

CHAPTER EIGHT

JOHN 8:1-11

CHRIST CONFOUNDS THOSE WHO WERE LYING IN WAIT FOR HIM

1. *But Jesus went*, etc. After describing the refutation of those who were asserting their power, the Evangelist now turns to Christ's *confounding of those who were lying in wait out of malice*. Since they were unable to murder him, they sought to find an opportunity to catch him in his speech. And so they posed a question to trap the Lord. But on the contrary, they themselves were trapped and were confounded. And the text depicts their confounding in this order. First, it mentions *Christ's teaching*. Second, *the malicious questioning* of the Pharisees. Third, Christ's wise response. Fourth, *the confusion of the Pharisees*. Fifth, *the freeing of the woman*.

2. (Verse 1). So the first item to be mentioned is Christ's teaching that was of loving care, public, and truthful. Of loving care, for the text says: "But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives." For in Bethany he received hospitality at the home of Mary and Martha. Luke 21:37 reads: "In the daytime he was teaching in the temple, but as for the nights he would go out and spend them on the mountain called Olivet."¹

¹ Presupposed in Bonaventure's exposition is John 11:1-12:11, esp. 11:5: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister Mary, and Lazarus."

3. (Verse 2). *And at daybreak he again came to the temple.* Loving care is noted in that he went "at daybreak." Wisdom 6:14 states: "She anticipates those² who desire her by showing herself to them³ first."⁴ And Proverbs 8:17 states: "Those who will watch⁵ for me early in the morning will find me."⁶ – What he did was also public. Thus the text says: *And all the people came to him.* Luke 21:38 reads: "All the people came early in the morning to the temple to hear him."⁷ – What he did was also truthful. For the text continues: *And sitting down, he began to teach them.* "Sitting," because it was characteristic of teachers to sit. Matthew 23:2 has: "The scribes and the Pharisees have sat on the chair of Moses." "They sat," that is, to teach, as Christ is doing here.

4. (Verse 3). *They brought to him, etc.*⁸ The second point surfaces here, namely, the malicious question. The question concerned a woman who had been caught in adultery: whether she should be stoned according to the command of the law. So the text continues: *The scribes and the Pharisees brought him a woman caught in adultery.* The text mentions the scribes and the Pharisees, since they were very shrewd and very envious. The scribes envied the Lord's wisdom whereas the Pharisees envied his goodness. Luke 11:53 reads: "The Pharisees and the lawyers began to press him hard," etc. *And they placed*

² The Vulgate does not read *eos* ("them").

³ The Vulgate reads *illis* ("to them") whereas Bonaventure has *eis* ("to them").

⁴ Wis 6:14 speaks of wisdom.

⁵ The Vulgate reads *vigilant* ("watch") while Bonaventure has *vigilaverint* ("will watch").

⁶ Prov 8:17 begins with a reference to love: "I love those who love me and who...."

⁷ Hugh of St. Cher, p. 336s also cites Luke 21:38.

⁸ On p. 354 n. 3 QuarEd rightly notice that the Vulgate reads *autem* ("Now") while Bonaventure has *ei* ("to him").

her right in the middle, because they wanted to question him about her.

5. (Verse 4). *And they said to him: Teacher.* They are speaking out of adulation and deceit, trying to conceal their motives. Chrysostom observes: "They call him teacher, whose disciples they don't want to be."⁹ They said something similar in Matthew 22:16: "Teacher, we know that you are truthful and teach the way of God in truth." *This woman has just now been caught in adultery*, either because of the factual evidence or because of witnesses.

6. (Verse 5). *Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such a person.* Deuteronomy 22:22 reads: "If a man sleeps with the wife of his neighbor, both shall die,"¹⁰ that is, the adulterer and the adulteress. *What, therefore, do you say?* They were asking this, not as a true question, but as a means of deception. And the Evangelist says this very thing:

7. (Verse 6). *Now they were saying this to test him, so that they could accuse him.* Thus, the Lord answered those questioning him in a similar way in Matthew 22:18: "Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?" *So that they could accuse him*, as in the passion. Matthew 27:12 reads: "And when he was accused by the elders and the leaders, he made no response."¹¹

⁹ See Homily 42 (*Opus Imperfectum*) in PG 56:867: "They call him teacher and truthful: Teacher, as one honored and praised, who opened the secret of his heart to them in a straightforward way, trying to make them his disciples. For this is the primary power of hypocrites: fake praise. For they praise those whom they want to destroy."

