

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST.

I.

It is one of the merits of early Christian theology that it lays frequent emphasis upon the claim of Jesus Christ to be the supreme Teacher of men. This claim is based partly upon the relation which He bears to the world as the Eternal Word, partly upon the recorded teaching of the Ministry. "There is one Teacher," Ignatius writes, "who spake and it was done. He who truly possesses the word of Jesus can learn even from His silence. We endure, in order that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ, our only Teacher; how can we live apart from Him? Even the prophets were His disciples through the Spirit, and looked for Him as their Teacher."¹ "The utterances that fell from Him," Justin explains, "were brief and concise, for He was no sophist, but His word was the power of God."² "Who that has been rightly instructed and has become attached to the Word," asks an early Alexandrian writer, "does not seek to have a clear understanding of the lessons which were plainly taught by the Word to His disciples?"³ With Clement of Alexandria the thought of Christ the Teacher becomes an inspiration. "Our Tutor," he exclaims, "is the holy and divine Jesus, the Word who is the Guide of all humanity. The Christian life in which we are now receiving our education is an ordered succession of

¹ Ign. *Eph.* 15, *Magn.* 9.

² Just. *Apol.* i. 14.

³ *Ep. ad Diog.* 11.

reasonable actions, an unbroken fulfilment of the teaching of the Word. He is the Teacher who educates the riper scholar by mysteries, the ordinary believer by hopes of a better life, the hardened by corrective discipline operating upon the senses."¹

In the present series of papers we shall take a narrower view of the teaching of Christ than that which forms the theme of Clement's great work. The teaching of the Ministry was a particular manifestation of the didactic energy of the Word, a manifestation limited both in scope and in duration. But its very limitations may attract some who are not prepared to commit themselves to the guidance of the Christian mystic. The Gospels reveal our Lord as exercising the office of Teacher under the conditions of human life, and they place the teaching in relation with human history. It is with this tangible evidence of Christ's power as a Teacher that the study of His didactic work will naturally begin.

1. In the Palestine of the first century there was no lack of religious teaching. The scribe was a familiar figure in Galilee as well as in Judea; he was to be met everywhere, in the synagogue, in the market-place, in the houses of the rich. With him went a numerous following of attached scholars. The first business of the Rabbi was to "raise up many disciples," and the first care of the good Jew to "make to himself a master."² It is not without a bitter reminiscence of the religious condition of Palestine that St. James of Jerusalem counsels the members of the Christian communities to which he wrote, "Be not many teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgement."³ In Christ's day, however, few appear to have questioned the sincerity or the competency of a Rabbi. Wherever he went he was treated with

¹ Clem. Al. *Paed.* i. 7. 55, 13. 102; *Strom.* vii. 2. 6.

² *Virge Aboth*, i. 1, 17.

³ James iii. 1.

respect ; in places of public resort he received the greetings of all who recognized him ; in the synagogue he sat on the front benches, and at banquets was among the most honoured guests.¹

As soon as a band of personal followers began to gather round the Lord, He was addressed as "Rabbi," not only by His disciples² but generally.³ The title seems not to have been restricted to scribes ;⁴ in popular use it denoted only that the person so accosted claimed to be a public teacher of religion. In this sense Christ accepted the designation.⁵ That He did so is the more significant, because He strictly forbade His disciples to assume it.⁶ In the Christian Society His position as "the Teacher" was to be unique. He did not aim, like the Scribes, at creating a school of teachers. The Apostolic Church, indeed, possessed an order of "teachers," which was of Divine appointment ;⁷ but the spirit of Christ's prohibition is to be heard in more than one passage in the Epistles.⁸ The saying : "One is your teacher, and ye all are brethren," was of permanent import in so far as it asserted the supremacy of the Master, and the substantial equality of all His disciples in their relation to Him.

