

# **THE REDEMPTIVE MYSTERY**

of the



## **AGONY IN GETHSEMANE**

[FOR THE PRIVATE USE OF STUDENTS]

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## The Redemptive Mystery of the Agony in GETHSEMANE

### Presentation

#### The Name:

St. Jerome understood this to have come from one of Isaiah's warnings to Samaria:

*... Woe to the haughty crown of Ephraim's drunkards, to the fading flower of its proud splendor overlooking the lush valley, to those prostrated by wine* [cf. Is 28:1]

Others, though, see its explanations more from the Greek word **GB SAMMANI**, oil plot. Only Mk [14:32] and Mt [26:36] give the name, and it is presented as a field, an extended area most likely, a grove of **olive trees**. John calls it a **Garden** [18:1].<sup>1</sup>

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### Garden – Desert – Garden = Creation – Sin – Redemption

#### The Garden [cf. Gn 2:8]

God plants a Garden in Eden, which might have been part of a tree grove [cf. Ezk 31:8]. The cultivation of vegetable gardens was widely practiced in the ancient Orient –but, less frequently that of parks: these were generally laid out only by the great Kings. Here there may have been the faint idea of the conception of Yahweh as the owner of the park. The narrative clearly presents this as a holy region, enclosing God's presence and, therefore, guarded by the Cherubim [cf. Gn 3:24]. **Eden** seems to be the proper name of a land in the distant east.

The narrative speaks in rather an imprecise manner of a **Garden in Eden**, and also of the **Garden of Eden** [cf. Gn 2:15; 3:23, f.]. **Eden** is almost synonymous for **Paradise** [cf. Is 51:3; Ezk 28:13; 31:9].<sup>2</sup>

The fact that God has 'planted' this Garden is an expression of a very open anthropomorphism; - this is God Who *shapes* clay like a potter – *breathes* and *walks* on the evening breeze. **Eden** might once have referred to some real land, appears sometimes as the Garden where God Himself dwells [cf. Is 51:3; Ezk 28:13; 31:9 – Ezk 28:11-19 is the closest biblical parallel to Gn 2-3]. One hypothesis is that both Ezk and the Tradent "J" have drawn on a common mythology from which one has appropriated some of the details.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. K. W. Clark, 'Gethsemane', in: *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Nashville/NY: Abingdon Press. Vol. I, p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> G. van Rad, *Genesis*. OT Library. London: SCM 1972, pp. 78, f.

<sup>3</sup> cf. B. Vawter, *On Genesis – A New Reading*. Garden City NY: Doubleday 1977, pp. 68, f.

**The Desert:** this, too, is present in the creation story: *the world was a formless void, a trackless waste* [cf. Gn 1: 2+]. God's Word created the Garden, which returned to a desert because of sin. The Exodus story is redemption from slavery, across the desert, to the land flowing with milk and honey – the annual harvest seemed to be **Creation re-visited**. The **Return to Eden** is also a theme of hope.<sup>4</sup>

The story of Creation began in what seems to have been a beautiful park, a kind of oasis. The harmony and peace that reigned there was disrupted, the Covenant of Peace was turned aside. The beautiful garden where all was in harmony became an arid desert. The Israelites *groaned* [a Lamentation Liturgy?] in their slavery, and their *cry came* up to God. Exodus became a New Creation – as later the Babylonian Captivity would be reversed from slavery to service.

The Prophet, II-Is, speaks of this transformation:

*... In the wilderness, I will plant cedar trees, acacias, myrtles, olives. In the desert, I will plant juniper, plane tree and cypress, side by side, so that all may see and know... that the hand of Yahweh has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it ...* [II-Is 41:17, f.]

A specific mention of a New Eden appears in the prophetic writings:

*... Yes, Yahweh has pity on Zion, has pity on all her ruins; turns her desolation into Eden, her wasteland into a Garden of Yahweh. Joy and gladness are found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of music ...* [Is 51:3].

As has been noted, Ezechiel reflected often on Eden, the Garden of God:

*... You were once an exemplar of perfection, full of wisdom, perfect in beauty: you were in Eden, in the Garden of God ...* [Ezk 28:12].

*... I made [the cedar] lovely with branching green. It was the envy of every tree in Eden, in the Garden of God....* [Ezk 31:9].

Ezk saw the transformation of the desert into a fertile Garden, or ground, once again. This is the result of the fulfillment of the promise of the living waters:<sup>5</sup>

*... Everyone will say: this land, so recently a waste, is now like a Garden of Eden, and the ruined cities once abandoned and leveled to the ground, are now strongholds with people living in them...* [Ezk 36 :35].

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<sup>4</sup> cf. C. Mesters, OCD, *Paraíso terrestre: saudade ou esperança?* Petrópolis: Vozes Ltda. 1971; G. Cussen, SJ, *Un jardin en Eden, nommé Gethsemani*. Cahiers de Spiritualité'. Quebec 1978.

<sup>5</sup> J. Steinmann, *Le prophète Ezechiel – et les débuts de l'exil*. Paris: du Cerf 1953, pp. 127, ff.; 194, ff.

### Jesus' Trial In The Desert

*... During His life on earth, He offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, to the One Who had the power to save Him out of death, and He submitted so humbly that His prayer was heard ... [Heb 7:5].*

The Synoptic account of this episode presents some terms, the understanding of which is of greatest assistance in coming to grasp the deeper meaning of the mystery. These terms are:

- **Desert:** [cf. Mt 4:1; Mk 1:12; Lk 4:1 [4 x];
- **To Tempt; the Tempter; Temptation:** [11 x];
- **Devil :** [cf. Mt 4 :1, 5, 8, 11 ; Lk 4 :2, 3, 6, 13 [8 x] ;
- **Satan:** [cf. Mt 4:18; Lk 1:13 [2 x].

To call to mind even rapidly, the meaning of these terms had throughout the mentality of the OT in Judaism and also in the NT – would imply remembering a well determined background, in which the Gospel narrative is framed.

#### **A. The Temptations of Jesus**

**1. The Desert:** this is a very profound term, when one recalls the extensive history and spirituality which developed in the religious experience of Israel.

**a. The Desert: a place of trial and infidelity on the part of Israel:** this 'sterile' and uninhabitable place, as a geographic reality, is opposed to inhabited land – in the same way that *malediction* is contrasted with *benediction*:

*... this vast and dreadful wilderness, a land of fiery serpents, scorpions, thirst... a waterless place ... [Dt 8:15].*

As is evident from this description, the Desert is a place of fearsome struggle against hostile powers.

Israel was invited to experience the desert, to be far from the seductions of the far more comfortable, sedentary life. In the desert, with greater ease, however, the People came to experience more the closeness and the supreme dominion of God, and the total need of dependence on God.

However, to be put to such a trial, the Israelites fell into sin. Having been called to this ordeal of desert life, chosen expressly by God and entrusted to their faith, in Him as their only Guide, the People very clearly preferred the ordinary way of security and harshly criticized their having to leave the 'comforts' of the more regulated life of slavery.

In one of the biblical traditions [cf. **Ps 95**, often the Invitatory to the Liturgy of Hours], the Desert would be remembered in this most ancient of traditions [cf. Ex & Nb] as the time of **murmuring, complaining, or infidelity**, thus laying bare the inconstancy of the Chosen People.

**A. The Desert: a Time of the Manifestation of Divine Love and Wonders:** [cf. especially the Prophets, as Ho 2], which presented the time of the crossing of the Desert as a period of rebellion and apostasy, but also show it to have been a time of glory for the Lord, as the triumph of His **Mercy** and His fidelity [**Hesed**].

The hardness of Israel's heart did not disarm the loving and merciful God – He has freely chosen to bring to a happy conclusion His Plan of salvation. In the desert, the People were gradually forged from being a 'motley crew' of wandering nomads into the Chosen People, entering into a Covenant of Mercy with the God of their Fathers, and accepted His Law, His word. Even though the obstinate who rebelled did not survive the Desert, nevertheless, Yahweh shows a very special protection for this People, multiplying His stupendous wonders of Mercy in its behalf.

In one strand of later writing, the 'D' Tradent is the aspect that emerges. The experience of the Desert will be idealized and experienced as a privileged period of the History of salvation. This will be looked upon as the 'idyllic' time period, that era of the engagement of the young Spouse with the Heavenly Suitor. In later times, this happy time will be contrasted with the times of infidelity and adultery. It is on the basis of the 'nuptial theme' that God invites to conversion, reveals His divine 'jealousy.'

**A. The Desert: the perspective of the Future:** the religious experience of the Desert, re-presented continually as an ideal for the present, became enriched and served as a kind of model for Israel's future spiritual direction. The same God, Who had achieved salvation in ancient times, will renew His wonders in the future:

*... Once more there will be poured out on us the spirit from above; then shall the wilderness be fertile land and fertile land will become a forest. In the wilderness justice will come to live and integrity in the fertile land – integrity will bring peace, justice will give lasting security. My People will live in a peaceful land... [Is 32:15, ff.].*

*... Let the wilderness and the dry lands exult, let the waste-lands rejoice and bloom, let it bring forth flowers like the jonquil, let it rejoice and sing for joy ... Look, your Lord is coming ... He is coming to save you... [Is 35:1, ff.].*

*... I will make rivers well up on barren heights, and fountains in the midst of valleys... [Is 41:18, ff.].*

***... No need to recall the past, no need to think about what was done before. See, now I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light. Can you not see it? Yes, I am making a road in the wilderness, paths in the wilds ... [Is 43:18, ff.].***

By the time of the NT, the 'Desert' had acquired an **eschatological meaning**: once again the Lord will appear and will accomplish His merciful wonders [cf. Mt 24:26; Ac 21:38]. This fascination for the Desert is present also in the mysterious Community of Qumran.

However, it is in the ministry of John the Baptist that this Messianic-Eschatological ideal of the Desert peaks: John the Baptist has been invested with the Mission of the Precursor and begins his preaching in the Desert [cf. Mt 1:4, ff.; par.]. Jesus multiplies the Bread 'in a deserted place', a kind of symbol of calling to mind a 'new and greater Manna' [cf. Jn 6]; cf. also Mt 14:12-21, ff.]. this was to teach that a new era had been inaugurated, in which one would live wondrously from the word of Jesus.

The eschatological symbolism continues in the life of the Church – which is meant to live a hidden life in the Desert until the return of Jesus. When He comes, He will terminate definitively the last vestiges of the power of Satan [cf. Rv 12]. The fact that Jesus is 'led out into the desert' seems to be explained by these three motives:

- to fast and to pray in this place that was traditionally considered to be close to God and thus undertake His Personal Salvific Mission – it began this way;
- to be put to the test by God, by means of Satan – in the very place where traditionally it was believed that the Evil One had his 'residence';
- to inaugurate the new Messianic times.

**2. *Temptation* – the word itself, both noun and verb:** in Scripture, two aspects at least of this word are associated wither with ***trial [ordeal]*** – or simply, ***to tempt***.

a. **Israel tempts God:** this theme of God being *tempted* by His Chosen People is developed particularly in connection with the desert pilgrimage. In this context, *to tempt God* meant to **doubt** His power, by **forgetting** the merciful wonders He had already accomplished. This would lead to **disobedience**, to **presumption**, on His wonderful interventions, by demanding miracles for their own satisfaction, or for reasons that were disproportionate to the request.

