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**THE TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS AND THE TEMPTER
IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

Moderator

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For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted. (Heb 2:18)

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

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This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The temptations of Jesus and the action of an adversary to God, be it called Satan, the devil, or the tempter, have, in the past, inspired many a research work, as well as movies, novels, pious legends, and stirred up the imagination about mythical beasts and creatures who approach human beings with all kinds of evil intentions. Matthew's gospel partly contains this legendary vocabulary. It is not, though, a tale about good and evil, but a carefully constructed account about Jesus, the Son of God, his suffering during his public life among his fellow people, and the way he has overcome death once for all. Matthew proclaims the early Christian kerygma throughout his Gospel account: Jesus suffered, died and rose from death. And all those who believe in him, through faith, may share in the eternal life he has attained for all. And what is faith? As we will see, faith is obedience to God our Father. Obedience to do what? The answer to these and other questions is found in this long essay. But I am not going to advance anything else in this introduction, apart from saying that Satan, the tempter, has many faces, but none of them is the face of a monstrous beast. Rather, his aspect is rather decent, and so are his proposals.

This essay is primarily a biblical and exegetical research paper. I have used the English *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible, and occasionally the *Greek New Testament*, in the way they have come down to us today. I do not attempt to carry out any formal textual criticism on the texts used, but will nevertheless use some

elements of form, source and redaction criticism. I take for granted that the present final redaction of Matthew's gospel is shaped for his audience best, and therefore I will use it for my analysis, but without questioning its final editing.

In my research I have come across excellent exegetical commentaries on the temptation narrative in Matthew, and I am aware that there is nothing I can add in this essay to what has already been written. Nevertheless, by compiling these materials and further venturing into some applications which can be drawn from the present study, I do hope that some clear insights into the nature of the Son of God and his mission may be gained, even if it is only for my own better understanding.

I will also try to present some practical applications based on the results of this mainly exegetical study. These applications will be a result more of my own reflection since there is not much material available on the pastoral consequences of the exegesis. Nevertheless, I understand that drawing pastoral applications is also part of the aims of literary criticism, since I understand that through the study of the final form of a bible text we can bring it closer to our present pastoral context.

Chapter I

Analysis of Matthew 4:1-11

1. Introduction

I am going to start this essay by analysing the temptation narrative in the Matthean gospel account, which will lead us to other texts in the same gospel, as well as to OT texts which are in clear reference to the former. Even though Matthew has been drawing from other sources, probably Q¹, he has edited the pericope to suit his audience best, namely the Christian community at Antioch². We will see that the author is pursuing at least two different aims in telling this narrative: on the one hand, he is making a Christological statement about the nature of Christ. In the words of A. Kirk, “each temptation is an attempt to have Jesus abandon the role of the Suffering Servant and take another kind of messianic mission”³.

On the other hand, there is a more pastoral purpose to this story. By means of showing his audience the way scripture may be used or rather misused, the author is also sending a warning to the community he is writing to. The testing of the Son of

¹ Cf. J.P. MEIER, *Matthew*, 29.

² On the question of origin of Matthew's gospel, see D. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 8-10, and also R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 609.

³ A. KIRK, *Gospel of Matthew*, 46.

God becomes for him a paradigm of the testing Christians are to go through, and the way Jesus masters his own testing, an example for all of us.

2. Delimitation of the Text

The text I am going to take as a base for this essay is the temptation narrative in the Gospel of Matthew, comprising chapter 4:1-11, which is clearly distinguished from the preceding and following narratives. There can be no room for doubt on the delimitation of this text, since it is a narrative that was inserted by the author between two other independent narratives. It is commonly assumed that it has its origin in the Q material, with its introduction and conclusion taken from Mark⁴.

3. Context of the Text

The passage is directly related to the baptism of Jesus, which it follows. The wilderness in which the narrative takes place is not the “wilderness of Judea” (Matt 3:1) in which John baptized Jesus, it is just “the wilderness” (Matt 4:1), not a geographical place but a symbolical setting, the dwelling place of the tempter. “The desert is the place of exposure to evil, as Israel knew, in an analogous way, from its forty-year sojourn in the desert.”⁵ After the testing has been overcome, Jesus will withdraw from Judea back to Galilee.

⁴ Cf. W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 350-351.

⁵ M. BIELER, “The Mysteries of Jesus’ Public Life”. *Communio* 29, 54.

We can therefore consider the temptation narrative in Matthew as an *excursus* in time and space, an independent account which the author has placed after the baptism account. The purpose of setting this narrative directly after the theophany in Matt 3:17 following the baptism of Jesus will become clearer as we analyse the text: it is a Christological statement about the nature of Jesus, which acts as a counterbalance to that theophany.

Within a wider context, Matthew inserts the temptation narrative at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. That very same ministry will conclude at the crucifixion of Jesus, and we have to view the temptation narrative as setting the frame for the whole of his public ministry, like a major inclusion that comprises all of his public life, from the first testing in the wilderness up to the final testing on the cross. We will see how the temptations run all along that public life of Jesus, and how actually the crucifixion is precisely the hour of the greatest temptation, that is, the ultimate testing of the Son of God. M. Bieler also sees the temptation narrative from this perspective, when he highlights that "Jesus withstood temptation in an all-encompassing way and did not deviate from the path that leads from baptism via Gethsemane to the cross"⁶.

4. Synoptic Parallels to the Text

It is a common understanding that this passage comes from Q, as it is found in Matthew and Luke, but only in a very short version in Mark, who mentions the fact of Jesus being tempted, but does not have the three temptations nor the dialogue

⁶ M. BIELER, "The Mysteries of Jesus' Public Life". *Communio* 29, 55.

with the Tempter. Mark's version of the temptations of Jesus only covers two verses and probably reflects an earlier tradition, further developed by Matthew and Luke.

