APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FIVE

THE 'Αγωνία OF JESUS IN GETHSEMANE, LK 22:44

The development of a traditional picture of prayer itself as an Agon has been rejected for Rom 15:30 and Col 4:12.¹ No exception is provided by the picture of Jesus’ ‘agony’ in Gethsemane in Lk 22:44 which has been referred to as illustrating the Agon of prayer.² The reference is in place only in so far as ἀγωνία (καὶ γενόμενος ἐν ἀγωνίᾳ ἐκτενέστερον προσηγχέο) indicates a real struggle and not simply fear. It is true that ἀγωνία and ἀγωνίαν frequently occur, especially in later Greek, in juxtaposition with φόβος (and δέος) and φοβεῖσθαι.³ But enough references are at our disposal to show that even at Paul’s time and later, these first two terms still often carried a hint of their original agonal colouring. This comes to light in the use of ἀγωνία to express fear of the imminent and uncertain future (e.g. Diog. Laert. VII 112: δὲ φόβος ἐστὶ προσδοχία κακοῦ … ἀγωνία δὲ φόβος ἀδήλου πράγματος; cf. Diod. Sic. XIX 26: περὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος ἀγωνίαν), especially of defeat and catastrophe (Stob. ecl. II 92W: ἀγωνία δὲ φόβος διαπτώσεως καὶ έτέρως φόβος ἡττησ), and therefore for “die letzte Spannung der Kräfte vor hereinbrechenden Entscheidungen und Katastrophen”.⁴ Even at a late time the verb could be used in an active sense similar to ἀγωνίζεσθαι.⁵ The active

¹ As well as these two Pauline passages, I Clem 2:14 and Eusebius H.E. III 23:19, already cited, note also Justin Apol. II 13: καὶ εὐχόμενος καὶ παμμά-χως ἀγωνίζομενος.
² Cf. Sanday and Headlam on Rom 15:30 and Lightfoot on Col 4:12. — Vv.43f. are not found in many of the Gospel collections of the early Church, but can be found in others from the second century. Schlatter (Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament I, p. 585) concludes that they possibly form a “Zusatz eines anderen Christen, der der Kirche eindringlich vorhalten wollte, wie schwer der Kampf war, den Jesus damals bestand”. E. Klostermann, Das Lukasevangelium (HNT), *1929, p. 215, speaks of a “lukanische Sprachfarbe tragender Einschub”. But it is just this Lukan colouring, especially the characteristic appearance of the angel, which allows us to retain these verses in the original text, cf. B. H. Streeter, The Four Gospels, London *1927, pp. 61 and esp. 137.
⁴ E. Stauffer, TWNT I, p. 140. For the element of the decisive in ἀγωνία see supra, p. 54.
⁵ Cf. also Or Sib III 710.
meaning of decisive struggle must also be given to ἀγωνία in Lk 22:44. It does not suggest that the wrestling of Jesus emphasises a struggle for peace of soul, for inner composure in view of the cruel irrevocable fate which awaited him, but rather an intense and decisive struggle for victory.1 "Jesus gerät in ἀγωνία, war eine letzte Anspannung seine Kräfte vor der Entscheidung, einen Angst-Kampf um den Sieg andeuten will".2 L. Brun who has given detailed attention to vv. 43f. is probably right in noting as the background of this struggle the attacks and temptations of Satan who plays a major role in Luke's account of the life and passion of Jesus (4:13, 22:3.31.53, 22:28,40,46; cf. John 12:27-31). We here see the beginning of the climax to the struggle between Jesus and his arch-enemy who wishes to destroy his work and rob him of the victory by tempting him in the hour of his betrayal. In this struggle it is the appearance of the angel which provides strength for the battle proper which follows.3

A passage from Clement of Alexandria which is possibly based on Lk 22:44 offers a second interpretation which is equally as good. In Quis Dives Salv. 23 Christ says: "On your behalf I wrestled (διαγωνίζομαι) with death and paid your penalty of death ... Let it be Christ who conquers in you, since it is on your behalf that he struggles (ἀγωνίζομαι)". Jesus ἀγωνία, if Lk 22:44 is meant, here appears as the active struggle with death, clearly not fear of death.

It is just possible that later Christian writers had the same scene in mind—though not necessarily in its Lucan form—when they spoke of Christ as the great athlete who had suffered first and now stood by those who suffered martyrdom for him.4 The martyrdom of Blandina (cf. Euseb. H.E. V 1.36ff.) is summed up in the following lines full of imagery: ή μικρά καὶ ἀσθενής καὶ ἐκκαταφρόνητος μέγαν καὶ ἀκαταγώνιστον ἀθλητήν Χριστόν ἐνδεδυμένη, διὰ πολλῶν

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1 Cf. K. H. Rengstorf, Das Evangelium nach Lukas (NTD), ad loc., and Stauffer, op.cit., p. 140, lines 36f.: "Das ist nicht die Angst vor dem Tode, sondern die Angst um den Sieg —angesichts des nahenden Entscheidungskampfes, von dem das Schicksal der Welt abhängt". So also Cremer-Kögél, p. 75f.: ἀγωνία "hier nicht die sich zurückziehende, fliehende, sondern die um den Ausgang zitternde, bis zum Aussersten spornende Furcht", quoting also Arist. Rhet. 1:9 for the distinction between ἀγωνία and φοβεῖσθαι.


3 Ibid.

4 This thought is not behind the picture of Christ as the πρόδρομος in Hebr 6:20.—In addition to the passages here cited note Acta Philippi 144 (Bonn.-