having received Jesus in the praetorium, gathered their entire battalion²⁴ before him to take pleasure most cruel in the mockery of an innocent man; in part they were following their own inclination, in part they were spurred on by the Jews.²⁵ But they heard that he made himself out to be king of the Jews, and so, as though intending

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19 Here Erasmus follows Luke 23:22.

20 Cf John 19:15.

21 all the more] First in 1534; previously 'greater,' to read 'inciting a greater uproar among the people'

22 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 86.2 (on Matt 27:25) PG 58 766: 'The lover of mankind . . . did not ratify their judgment against themselves and their children but received those who repented and judged them worthy of many benefits. Paul was of their number, as well as many thousands of the believers in Jerusalem.' For the 'many thousands' Chrysostom cites Acts 21:20; Erasmus here may also have in mind Acts 2:22-41 and 3:12-4:4.

23 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 27:26) PL 26 208A notes that Pilate was merely administering Roman law when he had Jesus scourged before crucifixion.

24 'Battalion': *cohortem*, which in his annotation on 27:27 (*cohortem*) Erasmus calls a 'band of soldiers.' Biblical translations vary: 'band' [DV], 'battalion' [RSV], 'cohort' [NRSV].

25 For the same motives cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 87.1 (on Matt 27:27-31) PG 58 769: 'They mocked and rushed upon him, perhaps as much to please the Jews as acting in accordance with their own ingrained surliness.'

to reproach so contemptible a man for having the arrogance to aspire to rule, they stripped him of his clothes, and dressed him²⁶ in a scarlet military cloak²⁷ to serve as a royal robe. Then in place of a diadem they set a crown of thorns on his head. In place of a sceptre they put a reed in his right hand. And now as if saluting their new king, they knelt before him and mocked him, saying: 'Hail, king of the Jews.' Not content with these insults, they spat on him, and with the reed they had given in place of a sceptre they struck his head crowned with thorns. Although they omitted no abuse, he endured everything with supreme gentleness so that he might provide his disciples with a perfect model of endurance.

After the soldiers had sated the minds and eyes of the battalion with every kind of mockery, again they removed the cloak from him and put on him his own clothes so that everyone might more easily recognize him. Then they led Jesus out of the praetorium bearing his own cross. As they went they came upon a certain Simon, from Cyrene, whom they compelled to carry Jesus' cross.²⁸ They came to the place where he was to be crucified, called Golgotha in Aramaic,²⁹ that is, 'the place of the skull,' because it was a place of death, hideous with the bones and skulls of those who had been executed.³⁰ Here, so that no part of his body should be free from torture, or no mockery omitted,³¹ they offered him a cup to drink, prepared from

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26 him] *ei* in 1522 and 1524; omitted in 1534 and 1535, still implied by the context

27 'Scarlet military cloak': *chlamydem coccineam* as in the Vulgate; see the annotation on 27:28 (*coccineam*) where the scarlet robe (RSV) is said to be identified as a military cloak both by its colour and its designation as a *chlamys*: 'in both colour and shape it is a military cloak, making the scene all the more one of mockery, since the godly wears the garb of the ungodly.'

28 That Jesus bore his own cross out of the praetorium is evidently inferred from John 19:17. The Synoptic Gospels do not record that Jesus carried his own cross, but they note that as Jesus was led away (Matt 27:31–2; Mark 15:20–1; Luke 23:26) they found Simon and compelled him to carry the cross. Likewise Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 27:32) PL 26 209A: 'But it must be understood that leaving the praetorium Jesus himself carried his cross; later they met Simon, to whom was given the task of carrying the cross.'

29 In his annotation on 27:33 (*qui dicitur Golgotha*) Erasmus cites Jerome as his authority for calling the word Aramaic (*Syrum esse verbum* 'it is an Aramaic word' – see n8 above) rather than Hebrew.

30 Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 27:33) PL 26 209B explains: 'Outside the city, beyond the gates, are places where the heads of the condemned are cut off.' Nicholas of Lyra (on 27:33): 'The place was filled with the heads of the dead, who had been decapitated there, where criminals were punished.'

31 While Erasmus emphatically notes the torture, his description of the torture is considerably more restrained than one finds at this point in Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 87.1 (on Matt 27:27–9) PG 58 769: 'What was then done was

vinegar and gall,³² in order to fulfil what was written in the oracle: 'They gave me gall for my food and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.'³³ But when Jesus had tasted, he refused to drink.

After they had crucified him they divided Jesus' garments among them. For his tunic, however, they cast lots, since it had been woven in such a way that it could not be unstitched, so that what the prophecy had said should be fulfilled: 'They divided my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots.' [Ps 22:18]³⁴ And sitting by the cross they guarded him so no one would take him down.³⁵ Moreover, an inscription was placed on the cross in mockery: 'This is Jesus, King of the Jews'; but this itself was more honorific than the Jews could bear. They had negotiated with Pilate to have the title changed to say not 'King of the Jews' but 'This man made himself out to be king of the Jews.' And in this one thing they allowed Pilate to prevail.³⁶ The Jews were careful also to have two robbers crucified along with him, in such a way that Jesus had one on his right, the other on his left, while he was in the middle; in this way he would be regarded by everyone as a delusive imposter, and a man like the robbers among whom he had been included.³⁷

The cruelty of the Jews had not yet been glutted by these atrocious deeds. They taunted him on the cross, and as they were passing by they

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surely the very limit of abuse. For they afflicted his entire body with abuse, not just part: his head with the crown and the reed and the blows; his face with spitting; his cheeks with slaps; his whole body with flogging and by being dressed in the cloak and by the mock worship; his hand with the reed that was given in place of a sceptre; his mouth with the vinegar that was offered.'

32 Erasmus follows his own Greek text which read 'vinegar' rather than 'wine.' In his annotation on 27:34 (*dederunt ei vinum*) he notes that there is little difference between vinegar and acid wine.

33 Erasmus cites the Vulgate according to the Septuagint of Ps 68:22 (69:21 NRSV).

34 The verse is quoted in John 19:24 but Erasmus cites the Vulgate of Ps 21:19 according to the Septuagint.

35 Nicholas of Lyra (on 27:36) also understood the biblical 'watched him' to mean that they guarded him against removal – a view Albright-Mann *Matthew* (AB) 348 apparently regard as plausible.

