

The Testimony of the Devil: The Temptation and Mission of Jesus

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“For in that wherein he himself hath suffered and been tempted he is able to succor them also that are tempted.”

Hebrews 2:18

The temptation of Christ in the desert presents us with a seemingly insurmountable problem. On the one hand, we must ask how the “Man Who is God” can be “tempted”, lacking as He does that tendency towards sin known as concupiscence. Further, if Christ is united to the Father in the Beatific Vision, in what sense can there be that lack of knowledge that is required for faith to operate? If Jesus lacks both concupiscence and that darkness of knowledge required for faith, in what sense can we say he has been “tempted” or “tested”? Can this “tempting” exist anywhere save at the level of mere annoyance? On the other hand, if Jesus is not really tempted, how can he be the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2)? Man, from the very beginning has been determined by temptation and the need for faith. Adam in the garden must make a decision either for obedience (faith) or for knowledge, and human history hangs on that decision, and the “divine history” as well, since the divinity will partake of the human condition. But if we diminish the reality of the temptation, do we not also diminish the connection with Adam and his race? If there is no real temptation, in what sense can we still call Jesus “our brother, like us in all things but sin”? Thus we seem to be faced with a choice of denying either the divinity or the humanity of Christ.

If one is going to talk of temptation, one must wonder if there is anything that

can appeal to one who is Son of God. In this regard, Roch Kereszty has said:

In this typical Jewish milieu the devil’s offers could have held a real appeal for him. Not because they were suggesting something evil, but because they promised something that he may have wished for his people with all his heart: providing food for the hungry, liberating his people from Roman oppression, establishing an earthly kingdom of God over the whole world, and providing irrefutable “heavenly signs” to convince the people of the truth of his message.¹

In other words, the temptations deal with possible ways Jesus could accomplish his mission. This approach forces us to ask whether Jesus could have erred in his mission, whether he could have fulfilled it in a way that was not “according to the Scriptures,” or more importantly, a way not according to the will of the Father as embodied in the Scriptures. If Jesus must make a “decision” about his mission, can we then consider that his mission is fixed and “preordained”, or must we allow, in theory at least, the possibility of other outcomes; for example, could the cup have passed him by? Thus even at the level of mission, the Temptation of Christ presents us with some

¹ Roch A. Kereszty, O. Cist., *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology* (New York: Alba House, 1995) 79.

difficult conundrums. In order to resolve these we shall need to examine the temptation in the light of its close parallels in Deuteronomy, then to look at it with respect to the mission of Jesus, and even in light of the “faith” of Jesus. Finally, we will have to consider that the very fact of the temptation constitutes a kind of testimony which, although demonic², is nevertheless meaningful.

The Baptism of Jesus

All three synoptic gospels mention the temptation; it is omitted only in John, probably as being inconsistent with the high Christology of that gospel³. In each case it is closely connected with the Baptism of Jesus, where Jesus is commissioned as Messiah and Servant.⁴ The Father declares Jesus to be his Son, the beloved, with whom he is well pleased (Mt 3:17; Mk 1:11; Luke 3:22). In Mark and Luke, the words are addressed to Jesus (“You are my Son...”) while in Matthew they are addressed to the crowd (“This is my Son...”). The first part of the affirmation recalls the words of Psalm 2, “He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession’ (vv. 7-8).⁵ The second half is related to the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 42:1, “Here is my servant,

whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.” This is the same servant, according to a later passage (Is 53) who will be the sacrifice for the many, “Upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed” (v. 5). Thus the affirmation by the Father and the Spirit unite the two major themes of Old Testament prophecy, the messianic ruler and the suffering servant.

With such testimony, which involves the entire Trinity, Jesus receives confirmation of his identity, of which he was always aware, at least to some degree, for “at the baptism his peculiar sense of sonship, hinted at in his reply to his mother when he was found as a boy in the temple, was now placed in the category of certainty.”⁶ However, this “certainty” is, as yet, untested; certainty can never be conferred merely by hearing, it also requires a response.