¹⁰ Hugh of St. Cher, p. 336v, k also cites Deut 22:22.

¹¹ The Vulgate reads *principibus sacerdotum et senioribus* ("the chief priests and elders").

*But Jesus, bending himself.*¹² The third point occurs here, that is, the wise response of Christ. His response is wise, since it is offered with due moderation. For he was duly moderate by not hastening to make a judgment. So the text continues: *Jesus, bending himself, began to write with his finger on the ground*, that is, waiting to see whether they might back off from their painful question. *He began to write with his finger*, in order to suggest that he had written the Law with his finger, as in Deuteronomy 9:10 and Exodus 31:18.¹³ – He was also duly moderate in pronouncing judgment, since he did not swerve away from the rigor of the Law that she should be put to death and he did not go against the Law and thereby give them an occasion to accuse him. So the text continues:

8. (Verse 7). *But when they continued to ask him*, and would not desist from their foolishness, *he raised himself and said to them: Let the person among you who is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her*. He had bent down out of mercy. Now *he raised himself*, out of justice. *And he said to them*, in pronouncing judgment. *Who is without sin*, etc., to inflict the punishment? By his duly moderate response he confounded them as hypocrites, according to what Matthew 7:3-5 states: "Why do you see the speck in your brother's eye, and yet do not consider the beam in your own eye? ... First cast out the beam from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to cast the speck from your brother's eye."¹⁴ – His conduct was also duly

¹² On p. 354 n. 8 QuarEd correctly indicate that the Vulgate reads *inclinans se deorsum* ("bending himself down").

¹³ Deut 9:10 reads: "And the Lord gave me (Moses) two tables of stone written with the finger of God." Ex 31:18 says: "And the Lord ... gave to Moses two stone tables of testimony, written with the finger of God."

¹⁴ Interestingly, Bonaventure does not explicitly cite the words "You hypocrite," that begin Matt 7:5.

moderate after he had pronounced his sentence as the text adds:

9. (Verse 8). *And again stooping down, he began to write on the ground*, so that he might give those who had been confounded a chance to leave without shame. For Bede comments: "In the presence of his tempters he wanted to stoop down and write on the ground, so that, by turning his face to another matter, he might give them freedom to depart. His response had withered them, and now he provides them the opportunity to steal away quickly rather than ask any more questions."¹⁵ Jeremiah 17:13 reads: "All those who forsake you will be confounded. Those who depart from you will be written on the ground." Jeremiah 22:29-30 states: "O ground, ground, hear the word of the Lord ... Write this man sterile."¹⁶

10. (Verse 9). *But when they had heard this*, etc.¹⁷ This verse introduces the fourth point, that is, the confounding of the Pharisees which is obvious because of their departure. So the text says: *But when they had heard this*, namely, his wise and just answer, *they went away one by one, beginning with the oldest*. Those who had come as a group were dispersed and went away with the eldest the first to depart, because they had been the first in sin and now the first in flight. Daniel 13:5 says: "Iniquity came ... from the eldest judges who seemed to rule the people." And all left, because all had been confounded. Thus the text continues: *And Jesus remained alone with the woman*

¹⁵ See Bede's commentary on John 8:8 in PL 92:756B.

¹⁶ I have translated the occurrences of *terra* in Jer 17:13 and 22:29 by "ground" rather than by "earth," so that Bonaventure's reason for citing them is more evident. Hugh of St. Cher, p. 336v, q also cites Jer 17:13 and 22:29-30.

¹⁷ On p. 354 n. 13 QuarEd accurately mention that the Vulgate does not read *haec* ("this").

standing in the middle. He remained alone who required a place of solitude. Hosea 2:14 reads: "I will lead her into a place of solitude and there I will speak to her heart." Another interpretation: He alone had been offended. Psalm 50:6 says: "Against you alone have I sinned, and I have committed evil before you." Augustine observes: "Two remained: misery and mercy."¹⁸ And since mercy had regard for misery, the text adds:

11. (Verse 10). *And Jesus, raising himself.* Here the fifth point occurs, that is, the merciful liberation of the accused woman. And since mercy is a friend of justice and not its enemy, the Lord asks her about the accusation and condemnation lodged against her. So *he says*:¹⁹ *Woman, where are they who accused you?*²⁰ *Has no one condemned you?* He asks about two matters. And since the answer to his first question is evident in the withdrawal of her accusers, the woman responds to his question about her condemnation.