Both Matthew and Luke had access to Q and would have drawn from this common source⁷ to expand the temptation narrative, but the order in which they present the three temptations is different: the second temptation in Matthew is the third in Luke, and vice-versa. Harrington considers that "the Matthean order of tests – wilderness, Temple, mountain – is generally considered to reflect the order of Q"⁸. Also Gundry⁹ and other scholars favour the idea that Matthew has kept the original order. There is no precise way, however, to establish whether it was Luke or Matthew who changed the order of the tests in order to make them fit their purpose better.

The direct connection with the baptism of Jesus preceding the temptation account is only found in Mark and Matthew, as Luke places the genealogy of Jesus between the baptism and the temptation. Still, all three synoptic authors have placed this narrative after the baptism and before Jesus' start of his public ministry. According to J. C. Fenton, the fact that the Matthean version is well grafted within the narrative structure of his gospel may suggest that "these verses were composed by Matthew himself, to fit in here, and were not part of an earlier document, Q"¹⁰. Again, this is pure speculation, and I will not enter into deeper discussion on the question of the authorship of the temptation narrative.

⁷ Cf. A. KIRK, *Gospel of Matthew*, 46.

⁸ Cf. D. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 69.

⁹ Cf. R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 56.

¹⁰ Cf. J.C. FENTON, *The Gospel of Saint Matthew*, 63.

5. Old Testament Parallels to the Text

The whole of the temptation account echoes different parts of scripture of the OT, both because of the quotations of Deuteronomy which are used, as well as because of the motif of the testing in the wilderness itself. I have found an excellent discussion about the theme of temptation, both of man being tempted by God, as well as of God being tempted by man, in the OT, in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*¹¹. Since the result of such a research can not be given back at length in this essay, I will present only the most relevant references to temptation in the OT in regards to the temptation narrative in Matthew.

5.1 *The Story of the Fall in Gen 3:1-19*

In the OT, it is usually God who tests the faith of his people by means of demands or hardship, such as in the testing of Abraham by demanding the sacrifice of his son Isaac (Gen 22:1-19), so as to see if they remain faithful to him. But in the story of the fall, for the first time it is not God who tempts man, but an adversary of God, in the shape of a serpent. Though it is only later that the serpent was interpreted as being the devil himself, the idea of a third being, opposed to God, is introduced, who tests mankind by presenting them with other options which are apparently good in themselves, but are against God's plan. The serpent does not test man the way God does: God forces man to make an option in view of strong demands or hardship, whereas the serpent presents a tree which is "good for food",

¹¹ See G. FRIEDRICH, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. VI. 23-28.

“a delight to the eyes” and “to be desired to make one wise” (Gen 3:6). Man does give in quickly to such a temptation, because all these things are good in themselves, and apparently do not seem to harm anyone!

Thus, the idea of a sweet temptation is introduced in the Bible from the very beginning, in which the initiative is not taken by God, but by his adversary.

5.2 The Testing in the Wilderness in Exod 17:1-7

In the wilderness at Rephidim it was the people of Israel who put “the Lord to the proof by saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’” (Exod 17:7). Israel rebels against God because they are lacking water in the wilderness. But this testing of God at Meribah or Massah (“the place of the testing”) becomes sort of a paradigm of Israel’s lack of faith, and is recorded again in Numbers 20:2-13, where the lack of faith of the people of Israel at Meribah is even presented as the very reason why they are forbidden to enter the promised land.

The testing, in this case, is not because God or his adversary have put the people in front of a choice to prove their faith: it has been the people who have put God to the test by doubting that he cares for them, and that he will never let them down, not even in a wilderness without water nor food. This biblical image of the wilderness, where man experiences need even of the most basic of human requirements for survival and thus may doubt that God cares, is certainly the background of the setting of the Matthean account of the temptations. When Jesus answers, quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 (“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah”), even though Matthew omits the second part of

the verse, his audience would certainly recall the incident of the people of Israel in the wilderness, in the “place of the testing – Massah”.

The same book of Deuteronomy which Jesus quotes in his answers portrays the setting of the temptation narrative: “And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart [...] And he humbled you and let you hunger” (Deut 8:2-3).

6. Form and Structure of the Text

The pericope of the temptation of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, as in Luke, is arranged in a precise order. There is an introduction (verses 1-2), a threefold dialogue between the tempter and Jesus (verses 3-10), and a conclusion (verse 11). It is therefore a short narrative in itself, which follows the pattern of a discussion, or rather a debate. More specifically, authors such as Harrington¹² and Beare¹³, as well as Davies and Allison¹⁴, call it a “rabbinic debate”, attending to the way scripture is used both by Jesus and the tempter. A rabbinic debate would be the way a theological dispute would be conducted in a rabbinic school: the parties involved in the dispute would have to quote Scripture by heart to give credibility to their points, without giving much importance to the context from where a given passage would come from, provided “it is written”. Rabbinic debates follow a methodology which would hardly be acceptable in modern biblical scholarship, but which surely was a

¹² See D. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 69.

¹³ See F. BEARE, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 111.

¹⁴ See W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 352.

common means of theological discussion in a Jewish setting in the first century. Another example of rabbinic argumentation would be the way the Letter to the Hebrews deals with Scripture to argue in favour of Christ's priesthood. We shall later see that there are other rabbinic debates in Matthew's gospel, and that they are strongly connected with this one.

7. Detailed Analysis of the Pericope

v. 1: The pericope is started by the conjunction Τότε, therefore linking it directly to the previous narrative, the baptism of Jesus. The initiative for going into the wilderness is not Jesus', but the Spirit's, in contrast to the narratives before (baptism) and after (starting of the preaching) the temptation account. In these narratives, Jesus is the one taking the initiative of going into the wilderness of Judea and later on back to Galilee. But in the present account, it is God's initiative that he be tested by the devil, πειρασθῆναι ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου.

v. 2: Matthew adds "and forty nights" to the fasting period of Jesus. According to Juan Mateos, the author is recalling the fasts undertaken by Moses and Elijah, who summarize the OT (the Law and the Prophets)¹⁵. In this way, Matthew wants to show that Jesus is the Messiah in whom the whole of the OT is being fulfilled. We will find both figures again at the transfiguration narrative (Matt 17:3). Jesus is presented as the Messiah of the OT, who takes upon him all of the authority and credibility of the OT revelation.

