

JESUS AS A TEACHER.

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In this article we are not dealing with the pedagogical methods in the four Gospels. Jesus used pedagogical methods worthy of study and emulation by modern pedagogues. But it is not the method of His teaching but the fact that He was a teacher—a universal ethical, religious teacher—which engages our attention now, and on which we hope to throw some light from the New Testament itself.

THE TERM TEACHER AS APPLIED TO JESUS.

In the Synoptic Gospels the title Teacher is applied to Jesus thirty-nine times, twelve each in Mark and Matthew, fifteen in Luke. In the Fourth Gospel it is used six times to designate Jesus. That is, forty-five times in the four Gospels Jesus is called the Teacher.¹

In studying the above passages more closely we observe that they can be divided into three classes: First, those in which Jesus is called the Teacher by Himself: Mt. 10:24, 25; 23:8; Lk. 6:40; Jno. 13:14—six in all. Secondly, those in which He is called the Teacher by those friendly to Him, including the Twelve and His other followers or sympathizers. There are twenty-three instances where those friendly to Him call Him the Teacher, ten of which are cases in which the Twelve call Him the Teacher.² I have included in this class the case of the Scribe in Mt. 8:19f. whom Jesus told it was necessary to count the cost of discipleship before entering upon such a career of suffering and self-sacrifice. I have counted in

¹This count is based on the WH text as seen in Moulton & Geden, *Concordance to the Greek Testament*.

²Mt. 26:18; Mk. 4:38; 9:38; 10:35; 13:1; 14:14; Lk. 21:7; 22:11; Jno. 1:39; 13:13.

this class Mt. 19:26 (parallels, Mk. 10:17, 20 and Lk. 18:18) the case of the rich young man who asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life. He was not hostile to Jesus, even if he did not accept His terms of discipleship. He called Jesus Teacher. We have also included in this class Mk. 5:35 (parallel, Lk. 8:49) where the servants of Jairus call Jesus the Teacher. They were probably friendly to Jesus, as was their master. We include also Mk. 9:17 in which the father of the demoniac boy addresses Jesus as Teacher. This father was evidently not hostile to Jesus, though it is not known how much he sympathized with His movement and teachings. We include also (with much hesitation) Lk. 7:40, the case of Simon the Pharisee who invited Jesus to dine with him, and who addressed Jesus as Teacher during the evening's conversation. Also Lk. 9:38, the case of the father of the epileptic boy who called Jesus Teacher.

Nicodemus (Jno. 3:2), who was friendly to Jesus, called Him Teacher. Martha (Jno. 11:28) called Him the Teacher. Mary Magdalene, after the resurrection (Jno. 20:16) called Jesus Rabboni, which John tells us means Teacher.

Thirdly, those passages in which Jesus is called Teacher by those hostile to Him. His enemies, Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, etc., called Him the Teacher in the following twelve passages: Mt. 9:11; 12:38; 17:24; 22:16; 24:36; Mk. 12:14, 19, 32; Lk. 11:45; 12:13; 19:39; 20:21, 28, 39. It is remarkable that in John's Gospel Jesus is not called Teacher by His enemies, though once He calls Himself the Teacher and five times the disciples do so.

It is to be observed from the above passages that the Twelve did not call Jesus Teacher until toward the close of His life, according to the Synoptic references, but in Jno. 1:39 the two disciples of John the Baptist, on becoming the disciples of Jesus, address Him as Rabbi, which John tells us means Teacher. There is no conflict. The Synoptic writers do not mention this incident at all.

Jesus calls Himself Teacher in the middle and late por-

tions of His ministry, according to the Synoptics.³ Nowhere in the Gospel of John, except in His last address (13:14), does he speak of Himself as the Teacher. It was natural for Him to emphasize His function of Teacher in those closing days of His ministry and life. It is also easy to see why the disciples, after associating with Him during His ministry and hearing His words of grace and wisdom, should, in the last months and days of His ministry, think more especially of Him as their great Teacher. Others called Him Teacher from the earliest months to the last week of His ministry.

THE VERB "TO TEACH" AS APPLIED TO JESUS.

