

THIRD PART, QUESTION 42

Of Christ's Doctrine (In Four Articles)

We have now to consider Christ's doctrine, about which there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether Christ should have preached to the Jews only, or to the Gentiles also?
- (2) Whether in preaching He should have avoided the opposition of the Jews?
- (3) Whether He should have preached in an open or in a hidden manner?
- (4) Whether He should have preached by word only, or also by writing?

Concerning the time when He began to teach, we have spoken above when treating of His baptism (q. 29, a. 3).

Whether Christ should have preached not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles?

IIIa q. 42 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ should have preached not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. For it is written (Is. 49:6): "It is a small thing that thou shouldst be My servant to raise up the tribes of Israel [Vulg.: 'Jacob'] and to convert the dregs of Jacob [Vulg.: 'Israel']: behold, I have given thee to be the light of the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation even to the farthest part of the earth." But Christ gave light and salvation through His doctrine. Therefore it seems that it was "a small thing" that He preached to Jews alone, and not to the Gentiles.

Objection 2. Further, as it is written (Mat. 7:29): "He was teaching them as one having power." Now the power of doctrine is made more manifest in the instruction of those who, like the Gentiles, have received no tidings whatever; hence the Apostle says (Rom. 15:20): "I have so preached the [Vulg.: 'this'] gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation." Therefore much rather should Christ have preached to the Gentiles than to the Jews.

Objection 3. Further, it is more useful to instruct many than one. But Christ instructed some individual Gentiles, such as the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4) and the Chananaean woman (Mat. 15). Much more reason, therefore, was there for Christ to preach to the Gentiles in general.

On the contrary, our Lord said (Mat. 15:24): "I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel." And (Rom. 10:15) it is written: "How shall they preach unless they be sent?" Therefore Christ should not have preached to the Gentiles.

I answer that, It was fitting that Christ's preaching, whether through Himself or through His apostles, should be directed at first to the Jews alone. First, in order to show that by His coming the promises were fulfilled which had been made to the Jews of old, and not to the Gentiles. Thus the Apostle says (Rom. 15:8): "I say that Christ... was minister of the circumcision," i.e. the apostle and preacher of the Jews, "for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers."

Secondly, in order to show that His coming was

of God; because, as is written Rom. 13:1: "Those things which are of God are well ordered [Vulg.: 'those that are, are ordained of God']"* . Now the right order demanded that the doctrine of Christ should be made known first to the Jews, who, by believing in and worshiping one God, were nearer to God, and that it should be transmitted through them to the Gentiles: just as in the heavenly hierarchy the Divine enlightenment comes to the lower angels through the higher. Hence on Mat. 15:24, "I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost in the house of Israel," Jerome says: "He does not mean by this that He was not sent to the Gentiles, but that He was sent to the Jews first." And so we read (Is. 66:19): "I will send of them that shall be saved," i.e. of the Jews, "to the Gentiles... and they shall declare My glory unto the Gentiles."

Thirdly, in order to deprive the Jews of ground for quibbling. Hence on Mat. 10:5, "Go ye not into the way of the Gentiles." Jerome says: "It behooved Christ's coming to be announced to the Jews first, lest they should have a valid excuse, and say that they had rejected our Lord because He had sent His apostles to the Gentiles and Samaritans."

Fourthly, because it was through the triumph of the cross that Christ merited power and lordship over the Gentiles. Hence it is written (Apoc. 2:26,28): "He that shall overcome... I will give him power over the nations... as I also have received of My Father"; and that because He became "obedient unto the death of the cross, God hath exalted Him... that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow..." and that "every tongue should confess Him" (Phil. 2:8-11). Consequently He did not wish His doctrine to be preached to the Gentiles before His Passion: it was after His Passion that He said to His disciples (Mat. 28:19): "Going, teach ye all nations." For this reason it was that when, shortly before His Passion, certain Gentiles wished to see Jesus, He said: "Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground dieth, itself remaineth alone: but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit" (Jn. 12:20-25); and as Augustine says, commenting on this passage: "He called

* See Scriptural Index on this passage

Himself the grain of wheat that must be mortified by the unbelief of the Jews, multiplied by the faith of the nations.”

Reply to Objection 1. Christ was given to be the light and salvation of the Gentiles through His disciples, whom He sent to preach to them.