36 Cf John 19:19-22, cited also by Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 87.2 (on Matt 27:40) PG 58 771.

37 Cf Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 87.2 (on Matt 27:38) PG 58 771: '... they crucified the robbers with him, and, to show he was an imposter, said, "You who destroy the temple ... come down from the cross."' But Chrysostom had already (87.1 PG 58 770) noted the symbolic significance of the central cross in his comments on verse 31: 'They crucified him between the two so that he would share their reputation.' Similarly Nicholas of Lyra (on 27:38).

hurled insults at him, deriding him with wagging heads and saying: 'Ah! You there! are you the one that demolishes the temple of God and restores it again in three days? You promised others salvation, now save yourself. You boasted that you are the Son of God, therefore come down now from the cross.' Similarly the chief priests also, together with the scribes and elders of the people, taunted him with insults: 'He bestowed salvation upon others, now he cannot save himself. If he is the king of Israel as he wanted to be regarded, let him now show what he can do. Let him come down from the cross and we will believe him.'³⁸ He trusts in God who, he boasted, is his Father. Let God free him now if he loves him.' The robbers too, associates of Jesus in punishment, cast similar reproaches upon him, in this way ensuring that the most innocent Jesus would be assailed with abuse from every quarter. Jesus endured all of these things with steadfast patience so that he might complete that salvific sacrifice for everyone. He restrained his divine power and laid open his whole human nature to every torture. Far from retorting or avenging such dreadful abuse – abuse inflicted on a man at the point of death, and more bitter than the cross itself – he even interceded with his Father in the meantime on behalf of the soldiers and the Jews who were assailing him,³⁹ and the one robber who repented he received into his paradise.⁴⁰

The sun itself became aware of the punishment of the innocent man and did not bear to be a spectator of this, an outrage so wicked. It wrapped its face in a black cloud, and a gloomy darkness covered the whole region⁴¹ from the sixth until the ninth hour. Meanwhile, the darkness of Jewish hearts could not be dispelled. Then, about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, quoting the words of the psalm, 'Eli Eli lama sabachthani,' 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' [22:1] But some of the

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38 The 1535 edition incorrectly prints the present tense *credimus* 'we believe' for the future *credemus*: 1522, 1524, 1534.

39 Cf Luke 23:34a. Erasmus evidently accepted the reading as genuine; modern textual evidence does not support its inclusion in the Gospel; cf Metzger *Textual Commentary* 154.

40 For the repentant robber see Luke 23:42-3. Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 27:44) PL 26 211B-C reconciles the accounts in Matthew and Luke by supposing that, as in Matthew, both robbers reviled Jesus, but later the one robber, as in Luke, repented. So here, Erasmus.

41 In his annotation on 27:45 (*tenebrae factae sunt super universam terram*) Erasmus explains that the darkness was not over the whole earth, but only over Judea. There would otherwise be, he argues, some record of the event in the writings of ancient historians.

bystanders who heard 'Eli' from some distance believed he was imploring the aid of Elijah. They said: 'That fellow is calling Elijah. Let us see whether he comes at this call and⁴² helps him.' Then, to show that this was a true and real death that he was meeting for all, Jesus exclaimed: 'I am thirsty.'⁴³ For it is usual for thirst to accompany wounds and the loss of blood, a thirst that is sometimes a more dreadful torment to people than death. And someone ran up with a sponge soaked in vinegar, placed it on the tip of a reed, and put it to his mouth as he hung there. Jesus was earnestly thirsting for the salvation of mankind, but the Jews offered him nothing but gall and vinegar. After tasting⁴⁴ the vinegar, he said: 'It is finished,'⁴⁵ indicating that nothing pertaining to the rite of his sacrifice had been left undone. Soon, to make clear that he laid down his life willingly, when he had commended his spirit to the Father, he uttered a loud cry, bowed his head, and died.

Instantly everything bore witness to the efficacious death of the Lord Jesus, for in the temple the veil that separated the holy part from the rest of the temple was, of its own accord, split in two, indicating that the shadows of the Mosaic law were hereafter to vanish in the gleaming light of the gospel.⁴⁶ In addition, the earth shook and the rocks were split, reproving the Jews for the unconquerable hardness of their hearts. Tombs were opened and many of the bodies of saints who had died came back to life; coming out of the tombs after the resurrection of Christ they entered the holy city of Jerusalem and appeared to many as heralds and associates of the resurrection of Jesus.⁴⁷ Then the centurion and his comrades who were there to

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42 comes at this call and] Added in 1534

43 Cf John 19:28.

44 after tasting . . . he said] First in 1534; previously 'he again abstained, saying'; the change appears to be a correction in light of John 19:29–30.

45 Cf John 19:30. 'It is finished': *consummatum est*. The paraphrase retains the Latin of the Vulgate and Erasmus' translation for the Greek *τετέλεσται*; the remainder of the sentence clarifies the biblical expression; cf chapter 24 n13 above.

46 Erasmus apparently overlooks the significant detail in 27:51 that the veil was split 'from top to bottom.' With the interpretation here of the rent veil compare Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 27:51) PL 26 213A: 'All the sacraments of the Law that before lay hidden are now revealed, and pass over to the gentiles.'

47 The paraphrase on 27:53 adopts the interpretation Erasmus believes is implied by the arrangement of the Greek text; at Jesus' death the saints arose, but did not come out of their tombs until after Jesus' resurrection; cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 27:53) PL 26 213B: 'Though the tombs were opened, [the saints] did not arise before the Lord arose, so that he would be the first-born of the resurrection from the dead.' Similarly the *Gloss* (on 27:53) and Nicholas of

guard Jesus, aware of the earthquake, the darkness, the rocks split asunder, and the other wonders, feared exceedingly, saying: 'Truly this was the Son of God.' There were also present there many women who were watching events from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, as well as the mother of the sons of Zebedee, and many others besides.⁴⁸

When night was approaching, a certain rich councillor⁴⁹ from Arimathea by the name of Joseph, who had himself been a disciple of Jesus, went to the governor asking to be given Jesus' body. Pilate wondered if he was already dead,⁵⁰ inasmuch as he was a man in his prime, and his legs had not been broken,⁵¹ but as soon as he knew for certain from the centurion that he was dead,⁵² he ordered his lifeless body to be given to Joseph. He received the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in a new tomb that he had cut out of solid⁵³ rock. After a huge stone had been rolled to the door of the tomb, he went away. This was done by divine determination, so the people would not inflict violence on the corpse, or so no one would be able to break into the grave and take him away by stealth. Indeed, after the rest had gone away, two women continued to remain there, Mary Magdalene and one other, sitting opposite the tomb, and noting⁵⁴ the

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Lyra (on 27:52); see also the annotation on 27:52 (*et multa corpora quae dormi.*). Erasmus analyses carefully the various interpretations of this verse in the annotation on Rom 1:4 (from the resurrection of the dead of Jesus Christ) cwe 56 21.

48 'and many others besides'] Added in 1534; cf Mark 15:41

49 'Councillor': *decurio*, as in the Vulgate in both Mark 15:43 and Luke 23:50, for the Greek *βουλευτής*. For his own translation Erasmus retained the Vulgate's *decurio* in Luke 23:50, but rendered the same word in the Markan passage by *honestus senator*. In classical Latin *decurio* is used of members of the senate in 'municipalities' and Roman colonies.

50 For Pilate's surprise see Mark 15:44.

51 For breaking the legs to hasten death see John 19:33.

52 Cf Mark 15:45.

53 solid] Added in 1534

54 noting . . . more certain] First in 1534; previously 'waiting for the Lord to come back to life, as he had promised.' The original version echoes Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on 27:61) PL 26 215C: 'The women persevered in their duty, awaiting what Jesus had promised.' The 1534 revision follows more closely Chrysostom *In Matt hom* 88.2 (on Matt 27:61) PG 58 778, who explains that the women sat there in the hope that an opportunity would arise to anoint the body, 'for they still knew nothing "great or lofty" about him.' Bédā had marked this passage as objectionable, and the change in the paraphrase reflects Erasmus' response in the *Divinationes ad notata Bedae* LB IX 466E-F, where he guessed that Bédā

place where they buried the body so that at their own time they might perform the duty of anointing it. The Lord had incited the zealous vigilance of these women so that the evidence for the resurrection would be more certain.