2. That Jesus took rank among the Rabbis did not conceal but rather accentuated the difference which separated the Prophet of Nazareth from the other religious teachers of the time. Men could not but institute a comparison between the new Rabbi and the teachers to whom they had so long been accustomed. The latter were moulded after one pattern ; they had been produced by the same process, they followed the same methods and taught on the whole the same doctrines. Each of them had himself

¹ Matt. xxiii. 6 f. ² John i. 38 ; Mark ix. 5. ³ Mark v. 35 ; x. 17, 51.

⁴ It is given to the Baptist (John iii. 26).

⁵ Mark xiv. 14 ; John xiii. 13 f.

⁶ Matt. xxiii. 8 f.

⁷ 1 Cor. xii. 28, οὗς μὲν ἔθετο ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ . . . τρίτον διδασκάλους,

⁸ 1 Thess. iv. 9. 1 John ii. 27.

been the disciple of a Rabbi, "brought up at the feet" of one who had "received" from his predecessor. The teaching was traditional; if from time to time it received accretions, they were on the lines of earlier decisions, and differed from them only by entering into minuter details. In all these respects the contrast presented by the new Teacher was complete. The home life at Nazareth had supplied His only preparation for the teacher's office; if He had acquired the elements of learning from the master of the synagogue school, with the higher education imparted by the Scribes He had no acquaintance;¹ in the place of professional training He could produce nothing but the experience gained in an obscure village and varied only by an occasional visit to Jerusalem, and such knowledge as could be gathered from observation and from a study of the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. Nor was His method of teaching less singular than His training for the teacher's office. The common people, no bad judges of distinctions which depend upon character and personality, recognized in it something which was wholly new. "They were greatly struck at His teaching," St. Mark forcibly observes, "for He taught them as one having authority, and not after the manner of the scribes."² This remark is placed by St. Matthew at the end of the Sermon on the Mount,³ but in St. Mark it holds what is doubtless its original place, coming immediately after the first Sabbath discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum. One address in the synagogue was enough to convince an untrained but devout audience that this was no Rabbi of the ordinary type. The distinguishing note of His teaching was "authority" (*ἐξουσία*), not so much unusual capacity as the consciousness of a Divine right to teach; not learning, but the force of truth. Here was a

¹ John vii. 16, *πὺς οὗτος γράμματα οὐδεν μὴ μεμαθηκὼς*;

² Mark i. 22,

³ Matt. vii. 28.

Teacher who had no need to appeal to older authorities, but stood upon His own right. The discourse was no doubt based upon the usual lesson from the Law or the Prophets, but the interpretation rested simply on the testimony of the speaker. He seemed to speak that which He knew, and to bear witness of that which He had seen.¹ No great Rabbi was quoted in support of what He said; it carried conviction by the simple weight of an *αὐτὸς ἔφα*. Yet He who spake was a man of thirty, and it was the first time, at least in Capernaum, that he had used His privilege of addressing His brother Israelites. The authority which held the audience spell-bound was not the magic of a great reputation, but the irresistible force of a Divine message, delivered under the sense of a Divine mission. Nothing could have been more opposed to the traditionalism of the scribes, who did not venture a step beyond the beaten path, and even there leaned heavily upon the authority of their predecessors.

3. It was a "new teaching"² which was heard that Sabbath day in the synagogue of Capernaum, and its freshness was not limited to method. Our Lord's teaching was not indeed "original," in the sense of being the outcome of human genius. He distinctly disclaimed originality of this kind: "My teaching," He said, "is not Mine, but His that sent Me."³ Moreover, its novelty was not absolute but relative. It came as a surprise to those whose circle of religious ideas had from childhood been filled by the jargon of the scribes, and the party cries of contemporary Judaism. Jesus was not a disciple of Hillel or of Shammai; He was neither Pharisee nor Sadducee nor Essene; His sympathies were not with Nationalists, Herodians, or Hellenists. The one topic which seemed to possess His mind and overflowed into His teaching was the Kingdom of

¹ John iii. 11.