¹⁵ See J. MATEOS, *El Evangelio de Mateo*, 41.

v. 3. Matthew gives a new name to the devil, which is not found elsewhere in the NT, ὁ πειράζων, or the tempter. The author starts here a play of words, in which he wants to avoid using mythical language when talking about the devil, so as to introduce a parallelism between the tempter who approaches Jesus to test him and the Jewish authorities who will do the same later in the gospel¹⁶. Gundry is the author who probably acknowledges this parallelism more openly, saying that “instead of ‘the Devil’ (so Luke) Matthew has ‘the tempter’”. The result is clearer parallels with the Pharisees and Sadducees [...] all of whom tempt Jesus later in the gospel”¹⁷.

Καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ πειράζων - the tempter approaches Jesus with reverence, implicitly acknowledging his divine sonship. An interesting discussion on the use of the term προσελθὼν in Matthew is found in *The Gospel according to Matthew* by Francis Beare¹⁸. I include an extract of the same:

The indications are that Matthew wants to emphasize that no one approaches Jesus casually. Here even ‘the tempter’ makes a ceremonial ‘approach’, as do the angels in verse 11. It is used alike of friends and foes, of people who come seeking help and of those who come to challenge his authority or to criticize his actions, of disciples and also of scribes and Pharisees, and of Judas at the betrayal (F. Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 108).

v. 4. The first temptation is about using the power of being “the Son of God” to get benefit for Jesus’ own sake, for he is hungry. Jesus’ answer, as in the following two temptations, comes from Deuteronomy: he knows and represents the Law more than anyone else. But he is determined to use his supernatural powers, which have been openly revealed at the baptism, only to fulfil the will of God, as he

¹⁶ Cf. *The New Interpreter's Bible*, VIII, 162.

¹⁷ R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 55.

¹⁸ See also W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 360.

will do when feeding the crowds in Matt 14:13-21 and 15:32-39, but only to feed those he felt compassionate about.

v 5-7: The second temptation shows the devil tempting Jesus to become a Messiah who relies on fantastic miracles to attract followers. By throwing himself from the pinnacle of the temple and being carried by angels in front of the people of Israel, he would gain followers on account of his miraculous power. They would follow him blindly, for there would be no doubt about his divine nature. Even though Harrington¹⁹ or Davies and Allison²⁰ do not share this understanding, in this point I agree with Beare who says that “although no spectators are mentioned, the narrator must none the less be thinking of a public display”²¹, a view also shared by Gundry²².

v. 8-9: The third temptation is about becoming a political Messiah, who is willing to compromise for the sake of success. If Jesus worships Satan, he will be given all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. Matthew makes a clear connection between idolatry and power, as he will repeat in Matt 6:24: “You cannot be the slave both of God and of money”.

The temptation is overcome by Jesus by making again a choice of relying solely on the mission of his father, being the slave of his master, not wanting his own will but the will of the one who sent him (cf. Matt 26:39).

¹⁹ “There is no reference to crowds of people frequenting the Temple, and so the test should not be taken as incentive to perform a public ‘show miracle.’” D. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 66.

²⁰ “Jesus is not being tempted to perform, as the second Moses, a messianic miracle and thereby prove his messiahship.” W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 361.

²¹ F. BEARE, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 110.

²² “The selection of the Temple implies the public display of a messianic sign” R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 56.

v. 10: The answer to the devil is final: Ὑπαγε, Σατανα, which has been added by Matthew, as it is not found in Luke. Most authors mention the obvious connection of these words of dismissal with the rebuke to Peter at the scene in 16:23, which we will consider in chapter II.

v. 11 Once Jesus has overcome the three (all) temptations, the devil leaves him and angels come and minister to him. This conclusion, which differs significantly from Luke, ends the pericope by foreshadowing the risen Christ, who will be served by angels (cf. Matt 28:1-10) and restores paradise²³. Having overcome the three temptations, Jesus is given divine authority in the form of angels. Gundry notes that “Matthew may have transferred ‘all authority’ from the tradition of the temptation to 28:18”²⁴.

Boring interestingly notes that “by placing the kingdom of God first, even though it meant rejecting food and the help of angels, Jesus finally receives both, thus becoming an anticipatory example of his own teaching (6:33)”²⁵. This same remark is made by Gundry²⁶, who also sees a connection between the angels ministering to Jesus (δυναστεύουσιν αὐτῷ) and the women disciples, who are mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew as in the same quality (διακονοῦσαι αὐτῷ) in Matt 27:55 on the foot of the cross, once Jesus has overcome the last of his tests.

²³ See M. BIELER, “The Mysteries of Jesus’ Public Life”. *Communio* 29. 54.

²⁴ R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 58.

²⁵ M.E. BORING, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 164.

²⁶ R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 59.

8. Conclusion

The temptation narrative, or better the testing of the Son of God, will serve as the main text for my essay. It is an account, not about moral temptation, but a testing as to the kind of Messiah Jesus would be willing to become. We have already seen that this narrative is deeply connected with the past, which is the experience of the people of Israel in the wilderness, where they were misled. Jesus, on the other hand, passes every test by relying precisely on that same experience by quoting Deuteronomy in all his answers. "Where Israel in the wilderness failed, Jesus passes every test."²⁷

But the narrative also connects to the future, which will be the experience of the disciples of Jesus. He is setting an example by his own life on how to overcome the testing by the devil. This will become clearer as we consider the presence of the tempter in other passages in Matthew, which is our concern in the following chapter. The author will connect the temptation narrative with the life of Jesus, the life of his disciples, as well as with the Christian community he is writing to.

The main test of the Son of God is accepting his own death on a cross as part of his being the Christ, the Messiah. We are going to see how Jesus overcomes this test only on the cross itself, and sets an example for his followers, who are called to carry their own cross and follow him (Matt 16:24). The answer to the testing of the Son of God is his obedience to his Father, no matter the price he is to pay for that obedience.

