

THIRD PART, QUESTION 41

Of Christ's Temptation (In Four Articles)

We have now to consider Christ's temptation, concerning which there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether it was becoming that Christ should be tempted?
- (2) Of the place;
- (3) Of the time;
- (4) Of the mode and order of the temptation.

Whether it was becoming that Christ should be tempted?

IIIa q. 41 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that it was not becoming for Christ to be tempted. For to tempt is to make an experiment, which is not done save in regard to something unknown. But the power of Christ was known even to the demons; for it is written (Lk. 4:41) that "He suffered them not to speak, for they knew that He was Christ." Therefore it seems that it was unbecoming for Christ to be tempted.

Objection 2. Further, Christ was come in order to destroy the works of the devil, according to 1 Jn. 3:8: "For this purpose the Son of God appeared, that He might destroy the works of the devil." But it is not for the same to destroy the works of a certain one and to suffer them. Therefore it seems unbecoming that Christ should suffer Himself to be tempted by the devil.

Objection 3. Further, temptation is from a threefold source—the flesh, the world, and the devil. But Christ was not tempted either by the flesh or by the world. Therefore neither should He have been tempted by the devil.

On the contrary, It is written (Mat. 4:1): "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil."

I answer that, Christ wished to be tempted; first that He might strengthen us against temptations. Hence Gregory says in a homily (xvi in Evang.): "It was not unworthy of our Redeemer to wish to be tempted, who came also to be slain; in order that by His temptations He might conquer our temptations, just as by His death He overcame our death."

Secondly, that we might be warned, so that none, however holy, may think himself safe or free from temptation. Wherefore also He wished to be tempted after His baptism, because, as Hilary says (Super Matth., cap. iii.): "The temptations of the devil assail those principally who are sanctified, for he desires, above all, to overcome the holy. Hence also it is written (Ecclus. 2): Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation."

Thirdly, in order to give us an example: to teach us, to wit, how to overcome the temptations of the devil. Hence Augustine says (De Trin. iv) that Christ "allowed Himself to be tempted" by the devil, "that He might be our Media-

tor in overcoming temptations, not only by helping us, but also by giving us an example."

Fourthly, in order to fill us with confidence in His mercy. Hence it is written (Heb. 4:15): "We have not a high-priest, who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin."

Reply to Objection 1. As Augustine says (De Civ. Dei ix): "Christ was known to the demons only so far as He willed; not as the Author of eternal life, but as the cause of certain temporal effects," from which they formed a certain conjecture that Christ was the Son of God. But since they also observed in Him certain signs of human frailty, they did not know for certain that He was the Son of God: wherefore (the devil) wished to tempt Him. This is implied by the words of Mat. 4:2,3, saying that, after "He was hungry, the tempter" came "to Him," because, as Hilary says (Super Matth., cap. iii), "Had not Christ's weakness in hungering betrayed His human nature, the devil would not have dared to tempt Him." Moreover, this appears from the very manner of the temptation, when he said: "If Thou be the Son of God." Which words Ambrose explains as follows (In Luc. iv): "What means this way of addressing Him, save that, though he knew that the Son of God was to come, yet he did not think that He had come in the weakness of the flesh?"

Reply to Objection 2. Christ came to destroy the works of the devil, not by powerful deeds, but rather by suffering from him and his members, so as to conquer the devil by righteousness, not by power; thus Augustine says (De Trin. xiii) that "the devil was to be overcome, not by the power of God, but by righteousness." And therefore in regard to Christ's temptation we must consider what He did of His own will and what He suffered from the devil. For that He allowed Himself to be tempted was due to His own will. Wherefore it is written (Mat. 4:1): "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil"; and Gregory (Hom. xvi in Evang.) says this is to be understood of the Holy Ghost, to wit, that "thither did His Spirit lead Him, where the wicked spirit would find

Him and tempt Him.” But He suffered from the devil in being “taken up” on to “the pinnacle of the Temple” and again “into a very high mountain.” Nor is it strange, as Gregory observes, “that He allowed Himself to be taken by him on to a mountain, who allowed Himself to be crucified by His members.” And we understand Him to have been taken up by the devil, not, as it were, by force, but because, as Origen says (Hom. xxi super Luc.), “He followed Him in the course of His temptation like a wrestler advancing of his own accord.”

