

For the DIII Course  
Deep River: Mysticism &  
Ethics in the Preaching  
of Howard Thurman

## Temptations of Jesus

*Five Sermons given by Dean Howard Thurman  
in Marsh Chapel, Boston University*

1962

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## Foreword

Here are five sermons preached in Marsh Chapel during the month of July, in the year of our Lord, 1962. They are a faithful transcription of the spoken word from tape recordings made for rebroadcasting to a radio audience in the evening of the Sunday on which each was delivered. The minimum of editing has been done in order that the clarity of expression might be maintained despite the change of the medium from the spoken to the written word.

These are five sermons on certain dilemmas of Jesus, growing out of temptations which he faced. They are not five lectures. They are not five critical essays. They are five sermons, having as their fundamental purpose the illumination of the imagination, the stirring of the heart, and the challenge to live life meaningfully.

We see the Master as he struggled to find a way which will be for him The Way in which he can walk in utter harmony with the Will of his Father and the purpose of life. This too is what we seek, and in his answer we may find precious clues for ourselves. He was tempted as all men are tempted and his example leaves the whole world in his debt.

It so happens that this was the last sermon-series which I presented in Marsh Chapel, marking the end of a nine-year period of active responsibility for that part of the religious life of Boston University, as expressed in the preaching and ministry of Marsh Chapel, and the beginning of a two-year leave for an extended ministry in the service of the University, to other areas of the United States and countries abroad.

The material presented here was later used as the basis of the Theme Devotional Addresses at the meeting of the 20th General

Council of the United Church of Canada, including the Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations, held at the Metropolitan United Church, London, Ontario, September twelfth through the nineteenth. Significantly, the addresses delivered before this inspiring body marked the first major assignment in the wider ministry of the next two years.

HOWARD THURMAN

*Boston University*  
*September, 1962*

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Appreciation is given for permission to use the following quotations: "The Brothers," "The Rich Young Ruler," and "Martha of Bethany" from *The Witnesses and Other Poems* by Clive Sansom published by Methuen & Co., Ltd., London; selections from *From Man to Man* by Olive Schreiner published by Harper & Row, Inc., New York; and from *The Choir Invisible* by James Lane Allen published by The Macmillan Company, New York.

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Frankfurt  
Kant

There is something very private, solitary and intimate that characterizes the religious experience. The inner quality creates the mood of solitariness but not loneliness. It is to the credit of the genius of the religious experience that it does not create within the individual an attitude of pride or arrogance. There is a quality present at the very core of the religious experience that pushes against any mood of self-centeredness until the very boundaries of the self are transformed into a dimension of the Other, the more than self. Thus the ultimate validity of the privacy of the religious experience is its universality. This is the *miracle* and the *paradox*.

Thus in the religious experience the individual is acted upon, is a sharer in the givenness of God. The experience itself does not create this awareness but it is in the religious experience that the awareness surfaces and becomes a part of consciousness itself. It may be that this awareness is the individual's experience of faith. It is true that on many levels of life, an individual may be conscious of this gratuitous expression which is at the heart of life. Sometimes without awareness, without any conscious preparation, without anticipation or expectancy, the consciousness of some additional meaning, some extra increment charges an ordinary experience with a strange new glory. At any turn in the road I may come upon the

'Burning Bush' and hear The Voice say, "Take off your shoes, the place where you are now standing is a holy place." Thus the religious experience may not of necessity be a creation of the mind. It may not be summoned by an act of will — it is an opening, it is a grace, the surfacing of the givenness of God in the human spirit.

The place and significance of spiritual disciplines and exercises cannot be overemphasized. It is important, however, to understand what that significance is. There is no *necessitous* relationship between the disciplines and the awareness of God's presence. All disciplines of this character are meant to "ready" the mind, the emotions, the spirit. They are no guarantor of Presence.

This is the miracle, the heights and depths of wonder and awe. God reveals His Presence out of the mystery of Being. With all of my passionate endeavor, I cannot command that He obey. All of my prayers, my meditation, my *vast* and compelling urgency or need cannot order, woo or beg God into the revealing of His Presence. Even my need and my desperation cannot command Him. There is an overwhelming autonomy here; God does move in a mysterious way His wonders to perform. But He is so full of such wonderful and heartening surprises.

In the total religious experience we learn how to wait; we learn how to ready the mind and the spirit. It is in the waiting, brooding, lingering, tarrying timeless moments that the essence of the religious experience becomes most fruitful. It is here that I learn to listen, to swing wide the very doors of my being, to clean out the corners and the crevices of my life — so that when His Presence invades, I am free to enjoy His coming to Himself in me.

