



The Word - - Sent from God

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A man steps forth from the crowd. He stands before his audience with an air of confidence born of authority. He has a task to execute—has been commanded to proclaim it.

The people have been in attendance to his arrival, for in him is fulfilled a promise. His words, however, once pronounced, do not evoke satisfaction and joy, but rather animosity, perplexity, incredulity, and, in some, even repulsion. How can this be?

Surely such a state of affairs can lay no claim to the element of surprise. Time and time again the hearers had been prepared for this moment. They knew definitely that just such an envoy would be sent them. They

even knew, though confusedly, the precise content of the message. Why then this contradictory reception?

Could it be the words elude their grasp? Too obscure a terminology? Too vague an idiom? Too strange a language? Or perhaps it was badly presented? Wrongly timed? Whatever the cause, the facts, nonetheless, testify to the ignominy of rejection. Until the obstacle has been removed and acception accomplished, the nuncio can find no rest. Hence, the query of cause and remedy devolves to him. Perhaps the message was erroneously conceived as being different in nature. Well, then, he must point out the falsehood and afford a new opportunity for acceptance. Some have doubted his veracity and his claim to be the promised one—the one they have been anticipating. Well, then, he must prove his worth and manifest his identity as the true courier. And so it goes. . . . In effect, the once authoritative representative, by necessity of circumstances, becomes now the authoritative teacher as well.

By no means is this a unique situation in the annals of time. Someone has a message for another; the message comes from still another; and the bearer of the message has the duty to transmit that which is not his, i.e., the message, to those who not only desire it, but who, by reason of a promise, also have a perfect right to it. However, somehow in the course of events, the completion is frustrated and results in failure.

Almost two thousand years ago, another man stood similarly before another assemblage. The man was Jesus. The group was the chosen people of Yahweh. Caution, indeed, must be exercised so as not to equate the above case with the situation of Jesus. His life can never be categorized in this stereotyped formula so familiar and so oft repeated on the pages of history. Jesus is not merely another misunderstood legate who is rejected in His own milieu and time. Nor was He sent to deliver merely another message. His mission goes far beyond and much deeper than any such superficialities as those above would ever admit. His encounter is unique, both in time and outside of it, for indeed, Jesus is Uniqueness Itself, yesterday, today, and forever.

Jesus: The Divine Teacher

Reflect a moment upon Jesus. He was a Jew. He came from the finest stock of people—a line of kings. His life was indeed rooted in the life of His people. He was deeply involved in the tradition and history of His people. He was well aware of how deep the obligation was to this sacred past. "Do not think that I have come to set aside the law and the prophets;

I have not come to set them aside, but to bring them to perfection" (Mt 5:17). Nothing—"not one jot nor tittle"—may be taken away; everything must be fulfilled.

More than that, He knew how the purpose of His being and His mission was substantiated by Holy Writ. "You pore over the scriptures, thinking to find eternal life in them, and indeed it is of these I speak as bearing witness to me" (Jn 5:39). The events of the past had meaning, and now their place in the order of things is easily determined. The Old Testament looked toward the future, waiting to be fulfilled by something to come: the Messiah, and the Kingdom of God which He was to establish. Jesus boldly asserted that He was the One referred to there. In the synagogue while performing the *maphthir*,¹ He stood up to read and speak about the text: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, He has anointed me, and sent me out to preach the good news to the poor . . . (Lk 4:18ff). And having read, He said, "This scripture which I have read in your hearing is today fulfilled."

And what did His people do? They did not receive Him. They refused Him. They rejected Him. They tried to eradicate Him. Why? Volumes could be written. Justification or censure is beyond the ken or intention here. What is to fore is the veracity and worth of the Legate and His claims.

Within every man's life there is a myriad of occurrences of every kind and description. People and things are there. Friendliness and hostility, closeness and alienation are also therein contained. In one way or another all of these influence, hinder, or further him. Man becomes conscious of the realities of the world. He has encounters. He acts, creates, and experiences. He makes an impression on the world and on men. There are a multitude of ways to view this impression. In the case of Christ, the approach will be limited to His role as Divine Teacher.

