

QUESTION 42

Christ's Teaching

Next we have to consider Christ's teaching (*de doctrina Christi*). And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Was it fitting for Christ to preach only to the Jews, or to the gentiles as well? (2) In His preaching, should He have avoided disturbing the Jews (*debuerit turbationes Iudaeorum vitare*)? (3) Was it fitting for Him to teach openly or in private? (4) Was it fitting for Him to teach only by the spoken word or in writing as well?

As regards the time at which He began to teach, we already discussed this when we were talking about His baptism (q. 39, a. 3).

Article 1

Was it fitting for Christ to preach only to the Jews, or to the gentiles as well?

It seems that it was fitting for Christ to preach not only to the Jews but to the gentiles as well (*Christus non solum Iudaeis, sed etiam gentibus debuerit praedicare*):

Objection 1: Isaiah 49:6 says, "It is a small thing for you to be to me a servant to raise up the tribes of Israel and to convert the dregs of Jacob: I have given you as a light to the nations, that you might be my salvation even to the ends of the earth." But Christ gave light and salvation through His teaching. Therefore, it seems to have been "a small thing" if He preached only to the Jews and not to the gentiles.

Objection 2: As Matthew 7:29 says, "He was teaching them as one having authority." But more authority in teaching is found in instructing those who have heard nothing at all, which is what the gentiles are like; hence, in Romans 15:20 the Apostle says, "I have not preached the gospel where Christ has already been named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation." Therefore, Christ should have preached to the gentiles much more than to the Jews.

Objection 3: Instructing many is more beneficial than teaching a single individual. But Christ did instruct some gentiles, e.g., the Samaritan woman in John 4 and the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15. Therefore, it seems that, *a fortiori*, He should have preached to a multitude of gentiles.

But contrary to this: In Matthew 15:24 our Lord says, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But Romans 10:15 says, "How will they preach unless they have been sent?" Therefore, it was not fitting for Christ to preach to the gentiles.

I respond: It was fitting for Christ's teaching to be presented at the beginning, both by Himself and by His apostles, only to the Jews.

First of all, in order to show that by His coming the promises made of old to the Jews—but not to the gentiles—were being fulfilled. Hence, in Romans 15:8 the Apostle says, "I say that Christ has been the minister of the circumcision"—i.e., the apostle and preacher to the Jews—"because of God's truthfulness, to confirm the promises made to our fathers."

Second, in order that His coming might be shown to be from God, since "what is from God is ordered," as Romans 13:1 says. For it was required by due order that Christ's teaching should be proposed first to the Jews, who were closer to God through faith and the worship of the one God, and then transmitted to the gentiles through them—just as in the celestial hierarchy illuminations likewise come down from the higher angels to the lower angels. Hence, in commenting on Matthew 15:24 ("I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"), Jerome says, "He does not say that He was not sent to the gentiles, but that He was sent first of all to Israel." Hence, Isaiah 66:19 says, "From among them I will send those who have been saved"—viz., Jews—"to the nations, and they will announce my glory to the gentiles."

Third, in order to remove from the Jews a reason for accusing Him unjustly (*ut Iudaeis auferret calumniandi materiam*). Hence, in commenting on Matthew 10:5 (“Do not go in the direction of the gentiles”), Jerome says, “It was necessary for the coming of the Christ to be announced first to the Jews, lest they have a justifiable excuse, claiming that they had rejected our Lord because He was sending His apostles to the gentiles and the Samaritans.”

Fourth, because Christ merited His power and dominion over the nations through the victory of His cross. Hence, Apocalypse 2: 26,28 says, “And to him who overcomes ... I will give him authority over the nations ... just as I have likewise received it from my Father.” And Philippians 2:8-11 says, “Because He became obedient unto death on a cross, God has exalted Him, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend and that every tongue should confess Him.” And this is why He did not want His teaching to be preached to the gentiles before His passion, whereas after His passion He said to His disciples in Matthew 28:19, “Go and teach all nations.” Because of this, as we read in John 12:20-25, when, as His passion was approaching, certain gentiles wished to see Jesus, He responded, “Unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.” And as Augustine says in commenting on this passage, “He was calling Himself the grain that had to die in the unfaithfulness of the Jews in order to be multiplied in the faith of the nations.”

Reply to objection 1: Christ was given as the light and salvation of the nations through His disciples, whom He sent to preach to the gentiles.

Reply to objection 2: It bespeaks more authority, and not less authority, to do something through others than to do it by oneself. And so the divine authority in Christ is demonstrated to the highest degree in the fact that He bestowed such power on His disciples in their preaching that the nations, which had heard nothing about Christ, turned toward Him.