In fine, I cannot command; I work at preparing my

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mind, my spirit for the moment when God comes to Himself in me. When it happens, I experience His Presence. When this experience becomes an object of thought and reflection, it is then that my mind creates dogmas, creeds and doctrines. These are the creations of the mind and are therefore always *after* the fact of the religious experience. But they are always out of date. The religious experience is always current, always fresh. In it I hear His Voice in my own tongue and in accordance with the grain in my own wood. In that glorious and transcendent moment, it may easily seem to me that all there is, is God.

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*Not by Bread--Alone*

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## Meditation:

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We bring into the quietness of Thy Presence, our Father, all the particulars of our lives. We would not hold back from Thy scrutiny any facet of ourselves:

The things of which we are ashamed and by which our spirits are embarrassed; the good things which we have done and the good impulses of which we are aware; those whom we recognize by ties of kinship, but with whom we have no fellowship; those whom we recognize by ties of kinship and with whom we have deep and abiding fellowship; those whom we love as best we can; those whom we have not yet learned how to want to love; the quiet satisfaction of some part of us that is found in the strength of hostility and the reinforcement of bitterness of heart.

Our maladies we bring before Thee: The things in our bodies that have given us trouble, which we cannot quite shake off despite all of the skill of the minds of men and all the wisdom of the art of healing; those deep and turbulent upheavals in our spirits that keep our minds divided and our emotions in revolt.

Into the quietness, our Father, we bring all the facets of our lives; we hold them there, trying to restrain ourselves lest we ask of Thee that which is not in accordance with Thy Purpose and Thy Will; waiting that we may discern the movement of Thy Spirit amidst all the hinterland of our region.

Of all the peoples of the world and of all the troubled places, we bring only one before Thee this morning—the turbulent, pain-wracked, suffering spirit of Algeria. After more than a hundred leaden-footed days and months and years, our Father, this day they will speak with freedom what it is in their hearts to say as Thy



children. Brood over that troubled land to the end that some way may be found for the great healing, for forgiveness of Frenchmen and Moslem.

O God, do not despair of us. Do not despair of us, but hold us with Thy Love until we learn how to love.

O God, do not despair of us, our Father....

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## Temptations of Jesus

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I begin this morning a journey which we shall be taking having to do with certain of the fundamental dilemmas in the life of the Master.

As a background for our consideration today I want to read two things, one by Oscar Wilde (*De Profundis*), and the other by the British poet, Clive Sansom (*The Witnesses and Other Poems*).

“There is still something to me almost incredible in the idea of a young Galilean peasant imagining that he could bear on his own shoulders the burden of the entire world: all that had already been done and suffered, and all that was yet to be done and suffered: the sins of Nero, of Caesar Borgia, of Alexander the Sixth, and of him who was Emperor of Rome and Priest of the Sun: the sufferings of those whose names are legion and whose dwelling is among the tombs: oppressed nationalities, factory children, thieves, people in prison, outcasts, those who are dumb under oppression and whose silence is heard only of God; and not merely imagining this but actually achieving it, so that at the present moment all who come in contact with his personality, even though they may neither bow to his altar or kneel before his priest, in some way find that the ugliness of their sin is taken away and the beauty of their sorrow revealed to them.”

In this, from the British poet, “The Brothers’ address Jesus:

Going from Nazareth? Where? — To the Jordan valley?  
Leaving your home and your trade, your own kinsfolk?  
For what? For an unwashed preacher, a ranting hermit  
Who sacrificed family and wealth, and a seat in the priesthood  
For locusts and prophecies? Why — you are mad, insane,  
Selling your life for a whim, a religious frenzy.  
Mad, yes, mad. Will you share his faith and his filth,  
Outcasts like him, rejected by brother and friend,  
A life of rebellion, hunger, a shameful death?

If the thought of that leaves you unmoved, then remember us  
Your brothers and sisters, the mother who gave you birth.

See her there, standing in tears, forsaken, bewildered,  
Left by her first-born, you, the head of the household.

Think of her neighbours' looks, the humiliation,

Her fears and her griefs. What? What do you say?

'Whoever obeys the will of my father in heaven

Is my brother, my sister, my mother.'—By the God of Israel!

Would you preach at us?—your ministry start at home?

Better recall, if you can, your father in Nazareth,

Your pledge to him, your promise of filial care.

'You shall honour your father and mother,' Remember that

When you mouth your texts. Remember that:

And carry for ever the shame of your father's children.

