

# The Temptation in the Wilderness

A071 Sunday Address 3rd March 1940 Pembroke Hall, London Sunday service

*The date of this address is conjectural (see below), while the text is as issued in the magazine Angelus after it was given, apart from correction of errors*

*Text:* from *Angelus*, February 1941. No date is given and the only reasons for ascribing it to 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1940 are (1) a White Eagle talk would normally have occurred on this first Sunday of the month and none other is recorded; (2) 1941 sees a movement from printing each Sunday address in the next magazine, which means that they are always out of date, to choosing seasonal but undated addresses – and if this is a March address, it was at least seasonal to reproduce it the following February. The date is otherwise sheer conjecture.

*Context:* White Eagle is quite intimate in his opening remarks, implying a largely known congregation. It is clear that the reading was the story of Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness, possibly from Matthew 4 : 1-11 or Luke 4 : 1-14. The first quotation is from Matthew rather than from Luke and it is a fair assumption that the Matthew account was read. Mark's account is very brief indeed (1 : 12-13) and the story does not come in John as such, although there are some parallel stories in John 2 and John 6. White Eagle speaks of 'this Lodge' so the address was presumably given at Pembroke Hall – unless Edinburgh.

*General Notes:* White Eagle here makes a particularly clear distinction between Jesus the man and the universal Christ, maybe even implying that the testing of Jesus was necessary to ensure that the Christ had fully entered in. White Eagle is particularly eloquent around the distinction between having trust in God and 'tempting the Lord'.

*References:* for the various quotations from the Temptation story, see above ('Context') and Matthew 4 : 1-11.

## White Eagle's Address:

*O Divine Spirit, our Father-Mother God, we pray that at this time and in this place the light and the power of the Spirit of Christ may fall upon and bless every soul in this Lodge. There are those who come needing the inspiration and blessing of Thy Spirit. There are those who are wearied in body and soul. There are those who are sick in mind. O Father God, may these, Thy children, be refreshed this night! May the waters of the Spirit of Life fall gently upon them, that they may be revived and blessed in Thy great love. Amen.*

Before we commence this short address, we welcome all to this service, and particularly our old friends. We give our love, our brotherhood to you and pray that God may bless you as you journey forth upon life's way.

We come again to bring some message of inspiration and power. We have heard read one of the most beautiful lessons in the four Gospels, so familiar to many, that it becomes a mere matter of words and the inner and deeper meaning of the Three Temptations in the Wilderness is not known to many. Perhaps not all of you have realised the Three Temptations, which our Lord, the Christ, had to undergo were the same temptations – or shall we call them initiations – which every soul that aspires must pass through.

Let us look, first of all, upon man's threefold being, of body, soul and spirit. Body needs very little explanation, we think, because all living in a physical body are conscious of the physical – only too conscious – because it makes such great demands upon the valuable time of man.

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The body has to be clothed and fed and kept in good health if it is going to be a useful vehicle for those two other aspects of man; the soul and the spirit. The body, then, is of the upmost importance. It is a great mistake for anyone to neglect, mortify or crucify the flesh. This may seem to contradict former statements we have made. But it is a different matter to *crucify* the flesh, on the one hand, and to become *master* of the flesh on the other. Crucifixion, as we intend to convey the meaning to you tonight, means to disregard the needs and the claims of the physical body. Otherwise the body will become unwell, out of harmony, dis-eased. But the body should never master either the soul or the spirit, both of which equally belong to a man's being.

As we continue, you will recognise these same tests or temptations as those which have come also to you, though, perhaps, only in a minor degree. As you advance along the path, the tests become greater, more difficult. The tests are very subtle and one of the great lessons which has to be learnt on the path of spiritual development is that of discrimination. We have to understand, to recognise, immediately, the subtleties of the tests which we encounter every day of life.

The First Temptation of our Lord was to satisfy the cravings of the physical body. We have explained that the physical body must be respected and cared for; but the higher aspect – shall we call it the master of man, within – must control the desirousness of the physical body. But do not confuse Jesus of Nazareth with Christ – the Cosmic Christ, the Son of God. The Master, Jesus, was tested in the wilderness to see if He could pass the final test, or that highest Initiation, the Christ Initiation. He was our Brother because we are like unto Him in that we have the same frailties of the flesh, of the soul and of the spirit. We are as one in brotherhood in these tests and Initiations. We all pass through them in course of time. Whether we do so in one short life is doubtful and, indeed, very rare. But in the course of training, in the course of the development of the God-consciousness within, all men and women traverse the same road.

Our beloved Brother, after long wrestling with the legions of the darkness, was naturally very exhausted physically. You know how it feels. What it means to need sustenance. He needed bread. The body was calling out for satisfaction. All men are brothers in that we all know what hunger means. And then the Tempter came: *'If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made into bread'*. Now, it is a deep occult law that no soul must ever use spiritual power to satisfy its own cravings; a very subtle temptation, my brethren? Many a disciple finds that when he has developed certain supernormal powers, he desires to use the powers to satisfy some claim of the physical life. Remember also another aspect of the subtlety of this tempting of our Brother to use His power for His own need; to satisfy the cravings of the lower self, of the body. And He knew that He must not give way to the temptation of Lucifer. Why?