The Israelites tempted God at Massa and Meriba by doubting His providential presence:

*... The place was named Massa and Meribah, because of the grumbling of the sons of Israel and because they put God to the test by saying: 'Is God with us, or not?' ... [Ex 17:7].*

Deuteronomy makes a prescription out of the incident:

*... Do not put Yahweh, your God, to the test as you tested Him in the desert, at Massa. Keep the commandments... [Dt 6:16, ff.].*

In this passage **to tempt God** means the same as provoking His wrath by disobedience [cf. also Nb 14:22, f.; also Ps 78:41; 95:8, f.]. St. Paul will use the idea for the People of Corinth:

*... You are not to put the Lord to the test; some of them did, and were killed by snakes ... [1 Co 10:9; also Heb 3-4].*

**b. God puts Israel to the test:** to tempt, or to put to the *trial*, is also attributed to God for the purpose of knowing in depth the human heart of His Chosen Ones. The trial-type of all time is Abraham. God *tries* him as though He needed to 'find out' the extent of his generosity: **now I know that you fear God** [Gn 22:12]. The trial was then ever afterward held up to believers as a Model of Faith for all the faithful.

In a parallel manner to the idea that the Israelites *tempted* God in the desert, the Books of Ex and Dt state that Yahweh *put Israel to the test*:

*... Now I rain down bread for you from the heavens. Each day the People are to go out and gather the day's portion; I propose to test them in this way, to see whether they will follow My Law or not ... [Ex 16:4].*

In the final books of the OT, the concept of *temptation* became more and more refined, with more 'elevated' formulations. It is no longer presented as a means by which God purifies His People to see whether or not they will be faithful. Temptation became an **instrument of education**, and of teaching, a privilege and even a sign of affection. A distinction is drawn between **trial** and **temptation**:

- **trial:** comes from God, and it is a characteristic of the divine **Paideia, pedagogy**, tending to purify the just person [cf. Tb 12:13; Si 2:1-6; Ws 3:10; Jn 15:2-8].
- **temptation:** is considered as a suggestion toward evil, and this is never attributed to God but to the *world, the flesh and the Devil* – the **Adversary**.

In Judaism, following the Babylonian Captivity, there was a marked tendency to safeguard the transcendence of God. This 'movement' led to the re-reading of some of the earlier biblical texts, and resulted in an ever more refined religious

sensibility. Thus, certain *temptations* which were once considered to have had God as their Author, in the 'up-dated' understanding of this mystery, came eventually to be attributed to Satan. Some examples might be:

- in 2 S 24:1, it is 'God' Who moves David to take up a census – yet, this is presented as a 'great sin and stupidity' [cf. 24:10]. This same episode is in 1 Ch 21:1 and there it shows that the 'temptation came from Satan;
- in Ex 4:24, it is 'God' Who tries to 'kill' Moses – but the LXX and also the Targum read this as the 'Angel of the Lord' – and finally, in the apocryphal work, *Jubilees*, it is attributed to the Prince of Demons;
- in Gn 22:1, ff. God is presented as tempting Abraham, asking him to sacrifice Isaac – and again, the 'Book of Jubilees' attributes this initiative to *Hastema*, who had said to God that the fidelity of Abraham could not have overcome such a trial.

Perhaps an analogous nuance might be presented in the Temptation Scenes involving Jesus. The Synoptics' accounts<sup>6</sup> show a marked evidence of being permeated with the OT accounts for the temptations of Israel- a trial to which the People of God surrendered and were defeated. There is this difference: while in Dt [8:2], God is the One who puts Israel to the test – in the Gospel narrative, very clearly it is the work of **Satan**, even though the 'Spirit' did indeed lead Jesus out into the desert.

This shift in emphasis corresponds to the post-exilic concern which placed a series of intermediaries between the transcendent God and sinful humanity: and this for the 'good' [angels], and also for all inclination toward evil [the demons]. The *angelology* and the *demonology* in the NT may have counter-arts in the Judaic writings that have remained 'extra-biblical'. However, the NT writings do bring a line of sobriety to this whole area.

c. **The Final Petition of the *Pater Noster*:** in this last Petition: ***lead us not into temptation*** – or: **do not put us to the test** – seems to have more the meaning of **trial**. For Jesus, temptation is identified with the great danger of succumbing to it. *Temptation* and *Fall* are almost synonymous, and are identified in some way with the *evil* spoken of in parallel discussions. *To enter into temptation* is already, in some way, to be 'lost', 'overwhelmed' – it is always a real danger, a genuine *crisis*, time for judgment, choice - note the words of Jesus to his Disciples in the Garden:

**... You should be awake, and praying, not to be put to the test...** [Mk 14:38, par.]

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. Dupont, OSB, *Le tentazioni di Gesù nel deserto*. Brescia: Paideia 1970 – a recognized classic in this matter.

The *temptation*, or *test* of which Jesus speaks, has an **eschatological** resonance. It is immediately associated with the **grand tribulation, ordeal** [*thlipsis*] of the last times, which will place the faith of the believers to the fire of trial. The great danger implied here is **apostasy from the faith**, the Christological scandal: a reality present in the History of the Church [as the Apostles found out!] from the time of Jesus until the end of time.

There is no question here – at least, directly – of the ‘ordinary’ temptations to sin: even though these in some way are ‘parts’, or expressions of the ultimate trial. The real ‘test’ here is whether one will remain a disciple, be preserved from apostasy, to avoid total and definitive and eternal failure.

Jesus is here directing those who would follow Him to pray for that same intention which was often the scope of His own personal Prayer:

*... Simon, Simon! Satan, you must know, has got his wish to sift you all like wheat; but what I have prayed for you, Simon, is that your faith may not fail, and once more you have recovered – you, in your turn, must strengthen your brothers ...* [Lk 22:31, ff.]

*... keep those who You had given to Me true to Your name ... I am not asking You to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the Evil One ...* [Jn 17:11, 15].

This **apocalyptic tribulation** began with the Passion of the Lord and will be experienced ever anew in the destiny of anyone who might accept the call to follow/ imitate Jesus Christ.

The experience of the disciples of Jesus is always a threatened way of life. Therefore, it is necessary to ask for help. It is not God Who *tempts*. **To follow after Jesus** is of necessity a **harsh situation of on-going trial** – in the Desert, in the Garden, on Calvary – the Evil One seems to have full sway. It seems, over those who would strive to be other **Christ's**. [cf. Jas 1:13; Si 15:11-15].

So, inspiring this ultimate petition of the **Our Father** is an image of the world, and the **way of the pilgrim** in which the powers of evil still have a following. There is personified evil, and its despotism and apparent unchecked victories. Coupled with that, there is in each person a truly fearsome weakness, an active possibility to be tempted.

Yet, far beyond these distressing facts of the fierce battle between Christ in the desert and in the Garden with the powers of evil – there is already visible the ultimate victory of Jesus. The struggle in the desert was ‘prophetic types’ of His ultimate victory – even though devil **left Him to return at the appointed time!** The reign of God is imminent – Satan has only a little time [relatively speaking] at his disposition [cf. Rv 12:12]. This time of **trial** is abbreviated for each one – the reign of

God is near! [cf. Mk 13:19, ff.]. So, the ***Our father*** manifests the awesome tension that invades the life of all disciples:

- on the one hand, the great dangers that threaten the faith, provoking the plea for help;
- on the other hand, the full confidence of the Providence of the Heavenly Father of Mercy.

**3. Satan – the Devil<sup>7</sup>:** the place of the Devil in the OT is extremely limited. By the word ‘Devil’ [a Greek word, meaning **accuser, calumniator, adversary**] – is expressed by the Hebrew word, Satan. By it, there is intended that mysterious personality, invisible, whose sway is made manifest in the activities of other beings, or in temptation. Biblically, his role appears as follows:

**a. The Adversary of God:** SATAN is first expressly mentioned in Jb 1-2 – but even here, it does not seem to be a question of the ‘devil’ in the truly traditional sense – but, much more the Book of Job speaks of one among the ‘sons of God’/ However, even here, the role of ‘Satan’ seems to be that of the ‘Accuser’, Prosecuting Attorney’, charged with making sure that justice be respected on the earth, as well as the rights of God. In this guise, he acts, in the interests of God regarding Job and only with His authorization The trials which ‘visit’ Job come from God: Satan is God’s docile instrument, His emissary.

However, even behind this rather strange story, and this apparent ‘service’, there is already a certain hostility that may be noted. The account does not specifically state that Satan had inspired the wife of Job to induce her husband to ‘curse God, and die!’ However, there is at least the impression that secretly Satan is hoping that Job will succumb. The Accuser here is almost the ‘Tempter.’

A very similar frame of reference is attributed to Satan in the vision of Zc 3:1-5. The Prophet contemplates the Judgment of Israel, represented by the High Priest, Joshua: there is noted that on the right hand of the Angel of Yahweh, there is Satan to accuse the people. However, God does reject the accusations. Joshua’s garments of mourning are removed that he might be vested with the robes of festivity and with the insignia of the priesthood. And Satan remarked:

**... May Yahweh rebuke you, Satan, may Yahweh rebuke you...!** [Zc 3:2; Jude 9].

Here, the Accuser is changed into a true ‘Adversary ‘of God, and of His Plan of Salvation.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Foi chretienne et demonologie*. S. Congregation of the Faith, June 1975. cf. Flanner Documents of Vatican II, Vol. II. ‘Demonology’

A third episode is the vision of the Prophet Micah [cf. 1 K 22:19-23], where the 'spirit of lying' who takes the place of Satan, is a simple agent of the Lord – who responds to His appeals, and carries out His orders.

There is a good comparison that might be made between 1 K 24:1 and 1 Ch 21:1: this shows the care of later revelation to safeguard the divine transcendence – and also makes it very clear that the faith of Israel is not dualistic in its understanding of God.

Satan appears very clearly as an Adversary in Gn 3. Without mentioning his name, and without offering any further information on his nature and origin, the Bible has Satan appear under the mythical form of a snake, in the background of a tense drama an avowed adversary of the Plan of God.

Here, too, the artful author avoids every danger of dualism: the serpent is a creature of God [cf. Gn 3:1] – He will be punished severely for his opposition to God's Word [cf. Gn 3:14]. However, he is a special creature, endowed with exceptional knowledge and ability, very much superior to those of human beings. Thus, Satan is presented as a mysterious individual, and from the very beginning, an enemy of human nature. The Bible maintains most extraordinary silence, right up until those generations just prior to the Christian era. The Book of Wisdom finally gives his name: the DEVIL [cf. Ws 2:24; Si 25:24].

His victory over humanity is not lasting: he is the first to be punished and he alone is 'cursed'. There is already the Promise that humanity will eventually triumph [cf. Gn 3:5]. This victory of humanity over Satan is the object of OT revelation.

