

Walking home from church this morning (6Mar77) after having taught on temptation, I sang aloud over and over a hymn I'd not sung for years and that I guessed was in my denomination's old hymnal [it was] and not in the new [right again]: "In the hour of trial, Jesus, plead for me lest by base denial I depart from thee. When thou seest me waver, with a look recall; nor for fear or favor suffer me to fall." Subsequent stanzas speak of "forbidden pleasures" the "vain world" would "charm" me with, and seek to "work me harm" with the temptations of its "sordid treasures." It reminds me of Jesus' victories over temptation in Gethsemane and on Cross--thus a proper god to strengthen me as I face my temptations, "sorrow, toil, or woe." And it closes with "Grant that I may never fail thy hand to see, grant that I may ever cast my care on thee." Neurotic dependence, bhakti devotion, biblical trust? Could be all three, but need't be any but the third....A thoroughgoing sanctional analysis of this hymn, sung more when folks sinned no less but repented more--or did they sin less?--would be a rich experience. Here, just a few comments: (1) Yielding to temptations that threaten to diminish human life is treated under the category of betrayal ["base denial"] of God, a fortiori of the whole creation, including self. And in reverse, in F. Thompson's most famous poem, "All things betray thee who betrayest me." The divine sanction under the metaphor of treachery-treason-betrayal hits as a dynamic negative: I who am defined as at least a potential truster of God am in danger of violating his trust in me that I'll not break the relationship of trust, the bond of leal-love [the heart notion of "love" in the biblical tradition]. One reason I've never been drunk is that, by both biblical and stoic sanction, it'd be an insult to God; same for genital faithfulness in marriage; same for.... Without this tension-relation with the God of Truth and therefore Justice, of Love and therefore Forgiveness, human life on this planet would now, 1977, be baser than it is; and for this God there has been found no adequate substitute. (2) As it's a hymn of Jesus devotion, the divine sanction appears within the dominical sanction throughout. God's providential attention appears in the allusion to Jesus' redeeming glance at Peter right after Peter's betrayal ["denial"] of Jesus--an allusion reinforcing the trust/betrayal theme. [Also, though Jesus was watching Peter walk on water, Peter diverted his attention from Jesus to the storm, and began to sink.] (3) The "fall" danger is connected to two motive-situations, viz. fear and lust-greed ["favor"]. (4) Finally, the idea that God-Jesus "suffers," Mod.Eng. "permits," us to "fall," for our education-maturity in the freedom with which we're trusted at the heart of our existence by the Heart of the universe, is affirmed in the petition that it won't occur destructively, in excess--on which cp. the line in the Lord's Prayer [unfortunately, liturgically generally treated as two lines], "Don't let us be so tempted that we fail to be delivered from the evil."

3. The solution to temptation is directly put in another old hymn: Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged! Take it to the Lord in prayer.

1. The source of temptation? From OT through IP [intertestamental period] through NT, a modulation from God to a functionary in his court ["the adversary" lawyer, Heb. "Satan," but not as a name] to a personage combining that function with the prime ministry [L.4.6, Satan to Jesus, "I will give you all this power and all this wealth, for it has all been handed over to me, and I can give it to anyone I choose."], to a person rivaling God for dominion over the universe [the Lucifer motif] and therefore a type of all idols tempting us to replace God as life-center. God with the gift of freedom, to conscious creatures without and with skinbags, necessarily in the very process gave also the power to drift away from him, to cut the moorings in the true Source and true Destiny. The furniture of popular religion, in and after the Bible, represents this distance, "alienation," of the tempting power from God, till a rival center is set up, a chthonic pseudocenter imitating the divine Center. ...Tempted not by God, but by our "own evil desire"(Jas.1.13f).
2. The subjects tempted? Supremely and a fortiori, God himself [in Jesus, tempted "in every way" (L.4.13 and Heb.4.15)]; angels; humans. "The Temptation of Jesus": M.1.12f; L.4.1-13; Mt.4.1-11....In L.23, Jesus' victories over temptation toward God ["into your hands"] and humanity ["Father, forgive them"].