Reply to Objection 2. It is a sign, not of lesser, but of greater power to do something by means of others rather than by oneself. And thus the Divine power of Christ was specially shown in this, that He bestowed on the teaching of His disciples such a power that they converted the Gentiles to Christ, although these had heard nothing of Him.

Now the power of Christ’s teaching is to be considered in the miracles by which He confirmed His doc-

trine, in the efficacy of His persuasion, and in the authority of His words, for He spoke as being Himself above the Law when He said: “But I say to you” (Mat. 5:22,28,32,34,39,44); and, again, in the force of His righteousness shown in His sinless manner of life.

Reply to Objection 3. Just as it was unfitting that Christ should at the outset make His doctrine known to the Gentiles equally with the Jews, in order that He might appear as being sent to the Jews, as to the first-born people; so neither was it fitting for Him to neglect the Gentiles altogether, lest they should be deprived of the hope of salvation. For this reason certain individual Gentiles were admitted, on account of the excellence of their faith and devotedness.

Whether Christ should have preached to the Jews without offending them?

IIIa q. 42 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ should have preached to the Jews without offending them. For, as Augustine says (De Agone Christ. xi): “In the Man Jesus Christ, a model of life is given us by the Son of God.” But we should avoid offending not only the faithful, but even unbelievers, according to 1 Cor. 10:32: “Be without offense to the Jews, and to the Gentiles, and to the Church of God.” Therefore it seems that, in His teaching, Christ should also have avoided giving offense to the Jews.

Objection 2. Further, no wise man should do anything that will hinder the result of his labor. Now through the disturbance which His teaching occasioned among the Jews, it was deprived of its results; for it is written (Lk. 11:53,54) that when our Lord reproved the Pharisees and Scribes, they “began vehemently to urge Him, end to oppress His mouth about many things; lying in wait for Him, and seeking to catch something from His mouth, that they might accuse Him.” It seems therefore unfitting that He should have given them offense by His teaching.

Objection 3. Further, the Apostle says (1 Tim. 5:1): “An ancient man rebuke not; but entreat him as a father.” But the priests and princes of the Jews were the elders of that people. Therefore it seems that they should not have been rebuked with severity.

On the contrary, It was foretold (Is. 8:14) that Christ would be “for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to the two houses of Israel.”

I answer that, The salvation of the multitude is to be preferred to the peace of any individuals whatsoever. Consequently, when certain ones, by their perverseness, hinder the salvation of the multitude, the preacher and the teacher should not fear to offend those men, in order that he may insure the salvation of the multitude. Now the Scribes and Pharisees and the princes of the

Jews were by their malice a considerable hindrance to the salvation of the people, both because they opposed themselves to Christ’s doctrine, which was the only way to salvation, and because their evil ways corrupted the morals of the people. For which reason our Lord, undeterred by their taking offense, publicly taught the truth which they hated, and condemned their vices. Hence we read (Mat. 15:12,14) that when the disciples of our Lord said: “Dost Thou know that the Pharisees, when they heard this word, were scandalized?” He answered: “Let them alone: they are blind and leaders of the blind; and if the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit.”

Reply to Objection 1. A man ought so to avoid giving offense, as neither by wrong deed or word to be the occasion of anyone’s downfall. “But if scandal arise from truth, the scandal should be borne rather than the truth be set aside,” as Gregory says (Hom. vii in Ezech.).

Reply to Objection 2. By publicly reproving the Scribes and Pharisees, Christ promoted rather than hindered the effect of His teaching. Because when the people came to know the vices of those men, they were less inclined to be prejudiced against Christ by hearing what was said of Him by the Scribes and Pharisees, who were ever withstanding His doctrine.

Reply to Objection 3. This saying of the Apostle is to be understood of those elders whose years are reckoned not only in age and authority, but also in probity; according to Num. 11:16: “Gather unto Me seventy men of the ancients of Israel, whom thou knowest to be ancients. . . of the people.” But if by sinning openly they turn the authority of their years into an instrument of wickedness, they should be rebuked openly and severely, as also Daniel says (Dan. 13:52): “O thou that art grown old in evil days,” etc.

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ should not have taught all things openly. For we read that He taught many things to His disciples apart: as is seen clearly in the sermon at the Supper. Wherefore He said: “That which you heard in the ear in the chambers shall be preached on the housetops”*. Therefore He did not teach all things openly.