Now Christ’s authority in teaching has to do (a) with miracles, through which His teaching is confirmed, (b) with an efficacy in persuading, and (c) with the authority of His speech, since He spoke as one having dominion over the Law when He said, “... but I say to you,” and likewise (d) the power of rectitude which He showed in His manner of life, living without sin.

Reply to objection 3: Just as it was not fitting for Christ to communicate His teaching to the gentiles on an equal footing with the Jews from the beginning, in order that He might be seen as having been given to the Jews as to the first born people, so, too, it was not fitting for Him to repel the gentiles altogether, lest the hope for salvation be precluded from them. And this is why some gentiles were admitted as individuals because of the excellence of their faith and devotion.

Article 2

Should Christ have preached to the Jews without offending them?

It seems that Christ should have preached to the Jews without offending them (*Christus debuerit Iudaeis sine eorum offensione praedicare*):

Objection 1: As Augustine says in *De Agone Christiano*, “In the man Jesus Christ, the Son of God gave Himself to us as an example of how to live.” But we ought to avoid offending not only the faithful, but also non-believers—this according to 1 Corinthians 10:32 (“Do not give offense to Jews or to gentiles or to the Church of God”). Therefore, it seems that in His own teaching Christ should have avoided offending the Jews.

Objection 2: No wise man should do what impedes the effect of his work. But by the fact that Christ’s teaching disturbed the Jews, the effect of His teaching was impeded; for instance, Luke 11:53-54

says that after our Lord had rebuked the Pharisees and the scribes, “they began to press Him hard and to force Him to speak on many things, setting traps for Him and seeking to seize upon something out of His mouth in order to accuse Him.” Therefore, it does not seem to have been fitting for Him to offend them in His teaching.

Objection 3: In 1 Timothy 5:1 the Apostle says, “Do not upbraid an elderly man, but exhort him as you would a father.” But the priests and rulers of the Jews were the elders among that people. Therefore, it seems that they were not to be censured with harsh rebukes.

But contrary to this is that it had been foretold in Isaiah 8:14 that the Christ was going to be “a stumbling block and a rock of offense (*in lapidem offensionis et petram scandali*) to the two houses of Israel.”

I respond: The salvation of a multitude is to be preferred to the peace of any particular human beings. And so when certain individuals impede the salvation of a multitude by their perversity, then, in order to provide for the salvation of the multitude, a preacher or teacher should not fear offending those individuals. But, by their malice, the Scribes and the Pharisees and the rulers of the Jews impeded the salvation of the people to a great degree, both because they resisted Christ’s teaching, through which alone salvation was able to exist, and because by their depraved morals they were corrupting the life of the people. And so our Lord, notwithstanding their taking offense, publicly taught the truth that they hated and censured their vices. Hence, Matthew 15:12,14 says that when the disciples of our Lord asked, “Did you know that the Pharisees, upon hearing this word, were scandalized?” He answered, “Leave them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind, and if the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit.”

Reply to objection 1: A man should refrain from offending any individuals in such a way as to give them a cause for ruin by a wrong deed or word of his (*suo facto vel dicto minus recto*). However, as Gregory explains, “If a scandal arises from the truth, then it is better for the scandal to be tolerated than for the truth to be relinquished.”

Reply to objection 2: By rebuking the scribes and Pharisees publicly, our Lord did not impede, but to the contrary promoted, the effect of His teaching. For when the vices of those men became known to the people, they were turned away from Christ to a lesser degree by the words of the scribes and Pharisees, who were always resisting His teaching.

Reply to objection 3: The Apostle’s words should be taken to apply to those who are elderly not only in age or authority but also old in moral uprightness—this according to Numbers 11:16 (“Gather around me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the old men of the people”). However, if by sinning openly they turn the authority of old age into an instrument of wickedness, they should be rebuked openly and severely—as Daniel likewise says in Daniel 13:52: “O you are grown old in evil days, etc.”

Article 3

Was it fitting for Christ to teach all things in public?

It seems that it was not fitting for Christ to teach all things in public (*Christus non omnia publice docere debuit*):

Objection 1: We read that Christ said many things to the disciples apart by themselves, as is clear from the discourse at the [Last] Supper (John 13-17). Hence, in Matthew 10:27 He said, “What you have whispered in private will be preached on the housetops.” Therefore, He did not teach all things publicly.

Objection 2: The deepest wisdom should be expounded only to those who are mature (*inter*

perfectos)—this according to 1 Corinthians 2:6 (“Wisdom we speak among the mature”). But Christ’s teaching contained the deepest wisdom of all. Therefore, it was not to be communicated to the multitude of the immature.

