

ON CHRIST'S MANNER OF LIFE

BEING A TRANSLATION OF THE FORTIETH QUESTION OF THE THIRD PART OF
THE SUMMA THEOLOGICA.

BY

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I



HETHER Christ should have lived alone or in company with others. It would seem that he should not have lived with others but should have adopted a solitary life.

(i) For it behoved Christ by his manner of life to declare himself not merely true man but also true God. It does not behove God to associate with men, as witness Daniel 2, 11: 'For the thing that thou askest, O King, is difficult; nor can anyone be found that can show it before the King, except the gods who live apart from men'. Aristotle, too, states (*I Polit.* 2): 'Who lives alone is either a beast' that is to say, he is ostracised on account of his savage character, 'or he is a god', that is, if he seeks solitude as being most conducive to contemplating the truth. Therefore does it seem unfitting for Christ to have associated with his fellow men.

(ii) Moreover, whilst on earth Christ should have led a life in every way perfect. Since such a life of perfection is wholly contemplative (cf. II-II, 182, 1 and 2), it entails retirement from the world; as we find in Osee (2, 14), 'I will lead her into the wilderness and I will speak to her heart'. Hence it seems Christ should have led a secluded life.

(iii) Furthermore, Christ's life should have been consistent and unvarying, for whatever he did was faultless. But from time to time he avoided the multitudes and sought out places of solitude. Hence Remigius commenting on Matthew (cf. *Catena Aurea*, cap. 5) writes: 'Our Lord, so we are told, had three places of refuge—a ship, a mountain or a desert. Whenever he felt overwhelmed by the crowds, he sought safety in one of them'. Therefore Christ ought always to have lived in solitude.

But, on the other hand, it is stated in Baruch (3, 36 and 38): 'This is our God and there shall be no other accounted of in comparison with him. . . . Afterwards he was seen upon earth and conversed with men'.

I reply that Christ's manner of life must have been in accord with the purpose of the Incarnation, to fulfil which he came into the world. Now he came into the world, firstly, to make plain the truth; as he said himself: 'For this was I born, for this came I into the world,

that I might give witness to truth'. (Jn. 18, 37). Only by coming forth and preaching, not by living in retirement, could our Lord have gained his end. Thus, when some would detain him, he replied: 'I must preach the gospel of God's kingdom to other cities too; it is for this that I was sent'. (*Lk.* 4, 43). Secondly, Christ came to deliver men from sin, as St Paul says (*I Tim.* 1, 15): 'Christ came into the world to save sinners'. Wherefore, Chrysostom comments (on *Lk.* 4, 43): 'Although by remaining in one place Christ could have drawn all men thither to hear his preaching; nevertheless he did not so work. He preferred to give us an example how we too should go forth, ministering to all in need, even as the shepherd searches out the lost sheep and the doctor hastens to his patients'. Thirdly, Christ came that through him we might draw nigh to God (cf. *Rom.* 5, 2). Consequently, by his friendliness to all he inspired men with confidence to approach him. Thus we read: 'And afterwards when he was taking a meal in the house, many publicans and sinners were to be found at table with him and his disciples' (*Mtt.* 9, 10), which Jerome explains by saying: 'Sinners on thus beholding a publican renounce his sins and change for the better, became hopeful of their own salvation'.

Replying therefore to the previous arguments we say: (i) Christ through his human nature wished to disclose his divinity. Therefore, by living among men as one of themselves, he gave proof of his divinity by his preaching, by his miraculous power, and by his upright and just life.

(ii) In itself, a life of contemplation is better than an active life which is concerned with bodily actions, as we have pointed out (II-II, 182, 1; and 188, 6). Yet that form of active life, in which a man by preaching and teaching hands on to others the truths he contemplates, is more perfect than the life which is solely contemplative; because such a life demands a superabundance of contemplation. So that Christ chose that sort of life.