Decision in the Desert

After the baptism Jesus is either “led” into the wilderness or, in the gospel of Mark, “thrown out”, a verb Mark usually reserves for exorcisms (1:34, 39: 3:15, 22, 23; 6:13; 7:26; 9:18, 28, 38) or acts of physical violence (9:47; 11:15; 12:8).⁷ In either case, Jesus responds to the prompting of the Spirit with the express purpose of being tempted by the devil (Mt 4:1; Luke 4:2). We cannot know why the Spirit “drives out” the Son, but I think we are permitted to say that the confirmation by the Trinity requires an affirmation by the Jesus, and affirmation not merely at the level of intellectual assent, but one tested under the

² Of course the direct testimony is from the evangelists who presumably received it from Christ. We can assume that the testimony of this witness is reliable and that the devil spoke and acted as reported.

³ Although John does record another temptation of Jesus (12:27-28).

⁴ G. H. P. Thompson, “Called—Proved—Obedient: A Study in the Baptism and Temptation Narratives of Mathew and Luke,” *Journal of Theological Studies* April 1960: 2

⁵ Archibald B. Taylor, Jr., “Decision in the Desert,” *Interpretation* (1960): 301

⁶ Taylor 302.

⁷ Virgil Howard and David B. Peabody, “Mark,” *The International Bible Commentary*, ed. William R. Farmer (Collegeville, Minnesota): 1338

most extreme conditions and involving three levels: material want and human needs, identity, and mission. We might say that the devil “cooperates” with the Spirit, who allows him to attack Jesus at all three of these levels.

The temptation is preceded by a forty day fast which recalls the fasts of Moses (Ex 34:28; Deut 9:9, 18) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8), the two great prophets who established and reaffirmed the covenant of Israel with God.⁸ These forty days are also analogous to the forty years of wandering in the Sinai. The words of Matthew and Luke are similar to the words of Deuteronomy 8:2, which gives a “theological interpretation of the wilderness wanderings: they had the purpose of testing and proving Israel to see whether the people of God would be loyal to their Redeemer.”⁹

In the first temptation, the “famished” Jesus is invited to satisfy his material needs in a miraculous fashion, “if” he is the Son of God.¹⁰ Thus Satan’s attack works both at the level of identity and human want. Jesus replies by quoting Deut. 8:3, (“Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord”). This passage recalls the testing of Israel, a test they did not pass, preferring the slavery of Egypt, with its fleshpots, to a liberty which depends on trust in God (Ex 16). Jesus’ answer expresses his complete trust in God; he thereby passes the first test that the followers of Moses failed; “in

⁸ Adrian Leske, “Matthew,” *The International Bible Commentary*: 1267

⁹ Thompson 2.

¹⁰ Archibald Taylor would have the preferred translation as “*Since* you are the son of God...” (303) thereby removing the question of divinity and focusing solely on the humanity. However it seems clear that all the attacks are on the *person* of Jesus and involve both the divinity and humanity.

contrast to Israel, he does not lose his faith under conditions of privation.”¹¹

This test also looks forward to the mission of Jesus; he must decide the kind of Messiah he will be. The man who will later feed the 5,000 refuses to use the same ability to feed himself; he will not become a “messiah of the miracles,” constantly required to perform wonders to convince skeptical followers.

The second test (in Luke, it is the third in Matthew) promises all the Earthly power and glory to Jesus, if only he will align himself with Satan. This must be regarded as a diabolically clever temptation, since it promises instant fulfillment of a Davidic messiah without the inconveniences of the suffering servant. Once again, Jesus’ response, reminiscent of Deut. 6:13, places the temptation within the Sinai experience; the people are warned that if they turn to other gods, “the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you and he would destroy you from the face of the earth” (v. 15). Thus Jesus rejects the easy path, the path that excludes death and suffering and puts his trust and worship in God alone. Had he decided otherwise, he would have become the world’s messiah, but not the Messiah the Father wanted him to be.¹²

Jesus’ response is also reminiscent of Deut. 10:20-22; here the context is that trust in Lord also empowers the nation: “your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the Lord your God has made them as numerous as the stars of heaven” (v. 22) and “what he did to the Egyptian army, to their horses and chariots, how he made the water of the Red Sea flow over them as they pursued you, so that the

¹¹ Thompson 3.