It is very important to lay a general foundation for our thinking  
together about certain of the dilemmas of Jesus. A dilemma is the  
kind of problem that a man faces when live options, alternatives,  
are presented to him, any one of which is not quite a satisfying  
solution to the problem that confronts him. Very often when we  
are faced with our dilemmas, we are not as fortunate as is indicated  
by a sign I saw thirty years ago at a town in Texas called Big Sandy.  
My train coach stopped across a highway; I looked out of the win-  
dow and saw a huge sign. It must have been twenty feet high and  
about twenty feet square. It read: 'FIVE HIGHWAYS MEET HERE.  
FOUR CHANCES TO GO WRONG. ASK US.' But we aren't as fortu-  
nate as that when we face our dilemmas.

Jesus of Nazareth had what seems to me to have been a fun-  
damental and searching—almost devastating—experience of God.  
This experience was so frontal and so fundamental to the very  
grounds of his being that he had to deal with the implications of  
this experience whenever he raised any question about the meaning  
and function of his own life. When he heard that John the Baptist

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was preaching at the Jordan River, it must have been quite a prob-  
lem for him.

—Shall I go and hear him or shall I ignore him? If my personal and private  
and intimate religious experience, my experience of God is valid, if it is  
authentic, if it is dependable, then I do not need any other-than-self refer-  
ence. And besides, John is saying to everybody, 'Repent of your sins and  
receive the Kingdom of God.' What does this say to me if I go down there  
and present myself for baptism? If I accept baptism at his hands, then doesn't  
this give to his utterances and his movements the sanction of my heart and  
my mind, as if what he is saying and what he is doing represent the fulfill-  
ment of the meaning of that which I, myself, have experienced under God?

This is always the dilemma. Shall I wait until the most perfect  
thing comes along and identify myself with that, or shall I accept  
something that doesn't quite say all that I think can be said, but is  
the best that is being said at this particular time?

We feel this way sometimes about the church, don't we? We  
forget that the church is made up of the halt and the lame and the  
blind; the sinners, the prejudiced, those whose hearts are bitter and  
those whose hearts are sweet. It is made up of the people who make  
up the world. I knew a man in Oberlin, when I was the minister  
there, who would not join my church, or any church, because he  
said that he did not want to lose his soul. He said that as long as he  
strayed out of the church, he could be greatly exercised about try-  
ing to follow Jesus, but if he joined the church, he would become  
confused. There are many people who feel that way. Well, Jesus  
may have felt that way about John. But at any rate, he presented  
himself for baptism.

When Jesus was baptised of John, a very extraordinary thing  
happened to him. It seemed to him that the heavens opened and  
that the living Spirit of the living God descended upon him like a  
dove and in the midst of this experience, he heard a Voice... and  
the Voice said, "You are my Son, in whom I am well pleased."

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And then he left; shaken to his core.

—I must find some place of complete and utter isolation, a chance to sense the bearings of this tremendous experience, lest I find myself betraying it or betrayed by it.

He went into the wasteland. To sit it out. To think. To weigh and to wait.

There is a Congregational Church in Chicago, about ten blocks from the Loop, where there is an amazing painting of The Temptations of Jesus. Jesus is seated on a rock overlooking a valley. That much is the traditional image which artists portray. He is looking straight ahead. As you stand watching the figure, your eyes get adjusted to the light on it, and this is what you see—dozens of fingers clutching at his mind.

—What shall I do with my life if I am going to be true to the tremendous experience of God which I have had? How can I live so that my life will not deny the glory which I saw and felt? Or was the glory which I saw and felt completely other-worldly and beyond any thing that human experience can seek to implement? Is it something that is separate and is not to be a part of the warp and woof, the stuff of human experience? Was I invaded by something that does not belong to the nature and the character of the normal working paper of human life? This is the question.

And then, after a long time thinking, pro-ing and con-ing, if-ing, but-on-the-other-hand-ing, his eyes fell on a stone at his feet and the stone looked just like one of the cakes that his mother used to make. At once he became aware of something which had been on the periphery of his mind for a long time; but he hadn't gotten around to it. It hadn't moved to the center of his consciousness. He was hungry. And then the struggle was on.

—If it is true that you are the Son of God, you are the Son of God, the Son of God, then the moment coming up out of the water of the River Jordan, when the heavens opened and you could scarcely discern between that which was you and that which was the Light, the Shekinah of your Father—

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this moment was The Moment of all your life. So! Why not reduce that moment to a manageable unit of confirmation by putting it to work to administer to the needs which must be met in you, if you are to be released to be in the world what you can be. Turn the stones to bread.

Thus argued the Tempter.

For a long time, all he could think of were these few words, 'Man, man must not live by bread...'