The assertion, then, is that Jesus, making a legal claim for Himself to divine authority, came for the expressed purpose of teaching a new religion. Hence, the integrity of His doctrine being truly and properly divine He not only had the right but the obligation as well to exercise this divine commission of teaching.

¹ In the worship at the Temple, one of the men stood up at an appointed time to read a lesson, which is always taken from the prophets. The one doing this is said to be *maphthir* or to perform *maphthir*. This reader quotes three verses at the most, which he had chosen beforehand and meditated upon and then speaks upon them.

Authorization for the Office of Teacher

Teaching formed an important and integral part of Christ's task. The prophets, among the things they foretold of the Messiah, said that He would be a teacher (Isa 30:20) (Joel 2:23), "the light of the gentiles" and "a witness to the people" (Isa 49:6; 55:4; 61:1 ff). He was expected by the people as a prophet and a teacher: "I know that the Messiah is coming . . . and when he comes he will tell us all things" (Jn 4:25). The evangelists, as a matter of fact, while explicitly recording the events of the public life of Jesus, whether intentionally or not, expose this portion of His life under the formality of religious teacher: Matthew writes: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom . . ." (4:23). "Now it came to pass when Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, that He passed on



from there to teach and preach in their towns" (11:1). Mark records: "And after John had been delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God . . . (1:14). "And he said to them, 'Let us go into the neighboring villages and towns, that there also I may preach. For this is why I have come" (1:38). Luke notes: "And he taught in their synagogues, and was honored by all" (4:15). "To the other towns also I must proclaim the kingdom of God, for this is why I have been sent" (4:43). His very words mirror truly an especially ardent desire to be a teacher. In fact, He was an itinerant teacher, which in those days was not at all uncommon. Without any real home He went from place to place, instructing the people, the disciples, and apostles.

Certainly, teaching also formed an essential part of the Redemption. No one can be saved except by faith and the supernatural knowledge of the end and the means of faith, and therefore, it was necessary that Christ should teach the way of salvation.

The authority, however, for this teaching can only come from God, because He alone knows and can teach the way to the supernatural goal. The office of teaching is a divine office, and it can only be undertaken and exercised in virtue of a commission from God. A comparison between Jesus and His contemporaries may help bring this point out.

All of the theological schools flourishing at that time, were not only opposed to Jesus. The Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and the *periti* of the Law were always in a constant state of contention, because each group was offering doctrine proper to themselves stemming from the authority vested in their own factions. Hence, in reality, their authority was of men and not of God, and consequently, their teaching became bogged down with an over-emphasis of the means to the neglect of the ultimate end, God.

No such accusation could be launched against Christ. He explicitly denies any doctrine proper to Himself; moreover, He affirms that He *is sent* to teach men. Nothing is more frequently spoken of than His mission from the Father. Publicly in the synagogue while teaching He applies to Himself the words of the Messiah; to the crowds, who after many miracles wished to retain Him, He tells them that He must go to the other towns to proclaim the kingdom of God. Even in the parables, especially the one of the vinedressers (Mt 21:33ff), the import of the parallel can be easily seen, namely, that the Son whom the Lord finally sends is Jesus Himself, as its hearers well knew, a fact evidenced by their reaction.

Often He asserted the perfect identity of His doctrine with that of the Father: "All things have been delivered to Me by the Father . . ." (Mt 11:27). "The son can do nothing of himself . . ." (Jn 5:19). "My doctrine is not mine but His who sent me . . ." (Jn 7:16).