**b. The Adversary of Jesus Christ:** under a variety of names, the NT has in mind the same mysterious personality as in Genesis. He is the 'great dragon', the 'ancient serpent', the one who is known as the Devil, Satan, the Seducer of the entire world [cf. Rv 12:9; cf. Jn8:44; 1 Jn 3:8; 2 Co 11:3].

- the Synoptics: even though they all speak of him differently, they are all careful to mention him. In the parable of the Sower, he is Satan [Mk], the Evil One [Mt], and the Devil [Lk]. Elsewhere he is spoken of as the 'enemy' [in the parable of the cockle and the wheat]. He is 'Beelzebul', the 'Prince of Demons' [cf. Mt 10:25; 12:4, par.].

- St. Paul: uses different titles, and adds his own: 'Beliar' [cf. 2 Co 6:15]/ He is Satan, the Devil, the Tempter [cf. 2 Th 3:3; Ep 6:11-16; 1 Th 3:5].

- St. John: presents him as 'the Prince of this World' [cf. Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11]: the 'god of this world' [as expressed also by Paul – cf. 2 Co 4:4]. It is no longer

merely Satan himself who is opposed to God, but that there is endless hostility between the Reign of Satan and that of God.

The life and the activities of Jesus are placed in the perspective of a real struggle between two worlds: Light and Darkness. What is at stake is the definitive salvation of humanity. The 'reign' of Satan existed before the coming of the Messiah [cf. Ac 26:18; Gn 1:4]. Jesus has come to substitute the Reign of God [cf. Mt 3:2, par.; Jn 3:3-5; Rm 14:17]. And this Reign of God [cf. Mt 3:2, par.; Mt 13:41; Jn 18:36; Col 1:13; Ep 5:5] is His very own self, His Person. The Son of God came to destroy the works of the Devil [cf. 1 Jn 3:8] - He has come to reduce to powerlessness the one who has power only over death, the Devil [cf. Heb 2:14].

From the very opening pages of the Gospels, immediately after the investiture received at His Baptism, the first act of the public mission and life of Jesus is a terrible confrontation with Satan in the desert. Seen throughout as an anticipation of the Gethsemane scene, the terrible struggle between the devil and Jesus is developed throughout the entire course of His public life, in a variety of Gospel episodes. In these, the Evil One crosses the path of Jesus and figures in His teaching. Jesus takes on the evil spirits, the accomplices of Satan – they are enthroned on this earth as 'masters', and on each occasion, they are defeated in their very domain.

This is the meaning of a number of accounts in which the 'possessed' are on the scene:

- in the Synagogue of Capernaum [cf. Mk 1:23-27, par.];
- the one of Gadara [cf. Mk 5:1-20, par.];
- the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician [cf. Mk 7:25-30, par.];
- the epileptic boy [cf. Mk 9:14-29, par.];
- the mute possessed man [cf. Mt 12:22, ff.];
- Mary Magdalene [cf. Lk 8:2]. Th

The many healings from afflictions are to be seen in an analogous sense. Every human suffering is a sign of the Power of Satan over humanity [cf. Lk 13:11]. By confronting the malady straight on and giving the cure, Jesus takes Satan himself on, and on such occasions, triumphs – which will be the bottom line of the drama.

The delivering of the possessed and the healing of the afflicted is clear testimony that the ***reign of God has come!*** [Mk 3:22, f.]. Satan believed himself to be 'strong', but is beaten back by **the One Who is the 'Stronger'** [cf. Mt 12:29, f., par.]. Exorcisms are performed in the Name of Jesus [cf. Mt 7:22; Mk 9:38, f.]. All of these interventions are 'proof' that the reign of Satan has fallen [cf. Lk 10:17-20].

This terrible struggle goes on also as the ‘head-on’ conflicts that Jesus has with the incredulous. They are called ‘the authentic children of the devil’ [cf. Jn 8:44; Mt 13:38- a ‘brood of vipers’! – cf. Mt 3:7, ff.; 12:34; 23:33]. This awesome struggle reaches its culmination in the terrible *Hour* of the Passion – which Lk clearly links to the Temptations in the Desert:

***... Having exhausted all these ways of tempting Him, the devil left Him to return at the proper time...!*** [Lk 4:13].

Jn underlines the function of Satan to proclaim the defeat [cf. Jn 13:2, 27; 14:30; cf. Lk 22:3, 31]. In the precise moment in which the Devil thinks that he has won the victory, and that it is firmly clenched in his hand, ***‘the Prince of this world is thrown outside!’*** [Jn 12:31; Rv 12:9-13]. The dominion of the world, which the devil has boldly offered to Jesus [cf. Lk 4:6] now belongs to Jesus, Who has died and been glorified [cf. Mt 28:18; cf. Ph 2:9].

**A. The Adversary of the Disciples:** every disciple is called to participate in the Victory of Jesus by a free choice ***to follow Him***. The entire Christian life is looked at also as a ***trial, a spiritual combat, with*** the Powers of darkness. Even though the resurrection of Jesus has ***consecrated*** the ultimate defeat of Satan, the struggle will not terminate in the Church until the final resurrection of His followers, the ultimate victory of Salvation History, the ***Day of the Lord***. [cf. 1 Co 15:24-28].

***Following after Jesus,*** the Christian will encounter the Adversary across his/her path. It is the Adversary who placed obstacles in the way of Paul’s apostolic mission [cf. 1 Th 2:18; 2 Co 12:7-10]. The ‘enemy’ has sown the cockle in the field with the good seed [cf. Mt 13:39, par.]. The Evil One removes from the heart of believers the seed of God’s Word [cf. Mt 13:39, par.] – out of fear that ***they might believe and be saved!*** [Lk 8:12].

As a ***lion goes around roaring, seeking to devour*** – this is an image that Peter offers [from his own personal experience?] of the evil One [1 P 5:8]. As was the case in the revelation concerning the Garden of Paradise, the Devil plays the role of Tempter, struggling to lead human beings into sin, and to bring them into open hostility with God [cf. 1 Jn 3:8; 1 Co 7:5].

The genuine ‘disciple’ is called upon to make the choice between God and Satan, between Christ and Beliar [cf. 2 Co 6:14, ff.] – between the ‘Evil One’ and the Truth [cf. 1 Jn 5:18, f.]. The disciple is subjected to these two ‘Masters’ and no one can serve both of them – on the last day, the definitive choice will be known, as each person will have chosen one or the other.

The 'strategy' of Satan with the disciples of Jesus is no different from that which Jesus Himself experienced: as He endured the Desert, and the Agony of the Garden, each follower of Jesus will do the same. While Satan conquered in Paradise, he loses in the struggle in the Desert, and the Garden. He is presented as a 'liar', and the 'father of all lies' and this from the very beginning [cf. Jn 8:44]. He is a deceiving spirit [cf. 1 Tm 4:1, ff.] and he 'disguises himself as an angel of light' [cf. 2 Co 11:14]. Paul speaks of his 'bonds' [cf. 1 Tm 3:7; 6:9; 2 Tm 2:26], his 'antics', his 'maneuvers' [cf. Ep 6:11] and his astuteness are formidable but will be defeated. [cf. 2 Co 2:11].

Yet, even with all this and no matter how fearsome is his power, the 'Prince of Darkness' is nonetheless an enemy who has already been overcome. United with Jesus through faith [cf. Ep 6:10], and continuing prayer [cf. Mt 6:13; 26:41, par.], sustained also by this Prayer of Jesus Himself [cf. Lk 22:32; cf. Rm 8:34; Heb 7:25], the believer will share in Jesus' triumph.

The culminating point of so much revelation, the Apocalypse represents the terrifying struggle with the serpent in the Garden of Eden, and shows it as the Dragon of the Desert. In an extraordinary synthesis [the Book of Revelations has more than one half of its verses from the OT], all of Scripture, the Devil is presented as historically, prophetically as very active, damaging and threatening at the dawn of Salvation History. He is rendered powerless, however, before the mysterious 'Woman' and before the One Whom she will bring to light [cf. Rv 12:5, ff.]. Therefore, he spews out of his mouth his venom on the rest of the descendants [cf. Rv 12:17]. The apparent triumph that the adherents of the Anti-Christ seem to win [cf. Rv 13-17], it will all end with the definitive victory of the Lamb and of the Church, His Spouse [cf. Rv 18-21].

The Church is involved in a war, a spiritual combat to the death, following the example of Jesus Himself. Throughout this awesome **ordeal**, the Church is guided with an unshakable hope: Satan has already been compared and does not have unlimited power. The end of time will see his complete defeat, and that of his reign. The Apocalypse describes the ultimate defeat: the 'beast', the 'false prophet', and all their allies:

***... Then, the devil, who misled them, will be thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the Beast and the false Prophet are, and their torture will not stop, day or night, for ever and ever ... Death and Hades were emptied of the dead that were in them; and everyone was judged according to the way in which he had lived. Death and Hades were thrown back into the burning lake. This burning lake is the Second Death; and anybody whose name could not be found written in the Book of Life was thrown into the burning lake*** [cf. Rv 20: 10, 14, f.].

Throughout, Satan is presented as the Adversary of Jesus and His Disciples. But Scripture comes to a close with the ultimate Victory of Jesus Christ and of His Reign: **the Nuptials of the Immolated Lamb.**<sup>8</sup>

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## **[B] The Literary Style of the Temptation Accounts**

The 'Temptation accounts', along with that of the Baptism, are placed at the beginning of the synoptic Gospels – not only for reasons of chronology, but also as keys of comprehension to penetrate the more profound meaning of the public life and the personal mission of Jesus Christ. Who this 'Jesus' is was proclaimed in the Theophany and the Investiture in the Garden – and what He has come to do, and all that He has not come for, is brought out in this initial conflict with the Powers of Evil.

### **1. Some Background to the Historical and Literary Discussions**

**a. The Literary Problem:** Mt and Lk, although independent from one another, seem to have drawn from a single source here. In this source, there are many indications that there must have been substantially the same information. Mk seems to be just the summary of the longer accounts – as his entire account is reduced to two lines! But, most likely, he also had the other sources available to him.

From the indications found in the longer accounts, it would seem that the common font used by the Synoptics most probably was compiled in a Christian-Judaic-Hellenistic background. One indication of this might be the citations from Scripture of OT passages that seem to follow the LXX translation. The scope of this source used by the evangelists must have been that of a messianic-apologetic nature. It seems that its purpose was to demonstrate, in clear contrast with the popular expectancy of a temporal, or political Messiah, that the life of Jesus had to manifest its messianic activity in full accord with the Will of the Heavenly Father – and that Satan was the Adversary to the death, of this 'way.' Another characteristic of this Temptation account is its exemplary content: the idea that is clearly presented is that the genuine disciple of Jesus who indeed has chosen ***to follow after Him*** must clearly follow the Master ***wherever He goes***, and in all that He does - and must clearly reject the solicitation of Satan. Each of the Evangelists handled the material in his own way. To many scholars, it seems that Mt has remained the closest to the wording and to the scope of the 'original source.'