We spoke some months ago on Good and Evil and explained that the so-called evil in life was the lower mind of man, always so ready to assert itself. The occultist will understand when we say the power of Lucifer rises up from the lower centres into the head and, through the lower mind, tempts the young brother on the path. Thus the Lucifer-power (or 'Satan' as

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it is sometimes called) crept up, tempting the mind with, *'I can turn these stones into bread and satisfy my hunger'*. But the Higher Self of Jesus knew well that He, the Brother, was undergoing His test to become more than a Brother, a Master. He knew that He must master the mind tempting Him and cried out, *'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God; by the power which floweth from the Heart of the Infinite!'*

So much for the First Temptation; what of the Second? In the Gospel story, the writer takes what we consider the Third Degree, or the Third Temptation, and relates [it] as the second. We want to reverse the two. First came the temptation of the Body by hunger, then the temptation of the Soul; the soul which is the seat of emotion and desire and also of the powers of the mind. The aspects of the soul are related to the arts, the sciences as well as to the emotions and all the experiences of earth life, all your reactions to what happens in your daily life, both mental and physical, are registered by the soul; such reactions causing you to develop your soul.

Between the soul and the body there is a very fine bridge known as the etheric body. Were it not for that etheric body, the physical consciousness could not receive or register the emotions, the feelings, the thoughts which come from the soul body. So also, between the soul and the spirit, there is yet another bridge and this we call the intuition, or the intuitional body. Through the intuitional body, therefore, is the spirit; the highest aspect able to make itself felt in the soul body and, through the etheric body, the soul transmits to the physical.

In the Second Temptation, Jesus was taken into a high mountain from where He could see the kingdoms of the earth. Lucifer said; *'I will give you dominion over all these kingdoms, if you will fall down and worship me'*. The subtlety of this temptation! This Lucifer symbolises or represents the mind of earth, the many arrogancies of the intellect. Do not confuse intellect with intelligence and do not think that we decry the intellect because it has its use in the evolution of man. But when it shuts off all contact through the intuitional body with the spirit, then the intellect is missing the valuable work for which it is intended. It is the intellect which denies, denies, denies man's contact with the gentle, loving spirit of Christ, the Son. The intellect steps forward and gives a perfectly good reason why you should not follow the precepts of Christ. Oh, yes! The intellect is subtle and clever and a great enemy, oft-times, to man's spiritual progress, because through the Higher Mind can the Divine inspiration reveal to the soul the glories of God's Universe.

But in the Temptation in the Wilderness (that means on the earth plane, as man wanders alone in the dreary wastes of materialism) the intellect can tempt the man off the true path of illumination. So Lucifer said to our brother, Jesus, *'Fall down and worship me'* – the intellect, the mind – *'and you shall rule over all the kingdoms of the earth'*. How often do we see this done? The Intellect of man supreme over the kingdoms of the world; but such men within are but as empty vessels, making much sound, but empty of soul and spirit. So our Brother, the Master Jesus, replied; *'Get thee behind me, Satan. Get thee hence. It is written "thou shalt love the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve"'*.

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A word here; the phrase *'It is written'* we believe means *'It is a law'*; it is written in the heavens, it is written in life, in the Universe. *'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve'*. And thus the mind was vanquished.

Then the last, and perhaps the most subtle temptation of all, which comes to most of you every day and you do not realise it; the temptation of the spirit. Beloved ones, so many good brothers succumb to this temptation of the spirit and thus, some of us, at some time on the path of spiritual evolution, come to the conclusion that we have progressed well and that we are becoming rather nice to know! Is not this, in everyday language, becoming spiritually snobbish? You may smile at this because no one would be snobbish if they but realised it, on any plane of life, but on the spiritual plane of life, we do and can become inflated, prideful. We think that we have the power of the spirit with us to such a degree that we can defy, as it were, the law of God. Do you know what this means?

Well, the tempter said to Jesus, after He had been taken up into a high mountain: *'If thou be the Son of God, cast yourself down, for it is written, "thou shalt not dash thy foot against a stone; the Lord thy God has given His angels charge over thee, to protect thee"'*.

What is the meaning of this subtle temptation? It means that when a man becomes puffed up with spiritual pride, when Lucifer holds dominion in his mind instead of the gentle Christ, he thinks nothing can hurt him; 'I can break all the laws of the physical, material life and I shall be alright because God will see to it that I *am* alright'. Jesus answered, *'It is written again; thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God'*.

Has it occurred to us that by violating the laws of our country, forgetting the laws of hygiene, of physical well-being, that we are tempting the Lord God? In other words, we do not obey His wise laws which are set for humanity to absorb the wisdom of the God-life. Do not eat unsuitable food or go into the winter elements unsuitably clothed. Do not do foolish and reckless things, unconstitutional things because you thus tempt the Lord thy God by breaking laws and it means that you will suffer. And you will also be disappointed that God has not protected you. This is a subtle temptation because, on the other hand, we are taught by our Masters that if we bring ourselves to trust God's love completely, all will be well with us in life. This is true. But we must first be wise, and wisdom is far removed from tempting Providence, or tempting the Lord our God. We must do all those things in the physical life which we know we should do. In other words, do our very best and leave the *rest* to God. If we fail to do our best and fail to fulfil our obligations, then we are tempting the Lord our God.

So, first is the temptation of the body, second, the temptation of the soul and third, the temptation of the spirit. And all three were safely met and overcome by our beloved Master, Jesus.

So we too, now walking the path towards the fuller illumination of the Christ life, must meet each day in our particular little wilderness our own particular temptations. Every time we

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meet them we must say, *'Get thee behind me, Satan'*. In other words, let the spirit of Christ, the Son of God, the true Wisdom and Love of life, possess, control and illumine our lives.

*And in the Silence we wait upon the blessing of Christ, the Light of Man. Amen.*

*The search matches with either words and phrases, which appear in the text, or the following 'key' words and phrases, which are similar in meaning to those in the document:*

*magic, razor's edge, tantalise, haughty*