² Mark i. 27, *τί ἐστιν τοῦτο; διδαχὴ καινὴ.*

³ John vii. 16.

God. Yet in this there was nothing essentially new ; it was in its central thought as old as the Law and the Prophets ; it had kindled the fire of devotion which burns in many of the Psalms. The Lord did not come to revolutionize the faith of Israel, as some soon began to suspect ; His antagonism to the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees was not due to any secret design against the national religion. "Think not," He explained, "that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets ; I came not to destroy, but to fulfil."¹ His teaching had its roots in the teaching of the Old Testament ; it merely brought the latter to its legitimate and appointed end. He was in the direct line of succession from Moses and Elijah ; in Him they found their consummation, the goal to which they had been half unconsciously reaching forth, the Teacher whose voice revived and perfected their fragmentary expositions of truth.² It was His mission to give effect to ideals which had long floated before the imagination of the Covenant people. Thus the teaching of the great Scribe of the Kingdom of Heaven was old even while it was new,³ carrying the old further, but never breaking from it ; fulfilling and not destroying it, but rather bearing it on to its completion and accomplishment.⁴

4. The Kingdom of God or of Heaven—the terms are practically synonymous⁵—covers more adequately than any other single phrase the whole field of our Lord's teaching. His Gospel was "the Gospel of the Kingdom" ;⁶ it brought the good news that the reign of God on earth was about to begin. The conception of the Divine sovereignty lay at the root of the theocratic constitution of Israel ; it inspired the

¹ Matt. v. 17.

² Cf. Matt. xvii. 3-5 ; Heb. i. 1 f.

³ Cf. Matt. xiii. 52.

⁴ Cf. (but in reference to another sphere of Christ's activity) Heb. i. 3 *φέρων τε τὰ πάντα*, with Westcott's note *ad loc.*

⁵ See Dalman, *Worte Jesu*, i. p. 75 ff.

⁶ Matt. iii. 2.

Messianic hope; it colours the splendid visions of the Prophets. Yet both in the announcement of the immediate approach of the Divine Kingdom, and the interpretation which was given to the Kingdom, Jesus struck a note which had not been sounded before. According to St. Matthew, indeed, the Baptist had already proclaimed that the Kingdom was at hand; but St. Mark attributes the words to our Lord,¹ and neither St. Mark nor St. Luke recognizes an earlier use of them by the Forerunner. Certainly it was in Christ's teaching that the idea took shape and became a permanent factor in religious thought. As for the interpretation of the Kingdom, it is no exaggeration to say that this forms the staple of the instructions which our Lord gave to His Galilean hearers. It was here that He departed most widely from prevalent beliefs, and may indeed have seemed to many to depart from the teaching of the Prophets. The Prophets had drawn a glowing picture of the glories of the Messianic Kingdom, and in the pre-Christian apocalyptic writings a vast eschatology had grown up around the earlier hope. But in our Lord's presentation of the Kingdom eschatology falls into the background, while even the prophetic picture loses much of its colouring. The parables may be taken to exhibit the sovereignty of God in the light in which Christ meant it to appear before the people. They compare it to the sowing, growth, and harvesting of the crops; to the labours of the merchant, the fisherman, the housewife;² to the relations of the master of a great house with the members of his household;³ to a marriage feast and incidents connected with it.⁴ These homely illustrations bring the Kingdom into the heart of ordinary life, not only by appealing to common experience, but by representing it as a force working within men, and

¹ Mark i. 15. So also does St. Matthew a little further on (iv. 17).

² Matt. xiii. 1 ff., Mark iv. 1 ff.

³ Matt. xxv. 14 ff., Luke xix. 11 ff.