Objection 2. Further, the depths of wisdom should not be expounded save to the perfect, according to 1 Cor. 2:6: “We speak wisdom among the perfect.” Now Christ’s doctrine contained the most profound wisdom. Therefore it should not have been made known to the imperfect crowd.

Objection 3. Further, it comes to the same, to hide the truth, whether by saying nothing or by making use of a language that is difficult to understand. Now Christ, by speaking to the multitudes a language they would not understand, hid from them the truth that He preached; since “without parables He did not speak to them” (Mat. 13:34). In the same way, therefore, He could have hidden it from them by saying nothing at all.

On the contrary, He says Himself (Jn. 18:20): “In secret I have spoken nothing.”

I answer that, Anyone’s doctrine may be hidden in three ways. First, on the part of the intention of the teacher, who does not wish to make his doctrine known to many, but rather to hide it. And this may happen in two ways—sometimes through envy on the part of the teacher, who desires to excel in his knowledge, wherefore he is unwilling to communicate it to others. But this was not the case with Christ, in whose person the following words are spoken (Wis. 7:13): “Which I have learned without guile, and communicate without envy, and her riches I hide not.” But sometimes this happens through the vileness of the things taught; thus Augustine says on Jn. 16:12: “There are some things so bad that no sort of human modesty can bear them.” Wherefore of heretical doctrine it is written (Prov. 9:17): “Stolen waters are sweeter.” Now, Christ’s doctrine is “not of error nor of uncleanness” (1 Thess. 2:3). Wherefore our Lord says (Mk. 4:21): “Doth a candle,” i.e. true and pure doctrine, “come in to be put under a bushel?”

Secondly, doctrine is hidden because it is put before few. And thus, again, did Christ teach nothing in secret: for He propounded His entire doctrine either to the whole crowd or to His disciples gathered together. Hence Augustine says on Jn. 18:20: “How can it be said that He speaks in secret when He speaks before so many men? . . . especially if what He says to few He wishes through them to be made known to many?”

Thirdly, doctrine is hidden, as to the manner in which it is propounded. And thus Christ spoke certain

things in secret to the crowds, by employing parables in teaching them spiritual mysteries which they were either unable or unworthy to grasp: and yet it was better for them to be instructed in the knowledge of spiritual things, albeit hidden under the garb of parables, than to be deprived of it altogether. Nevertheless our Lord expounded the open and unveiled truth of these parables to His disciples, so that they might hand it down to others worthy of it; according to 2 Tim. 2:2: “The things which thou hast heard of me by many witnesses, the same command to faithful men, who shall be fit to teach others.” This is foreshadowed, Num. 4, where the sons of Aaron are commanded to wrap up the sacred vessels that were to be carried by the Levites.

Reply to Objection 1. As Hilary says, commenting on the passage quoted, “we do not read that our Lord was wont to preach at night, and expound His doctrine in the dark: but He says this because His speech is darkness to the carnal-minded, and His words are night to the unbeliever. His meaning, therefore, is that whatever He said we also should say in the midst of unbelievers, by openly believing and professing it.”

Or, according to Jerome, He speaks comparatively—that is to say, because He was instructing them in Judea, which was a small place compared with the whole world, where Christ’s doctrine was to be published by the preaching of the apostles.

Reply to Objection 2. By His doctrine our Lord did not make known all the depths of His wisdom, neither to the multitudes, nor, indeed, to His disciples, to whom He said (Jn. 16:12): “I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” Yet whatever things out of His wisdom He judged it right to make known to others, He expounded, not in secret, but openly; although He was not understood by all. Hence Augustine says on Jn. 18:20: “We must understand this, ‘I have spoken openly to the world,’ as though our Lord had said, ‘Many have heard Me’ . . . and, again, it was not ‘openly,’ because they did not understand.”

Reply to Objection 3. As stated above, our Lord spoke to the multitudes in parables, because they were neither able nor worthy to receive the naked truth, which He revealed to His disciples.

And when it is said that “without parables He did not speak to them,” according to Chrysostom (Hom. xlvii in Matth.), we are to understand this of that particular sermon, since on other occasions He said many things to the multitude without parables. Or, as Augustine says (De Qq. Evang., qu. xvii), this means, “not that He spoke nothing literally, but that He scarcely ever spoke without introducing a parable, although He also spoke some things in the literal sense.”