Objection 3: Hiding a truth by silence is the same as hiding it by the obscurity of one’s words. But Christ hid the truth that He preached from the crowds by the obscurity of His words, since, as Matthew 13:34 says, “Without parables He did not speak to them.” Therefore, it could equally well have been hidden by silence.

But contrary to this: In John 18:20 He Himself says, “I have said nothing in secret.”

I respond: There are three ways in which the teaching of something can be “in secret”:

In one way, *with respect to the intention of the teacher*, who wants to hide his teaching instead of making it manifest to many. There are two ways in which this happens:

(a) Sometimes because of the envy of the teacher, who wants to distinguish himself by his knowledge and so does not want to communicate it to others. This has no place in the case of Christ, of whose person Wisdom 7:13 says, “I have learned her without guile, and I communicate her without envy, and her integrity I do not hide (*honestatem eius non abscondo*).”

(b) On the other hand, sometimes this happens because of the vileness (*propter inhonestatem*) of the things that are taught. As Augustine explains in *Super Ioannem*, “There are some bad things which no sort of human shame can bear.” Hence, Proverbs 9:17 says of the teaching of the heretics, “Hidden waters are more sweet.” However, Christ’s teaching “has nothing of either error or uncleanness” (1 Thessalonians 2:3). And in Mark 4:21 our Lord asks, “Is a lamp”—i.e., true and respectable teaching (*vera et honesta doctrina*)—“put under a bushel basket?”

In a second way, a teaching is in secret because *it is proposed to just a few individuals*. And once again, Christ taught nothing in secret in this sense, since He proposed His entire teaching either to the whole crowd or to all of His disciples in common. Hence, in *Super Ioannem* Augustine asks, “Who is it that is speaking in secret when He is speaking in front of so many people?”

In a third way, a teaching is in secret *with respect to the manner of teaching*. And in this sense Christ said certain things to the crowds in secret, making use of parables to proclaim spiritual mysteries which were such that the crowds were not able or worthy to grasp them. And yet it was better for them as such to listen to teaching about spiritual realities under the cover of parables than to be deprived of it altogether. Still, our Lord expounded the open and unveiled truth contained in these parables to His disciples, through whom this truth came down to others who were capable of grasping it—this according to 2 Timothy 2:2 (“What you heard from me through many witnesses, entrust this to faithful men who will be capable of teaching it to others”). And this was prefigured in Numbers 4, when the sons of Aaron were told to cover the sanctuary vessels that the Levites were carrying around uncovered.”

Reply to objection 1: As Hilary says in *Super Matthaëum* while explaining the quoted passage, “We do not read that our Lord was used to preaching at night or to handing down His teaching in the dark. Instead, He says this because His speech is darkness to carnal men, and His words are night to non-believers. And so what He teaches is to be proclaimed among non-believers with the freedom of faith and profession (*cum libertate fidei et confessionis*).”

An alternative reply is that, according to Jerome, our Lord is invoking a comparison, since “He was instructing them in Judea, a small place” in comparison to the whole world, in which Christ’s teaching was going to be made public by the preaching of the apostles.

Reply to objection 2: It was not just with respect to the crowds that Our Lord did not reveal by His teaching all the profundities of His wisdom; this applied even to His disciples, to whom He said in John 16:12, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” Yet He proposed openly, and not in secret, everything of His wisdom that He thought it right to make known to

others—even if He was not understood by everyone. Hence, in *Super Ioannem* Augustine says, “We must interpret our Lord’s saying, ‘I have spoken openly to the world’ (John 18:20), as if He had said, ‘Many have heard me’—and, yet again, it was not ‘openly’ (*non erat palam*), in the sense that they did not understand.”

Reply to objection 3: As has been explained, our Lord spoke to the crowds in parables because they were not worthy or capable of receiving the unveiled truth that He explained to His disciples.

Now when it says, “Without parables he did not speak to them,” according to Chrysostom this should be understood to apply to that particular sermon, even though at other times He had also said many things to the crowds without parables.

An alternative reply, following Augustine in *De Quaestionibus Evangeliorum*, is that this is said “not because He said nothing in a literal sense (*proprie*), but because He preached almost no sermon where He did not signify something through a parable, even though He had said some things in a literal sense in that same sermon.”

Article 4

Should Christ have handed down His teaching in writing?