The verb "to teach" (*didasko*) is referred to Jesus forty-five times in the Gospels—thirty-nine in the Synoptists and six in John. These references are divided into four classes:

First, those in which *the evangelist* says Jesus taught or was teaching. Most of the references to Jesus' teaching belong to this class—of the nine in Mt., seven passages;⁴ of the fifteen in Mk. thirteen passages;⁵ of the fifteen in Lk., ten;⁶ of the six in Jno., four.⁷ The Synoptists apply the verb teach to Jesus from the beginning of the Galilean Ministry to the last week in Jerusalem. John uses it of Him apparently only in the middle portion of His ministry (chaps. VI-VIII).

Secondly, those passages in which *Jesus* speaks of Himself as teaching. These number only three, one in Mt. (26:55), one in Mk. (14:49) in both of which He refers to His daily teaching in the temple during the last week of His ministry, and one in Jno. (18:20) where He says to the high priest, "I ever taught in synagogues and in the temple where all the Jews come together; and in secret spake I nothing." He

³Mt. 10:24, 25 (parallel Lk. 6:40) Mt. 23:8.

⁴Mt. 4:23; 5:2; 7:29; 9:35; 11:1; 13:54; 21:23.

⁵Mk. 1:21, 22; 2:13; 4:1, 2; 6:2, 6, 34; 8:31; 9:31; 10:1; 11:17; 12:35.

⁶Lk. 4:15, 31; 5:3, 17; 6:6; 13:10, 22; 19:47; 20:1; 21:37.

⁷Jno. 6:59; 7:14, 28; 8:20.

claims two things in this statement, first, that He was always a Teacher, that is, during His public ministry; secondly, that He was a public Teacher, teaching nothing of which He or anyone should be ashamed.

Thirdly, those passages in which *His enemies* speak of Him as teaching—one in Mt. (22:16) where the Pharisees and Herodians refer to His fearless, impartial teaching; one in Mk. (12:14) parallel to Mt. 22:16; four in Lk. 13:26, where the rejected ones in the last day appeal to the fact that Jesus taught in their streets; 20:21, the parallel of Mk. 12:14; 23:5, where His accusers accuse Him of seditious teaching; one in Jno. 7:35 where His enemies ask if He was going to teach the Greeks when He went away. So we see His enemies seven times used the verb "to teach" of His public ministrations.

Fourthly, there is one passage in which the *disciples* apply the verb "to teach" to Jesus Lk. 11:1, where they ask Him to teach them how to pray.

There are scores of other paragraphs in the four gospels in which Jesus is teaching the people, and yet neither the noun "teacher" nor the verb "teach" is used.

OBSERVATIONS ON JESUS AS A TEACHER.

What kind of a Teacher was Jesus? What light do the above passages throw on the nature of Jesus as a Teacher?

1. HE WAS AN ETHICO-RELIGIOUS TEACHER. "Jesus as a religionist gave chief place to the moral and spiritual values of life."⁸ Jesus was not a Teacher of natural science. He did not teach anything positively as to the laws of nature. He followed the Jewish view of the world and of nature. Yet He studied seed and soil, shepherds and sheep, pearls and leaven, sun and mountains, light and salt, and other phenomena of nature, in order to teach that God is in His world; yea, in His world is working out His purposes of love for

⁸McGee, *Jesus the World Teacher*, p. 121.

His creatures. His references to nature are only illustrative, as would be those of a cultivated modern preacher of spiritual truth.

Nor was He a Teacher of history. To be sure, He did know the history of the Jews and the history of God's dealings with them and the nations. He also referred to many historical facts in the history of the Jews and of the world—to the flood, fall of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the wilderness experience of Moses, etc., but He did so in order to clinch in the memories of His hearers great religious truths. The historical references were used by Jesus as pegs on which to hang spiritual truths; as the means of turning on and of focusing the light of certain great spiritual truths which He wished to teach.