Time and time again, it was said of Jesus, ". . . He taught them, not like their Scribes and Pharisees, but like one having authority" (Mt 7:28). One author interprets and contrasts beautifully the authority of the two in the following passage:

. . . the scribes were well instructed people. They reflected a lot, and worked hard. Their sayings were learned and to the point. But Their words were cold and hard, rigid, oppressive. And now here stood One whose words were warm, full of power. This power derived from what He said, from the depth and the truth of the spoken word—but not from that alone. More than anything else, it came from the vitality sounding through His speech, from the vital energy of Him Who spoke. Everything about Him was genuine, strong, straight from the mind and heart. It was

candid, rang true, had radiance, contained an effective principle of life. It sent out a call, it wakened, lifted up, cleared the mind, clutched at the heart. And there was warranty behind it, an assurance of salvation.²

In this citation, there is certainly captured something of the inner beauty of Christ's Being—a unique and superhuman being seen never before, nor since on this earth. He was at once God and Man. Indeed, Christ had authority in His own right, as a consequence of the union of His human nature with the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus Himself was God and the "Light which enlightens every man . . ." (Jn 1:9). As God-Man, He is Lawgiver, Prophet, High Priest, King of Angels and Men, and thus, He cannot only enlighten and teach all but lay upon them the obligation of accepting His doctrine and belief as well. Therefore, Jesus possesses in the most eminent way all the qualifications requisite for a teacher:

He who comes from above is over all.

He who is from the earth

belongs to earth,

and of the earth he speaks.

He who comes from heaven

is over all.

And he bears witness

to that which he has seen and heard,

and his witness no one receives.

He who receives his witness

has set his seal on this,

that God is true.

For he whom God has sent

speaks the words of God,

for not by measure does God give the Spirit.

The Father loves the Son,

and has given all things into his hands.

He who believes in the Son

has life everlasting;

he who is unbelieving towards the Son

shall not see life,

but the wrath of God rest upon him . . . (Jn 4:31-36).

² Romano Guardini, *Jesu Christus*, Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959, p. 29.

He possesses the power, strength, and skill to instruct outwardly, as well as the power of grace, to enlighten the mind, touch the heart, and even in an instant give vision to ignorant men. Whatever anyone teaches or effects by their teaching, they do only by virtue of His authority and His power.

Exercise of the Office of Teacher

God is the beginning and the end of man. He knows all things. He wishes to make all men happy by making them heirs to His glorious and eternal kingdom. This is man's aim and end. So Jesus came to tell man about it.

The whole earth was His classroom. He preached in the cities and the towns, at the synagogues, atop a mountain, and on the sea-shore. The subject of His lectures were the good tidings of the kingdom of God—its nature, its aim, laws, and rewards, and also the conditions for membership. Jesus Himself speaks of His magisterial mission. "You call me, Master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am" (Jn 13:13). "I am the Light of the world . . ." (Jn 8:12). ". . . no one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). "For this was I born and for this did I come into the world, that I might give testimony to the truth" (Jn 18:37). Hence, it is clear from His words that His teaching has reference to the end of man and the means to attain this end.

Jesus sums up the means under two groupings, namely the commandments and grace. ". . . if thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17). The commandments, being the embodiment of the virtues, must be exercised in order to achieve the goal—to these belong, above all, faith: "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned" (Mk 16:16), and the great commandment of love: ". . . thou shalt love the Lord with thy whole mind and thy whole strength." This is the first commandment. And the second is like it, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Mk 12:30-31).

Of the moral virtues, as expressed in the Beatitudes, four are especially recommended by Christ: poverty, both of spirit and of fact; love of neighbor and love of enemies, especially by the works of mercy; purity of heart; and finally patience and joy in the midst of suffering and persecution.

Prayer receives a prominent place as a recommended way of grace for Christ tells His disciples: "When you pray, say Father hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. . . ." (Lk 11:2), and then again, as a preface to the parable of the godless judge, He urges, ". . . that they must always

pray and never lose heart . . ." (Lk. 18:1). His insistence on this means is manifested by the extensive discourses He devotes to it. Furthermore, by His example He gives witness to the importance of prayer.

Grace is also dispensed by the sacraments which He instituted and prescribed: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. . . ." (Mt 28:19) for "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned" (Mk 16:16). "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you" (Jn 6:54). "And having taken bread, he gave thanks and broke, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which is being given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In like manner he took also the cup after the supper, saying, 'This is the new covenant in my blood, which shall be shed for you' (Lk 22:19-20). These precious means, unlike prayer, were not left to individual discretion, but rather their regulation and disposition were bequeathed to definite authorities in a defined social union, namely, by and in His Church.