²⁷ D. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 68.

Chapter II

The Presence of the Tempter in other Passages in Matthew

1. Introduction

I start this second chapter based on a premise which I hold for sure: the synoptic gospel writers did not intend to mention the temptations of Jesus at the beginning of Jesus' public life because there are no temptations to be found later in that life. On the contrary, the temptation narrative serves as an introduction to the challenges the Son of God had to face in his public life, and contains in a nutshell what then is developed in full in the account of his life. "Conflict with Satan is not limited to this pericope, but is the underlying aspect of the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world, which is the plot of the *whole* Gospel of Matthew",²⁸ as Boring has it.

Most commentators I have been reading on this subject do not hesitate in drawing connections between the temptation account and specific tests and challenges Jesus went through in his public life, right until his passion in Gethsemane and his crucifixion²⁹.

²⁸ M.E. BORING, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 162.

²⁹ Cf. F. BEARE, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 105.

It is my intention to show these connections in detail, for they will allow us to understand better the Christological debate that is emerging from the analysis of these passages of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus' sonship was tested over and over again, and the ones testing him are found all through his life. "The Devil does not tempt Jesus to doubt his divine sonship, just pronounced at his baptism, but to rely on that sonship in self-serving ways that would lead him disobediently from the path to the cross"³⁰. His public life is a life in the wilderness, since he is fully exposed to the tempter right until his crucifixion. This tempter, in any of his many manifestations, tries to confuse Jesus with all kind of proposals to betray his divine sonship as suffering servant and to rather become a successful political leader or religious wonder-worker.

2. Temptations by the Authorities

I have mentioned in chapter I that Matthew uses a play of words in order to draw a parallelism between the way the tempter approaches Jesus and other characters in his gospel, who approach Jesus in the same way and with the same intentions, namely to put him to the test. A prominent group that repeatedly approaches Jesus to test him were the religious leaders of the time, that is, the Pharisees, Sadducees and lawyers. Let us see some examples of this:

Matt 3:3: Καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ πειράζων εἶπεν αὐτῷ

Matt 16:1: Καὶ προσελθόντες οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ Σαδδουκαῖοι πειράζοντες

Matt 19:3: Καὶ προσῆλθον αὐτῷ Φαρισαῖοι πειράζοντες αὐτὸν

³⁰ R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 55.

and, in a way, also Matt 22:34-35: Οἱ δὲ Φαρισαῖοι ἀκούσαντες ὅτι ἐφίμωσεν τοὺς Σαδδουκαίους συνήχθησαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό, καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν εἰς ἕξ αὐτῶν [νομικὸς] πειράζων αὐτόν

It is more than striking to see how the author of Matthew's Gospel uses the same grammatical construction to compare the testing of the Son of God by the tempter with the same testing by the Pharisees, Sadducees, and lawyers. All of them approach Jesus in a reverential way, as we have seen in Chapter I, somehow acknowledging his authority, and then put a question based on Scripture to him, in order to test him. It is difficult to believe that this exact matching of words may be pure coincidence. Rather, I think that Matthew is making a clear point that this anonymous tester or devil becomes real in the form of Pharisees, Sadducees and lawyers. This play of words is lost in the *Revised Standard Version*, where the same word may translate as tempter/temptation or testing/test. In my bibliographical research I have only found a mention of this play of words in Gundry's commentary, who also notes that "notably, in 16:1 Matthew will introduce, against Mark and Luke, the same combination of προσερχομαι and πειράζω for the Pharisees and Sadducees that he alone has here for the Devil"³¹.

There is only one tester, or tempter, who takes the form of all those who challenge Jesus through means of Rabbinic debates in order to seek his disobedience from his Father's will, which includes the acceptance of the cross. The devil is an attitude opposed to God's will, represented mainly by the religious authorities.

³¹ R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 55.

Boring also notes this parallelism: “Matthew creates a literary bracket by crafting this dispute with Satan so that it corresponds to the disputes with the Jewish leaders at the end of Jesus’ ministry, thereby suggesting the underlying cosmic conflict that surfaces in the confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders”³². The dispute with the Jewish leadership reaches its climax after the debates in Matt 22:15-45, when Jesus spills out the Woes against them. None of them will dare ask him any question again (Matt 22:46), but his condemnation is now final. Jesus denounces openly in Matt 23:1-36 the double-morale of the scribes and Pharisees, who misuse their knowledge of Scripture and the law in order to keep their positions of power, instead of preaching the kingdom of God. They are agents of the tempter - the devil – Satan, since we now know that these are different names for the same person. And they are acting as agents of the kingdom of Satan. Matthew is not talking about a mythical creature, as Beare believes³³, but of real life characters whom Jesus encountered over and over again.

This misuse of Scripture is at the service of the kingdom of Satan, as opposed to the kingdom of God. As we saw in the temptation narrative, “the devil shows that he too can quote Scripture for his purpose”³⁴. Matthew implies that there is a great danger in the way Scripture is used. Jesus only quotes Scripture when he is confronted by the religious authorities in a debate, fighting “Scripture with Scripture”³⁵, but his own teaching amazed the people, “because he was teaching them as one having authority, and not like their own scribes” (Matt 7:29). The

³² M.E. BORING, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 162.

³³ See F. BEARE, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 107-108.

³⁴ J.P. MEIER, *Matthew*, 30.

³⁵ J.P. MEIER, *Matthew*, 30.

authority of Jesus does not come from the way he uses Scripture, but flows from himself, since he really is the Son of God, who has “all authority” (Matt 28:18).

3. Temptation by Peter (Matt 16:23)

The attempt by Peter to convince Jesus that he should not risk himself to be put to death is answered by the clear-cut rejection on the side of Jesus: “Get behind me, Satan!” (Matt 16:23). Interestingly, Peter has just professed the identity of Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16), a theophany which reminds us of the similar theophany we heard at the baptism of Jesus just before the temptations by Satan which were rejected by Jesus with the same words.