¹² Taylor 304.

Lord has destroyed them to this day” (11:4). Thus we have a response which affirms both the necessity of worshiping only God and the power that comes from God to those who keep faith with him.

Given that in the second temptation Jesus had rejected the easy path, the third temptation (the second in Matthew) “strikes at the tenderest place in Jesus’ heart, where he trusts in God’s care and protection from all suffering and danger.”¹³ The Devil invites Jesus to toss himself from the pinnacle of the Temple and let God protect him “lest he dash his foot against a stone.” Jesus’ response is once again from Deuteronomy, 6:16, which recalls the testing of God at Massah. This is a culmination of the first two tests: it would grant Jesus absolute proof of his calling and would allow Jesus to be a wonder-working Messiah, rather than a suffering servant. He responds, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test,” for the “testing” of God is the opposite of faith (see Numbers 14:22). Thus Jesus rejects any way save the way of faith and obedience, even to the point of suffering and death; this is in sharp contrast to the desert experience of the Hebrews, whose lack of faith, despite the signs and wonders they had seen, caused the angry Lord to deny them entry into the promised land.

In replying to the devil from Deuteronomy, Jesus is clearly contrasted with the unfaithful Hebrews. In fact, in the Matthean context, his life is a clear recapitulation of the history of Israel

His return from Egypt corresponds to Israel’s leaving Egypt. His baptism corresponds to Israel’s crossing the Red Sea. His forty days fast corresponds to the wandering of Israel in the desert for forty

years. And so, his three temptations also correspond to the temptations of Israel in the desert and to those of her entire history.¹⁴

In addition to the comparison with the trials of Israel, the Temptation is also compared to the temptation of Adam, especially in Luke’s account. Luke interrupts the baptism-temptation sequence to insert the genealogy of Jesus, which Luke takes all the way back to Adam, rather than to just Abraham, as in Matthew. This is an odd place to put the descent of Jesus, but makes sense if we consider Luke as contrasting the obedience of Jesus with the disobedience of Adam, and all the other sons of Adam. The arrangement of the material implies what will be made explicit in Paul, “For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19)¹⁵

At this point, we must ask if the above comparison can be true in anything other than a docetic sense? Might not an Israelite rise up in indignation and ask, “True, we were in a place without food or water, and even Moses had abandoned us. Hungry, we demanded food; thirsty, we demanded water; abandoned, we looked for a new god. But if we lacked trust in the Lord, as we did, did your Christ do any better? Did he have trust, or did he simply know all things, past, present and future? We knew not where we were nor where we were going, but had we known all things, had we been without even the possibility of sin, then neither would we have sinned!” And might not Adam himself join the complaint, “If I had had all knowledge, I would hardly have bothered with the tree of

¹³ Samuel Oyin Abogunrin, “Luke,” *The International Bible Commentary*: 1380

¹⁴ Kereszty 76.

¹⁵ Thompson 7.

Knowledge!” The question of our indignant Israelite and our indignant Adam must be given full answer. For if they are right, then Christianity must collapse into docetism. But is there an answer that does not compromise the full divinity of Christ, and hence leave him an Arian demigod?

