Students of the Renaissance period are increasingly inclined to credit major humanist thinkers with a new, less rationalist understanding of human nature, and a new, critical understanding of texts in their historical setting. It will be the purpose of this paper to ask whether, or how far, these two aspects of humanist thought were able to achieve original results at an important point where both came together, that is, in the understanding of the human nature of Christ as described in the Gospels. First, to define the state of the question as humanists might have understood it, Erasmus' De tedio Iesu: Disputatunccula de tedio, pavore, tristica Iesu will be considered in light of the patristic and medieval sources available to him (I). Next, humanist writings on the Gospels—including those by Erasmus himself—will be examined to see what changes may have been wrought in traditional views by the novel humanist discipline of biblical philology (II).

The De Taedio Iesu is not one of Erasmus’ better known works. Because of its rather syllogistic form of argumentation, it seems less characteristic of the Rotterdam humanist than his more famous works of the same period (notably the Enchiridion Militis Christiani), and it has seldom been the object of any special study. Nonetheless, since it represents a declaration of intellectual independence from his admired mentor in theological matters, John Colet, and since it offers a rare glimpse of how a self-styled “theologian after the manner of the an-

scientiae* treated one of the most familiar topoi of late medieval devotional literature, this brief treatise warrants attention in its own right. The printed version (published with the *Enchiridion* in 1503 or 1504) represents a lengthy reworking of an exchange of letters between Erasmus and Colet in 1499, which in turn grew out of a verbal disagreement: Colet asserted that Christ's agony in the garden had nothing to do with any human fear of death, but expressed rather his grief over the punishment that would come to the Jews for rejecting his message, while Erasmus defended the view that Christ did indeed have a human fear of death. In what follows, it will be convenient first to sketch patristic and scholastic views on Christ's agony in the garden, as found in works which Erasmus used in the composition of his treatise, and then to show how Erasmus dealt with themes inherited from his intellectual forebears.

Christ's suffering at Gethsemane, particularly in his prayer to the Father to "let this chalice pass" from him, posed for exegetes and theologians a problem at two different levels. First and foremost, as St. Anselm put it in a prayer to Christ: "You show me that you are a man in such wise that you would seem in a certain manner to be unaware that you are God." It was among orthodox interpreters a settled conviction, indeed, the nearest thing to a dogma of the faith (Karl Rahner has described it as "an undefined doctrine of the church"), that the human soul of Christ enjoyed from the earliest moment of its existence a direct vision of his divine nature; how then could Jesus cry out in anguish at Gethsemane, or on the cross, as if the Father had forsaken him? At a lesser level of importance, since the Second Person of the Trinity was believed to have assumed a perfect human nature in his Incarnation, it was for the devout no small occasion for scandal that the Gospel narratives portray Jesus as fearing his own painful death and praying to avoid it, especially

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4 Ludolphus de Saxonia, *Vita Christi* (Paris, 1529), 2, lix, f. CCCLVII. (I have not found the source for the quotation from Anselm.)