—But there is something wrong with that. Man has to have bread. Man must not live by bread.... Man must not live by bread.... bread.... by bread—but men *do* live by bread. And if a man is hungry, he can't get through to his spirit unless, unless his hunger has been selected as the avenue through which he seeks the highway of God. But if the hunger is another kind, you can't get through to him until you meet the hunger. Man *does* live by bread. But man does.... but man.... but bread.... If I have all the bread I need, and something else doesn't happen, I am still a poor.... There is something wrong with this. Man.... Man does not live by bread *ALONE!*

It must have been days between the first part of the sentence and the last word. I wonder how many weary hours he said it over and over again—Man must not live by bread—not being able to get beyond it, until at last, there must have leaped into his mind, like a flash of blinding light, one word: *Alone*. Ah! This is a practical world even for one who has seen visions and who feels that there is incumbent upon him some peculiar ministry to his people, or to other people. Nevertheless, even for him, it is a practical world. "Man must not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Man must get bread to eat. He must organize the resources of his life in an effort to build some kind of windbreak against the impersonal operation of the economic and social order by which he is surrounded, so that with some measure of balance and equilibrium and tranquility he might reproduce his kind and preserve some seed against the impersonal workings of the future. This is a necessity

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for man. He must be a bread-winner. He must wrest from the stubborn and recalcitrant and unyielding earth the stuff that he needs to build his body and to bring assurance and health and well-being to his children. Man must do this. But the *bias*, the emphasis, the prejudice, the slant of his life must be on the side of the hungry of his mind and his spirit. Do you believe that?

It is easy to believe it when you are not hungry. There is an old Zulu proverb that says, "Full-belly child says to empty-belly child, 'Be of good cheer.' Only the empty-belly child has the right to say to the empty-belly child, 'Be of good cheer.'"

Do you believe that the bias, the loaded energy of your life must always be on the side of those things that are addressed to the deepest and most searching hungers of your mind and your spirit? And if, in the swing of your years, you must make the choice, how will you vote? For where your treasure is, there your life will be. How does our society vote on this? How does the church vote on this? How do you vote? How do you vote? How?

Forgive us for our sins, our Father; leave us not to the weakness of our strength, or to the strength of our weakness, but tutor us in Thy graces that we may not deny in the darkness, the light which we have seen at other times. And for us, this is enough.

Amen.

Tempt God?

## Meditation:

Our Father, we would bring before Thee, as we offer our prayer, the far-flung needs of Thy children everywhere. Some of the needs we recognize as part and parcel of the full or limited measure of our own responsibilities. Some of the needs seem far removed from where we are, and they but underscore the littleness and impotency of our own lives. We would share all of this, you see, our Father, but our minds and our hearts are caught and held by our own private predicament and our own great personal need. So wilt Thou understand us and deal gently with us as we speak to Thee about the concerns of our hearts out of the private life with which we are so utterly familiar.

We are mindful that we are sinners and when we say this, our Father, we are not thinking of ways by which we have not conformed to some great external law, or doctrine, or theology, but when we say that we are sinners, our Father, we are talking very personally to Thee about our own experiences of our own limitations—all the mean things to which we have yielded, either in moments of weakness or of pride; the bad thoughts that we have had even as our faces were smiling and our eyes were glowing; the things that we have refrained from doing when we felt the urge to do them, because they were right and decent; whole and clean. These are the things, our Father, that we mean as we talk to Thee about our sins. Wilt Thou forgive us that we may try again where we have failed before?

Our fears, our Father, are very present and we know that this is no place, before Thee in all the quietness, to talk of the tempest and the torture of our private fears, but they are a part of our lives:

## Temptations of Jesus

We are continuing our thinking together about certain of the dilemmas of Jesus, and today we consider *another* aspect of the dilemma in the wilderness. First, I want to read two things by the same British poet from whom I read last week.

### THE RICH YOUNG RULER

'What must I do, master, to gain  
Eternal life?  
From my youth I have kept the Commandments,  
Honoured my parents;  
Theft, murder, lying, adultery—  
All these  
By God's mercy have passed me by.  
What then must I do, master?  
What more must I do?'  
'Sell all,' he replied, 'And follow me.'  
An easy saying.  
He, a carpenter, a carpenter's son,  
Sacrificed nothing.  
And his man Peter—smirking, self-righteous—  
What did he lose  
But some worn nets, a boat-share,  
And trade in the market?  
It wasn't myself I was thinking of—  
Ease and possessions—  
But the responsibility of wealth  
Towards its dependents.  
What of them, if I had obeyed him—  
What of my servants?  
That's what I tell myself, now—

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Fear of sickness and bodily failure, fear of desertion and loneliness, fear of our jobs, fear of the instability of our own economic lives, fear for our families and our children, fear of life itself. And it is so wonderful, our Father, that as we talk with Thee about this, the fears are not always present; there are moments when we are free. Our very spirits take wings and all the things that imprison and hold, like the fears and anxieties, are left behind and we look down upon them from afar and wonder why they could hold such sway over our lives. There are these moments that come to us, and we thank Thee for them. May we remember them when the fears close in upon us!