**b. The 'Historical' Problem: the Origin of this Account:** there are many scholars who have wondered whether this account really did happen in all of its details. One difficulty is that some of the details differ from one account to another:

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<sup>8</sup> For these pages, cf. S. Raponi, *Tentazione ed esistenza umana*. Tuscoli: Paoline 1974, pp. 11-29, *passim*.

as, the place of the temptation scene, the order of the temptations. A further question is whether this story *is a pious story meant to edify, encourage* the struggling believers of a generation or more later. This question of the *historicity* is still much debated – and there are similar questions regarding the Gethsemane account:

**1.]** One hypothesis would defend the view that this account originated in the community of believers: the arguments brought forward are that there were no eye-witnesses, and that the account has unmistakable apologetic, catechetical and theological overtones.

This is the defended view of a very large number of non-Catholic authors, but there are also some Catholic scholars who have defended this rather bold position [e.g., R. Brown, B. VanJersel]. In this position, the ‘Temptation Account’ is considered to be a dramatic compendium, an almost artificial summary of temptations that would really have taken place [thus ‘defending’ the insistence on ‘historicity’], although in a much less extraordinary manner, in the course of Jesus’ public life. In other words, in this view, the Temptation Account would be based on very real, historical events, but which took place at various intervals after the beginning of His public life. The following attempts are also made to substantiate this view:

- the incident at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus suffered a ‘check’, non-acceptance in His ministry;
- various episodes taken from the Johannine accounts, which would represent perhaps three clearly distinct temptations in His life:
  - the Bread from heaven [cf. Jn 6:26-34] – would respond to the temptation concerning hunger;
  - the going up to Jerusalem [cf. Jn 7: 1-4] for the Feast of Tabernacles – corresponding perhaps to the temptation on the pinnacle of the temple;
  - the attempt to make Jesus King [cf. Jn 6:15] – which is at least similar to the temptation on the Mountain [R. Brown’s early view].

The hypothesis is that these three happenings in the life of Jesus as found in Jn were merely assembled by the Synoptics and made into one incident, showing the first phase of Jesus’ arduous Mission.

**2.]** The second hypothesis, which seems to attract a greater number of Catholic exegetes, rejects this view along the following lines: it would seem impossible to believe that an entire Christian community, following the events of Easter, would have been able to attribute the temptation Account, as it stands, to

Jesus risen in glory. In a way, the temptations refer to the *weakness*, the vulnerability of Jesus. The fact that the temptation scene was with Jesus and Satan, offers little obstacle – in that ***not all that Jesus said and did are written in this book.***<sup>9</sup>

Some would maintain that the first hypothesis is possible, in that it does admit that the temptations of Jesus actually did take place – but perhaps not precisely in the manner the Synoptic accounts present them.<sup>10</sup>

**2. The Structure of the Temptation Account:** the *literary genre* that is used here is that of **dialogue**, a **debate** between exceptional personalities concerning divergent points of view. This format is not unlike the **Book of Job**. This literary form dramatizes an option, the **two ways** perhaps of Dt: to follow Jesus and share His Mission, that took Him – like Israel of old – through the desert, to the Garden, to Calvary, and eventually to the resurrection: **OR:** that of Satan which offers immediate response to life's desires. This literary style might further suggest that not each and every element, in all its particulars, is to be imitated by the Follower of Jesus Christ.

There is evidence in the text that the presentation has indeed been *worked over* – hence, the way the story unfolds would indicate that it is impossible from the text itself to respond to many questions that might arise: e.g., whether the appearance of Satan was in visible form, or not – whether Jesus indeed stood on the mountain, or the pinnacle of the temple. The question has been asked whether these events were interior to Jesus Christ, one that was indeed **experienced** by Him.

The order of the events does manifest clear differences – and the fact that the evangelists' writings as they stand, offer some indications that they have been 'redacted', edited – and it is also possible that the original source was as well. Some maintain that the original order is perhaps the one that is presented by Mt – furthermore, the first two temptations are also connected with the title: **Son of Man.**

In Lk's presentation, there is a concern for the Holy City, Jerusalem, that appears throughout. The number of temptations – three – also offers a very 'neat' plan – the three-fold response is a progressive repetition that is arranged to give emphasis, insistence and intensity to be noted in the temptation accounts. The number for the days in the desert- **40!** – hardly needs comment –once it was thought to apply to the hearts of a human generation:

- 40 years of Israel's sojourn in the desert [cf. Nb 14:34];

<sup>9</sup> cf. J. Dupont, OSB, *Le tentazioni di Gesu' nel deserto*. Brescia: Paideia 1970 – with an abundant bibliography-staunchly defends the historicity of the Synoptics' account].

<sup>10</sup> cf. *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*. London: Nelson 1962, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition p. 910. As this involved discussion is beyond the capacity of this course on Biblical Spirituality, the bibliography would help to understand the state of the question among the experts.

- 40 years of Peace after the deliverance achieved under the Judges [cf. Jgs 3:1-, 30; 5:31];
- 40 years of the reigns of David [cf. 2 S 5:4] and Solomon.

This would seem to indicate a rather long period of time, the exact duration of which might not really have been known:

- 40 days and 40 nights for the down-pour, causing the Flood [cf. Gn 7:4];
- the 40 day journey of Elijah to the Holy Mountain [cf. 1 K 19:8];
- and Jesus' 40 day experience in the desert;
- the 40 days between the Resurrection and the Ascension. [cf. Ac 13].

In the view of many '40' seems to offer a round number, frequently found in Scripture to indicate an extended, but somewhat indefinite period, the purpose of which was to register a significant divine intervention in salvation History [Flood, Desert sojourn] – or, to indicate a period of preparation for a difficult task or Mission [cf. Moses, Elijah, Jesus – and he Disciples being prepared after the resurrection for the Ascension]. Jesus' 40 days in the desert, are very similar to Moses' 40 days on Sinai.

Therefore, much of the precise 'history' of these passages will remain obscure and will be discussed by the experts. What is important for spirituality is the ultimate meaning of this extraordinary episode, and the role of the Powers of Evil. The evangelists have seen the temptation story as something pertaining to the very beginning of the Mission of Jesus. Here, at the beginning of His conquering the world, Jesus is submitted to the Powers of darkness:

*... Here we are preaching a crucified Christ... an obstacle ... madness...* [1 Co 2:3].

This passage, therefore, has an exceptional importance: it is the Prologue of the whole life of Jesus and His Mission. Anyone who follows Jesus will know the desert, the Garden and Calvary – as preparation for the Resurrection, Ascension.<sup>11</sup>

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### [C] A Special Look at Luke's Temptation Account [4:1-13]

Lk's narrative seems to have drawn on the same sources as that of Mt, and is structured around the same biblical texts. However, Lk also offers some original traits.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. raponi, *tentazione ed esistenza. Cristiana*. Paoline, ib., pp. 33-40.

**A. The Humanity of Jesus: the Tempted/ Tried One:** Lk does retain substantially the teaching of the primitive font concerning the Messianic character of the temptations – but, Lk sheds even greater light on His humanity: ***it is not only by bread alone that one lives*** - which clearly implies His human nature.

In this scene, Lk eliminates the Angels – whereas, there is an angel in Lk's Garden scene [cf. Lk 22:43]. In the temptations, Jesus is presented as a Model: all those who will follow Him, must commit their entire existence into the hands of God. 'Power' has not been given to Him to conserve, or to prolong His life for His own advantage, or in accord with His own will.

Placing the emphasis here on the humanity of the Messiah, Lk teaches that Jesus recognizes **the will of the Father** as the sole norm of His Messianic activity. Therefore, He rejects Satan's temptation, suggesting to subject the Messianic Function and the miraculous powers associated with this – at the personal service of the Devil. This would separate the reign of God from the Messianic Kingdom – and the temptation is to submit the realm of the Messiah to that of Satan.

**2. The Temptation and the Passion:** according to Lk, in no way were the end of the terrible spiritual combat between Jesus and the Powers of darkness – this awesome struggle would be carried over and fulfilled in the Passion and Death. There are two facts in particular which give this impression:

- first, the different collocation of the three stages of the temptations – the 'climax', or the culminating encounter is the one in Jerusalem:

*... Then Satan led Jesus to Jerusalem, and made Him stand on the parapet of the Temple. If you are the Son of God, he said to Him, 'throw Yourself down from here, for Scripture says: 'He will put His angels in charge of you to guard you...!' [Lk 4:9, ff.]*

Lk is faithful to his over-all plan according to which Jesus' 'exodus' ends in Jerusalem. In the Transfiguration, we find Moses and Elijah, ***speaking of His passing [over] which He was to accomplish in Jerusalem...*** [Lk 9:31].

- and secondly, the ominous sounding conclusion to Lk's account: ***Having exhausted all these ways of tempting Him, the devil left Him to return at the appointed time ...*** [Lk 4:13]. This line makes it appear as though the temptation incident was merely part of an over-all hostility, declaration of war, between Satan and Jesus.

This may also shed some light on the surprising interest in the 'Devil' during the Temptation account. In the second Temptation, Satan has led Jesus to a 'height' [cf. Lk 4:5, ff.], and the devil pronounces these words:

*... I will give You all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to Me, and I will give it to anyone I choose. Worship Me, then, and it shall all be yours ... [Lk 4:6, ff].*

This is almost a 'paragraph' when compared to the few words in Mt: *... I will give You all these 'he said, 'if You fall at my feet and worship me... [Mt 5:9].* In Mt, the devil offers all these, whereas Lk seems to stress all this power – the implication being that Satan may dispose freely of the powers that govern this world. This seems to be present also in Jn's thought when he speaks so often of the **prince, the god of this world** [cf. Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11].

Therefore, Lk's rendition of the **Temptation Account** has to be read in intimate connection with the **Passion Account** – there is a 'passing over' from a lonely, isolated struggle – to one that is very public and open. The Passion becomes the explicit temptation – as the Trial implicitly is already the Passion of the Redemption. For Lk, temptation and Passion are already two acts of the one and the same drama. When he was defeated in the desert, the devil goes away to prepare for the final and decisive combat.

It seems that the temptation account in Mt is looking back at the **OT Israel** – whereas the temptation account in Lk is looking toward the future. Mt places the **New Exodus** right at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus – while Lk places it in relationship with the **New Pasch**, which will open the new economy of Salvation, and bring the work of Redemption to completion. Mt has an account of Peter's temptation at Caesarea Philippi:

*... 'Peter remonstrated with Jesus: Heaven preserve You, Lord, this must not happen to you!' But Jesus turned and said to Peter: 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an obstacle in My path, because the way you think is not God's but man's...!' [Mt 16:22, f.]*

Lk does not present this scene – and the reason may very well be that he reserves all the formal 'diabolic temptations' to the setting of the Passion.

It is also significant that while in Lk's account, the devil quotes Scripture speaking of the angels who come to comfort him while there is not mention of any angel actually coming as there is in Mt:

*... then the devil left Him, and the angels appeared and looked after Him ... [Mt 4:11].*

Lk presents the Angel in Gethsemane, whose function seems to be that of encouraging Jesus onward to accept the Father's total will, including all that will be involved. However, there is no mention here after Jesus' temptation. The Angel of Gethsemane, however, does witness to the connection existing between the two scenes.