* St. Thomas, probably quoting from memory, combines Mat. 10:27 with Lk. 12:3

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ should have committed His doctrine to writing. For the purpose of writing is to hand down doctrine to posterity. Now Christ's doctrine was destined to endure for ever, according to Lk. 21:33: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." Therefore it seems that Christ should have committed His doctrine to writing.

Objection 2. Further, the Old Law was a foreshadowing of Christ, according to Heb. 10:1: "The Law has [Vulg.: 'having'] a shadow of the good things to come." Now the Old Law was put into writing by God, according to Ex. 24:12: "I will give thee" two "tables of stone and the law, and the commandments which I have written." Therefore it seems that Christ also should have put His doctrine into writing.

Objection 3. Further, to Christ, who came to enlighten them that sit in darkness (Lk. 1:79), it belonged to remove occasions of error, and to open out the road to faith. Now He would have done this by putting His teaching into writing: for Augustine says (De Consensu Evang. i) that "some there are who wonder why our Lord wrote nothing, so that we have to believe what others have written about Him. Especially do those pagans ask this question who dare not blame or blaspheme Christ, and who ascribe to Him most excellent, but merely human, wisdom. These say that the disciples made out the Master to be more than He really was when they said that He was the Son of God and the Word of God, by whom all things were made." And farther on he adds: "It seems as though they were prepared to believe whatever He might have written of Himself, but not what others at their discretion published about Him." Therefore it seems that Christ should have Himself committed His doctrine to writing.

On the contrary, No books written by Him were to be found in the canon of Scripture.

I answer that, It was fitting that Christ should not commit His doctrine to writing. First, on account of His dignity: for the more excellent the teacher, the more excellent should be his manner of teaching. Consequently it was fitting that Christ, as the most excellent of teachers, should adopt that manner of teaching whereby His doctrine is imprinted on the hearts of His hearers; wherefore it is written (Mat. 7:29) that "He was teaching them as one having power." And so it was that among the Gentiles, Pythagoras and Socrates, who were teachers of great excellence, were unwilling to write anything. For writings are ordained, as to an end, unto the imprinting of doctrine in the hearts of the hearers.

Secondly, on account of the excellence of Christ's doctrine, which cannot be expressed in writing; accord-

ing to Jn. 21:25: "There are also many other things which Jesus did: which, if they were written everyone, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written." Which Augustine explains by saying: "We are not to believe that in respect of space the world could not contain them. . . but that by the capacity of the readers they could not be comprehended." And if Christ had committed His doctrine to writing, men would have had no deeper thought of His doctrine than that which appears on the surface of the writing.

Thirdly, that His doctrine might reach all in an orderly manner: Himself teaching His disciples immediately, and they subsequently teaching others, by preaching and writing: whereas if He Himself had written, His doctrine would have reached all immediately.

Hence it is said of Wisdom (Prov. 9:3) that "she hath sent her maids to invite to the tower." It is to be observed, however, that, as Augustine says (De Consensu Evang. i), some of the Gentiles thought that Christ wrote certain books treating of the magic art whereby He worked miracles: which art is condemned by the Christian learning. "And yet they who claim to have read those books of Christ do none of those things which they marvel at His doing according to those same books. Moreover, it is by a Divine judgment that they err so far as to assert that these books were, as it were, entitled as letters to Peter and Paul, for that they found them in several places depicted in company with Christ. No wonder that the inventors were deceived by the painters: for as long as Christ lived in the mortal flesh with His disciples, Paul was no disciple of His."

Reply to Objection 1. As Augustine says in the same book: "Christ is the head of all His disciples who are members of His body. Consequently, when they put into writing what He showed forth and said to them, by no means must we say that He wrote nothing: since His members put forth that which they knew under His dictation. For at His command they, being His hands, as it were, wrote whatever He wished us to read concerning His deeds and words."

Reply to Objection 2. Since the old Law was given under the form of sensible signs, therefore also was it fittingly written with sensible signs. But Christ's doctrine, which is "the law of the spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2), had to be "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart," as the Apostle says (2 Cor. 3:3).

Reply to Objection 3. Those who were unwilling to believe what the apostles wrote of Christ would have refused to believe the writings of Christ, whom they deemed to work miracles by the magic art.