Our dreams are before us and before Thee, our Father; the dreams which we have forgotten until in the quietness, all the stillness before Thee brings them back with their living touch—there are things that we had planned for our lives at some earlier time, the way we thought the future would unfold for us, and somewhere along the way something happened to us and the dream faded—maybe a wrong turn in the road, we don't know; but as we sit together in the quietness, fingering the dreams of our lives, our hearts yearn for a fulfillment which has never been ours.

O God, Keeper of the dreams of Thy children, leave us not alone. Leave us not alone, but be in us and about us even as Thy Spirit doth surround us, to the end that we may take courage, without which, our Father, our very spirits sicken and die.

O God who will not let us go, teach us how to hold fast to Thee, our Father.

'If Thou but suffer God to guide thee  
And hope in Him thro' all the ways,  
He'll give thee strength, whate'er betide thee,  
And bear thee thro' the evil days;  
Who trusts in God's unchanging love  
Builds on the rock that naught can move."

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But do I believe it?  
Then—silent—I walked away,  
Watching my sandals,  
While his voice, the voice of my heart,  
Followed me homeward.  
In misery, I stopped by the lake,  
Hid by the crowd-wall,  
I heard him speak of the Kingdom of God,  
The camel, the needle.

MARTHA OF BETHANY

It's all very well  
Sitting in the shade of the courtyard  
Talking about your souls.  
Someone's got to see to the cooking,  
Standing at the oven all morning  
With you two taking your ease.  
It's all very well  
Saying he'd be content  
With bread and honey.  
Perhaps he would—but I wouldn't,  
Coming to our house like this,  
Not giving him of our best.  
Yes, it's all very well  
Him trying to excuse you,  
Saying your recipe's best,  
Saying I worry too much,  
That I'm always anxious.  
Someone's got to worry—  
And double if the others don't care.  
For it's all very well  
Talking of faith and belief,  
But what would you do  
If everyone sat in the cool  
Not getting their meals?  
And he can't go wandering and preaching

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On an empty stomach—  
He'd die in the first fortnight.  
Then where would you be  
With all your discussions and questions  
And no one to answer them?  
It's all very well.

And then these few sentences by James Lane Allen *The Choir Invisible*:

"To see justice go down and not believe in the triumph of injustice; for every wrong that you weakly deal another or another deals you to love more and more the fairness and beauty of what is right; and so to turn with ever-increasing love from the imperfection that is in us all to the Perfection that is above us all—the perfection that is God."

The Tempter took him to the pinnacle of the Temple and he said to him,

—If you are the Son of God, jump down from the pinnacle and it will be all right. Nothing will happen to you. Why? Because you are someone very special and God will give his angels charge concerning you, as the Psalmist says, and upon their wings they will bear your feet lest you hurt yourself in some way.

And the Master replied,

—Man must not tempt God, even a good man.

What is the essence of the dilemma? You have thought of it many times and it is all so familiar that anything I say to you this morning you may have heard before, but nevertheless I am going to say it.

The Tempter said to him that this world is not orderly. It is not structured. There is no fundamental dependability upon which the individual living expression of life may depend. But if you can manage to get into a certain position of immunity, then the ordinary logic of life can be hurdled and manipulated.

The implication of the Master's reply to the Tempter is this:

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—If I go up to the pinnacle of the Temple and jump down, the possibilities are I will break my neck, Son of God to the contrary notwithstanding, because this is an orderly world and if I act as though I am immune to the logic, the logic itself will destroy me.

Do you believe that?

Life is rooted and grounded in a structure of dependability. It is this that makes it possible for the private enterprise, or the collective enterprise, to be sustained by life. If I ignore this fact, then the very force of life itself becomes an instrument of death in my hands. Let's see what this means in terms of the intimate dilemma which Jesus faced.

We experience it in our own time. The mind of man has been activating its affinity with the external world of nature, and as a result, man has been able to lift out of the world of nature many things which are inherent in its order. As man has lifted these things out and observed them and reduced them to manageable units of control and manipulation, he has made the order of nature become an instrument in his hands for the fulfillment of private ends, ends which themselves may be destructive of the very nature that gave the secret in the first place. And that means, in simple terms, that when the secret of atomic energy becomes available to man and man uses this knowledge, skill, power, and insight for ends that are exclusive of his fellows, in other words, when he uses it in ways that will give him a kind of immunity against the moral quality of human relations, then the very order itself, the very logic itself, the very energy of the atom itself becomes the stalking manifestation of the *currah* of God. But if he uses the knowledge for ends that are inclusive of his fellows and their needs, the very energy itself becomes a manifestation of the *love* of God. When man experiences that kind of community, achievements of health and meaning and vitality and fulfillment become available unlike anything

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that had harassed or haunted his mind through all the generations of the past.