(iii) We are meant to learn from the life of Christ. Thus by our Lord's withdrawal from crowds, preachers are meant to learn that they must not be continuously engaged in public life. There are three reasons, we read, why Christ fled from the crowds: Firstly, to seek rest when physically fatigued, as he himself says to his disciples: 'Come away into a quiet place by yourselves and rest a little. For there were many coming and going and they scarcely had leisure even to eat' (*Mk.* 6, 31). Secondly, for purposes of prayer. 'It was at this time that he went on to the mountainside and passed the whole night offering prayer to God' (*Lk.* 6, 12). St Ambrose comments: 'He requires us to follow his example in the matter of virtue'. Thirdly, to teach us to spurn human respect. 'Jesus seeing the

crowds went up into the mountains' (*Matt.* 5, 1). About this Chrysostom declares (*hom.* 16 on *Matt.*): 'Because it was neither to the city nor public highway but to the mountain that he (Christ) went, we are to learn how we should count outward show as nothing, and should cut adrift from public life especially if we are to convince others of fundamental truths'.

II

Second Article: Whether Christ should have led a more ascetic life.

It would seem that Christ while on earth should have led a more severe life: (i) Christ preached perfection to a far greater extent than John the Baptist. Yet the Baptist led an ascetic life, that by his example he might encourage others to seek after perfection. Whence we read: 'John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather girdle about his loins: and locusts and wild honey were his food' (*Mtt.* 3, 4); on which Chrysostom remarks (*hom.* 10 on *Mtt.*): 'To see such asceticism displayed by a man was remarkable: and this more than anything else drew the Jews'. It would thus appear more befitting if Christ had led an ascetic life.

(ii) Furthermore, abstinence is conducive to self-control. Thus we read: 'They shall eat and not be filled; they have committed fornication and have not ceased', (*Osee* 4, 10). Yet Christ remained chaste and he invited others to follow his example, saying: 'There are some eunuchs who have made themselves so for love of the kingdom of heaven: take this in, you whose hearts are large enough for it' (*Mtt.* 19, 12). It would thus appear that both Christ and his disciples should have led a more austere form of life.

(iii) Finally, it seems absurd that anyone should begin a strict life, only to return to a 'broader' way of living. Against such a one we could quote: 'Here is a man who began to build and could not finish his building' (*Lk.* 14, 30). But after his baptism Christ began to lead a most rigorous life, remaining in the desert and fasting forty days and forty nights. Therefore was it out of keeping that after such restrictions he should have returned to a communal form of life.

But on the other hand, we read that 'when the Son of Man came, he ate and drank' (*Mtt.* 11, 19).

In reply I maintain that, as was stated in the previous article, it was in accordance with the purpose of the Incarnation that Christ should live not as a hermit but rather as a friend among mankind. However, he who lives among others must needs conform himself to their way of life, as witness St Paul: 'I have been everything by turns to everybody' (*1 Cor.* 89, 22). Hence to eat and drink with others like everybody else was, on the part of our Lord, highly appropriate. Thus Augustine says: 'John neither ate nor drank,

which means he did not take the same sort of food as the Jews. Our Lord did live like the Jews, so it was said of him that he ate and drank'. (*contra Faustum* lib. 16, cap. 31).

Replying therefore to the previous arguments we say: (i) Our Lord during his earthly life gave example of what was perfect in all those things which belong of themselves to salvation. But abstinence from food and drink does not, of itself, lead to salvation. 'The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating this or drinking that' (*Rom.* 14, 17). Augustine, commenting on *Mtt.* 11, 19 (lib. 2, q. 11, *de Quaest. Evang.*), says: 'Wisdom is justified in her children. That is to say, because the kingdom of God (as the Apostles understood) was not a question of eating this and drinking that, but lay in stability of character' which is neither unduly elated by plenty nor downcast by want. Similarly in *3 de Doctrina Christi* he remarks: 'Sin lies not in the use of things, but in the intemperate desire thereof'. Yet both types of life are lawful and commendable, whether it be the one led apart from the company of men and devoted to ascetical practices, or whether it be the life of one who finds himself leading the common life with others. Wherefore our Lord desired to give men example of both. But whereas the Baptist, as Chrysostom points out, 'gave witness by his life and righteousness alone, Christ gave witness by his miracles. Whilst therefore John's mission was enhanced by fasting, Christ went the opposite way and chose to frequent with publicans, eating and drinking with them' (*38 hom. on Mtt.*).