Jesus' teaching, bolstered by His new code of faith and morals, may be summed up in the gospel law to love God and neighbor. Thus, the only new command added to the Decalogue of the Old Testament is the command to believe and to submit to His Church. How simple! Unfortunately, this sublime simplicity was destined to become the stumbling block for countless men.

The Manner and Method of the Teacher

For the sake of inquiry, Christ's manner of teaching may be distinguished by reason of its exterior and interior characteristics. The primary exterior characteristic is nothing other than His form of address. He taught by all kinds of sermons. The moral sermons were given everywhere, inasmuch as all men could grasp these truths more readily than the dogmatic ones. The dogmatic discourses are primarily confined to Jerusalem, and understandably so, since, then, Jerusalem was the traditional political and religious center, and hence, the meeting place of the scholars and priests. When He went there for one of the feasts, His teaching often took the form of controversy with either the Pharisees, Scribes, or other *periti*. In fact, on one such encounter, concerning the outcome of a dispute with the Pharisees, St. Matthew concludes: "And no one could answer Him a word; neither did anyone dare from that day forth to ask Him any more ques-

tions" (22:46). Many instructive points were made in debates between Christ and the Jews: "And the Jews marvelled, saying, 'How does this man come by learning since he has not studied?' " (Jn 7:15) In many places Jesus makes use of the attacks upon Him to propose a positive enunciation of His doctrine, as for example in the question of divorce (Mt 19:1ff).

One of the most outstanding of the intrinsic characteristics of His manner is His remarkable zeal. He refuses to be confined to one locale, or restricted to the confines of an auditorium. Any place there was an ear to hear or an eye to see was sufficient for Him. He—completely indifferent to the number or class of His audience—came to let the deaf hear and the blind see. Anything served as a lectern, from a well to a boat. All things, no matter how humble, were used as subjects for His discourses: life and customs, religious and political events, lillies, birds, or mustard seed. He never refused to teach. He was always ready. He was, as it were, compelled to teach.

Majesty and dignity describe His style. Quarrels and fighting have no place with Him. His replies to all questions regarding the law and the truth—devoid of subtleties—are fearless and unhesitating. He makes decisions clearly and authoritatively, not merely interpreting the laws but establishing new ones. His indestructable bulwark is based upon His beautiful and moving eloquence and the irreproachable holiness of His life. Even Pilate, an outsider and, in a sense, an objective judge, replies to the accusations of the Jews and High Priests, "I find no guilt in Him" (Jn 18:38).

The high moral character and religiosity of Christ's doctrine hardly needs mentioning. For one thing, He taught in the Temple. Nowhere in the New Testament is it even insinuated that He taught profane things. He warns against avarice. He urges trust in God. He tells of the reward of the watchful servant. He frankly admits the necessity for struggle.

The manner of teaching was very natural and quite unaffected—like a father among his children. The words flow freely and easily from His lips. Before His sight was the entire realm of truth, natural and supernatural. He saw clearly all relations, how one thing is foreshadowed and then prepared for in another, how common place things are types and exemplars lending themselves easily to interpreting the lofty and sublime. Thus, there was only need for Him but to point out these relationships to men. This He did quite ingeniously through the magnificent parables, whose depth no mind can fully plumb, and yet, whose truth any child can

grasp. Since their frequent use is a peculiarity of Jesus' method, these monuments of wisdom deserve a closer scrutiny.

A parable is a comparison, more precisely, a short narrative taken from some actual or possible object or occurrence of the concrete order for the expressed purpose of explaining an abstract moral or spiritual truth, that is, rendering it more comprehensible. Sometimes they are real allegories worked out with the finest details, sometimes a figure of speech, an allusion, or perhaps, a maxim.