One other word in this connection. There is something even more personal here, it seems to me. It is reasonable for a man to say: If I am good, if I try to do the best I can, if I have followed the law of my heart, and in ways that were deliberate and conscious, tried to understand the will of God and put myself at its disposal, if I have not withheld my compassion from the needy, and have offered my thanksgiving to God for all of the manifestations of graces by which he has surrounded and sustained my life, if I have an inner sense of harmony and peace with His Spirit—then this ought to give me certain pragmatic advantages in life. I ought to be privileged to be an exception to the rules that bind people who have not been acting this way. Have you ever felt that way? Consider something you yourself are experiencing, and then look across the street and see a person who, from your point of view, has violated everything that you regard as holy and sacred. Yet—what he touches seems to blossom, and what you touch seems to wither and die as soon as it looks in your face. It's peculiar. You have felt that way?

Jesus may have thought:

—Somehow the quality of my character ought to render me immune to the order of life. Life should make an exception in my case because I am Jesus! Because of that great moment when I felt the affirmation and the confirmation of my Father!—When he gave to me the complete and utter sanction and imprimatur of His whole Being—under the aegis and sweep of that sense of glory and communion and identity—I seemed to have been lifted out of all the categories by which men are bound and held. Why can't I, then, act with utter disregard for all of this?

A friend of mine who is a doctor, was the dean of a medical school once upon a time. Many years ago I went to him for a physical examination. I was making a change in my plan of life and I

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wanted to know what was working for me and what would be working against me. He gave me his part of the exam and then sent me to about five other people to do various things. At the end of about a week I got a telephone call from him telling me that he wanted to see me. You know the sense of destiny that rides on that. You walk into his office; you sit in the chair and he sits at his desk. He has a manila folder and in it there are sheets of paper with typing and graphs and a lot of things you don't understand. He opens the folder, looks at you and says, "Hmmm, hmmm. . . . Uhhmm." Then he hesitates on one page, looks at you again, and then, it is a great relief, he turns it over and says, "Hmmm." And so he goes, all the way through. Well, that's what my doctor did, and I rejoiced to see him close the folder. I knew that I had made it. Then he said to me, "You are in fine shape. Your heart, your lungs, all those things are in good order, but you are too heavy."

He talked with me rather learnedly about what the extra pounds I was carrying would do to my heart and lungs and bloodvessels—all kinds of things that were very frightening to me. Then I looked at him! He wasn't as tall as I, and he weighed about two hundred and twenty-five pounds. *He thought that his body knew that he was a doctor.* His body did not know that he was a doctor; his body knew precisely what my body knew. We were bound by the same relentless logic of orderedness that provides the structure of dependability for life. Because he knew something about the structure had no bearing on this fact. It gave him no immunity, unless his knowledge enabled him to operate more fully, more effectively, more creatively *within* the order than my lack of knowledge.

This is a part of the dilemma of the trained mind, isn't it? Because we are trained, because we know so much about some things, in very subtle ways this counsels us into a kind of delusion about the extent to which we ourselves are just a part of the ebb and flow and

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order of life. Unless the knowledge gives us insight that will enable us to function in ways that will use the structure of dependability as a resource for the highest fulfillment in life, then the very knowledge that we have tempts us to put ourselves against life. And very quietly, without blasting of trumpets, without making any noise, life just grinds us to powder.

This is what the Master saw.

With all the embodiment which I feel of the very living Spirit of God, with all the "for instances" of His Kingdom, and the Angelos of His Spirit that has as its fundamental purpose the renewing and the regenerating of life so that more and more, all of life will come under the sweep of the gentle approval of the Will and Mind of the Love of God; nevertheless, I still must operate within the structure that *holds*. When I get out of it, life becomes the Enemy. When I am in it, life becomes the Resource. When I get out of it I experience the Wrath of God. When I am within it I experience the Love of God.

And the Tempter carried him to the pinnacle of the Temple and said,

—It is all right for you to jump. God will guarantee you.

If the dilemma were real, if the temptation were real, Jesus could have failed. If he could not have failed, there is no meaning in his freedom. I am so very glad that he struggled and triumphed. And so he speaks to me all the time that I might struggle, if happily, I too might triumph. But if I felt that when the pressure was upon him, he had an out, then when the pressure is upon me I could not hear him speak to me. Because he triumphed, there is laid upon my soul a necessity that I can never shake, that there is a way. There is a way.

Leave us not, our Father, to the strength of our weakness or the weakness of our strength. Hold us, O God, hold us until at last there begins to move deep within us the response to Thy Love. This is what we want, O God, so much, so very, very much, our Father.

Amen.