Again, in this pericope, the identity of the Son of God is at stake, but this time Matthew presents a very specific temptation: the denial of the cross, of having to die, the rejection of suffering. When Peter rejects the possibility of the Son of God having to suffer and to die he also becomes an agent of Satan, in so far as he opposes God’s will, turns Jesus away from obedience to God. The temptations are hereby linked up with the crucifixion, as we are going to see in the next point. The tempter wants to get Jesus to the point of rejecting the cross as a necessary part of his messianic mission. Anybody, including Peter, who takes on that idea, is embodying Satan’s person, and Jesus rebukes him as such: a disciple who is acting in Satan’s name. In Luke’s Gospel, Judas Iscariot will be used by Satan to betray Jesus (Luke 22.3), but in Matthew’s account, it is only Peter who through his denial of the cross deserves being called Satan, not even Judas.

4. Temptations in Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-46)

The prayer in the garden of Gethsemane comes as the ultimate test of Jesus' willingness to do his Father's will – the crucifixion – is becoming imminent. Jesus' coherence with his mission as the Christ, the Son of God, has brought about condemnation by the high-priests and the elders, and he is asked to answer as the suffering servant. His dramatic prayer in Gethsemane is a final act of obedient surrender to the will of his Father. Jesus is now fully aware of his divine identity, as he tells his disciples in 26:53: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" We are reminded of the angels of the second temptation in the wilderness. Again, Jesus rejects using his power for his own sake.

He overcomes this final testing through prayer, and by making for the last time the choice "not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt 26:39), this time in view of his arrest and crucifixion. "What this pericope emphasizes concerning the relationship that Jesus Son of God has with God his Father is the total obedience the Son renders the Father."³⁶ But Matthew introduces once more the word test/temptation, not referring to Jesus, who has already overcome the test, but referring to the disciples, who are just starting their testing: "Watch and pray that *you* may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt 26:41). Jesus, out of his own experience of being tested, knows of the danger that lies ahead of his disciples: it will be easier for them to deny him rather than to be obedient to God, especially in view of coming persecutions.

³⁶ J. D. KINGSBURY, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 73.

5. Temptations on the Cross (Matt 27:32-54)

Finally, in the life of the historical Jesus, the testing motif is shown once more during the crucifixion. We already saw how Peter tempted Jesus by precisely denying the necessity of the cross as the necessary outcome of Jesus' life and ministry as the Son of God. As Fenton puts it, referring to Matt 4:1-11, "notice also how the temptations here are linked with the account of the crucifixion by the repetition there of the title *Son of God*, i.e. 27:40 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross'; 27:43 'He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, I am the Son of God.'"³⁷ Without using the word temptation/test any more, the author clearly connects the crucifixion with a final test. This test is overcome only through obedience: "Matthew, therefore, stresses that Jesus hangs upon the cross and dies in his status as the Son of God because it is only the death of God's perfectly obedient and trusting Son that accomplishes the forgiveness of sins."³⁸

The crucifixion of Jesus in Matthew's account also carries a strong parallelism with a text from the Wisdom of Solomon, which must have been known to the author, as it describes the testing motif on the divine sonship in connection with suffering. Let me quote some parts of it to show how close it is to what we have seen so far about suffering as a test for the Son of God:

"Let us lie in wait for the righteous man,
because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions;
he reproaches us for sins against the law,
and accuses us of sins against our training.
He professes to have knowledge of God,

³⁷ J. C. FENTON, *The Gospel of Saint Matthew*, 64-65.

³⁸ J. D. KINGSBURY, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 76.

and calls himself a child of the Lord. [...]

Let us see if his words are true,

and let us test what will happen at the end of his life:

for if the righteous man is God's son, he will help him,

and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries." (Wis 2:12-13, 17-18)

This text combines several elements of the testing of the Son of God which we have seen so far. First, the accusation of the righteous man as being the Son of God itself. In this text, this is shown as the reason for testing him through suffering, and for putting him to a "shameful death" (Wis 2:20). His divine condition is being tested by his adversaries by trying to force upon him an act of miraculous power, as in the temptations narrative, so on the cross. The Wisdom of Solomon does not tell us the answer the righteous man gives to his adversaries, but it is understood that he does not take any action against them and dies (cf. Wis 4:13-14), and is somehow raised by God (cf. Wis 5:1-4), "for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity" (Wis 2:23).

Secondly, the adversaries are described as people well instructed in the law, who have undergone some kind of training, and who have been denounced by the righteous man. Again, this description fits perfectly into the motif of the tempter as being the Pharisees, Sadducees and lawyers in the Gospel of Matthew. Those who are most knowledgeable in Scripture are the ones who feel threatened by the teachings of the Son of God, and therefore oppose him to the point of putting him to death, the final test.

Once Jesus has overcome this final test, a last theophany is given by Matthew in full view of the dead corpse of Jesus, who had suffered death in spite of his powers. "Truly, this was the Son of God" (Matt 27:54), is a confession made by

a pagan centurion, in contrast to the Jewish authorities who put him to death because of the same statement

The testing of Jesus was about his identity as the Son of God. Matthew connects every one of his acknowledgements about the divine sonship of Jesus with a testing of Jesus. Jesus' answer is to become "obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). On the cross, Jesus shows his true nature as the Son of God, so that now even pagans can recognize him. He refused to be a political or religious Messiah to fit the expectations of the Jews. Because of the rejection he suffered from the leading Jews, he is recognized as the Son of God by a pagan first. As Kingsbury summarizes in a very compact way:

Placed on the cross, he dies as God's obedient and trusting Son (27:38-44), and through his death he effects the forgiveness of sins (26:28), thus destroying the temple and bringing the sacrificial cult of Israel to an end (27:51). The Jewish saints who come forth from their tombs (27:52-53) and the Roman soldiers who confess him to be the Son of God (27:54) prefigure the post-Easter church of Jewish and gentile origin. (J.D. Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 53)

Having overcome the test on the cross, Jesus has defeated death once and for all, making his experience available to those who believe in him. His resurrection is what really shows him to be the Son of God. It is the only sign he was to deliver. For a further discussion on the post-resurrection title of Son of God given to Jesus, see the Appendix.

