



# Paraphrase on the Gospel of Matthew: Volume 45 (Collected Works of Erasmus)

*Desiderius Erasmus*

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Erasmus yearned to make the Bible an effective instrument of reform in society, church, and everyday life. To this end, he composed the *Paraphrases*, in which the words of Holy Scripture provide the core of a text vastly expanded to embrace the reforming 'philosophy of Christ.' *Matthew* was Erasmus's first paraphrased Gospel and was thus the great theologian's first opportunity to set out a full portrait of the life of Jesus.

In this *Paraphrase*, the wonderful complexity of Jesus's life finds coherence in the conception of Him as a teacher. The baptism, the dove, and the divine voice attesting sonship are called the 'inaugurating ceremonies' that authenticate Jesus as the divine teacher of heavenly philosophy. His students are the disciples, who are to be teachers themselves, initiating an unending line of Christian teachers. The Jesus of this *Paraphrase* understands pedagogy: He adapts His teaching to the developing abilities of His pupils, quizzes them, and gently rebukes them. His actions as well as His words have one primary objective: to teach the disciples.

As a Preface to the *Paraphrase*, Erasmus wrote a 'Letter to the Pious Reader,' which became one of his most provocative and important essays. Like the more published *Paraclesis*, this 'Letter' vigorously advocates the translation of scripture into the vernacular languages, and proposes a 'confirmation' ceremony to encourage young people to assume responsibility for the vows taken for them at baptism by their sponsors.

This volume illuminates the early thinking of Erasmus and is a welcome addition to the Collected Works series.

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