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*At the Crossroad*

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## Meditation:

We were delivered from something that threatened, something that would have destroyed or hurt or injured us, and we give to Thee the after-praise of our hearts, generated by the memory that survives. When we are most ourselves, we are concerned about doing the things which not only seem to our minds to be right and true, genuine and authentic, but which bring into our whole being a sense of peace, a sense of health and oneness.

We are troubled, our Father, by the divisions that are within us, deep conflicts in our own spirits which cause us to be at war within, a house divided against itself. This sense of inner conflict and the divisiveness is a part, as we think sometimes, our Father, of the conflict and the divisiveness that exists among Thy children everywhere. The peace which we seek in our private lives, that we may be one, is a part of the peace that we seek for all Thy children that they may be one family in Thy Presence, living in Thy world. How do we do this? If we only knew how to experience this, O God, with all our being. Out of Thy long experience with the life which Thou has created, the ups and downs of the journey of life by which Thou hast sought to make beauty out of ugliness, and harmony out of disharmony, wholeness out of things that are deep in their division, hast Thou learned so much that the overflow of Thy wisdom might be shared by us? May we too know how to win beauty out of ugliness, peace out of confusion, order out of chaos?

O God, how precious are Thy thoughts to us. How great is the sum of them.

Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting.

## Temptations of Jesus

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We continue our thinking together about the dilemmas of Jesus; this morning, the dilemma of the crossroad. As a background for our thought, I am reading two paragraphs from Olive Schreiner's

*From Man to Man.*

"I have sometimes thought, it would be a terrible thing if, when death came to a man or a woman, there stood about his bed, reproaching him, not for his sins, not for his crimes of commission and omission toward his fellow-men, but for the thoughts and the visions that had come to him, and which he . . . had thrust always into the background. . . . And then, when he is dying, they gather round him, the things he might have incarnated and given life to—and would not. All that might have lived, and now must never live forever, look at him with their large reproachful eyes—his own dead visions reproaching him, . . . saying, 'We came to you, you, only you could have given us life. Now we are dead forever. Was it worth it? All the sense of duty you satisfied, the sense of necessity you labored under: should you not have violated it all and given us birth?' It has come upon me so vividly sometimes, that I have almost leaped out of bed to gain air—that suffocating sense that all his life long a man or a woman might live striving to do his duty and then at the end find it all wrong."

"There are such absolutely conflicting ideals; the ideal of absolute submission and endurance of wrong towards oneself—the ideal of noble resistance to all injustice and wrong, even when done to oneself—the ideal of the absolute devotion to the smaller, always present, call of life—and the ideal of a devotion to the larger aims sweeping all before it. . . . The agony of life is not the choice between good and evil, but between two evils or two goods!"

One of the common errors, to begin on a negative note, that we experience when we think reflectively about the meaning of the life of Jesus, is to isolate a particular event, and regard it as some-

thing which stands by itself alone, not a part of the process, the story, the living stuff of his career. For instance, on Good Friday all of the concentration of the mind and the thinking is on the crucifixion, as if his life began there, as if there were no birth, no development, no logic. And so it is with the temptations. We think of them as taking place in a moment in time. Once they have been dealt with, once he has conquered them, then he goes on triumphing in the light of this conquest. How unlike our lives this is. Every battle that you win, you must win over and over again, for as long as you are living and growing and experiencing and developing. This is dramatized in the dilemma of the crossroad. Let's get a feeling of the picture.

Jesus and his disciples had been in Jericho and as they were walking together on the road that leads out of Jericho, they approached the fork. One road went north to Galilee and Nazareth; the other went south to Jerusalem. As they neared, something strange apparently took place in Jesus' face and his whole body. He strode ahead of his disciples and when they looked in his face, they were frightened. This is the only place in the Gospels in which it is written that when the disciples looked into the face of the Master, they were frightened. They were frightened by what they saw in his face as he moved ahead of them and then made the sharp turn south—to Jerusalem.

Now what was going on in his mind? I don't know. I wasn't there. But I think that any reading of his life would indicate that this was one of the critical moments when he had to say, all over again, what he had said many times, as dramatized in the temptations. He had to decide again:

—What shall I do with my own life if I am to be true to the thing that sent me forth when I had the moment, unlike all other moments in any man's life, when he gathers together all the powers of his being and his mind and

