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Norman Geisler

## Sir Gawain's Conflict with the World, the Flesh, And the Devil.

Sir Gawain represents the ideal Christian knight. As such he is faced with the Christian's threefold temptation, viz., the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world presents the sphere of his conflict, the flesh is the source of it, and the devil was the seducer to evil. It was on the last of these three that Sir Gawain met with his greatest failure and his real source of defeat.

Sir Gawain's first conflict<sup>was</sup> with the world. The noble knight seemed to be somewhat impervious to the temptations of the world. In general the knight was unaffected by the presence of riches, a source of many a soul's failing. He acted somewhat at home in the atmosphere of the merry making and reveling of the Christmas season yet at the same time he was not overtaken by its excesses, ~~on~~ any occasion. When Sir Gawain and the lord covenanted with kisses to reciprocate the things gained during the day, the lord said, "riches you soon will get." The offer ~~evidently~~ had little or no effect on the knight for he passed on to this room while the others were drinking and making merry. On another occasion he was offered a gift by the fair lady as a token of love. She offered "a rich ring wrought in gold with a blazing stone that stood out above it," but promptly the hero refused it, "Madam, I care not for gifts <sup>and</sup>." Finally, he <sup>agrees</sup> ~~consents~~ to accept the green belt not for its value in riches but for its mystical protection.

Now Sir Gawain resisted the impact of the world on his life is summed up very nicely by Saint John when he said, "and this is the victory that overcomes the



world, our faith". Time and time again, while faced with overwhelming temptation, the hero <sup>never</sup> ~~make~~ <sup>never</sup> recourses to the faith. "By my faith," it would be a manifold fallacy, "By many" and many other such phrases which indicated the good knight's victory lies in his faith which overcome the world.

Sir Gawain's conflict with the flesh was even more <sup>lothal</sup> real and forcefully shown in the poem than the former. Three times over he was faced with temptation that might have swept him into sin, but as a stalwart soldier of Christ he gracefully resisted each time. The first of these forward ladies throws herself at the knight's disposal, only to find that his tact was unmatched and his guard always ready. However, before leaving, he replied to her by a refuge to faith and humility. We reassured her that he <sup>loved</sup> ~~adored~~ it a favor of which, if he was unworthy and ~~had~~ her good day with the blessings of Mary. The knight was no less the victor on the occasion of the second temptation of the flesh. "The fair lady tempted and tested him often to make the man see whatever she'd in mind, but so fair his defense was, no fault was apparent...." The lady of love, on the third attack of his virtues, came to his room all decked out in jewels and prepared for his doom, but Mary had not quit her knight for the fair lady left him unhindered by sins of the flesh.

In these three episodes Sir Gawain manifested unflinching faith in Christ. He continued at Mass and in life to look on the five wounds and remember the Savior's death for all mankind. It was not on the second that the knight was to falter, but the third was to prove more than a match for him.

Sir Gawain's conflict with the devil was to prove fatal to the knight's virtues. The devil himself was the



originator of pride. It was found in him at the very first and has been found in his subjects ever since. The world did not hamper nor the flesh conquer the hero, but the devil proved to be more than a challenge.

Upon arriving at the Green Chapel and seeing its ugliness, Sir Gawain gives vent to his feelings as to how he was tricked into failure by the acceptance of the green belt, the fatal shortcoming. He felt that the Green Knight had come "to perform in the devil's own fashion his worship." "I feel in my five senses this is the fiend who has made me come to this meeting to kill me," said the knight. He at once sees that the trickery involved was devilish and his failure had been to fall for the sin of self love. It was for love of his life that he was blamed and punished by a cut in the neck. As a Christian knight he had failed to take the whole armor of God that he might be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. He had failed with his shield of faith to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. He had fallen prey to the vanity of human pride and felt the sparing of his life to be important enough to accept the green belt which was supposed to protect him from the blow of any man's sword. For this sin he wore the belt on his neck as a token of his mistake. It was Sir Gawain's conflict with the devil, though unbeknownst to him, in which his virtues failed and he found real defeat. Among other morals, the poem depicts man's inability to completely conquer the subtilty of human pride - the pride of life. St John says, "in the world is the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life..." It was on this last one under devilish influence that the noble knight failed.

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