On the day after the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees again came together before Pilate, about to confirm the truth of the resurrection, though they were trying to obstruct it, and they said to the governor: ‘Sir, we recall that while that imposter was still alive he said that after three days he would rise again. Therefore, order the tomb to be guarded right through the third day, so that his disciples do not come and steal his body and convince the people that he has risen again. If this should happen, we will have accomplished nothing, but the later fraud will be worse than the earlier one.’ Pilate said to them: ‘You have a guard,⁵⁵ go and keep watch as well as you know how.’ But while they were trying to block up the exit for the one who was going to rise again, they enhanced the miracle and the trustworthiness of the resurrection.⁵⁶ They secured the tomb with guards put in place and even sealed the rock that closed the mouth of the tomb; in this way, there could be no fraud even among the guards.

Chapter 28

Now, when the evening had arrived of the sabbath just passed, its last moments succeeded by the dawn of the following day – the first of the new week¹ – Mary Magdalene and the other Mary returned to the sepulchre in

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was offended by the statement that the women were waiting in expectation of the resurrection – a point of conjecture on Erasmus’ part. But the *Supputatio* LB IX 594A–D defends another conjecture, that whereas Matthew mentions only two women, the paraphrase speaks of the ‘rest’ who had gone away (cf Luke 23:55–6). This Bédā thought was ‘to destroy the sacred Gospel.’

55 In the paraphrase on Luke 24:1 Erasmus specifies that the guard was ‘from the governor’s cohort’ CWE 48 227.

56 Jerome *In Comm Matt* 4 (on Matt 27:64–6) PL 26 215D notes that the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees did all they could to obstruct the resurrection, ‘so that their diligence would advance our faith: the more the obstruction, the more the evidence for the resurrection.’

1 ‘The first of the new week’: *primus ... hebdomadae successurae*. For Erasmus’ attempt to explain the first phrases of Matt 28:1, somewhat puzzling in both the Greek and the Vulgate, see his annotation (*in prima sabbati*): ‘Unless I am mistaken, he is thinking of the dusk of the last day of the previous week turning into the dawn of the following day, the first day of the new sabbath (*primus ... succedentis sabbati*).’

the morning with ointments they had prepared at night to see what had happened and to anoint the body of Jesus. There was a great earthquake, and while the women were deliberating among themselves how they could roll the stone away from the mouth of the tomb² (for it was too large for woman's strength to move), behold, an angel of the Lord descended³ from heaven and⁴ moved the stone away from the entrance of the tomb and then sat on it. The angel's face was like lightning, and his clothes gleamed with a snowy whiteness. At this sight the guards of the sepulchre became terrified and so alarmed that they lay senseless like dead men. The angel encouraged the women, saying: 'These are deservedly frightened to death at the glory of the resurrection – they are men who persevere in their disbelief.⁵ As for you, do not be afraid, for I know you are seeking Jesus who was crucified. He has already left the tomb and has done what he promised he would do. This is the dawn of the third day, and so he has risen. Come, see the place that still shows the imprint of a body, though no body is here, and the clothing⁶ of the body, the linens in which it was wrapped. These things will convince you if you do not believe me. But depart in haste and tell the other disciples, who are sorrowing at the death of their Lord, what you have seen: that he has risen. If you want to see him, behold, he will go before you into Galilee as he had promised before his death. There you will be able to look upon him alive whom you have mourned as dead. Behold, I have told you beforehand.'⁷

After inspecting the empty tomb⁸ they had found shut,⁹ they quickly returned, in part frightened by the greatness of the miracle, in part pos-

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2 Cf Mark 16:3.

3 descended] First in 1534; previously 'descending'

4 and] Added in 1534

5 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 28:4-5) PL 26 216C-D: 'The guards lay senseless like dead men ... but the angel encouraged the women ... Fear remains in those who persevere in unbelief.'

6 'Clothing': *exuviae*, used here perhaps with some irony; the word was commonly used of armour stripped from a slain enemy. The detail in the paraphrase is taken from John 20:6-7, where the Greek *θήβια* is translated by Erasmus and the Vulgate as *lintheamenta* 'linen clothes.'

7 'Told beforehand': *praedixi*. In his paraphrase Erasmus has adopted the word from the Vulgate of Matt 28:7; in his translation he wrote *dixi* 'I have told,' following more closely the Greek.

8 Cf Luke 24:3.

9 The paraphrases on Matt 28:1-7 seem to imply that the women found the tomb still closed when they arrived; the paraphrases on Mark 16:4 CWE 49 174 and Luke 24:1-2 CWE 48 227 are more ambiguous.

sessed by great joy because of their ardent desire and hope to see their Lord alive again, and they ran to share this joy with Jesus' disciples.¹⁰ On their way Jesus met them so that they would be able to make a more assured announcement. To help them in their fear regain possession of themselves, Jesus said: 'Hail.' When they saw and recognized their Lord, they approached, and embracing his feet they worshipped him. Again, in order to take away all their fear, so that they might understand more clearly what they would have to say, Jesus said: 'Do not be afraid. Go, announce to my brothers what you have seen, and tell them to go to Galilee. There they will see me.'

The women departed. Then some of the guards left the sepulchre, went to Jerusalem, and reported to the chief priests what had taken place – this was done so that confidence in the resurrection might be strengthened even by the testimony of enemies. The guards told how, although the sepulchre had been closed and sealed, the body had not been found; how an angel of wondrous aspect moved the stone; they spoke about the earthquake, and how they had been¹¹ paralysed with fear; also how they had heard the angel speaking with the women. When the chief priests had heard these things from the guards, they again entered into consultation with the elders. Since the matter was too evident to be doubted, they bribed the guards with an offer of money to lie, in precisely the same way as they had earlier bribed the betrayer with money,¹² except that the services of the liars cost more than those of the betrayer. They said: 'Say¹³ nothing about what you have seen, but spread the story among the people that his disciples came in the night and stole him away while you were asleep. If this fabrication ever reaches your governor, we will prevail upon him and we will free you from all peril in the matter.' So the soldiers took the money and did as they had been instructed, and a fiction so frivolous found credence among the people. For this report is to this very day widespread among the unbelieving Jews.

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10 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 28:8) PL 26 217A: 'Contrasting emotions gripped the women: fear because of the greatness of the miracle, joy because of their longing for the risen one. Both spurred them on as they went to the apostles ...'

11 had been] First in 1534; previously 'were'

12 Cf Matt 26:14–16. Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 28:12–15) PL 26 217D–18A: 'Money given for the temple the priests use for the purchase of a lie, as before they had given the thirty pieces of silver to Judas the betrayer.'