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his personality and makes a decision. If he feels that the decision which he has made has the sanction of the God whom he worships, then he and his decision and his life, in that creative moment of swirling intensity become one thing. So, shall I go north? Back home? I have had a very interesting experience, a very meaningful experience. I have made several dry runs with reference to the insights of the Kingdom of God. I have had moments when it seemed to me I stood in that place where the old and the new and the future come together. I was on a Mount of Transfiguration once, and there my whole life was caught up in a movement which I recognized so fully and graphically all that the heart of Israel has been saying through Moses and all that the heart of Israel has been saying through the prophets came together for me in a moment of profound and intimate awareness. It was so vivid that I was sure that before my eyes stood Moses and the Prophets, and I shuddered with ineffable joy. I have touched with wholeness emotions that were wild and unstructured, and I have held such wholeness before wavering, distracted, tortured spirits until they knew what it meant to become domesticated, to become living instruments in the hands of a whole mind and a whole spirit. I have felt power moving through me as it touched and healed and helped; all this before my very eyes. I looked at the sick and as their agony broke my heart, I stormed the gates of heaven seeking one little increment of verity that I could transmit, if I could find in them any receptacle of faith and outreach. I have seen this; I have felt it. If I go back home now, I can live in the place with which I am familiar, and from all the ends of the region these people could come and be blessed and helped. What a comfort I would be to my mother who finds it so difficult to accept the fact that her oldest son has walked out from under the responsibilities left when the head of the family died. All this is the will of God, isn't it?

Perhaps, in the back of his mind, there was this thought:

—If I go home, then I can die in my bed. And how long I could live doing good, helping, teaching. The world needs somebody to teach it. If I could have a long time interval to make available to all who seek, that which moves in me, of which I am so fully conscious and aware, isn't this enough? What is wrong with that?

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So runs my dream. But what am I?  
An infant crying in the night;  
An infant crying for the light  
With no language but a cry . . .

This would be wonderful . . . but I can't do it. I can't do it. I must go to Jerusalem. And I know that if I go to Jerusalem, the possibilities are I won't come back.

By making a choice to go to Jerusalem, am I simply following some ego-centric impulse, some desire that has crept into my being that I thought I had conquered some time ago? I was convinced that even though I felt myself to be the living embodiment of the Kingdom of God, He would not make an exception in my case. If I go to Jerusalem, the possibility is that I may be mistaken about this. It may be true, you see, that if I go to Jerusalem God will just make it possible for me to get there, to teach, to take the position which is the logic of my commitment at a time when my act would be a defiance of religious and political authority. It would be something that I would have to do in order that the truth might be proclaimed.

It may be that I missed the reading when I was tempted to go up to the pinnacle of the temple and jump down. If I did, God would take care of me because he couldn't afford to run the risk of letting anything happen to me! Too much destiny rides on my continuing. And He knows that, so he will give his angels charge over me. They will bear me up and keep me from fulfilling the natural logic of my experience. Maybe the conclusion I reached was not right.

It is so difficult to find a way by which we may be protected from self-deception. I may be absolutely sure, now, but suppose I am wrong. How can I know whether I am right or not? Now, before I take the step into the future—if I could know, then everything else would be all right.

—Perhaps I misread it, and if I go to Jerusalem, maybe I am going just to prove that I was mistaken when I decided that life would *not* make an exception in my case.

He made his decision, and even though (and I say this with reverence) it was Jesus of Nazareth, even though it was Jesus Christ,

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in the decision that he made, he could have been mistaken. If he could not have been mistaken, there is no significance in the idea of a decision in the first place. This is the thing that ties his life to mine with hoops of steel! He gathered all the distilled wisdom, insight, brooding, devotion, worship, prayer and dedication of which he was capable, and standing within the movement of this kind of searching conviction, he acted, confident that in his act he would be sustained not merely as Jesus Christ, or not merely as Jesus of Nazareth. The insight of which he became the living embodiment was that this is the kind of world in which God would sustain and support and hold that insight that it might hold in his world. When? Five years from now? Six years? Twenty? A thousand? All of this has no particular significance. If I act within that kind of vivid religious experience—what is death, persecution, rejection? They have no significance.

—I must be careful now, lest when they come upon me, I make them significant. I must watch this, because the issue is not there! The issue is at another point. As long as I abide in it, if I live six weeks, six days, ten weeks, ten years, it doesn't make any difference. And I will not regard myself as a martyr, either. I will not say because I took this stand, or this position, and all the world came down upon me, won't somebody please come and help me out? Or, what were you doing that you let this happen to me?

These are all good thoughts, but irrelevant ones. Jesus did what he had to do! He moved out of the center which he held and which held him. I wish I could have been there. I wish I could have seen his eyes when he took the first step on the Jerusalem Road. It would have been worth a lifetime of living, just to feel the pull of that moment.

—Back home, and die in my bed. Go to Jerusalem; die on a hill.

When you face that kind of crossroad, as every human being does, how will you vote? As you have faced that kind of crossroad,

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as every human being has, how did you vote? The answer is the story of your life.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,  
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory  
Forever and ever.  
Amen.

In the Garden

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