⁴ Matt. xxii. 2 ff., xxv. 1 ff.; Mark ii. 19.

not merely controlling them from without. The same conception is to be noticed in sayings of our Lord which are not cast in a parabolic form. The Kingdom of God belongs to the poor in spirit, to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake;¹ the position which men will hold in it depends on their moral character;² the rich and great of this world enter it with difficulty;³ it comes not "with observation," so that men can say of it "Lo here" or "Lo there," but is to be sought around us or within;⁴ it cannot be entered, it cannot be seen, except by those who have been born into a new order and possess spiritual faculties.⁵ The Kingdom of God is coupled with the righteousness of God;⁶ it is the great moral and spiritual lever which is designed to lift men's lives up to the Divine standards of goodness and truth.

If this teaching was novel, it must have been to many disappointing in the extreme. Notwithstanding the popular form in which it was expressed, there was nothing in it which pandered to the popular taste. It took no account of the national expectations of restored independence and an imperial mission. It offered no worldly advantages; it discouraged the common passions of men; it limited itself strictly to the ethical and spiritual. Yet the preaching of the Kingdom, as Christ preached it, fascinated thousands of the common people. There was in it that which touched the springs of human life; those who heard it knew themselves to be face to face with ultimate realities. And there was in the Teacher that which corresponded with the teaching; no suspicion of insincerity, no hardness of professional formalism, no flourish of ambitious rhetoric, no self-seeking or display spoiled its general effect. Every word rang true and went home. Morality as taught by Christ was neither dull commonplace nor arid philosophy, but a matter of vital interest; the spiritual order, as He revealed it, was seen to

¹ Matt. v. 3, 10.² *Ibid.* 19.³ Mark x. 23 f.⁴ Luke xvii. 20 f.⁵ John iii. 3, 5.⁶ Matt. vi. 33.

environ the life of man ; the powers of the world to come were upon His hearers,¹ and they seemed to be standing in the presence of God. No wonder that "the people all hung upon Him, listening."² But the enthusiasm evoked by His teaching was not to be limited to a single generation. The teaching asserted principles of universal application, and it clothed them in the plain strong language which is the best vehicle of religious truth. The Lord knew that in addressing the peasants of Galilee He was speaking to the world. This Gospel of the Kingdom must be preached to all nations, and with it would be spread the knowledge of even the smallest incidents connected with His ministry.³ History has more than verified His prediction ; written Gospels stand behind the preached Gospel and enshrine in immortal pages the sayings of Jesus Christ. Teaching such as His could not die ; its permanence was guaranteed not only by its Divine origin, but by its correspondence with the deepest needs of men, and its clear unfaltering statement of those eternal truths to which the human conscience pays homage even when the will does not render a prompt obedience.

5. There is another element in our Lord's teaching which is specially prominent in the Fourth Gospel, though it is not altogether overlooked by the Synoptists. Jesus not only proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom, but He proclaimed Himself as standing in a unique relation both to God and to men. In the Synoptic teaching, i.e. the teaching in Galilee, this relation is usually kept in the background of the thought ; He is content to speak of Himself as the "Son of man" ;⁴ but occasionally He permits Himself to be called "the Son of God,"⁵ and even calls God His Father in a sense which implies a peculiar sonship.⁶ In the Johannine teaching, especially in that part of it which

¹ Cf. what is said (though in another connexion) in Matt. xii. 28, *ἐφ' ἡμᾶς ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ*.

² Luke xix. 48.

³ Matt. xxiv. 14, xxvi. 13.

⁴ E.g. Matt. xi. 19.

⁵ E.g. Mark v. 7 ; Matt. xiv. 33, xvi. 16.