6. Temptations in the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13)

As a legacy given by Jesus to his followers, the Lord's prayer reflects the experience Jesus gained in his lifetime in his own personal struggle between learning how to fulfil his Father's will and wanting to avoid suffering. We can even

trace back the three basic temptations in the wilderness, as they are reflected in the Lord's prayer, in the following way:

The first temptation is wanting to gain personal profit from one's ministry, turning stones into bread. Jesus' petition, "give us this day our daily bread", rules out the possibility of seeking personal advantage beyond the daily needs of the community, rather than of the individual person.

The second temptation is about wanting to perform signs to bring people to faith. In Matt 16:1, the Pharisees and Sadducees already used this demand for a "sign from heaven" as a means to test Jesus. There is no other sign for Christians beyond Jesus himself, the ultimate sign of the Father. Therefore, *καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκης ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν*, which is better translated as "do not lead us into testing". No more signs should be asked from God by those who have known Christ.

The third temptation, finally, is about worshipping the devil rather than God. The answer to this temptation is also included in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven". The obedience of the Son of God, as we already analysed above, is the final answer to every test. The Son of God, and in extension the Sons of God who are those who believe in him, have been entrusted with the mission of fulfilling God's will instead of their own.

The conclusion to the Lord's Prayer expresses the experience of Jesus of having to face the tempter all his life: *ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ*, but deliver us from the evil one, just another name for Satan, the tempter. The followers of Jesus will have to face the tempter as much as he had to face him, therefore Jesus includes him in the prayer which he teaches as a legacy of his own experience.

7. Conclusion

The testing of the Son of God did not occur only in the wilderness, but throughout the public life of Jesus. As a matter of fact, the first test takes place during his baptism, when Jesus refuses to become a political Messiah as John would have liked to have him³⁹. As I have already said in Chapter I, the baptism-temptation account opens a major inclusion which ranges all the way up to the crucifixion. In the words of J. Rius i Camps, “the scene of the test which Jesus undergoes immediately after his anointing as Messiah describes in advance all the temptations of leadership, despotic power or miracles which will assail him from this moment onwards and right up to the death on a cross”⁴⁰.

The prayer in Gethsemane, as well as the Lord’s Prayer, also show how Jesus already foresees the same tests for his followers and disciples, since they are also called to carry their own cross and follow him (Matt 16:24). Therefore, Matthew connects the testing of the Son of God with the test his followers will have to undergo, but who can now rely on his experience.

His passion, death and resurrection, the post-Easter kerygma of the early Church, is the ultimate sign that has been given to those who have faith in the Son of God. It is, in fact, the sign of Jonah (Matt 12:40, 16:4). No other sign is needed for the followers of Christ.

³⁹ See M.E. BORING, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 162.

⁴⁰ J. RIUS I CAMPS, *L'Exode de l'Homme* Livre. 18. (translation mine)

8. Appendix: Jesus, Son of God, Walking on the Water (Matt 14:22-33)

In the present chapter I have repeatedly analysed the different passages in which Matthew calls Jesus “the Son of God”, a public acknowledgement of the divine sonship of Jesus. Starting from the baptism, in which God calls Jesus his Son (Matt 3:17), we later on had Peter confessing Jesus to be “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). A further theophany is given at the transfiguration (Matt 17:5), and finally acknowledged by the centurion at the cross (Matt 27:54).

The tempter, on the other hand, questions Jesus again and again about what kind of a Son of God he really is. “If you are the Son of God” is asked twice in the temptation narrative, and also by the high priest at the trial of Jesus (Matt 26:63) and again twice on the cross. Accepting death in order to be risen to eternal life, renouncing some authority in order to be given “all authority” (Matt 28:18) by God, is the key to the divine sonship in Christ. The post-Easter proclamation of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, what has come to be called the kerygma of the early Christian Church, is what shows Jesus to be the Son of God.

But Matthew has one more account in his gospel where Jesus is recognized as being the Son of God: the story of the miraculous walking on the water. If we continue our line of thought, Jesus shows himself to be the Son of God insofar as he overcomes death (the death of baptism and the death of the cross). Jesus walking on the water is therefore a narrative that anticipates his post-resurrection identity: the waters have always been a symbol of death for Jews, and Jesus walks on them. He has conquered death. The disciples are terrified and think that he is a ghost, since it is the risen Lord who is coming to them, indicated by the title Κύριε or Lord. The

message of Jesus, “do not be afraid”, also corresponds to the risen Lord in Matt 28:5,10. Peter gets out of the boat and starts walking on the water, but eventually is overcome by the fear of death – the test on the cross. Jesus has already overcome death, and so is able to reach out to Peter and help him overcome his own death. Christ has overcome death once and for all, and through faith all can share in his life.

Thus, the disciples in the boat acknowledge that Jesus has mastered death, and has even made his experience available to his disciples and those who believe in him, and so they also confess: “Truly you are the Son of God” (Matt 14:33). This short narrative illustrates clearly the Matthean understanding of the death on the cross as the final temptation, and the example that Christ has set once for all by overcoming death. In view of this sign – the only sign of Jesus, which is the sign of Jonah – the disciples make the confession of faith of the early Church: “Truly you are the Son of God”.

Chapter III

Theological Significance of the Temptations

1. Introduction

At this point of my essay, after having analysed the temptation narrative and most of the related passages in Matthew's Gospel, we reach the point of broadening our perspective out of the text into the wider context of Matthew's community, as well as Christian communities in general. As a canonical book, we hold that the Gospel of Matthew is inspired and therefore conveys the truth in regards to the History of our Salvation. It is right to think, therefore, that the insights we gain from this study were not only relevant for Christians in Antioch at the end of the first century A.D., but are to be relevant for Christians of all times, including the present.