It is in Gethsemane that there is realized the *kairos*, the appointed time [cf. Lk 4:13]. It is noteworthy that in the Garden scene, Jesus twice tells the disciples to pray that they be spared this 'Temptation/ Trial'- ***Pray not to be put to the test!*** [Lk 22:40, 46]. Many see this as another indication that Lk is joining Gethsemane to the Desert. The temptation in the Garden for Jesus is that of having the cup removed – but he conquers this with **His Profession of Faith in the Father's will**. [cf. Lk 22:42]. A further intensification of the *Hour* and the *kairos* is the moment of His being apprehended: ... ***But, this is your Hour, this is the reign of Darkness...!*** [Lk 22:53].

The ***Temptation/ Trial*** reaches its culmination on the Cross. Even here, there is a partial fulfillment, and repetition almost, of the form of the temptations in the Desert. Many believe that the Crucifixion scene is permeated –cf. Lk 22:35-43] as a Time of Crisis, judgment. It is very strongly structured as an evident parallelism with the first temptations, even to repeating the three-fold form. Basically, the Desert and Calvary are the same trial: the means to realize the Advent of the reign of god and the Messianic Realm.

Throughout the entire narration of the Passion, one can almost 'hear' the voice of the Tempter. The stories of the temptation, and that of the Passion, are a commentary on one another. After having been **baptized in water by John**, Jesus was led out into the desert by the Spirit **to be baptized by fire in Temptation** – as later He would be **baptized in His own blood on Calvary and in Gethsemane**.

#### **A. Temptation and Paradise: the New Adam:**

Many of the Church Fathers noted in Lk's version of the temptations that two themes seem to intertwine:

- the entrance into Gethsemane;
- the Gate of Paradise.

It would be enough to recall to mind how the first Adam was expelled from paradise into the Desert – and then observe how the 'second Adam' returns from the Desert to Paradise.

The existence of this parallelism in the intention of Lk seems to result from the fact that in his Baptism Account of Jesus, the genealogy going all the way back to Adam – is followed immediately by the temptation Account. These two passages seem to form a kind of complex unity [cf. Lk 3:21-4:13].

There are two basic reasons, often cited, to establish this parallelism:

- the emphasis on **the humanity of Jesus**: this insistence leads to two other themes: the **Suffering Servant of Yahweh** [cf. Is 53], and the typology of the **Second Adam** [cf. RM 5:12-19; PH 2:5-11].

- the insertion of the genealogy that goes back to the **Son of Adam – the Son of God** [cf. Lk 3:38]<sup>12</sup>

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### Summary

**[1] The Synoptic Perspective**: From the analysis of the temptation scene, it has been noted that these relatively brief passages are filled with OT allusions and steeped in doctrine. The principal themes that emerge are the following:

- Jesus is the **New Moses**, the **New Israel** – the true **Son of God** [cf. Mt 4; 1-13];

- Jesus is the **Victor**, the **Stronger One** [cf. Mk 1:12, ff.];

- Jesus is the **New Adam** – and there is great similarity [continuation?] between the temptation scene and the **Garden** – the **Desert** and **Paradise** [cf. Lk 4:1-13].

These principal themes recall to mind two essential stages in Salvation History: **Eden** and the **Desert** – **Genesis** and the **Exodus**. The typology between the **First/ Second Adam** is most often a theme of Patristic reflection. While it seems that the Exodus has only been ‘discovered’ recently by some, this typology is the more fundamental and seems to have been already present in the source used by Mt and Mk. The **Exodus** remains the link between these Gospel scenes and the OT revelation<sup>13</sup>.

**[2] The Temptations and the Church**: the temptations of Christ are in most intimate contact with Jesus’ redemptive Mission as Messiah. However, ‘Israel’ itself is tempted ‘in’ Jesus. This solemn temptation scene does not regard Jesus alone, but also – and maybe even principally – it pertains to the Church, called to continue His Personal Mission through the centuries. **Mt’s** particularly has an **ecclesial emphasis**. The spiritual dangers which threaten the Apostolic Mission of the Church have been met by Jesus Christ. Jesus has shown how the Church is meant to overcome these terrible trials.<sup>14</sup>

**[3] Jesus is the Model for Christians**: for **Lk**, the temptation scene offers a paradigm for the community of Jesus, the **Second Adam** – the prototype for all Christians. Tempted as human beings are, He shows Himself to be in profound solidarity with humanity. His temptations are a model for the tempted Christian. The

<sup>12</sup> cf. S. Raponi, *Tentazione ed esistenza umana*. Tuscoli: Paoline 1974, pp. 59-64].

<sup>13</sup> ib., p. 71]

<sup>14</sup> ib., p. 58.

lines of contact between the temptation of **Eden** and that of the **Desert**, should not be exaggerated, but simply evaluated in their objective connection. This also holds true for the connection with Gethsemane. Beyond all excessive 'moralizing', Jesus' temptation is one of the 'mysteries' of Redemption, a most extraordinary reality of the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *ib.*, p. 65.

## I. THE FUNDAMENTAL MEANING OF THE AGONY OF GETHSEMANE

### Introduction:

[1] It has been difficult to establish the fundamental doctrinal meaning of the Agony scene, because the Evangelists themselves – while conferring concise and dense descriptions – have not offered any synthesis themselves. As a result, a good number of extremely erudite commentaries have come to light in recent years – and some of these do not remain faithful to the texts; others seems to offer very little for the spiritual life of the believers.

[a] It might appear that in Mk and Mt – there does not seem to be much unity – as there seems to be two separate ‘centers’ of interest:

- on the one hand, Jesus Himself;

- and then, the three disciples who were privileged to be there – the same three would have shared, then, both the **Transfiguration** and the **Gethsemane** scenes.

[b] These three disciples seem to play a most important role here, on the mount of transfiguration –they were on ‘center-stage’ for the entire scene of the divine manifestation.

[c] But, how different it is for them at Gethsemane: Jesus occupies the central place – the disciples, at best, are in the ‘wings’, on the ‘margin’. Even if they were not there, the drama would have unfolded as it did in the temptation scene, without them. Gethsemane is a scene in which Jesus alone endures the ordeal.

[d] For some reason, nonetheless, Jesus to be in the company of the three privileged disciples. The texts do not separate the terribly anguished prayer of Jesus and the profound sleep of the disciples. The unnecessary presence of the disciples would need some explanation. In the first part of these reflections, however, the emphasis will be on the Agony of Jesus, and its meaning for the Church: for all who suffer deeply, mentally, spiritually, physically.

[2] It is very clear that there is something unusual about Gethsemane: when Jesus comes into the Garden of Olives, He seems to be at peace, He seems to be calm about His impending ordeal – He is tranquil, and truly ‘abandoned; to His Father:

*... This is My Blood, the Blood of the Covenant, which is to be poured out for the many ... After psalms were sung, they left for the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them: You will all lose faith, for the Scripture says: I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered; however, after My resurrection, I shall go before you to Galilee...* [cf. Mk 14:24, 27, f.].

[a] However, at the moment that He sets to pray, suddenly, and without warning, and without any apparent exterior explanation, there falls down upon Him an indescribable anguish, which lasts for all the time He prays. This deep 'gloom' lifts surprisingly enough when they come to arrest Him.

[b] At this instant – and again, without any apparent exterior explanation – calm and tranquility are restored, and He says: ***My betrayer is at hand!***

*... Jesus spoke: 'Am I a brigand that you had to see out to capture Me with swords and clubs? I was teaching among you in the temple day after day, and you never laid hands on Me... But this is to fulfill the Scriptures ... [cf. Mk 14:41, f., 49].*

[c] In Mt, the contrast between the fear of Jesus during His prayer, and the absolute absence of fear immediately afterwards:

*... Put your sword back, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Or, do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father who would promptly send Me more than 12 legions of angels to My defense? But how would the scriptures be fulfilled...? [cf. Mt 26:52-54].*

[3] this does not mean that this terrible fear would not return – two of the Evangelists do record the terrible cry of anguish Jesus emitted from the Cross: ***... My God, My God, Why have You deserted Me...?*** [cf. Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34]. This cry alone would prove the return of supreme anguish to Christ. However, it is also very true that this profound anguish seems 'sandwiched' in, between the apparent calm after the Last Supper – and the true nobility of surrendering to arrest. Attempts to analyze the cause of this fear have been most varied: some would settle for **psychological fear**; and others read this as the **Messianic Trial** [Is 53], and **the Shepherd is struck by God** [Zc 13]. There is needed a clear analysis of what actually happened:

#### A. THE AGONY OF GETHSEMANE AS FEAR OF DEATH

1. renowned biblical scholars [e.g., M. J. Lagrange, OP] see the ultimate motive for Jesus' anguish to His all too human **fear of death** – at this moment, Jesus is standing in the face of terrifying cruelty.

a. Recent biblical scholarship has noted that certain Fathers of the Church – such as St. Ambrose and St. Jerome, may have been hesitant to admit this natural human response to such a situation, because of their dogmatic concerns. They even tried to show that since Jesus was also God, He would not have been subject to such passionate fear. Lagrange's commentary states that there are some readers of this episode who are really **amazed** ['scandalized'?] with the thought that Jesus, Who was most convinced of His ultimate victory, should show Himself just a few hours before it, to be oppressed by such worries and fear. But, such as these might be

forgetting that one of the most extraordinary aspects of human nature is that a person might be seized by opposing sentiments, at one and the same time.

b. In this view, what is being revealed here is simply the **depths of the humanity** of Jesus Christ. He is simply *like us in all things save sin*. His Will is so human that it naturally recoils in the presence of impending harm and hurt. This is the language of a great number of exegetes, and it simply does express at least something of the truth.

c. A 'Stoic' confrontation with suffering would simply deny with fierce obstinacy, all evil and suffering. 'Be a brave soldier' – or: 'be like a rock against which the violent sea crash incessantly' – where the rock is expected to remain firm, unmoved, while all around the violent sea rages. In a human being, one would be untouched by affliction – unwounded by the present, un-frightened by the future, no matter what!

2. However, being impervious, aloof from real pain, has never been the Judaic-Christian point of view. The Bible, while being a 'divine' book, is also among the most 'human', which gives rise to the legitimate observation: how much of the OT, so many Psalms, and numerous other passages are dedicated to trying to fathom **the scandalous suffering of the innocent**. In the NT, Jesus is far from any Stoic confrontation with pain. He was not 'above' the human condition, but totally immersed in its frequent and ever-changing difficulties.

a. However, in Gethsemane, Jesus was **eminently 'human'**. It simply would not have been normal that in His human nature, Jesus having come to realize the inhuman sufferings that were soon to descend upon Him, could simply have shrugged it all off. Along with the over-whelming physical sufferings, the immense moral agony that enveloped Him would bear reflection:

- having been so full of love for His disciples, and already having shared so much with them, and now to see Himself **so alone** in what was coming;
- the fact of the betrayal of Judas, 'on of His own', with whom He had dipped his hand into the same dish;
- and finally, a believing exegesis would also maintain the '**fore-knowledge**'<sup>16</sup> of Jesus and the terrible affliction that this would have meant for His human nature.

b. Even expressing one's faith in the last point, it still would not seem sufficient, at least to many scrutinizing exegetes of all time, to explain the

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Bertrand de Margerie, SJ, *The Human Knowledge of Jesus Christ*. St. Paul 1980.

extraordinary state of Jesus in Gethsemane. It might be noted that this same 'omniscience' would also have made known to Him the **ultimate victory**.