⁶ Matt. xi. 25 ff., xii. 50, xv. 13.

belongs to Jerusalem,¹ His relation to the Father is handled with much fulness, and on many occasions both public and private. We need not stop here to inquire into the import of this Christology; it is enough to note that it has a place in all the records of Christ's teaching, although not the same place. In Galilee His first purpose was to awaken the consciences of the multitudes who were indifferent to the realities of the spiritual Kingdom, and the message rather than the person of the Messenger occupied His thoughts and filled His instructions. But in Jerusalem, among the learned, and on the historic ground of the Temple courts, He did not shrink from answering the questions which were rising in men's minds about Himself. There is no cause for suspecting the genuineness of the discourses in the Fourth Gospel which deal with this subject; such a passage as Matthew xi. 25-30 shows that the elements of the Johannine Christology were present in the mind of our Lord during His ministry in Galilee, although the conditions which surrounded Him there did not call for frequent or detailed reference to it. Sooner or later the self-revelation could not but have been made. The Teacher of the Church is inseparable from His teaching; the Gospel of the Kingdom is also "the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God,"² and no presentation of it is complete which leaves out of sight His Person and relation to the Father. A Christianity without a Christology is no true description of the Gospel as Christ taught it at Jerusalem or even at Capernaum.

6. Both in Jerusalem and in Galilee our Lord's teaching was partly delivered in public, partly addressed in private to His disciples. The distinction is not unimportant, for the private teaching differed from the public both in aim and methods.

¹ See cc. v., viii., x., xiv.-xvii.

² Mark i. 1. *υιοῦ θεοῦ* if not part of the original title of St. Mark at least sums up the impression derived from the reading of the "earliest Gospel."

The Lord began with the people at large, addressing Himself to the pious who attended the synagogues, and the mixed crowds who gathered round Him on the shore of the lake or by the road-side. His message was to all, and He devoted His first and, to the end, His chief attention to the outside crowd. There is in His public teaching no trace of contempt for the *'am haaretz*,¹ no lofty superciliousness; their ignorance awakened no impatience in Him, but only an infinite compassion which impelled Him to give them of His best.² But from the first an inner circle of disciples claimed His special attention. St. John enables us to see how this "little flock" had its beginnings. One or two of the disciples of the Baptist found themselves drawn to the new Teacher, followed Him to His lodging, spent the night in His company, and in the end resolved to share His life. The number might have become inconveniently large, had not Jesus Himself reduced it to twelve.³ These select disciples received special instructions, chiefly when the hours of public instruction were over. He explained to them the teaching which had been given in parables to "those outside";⁴ He entrusted to them "the secret of the Kingdom of God."⁵ Yet they were warned at the time that they received this additional teaching in trust for the whole Church; it was imparted to them only that they might be prepared, when the right moment came, to deliver it to the world. It was not an esoteric teaching in the strictest sense, not the heritage of a privileged order, but the common property of the Christian Society, spoken for the moment into the ear, but one day to be proclaimed upon the housetops.⁶ The line which the Master drew between His two methods of teaching was temporary and not permanent, due to circumstances and not to any essential difference.

¹ Contrast John vii. 49, and Hillel's caustic saying in *Aboth* ii. 6.

² Matt. ix. 36 f.

³ Mark iii. 13 f.

⁴ Mark iv. 10 f., 34.

⁵ *Ibid.* 11.

⁶ Matt. x. 27.

7. What effect Christ's teaching has had upon the world we know. But it is natural to ask how far it impressed those who were brought directly under its influence. It is strange to find but one reference in the Acts to Christian communities in Galilee;¹ it would seem as if little permanent impression had been produced, and we know from our Lord's own words that the chief lake-side towns in which He preached were unmoved.² But the crowds which attended His preaching in Galilee were not all Galileans; Judæa, Idumæa, Peræa, and even Phœnicia were represented, whilst the great roads which crossed Galilee in all directions carried His fame through Syria.³ It is impossible to determine how far the early spread of the Palestinian Church was due to these influences, to say nothing of effects produced upon individual lives, or of the priceless treasure which the Church has inherited in the records of the Galilean ministry.