Reply to Objection 3. As the Apostle says (Heb. 4:15), Christ wished to be “tempted in all things, without sin.” Now temptation which comes from an enemy can be without sin: because it comes about by merely outward suggestion. But temptation which comes from the flesh cannot be without sin, because such a temptation is caused by pleasure and concupiscence; and, as Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix), “it is not without sin that ‘the flesh desireth against the spirit.’” And hence Christ wished to be tempted by an enemy, but not by the flesh.

Whether Christ should have been tempted in the desert?

IIIa q. 41 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ should not have been tempted in the desert. Because Christ wished to be tempted in order to give us an example, as stated above (a. 1). But an example should be set openly before those who are to follow it. Therefore He should not have been tempted in the desert.

Objection 2. Further, Chrysostom says (Hom. xii in Matth.): “Then most especially does the devil assail by tempting us, when he sees us alone. Thus did he tempt the woman in the beginning when he found her apart from her husband.” Hence it seems that, by going into the desert to be tempted, He exposed Himself to temptation. Since, therefore, His temptation is an example to us, it seems that others too should take such steps as will lead them into temptation. And yet this seems a dangerous thing to do, since rather should we avoid the occasion of being tempted.

Objection 3. Further, Mat. 4:5, Christ’s second temptation is set down, in which “the devil took” Christ up “into the Holy City, and set Him upon the pinnacle of the Temple”: which is certainly not in the desert. Therefore He was not tempted in the desert only.

On the contrary, It is written (Mk. 1:13) that Jesus “was in the desert forty days and forty nights, and was tempted by Satan.”

I answer that, As stated above (a. 1, ad 2), Christ of His own free-will exposed Himself to be tempted by the devil, just as by His own free-will He submitted to be killed by His members; else the devil would not have dared to approach Him. Now the devil prefers to assail a man who is alone, for, as it is written (Eccles. 4:12), “if a man prevail against one, two shall withstand him.” And so it was that Christ went out into the desert, as to a field of battle, to be tempted there by the devil. Hence Ambrose says on Lk. 4:1, that “Christ was led into the desert for the purpose of provoking the devil. For had he,” i.e. the devil, “not fought, He,” i.e. Christ, “would not have conquered.”

He adds other reasons, saying that “Christ in doing this set forth the mystery of Adam’s delivery from exile,” who had been expelled from paradise into the desert, and “set an example to us, by showing that the devil envies those who strive for better things.”

Reply to Objection 1. Christ is set as an example to all through faith, according to Heb. 12:2: “Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith.” Now faith, as it is written (Rom. 10:17), “cometh by hearing,” but not by seeing: nay, it is even said (Jn. 20:29): “Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed.” And therefore, in order that Christ’s temptation might be an example to us, it behooved that men should not see it, and it was enough that they should hear it related.

Reply to Objection 2. The occasions of temptation are twofold. one is on the part of man—for instance, when a man causes himself to be near to sin by not avoiding the occasion of sinning. And such occasions of temptation should be avoided, as it is written of Lot (Gn. 19:17): “Neither stay thou in all the country about” Sodom.

Another occasion of temptation is on the part of the devil, who always “envies those who strive for better things,” as Ambrose says (In Luc. iv, 1). And such occasions of temptation are not to be avoided. Hence Chrysostom says (Hom. v in Matth.*): “Not only Christ was led into the desert by the Spirit, but all God’s children that have the Holy Ghost. For it is not enough for them to sit idle; the Holy Ghost urges them to endeavor to do something great: which is for them to be in the desert from the devil’s standpoint, for no unrighteousness, in which the devil delights, is there. Again, every good work, compared to the flesh and the world, is the desert; because it is not according to the will of the flesh and of the world.” Now, there is no danger in giving the devil such an occasion of temptation; since the help of the Holy Ghost, who is the Author of the perfect deed, is more powerful[†] than the assault of the envious devil. .

* From the supposititious *Opus Imperfectum* † All the codices read ‘majus.’ One of the earliest printed editions has ‘magis,’ which has much to commend it, since St. Thomas is commenting the text quoted from St. Chrysostom. The translation would run thus: ‘since rather is it (the temptation) a help from the Holy Ghost, who,’ etc.