12. (Verse 11). *She said: No one, Lord,* supply: *Has condemned me.* It is not the prerogative of human beings to condemn. Matthew 7:1 states: "Do not condemn," etc. And behold, I am left with you. And there follows the merciful liberation of the woman. For the text says: *Then Jesus said: Neither will I condemn you.* Behold, mercy. Romans 8:33-34 states: "It is God who justifies. Who will condemn?" *Go and sin no more.*²¹ Behold, justice, that

¹⁸ See Tractate 33 n. 5 in CCSL xxxvi, p. 309: "Two were left behind: the miserable woman and mercy." Hugh of St. Cher, p. 337l quotes Augustine exactly.

¹⁹ On p. 355 n. 4 QuarEd correctly indicate that the Vulgate reads *Dixit ei* ("He said to her") while Bonaventure has *dicit* ("he says").

²⁰ The Vulgate does not read *qui te accusabant* ("who accused you").

²¹ On p. 355 n. 6 QuarEd rightly notice that the Vulgate reads *iam* ("from now on").

absolves from sin in such a way that it does not give anyone the freedom to return to sin. Sirach 5:7 reads: "Mercy and wrath quickly come from him, and his wrath looks upon sinners." Thus Augustine comments: "Let those who love gentleness in the Lord be attentive and also fear the truth. For 'The Lord is sweet and just.'²² Do you love what is sweet? Fear what is just. As a gentle person he says: 'I have kept silent,' but as a just one" he says along with Isaiah 42:14: "I speak like a woman in labor."²³ So he adds: "Sin no more."

QUESTIONS

13. Question 1. This passage raises a doubt. Since this question would easily be determined by the Law and those who are tempting the Lord should ask about doubtful matters, why did the deceitful Pharisees propose such a question to the Lord? – Some respond that this passage is a total human fabrication. For they have said that it was inserted into the Gospel of John just as the story of Susannah was inserted into Daniel.²⁴ To support their contention they refer to Chrysostom who doesn't mention this story.²⁵ For he skips over it and comments

²² See Ps 24:8.

²³ See Tractate 33 n. 7 in CCSL xxxvi, p. 309. Bonaventure's citation is virtually verbatim, until the end where he abbreviates Augustine's quotation of Isa 42:14.

²⁴ See Dan 13. See Book II, c. 33 of Jerome's *Apologia adversus Libros Rufini* in PL 23:476A: "The story against Susannah ... is not found in the Hebrew text."

²⁵ See Homily 52 n. 2 in PG 59:289 where Chrysostom concludes his commentary on John 7:52 and moves directly into an exposition of John 8:12: "I am the light of the world." Hugh of St. Cher, p. 336v, a makes the same point. Some, however, think that Chrysostom knew of this story from what he says in Homily 60 n. 5 in PG 59:334: The Lord "accepted and cured another prostitute that the Jews had accused."

straightaway on John 8:12: "Again Jesus spoke," etc. – But Augustine²⁶ and our commentators give an exegesis of it in the course of their expositions. – But I don't know the reason why Chrysostom made no comment about this story. Some say that this story is not found in the ancient Greek books, since John added it once his Gospel was completed.²⁷ – Therefore, it has to be said that the Pharisees were envious of the Lord in that he was being praised for his gentleness and his justice at the same time, in accordance with Psalm 44:5: "On account of truth and gentleness and justice." Therefore, they propose the question in which he would have to resort to the rigors of justice against gentleness, so that he would be considered cruel or as one who contradicted the justice of the Law. And they concocted their position as insoluble, so that, whatever part Christ took, they would obtain their objective. But the Lord wisely responds to the person, not to the question.

14. Question 2 concerns what the Lord was writing on the ground when he pronounced his sentence. – 1. For it seemed that this was a puerile action, because it was not something permanent and no one could read it. – 2. Likewise, why did he write with his finger? – 3. Furthermore, what did he write? – I respond that the moral reason why he wrote on the ground both before and after his sentence was in order to teach us, as Bede says, that "before we correct a neighbor who is sinning and after we have performed the ... ministry of punishment, let us humbly examine ourselves, lest perhaps we have fallen into the snare of the same sins that we are rebuking

²⁶ See Tractate 33 n. 4-8.

²⁷ For a discussion of this matter with translations of relevant ancient texts, see Brown, pp. 335-36.

or other ... sins."²⁸ – Another reason is to show that a sentence has to be pronounced with maturity, and first written down and with words that are formed within the confines of the law.²⁹ – The third reason is to show that a person should condemn unwillingly and that a person should unwillingly and with sorrow render the sentence of punishment.³⁰ – The fourth reason is that he might distance himself from an evil situation. And this point pertains especially to judges.