(ii) As others acquire self-control through abstemiousness, so Christ dominated the flesh in himself and his disciples through the power of his divinity. Whence we read: 'The Pharisees and disciples of John fasted but not so the disciples of Christ' (*Mtt.* 9, 14). And Bede in his commentary on *Mk.* 12 (and cf. *St Ambrose on Lk.* 1) says about this that 'John drank neither wine nor strong drink, because abstinence increased the reward which nature was powerless to acquire. But our Lord of his very nature had power to forgive sin; why therefore should he avoid those whom he on his part rather than any abstemiousness on their part could render holy?'

(iii) Chrysostom in his 13th Homily on *St Matthew* replies: 'Christ fasted not for his own profit, but to teach us how great a good fasting is, and how great a defence it is against the devil. Hence, after baptism we must apply ourselves to fasting and not to intemperate living; and he himself fasted not of necessity but for our learning. Yet Christ did not extend his fast over and above the time endured by Moses and Elias, lest we might be disposed to think he was not truly human'. Taking it mystically, Gregory declares, 'the number 40 has hidden meaning in the fast of Christ, since the strength of the decalogue has been fulfilled by the four gospels, and 10 multi-

plied by 4 gives 40. Or alternatively, our bodies, which we curb by the teaching of Christ foreshadowed in the decalogue, are composed of four elements' (*hom. 16 in Evang.*). Or again, Augustine says: 'The whole education of wisdom is the getting to know the Creator and his creature. Now, the Creator is Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The creature, too, is in part invisible, as in the case of the soul to which the number three belongs: for we are told to love God with our whole heart, our whole soul and our whole mind. In part the creature is material, in respect to his body—which is fourfold—hot, wet, cold, dry. Therefore the number 10 which encompasses the whole sweep of education when multiplied by the number four, i.e., when multiplied by the number pertaining to the body (since it is carried out through the services of the body) gives the number 40. So we weep and lament for a period of 40 days' (q. 81 in the book of *83 Questions*).

Nor was it absurd for Christ, after his fast in the desert, to return and live in common with others. This return is indeed consonant with the life wherein others are given the fruit of contemplation. That life Christ himself chose, for he gave himself first to contemplation and afterwards associated with others in his public ministry. Hence Bede attests: 'Christ fasted lest he be thought to break the Law; he ate with sinners so that perceiving grace they would acknowledge his power' (*comment. Mk. 2*).

III

Third Article: Should Christ have lived as a poor man?

It would seem that Christ ought not to have adopted a poor mode of life: (i) Surely Christ should have preferred a way of life that was fully in accord with reason, to wit, the mean between affluence and destitution. 'Give me neither beggary nor riches, give me only the necessaries of life' (*Prov. 30, 8*). Hence should Christ have lived frugally, but not in destitution.

(ii) Furthermore, material wealth is instrumental in providing food and clothing for the body. But in the matter of food and clothing Christ spent his life in common with others, following his companions' standard of living. Therefore also does it seem that in the question of wealth and poverty Christ should have adopted the common standard, and not gone to extremes in poverty.

(iii) And again: Christ especially exhorted men to follow his example of humility. 'Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart' (*Mtt. 11, 29*). But humility is particularly commendable in a rich man. 'Charge the rich of this world not to be high minded' (*1 Tim. 6, 17*). Therefore would it seem that Christ should not have taken on the life of a poor man.

But on the other hand, our Lord said, 'the son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (*Mtt.* 8, 20). As though to say, according to Jerome, 'Why do you seek to follow me and thereby gain the riches and wealth of this world, when I am so needy that none will receive me into his house nor have I a roof of my own'. And on the text of *Matthew* 17, 26: 'But we will not hurt their consciences; go down to the sea . . .' Jerome writes: 'This it is which edifies the bystanders when they heard Christ declare he was so poor as to be unable to pay the taxes demanded of him and his apostles'.