Nor was Jesus a Teacher of literature. He did not mean to give the world the results of His study on the questions of Hebrew Literature. He was not concerned about the problems of Higher Criticism. This He deemed not a part of His sublime mission to earth. He did know the books of Hebrew Literature (perhaps He did not know Greek and Latin Literature) but He did not claim to be a Hebrew literateur, and did not presume to solve for the world the problems of Hebrew Literature—problems of authorship, date, sources, integrity, etc. His literary references are valuable, not because they were intended by Him to settle all literary problems of the Old Testament, but because of His keen intellectual acumen, and because they are mere incidental allusions and are not studied, formulated arguments.

Nor was He a Teacher of philosophy. It is improbable that He ever read Philo, not to mention Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, or the writings of the Stoics and the Epicureans. These systems of thought would not have appealed to Him, even if He had had the opportunity to study and master them. He did not come primarily to enlighten the world intellectually, but spiritually and morally. He did not philosophize even on the origin of the worlds, or of religion or of morality. He knew that God made the worlds and taught religion and

ethics as facts, the highest values in God's universe, and sought to help men to attain the highest religion and noblest morality.

Nor was Jesus primarily a theologian. He did not elaborate a complex system of teaching about God, man, sin, salvation, etc. In fact, there is no system to His teachings. He just spoke out of the fulness of His loving heart, as occasions offered and the needs of His disciples and the people suggested. He probably often repeated Himself, or expressed similar teachings in slightly different form on different occasions.

Jesus was emphatically an *ethico-religious* Teacher. He knew what was men's right relation to God and to one another. He taught the true relation of men to God, that of loving, trusting, obedient children, for the realization of which relationship by men He Himself was the voluntary yet divinely appointed Medium. Back of this relation of men to God was that of God to men. He loves all men as a father loves his children. So men should love and trust Him. Likewise, Jesus emphasized the ethical side of human life. Men should love one another, as the Father loves the Son and loves men. They should forgive one another. They should even love their enemies. This love should express itself positively in deeds of help and mercy. Men should help all classes of their fellows, the poor, the sick, the despised, the outcast, anyone who needs help. That is, Jesus was emphatically the great ethico-religious Teacher. He taught that men could and should know God as their Father, and as His children should walk and live in the light of His love; that they should recognize their fellowmen as brothers, and as such should love and help one another in all the relations of life.

2. JESUS WAS A CONSERVATIVE TEACHER.

He had new truths to give to the world, and yet He was conservative in the presentation of all His most radical teachings. For instance, His teaching of the Fatherhood of God finds its roots in the Old Testament. He did break away from

the late Judaistic view of God as a Bookkeeper who places all men's good deeds in the credit column, and all their evil deeds in the debit column, and who rejoices at the moral failures of men. Jesus taught that God loves all men and watches sympathetically over all their interests. He used a term (Father) found in the sacred literature of the Jewish religion, but gave it a deeper and broader and higher content.

According to Mk. 2:18-22, Jesus did, however, teach that Christianity was no new patch to be sewed on the old garments of Judaism, nor were its teachings new wine to be preserved in the wine-skins of Judaism. In a sense Christianity is a new religion. And yet He did not positively condemn fasting (the problem which led Him to utter the above teaching) which was a teaching in the old system. If there were suitable occasions for fasting, His disciples might fast.

Nor was Jesus an iconoclast with regard to Jewish ritualism. He did come to supplant it and He knew that His spiritual teachings would overthrow the ritualistic system. Yet, He nowhere attacked the temple worship and its ceaseless round of animal sacrifice. He even paid the temple tax and called the temple His "Father's house", or His "Father's business". Yet He said to the Pharisees who believed in ceremonial uncleanness that moral and spiritual uncleanness is the more significant. Not that which goes into a man, but that which comes out of his heart, defiles him, namely, "evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness".