3. As to what he wrote, Augustine responds that he wrote what he gave as his sentence.³¹ But Ambrose says that he wrote: "O ground, ground, ... write that the men have been disowned,"³² and thus applied Jeremiah 22:29-30. The Glossa Interlinearis says that he was writing "their sins."³³ Others maintain that he was writing letters through which individuals could make out their own

²⁸ See his commentary on John 8:9 in PL 92:736B.

²⁹ See the Glossa Ordinaria on John 8:6 in PL 114:389A: "Now he teaches that before judgment is rendered, we must bend, that is, condescend in making our judgment and do so with discretion."

³⁰ See Bede's commentary on John 8:6 in PL 92:735D: Christ did not immediately pronounce his judgment, but only "after they pressured him with their question."

³¹ The closest parallel is not found in Augustine, but in Hugh of St. Cher, p. 337a: "... some say, and I believe, with Augustine, that he was writing what he was about to give as his answer: the one among you who has no sin."

³² See Epistola XXV, n. 4 in PL 16:1085A: "... the Lord Jesus, bending his head, began to write on the ground. What was he writing except that prophetic word: 'O earth, earth, write that the men have been disowned....' Hugh of St. Cher, p. 337a writes: 'Ambrose in a certain letter ... seems to want him to have written: O ground, ground, absorb these men who have been disowned, that is, they are fittingly to be judged. The text is taken from Jer 22:29-30.'"

³³ See Book II, n. 17 of Jerome, *Dialogus contra Pelagianos* in PL 23:579A: "But Jesus, bending down, was writing on the ground with his finger the sins of those who were accusing her and the sins of all mortals, according to what is written in the prophet: 'Now those who depart from you will be written on the ground' (Jer 17:13)."

sins.³⁴ – 2. Relative to the question of why he wrote with his finger, I believe that there is a literal reason, because he didn't have another means of writing. There is also a moral and an allegorical reason. The moral reason is that the finger means discernment, and he wanted everyone to examine himself carefully.³⁵ The allegorical reason is that he might signify that he was the one who had written the Law with his finger. See Exodus 31:18.³⁶

15. Question 3 deals with the Lord's response in John 8:7: "Let the person among you who is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her." – From this response it seems that no one could accuse anyone, because "no one is clean from defilement,"³⁷ and no one is sinless. And if this is the case, then there will be unpunished crimes. – If you say that the Lord meant mortal sin, then it is objected that the commandment is to correct and accuse a brother.³⁸ Therefore, if no one sins by doing what he was bound to do, and further, if a sinner is bound to accuse, for he is not freed from this obligation because of his sin, then it

³⁴ Hugh of St. Cher, p. 337a comments: "The Glossa says that he was writing their sins. Some say that he was writing a certain figure, which, when they saw it, reminded them of all their sins."

³⁵ See Bede's commentary on John 8:6 in PL 92:735C: The finger which is flexible for creating things also expresses the subtlety of discernment. See also PL 92:736C: "The judge of another person's crime is commanded to point the finger of discernment at his own heart, lest he, perhaps, may be found guilty of the same crime."

³⁶ See Ambrose, Epistola XXVI, n. 14 in PL 16:1089B: "Now he was writing on the ground with his finger, by which he had written the Law (Ex xxxi, 18). Sinners are written on the earth (Jer xvii, 13), while the just in heaven...." See also Augustine, Tractate 33, n. 5 in FC 88, p. 55: "What else did he signify to you when he wrote on the ground with his finger? For the Law was written by the finger of God...."

³⁷ See Job 14:4 in the LXX.

³⁸ See Matt 18:15-18.

follows that he does not sin when he accuses someone.³⁹ – If you say, that he does not sin by doing this, but by not doing it worthily, it is objected that this is not a privileged work.⁴⁰ – I answer that it has to be maintained that a sinner in mortal sin, who accuses another person, is either a notorious sinner who has committed the same kind of sin and then gives scandal because of what he is and sins in a twofold manner, that is, by giving scandal and acting contemptuously. Now the hidden sinner, whether he has committed the same sin or a different sin, if he knows that he has sinned and considers a brother's sin and judges the brother and neglects himself, he sins by acting contemptuously, not by accusing his brother, but because, although he should have examined himself and cleansed himself of sin, he was negligent and acted contemptuously. So this is how the Lord's response is to be understood. So the answer to this question is obvious.⁴¹

16. Question 4 revolves about the absolution of the woman's sin. – 1. It seems that the Lord acted directly against the Law, since whom the Law condemned, he himself absolved. And it was still the time of the Law and its observance. – 2. Likewise, it seems that he acted unjustly, for he did not impose a punishment and seemed to have given a license to sin.⁴² – I answer that the Lord did not act against the Law, since he was above the Law

³⁹ Some light is thrown on this discussion by Augustine, Epistola 82 n. 7 in CSEL xxxiii, p. 357 and FC 12, p. 395: "Surely, when anyone does what he ought to do, he acts uprightly, and therefore that man accuses him falsely who says that he has not rightly done what he knew he ought to do."