Reply to Objection 3. Some say that all the temptations took place in the desert. Of these some say that Christ was led into the Holy City, not really, but in an imaginary vision; while others say that the Holy City it-

self, i.e. Jerusalem, is called “a desert,” because it was deserted by God. But there is no need for this explanation. For Mark says that He was tempted in the desert by the devil, but not that He was tempted in the desert only.

Whether Christ’s temptation should have taken place after His fast?

IIIa q. 41 a. 3

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ’s temptation should not have taken place after His fast. For it has been said above (q. 40, a. 2) that an austere mode of life was not becoming to Christ. But it savors of extreme austerity that He should have eaten nothing for forty days and forty nights, for Gregory (Hom. xvi in Evang.) explains the fact that “He fasted forty days and forty nights,” saying that “during that time He partook of no food whatever.” It seems, therefore, that He should not thus have fasted before His temptation.

Objection 2. Further, it is written (Mk. 1:13) that “He was in the desert forty days and forty nights; and was tempted by Satan.” Now, He fasted forty days and forty nights. Therefore it seems that He was tempted by the devil, not after, but during, His fast.

Objection 3. Further, we read that Christ fasted but once. But He was tempted by the devil, not only once, for it is written (Lk. 4:13) “that all the temptation being ended, the devil departed from Him for a time.” As, therefore, He did not fast before the second temptation, so neither should He have fasted before the first.

On the contrary, It is written (Mat. 4:2,3): “When He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry”: and then “the tempter came to Him.”

I answer that, It was becoming that Christ should wish to fast before His temptation. First, in order to give us an example. For since we are all in urgent need of strengthening ourselves against temptation, as stated above (a. 1), by fasting before being tempted, He teaches us the need of fasting in order to equip ourselves against temptation. Hence the Apostle (2 Cor. 6:5,7) reckons “fastings” together with the “armor of justice.”

Secondly, in order to show that the devil assails with temptations even those who fast, as likewise those who are given to other good works. And so Christ’s temptation took place after His fast, as also after His baptism. Hence since rather Chrysostom says (Hom. xiii super Matth.): “To instruct thee how great a good is fasting, and how it is a most powerful shield against the devil; and that after baptism thou shouldst give thyself up, not to luxury, but to fasting; for this cause Christ fasted, not as needing it Himself, but as teaching us.”

Thirdly, because after the fast, hunger followed, which made the devil dare to approach Him, as already stated (a. 1, ad 1). Now, when “our Lord was hungry,” says Hilary (Super Matth. iii), “it was not because He was

overcome by want of food, but because He abandoned His manhood to its nature. For the devil was to be conquered, not by God, but by the flesh.” Wherefore Chrysostom too says: “He proceeded no farther than Moses and Elias, lest His assumption of our flesh might seem incredible.”

Reply to Objection 1. It was becoming for Christ not to adopt an extreme form of austere life in order to show Himself outwardly in conformity with those to whom He preached. Now, no one should take up the office of preacher unless he be already cleansed and perfect in virtue, according to what is said of Christ, that “Jesus began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1). Consequently, immediately after His baptism Christ adopted an austere form of life, in order to teach us the need of taming the flesh before passing on to the office of preaching, according to the Apostle (1 Cor. 9:27): “I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway.”

Reply to Objection 2. These words of Mark may be understood as meaning that “He was in the desert forty days and forty nights,” and that He fasted during that time: and the words, “and He was tempted by Satan,” may be taken as referring, not to the time during which He fasted, but to the time that followed: since Matthew says that “after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry,” thus affording the devil a pretext for approaching Him. And so the words that follow, and the angels ministered to Him, are to be taken in sequence, which is clear from the words of Matthew (4:11): “Then the devil left Him,” i.e. after the temptation, “and behold angels came and ministered to Him.” And as to the words inserted by Mark, “and He was with the beasts,” according to Chrysostom (Hom. xiii in Matth.), they are set down in order to describe the desert as being impassable to man and full of beasts.

On the other hand, according to Bede’s exposition of Mk. 1:12,13, our Lord was tempted forty days and forty nights. But this is not to be understood of the visible temptations which are related by Matthew and Luke, and occurred after the fast, but of certain other assaults which perhaps Christ suffered from the devil during that time of His fast.

