Erasmus of Rotterdam understood his life's work to be the restoration and elucidation of Holy Scripture. A part of this work was his publication of paraphrases of the books of the New Testament, beginning with Romans in 1517, going on through all the Epistles, and continuing with Matthew in 1522, John in early 1523 and Luke later the same year, and Mark and Acts by early 1524. The purpose of such paraphrasing was to expound the sacred books "so that, with the sense intact, they could be read with less distaste and understood more easily," and thus to advance the Christian humanist's dream of making a familiar knowledge of at least the Gospels available to all.


sorts and conditions of Christians. In the Gospel paraphrases in particular, Erasmus makes it his task to explicate both Jesus' words and his actions as exemplary for his followers, as setting the standards by which the conduct of individual and communal life may be judged. Here I intend to examine one such exemplary standard in the Paraphrase on John and its function in the context of the Paraphrase's intended audience.

By and large the example and teaching of Jesus is, in Erasmus' retelling, addressed to an undifferentiated "us," all Christian believers: he teaches "us" or shows "us"; "we" are to learn this or that from him; his words and actions are designed to strengthen "our" faith. Such instruction of "us" is sometimes presented rhetorically as directed to "us" without intermediary; or it is portrayed as directed at the disciples, who in their humble origins, insufficient faith, slowness at learning, and gradual progression towards a more complete understanding are typical of, and spokesmen for, all the Christians to come. Peter and the other disciples, however, are more than merely prototypical


6 For example (all in exposition), "nobis adumbravit," on 6:11 (LB, 7, 516C); "in hoc venerat ut nos doceret," on 6:15 (LB, 7, 543F); "docere quantum periculi sit nobis," on 6:17 (LB, 7, 544B); "ut nobis mansuetudinis ac modestiae praebert exemplum," on 7:16 (LB, 7, 555C); "sed nobis lenitatis exemplum praebens," on 7:21 (LB, 7, 556E); "nos interim suo facto admonens," on 7:28 (LB, 7, 558B); "ut nos certo doceremur," on 7:49 (LB, 7, 562B); "hac ipsa re nos docens," on 8:6 (LB, 7, 564B); "nos interim docens," on 10:21 (LB, 7, 584D); "[lachrymae] impendebantur ... nobis ... ut ... disceremus," on 11:35 (LB, 7, 591C); "ut nos doceret," on 11:41 (LB, 7, 592A); "nos obiter admonens exemplo suo," on 12:36 (LB, 7, 600A); "profecit ad fidei nostrae firmitatem," on 20:25 (LB, 7, 644F).