3. Therefore, there are many scholars today who do not hold that **human fear** would be enough to explain what happened to Jesus in Gethsemane. Jesus would have long been familiar with His destiny – he Himself had mentioned it as being ***in accord with the Scriptures***, that He had come for the sole purpose of showing love for the Father by ***carrying out His Will***. At the Last Supper He had already spoken calmly about His approaching death, and had already instituted a ***Memorial*** of it and of His Resurrection. So, many still ask the question: how is it, that so soon after all this, He is in the Garden, asking His Father, ***if it is possible let this cup pass from me!***

a. The first time that He had spoken of this terrible death was at Caesarea Philippi, a turning point in His preaching Mission. He reacted very harshly toward Peter who thought that He should be spared this terrible fate. Some have said that, since the whole earthly sojourn of Jesus was the richest that could ever be, it was only fitting that His fear at the aspect of losing it all would be the most intense for any human mind – especially once so finely attuned.

b. This, too, is an effort to respond to this mystery, but still has not satisfied all those who ponder this extraordinary reality. Furthermore, Jesus had already taught His disciples not to be afraid of death:

***... Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; fear him, rather, who can destroy both body and soul in hell...*** [Mt 10:28].

c. Jurgen Moltmann<sup>17</sup> offers a brief analysis that is a challenge:

... Socrates died as a wise man. Cheerfully and calmly he drank the cup of hemlock. This was a demonstration of magnanimity ... the death of Socrates was a festival of liberty. The Zealot martyrs who were crucified after their unsuccessful revolts against the Romans died conscious of their righteousness in the sight of God, and looked forward to their resurrection to eternal life, just as they looked forward to the Resurrection of their lawless enemies .. to their eternal shame ... The wise men of the Stoics demonstrated to the tyrants in the arena, where they were torn to pieces by wild animals, their inner liberty and superiority ... The Christian Martyrs went calmly and in faith to their deaths ... The last recorded words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, with which he took leave of his fellow prisoner, Zayne Best, as he went to the place of execution in Blossenbergh extermination camp, were: 'This is the end for me, the beginning of life'. Jesus clearly died in a different way ...'

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<sup>17</sup> ***The Crucified God***. London SCM Press 1974, pp. 145, ff.

d. One of the extraordinary aspects of the mystery of Gethsemane is that Jesus is attributed a weakness from which many human beings of far lesser stature seem to have been liberated. Many courageous men and women have been able to overcome great personal concern, anguish, pain and even death, with faith in Him!

e. So, for so many who have read this extraordinary scene of Gethsemane through the centuries, it is a perplexing mystery: here we have the Head, Model and Exemplar of legions of martyrs – Jesus Christ Himself, seemingly not as courageous as many of them were. How many have truly ***followed after Him***, and were sustained in their ordeal by His encouraging presence! How many calmly accepted their fate, confronted death thinking of it of such brief endurance. [Reflections such as these have been attributed to Pascal].

3. To respond to this perplexing difficulty, Pascal makes a kind of distinction:

- those sufferings which came from without, which Christ willingly shouldered;
- and those that came from deep within Him, as the expression of **some profound aspect of His mysterious personality**.

a. Many later interpreters believe that Pascal has indeed 'hit' on something by making this distinction. He personally was deeply perplexed why the Evangelists were almost unanimous in showing this terrible 'weakness' of Jesus in the presence of His death. Pascal wondered why they could not have shown the wonderful 'power' of Jesus in this instance:

- Pascal noted that St. Luke even shows that Stephen – whose death so closely follows that of Jesus, and imitates it so well – apparently was much stronger than Jesus was in this moment of His approaching death;
- However, Pascal does note that Jesus shows grater trepidation prior to the actual crucifixion, than He did on the Cross itself. When the moment came for Him to 'go', He clearly surrendered Himself into the hands of His captors;
- Pascal there suggests a plausible solution:
  - when Jesus is 'afflicted' by human beings, He shows that really, in the long run, He is the 'stronger', almost as He was shown to be in the temptation scene;
  - but when the disturbance comes from deep within – the awesome struggle with the Father's will, then the anguish seems almost overwhelming.

- therefore, ponders Pascal: Jesus suffers in the passion the torments afflicted, and inflicted upon Him by evil human beings – but, in the Agony of Gethsemane, He suffers the torments which in some way He personally assumed – in Pascal’s expression: ***turbare semetipsum***. This is a suffering that comes from no human hand – and there would require the exercise of the omnipotence to remove it.

b. The Agony of Gethsemane is often confronted with this passage from Hebrews:

***... It was essential that He should in this way become completely like His brothers, so that He would be a compassionate and trustworthy High Priest ...*** [Heb 2:17].

And this other one:

***... For it is not as if we had a High Priest Who was incapable of feeling our weakness with us; but we have One who has been tempted in every way that we are, though He is without sin ...*** [Heb 4:14]

- however, there could be some danger that these texts could be overworked in this context. These expressions mean that Jesus indeed possesses a human nature, and the Agony of Gethsemane is a most outstanding proof.

-Jesus is similar to us, and at the same time, He is very different. Even if Christian baptism unties one in the Baptism of Jesus – and while Jesus did offer an example in the desert of resistance to the assaults of the devil – yet, nonetheless, no one was baptized, or tempted precisely as he was. These events of His earthly existence have an **essentially messianic bearing**.

- likewise, no one has ever suffered precisely as Jesus has – as will appear from the biblical reflections buried in these texts.

c. It is true that Heb 5:7 to some interpreters comes to make of Fear the ultimate cause of the Agony of Jesus:

***... During His life on earth, He offered up prayer and entreaty aloud, and, in silent tears, to the One Who had the power to save Him from death, and he submitted to humbly that his prayer was heard ...***

However, there are many exegetes who maintain that this text is not an exact parallel to the Prayer of Gethsemane. This passage is more of a **Theological Affirmation** that must be read in the context of the entire Document to the Hebrews – rather than a reference to some specific incident in the life of Jesus, such as the Agony of Gethsemane. What is being stated here is that Jesus, the Great High Priest, with His sacrifice, has delivered humanity from eternal death, and: ***... He became for all who obey Him the source of eternal salvation ...*** [Heb 5:9].

The object of the prayers in this Document to the Hebrews as High Priest was the liberation from eternal death. There may even be an indication in this text from Hebrews that would show it to have little to do with what happened in Gethsemane: *... He submitted to humbly that His prayer was heard ...* [Heb 5:7]. The Agony in the Garden does not seem to have been heard so immediately –unless one were to read that the restoration of calm in Jesus is being referred to in the text.

### SUMMARY

Therefore, many questions come to the fore if one were to think that the sole, or even the principal cause of Jesus' Agony in Gethsemane were to be the fear of death. The thought offered by Pascal: that Jesus reacted more normally to the inflictions imposed on Him by the enemies of the Father. This terrible fear in the Agony of the Garden seems to be a human manifestation and revelation of a further mystery intimately tied to His Divinity.

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## **B. THE AGONY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE *ABANDONMENT BY GOD*.**

1. Through the centuries, many interpreters have read the episode of the Agony in Gethsemane interpreting it as not only fear, but perhaps principally to be the experience of divine malediction and abandonment on the part of God."

a. This view has known a great variation through the years – but, the views that merit attention would be those based on the biblical text itself, and, therefore, have drawn a large and lengthy following:

- Luther and Calvin: have excessively interpreted this Agony as the horrible torments that those condemned to hell forever would have to endure.

- Some Catholic Preachers: in the effort to explain in somewhat intelligible terminology, have exaggeratedly used similar expressions. Hence, we read in the writings and the discourses of a generation, or so ago:

- Jesus was the 'universal sinner', the sinner of all times and places, upon whom God allowed to fall the full rigor of His fierce paternal justice;
- Jesus is the 'Encounter' of all outrages, and of all wounds;
- Goodness in infinite extension, and the Living Blessing – would be the true expression of Jesus Christ. He made Himself sin [cf. Ga 3:13 +] , and thus had to be cursed for all.

b. Theologians have differed widely, therefore, in their interpretation of the Agony in the Garden – the above opinions have also recurred from time to time.

The major effort, along with knowing the views of theologians, is to seek more and more to understand the intricacies of the text itself, and a deeper appreciation of God's Word.

c. The opinion of the Swiss Calvinist, OSCAR CULLMANN, has drawn much attention: he refers back to the Document to the Hebrews – according to which **Christ has delivered humanity from the Fear of Eternal Death.**

- Cullmann brings out the similarity, as he sees it, between the Gospel texts and the Document to the Hebrews. He reads the 'hearing' of Jesus' Prayer, as being delivered from this fear – and this view is followed by other exegetes. And then, once Jesus has been 'liberated' from the expressive fear, he abandons Himself completely to the will of the Father: ***Not My will be done, but Yours!***

- Cullmann, like many others before him, and since – is really surprised by the real contrast evident between the accounts of the death of Socrates and that of Jesus. According to Plato's account of the death of Socrates, the paradigm wise man of ancient Greece, awaited death with an admirable serenity and courage, in almost violent contrast with the overwhelming fear experienced by Jesus in the Agony of Gethsemane.

- Cullmann offers some explanation by contrasting the Greek idea and the biblical idea of death:

- **according to the Greeks**, at least Plato and his school, all matter is evil; and the soul is of divine origin and is immortal by nature. It is in the body as in its prison. Death, therefore, is a liberation for the human soul, since the body releases the soul for a blessed immortality.

- **in the biblical idea**, on the contrary, the entire human person, body and soul, in the original plan of God, was destined for immortality. After the sin, God restored this original plan through the Redemption and Christian Eschatology is dominated by the hope of a glorious resurrection. According to Scripture, God did not want the death of human being – death was in no way part of the original plan, but entered as a consequence of human sin. Death is the 'wage' of sin and is a sign of rebellion of humanity against God. Therefore, physical death is the consequence of the **spiritual death**, which is the separation of humanity from God.

According to Cullmann this **total death**, the enemy of God, is the underlying cause of the mysterious Agony of Jesus in Gethsemane – even more than the fear of impending death on the Cross. Death is the radical solitude, **total death is distance from God**. Jesus was called to experience this total death of both soul and body, so that He could carry off the total and final victory. His victory would not

have been complete had He continued to live simply as ‘immortal soul’, without dying. He ‘conquered’ death by dying – He ‘won’ by being ‘defeated’ – by really surrendering Himself to the dominion of death. This total death is the great destroyer of all life, it is the realm of nothingness, emptiness, that of separation from God. To conquer this total death Jesus willingly surrendered Himself to it – and thus, overcame it.

d. Cranfield<sup>18</sup> arrives at a similar conclusion. He compares these verses:

*... ABBA, everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. But, let it be as You, and Not I, would want it ...!* [Mk14:36].

*... My God, My God, why have You deserted me...?* [Mk 15:34].