Other examples might be given to illustrate Jesus' conservatism. But what He said in Mt. 5:17-20 sums up his relation to the old religion of the Jews. It was not His purpose to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfill them, that is, to preserve their inner permanent values and to make them the basis of His more spiritual and more comprehensive teachings. Yet, He did condemn the Pharisaic interpretation of the law and the prophets and their consequent views of righteousness. If men enter His Kingdom their righteousness

must surpass that of the Pharisees (v. 20). He had new teachings, new in spirit and extent of application, and yet He preserved in His new teachings all of inner permanent value in the old religion. Harnack says,⁹ "The bud which Jesus placed in the Old Jewish stalk could result only in the decay of Judaism and the founding of a new religion. . . . Not in His preaching did Jesus teach this, but in His person, His work, His sufferings, in His resurrection, did His disciples learn it". That is, according to Harnack, Jesus in His teaching *was undermining* the old religion of Judaism but *not consciously*. It would be better to say, Jesus was not designedly undermining the Old Testament teaching but was positively building upon it a superstructure of the purest ethical and religious teaching.

3. JESUS WAS A FEARLESS TEACHER.

Although He was no iconoclast in religious teachings, yet He was fearless in the presentation of those marvelous spiritual realities which He knew the world needed. He was not afraid of the Scribes whose teachings He necessarily opposed by teaching the spiritual nature of the Kingdom and that love and service are greater than external deeds which do not necessarily express a loving heart. He knew that if He persisted in His spiritual teaching they would kill Him. But death did not daunt Him. Nothing could deter Him from teaching those truths which He knew the world must have or else die spiritually and morally.

4. JESUS WAS AN EXOTERIC TEACHER.

This term was originally applied to the popular teachings of Aristotle and the late Greek philosophers. But the public teachings of those philosophers were not so popular in matter or manner as were the teachings of Jesus. As hinted above,

⁹Biblical World, March, 1910, p. 148.

Jesus did not teach abstract truths. He was a practical Teacher. He taught those truths that help to make life moral and religious. He did not teach truth for the sake of its intrinsic beauty, but for the sake of its power in moulding character, conduct and life. His "wisdom" teachings (apothegms) were practical, intended to help men to live, as was the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and the late Wisdom Literature, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus. Of course, Jesus' teachings are far superior to these last, but they belong to the same class of literature, the religio-practical and not the philosophical.

Again, when we consider *the style* of His teaching, we see the methods of the popular teacher. His language is concrete. He speaks in pictures. He uses figures of speech, the simile, the metaphor, the apostrophe, the synecdoche, the hyperbole, etc. He often teaches by using examples from Old Testament history, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, David, Solomon, etc. Perhaps, the most characteristic method in His teaching is the parable. Though, according to Mk. 4:11, 12, He appears to have adopted the parabolic method, in order to veil the truth from the multitudes, yet, according to Mk. 4:21, 22, He says that truth, like a lamp, is intended to be placed, not under the bushel or bed, but on the lampstand, to illumine all that may see. The parables veil the truth only temporarily. When the inner meaning of the parable was grasped, the truth shone more brilliantly. The masses remembered those matchless stories from nature, the fields, the home, the shop, and the experiences of life. The parable was well fitted to be a vehicle of truth to the masses. He probably used the parable, because He was pre-eminently a popular teacher.

5. JESUS WAS AN ESOTERIC TEACHER.

This term was first applied to the secret teachings of Aristotle. Grote, however, thinks it not applicable to any of Aristotle's teaching, but that it is applicable to part of the

teachings of Pythagoras which seem to be suitable only to the initiated few.

Both in the Synoptic and Johannine Gospels there are portions of Jesus' teachings which are peculiarly fitted only to those who are in the inner circle—those who accept Jesus as their Savior, Lord and Teacher and are thus personally prepared to appreciate the deeper and more spiritual truths. According to John's Gospel (14:21f.) Jesus teaches that He manifests Himself in a special manner to those who keep His commandments, as He does not and cannot to the world. There must be an affinity between the pupils and the truths taught. If we would appreciate some of the deepest teachings of Jesus, we must think and live and act in the inner circle, with our heads and hearts close enough to Jesus to rest on His bosom, as did John the beloved disciple.

But let it be noted, what might be called esoteric teachings at one stage of our experience cease to be esoteric to us, because we have advanced to a higher stage of Christian experience. For instance, when Jesus first definitely foretold His death to His disciples, this was a matter of esoteric teaching to them, but later on, after they had come to see that Christ's death was a part of the divine plan and essential to the Messianic salvation, this teaching became a public teaching, that is, for all the people. On the day of Pentecost Peter preached the death of Christ as a part of the divine plan. It was no longer an esoteric teaching but a popular doctrine.