13 Say ... have seen] First in 1534; previously 'say nothing, you who have seen'

Then the eleven disciples, on the advice of the women, travelled into Galilee and went up the mountain that Jesus had designated. There he presented himself to their view. They saw and recognized their same Lord, and they worshipped him as one now sublime and heavenly. Nevertheless, some still doubted until a wealth of most certain proofs won their belief, too (although even their doubting contributed to the certainty of our faith).¹⁴ Accordingly, going closer to them, Jesus not only presented himself close up to be seen and touched, but also spoke with them in his usual and familiar voice: he showed that by his death he had attained rule and authority in heaven as well as on earth – in heaven where he had always reigned with the Father, on earth where he would reign hereafter, not with the garrisons of a tyrant, but through the faith of those who believe,¹⁵ and where he would share with his disciples also, who were about to follow in his steps, the execution of this gospel kingdom. He committed to them the responsibility of preaching the gospel, not only among the Jews, but among all nations; and the authority to baptize and through the Holy Spirit to forgive the sins of all who profess the gospel life with a sincere heart; the authority also to instruct and to form such ones, not according to the law of Moses or the regulations of the Pharisees, but according to his own precepts, until they should grow up to the perfection of the gospel philosophy.

And so that they should not lose heart because he would no longer be dwelling with them constantly, he promised that their fellowship would never perish, nor would he ever fail his disciples, but he would always be present to them in Spirit and in power, right to the final end of this world.¹⁶ He said: 'All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. You have seen me, through the weakness of the flesh, hungry, thirsty, weary, needy, despised, arrested, bound, spat upon, condemned, struck, crucified, covered with every sort of abuse, and in some way made lower than the most lowly

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14 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 28:16–17) PL 26 226C: 'After his resurrection, Jesus is seen and worshipped on the mountain in Galilee; although some doubt, even their doubting increases our faith.'

15 Cf Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 28:18) PL 26 226D: 'And authority has been given to him who a little earlier was crucified, was laid in a tomb, lay dead, and afterwards rose again. But authority has been given in heaven and on earth, that he who formerly reigned in heaven might, by the faith of those who believe, reign on earth.'

16 Similarly Jerome *Comm in Matt* 4 (on Matt 28:20) PL 26 218C–D: 'He promises that he will always be with his disciples, and shows that they will always overcome, that he will never depart from those who believe; he promises his presence right to the end of the world.'

of human beings. Since I bore all these things willingly and voluntarily for the salvation of mortals, my Father has raised me up from death and he has conveyed me, adorned with the glory of immortality, to the fellowship of his kingdom, and he has subjected all things that are contained in heaven and earth to my power and jurisdiction.¹⁷ You do not have a founder whom you ought to distrust, nor do you have a Lord of whom you ought to repent. Just as I died for the salvation of everyone, so there is no race of people on earth beyond my sovereignty. Your part will be to claim for me, as far as you are able, every race of people. Yet you will not claim them with weapons or by war, but by those same methods by which I gained this sovereignty for myself: by sacred teaching, by a life worthy of the gospel, by freely bestowed blessings, by patiently enduring wrongs. Go, therefore, as ambassadors,¹⁸ men of good faith, and, relying on me as your author, teach first the Jews, then those in neighbouring regions, and then all the peoples of the entire world. Teach them what they ought to believe about me, what they ought to hope for from me. Do this so they may, in the first place, acknowledge the heavenly Father as creator, governor, and restorer of all things visible and invisible,¹⁹ whose power no one can resist since he is omnipotent, whose knowledge no one deceives since he sees all things, whose judgment no one will escape, from whom flows as though from a

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17 The sequence describing the humiliation of Christ follows the pattern of Phil 2:6–11; cf also 1 Cor 15:24–8 for the subjection of all things to Christ. For Erasmus the humiliation of Christ was of special importance. He was inclined to think that it was the humiliation of Christ that had ‘more relevance [than the sublimity of Christ] for us,’ and ‘from which more profit is to be gained for the present’ CWE 83 35. He had made the point in a 1516 annotation on Heb 2:7 (*minuisti eum paulominus ab angelis*), and it became a major focus in the debate with Jacques Lefèvre d’Etaples; see the *Apologia ad Fabrum* CWE 83 32–42; cf also the paraphrases on Heb 2:5–9 CWE 44 218 and n6.

18 ‘Ambassadors’: *legati*. In his translation Erasmus, following the Vulgate, uses the term *legatio* ‘embassy’ in rendering the Greek *πρεσβεῖω* ‘to be an ambassador’ (RSV, NRSV) in 2 Cor 5:20 and Eph 6:20: *legatione fungor* ‘I am an ambassador.’ Erasmus elsewhere in his paraphrases favours political images to clarify the nature of the work of Christ’s heralds; see especially the paraphrase on Mark 3:13–14 CWE 49 50–1: prefects (*duces, praefecti*), personal envoys (*legati a latere*) in a direct comparison with the *legati* of the ‘monarchs of this world.’

19 ‘Creator of all things visible and invisible’: cf the Nicene Creed; indeed, what follows in the next few paragraphs is a short exposition of the essential points in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. For more formal expositions of the Creeds, see the colloquy ‘An Examination Concerning the Faith’ CWE 39 419–47 and the *Explanatio symboli* CWE 70 232–387. Nicholas of Lyra (on 28:19) assumes that ‘teaching’ in this verse implies the catechism.

spring whatever is good anywhere, to whom is owed all honour, praise, and thanksgiving.²⁰

‘Let them acknowledge also his son Jesus, through whom by his own eternal and unfathomable²¹ plan he decided to free the human race from the tyranny of sin and death and to open the way to eternal happiness through the gospel teaching. For this cause he descended to earth in accordance with the Father’s will, was born true man from the Virgin Mary, and dwelling for a time as a man among men taught the heavenly philosophy that alone makes people blessed. Though innocent, he suffered for the sins of the entire world, died on the cross, was laid in a sepulchre, then rose on the third day, in keeping with the oracles of the prophets.²² After this he dwelt with his disciples for many days,²³ and, with the truth of his resurrection made clear by sure proofs, he again ascended into heaven where, as a sharer of the kingdom and of paternal glory, he sits on the right hand of the Father almighty.²⁴ At some future time he will come into the world again, not lowly as before, but with divine majesty; not as a servant, but as a judge both of those whom that day will find alive and of those already dead whom the angelic trumpet blast will suddenly call back to life,²⁵ so that by his inescapable judgment each person may receive the reward befitting his deeds.

‘Let them acknowledge also the Holy Spirit that I have already in part bestowed upon you, and that I will bestow more plentifully when I enter heaven.²⁶ Its hidden inspiration will console, will teach, and will strengthen the minds of those who trust in me, and when it has been infused through the minds of all it will bind closely and confederate with mutual love as many as have sincerely professed the gospel faith, whatever their racial origin. If anyone does some wrong through human weakness, he will obtain

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20 The idiom is biblical; cf eg 1 Tim 1:17; 1 Pet 1:7; Rev 7:12. ‘Power, knowledge, judgment’ are a variation on the divine attributes of God – power, wisdom, and goodness; cf CWE 48 5 n9 and the colloquy ‘An Examination concerning the Faith’ CWE 39 423:16–40.