Cranfield sees in these two expressions the **radical solitude** of Jesus in the heart-rending cry of the Cross. For Cranfield, the weight of ‘sin’ of the world, the **absolute identification of Jesus with sinners**, implies an abandonment that is not only ‘felt’ but one that is objectively real [??] on the part of the Father. It is **in this anguished cry that there is revealed the full horror of human sin**.

e. Other interpretations: have come to similar conclusions. Some maintain that the narration of the Passion in Mk contemplates Jesus, literally ‘struck down’ by the divine malediction and wrath. In this view, Mk presents the only words uttered by Jesus on the Cross as being this terrible cry of Abandonment. What is implied here, in this opinion, is that **God has indeed abandoned Jesus** [??], while Jesus has not abandoned God, as He cries out to His Merciful Father as: **MY God!** As is evident, in this view, Divine Wrath, Justice – are supreme.

## 2. An Evaluation:

a. Before the mainstream believers can accept anything of these views, it would seem that it would first be very necessary to bring important modifications to them:

- first of all, it would seem necessary to **reject any idea** that Jesus was truly [*metaphysically!*] abandoned by God – or, thought of as the greatest of all sinners! This view would run into **insurmountable difficulties both in the global understanding of Scripture, questions of exegesis, and many theological problems:**

- it would first of all, seem simply contrary to the rich tradition of theologians and saints with simple believers who have read the Redemption narratives for centuries to maintain that Jesus – all the way up to the moment of the Agony is most convinced of His consciousness of being the son of God, in a very clear sense

<sup>18</sup> *The Gospel according to Mark*. Cambridge 1959

[cf. Mk14:36] – and then, all of a sudden, in the culminating moments of His ‘Hour’, should then be deprived of this most intimate and unique union with the Father. [cf. J. Jeremias, **Abba!**].

- one could agree with St. Bonaventure who sees in Mk 13:34 and Mt 27:46 **My God, My God ...** ] a symbol of the Church left in ‘apparent abandonment’ – this view would not be seen as strict exegesis in the formal sense.

- it is well known that this anguished cry of Jesus is taken from the language of the **Anawim**, whose mentality Jesus had taken on as His own.<sup>19</sup> Here precisely, this passage is from Psalm 22, and is one of the more studied Psalms of the entire Psalter. From its opening lines, it represents to the very end – a particularly moving testimony of the **piety of the Poor of the Lord** and their unshakable trust in God. This is the view that this Ps 22 is typically messianic and most likely was inspired by the great oracle of the mysterious Suffering Servant of Yahweh [cf. Is 53]. However, even should this view not be accepted, the Prayer does manifest a clear situation of human despair, which terminates, though, with the ‘happy ending’ – that of deliverance and eschatological salvation.

- sometimes, St. Paul. By means of a **legal fiction**, himself is quoted to show that Jesus was indeed ‘abandoned’ by His Father:

*... For our sake, God made the sinless one into sin that In Him we might become the goodness of God ...* [2 Co 5:21]

*... Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, by being cursed for our sake: since Scripture says: ‘Cursed be anyone who is hanged on a tree...!’* [Ga 3:13].

These texts might hint at a certain idea of **penal substitution**, Jesus being the ‘substitute’ for the truly guilty parties. This idea, withal of its limitations, is one of the human expressions given to the Mystery of Redemption throughout the Christian tradition, beginning perhaps, with **Is 53** – Jesus died **on our behalf, of the multitude**.

However, it is very important not to allow this idea of *substitution* to be exaggerated, that then would degenerate and become unacceptable because contrary to the overwhelming data of divine revelation concerning God’s love. So much of recent theology has rightly rebelled against presenting God as thirsting for vengeance, or that He would have forced His will to make one pay dearly for His offended Justice.

- the Suffering Servant of Is 53 as a voluntary Victim who has been inspired by an unheard of generosity, even to surpass the legendary Jeremiah [somewhat idealized, though, in that Jr had some real ‘complaints’ against God, and wished for vengeance

<sup>19</sup> A. Gelin, *The Poor of Yahweh*. Collegeville Press.

on his enemies], who was in 'solidarity with sinners. The Servant is the culminating personality in a long line of **Mediators**, beginning perhaps with Moses, who asked that his name be 'blotted' out from the Book of the Living, rather than see his much loved people rightfully annihilated. The Servant is thus described:

*... He surrendered himself to death, and let himself be taken as a sinner, while he was bearing the faults of many and praying all the while for sinners ... [Is 53:12].*

Only love could inspire one to accept fully such self-giving.

- it is divine love that is the ultimate explanation that is behind the Pauline and Christian tradition concerning Redemption: very freely, and only out of love, Jesus **handed Himself over for us** - and, in so doing, Jesus is continuously the object of the most tender love of His Merciful Father: *...the Father loves Me because I lay down My life and take it up again...* [Jn 10:17].

- it is not even intelligible to say that the innocent is punished for the guilty. Punishment cannot really be transferred from one person to another, without changing its nature. A debt can be paid by an intermediary, but a **punishment** cannot be undergone 'by proxy'. Punishment is essentially a personal thing, inseparable from the sin. If the Law of Nations every allows the fault of one of their members to pass over and be imputed to a family, a city, or the nation – it may be because these are considered more as moral virtues. So, it is not by virtue of any **penal substitution**, but by virtue of the wholly different principle of **solidarity**.<sup>20</sup>

- Divine love is the fundamental explanation of this most intricate mystery. Jesus is presented as though He were not sure of the father's will – but, He freely and totally opts for the total fulfillment of this Will. The entirely free choice on the part of Jesus is one of the most eloquent 'proofs' of His one and same love: for the Father, and for those who would share in His own Filiation by God's love.

- So, the idea of Jesus suffering **total death** is very different from this view – and very difficult to sustain. Jesus was like us in all, save sin – and so, would not have ever suffered the 'death of the soul.'

b. Keeping in mind the reservations of classical and traditional theology, the following statements might receive broader acceptance:

- Cullman's contrast in the Platonic idea of death with the biblical concept. Jesus, in His death, was not 'liberated' from any 'prison.' In the Christian understanding, death runs counter to God's original plan – but, it has been 'redeemed';

<sup>20</sup> cf. Ferdinand Prat, SJ, *The Theology of St. Paul*. Westminster: Newman 1961, Vol. 2, pp.196, ff.

- there are good reasons to indicate from Scripture itself that Jesus considered death in the biblical sense. Jesus, in His miracles, often places an intimate tie between physical healing and the message that is communicated: by His miracles, Jesus indicates the destruction of the Reign of Sin, and the inauguration of the reign of God. Whenever Jesus heals the infirm and raises the dead to life, by His intervention sickness and death are conquered, as is sin itself.

- with the definitive coming of Jesus, death loses its terrifying aspect, and He Himself compares it to 'sleeping': ***she is not dead, but sleeping – and they laughed*** [Mk 5:39,ff.].

- in the measure in which the Agony of Gethsemane is joined to the thought of death, what 'horrifies' Jesus is not 'death' considered merely as a simple biblical reality, but much more death as a sign of sin: death is the indication, the 'wage' brought by the proud rebellion of humanity against God – and is a sign of 'separation from God.'

c. Another important point to be remembered: the Evangelists in agreement, have emphasized the awesome solitude of Jesus in the Mystery of His Agony:

- Many commentators have noted His 'loneliness', particularly with reference to the three Disciples, whom Jesus hand-picked to be 'with Him in His dark Hour' – but, instead, these deny Him by giving themselves over to sleep, while He stays awake and prays. This seems to be the emphasis of Mt where the sleep of the disciples is in such stark contrast with the appeal made to them so insistently by Jesus that they ***watch and pray*** [Mt 26:38] - the expression ***to watch and pray WITH Him*** -seems particularly to Mt.

- A problem arises here: ordinarily Jesus was not 'accompanied' in His relationship with His Merciful Father in prayer. So many times we read that Jesus actually sought out solitude for His personal prayer [cf. Mt 14:23; Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16]. Why does He here seek accompaniment?

- Pascal had perceptively noted this unusual action of Jesus in the Garden – here He actually sought out the relief of human accompaniment for His prayer. This seems to be the only time in all of His recorded life that He did so. Pascal reasons that heaven seemed 'closed' even to Jesus. He suffers this 'abandonment' and this terrible pain also in the **dark night.**

- Ordinarily, Jesus gives the impression that He finds in God such support that it would exclude any thought of needing it from human beings – because His relationship with the Father was so 'personal', total, intimate. The sleep of the

Apostles already prefigures the cruel descriptions that He will soon experience from His specially Chosen Ones. Gethsemane, therefore, is unique under a variety of points of view. Jesus is abandoned by His intimate circle [really!] and seems to have been abandoned in some manner, by His Loving Father – in so many ways, it seems that an old curse of drought of Dt is being fulfilled in a way that no one could ever have imagined: ... ***The heavens above you will be brass, the earth beneath you, iron...!*** [Dt 28:23].

c. The terrible cry of Jesus later on: ***My God, My God...!*** is usually interpreted following one or two lines of reasoning:

- some interpreters are inclined to 'attenuate' the full meaning of these words: ***Why have You abandoned Me?*** They state that these words are only the opening lines of a Psalm, a Prayer of Hope, and that this Just Person who suffers, is already secure of the love and protection of God, Who in His holiness will come to the rescue, offering support in total fidelity;

- others [e.g., Benoit, OP] note that the very fact that this sentence is a citation of a Psalm, makes it impossible that these words should ever be interpreted as a Cry of Desperation, even though the words do reveal a real state of anguish. By citing this Psalm of Hope, Jesus once more has chosen ***to fulfill the Scriptures***, by applying to Himself this Psalm which wondrously prophesizes His terrible torment and which concludes with a Cry of triumphant Glory.

e. Hence, if we could speak of a 'majority Catholic view', the terrible anguish of Gethsemane and Calvary in no way eliminate the very personal union of Jesus with His Father. This intimate, unique bond, remains un-severed. In His Mission to ***expiate the sins of humanity***, Jesus voluntarily experienced in His humanity the misery and the solitude of those separated from God by their free choice of sin. The Prophets spoke of this:

***... My people have committed a double sin: they have abandoned Me, the fountain of living water, only to dig cisterns for themselves, leaky cisterns, that hold no water ...***  
[Jr 2:13].

The Passion and Death of Jesus are the most striking revelation of the infinite love of the Merciful Father, leading His Son to the glories of the resurrection – but, at the same time, it is commonly said that the Cross is the most profound manifestation of the horror of sin, this terrible catastrophe into which sinners fall head-long. They actually choose to distance themselves from the sole Source of genuine happiness.