In reply I maintain it was fitting for Christ to live as a poor man. Firstly, because such poverty is well in keeping with his mission of preaching, for which he became man—'Let us go into the neighbouring towns and cities, that I may preach there also; for to this purpose am I come' (*Mk.* 1, 38). Those who preach the Word of God must by very reason of their preaching be free from the worry entailed in administration of temporal affairs; which those who possess riches cannot be. Whence our Lord himself charged the apostles before sending them out to preach: 'Possess neither gold nor silver' (*Mtt.* 18, 9). The apostles later themselves insisted, 'It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables' (*Acts* 6, 2). Secondly, as Christ suffered the death of the body that he might bestow on us the life of the spirit, so also did he suffer physical poverty that he might bestow on us the riches of the spirit. 'You do not need to be reminded how gracious our Lord Jesus Christ was; how he impoverished himself for your sakes, when he was so rich, so that you might become rich through his poverty' (*2 Cor.* 8, 9). Thirdly, had Christ possessed wealth, his preaching might have been regarded as done out of love for money. Whence Jerome, commenting on *St Matthew* (10, 9), says that had Christ's disciples owned possessions, 'they might have been accused of preaching to gain not souls but filthy lucre'; and the same accusation might have been levelled at Christ. Fourthly, the more lowly his poverty, the more mightily was his divinity perceived. Hence we read in a certain discourse delivered at the Council of Ephesus: 'He chose all things lowly and common and for the most part insignificant and hidden, so as to impress on all that it was his divine power alone which transformed the world. Wherefore did he choose his mother from the ranks of the poor, his country from the poorer states, and he himself was ever penniless. Let the Crib teach you this'. (Theodoret of Ancyra).

Replying therefore to the previous arguments we say: (i) Those who strive for virtue avoid both excessive wealth and destitution, insofar as either can become an occasion of sin. Excessive wealth may well cause pride, and destitution cause theft, lying and even

perjury. Because of the danger of sin the Wise Man counsels avoidance of these extremes; but this cannot have reference to Christ, for he was incapable of sinning. Moreover, not all degrees of poverty are occasions of theft and perjury (as the Wise Man himself goes on to say), but only that impoverishment which being unsought and resented causes man to improve his condition through theft and perjury. Poverty which is wholly voluntary does not run this risk, and such poverty Christ chose.

(ii) A man can live a life in common with others, as regards food and clothing, not only if he possesses wealth, but also if he receives what is necessary from the wealthy. And such was the case for Christ. We read in St Luke (8, 2) that 'certain women' followed Christ, 'and they ministered unto him of their substance'. Commenting on St Matthew (27, 55), Jerome adds: 'It was customary among the Jews, nor was this ancient custom the subject of abuse, for women of means to make gifts of food and clothing to teachers of the Law. For fear such action might scandalise the Gentiles Paul would not tolerate it'. Hence, whereas the common board can remove the worry which would otherwise impede the ministry of preaching, that is not so in the case of the possession of private resources.

(iii) He who lives in enforced poverty is not remarkable for humility. But he who voluntarily becomes poor (as did Christ), that very poverty is the sign of the greatest humility.

IV

Fourth Article: Whether Christ lived in conformity with the Mosaic Law.

It would seem that Christ in his manner of life did not follow the Law: (i) The Mosaic Law forbade work on the Sabbath, since God 'on the seventh day rested from all works he had accomplished' (*Gen.* 2, 2). Yet Christ cured an infirm man on the Sabbath, and bade him take up his bed. Therefore does it seem Christ did not live according to the Law.

(ii) Moreover, what Christ taught he practised; as it says in *Acts* (1, 1): 'Jesus set out to do and to teach'. But he taught: 'It is not what goes into a man's mouth that makes him unclean' (*Mtt.* 15, 2), which is opposed to the teaching of the Law, whereby a Jew was rendered unclean if he touched proscribed animals (cf. *Lev.* 11). Therefore does it appear Christ did not live by the Law.

(iii) Furthermore, responsibility is shared both by him who acts, and by him who consents to the act; for 'Those who so live are deserving of death, not only those who commit such acts, but those who countenance such a manner of living' (*Rom.* 1, 32). Yet Christ

consented to his disciples breaking the Law, when on the Sabbath they plucked the ears of corn, for he defended their action (cf. *Mtt.* 12). Therefore does it seem Christ did not live by the Law.