21 ‘Unfathomable’: *inscrutabili*; see Rom 11:33 and the annotations on the verse, (‘incomprehensible’ and ‘untraceable’) CWE 56 317.

22 Cf Luke 24:25–7; Acts 2:23–36, 4:24–8.

23 Cf Acts 1:3.

24 Cf Acts 1:9–11; Mark 16:19.

25 Cf 1 Thess 4:15–18; 1 Cor 15:51–2.

26 With this entire paragraph compare John 20:22–3. For ‘console,’ ‘teach’ in the next sentence see John 14:16, 26 where Erasmus translates the Greek *παράκλητος* as *consolator* or ‘comforter’ and *paracletus* ‘advocate’; see CWE 46 171 n20.

forgiveness for his sins, provided that he does not separate himself from the alliance and fellowship of saints. And whoever joins this alliance will have all the sins of his former life freely forgiven him.

‘Finally, lest anyone should think that it is in this life that the rewards for good deeds should be sought, or should try to obtain vengeance against evil doers, let them know that what you see done in me will someday be done in them. Though dead they will live again, and every soul will be restored to its own body. As soon as this has happened, whoever belongs to this holy fellowship²⁷ and adheres firmly to me will be borne with me to eternal life, with the result that those who have been associates and emulators of my afflictions will be sharers of my happiness. When you have taught them these things, if they believe what you have taught, if they repent of their former lives, if they are ready to embrace the gospel teaching, then bathe them with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, so that by this sacred symbol they may trust that they have been freed from the filth of all their sins by the free benefit of my death, and have now been admitted²⁸ into the company of the sons of God.²⁹ Let no one be circumcised, let no one be baptized in the name of Moses or of any man. Let them all acknowledge to whom they owe their salvation, upon whom, accordingly, they ought to depend completely. Let them not be burdened with Mosaic ceremonies or human ceremonies. Let this symbol be sufficient for all who come over to the profession of the gospel, a symbol that is easily available everywhere.³⁰

‘But let no one think that to obtain salvation it is enough once to have been baptized and to have professed gospel faith; the baptized must again be taught how they can keep their innocence, in what ways they are able to advance to the perfection of gospel godliness. I have omitted nothing that pertains to obtaining eternal salvation, nor will the heavenly Spirit that you will receive allow you to forget what you have learned from me. Therefore whatever I have commanded you, pass it on for them to observe. I have not, however, prescribed for you the ceremonies of the Mosaic law

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27 Here and in the previous paragraph the language of fellowship and association in the church is heavily classicized, appearing frequently in political and quasi-political contexts in ancient authors: *sodalitas*, *contubernium* ‘fellowship,’ *foedus* ‘alliance,’ *confoederare* ‘confederate,’ *socii* ‘associates.’

28 admitted] *cooptatos*, in 1534 and 1535; in 1522 *coaptotos*, 1524 *coaptatos* ‘fit,’ surely an error

29 Cf Rom 8:14; Gal 4:4-6 and the paraphrase on Rom 8:14-19 CWE 42 47-8.

30 easily available everywhere] First in 1534; previously ‘everywhere easy and available’

that ought now to vanish like shadows before the light of gospel truth, nor the petty regulations of the Pharisees, but those things alone that make for true innocence and godliness, and those things alone that make you dear to God and truly happy. Therefore, to those who have professed my name teach these things, not only through your speech, but also through your lives, just as I have illustrated by my deeds whatever I have taught. While you do this, and while you claim mortals for heaven, the world will rise up against you, as it has risen up against me. For there is no agreement between my Spirit and the spirit of this world, and my entire teaching conflicts with the affections of those who love the things of this world.³¹ They will rise up against you with great tumults, but there is no reason for you to be disheartened, however lowly, however uneducated, however weak, however few. I have overcome the world, and you will conquer with my support and my example.³² By my strength, not your own, you will overcome whatever this world regards as terrible. But although I am about to take this body away into heaven³³ (because it is expedient for you that I do so),³⁴ nevertheless I will never desert you.³⁵ For when I have ceased to be with you in body,³⁶ then I will be with you more effectively by my Spirit. And I will be with you to the end of the world. Furthermore, it does not matter, nor is it expedient for you to know when the end of the world will be.³⁷ In the meantime do what you have been commanded, always ready for that day.³⁸ Then whenever it comes, you too will shake off mortality and you will in your entirety be with me, sharers in my Father's kingdom that will have no end.³⁹

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³¹ Cf 1 John 2:15.

³² Cf John 16:33.

³³ For Erasmus' view that the body of Jesus went to heaven cf CWE 50 9 n56.

³⁴ Cf John 16:7.

³⁵ Cf Heb 13:5.

³⁶ in body] First in 1534; previously 'with my body' 'bodily'

³⁷ Cf Acts 1:7.

³⁸ Cf Matt 24:44, and for the 'Day of the Lord' as 'that day' see 1 Thess 5:2-4 and 2 Thess 1:10 and 2:2-3.

³⁹ The sentence echoes the idiom of Scripture and the Creeds; cf the Nicene Creed 'His kingdom will have no end'; cf also Matt 25:34 (sharers of the kingdom); 1 Cor 15:53 and 2 Cor 5:1-4 (shake off mortality).

LETTER TO MATTHÄUS SCHINER

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND MATTHÄUS, CARDINAL OF SION, FROM
ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM, GREETING¹

I have at last dared to risk a journey into Germany, though the whole route was everywhere full of soldiers² – so contemptuous was I of their large numbers, when I should have been afraid of a few. I was dreadfully anxious to assist at the birth of the New Testament,³ which is now appearing for the third time. The Greek poet thought it better to stand in the battle-line and risk the chances of war three times than to bring forth once.⁴ How much greater my own ill luck, who have to bring forth the same bantling so many

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- 1 The translation of this letter (Ep 1248) to Matthäus Schiner is by R.A.B. Mynors, the notes by Peter G. Bietenholz, with some modifications. For the life of Schiner see Ep 1295 introduction and CEBR 3 221–2, which are followed closely here. Matthäus Schiner was born in the Swiss Valais, and became his uncle's successor as bishop of Sion (south-east of Lake Geneva) in 1499; Julius II made him Cardinal in 1511 and papal legate in 1512. He was a champion of the Swiss alliance with the papacy against the French, and served the Hapsburg government on several diplomatic missions. He appeared to support the cause of humanism and the new learning. He settled in Rome in 1522, where he died of the plague before the end of the year. For his meetings with Erasmus and his influence on the composition of the *Paraphrases* see the Preface, ix above.
- 2 On his way to Basel (cf Ep 1242 introduction), Erasmus travelled from Tienen to Speyer in the company of German soldiers, who had been dismissed from the imperial troops in the Netherlands and were returning home, transporting their booty on wagons (cf Ep 1342:166–73). They appear to have been contented and disciplined, unlike the bands of soldiers Erasmus had feared so often on his previous journeys between the Netherlands and Basel; cf Epp 412:4–8, 829:9–12, 832:14–16, 867:29–30.
- 3 For Erasmus' move from Louvain to Basel to assist at the printing of the third edition of his New Testament, see the Preface, ix–x above. For a detailed description of the course of its production see Ep 1174 n6.
- 4 Cf Euripides *Medea* 250–1.