The Mission of Jesus

We therefore come to the core of the conundrum we face a very delicate task. We are forced whether there is in Jesus any possibility other than what actually happened. As Von Balthasar states the problem:

Is the man Jesus, in his temporal dimension, only the manifestation of a divine decision that is prior to his entire existence (and is to that extent “alien”)? That is, can he only “subsequently” ratify what has already been decided concerning him and the world? Or can his human freedom—to which Orthodox dogmatics has so resolutely held fast ever since the Monothelite controversy—exercise its rightful privilege of being able to make his own decisions?¹⁶

Answering this question (and that of our indignant Israelite) is difficult in the light of a Christology that

attributes to Jesus every imaginable perfection of knowledge, right from his conception and birth; it wants to say that he, the Head of the Mystical Body, and indeed of all mankind, had from the outset the explicit knowledge of all his “members”.¹⁷

Yet Jesus himself makes no such claim. On the contrary, there is an

¹⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama III: Dramatis Personae: the Person in Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992) 197.

¹⁷ Von Balthasar 178.

“economic ignorance”; he knows not the day or the hour (Mk 13:32), and he grows in wisdom and grace (Luke 2:40, 52). However one explains this ignorance, it is a reality that belongs to his *kenosis*, which renounces the form of God and all the privileges associated with it.¹⁸

What we can say of Jesus is that his whole life is dedicated to his mission. He is the “the one who is sent” as the one who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28).”¹⁹ The “sending” of the Son by the Father and the coming forth of the Son into his mission is particularly strong in the Gospel of John, as von Balthasar notes. The Father:

...lays down the latter’s purpose right from the start, namely, the salvation of the world (Jn 3:17; 6:39). Thus Jesus’ knowledge of himself coincides with his knowledge of his being sent (5:36; 6:29, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:8, 21, 23, 25). He does not do the Father’s will incidentally but lives from it (4:34); he always seeks it (5:30), because apart from it he can do nothing (5:19). He defines his “having come” in terms of doing the will of him who sent him (6:38), performing his works (9:4) and speaking his words (3:34; 12:49). So much so that the One who sends is seen to be present in the One who is sent (12:45), witnessing to himself in him (5:37; 8:18); he dwells with him (8:16, 29) and so shows himself to be true and truthful (7:28; 8:26).²⁰

¹⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Fides Christi,” in *Explorations in Theology II: Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991) 53.

¹⁹ Other references to the “sending” and the “coming” of the Son include: Jn 1:9; 3:17, 19; 5:43; 10:10; 13:16, 20; 16:28; Mt 9:13; 9:37; 10:34; 15:24; 20:28; 21:37 Mk 1:38; Lk 4:43, 10:16; 19:10; 20:13

²⁰ Von Balthasar *Theo-Drama* 153.

St. Thomas will explain Jesus knowledge of his mission and of the Father as a special case of the Beatific Vision in which Christ, simultaneously *viator et comprehensor*, both pilgrim and “knower”, possesses all knowledge by infusion. However, as Fr. Kereszty notes, “It seems, however, more consistent with the scriptural data if, instead of explaining Jesus’ unique knowledge of God in terms of the beatific vision, we derive it from his human self-awareness.”²¹ This interpretation allows Jesus to fulfill his task within the dimensions of his human existence,²² and within this temporal existence he must “seek the Father’s will,” “live from it,” be “fed by it,” etc. The self-awareness of Jesus must include the awareness of the Father, “since his Self as Son is constituted precisely by being born from the Father,”²³ while allowing us to avoid the problems an “objective” *visio beatifica* would necessarily entail:

This reasoning brings to light the unique character of Jesus’ knowledge of God: he does not simply know or even see God the Son and God the father as quasi objects distinct from himself (as the doctrine of the *visio beatifica* would require) but rather his immediate self-awareness of being the Son of the Father.²⁴

In this way we can form a unity of human and divine natures without doing violence to either, provided, of course, we keep in mind the kenosis. Jesus’ growing self-reflection “depends on the Father’s

constant guiding and inspiring activity.”²⁵ He gives himself over in complete obedience to the Father’s will as it is presented to him by the Holy Spirit.²⁶ This need not imply an alteration in God; rather, it implies that the kenosis is “one of the infinite possibilities available to free, eternal life: namely, that the Son, who has everything from the Father, ‘lays up’ and commits to God’s keeping the ‘Form of God’ he has received from him.”²⁷ Thus, lacking the immediate beatific vision, he determines how to implement his mission.