In this third and last chapter I am therefore going to look into the theological and pastoral significance of the testing of the Son of God both in Matthew's community and in our present times. Theologically, the temptations of Jesus carry a message about his human nature, which stands in no way in contradiction to his divine sonship. His testing and suffering are to be understood as fully real and human, opening the way for his followers to overcome future temptations.

Pastorally, the temptation narrative deals with the use of Scripture in Christian communities, and with the message of the cross, central to the Christian kerygma. As we have already seen in the previous chapters, the cross is the main test that Jesus had to overcome, and continues to be the main test for his followers. I will try to draw some practical conclusions from this study for present day Christians, and especially for Christian leadership.

2. The Christological Debate Behind Matthew 4:1-11

The main question that arises from the testing of the Son of God in Christology is how Jesus, being fully divine, could possibly be tempted by the devil. An ethical interpretation would present Jesus as a model to be followed by believers in times of temptation. But this understanding would be unfair to us, because Jesus would not be a credible model, since he had the advantage of his divine nature. If Jesus chose not to perform miracles which he nevertheless would have been able to perform, the ethical interpretation of the temptations for Christians would be of little help.

In order for the testing of the Son of God to be a real model for mankind, it had to be real and not just a display with pedagogical purposes, in as much as the humanity of Jesus is fully real. Both Duquoc⁴¹ and Macquarrie⁴² quote the same passage of the letter to the Hebrews to highlight the fact that Jesus was made perfect progressively during his life on earth, and therefore experienced in himself doubt

⁴¹ Cf. C. DUQUOC, *Cristologia*, 66.

⁴² Cf. J. MACQUARRIE, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, 398.

and suffering: “Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb 5:8). His testing had to be entirely real, if real suffering is mentioned. Martin Bieler summarizes this Christological dimension of the historical Jesus very clearly: “That Christ *as man* could take upon himself the cross presupposed that he had withstood the full extent of temptation in all of its dimensions as it arises within the situation of decision in which human freedom necessarily finds itself.”⁴³

This understanding of the testing of the Son of God may help to bring this passage, otherwise written in a strange, almost mythical language, down to real life. The temptation narrative does not reveal a supernatural and distant Jesus, who is acting in a different sphere than us human beings when facing temptations. “The picture of Jesus as the obedient Son of God does not abolish or compromise the image of Jesus as truly human.”⁴⁴ This pericope should, therefore, help us to get a more human view of Jesus, the same Jesus who feels compassion for the crowds (Matt 9:36), weeps over Jerusalem (Matt 23:37) and is sorrowful to death in Gethsemane (Matt 26:38).

3. The Use of Scripture in Matthew’s Community

As we pointed out at the beginning of this essay, Matthew uses a distinct literary form in the temptation narrative, that of a rabbinic debate. It is difficult to think that Jesus would spontaneously talk using this form of quoting Scripture. As Francis Beare states, “this debate is the creation of someone who was trained in the

⁴³ M. BIELER, “The Mysteries of Jesus’ Public Life”. *Communio* 29, 57.

⁴⁴ M.E. BORING, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 165.

methods of the rabbinical schools”⁴⁵. We can assume, therefore, that these debates were common in early Christian communities, especially in Antioch in Syria. “Each of the temptation episodes probably reflects Jewish-Christian debate within Matthew’s community and discussions between Jews and Christians relating to the role of Jesus.”⁴⁶

Not only in Matthew’s community, I must add, since the temptation account is not exclusive to Matthew: the same debate is also found in Luke. It is an early account of Jewish-Christian Christological debate in early Christianity. And it also portrays the exegetical methods used in these communities: “The law or Mosaic Torah is affirmed as a whole as of abiding significance (5:17.20), but [...] the Pharisaic development of Torah is firmly rejected in favour of Jesus’ interpretation of the Torah.”⁴⁷ The preaching of the early Christian kerygma was based on a Christology in which the Son of God is identified with the Suffering Servant of the OT tradition. This is not in line with the Pharisaic interpretation.

But the temptation narrative also shows us that within these early Christian communities not everybody would agree with this interpretation. The tension and probably heated debates on the identity and authority of Jesus are in the background of Matthew, who “is illustrating that even the well-intentioned theologies and interpretations of Scripture in his own community can become the vehicle of a demonic alternative to the path of obedient suffering that Jesus has chosen as the path of messiahship”⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ F. BEARE, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 111.

⁴⁶ R.F. COLLINS, “Temptation of Jesus”, *ABD* VI, 382.

⁴⁷ B. VIVIANO, “The Gospel According to Matthew” *NJBC*, 632.

⁴⁸ M.E. BORING, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 164.

4. The Denial of the Cross: the Main Temptation for Christians

After analysing Matthew's account on the temptations, as well as all other related passages in his Gospel, I can now attempt to make a synthesis of the findings of this study. Temptations in the Gospel of Matthew are not about moral shortcomings, but about a fundamental option Jesus had to make in view of his divine sonship. By surrendering his will to his Father, he understood that the final outcome of his preaching and actions would be his condemnation and crucifixion. He rebuked those who would question the meaning of the cross, a "stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23). And he fully identified himself with the OT description of the Suffering Servant, who "was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3). Only through his death would he be able to bring life to all those who have faith in him and follow him. We can easily guess that the cross was still a stumbling block in Matthew's community when his Gospel was written.

The cross is, as we have seen, the main temptation of Jesus as the Son of God. But for Matthew it continued to be the main temptation for "his own church of Jewish and Gentile Christians, who are sons of God because the Son of God has died for their sins and been raised"⁴⁹. The proclamation of the kerygma of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection implies that his followers are adopted as sons of God, who pray to their Father as Our Father, but who are also tempted by the same temptations as Jesus, and have to make again an option for obedience to the Father, even until "death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). Through Christ overcoming death once

⁴⁹ J. D. KINGSBURY, *Matthew: Structure Christology. Kingdom*, 77.

and for all through obedience, the followers of Christ have been shown the way of how to be obedient to the Father. But that does not turn automatically their lives into a success story.