times! But as the donkey, they say, will go through fire and flame to rescue its young,⁵ it is not surprising that I should be willing to pass through so many dangers from time to time to assist my offspring. But it almost befell that my perilous and tiresome journey was in vain; for I soon began to feel ill from the stink of the stoves,⁶ and when I had barely recovered I had another attack of the illness which brought me within peril of my life.⁷

Nevertheless, half dead as I was, I finished in the meantime a paraphrase on Matthew's Gospel, a work which I promised you in Brussels, and which you promised to Germany in my name as you set out for Milan.⁸ Your Eminence is well aware how pitilessly she demands that promises be kept.⁹ And so I have tried in this same work to pay both my debt and your own. The subject suited my state of health, for even if one must die in such a task, death would be holy and desirable. We are both entirely, I am sure, immersed in business, whether similar or not, I do not know. I only wish that what each of us is engaged in may be successful, or rather that what we are all engaged in may tend equally to the glory of Christ. Some baleful star, I know not what, or evil demon¹⁰ must rouse these great tumults among mortal men. Nor is it enough that kingdoms and cities should thus be racked with civil war¹¹ and the greatest monarchs of the world meet in collision, but humane studies and the religion and the faith of Christians

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5 Cf Pliny *Naturalis historia* 8.68.169.

6 For Erasmus' dislike of the customary central-European stoves cf Epp 867:17–21, 1169:19, and other letters listed in Allen's note here. Johann Froben had a fireplace built specifically for Erasmus (cf Ep 1242 introduction), and so also did Johann von Botzheim in Constance; cf Ep 1382:65–7.

7 A reference probably to an attack of kidney stones, though in September Erasmus had suffered 'a pestilent rheum accompanied by fever' (Ep 1311:5), and in fact was 'seriously ill throughout 1522' (Ep 1256 n2).

8 Erasmus had spent the summer at Anderlecht, a country retreat only a few miles from Brussels. He was therefore easily able to visit acquaintances in Brussels (cf Epp 1208, 1218 introduction). See the dedicatory letter to Charles, 3 above, where Erasmus recalls that Schiner had urged him, when they met at Brussels after the cardinal's return from the Diet of Worms, to paraphrase Matthew. On 30 June Schiner set out from Brussels for Switzerland, and on 25 September he reached the region of Como.

9 See the dedicatory letter to Charles, 5 above (Ep 1255:89–92).

10 During this period of his life Erasmus often attributed the disasters of the day to fate; see Ep 1199 n1.

11 In their war against Charles v and Leo x (cf Ep 1228 nn12 and 13) the French had Italian, Netherlandish, and even Spanish allies; moreover, both sides were employing Swiss mercenaries. But Erasmus might have termed all wars between Christians 'civil wars' (*bella intestina*); cf Ep 1238:68–9 where Erasmus sees 'the whole Christian world ... cut into two halves' by the war.

have to be shaken by these perilous rivalries. For my own part, if I can produce no remedy for such great evils, at least no one shall turn rebel with encouragement from me.

This generation, I perceive, is evil and perilous. What certain persons plan, or what the world is in travail with, I do not know. I for my part shall not cease to wish well, as I have always done, to the glory of Christ. I am a poor, weak man, who can do less than nothing; yet it is my joy to see the doctrine of the Gospels flowering again and as it were kindling into flame. If only I could put as much strength behind that movement as I wish! At least I try my hardest in good faith. My conscience is clear, and Christ is my witness: I seek neither wealth, which I have never found desirable, nor honours, which I have always abhorred; pleasures still less, which, if I had a mind to enjoy them, do not suit my years, and which I know I must soon leave behind. My desire is rather to get ready some provision to support me as I make a prosperous journey hence towards Christ, the goal of all my efforts. If only I could be successful in this enterprise as I have been in the apostolic Epistles! – for they are thumbled everywhere, even by laymen.¹² If only the storm tempest of affairs would allow your Eminence to devote yourself to the one thing worth pursuing! And yet I know you do all you are allowed to do to promote Christ's cause – and will therefore, I doubt not, do the same for your Erasmus.

I have dedicated my work to our excellent prince, Charles,¹³ partly as I foresaw, knowing his singular piety, that it would give his Majesty great pleasure, and partly that the blessing of such a name might recommend it to the hearts of a larger public. Rumours have begun to spread here about our Leo which I greatly desire may prove false.¹⁴ No one had a more generous nature, and he was an especial patron of the humanities. To me he was particularly well disposed; but he was mortal. If it has pleased God to call his shepherd away to more secure felicity, I pray we may be given someone most like you – if indeed anyone can be more like you than you are yourself. May the Lord Jesus long preserve your Eminence in health and wealth.¹⁵

Basel, 14 December 1521

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12 There were many reprints of the *Paraphrases* of individual epistles as well as collections in Latin and also a German translation by Leo Jud, sold either individually or with a collective title-page (Zürich: C. Froschauer 1521); see Heinz Holeczek *Erasmus Deutsch* (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt 1983) 1 296.

13 Cf the dedicatory epistle to Charles, 2–6 above.

14 Pope Leo x died on 1 December 1521.

15 For the relation of this letter to Ep 1249 see CWE 44 xv–xvi.

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THE SEQUENCE AND DATES OF THE
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WORKS FREQUENTLY CITED

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The Epistles

Romans	November 1517
Corinthians 1 and 2	February 1519
Galatians	May 1519
Timothy 1 and 2, Titus, Philemon	November / December 1519
Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians 1 and 2	January / February 1520
Peter 1 and 2, Jude	June / July 1520
James	December 1520
John 1–3, Hebrews	January 1521

Gospels and Acts

Matthew	March 1522
John	February 1523
Luke	August 1523
Mark	December 1523 / February 1524
Acts	February 1524

The Epistles were originally published by Dirk Martens in Louvain, except for Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, which were published by Michaël Hillen in Antwerp. The Gospels and Acts where all originally published by Johann Froben in Basel.

WORKS FREQUENTLY CITED

This list provides bibliographical information for the publications referred to in short-title form in introductions and notes. For Erasmus' writings see the short-title list following.