As man, he must continually measure the partial values that present themselves against the totality of the mission, of his Father’s will; when he does this, the direction he is to take—the hardest course—becomes luminous. He sees the totality of the Father’s will, and hence of his mission, shining forth from this partial value—which may be of no value at all in terms of all that human beings strive for; and such luminous radiance is possible with his total, free availability. It is then that, although he cannot sin, his obedience is meritorious.²⁸

Thus we can now affirm that Jesus does indeed *decide* the means and direction of his mission. It is within the reality of this decision that we may affirm, in a concrete and specific manner, the reality of the Temptation *as* temptation, and not as mere

²¹Fr. Roch Kereszty, O. Cist., *Supplement to Jesus Chris: Fundamentals of Christology* (New York: Alba House, 1997) 34.

²² Von Balthasar *Theo-Drama* 149.

²³ Fr. Kereszty *Supplement* 34.

²⁴ Fr. Kereszty *Supplement* 34.

²⁵ Fr. Kereszty *Supplement* 35.

²⁶ Footnote 55 on page 195 of the *Theo-Drama*: “J. Guillet on the baptism scene: ‘It is not said that Jesus, with his human eyes, saw the Father but only that he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him. What the Spirit brings him is the Father. It is in the Spirit that he meets the Father, that he lives turned toward the Father.’ ‘Baptême et esprit’ in *Lumen vitae* 16 (March 26, 1956), 95-96.”

²⁷ Von Balthasar *Theo-Drama* 228.

²⁸ Von Balthasar *Theo-Drama* 200.

docetic exemplar. However, we are left with yet another problem, for if the “economic ignorance” of Jesus means that he must, in some way, bridge the gap of ignorance. In humans, this gap is bridged by faith. Yet, how can we ascribe “faith” to a divine person? At first glance, the very notion seems absurd.

The Faith of Jesus

Theology, especially since St. Thomas, has denied the possibility that Jesus had faith. They do this despite being aware of the counter arguments:

- (1) that faith is a more noble virtue than moral virtue and thus belonged a fortiori to Christ; (2) “that Christ taught none of the virtues that he himself did not possess...” (3) that “even the saints in heaven must still possess faith, because the glosses on Rom 1:17 say: from the faith of words and hope into the faith of things and sight”²⁹

St. Thomas refutes all of these with the principle that faith has for its object the divine which we do not as yet see, but Christ “has seen God according to his essence from the very first moment of his conception” (*S Th III*, q 7, a 3).³⁰ Insofar as the idea of faith is limited to “knowledge furnished by the one in whom confidence is placed” and “knowledge by hearsay”³¹, this is correct; one cannot at the same time see and believe something; if Christ “sees” God, he cannot at the same time “believe” in him. In this limited view, faith and knowledge are things opposed and faith exists only as a pre-cursor to knowledge, and will be rendered obsolete by knowledge; thus faith, at the highest rating, can only be a provisional expedient,

²⁹ Von Balthasar “Fides Christi” 64.

³⁰ Von Balthasar “Fides Christi” 65.

³¹ Maurice Blondel, “What is Faith?” reprinted in *Communio* (Summer, 1987) 167.

and not one of the “three things that last.”³² Yet, Jesus is proclaimed the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12.2); how can he “pioneer” where he cannot go?

However, such an “objective” view of faith is not the only possibility available and indeed, is not even the biblical view of faith.