Reply to Objection 3. As Ambrose says on Lk. 4:13, the devil departed from Christ “for a time, because, later on, he returned, not to tempt Him, but to assail Him openly”—namely, at the time of His Passion. Neverthe-

less, He seemed in this later assault to tempt Christ to dejection and hatred of His neighbor; just as in the desert

he had tempted Him to gluttonous pleasure and idolatrous contempt of God.

Whether the mode and order of the temptation were becoming?

IIIa q. 41 a. 4

Objection 1. It would seem that the mode and order of the temptation were unbecoming. For the devil tempts in order to induce us to sin. But if Christ had assuaged His bodily hunger by changing the stones into bread, He would not have sinned; just as neither did He sin when He multiplied the loaves, which was no less a miracle, in order to succor the hungry crowd. Therefore it seems that this was nowise a temptation.

Objection 2. Further, a counselor is inconsistent if he persuades the contrary to what he intends. But when the devil set Christ on a pinnacle of the Temple, he purposed to tempt Him to pride or vainglory. Therefore it was inconsistent to urge Him to cast Himself thence: for this would be contrary to pride or vainglory, which always seeks to rise.

Objection 3. Further, one temptation should lead to one sin. But in the temptation on the mountain he counseled two sins—namely, covetousness and idolatry. Therefore the mode of the temptation was unfitting.

Objection 4. Further, temptations are ordained to sin. But there are seven deadly sins, as we have stated in the Ia IIae, q. 84, a. 4. But the tempter only deals with three, viz. gluttony, vainglory, and covetousness. Therefore the temptation seems to have been incomplete.

Objection 5. Further, after overcoming all the vices, man is still tempted to pride or vainglory: since pride “worms itself in stealthily, and destroys even good works,” as Augustine says (Ep. cxxi). Therefore Matthew unfittingly gives the last place to the temptation to covetousness on the mountain, and the second place to the temptation to vainglory in the Temple, especially since Luke puts them in the reverse order.

Objection 6. Further, Jerome says on Mat. 4:4 that “Christ purposed to overcome the devil by humility, not by might.” Therefore He should not have repulsed him with a haughty rebuke, saying: “Begone, Satan.”

Objection 7. Further, the gospel narrative seems to be false. For it seems impossible that Christ could have been set on a pinnacle of the Temple without being seen by others. Nor is there to be found a mountain so high that all the world can be seen from it, so that all the kingdoms of the earth could be shown to Christ from its summit. It seems, therefore, that Christ’s temptation is unfittingly described.

On the contrary is the authority of Scripture.

I answer that, The temptation which comes from the enemy takes the form of a suggestion, as Gregory says (Hom. xvi in Evang.). Now a suggestion cannot be made to everybody in the same way; it must arise from those

things towards which each one has an inclination. Consequently the devil does not straight away tempt the spiritual man to grave sins, but he begins with lighter sins, so as gradually to lead him to those of greater magnitude. Wherefore Gregory (Moral. xxxi), expounding Job 39:25, “He smelleth the battle afar off, the encouraging of the captains and the shouting of the army,” says: “The captains are fittingly described as encouraging, and the army as shouting. Because vices begin by insinuating themselves into the mind under some specious pretext: then they come on the mind in such numbers as to drag it into all sorts of folly, deafening it with their bestial clamor.”

Thus, too, did the devil set about the temptation of the first man. For at first he enticed his mind to consent to the eating of the forbidden fruit, saying (Gn. 3:1): “Why hath God commanded you that you should not eat of every tree of paradise?” Secondly [he tempted him] to vainglory by saying: “Your eyes shall be opened.” Thirdly, he led the temptation to the extreme height of pride, saying: “You shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” This same order did he observe in tempting Christ. For at first he tempted Him to that which men desire, however spiritual they may be—namely, the support of the corporeal nature by food. Secondly, he advanced to that matter in which spiritual men are sometimes found wanting, inasmuch as they do certain things for show, which pertains to vainglory. Thirdly, he led the temptation on to that in which no spiritual men, but only carnal men, have a part—namely, to desire worldly riches and fame, to the extent of holding God in contempt. And so in the first two temptations he said: “If Thou be the Son of God”; but not in the third, which is inapplicable to spiritual men, who are sons of God by adoption, whereas it does apply to the two preceding temptations.