Albright-Mann <i>Matthew</i> (AB)	<i>Matthew</i> . Introduction, Translation, and Notes by W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann. The Anchor Bible 26 (New York 1967)
Allen	<i>Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami</i> ed P.S. Allen, H.M. Allen, and H.W. Garrod (Oxford 1906–58) 11 vols plus index volume by B. Flower and E. Rosenbaum (Oxford 1958)
<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> ed David Noel Freedman et al (New York 1992) 6 vols
ASD	<i>Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami</i> (Amsterdam 1969–)
Augustine <i>De sermone in monte</i>	S. Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi <i>De sermone domini in monte secundum Matthaeum libri duo</i> PL 34 (Paris 1862) 1229–1307
AV	<i>The Holy Bible ... Authorized King James Version</i> (London [1611; repr 1969])
Bede <i>In Matt expos</i>	Venerabilis Bedae <i>In Matthaei evangelium expositio</i> PL 92 (Paris 1850) 9–132
CCL	<i>Corpus christianorum series Latina</i> (Turnhout 1953–)
CEBR	<i>Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Bibliographical Register of The Renaissance and the Reformation</i> ed Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas B. Deutscher (Toronto 1985–7)
Chrysostom <i>In Matt hom</i>	S. Joannis Chrysostomi archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani <i>Homiliae in Matthaeum: commentarius in S. Matthaeum evangelistam</i> PG 57 and 58 (Paris 1862) 13–472 and 471–794
CWE	Collected Works of Erasmus (Toronto 1974–)
DV	<i>The Holy Bible, Douay-Rheims Version</i> (Rheims 1582 [New Testament], Douay 1609 [Old Testament]) rev Bishop Richard Challoner (repr Baltimore 1890)
<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i> ed Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder (New York 1972) 16 vols

- Ep *Epistulae*
- ERSY *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* (1981–)
- Gloss *Glossa ordinaria*, in *Biblia Latina, cum Glossa ordinaria Walafridi aliorumque et interlineari Anselmi . . . et cum postillis ac moralitatibus Nicolai de Lyra . . .* ed Sebastian Brant (Basel: Johann Froben et Johann Petri 1498) v
- Hilary *In Matt comm* S. Hilarii *In evangelium Matthaei commentarius* PL 9 (Paris 1844) 917–1078
- Holborn *Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus: Ausgewählte Werke* ed Hajo and Annamarie Holborn (Munich 1933; repr Hildesheim 1961) 10 vols
- Jerome *Comm in Matt* S. Eusebii Hieronymi Stridonensiis presbyteri *Commentariorum in evangelium Matthaei ad Eusebium libri quattuor* PL 26 (Paris 1884) 15–218
- Jerome *De nominibus Hebraicis* S. Hieronymi presbyteri *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* CCL 72 ed P. Antin (Turnhout 1959) 57–161
- LB *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami opera omnia* ed J. Leclerc (Leiden 1703–6; repr Hildesheim 1961) 10 vols
- LXX *Septuaginta, id est Vetus Testamentum Graece iuxta LXX interpretes* ed Alfred Rahlfs, 4th ed (Stuttgart 1950) 2 vols
- Metzger *Textual Commentary* Bruce M. Metzger *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* 2nd ed (Stuttgart/London 1994)
- NEB *The New English Bible, with the Apocrypha* (Oxford 1970)
- New Catholic Encyclopedia* *New Catholic Encyclopedia* ed Bernard L. Mathaler, Gregory F. LaNeve, Jonathan Y. Tan, Richard E. McCarron, 2nd ed (Washington 2000) 15 vols
- Nicholas of Lyra See *Gloss*
- NRSV *The Holy Bible . . . New Revised Standard Version* (New York 1989)
- OCD *Oxford Classical Dictionary* ed S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, 3rd ed (Oxford 1996)
- ODCC *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* ed F.L. Cross, 3rd ed rev ed E.A. Livingstone (Oxford 2005)

- OLD *Oxford Latin Dictionary* ed P.G.W. Glase (Oxford 1982)
- Origen *Comm in Matt* Origenis *Commentaria in evangelium secundum Matthaeum* PG 13 (Paris 1862) 828–1600
- Pabel *Conversing with God* Hilmar M. Pabel *Conversing with God: Prayer in Erasmus' Pastoral Writings* (Toronto 1997)
- PG *Patrologiae cursus completus . . . series Graeca* ed J.-P. Migne (Paris 1857–86) 162 vols (Electronic PG, Religion and Technology Center, Inc)
- PL *Patrologiae cursus completus . . . series Latina* ed J.-P. Migne (Paris 1844–66) 221 vols (Chadwick-Healey Patrologia Latina Database 1996–2006)
- Ps Chrysostom *In Matt hom* *Opus imperfectum: eruditus commentarius in evangelium Matthaei, incerto auctore* PG 56 (Paris 1859) 611–946
- RSV *The Holy Bible . . . Revised Standard Version* (New York 1952)
- Theophylact *Enarr in Matt* Theophylacti archiepiscopi Bulgariae *Enarratio in evangelium Matthaei* PG 123 (Paris 1864) 140–488
- Weber *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem; editio tertia emendata* ed Robertus Weber, Bonifatius Fischer, H.I. Frede, Johannes Gribomont, H.F.D. Sparks, W. Thiele, 3rd ed (Stuttgart 1983) 2 vols

SHORT-TITLE FORMS FOR ERASMUS' WORKS

Titles following colons are longer versions of the same, or are alternative titles. Items entirely enclosed in square brackets are of doubtful authorship. For abbreviations, see Works Frequently Cited.

Acta: Acta Academiae Lovaniensis contra Lutherum *Opuscula* / CWE 71

Adagia: Adagiorum chiliades 1508, etc (Adagiorum collectanea for the primitive form, when required) LB II / ASD II-1, 4, 5, 6 / CWE 30–6

Admonitio adversus mendacium: Admonitio adversus mendacium et obrectationem LB X

Annotationes in Novum Testamentum LB VI / CWE 51–60

Antibarbari LB X / ASD I-1 / CWE 23

Apologia ad Caranzam: Apologia ad Sanctium Caranzam, or Apologia de tribus locis, or Responsio ad annotationem Stunicae . . . a Sanctio Caranza defensam LB IX

Apologia ad Fabrum: Apologia ad Iacobum Fabrum Stapulensem LB IX / ASD IX-3 / CWE 83

Apologia adversus monachos: Apologia adversus monachos quosdam Hispanos LB IX

Apologia adversus Petrum Sutorem: Apologia adversus debacchationes Petri Sutoris LB IX

Apologia adversus rhapsodias Alberti Pii: Apologia ad viginti et quattuor libros A. Pii LB IX / CWE 84

Apologia contra Latomi dialogum: Apologia contra Iacobi Latomi dialogum de tribus linguis LB IX / CWE 71

Apologia de 'In principio erat sermo' LB IX

Apologia de laude matrimonii: Apologia pro declamatione de laude matrimonii LB IX / CWE 71

Apologia de loco 'Omnes quidem': Apologia de loco 'Omnes quidem resurgemus' LB IX

Apologiae contra Stunicam: Apologiae contra Lopidem Stunicam LB IX:

(1) Apologia respondens ad ea quae Iacobus Lopis Stunica taxaverat in prima duntaxat Novi Testamenti aeditione ASD IX-2; (2) Apologia adversus libellum Stunicae cui titulum fecit Blasphemiae et impietates Erasmi; (3) Apologia ad prodromon Stunicae; (4) Apologia ad Stunicae conclusiones; (5) Epistola apogetica adversus Stunicam [= Ep 2172]

Apologia qua respondet invectivis Lei: Apologia qua respondet duabus invectivis Eduardi Lei *Opuscula* / CWE 72

Apophthegmata LB IV

Appendix de scriptis Clithovei LB IX / CWE 83

Appendix respondens ad Sutorem LB IX

Argumenta: Argumenta in omnes epistolas apostolicas nova (with Paraphrases)
 Axiomata pro causa Lutheri: Axiomata pro causa Martini Lutheri *Opuscula* / CWE 71