...the Biblical idea of faith includes even more so *God's* faithfulness toward his people and assumes that this fidelity is a presupposition and prototype to be imitated... And so we can say a priori that it cannot be otherwise with Jesus then that he has perfectly fulfilled and lived out the disposition on the human side that the God of the Covenant, the Father, has demanded of all men.³³

Thus, we can say that if Jesus takes on man's part in the covenanted relationship with God, then he must live out the purely human faith that covenant demands. But in order for this view to have any relevance, we must find a definition of faith somewhat different from the simple objective view; most especially, we must have a definition of faith that does not require that it be opposed to knowledge. Maurice Blondel lays down the presuppositions of such a definition:

³² In adopting this view, Scholasticism anticipates the key tenant of the Enlightenment and a key premise of the Modern World. The moderns also see faith in terms of relative ignorance. For the scholastic, this ignorance will one day be replaced by the beatific vision; for the man of the Enlightenment, it will be replaced, one supposes, by the long promised “Theory of Everything.” Insofar as the Theory of Everything remains in the future and is believed to convey the solution to every dilemma, it remains an *eschatological* hope; insofar as the beatific vision will convey and organize all knowledge, it is a *scientific* hope. The irony is too delicious to be ignored.

³³ Von Balthasar “Fides Christi” 43.

...That the truth is loved as a being; that it is not treated as a simple object of study which can be disposed of at will; that there is a promise to give oneself to it as to a person; and that its conditions are accepted in advance in order [to] be worthy of knowing it better. Consequently, to say that this truth is penetrated only by letting oneself be penetrated by it, that it gives itself only to one who makes a self-gift, is to retrieve the well-known words of St. Augustine: *There is entrance into truth only by way of love. Ways of acting lead to understanding. When what is somehow or other known is loved, by this very love it comes about that it is more fully and better known.*³⁴

The solution to the problem would appear to arise naturally from these presuppositions, for that kind of truth which is “loved as a being,” to which one “gives oneself,” and whose “conditions are accepted in advance” is a *personal* truth and the kind of faith that this involves is faith given, not to some object like a creedal statement, but to another *person*. And when we recall that Jesus is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” we shall have no difficulty in grasping intuitively this concept of faith. Indeed, if ultimate truth is a *subject* rather than an *object*, faith can be no other than this handing of ourselves over to the other. Faith, then, rather than emerging as a temporal expedient given by a God too stingy to give us “real” knowledge, appears to us as “a healthy disposition, the synthesis of our powers of knowing, of willing, of loving, in relation to beings capable themselves of knowledge and of goodness, and, above all, in relation to God.”³⁵ Finally, this allows us to endorse Newman’s definition of faith which Blondel quotes: “To have faith is to

enter in a practical way into the invisible world, to realize the presence of God, to wait for his visit, to deliver oneself over to him, to abandon oneself into his hands.”³⁶

This concept of faith allows us to solve the dilemma of the Faith in Jesus Christ, for in seeking to discover the Father’s will, Jesus gives himself over to the Father entirely, perfectly, faithfully. This “abandonment” of his fate to the Father constitutes the faith of Jesus, and by this faith he discovers, through the Spirit, the Father’s will for him. Further, and although it is beyond the scope of this paper, this allows us to root the concept of faith within the life of the Trinity and give it an ontological foundation. For there is something analogous to the faith in the Trinitarian *circumincessio* of surrender and eternal Eucharist.

Of course the objection can be raised that Christ, by virtue of his divine nature, possesses the full beatific vision and thus lacks that lack of knowledge that even Newman’s definition of faith requires. However, a Jesus in possession of the full beatific vision runs into serious Christological difficulties. Jesus’ human nature is consubstantial with ours, and in our natural, unglorified state, the beatific vision is not possible for us; nor would it be so for Jesus before the Resurrection and the glorification of his body. For it is only in our glorified bodies that we can see God and live, and this is equally true for the “natural” humanity of Jesus; had Christ possessed the fullness of the vision of God, there would have been no room for his humanity; humanity can see God only through the Risen Christ. The objection can be pressed further by noting that whatever the state of Jesus’ human nature, his divine nature (and

³⁴ Blondel 171.

³⁵ Blondel 173.