⁴⁰ See Book II, d. 40 a. 2. q 1 of Bonaventure's *Sentence Commentary*. An example of a privileged work or deed is martyrdom.

⁴¹ See Book IV, d. 19 dub. 4 of Bonaventure's *Sentence Commentary*.

⁴² See Augustine, Tractate 33, n. 6 in FC 88, p. 57: "What does it mean, O Lord? Do you, therefore, countenance sins?" Hugh of St. Cher,

and could dispense from a precept of the Law. Further, he did not act against the Law, because the accusers did not persist in their accusations, and the woman remained alone without any accuser, and the Law did not condemn such a person. Thus, he first repulsed his adversaries with the tongue of justice, and afterwards, when she was left by herself, he looked at her with the eyes of mercy.⁴³ Even if his adversaries had persisted, he would not have condemned her, for as Augustine observes: "Far from it that he, who came to save, would condemn."⁴⁴ – 2. With regard to the second issue it has to be said that he was the Lord, and therefore could completely condone. Nevertheless, in condoning, he did not countenance sins, since he forbade her to sin anymore. And he did this, as Augustine says: "God does not condemn the person, but sin."⁴⁵

JOHN 8:12-59

THE DIGNITY AND NOBILITY OF THE LORD'S TEACHING

17. *Again, therefore, Jesus said to them*⁴⁶ *I am the light of the world.* Now that the perversity of the Jews has been confounded, the Lord manifests the dignity and nobility

p. 337v,f raises the same issue that Bonaventure does and phrases it in the words of Augustine just quoted in this note.

⁴³ See Augustine, Tractate 33, n. 6 in FC 88, p. 56: "But he, who had repulsed his adversaries with the tongue of justice, raising the eyes of gentleness to her...." Hugh of St. Cher, p. 337l writes, without attribution to Augustine: "But he, who had expelled his adversaries with the tongue of justice, looked at her with the eyes of his gentleness."

⁴⁴ See Tractate 33, n. 5 in CCSL xxxvi, p. 308 and FC 88, p. 55: "But far be it from him to say, 'Let her be stoned!' For he came not to destroy what he had found but to seek out what had been lost."

⁴⁵ See Tractate 33, n. 6 in CCSL xxxvi, p. 309 and FC 88, p. 57: "Therefore, the Lord also condemned, but the sin, not the person."

⁴⁶ On p. 357 n. 7 QuarEd rightly notice that the Vulgate has *dicens* ("saying"). But see John 8:12 n. 18 below where Bonaventure does read *dicens* ("saying").

of his teaching in this second part. Now the nobility of his teaching consists in this that it frees from *the blindness of error, the servitude of sin, the condemnation of death*. So it is first shown how it liberates from the blindness of error and infidelity. Second, how it liberates from the servitude of sin where verse 21 states: "So Jesus again said to them," etc. Third, how it liberates from the condemnation of death where verse 51 reads: "Amen, amen I say to you: If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death."⁴⁷

JOHN 8:12-20

CHRIST'S TEACHING LIBERATES FROM THE DARKNESS OF ERROR

So first he commends his teaching because it liberates from *the darkness of error*, and he does this in the following manner. First, *the commendation of his teaching* is suggested. Second, *the approbation of the commendation* on account of the rebuke of the Jews. Third, *the manifestation of Jewish ignorance*. Fourth, *Christ's evasion from unbelief*.

18. (Verse 12). So first the commendation of the teaching is suggested by this: that the Lord says that those who accompany him and abide by his teaching are freed from darkness. For this reason the text says: *Again, therefore, Jesus said to them*, since after having confounded their perversity, he resumes speaking, so that he might show the nobility of his teaching.

⁴⁷ On p. 357 n. 8 QuarEd accurately indicate that the Vulgate reads *videbit* ("will see") whilst Bonaventure has *gustabit* ("will taste"). John 8:52 reads: "And you say: if anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death."