But on the other hand, our Lord declared: 'Do not think I have come to set aside the Law and the Prophets' (*Mtt.* 5, 17), which Chrysostom explains: 'He fulfilled the Law, first by never infringing it; secondly, by fulfilling in spirit what could never be fulfilled according to the letter'.

I reply that Christ in all things lived by the Mosaic Law. Thus witness his willingness to be circumcised. In submitting to this rite he bound himself to observe all the Law in due course, for 'Once again I would warn anyone who is accepting circumcision that he thereby engages himself to keep all the precepts of the Law' (*Gal.* 5, 3). And Christ desired to live in conformity with the Law. First, in order that he might recognise the Law; secondly, that by his observance of the Law he might bring it to fulfilment and completion in himself, and show how it was instituted for him. Thirdly, to deprive the Jews of grounds to slander him. Fourthly, to free men from the yoke of the Law, for 'God sent out his son on a mission to us . . . (who) took birth as a subject of the Law, so as to redeem those who were subject to the Law' (*Gal.* 4, 4).

Replying therefore to the previous arguments we say (i) It cannot be contended that our Lord transgressed the sabbatical law, because whilst the Law forbade men to work, it did not exclude whatever might be done by divine activity. Although God ceased from his work of creation by the seventh day, his divine power is ever at work conserving and controlling the universe. The miracles of Christ were the outcome of divine power, so that Christ himself declares: 'My Father has never ceased working, and I too must be at work' (*Jn.* 5, 17).

Secondly, the Law does not forbid the sort of work which is needful to keep body and soul together. Whence our Lord remarks: 'Is there anyone of you who will not untie his ox or his ass from the stall and take them down to water when it is the Sabbath?' (*Lk.* 13, 15). 'Is there anyone of you who will not pull out his ass or his ox immediately if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath?' (*Lk.* 14, 15). Everyone will agree that Christ's miraculous deeds were performed for the welfare not only of the body but also of the soul.

Thirdly, the sabbatical law authorised all work pertaining to divine worship. Hence our Lord remarks: 'And have ye not read in the Law that the priests violate the Sabbath rest in the temple and none blames them' (*Mtt.* 12, 5); 'a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath' (*Jn.* 7, 23). When Christ, on the Sabbath, ordered the paralysed man to take up his bed, such work was religious in character, since it called forth praise at the power of God. Wherefore, Christ in no

wise broke the sabbatical law, although the Jews falsely reproached him: 'This man can be no messenger from God; he does not observe the Sabbath' (*Jn.* 9, 16).

(ii) Christ is showing that food of itself cannot be regarded as contaminating the soul. Certain types of food were designated unclean in the Law, as a kind of outward sign. On this subject Augustine writes (*contra Faustum* lib. 6, cap. 7): 'On the matter of clean and unclean food, both are wholesome for God created both; but in the Law mutton is deemed clean and pork unclean'.

(iii) The action of the disciples in plucking the ears of corn on the Sabbath was irreprehensible on account of the necessity of hunger. Thus also David did not transgress the law when, ravenous with hunger, he ate the loaves of proposition, which was legally forbidden.



THE HEIR

BY

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HERES UNIVERSORUM' occurs in the accusative case in the first sentence of the Epistle to the Hebrews. St Paul is intensely conscious that Christ's coming is the summing up of the past, the completion of an immense cycle, the climax of a great series of stupendous events, the crowning act of a drama, the final interference of God in his own creation. Not only that; Christ's coming, for St Paul, gathered up all the past, gave it shape and substance, explained it, since all things pointed to or prepared for him. He was the heir of all things. In this title we have a glimpse of the Augustinian vision that history was summed up in Christ,¹ that all the golden threads in pagan life and worship led ultimately to *heredem universorum Christum*. Thus there are two lines of thought: Christ heir to the Jewish tradition, and Christ heir to the pagan tradition.

Multifarium, et multis modis olim Deus loquens patribus in prophetis: novissime diebus istis locutus est nobis in Filio; quem constituit heredem universorum (Heb. 1, 1-2).

¹ Cf. 'The Bread of Life' (*Life of the Spirit*, June, 1947, p. 403), where a passage is quoted from St Augustine.