³⁶ Blondel 173.

hence his person) remains divine. However, one must note in reply that the kenosis involves a double movement; it is not just the taking on of the form of a slave, but an emptying of divinity. Of course we cannot push this “emptying” to the point that Christ is no longer a divine person; the statement of St. Thomas, noted earlier, remains true. But it is not *necessarily* true that it is a beatific vision of the Father. Jesus’ very identity is identical with God; nonetheless “He was to complete his task... within the dimensions of his human existence,”³⁷ and within that existence he must find the vision of the Father within himself through faith.

Therefore he is “led,” or even “driven out” by the Spirit. The paths of his mission are not laid out before him like a road map, and certainly not as something external to him. He must weigh and consider all the possibilities before him. Nor is this something that happens only in the desert, but is something that is present at every stage of his mission. Luke, in his account, adds a curious detail: the devil, he says, “departed from him until an opportune time” (Lk 4: 13). Therefore after the desert the devil was not finished with Jesus, and the temptations will remain with him. They appear in the form of the crowd that wishes to make him king; Satan’s words find their way into the mouth of Peter tempting him, as always, to take the easy path. Always before him is the possibility of this other path; even at the end he can still call on his heavenly Father for more than 12 legions of angels and thereby create an interesting problem for the Roman General Staff. Thus, the Father is always willing to ratify the Son’s decision and provide the necessary force; even at the last, he has the power to let the cup of suffering pass him by, to take

the easy path demanded of him by the crowd, by the Apostles, and pre-eminently by the devil. And since the devil is always dogging his heels, witnessing his mission while waiting for the “opportune time”, we should now consider the testimony of the devil.

The Testimony of the Devil

Perhaps the strongest argument for the full reality of the temptations is the fact that they take place at all. Of course, one can point out that the devil is a liar and no one can rely on his testimony which is in any case malicious. But one *can* rely on that very maliciousness to know that he will tell the lie that is most useful to him; and one can examine that lie to see what use it might have. Although we cannot precisely say what the devil knows, neither can we say that he knows nothing. It is, after all, not the apostles and not the crowd, but the devil himself who first proclaims the true nature of Jesus as “the Holy One of God” (Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34). Further, we have the testimony of James that “even the demons believe” (Jas 2:19); they know the truth of the matter, even if they have no faith in that truth. We must remember that we are dealing with the “morning star,” Lucifer, the *lux fero*, the one who “bore the light before the throne of God.” It is clear that the devil believes he has some chance, however slim, of influencing the mission of the Christ, the one sent to bind him. This would be futile if there were nothing for Jesus to do but follow a pre-arranged course; if he had no decision to make, there could be no possibility of temptation. Not even the demon’s malicious nature could be satisfied if he could not present something to the savior that at least savored of a possibility; otherwise the “temptation” could not have any reality, except perhaps a certain annoyance value. From the very fact of Satan’s attempt we may infer that Satan believes that Jesus is

³⁷ Von Balthasar *Theo-Drama III* 149.

free to make a decision in this matter, however much the theologians may dispute the case.

There was but one (human) witness to the events in the desert. The apostles could have heard about it only from the lips of Jesus himself. And the synoptics are unanimous in recording that this was a real temptation; there can only be one source for that impression.

men, we walk by faith and not by sight, and a Christ without faith cannot possibly walk the same path we do.

The Letter to the Hebrews

We have said that if no satisfactory answer could be given to our hypothetical Israelite, Christianity must dissolve into its shadow, docetism. We have tried to show that in Jesus we have indeed not just the true God, but the true man as well, and not merely the shadow of a man. The response to our Israelite has already been given by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, who asserts that “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in *every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (4:15). And again, “Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (5:8,9).

Archibald Taylor notes:

We like to remember that Jesus “in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning” (Heb. 4:15), but we often forget that the resources open to Jesus the man were no more than those which are available to us: the abiding presence and power of the Holy Spirit and the comfort and instruction of the Bible.³⁸

These “resources” however are available to men only in one way: faith. As

³⁸ Taylor 309.

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