We can apply this seeming contradiction to ourselves. In our ministry, we could use many methods in order to ensure success: compromising with the authorities, making use of our ministerial power, smoothening the message, etc. But if we are really trying to live as Jesus did, and to preach as Jesus preached, we are not to expect being always understood, or achieving pastoral results as planned. True preaching and living according to the Gospel will always raise mixed feelings, create enemies and challenge people's ideologies or ways of life. And the temptation will always be there: to soften the message, to compromise, to be on good terms with everybody. Jesus shows that by expecting nothing in return for his obedience to the Father, and by being ready to die in total rejection and discredit, he was restored to Paradise⁵⁰.

5. Pastoral Applications for Today's Christian Leadership

The first consequence of my essay for Christians in general, but especially for those entrusted with any kind of ministry within the Church, flows from our previous point. Christian life is not about success, neither public recognition nor achievements. Jesus had to reject any proposal that would aim at any of these.

⁵⁰ See note 23.

Rather, Christian life is about preaching a crucified Christ, who was able to surrender his life in perfect obedience to the Father, in order to free people from the burden of sin, “preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity” (Matt 9:35). An important application of this understanding of Christian life is that we should always be ready to review our preaching and actions to see if they correspond with this model of Jesus, as the NT portrays him.

Secondly, I would call our attention to the grave responsibility entrusted to Christian ministers and leaders, as we have been instructed in Scripture. The knowledge acquired in Scripture studies can very easily be misused, since those listening to Christian ministers will always tend to believe what they are told by those who are better instructed within their community. If Jesus could have well followed any of the biblically founded proposals of the Tempter, how much more can we find in Scripture reasons for making use of power or authority, avoiding Jesus’ radical option for the least of society, as Matthew reminds at the very end of the teachings of Jesus in Matt 25:31-46. Being entrusted with knowledge about Scripture has to go hand in hand with a fundamental option of becoming another Suffering Servant. Otherwise we may easily use our knowledge as the scribes and Pharisees did, who “bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders” (Matt 23:4).

6. Conclusion

The testing of the Son of God becomes the paradigm of the testing of all the followers of Christ, who become share in the divine sonship of Christ through faith

in him. The fact that Jesus overcame both the temptations in the wilderness of his life, as well as on the cross, showed the way for his followers to master the testing of their divine sonship, starting with his apostles, specifically with Peter, who was the first to follow him on the water, as we discussed in Chapter III. Nothing is said in the Gospel about following Jesus without having to master suffering and contradictions. Rather, “blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account” (Matt 5:11).

The suffering of Jesus, the Son of God, shows that faith through obedience in God the Father brings about an eternal reward. Isaiah already pointed out that “by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous” (Isa 53:11). The reward, however, is an eschatological reward, as in the parable of the final judgment in Matt 25:31-46. In Matthew, there are no guarantees as to what extent Christians will enjoy any public reward in their present life. There is no promise of success, recognition or support from this world for those who through faith decide to follow Christ, being obedient to his Father, who is also our Father. To a certain extent, Matthew inscribes himself in the line of the apocalyptic literature, where hope is placed in the Day of the Lord, but not in this world.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

As I warned in the general introduction, I have not tried to make any new findings on the text and the topic of this essay. The more I have been reading and researching, the more I have found thorough and deep commentaries about the passages in Matthew's Gospel which I have been writing about. There is no way I can add anything new to the findings of the extensive scholarship on Matthew's temptation narrative and its connections in Scripture. That is why chapters I and II of my essay are basically the result of an extensive bibliographical research, where I have only combined different sources, trying to present the findings of different authors in a logical manner.

On the other hand, the biblical analysis which I have done in this essay leads to a number of pastoral conclusions which are not found so easily in the bibliography I have been using. In chapter III I have tried to present the relevance of the testing of the Son of God for all who become Sons of God through faith. The leading motif that determines the divine sonship is the obedience to the Father on the cross, as we have seen. This message of the cross as central to the Christian message comes out very strongly from my present study, and carries a lot of actual significance.

We can try to water down the powerful message of the cross in Matthew by saying that he was writing for a community under persecution, when Christianity

was not an established religion and Christians often had to pay with their very lives for professing their faith. But I don't think Matthew is talking about external persecutions as the only reason for having to carry one's cross. Rather, I think that the cross symbolises the contradiction and tension of Christian life in any time and setting. We have seen some of the possible pastoral applications, like accepting defeat in one's ministerial life and avoiding strategies that lead to success based on power or authority.

In a world torn by violent changes, with an ever-rising poverty, pandemics and ethnic conflicts, Christians still preach the cross of Jesus as the final victory over death. Christianity is not about success or recognition, any more than it is not about a world without suffering and struggle. The cross of Jesus commits us to preach some meaning to this world of contradictions. It is a message of hope beyond what we perceive every day.

The testing of the Son of God, therefore, helps us to focus our Christian lives into the right perspective: the following of Jesus is full of radical decisions to be made, in obedience to the Father's will. But that obedience will be tested through and through by alternative proposals that will never look bad in themselves, but rather sound, and even well rooted in Scripture, because that is the way of the tempter. He approaches with reverence and is apparently just trying to give a helping hand in our otherwise troublesome Christian life.

We pray every day in the Lord's prayer to be delivered from the Evil one. In this essay I have outlined that we are not to imagine him as a terrifying creature that we would run away from as soon as we see him coming. On the contrary. Satan is able to stay unrecognised because his ways are neither indecent nor immoral. His

strategy to put Jesus to the test was to offer him an easy life, free of pain and suffering, endurable and rewarding. A life that would lead to self-realization, public acknowledgement and peace of mind and heart.

Satan never ceases in putting us to the test. All we have to do is to choose for the self, and we will have given in to his temptations. That is why Jesus taught us how to pray to our Father, out of his own experience, always asking him to be with us so that his will be done, "on earth as it is in heaven".

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