Brevissima scholia: In Elenchum Alberti Pii brevissima scholia per eundem
 Erasmus Roterodamum CWE 84

Carmina LB I, IV, V, VIII / ASD I-7 / CWE 85-6

Catalogus lucubrationum LB I / CWE 9 (Ep 1341A)

Ciceronianus: Dialogus Ciceronianus LB I / ASD I-2 / CWE 28

Colloquia LB I / ASD I-3 / CWE 39-40

Compendium vitae Allen I / CWE 4

Concionalis interpretatio (in Psalmi)

Conflictus: Conflictus Thaliae et Barbariei LB I

[Consilium: Consilium cuiusdam ex animo cupientis esse consultum] *Opuscula* /
 CWE 71

De bello Turcico: Consultatio de bello Turcico (in Psalmi)

De civilitate: De civilitate morum puerilium LB I / CWE 25

Declamatio de morte LB IV

Declamatiuncula LB IV

Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas: Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae
 vulgatas sub nomine facultatis theologiae Parisiensis LB IX

De concordia: De sancienda ecclesiae concordia, or De amabili ecclesiae concordia
 (in Psalmi)

De conscribendis epistolis LB I / ASD I-2 / CWE 25

De constructione: De constructione octo partium orationis, or Syntaxis LB I /
 ASD I-4

De contemptu mundi: Epistola de contemptu mundi LB V / ASD V-1 / CWE 66

De copia: De duplici copia verborum ac rerum LB I / ASD I-6 / CWE 24

De esu carniū: Epistola apologetica ad Christophorum episcopum Basiliensem de
 interdicto esu carniū LB IX / ASD IX-1

De immensa Dei misericordia: Concio de immensa Dei misericordia LB V / CWE 70

De libero arbitrio: De libero arbitrio diatribe LB IX / CWE 76

De praeparatione: De praeparatione ad mortem LB V / ASD V-1 / CWE 70

De pueris instituendis: De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis LB I / ASD I-2 /
 CWE 26

De puero Iesu: Concio de puero Iesu LB V / CWE 29

De puritate tabernaculi: De puritate tabernaculi sive ecclesiae christianae (in
 Psalmi)

De ratione studii LB I / ASD I-2 / CWE 24

De recta pronuntiatione: De recta latini graecique sermonis pronuntiatione LB I /
 ASD I-4 / CWE 26

- De taedio Iesu: Disputatiuncula de taedio, pavore, tristitia Iesu LB V / CWE 70
- Detectio praestigiarum: Detectio praestigiarum cuiusdam libelli germanice scripti
LB X / ASD IX-1
- De vidua christiana LB V / CWE 66
- De virtute amplectenda: Oratio de virtute amplectenda LB V / CWE 29
- [Dialogus bilinguium ac trilinguium: Chonradi Nastadiensis dialogus bilinguium
ac trilinguium] *Opuscula* / CWE 7
- Dilutio: Dilutio eorum quae Iodocus Clithoveus scripsit adversus declamationem
suasoriam matrimonii / *Dilutio eorum quae Iodocus Clithoveus scripsit* ed Emile V.
Telle (Paris 1968) / CWE 83
- Divinationes ad notata Bedae LB IX
- Ecclesiastes: Ecclesiastes sive de ratione concionandi LB V / ASD V-4, 5
- Elenchus in N. Bedae censuras LB IX
- Enchiridion: Enchiridion militis christiani LB V / CWE 66
- Encomium matrimonii (in De conscribendis epistolis)
- Encomium medicinae: Declamatio in laudem artis medicae LB I / ASD I-4 / CWE 29
- Epistola ad Dorpium LB IX / CWE 3 / CWE 71
- Epistola ad fratres Inferioris Germaniae: Responsio ad fratres Germaniae Inferioris
ad epistolam apologeticam incerto autore proditam LB X / ASD IX-1
- Epistola ad graculos: Epistola ad quosdam imprudentissimos graculos LB X
- Epistola apologetica de Termino LB X
- Epistola consolatoria: Epistola consolatoria virginibus sacris, or Epistola consolatoria
in adversis LB V / CWE 69
- Epistola contra pseudevangelicos: Epistola contra quosdam qui se falso iactant
evangelicos LB X / ASD IX-1
- Euripidis Hecuba LB I / ASD I-1
- Euripidis Iphigenia in Aulide LB I / ASD I-1
- Exomologesis: Exomologesis sive modus confitendi LB V
- Explanatio symboli: Explanatio symboli apostolorum sive catechismus LB V /
ASD V-1 / CWE 70
- Ex Plutarcho versa LB IV / ASD IV-2
- Formula: Conficiendarum epistolarum formula (see De conscribendis epistolis)
- Hyperaspistes LB X / CWE 76-7
- In Nucem Ovidii commentarius LB I / ASD I-1 / CWE 29
- In Prudentium: Commentarius in duos hymnos Prudentii LB V / CWE 29
- Institutio christiani matrimonii LB V / CWE 69
- Institutio principis christiani LB IV / ASD IV-1 / CWE 27

[Julius exclusus: Dialogus Julius exclusus e coelis] *Opuscula* / CWE 27

Lingua LB IV / ASD IV-1A / CWE 29

Liturgia Virginis Matris: Virginis Matris apud Lauretum cultae liturgia LB V /
ASD V-1 / CWE 69

Luciani dialogi LB I / ASD I-1

Manifesta mendacia CWE 71

Methodus (see Ratio)

Modus orandi Deum LB V / ASD V-1 / CWE 70

Moria: Moriae encomium LB IV / ASD IV-3 / CWE 27

Novum Testamentum: Novum Testamentum 1519 and later (Novum instrumentum
for the first edition, 1516, when required) LB VI / ASD VI-2, 5, 6, 8

Obsecratio ad Virginem Mariam: Obsecratio sive oratio ad Virginem Mariam in
rebus adversis, or Obsecratio ad Virginem Matrem Mariam in rebus adversis
LB V / CWE 69

Oratio de pace: Oratio de pace et discordia LB VIII

Oratio funebris: Oratio funebris in funere Bertae de Heyen LB VIII / CWE 29

Paeon Virgini Matri: Paeon Virgini Matri dicendus LB V / CWE 69

Panegyricus: Panegyricus ad Philippum Austriae ducem LB IV / ASD IV-1 / CWE 27

Parabola: Parabola sive similia LB I / ASD I-5 / CWE 23

Paraclesis LB V, VI

Paraphrasis in Elegantias Vallae: Paraphrasis in Elegantias Laurentii Vallae LB I /
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Paraphrasis in Matthaeum, etc (in Paraphrasis in Novum Testamentum)

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General Index

This index covers the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, the notes, and the accompanying prefaces and letters contained in this volume. It is not an index to the Gospel of Matthew and therefore omits topics that are paraphrased by Erasmus without notable amplification. Rather, it aims at identifying important elements in Erasmus' writing and thought, and topics and works relevant to their study. It strives to be representative, but does not claim to be exhaustive.

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