We do not deal with the problem whether or not the Sermon on the Mount was delivered to the masses or to the disciples only. It is likely exoteric. Though addressed specially to the immediate disciples, it is also a general code of ethics (though it contains much distinctively religious as well as ethical teaching) for all members of the Kingdom; yea, for all men whether or not they profess to be followers of Jesus.

6. JESUS WAS AN AUTHORITATIVE TEACHER.

At the close of the Sermon on the Mount the evangelist

says the people marveled at His teaching because He taught them as "one having authority and not as the Scribes". In what sense was Jesus an authoritative Teacher?

First, He did not resort to human teaching for endorsement, as did the Scribes.

The latter were always quoting what this or that rabbi said. Jesus never quoted Hillel, Shammai, or other rabbis. He felt that He needed no human teacher's words to back His teachings. He knew the Father directly and ethical, religious truth at first-hand.

Secondly, He was an original Teacher. He had a personal knowledge of God, a rich experience of fellowship with the Father. He knew in Himself those great truths of religion which He proclaimed. Again, He loved all men, He hated none. He forgave His enemies, He helped the helpless, healed the sick, lifted the fallen, and so in Himself He knew the fundamentals of ethics. Hence, He taught the world originally, authoritatively, that is, out of His own experience of love and service to others, those lofty ethical principles recorded in the Gospels.

Thirdly, He was God's appointed representative. He knew the Father (Lu. 10:22) and the Father had made Him His representative in making Him known to the world. Hence, His right to teach. God had given Him the right to reveal the Father because of His perfect knowledge of the Father.

So out of His own personality as the Son of God and the Son of man, out of His experience as such, and as the Father's representative to men, Jesus taught with authority. As God's Messiah to set up the Kingdom on earth He felt and used His right to teach the truths of God and the Kingdom. Hence, out of His lofty consciousness and His filial and representative relation to the Father and out of His helpful, fraternal relation to men as the Son of man, He taught those sublime teachings of religion and ethics which have been the marvel of the ages.

7. JESUS WAS A COSMOPOLITAN TEACHER.

Jesus gave no specific rules for living. He did not lay down a code of laws applicable for Jews but not suitable for the Gentiles. He taught universal principles, love, forgiveness, righteousness, service, sacrifice; principles as useful for the Mongolian, Malay and Ethiopian as for the Caucasian and Red Man. Witness the golden rule of Mt. 7:12. It was good for the early Jewish Christians. It has been the highest ethical standard of the civilized world for nineteen centuries. It is still as suitable for the relations of society in the twentieth century as it was in the first. Jesus taught for all the centuries and for all the world. He commanded His disciples to give His gospel to all the world. Though He said He was sent, in His personal ministry, "only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel", He laid the foundations for future apostolic teaching and entrusted to them teachings that were to be observed by "disciples in all the nations" (Mt. 28:18, 19).

In the early Christian centuries His teachings supplanted those of Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus and the Stoics, and in these last two centuries they are supplanting the teachings of Confucius and the Hindu sages. They are lifting the nations to the religion of the One God and to the highest moral living. Principal Fairbairn says, "You will get many a beautiful proverb in Seneca; you will find many a fine ethical principle in Plato; you will find in Stoicism some of the most exalted precepts that human ethics have ever known. But mark you one thing: You will never discover that these elevated the common life of man, affected the course of lust, made the bad good, or the impure holy. . . . Where they failed, Christ succeeded with splendid, glorious success; He made out of the very outcasts men that became saints of God".

Already it is true of the Occident and in the near future the Orient with the Occident will be sitting at the feet of Jesus, the recognized world Teacher. As suggested by James Russell Lowell, Jesus was the world's first real democrat, that

is, the first man really in sympathy with the people, the whole people, and all the peoples of earth. He was a world democrat. The world is fast recognizing Him as such and all the races and nations are being made one family of brothers as they hear and heed the universal teachings of Jesus. He is the world Teacher, the world Savior, and the world Master.