It seems that Christ should have handed down His teaching in writing (*Christus doctrinam suam debuerit scripto tradere*):

Objection 1: Writing was invented in order that teaching might be preserved in memory for the future. But Christ’s teaching was going to endure forever—this according to Luke 21 (“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”). Therefore, it seems that Christ should have handed down His teaching in writing.

Objection 2: The Old Law went before as a figure of Christ—this according to Hebrews 10:1 (“The Law had a shadow of the good things to come”). But the Old Law was written down by God (*a Deo fuit descripta*)—this according to Exodus 24:12 (“I will give you two stone tablets, and the law and the commandments that I have written”). Therefore, it seems that Christ should likewise have written down His teaching.

Objection 3: It pertained to Christ—who had come, as Luke 1:79 says, “to bring light to those who were sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death”—to remove the occasion for error and to open up the way of faith. But He would have done this by writing down His own teaching; for as Augustine says in *De Consensu Evangelistarum* 1, “It is not unusual for some to ask why our Lord wrote nothing Himself, with the result that it is necessary to believe others who wrote about Him. This question is asked by those, especially pagans, who do not dare to blame or blaspheme Christ and who ascribe to Him, albeit as to a [mere] man, the most excellent wisdom. They claim that His disciples attributed to their teacher more than He was in actuality by calling Him the Son of God and the Word of God through whom all things were made.” And a little later he adds: “They seem to have been prepared to believe of Him what He wrote about Himself, but not what others had said about Him using their own judgment.” Therefore, it seems that Christ should have handed down His teaching in writing.

But contrary to this: No books written by Christ are contained in the canon of Scripture.

I respond: It was fitting for Christ not to have written down His own teaching.

First of all, *because of His dignity*. For the more excellent the teacher, the more excellent his manner of teaching should be. And so the manner of teaching that is appropriate for Christ, as the most excellent teacher, is to imprint His teaching [directly] onto the hearts of His hearers. That is why

Matthew 7:29 says, “He was teaching them as one having authority.” Hence, even among the gentiles, Pythagoras and Socrates, who were the most excellent of their teachers, decided to write nothing. For writings are ordered, as [a means] to an end, toward imprinting teaching onto the hearts of the hearers.

Second, *because of the excellence of Christ’s teaching*, which cannot be captured in writing (*quae litteris comprehendi non potest*)—this according to John 21:25 (“There are many other things that Jesus did, but if every one of them were written down, not even the world itself, I think, could hold the books that would have to be written”). As Augustine explains, “We are asked to believe not that the world cannot hold them (*capere eos*) as far as physical space (*spatio locorum*) is concerned, but instead that they could not be held (*comprehendi*) by the capacity of the readers.” Moreover, if Christ had committed His teaching to writing, people would think that there is nothing deeper in His doctrine than what His writings contained.

Third, *so that His teaching would reach everyone in a certain order*, i.e., where He taught His own disciples without mediation, and they in turn taught others by both the spoken word and the written word. By contrast, if He Himself had written, His teaching would have reached everyone without mediation. Hence, Proverbs 9:3 says of wisdom, “She has sent her handmaidens to call them to her tower.”

However, notice that, as Augustine explains in *De Consensu Evangelistarum* 1, some gentiles have thought that Christ wrote certain books containing elements of the magic by which He worked miracles—magic that Christian discipline condemns. “And yet those who claim that they have read such books by Christ perform none of the feats that they marvel at His having performed in those books. Moreover, it is by God’s will (*divino iudicio*) that they make the great mistake (*sic errant*) of asserting that these same books were entitled as letters written to Peter and Paul, where the reason for this was that in several places they saw Peter and Paul pictured together with Christ. Unremarkably, these deceivers were themselves deceived by the painters. For during the whole time that Christ lived in His mortal flesh with His disciples, Paul was not yet His disciple.”

Reply to objection 1: As Augustine says in the same book, “Christ is the head of all His disciples insofar as they are members of His body. And so, since they were the ones who wrote down what He showed them and said to them, it should in no way be claimed that He Himself did not write. For with the head dictating, His members put down what they knew. And whatever He wanted us to read about His deeds and words, He commanded that this be written down by them as by His hands.”

Reply to objection 2: Since the Old Law was given in figures could be sensed, it was likewise fitting for it to be written down in signs that can be sensed. But Christ’s teaching, which is the Law of the Spirit of Life, had to be written down “not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tablets of stone, but in the fleshly tablets of the heart,” as the Apostle puts it in 2 Corinthians 3:3.

Reply to objection 3: Those who do not want to believe the writings of the apostles about Christ—and who thought that Christ had worked His miracles by means of the magical arts—would not have believed the writings of Christ Himself, either.