Many reasons can be offered for the adoption of this pedagogic device. First and foremost, parabolic speech belongs essentially to the Oriental teaching: "Solomon also spoke three thousand parables . . ." (III Kgs 4:32). "The wise man will seek out the wisdom of all the ancients and will be occupied in the prophets. He will keep the sayings of renowned men, and will enter withal into subtilities of parables. He will search out the hidden meanings of proverbs, and will be conversant in the secrets of parables" (Eccli. 39:1-3). Hence, since Jesus is the Great Master, it is fitting that He be proficient in this mode of instruction.

"All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and without parables He did not speak to them," records Matthew, "that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world'" (13:33-35).

Moreover, their advantages are multiple, both for the teacher and his hearers. The parables are adaptable to the mental capacity of anyone, to the learned and the unlearned. They are simple and popular, and thus, are appealing and easily retained, attractive to the intellect and the imagination. The moral status of the people was suitable to them. They whet the appetite of good men, the lovers of truth, and stimulated them to further inquiry. To those who were ill-disposed and unbelieving, they were a condemnation, as Jesus intimates, ". . . that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand" (Mk 4:12).

Parables are well suited for announcing that which is perhaps awkwardly told directly. An open statement of His doctrine, for instance, might have been repelling to the Gentiles, or, at best, misunderstood. Another point worth noting is the fact that the universality of this mode of speech lends itself well to this doctrine which was intended for all times and all men. The parable was at once an echo of Christ's own time and milieu, and yet, it is timeless and transcendent, a comely expression for all mankind uttered fittingly by the Son of Man. By way of summary,

then, it can be truly said of God, because of the Incarnation, He descended to live life with man, and by reason of His mode of teaching, He descended to teach man according to his natural capacity for knowledge.

Hearers of the Word

He came to teach all men. However, cognizant of the fact that soon He must leave His people "to prepare a place" for them, He makes provisions to insure that His teaching will be assimilated and dispersed until the *parousia*. Consequently, His listeners can be placed under a three-fold classification. In the first place one sees that ". . . with Him were the Twelve . . ." (Lk. 8:1), who were His constant and closest friends, chosen especially by Him to continue His commission of teaching. Thus as He was sent from the Father, now He sends the Apostles: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you . . ." (Mt 28:19-20).

Secondly, Luke related that also accompanying Jesus on His teaching journeys were ". . . certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities . . . who used to provide for them out of their means" (Lk 8:2-3). Their mission was voluntary, partially out of gratitude, partially out of interest in His words, but mostly out of love.

Finally there are the crowds who followed Jesus. He taught them, fed them, loved them. Some stayed with Him eager to follow Him to the Father. Others went their way after merely pausing and finding in Him no hope for material gain or happiness. Within this mixture of good and bad, there was always present the force of the Pharisees and Scribes, fearing Christ and guarding jealously their power over the people.

All of these escorts of Christ in some way are types of the Church. In the Apostles, there is prefigured the teaching authority of the Church, i.e. the Hierarchy and the Priesthood; in the dedicated women, there is prefigured the ancillary body of teachers, who either teach directly under the regis of the former group or who aid indirectly by freeing the actual teachers from the burden of menial cares; in the crowds, there is prefigured the Church learning, i.e., the Church at large, all those interested in salvation.

Conclusions

People must have felt there was something very special about this Man. Their attention was stirred. They were held fast. They valued Him and did Him honor. They called Him Rabbi, Master, and Prophet. This

fact shows an implicit approval by the people inasmuch as their words mirror their minds and hearts.

His success is voiced by the effects He produced. The people were always pressing around Him, forgetting to eat, leaving their shops and homes to be with Him, climbing trees to see Him, being lowered from roofs to hear Him.

Before the face of incorrigible evil, He stood fearless and condemned with power, wisdom, and authority the wickedness and errors of men.

Although many perished in hardness of heart, refusing to believe, His divine mission was, nonetheless, fulfilled successfully. The good tidings have passed from Jew to Gentile, from generation to generation, and His Church and members remain to this day a dynamic teaching force living in an aura of divine confidence and courage as a perpetuation of Jesus Christ, the Divine Teacher.