Nor is it less difficult to arrive at a clear estimate of the effects of Christ's teaching of the Twelve. The results, so far as they can be discovered by a casual reading of the evidence, seems to be sadly disproportionate to the time and labour bestowed. The Apostles do not upon the whole appear to have been men remarkable either for beauty or strength of character, or for judgment, insight, or breadth of view. If we put out of sight the Apocryphal Acts, only two out of the Twelve have left any appreciable mark upon Christendom. But the influence exerted by a college of trained men cannot be estimated simply by the recorded work of the individuals who composed it. The Apostolic body formed, as the Acts of the Apostles show, a nucleus which gave coherence and order to the nascent Church; in it the Church found a centre of unity; from it she received initiation and guidance in new movements, and

¹ Acts ix. 31.

² Matt. xi. 20 ff

³ Matt. iv. 24; Mark iii. 7 f.

a standard of teaching which was never wholly lost.¹ As soon as the Palestinian Church, the mother of a future Christendom, was able to stand alone, the Apostles were scattered, and their corporate action ceased. But even if St. Peter had not laboured both in East and West, or St. John at Ephesus, the years of patient training which the Apostles received in Galilee would not have been fruitless. The Great Teacher had in this way safeguarded the infancy of the Church, and created a deposit of doctrine and a basis of order which are with us to this day.

8. If we may accept the witness of the Fourth Gospel, the Master did not regard His work of teaching as ended by His death. "I have yet many things to say unto you," He declared on the night before the Passion, "but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the truth, for He shall not speak from Himself. . . . These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs; the hour cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but shall tell you plainly of the Father."² The fulfilment of the last words must be sought in the dispensation of the Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus³ and of Christ,⁴ sent in the Master's name⁵ to speak as His Vicar to the Churches.⁶ The teaching of the Spirit, both in the Apostolic Epistles and in the experience of Christendom, is thus a true continuation of the teaching of Christ. The Master, who of old taught in proverbs, teaches now with plainness of speech. To His progressive enlightenment of the Christian consciousness we look with confidence for an answer to the questions which are pressed upon us by the growth of knowledge and the complications of modern life. The Spirit of Christ will bring to the remembrance of

¹ Acts ii. 42, v. 12 ff., vi. 2; cf. Eph. ii. 20; 2 Pet. iii. 2; Apoc. xxi. 14.

² John xvi. 12 f., 25.

³ Acts xvi. 7.

⁴ Rom. viii. 9.

⁵ John xiv. 26.

⁶ Apoc. ii. 7; cf. Tert. *de praescr.* 13 creditur . . . Iesum Christum . . . misisse vicariam vim Spiritus Sancti.

the Church all that Christ said ;¹ He will take of Christ's, and declare it unto her,² and in the teaching of Christ, interpreted by the Spirit, will be found in due time the solution of problems which may for the moment threaten the foundations of our faith.

H. B. SWETE.

A MODERN SEANCE.

" Mutato nomine de te fabula."

" COME in ! " said our host, the Professor, opening the door in reply to a gentle knock ; and in stepped a small woman, dressed quietly and without jewels, yet so that not poverty but choice appeared to be responsible for the simplicity of her attire.

She glided in, just as if she knew the place, and sat down without word or greeting.

I now perceived that she had a perfectly regular face, colourless rather than pallid, and of the Roman rather than the Greek type. I was struck by something in her manner which resembled but was not impassiveness. It was not that she had taken her place without any seeming consciousness that the large reception-room was quite full of people, nor was it that she apparently saw nothing—rather it was this, that she looked away from us very attentively at something, something which interested her extremely.

So this was the mighty medium, the greatest yet known to students of psychology, indisputably (so they assured me) the mistress of strange and occult powers, concerning whom, if I was to believe my friend, the only question among well informed and unprejudiced persons was, how far did these powers extend ?

Like one who wakens, she called herself back from her own thoughts, and turned her gaze upon my friend, who had remained since her entrance expectant, silent, watchful.

¹ John xiv. 26.

² John xvi. 14.