And Christ resisted these temptations by quoting the authority of the Law, not by enforcing His power, “so as to give more honor to His human nature and a greater punishment to His adversary, since the foe of the human race was vanquished, not as by God, but as by man”; as Pope Leo says (Serm. 1, De Quadrag. 3).

Reply to Objection 1. To make use of what is needful for self-support is not the sin of gluttony; but if a man do anything inordinate out of the desire for such support, it can pertain to the sin of gluttony. Now it is inordinate for a man who has human assistance at his command to seek to obtain food miraculously for mere bodily support. Hence the Lord miraculously provided the children of Israel with manna in the desert, where there was no means

of obtaining food otherwise. And in like fashion Christ miraculously provided the crowds with food in the desert, when there was no other means of getting food. But in order to assuage His hunger, He could have done otherwise than work a miracle, as did John the Baptist, according to Matthew (3:4); or He could have hastened to the neighboring country. Consequently the devil esteemed that if Christ was a mere man, He would fall into sin by attempting to assuage His hunger by a miracle.

Reply to Objection 2. It often happens that a man seeks to derive glory from external humiliation, whereby he is exalted by reason of spiritual good. Hence Augustine says (De Serm. Dom. in Monte ii, 12): “It must be noted that it is possible to boast not only of the beauty and splendor of material things, but even of filthy squalor.” And this is signified by the devil urging Christ to seek spiritual glory by casting His body down.

Reply to Objection 3. It is a sin to desire worldly riches and honors in an inordinate fashion. And the principal sign of this is when a man does something wrong in order to acquire such things. And so the devil was not satisfied with instigating to a desire for riches and honors, but he went so far as to tempt Christ, for the sake of gaining possession of these things, to fall down and adore him, which is a very great crime, and against God. Nor does he say merely, “if Thou wilt adore me,” but he adds, “if, falling down”; because, as Ambrose says on Lk. 4:5: “Ambition harbors yet another danger within itself: for, while seeking to rule, it will serve; it will bow in submission that it may be crowned with honor; and the higher it aims, the lower it abases itself.”

In like manner [the devil] in the preceding temptations tried to lead [Christ] from the desire of one sin to the commission of another; thus from the desire of food he tried to lead Him to the vanity of the needless working of a miracle; and from the desire of glory to tempt God by casting Himself headlong.

Reply to Objection 4. As Ambrose says on Lk. 4:13, Scripture would not have said that “all the temptation be-

ing ended, the devil departed from Him,’ unless the matter of all sins were included in the three temptations already related. For the causes of temptations are the causes of desires”—namely, “lust of the flesh, hope of glory, eagerness for power.”

Reply to Objection 5. As Augustine says (De Consensu Evang. ii): “It is not certain which happened first; whether the kingdoms of the earth were first shown to Him, and afterwards He was set on the pinnacle of the Temple; or the latter first, and the former afterwards. However, it matters not, provided it be made clear that all these things did take place.” It may be that the Evangelists set these things in different orders, because sometimes cupidity arises from vainglory, sometimes the reverse happens.

Reply to Objection 6. When Christ had suffered the wrong of being tempted by the devil saying, “If Thou be the Son of God cast Thyself down,” He was not troubled, nor did He upbraid the devil. But when the devil usurped to himself the honor due to God, saying, “All these things will I give Thee, if, falling down, Thou wilt adore me,” He was exasperated, and repulsed him, saying, “Begone, Satan”: that we might learn from His example to bear bravely insults leveled at ourselves, but not to allow ourselves so much as to listen to those which are aimed at God.

Reply to Objection 7. As Chrysostom says (Hom. v in Matth.): “The devil set Him” (on a pinnacle of the Temple) “that He might be seen by all, whereas, unawares to the devil, He acted in such sort that He was seen by none.”

In regard to the words, “‘He showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them,’ we are not to understand that He saw the very kingdoms, with the cities and inhabitants, their gold and silver: but that the devil pointed out the quarters in which each kingdom or city lay, and set forth to Him in words their glory and estate.” Or, again, as Origen says (Hom. xxx in Luc.), “he showed Him how, by means of the various vices, he was the lord of the world.”