### Summary

NT Revelation was classically interpreted as showing that Jesus, through His intimate union with the Father, is at one and the same time 'blessed' and 'in agony'. Pope Pius XII spoke about this:

.... [For hardly was He conceived in the womb of the Mother of God, Jesus] began to enjoy the Beatific Vision, and in that Vision all the members of His mystical body were continually and unceasingly present to Him, and He embraced them with His redeeming love. O marvelous condescension of divine love for us!...In the crib, on the Cross, in the unending glory of the Father, Christ has all the members of the Church present to Him and united to Him in a much clearer manner than that of a mother clasps her child to her breast, or than that which a man knows and loves himself...<sup>21</sup>

a. The reasoning behind this is that the humanity of Jesus exists solely through the Person of the word. Hence, traditional theology attributes to Jesus the Beatific Vision in which He takes cognizance of His divinity and His Passion as the unique Revealer of the divinity.

b. Furthermore, since Jesus is man, traditional theology also teaches that in addition to the Beatific Vision, the *luminous immediate presence of God to His human soul*, it is also necessary to admit in Jesus an infused knowledge. This infused knowledge in the soul of Jesus was habitual and He was able to make use of it, as He chose.<sup>22</sup>

c. During His Passion, and first of all, the Agony of Gethsemane, Jesus freely chose to experience the terrible consequences of sin. In this way, there is explained in some way the simultaneous presence in the soul of Jesus of both joy and agony, or the presence of the Beatific Vision, infused knowledge and the Agony: this is a complexity that is beyond any fully satisfying human solution. Here are a few attempts:

- Knabenhauer and V. Taylor: hold that Jesus did use OT expressions to manifest this mystery of 'divine abandonment', but this does not imply any interpretation in the union between the Heavenly Father and Jesus. To state that there was a 'separation' between the father and the Son, even for an instant, 'is inconsistent with the love of God and the one-ness of purpose with the Father in the atoning ministry of Jesus. The depths of the saying *are too deep to be plumbed* - but, the least correct expressions

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<sup>21</sup> *Mystici Corporis*. June 29, 1943, n. 75. cf. *The Papal Encyclicals 1939-1958*. A Consortium Book. McGrath Publishing CO 1981, p. 52.

<sup>22</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. III, q. 12, a. 5.

are those which interpret the desolation of Jesus to have been a disruption in communion with the Father.<sup>23</sup>

- J. Maritain: presents the same conclusion, but more from a theological perspective than an exegetical one. The Thomistic scholar states that even in the moment of the terrible agony of Gethsemane, Jesus was personally united to the Father. However, the 'experience' in His human faculties of this paradise, and its normal 'irradiation' were impeded to these faculties by the power of God.<sup>24</sup>

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### C. The Agony of Gethsemane: A Messianic Trial

1. In the above 'solutions' to the sublime Mystery of the Agony of Gethsemane, perhaps each of them has '**something of the truth**' – and they might be used in a complementary manner. The most superficial explanation of all is the one that states that the Agony of Jesus in Gethsemane was simply **His Fear of Death** – and yet, there is something of the truth in that. A much more profound explanation is the one that states that the Mystery of the Agony should be sought in **the voluntary experience of Jesus enduring some kind of a 'separation' from God**. However, this would need qualification, and would need to be associated with Jesus' Messianism.

2. The most precise manner of understanding the Agony of Gethsemane is that of not looking at it solely as His own worry about death. Gethsemane reveals something profound concerning **God and sin**. The awesome terror experienced by Jesus at the thought of His imminent death, as well as the subsequent endurance of such a painful death – which was something NOT in the original Plan of God for humanity – are the sign of *sin* and the rebellion of humanity against God.

a. Therefore many interpreters look upon the entire Mystery of the Agony [as well as the Death] as a **Messianic Trial**, which renders Jesus the voluntary victim of sins of all time. This scene of Gethsemane is 'something of an anticipation' of the divine judgment of the *Parousia*. [This is the view of many exegetes, Catholic as well as Protestants].

b. This explanation is based on an incontestable truth, which is very often forgotten: the One Who suffers in the Garden is not an ordinary man, even though He is indeed **true God and true man** – nor is He merely the greatest of the saints. Jesus is the Son of God, the Servant of Yahweh, Who has taken on Himself the weight of the sins of the world. This statement in no way 'explains' the mystery – theology can never fully penetrate just what took place in this awe-inspiring scene. This

<sup>23</sup> Cf. V. Taylor, *The Atonement in NT Teaching*. London: The Epworth Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1963.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. Maritain, *On the Grace and the Humanity of Jesus*. Herder & Herder 1967.

drama, noted in various places in the NT writings, is vested with almost **apocalyptic amplitude** – this thought may shed even further light on this terrible **Dark Night**. In this way, the entire key to the solution is taken from merely human psychology, and is brought to the depths of the Mystery of Redemption. Realizing that the Agony in the Garden shed slight also on the hidden mystery of God Himself as well as of sin: this mystery is part of the grandiose plan of Divine Love of overcoming the rebellion of humanity, with the response of infinite divine love to humanity's self-centered sinfulness.

c. Yet, human psychology also has its legitimate sphere in this mystery, as Jesus was indeed 'true man'. However, He was also divinely endowed with heavenly supported **fore-knowledge**: and with this, Jesus even in Gethsemane would have known that so much redemptive suffering would remain without fruit for a good number of human beings [according to some interpreters], because of the hardness of their hearts. The fore-knowledge of the partial defeat of redemption must have been one of the most atrocious sufferings in the infinitely loving and merciful Heart of Jesus, sent by the Merciful Father to be the Savior of the entire world, Furthermore, in this terrible Agony, Jesus associated Himself with all those who struggle in apparent sinlessness, meaninglessness, spiritual agony – the many, many victims of horrible injustice who were denied their day in court.'

d. It is somewhat surprising, many feel, that so many excellent commentaries do not mention this **Messianic perspective**. There are also those who have specifically rejected any such idea from their descriptions of the trial of Gethsemane, seeing it to be merely theological speculation that does not derive from any objective exegesis. Others reject it as merely pious imagination. The salutary fear, or respect, of introducing ulterior theological ideas into the language of Jesus is healthy – however, this would not seem to keep the authentic scholar from discerning the true meaning of Jesus' words: and possible connection with the **Suffering Servant of Yahweh [Is 53]** and the **Messianic Shepherd, struck by God** [Zc 13!] . The added insight of seeing in the Agony of Gethsemane an aspect of great profundity concerning the mystery of the Redemption: Gethsemane tells us much more about the divine horror for sin, and the endless love of God for humanity. These profound insights seem to go far beyond any mere 'interpretation' – this reflection on Gethsemane can be substantiated – and has been by scholars.

3. It is the task of the exegete to ponder carefully the various accounts of Gethsemane and perhaps 'zero in on some of the more outstanding ideas, such as:

- Jesus' prophetic use of terms like **had to suffer, ... must suffer ...** - and the **inevitable apocalyptic judgment**: the **Hour**, - the **Chalice** - and the repeated formula: **The Son of Man was handed over - is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners**. These formulations will be considered here:

a. **The Prophetic Necessity:** of the Passion and death of Jesus Christ:

*... And He began to teach them that the Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again ... [Mk 8:31].*

*... But first [the Son of Man] must suffer grievously and be rejected by this generation ... [Lk 17:25].*

*... I tell you these words of Scripture have to be fulfilled in Me: He let Himself be taken as a criminal... [Mt 22:37].*

*... was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into His glory... [Lk 24:26] ... He would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead...*

*... But how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say this is the way it must be ... [Mt 26:54].*

b. These passages, then, might be compared to a **certain apocalyptic necessity** regarding the **eschatological judgment**, the obligatory prelude to definitive judgment:

*... When you hear of wars, and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed ... this is something that must happen, but the end will not be yet ... [Mk 13:7].*

*... You will hear of wars and rumors of wars; do not be alarmed, for this is something that must happen, but the end will not be yet ... [Mt 24:6].*

*... And when you hear of wars and revolution, do not be frightened, for this is something that must happen, but the end is not so soon... [Lk 21:9]*

In both of these series of important texts: both the **Prophetic *must*** as well as the **Apocalyptic necessity** are seen in intimate connection with the **culminating point of Salvation History**.

c. The mysterious ***Hour*** of the Agony of Gethsemane, the one that Jesus would have liked to avoid in His humanity, had this been the Father's will [cf. Mk 14:35], seems to be in intimate connection with the **Apocalyptic Hour** of the Judgment which God alone knows [cf. Mk 13:32]. It is this terrible ***hour*** which imposes on all the followers of Jesus the life-long duty of **vigilance**. This is the appeal that Jesus makes to His Apostles. It might be well to compare these two series of texts:

*... Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad: he has gone from home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own task; and he has told the door-keeper to stay awake. So, stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming:*

***evening, midnight, cock-crow, dawn: if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And, what I say to you, I say to all: Stay awake!*** [ Mk 13:33-37].

***... And he said to them: 'My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here, keep awake ... You should be awake and praying, not to be put to the test ...*** [Mk 14:34, 38].

Therefore, the **Hour** of Gethsemane is not simply the chronological moment of His arrest and impending death. The **Hour** is, though, a precise event, long awaited, in Salvation History. This is the **Hour** established by the Merciful Father for the culmination of the redemption, the judgment of the world. This awesome judgment falls with its full weight and horror on the Servant of the Father, in His freely accepted solidarity with sinful humanity.

d. The **Chalice**: this much feared **cup** cannot only be this terrible death that awaits Him. In the OT, the image of the **chalice** applied to a **cruel destiny**, did not necessarily refer to death. It always designates suffering willed by God as punishment for sin – in more precise terms, it seems to indicate **the eschatological suffering of the wicked** [cf. Is 51:17, 22; Jr 25:15-29; 49:12; 51:7; Lk 4:21; Ezk 23:31-33; Ps 11:6; 75:9].

- There is not a single example in which the image of the **Cup** refers to an unpleasant destiny that was not the result of divine punishment. In the episode of the Sons of Zebedee, the association made by the text from Mark [cf. 10:38, f.] of the two symbols, that of the **cup** and that of the **baptism** would bring a new support to this possibility of reading Gethsemane. In this passage concerning the Sons of Zebedee, Jesus uses the word **Baptism** to express His **Mission**. In this, there would be some connection with **expiation**.

- After having recognized the implications of the image of the **Cup** in the Prophetic writings of the OT, it is much more 'biblical' to interpret, as far as possible, the sayings of Jesus from Scripture itself. So, it would seem only logical to deduce that when Jesus speaks of **Cup**, He is using it in the sense of the OT Prophets. At least, this would be the view that would merit the most serious consideration.

- The fact that the interpreter might do well to place the **cup** which Jesus has to drink in relationship with the **Cup** of the Prophets, indicating the **divine, eschatological punishments** noted by numerous modern exegetes. However, a distinction must be introduced: that this divine, eschatological punishment does **not** fall on Jesus as on some ordinary sinner. Some have wondered whether in this scene there is the implication that as on the night of the Passover, the non-believers have to drink **the cup of divine wrath**, and that here Jesus is doing precisely that, similar to it – and motivated here by divine love. [There is nothing in the text that would favor this interpretation, advanced however, by some reputable scholars].

- However these lines may be read, the **Cup** that He **has** to drink makes Jesus tremble. This **chalice** would be destined not merely for the enemies of the Chosen People, but for all the enemies of God, who have been sinners. Some maintain that in this instance Jesus **drinks the Cup of Condemnation**: so that humanity might partake and share in the **Cup of Salvation**. There is here a relationship of cause and effect between the **chalice of the agony** and the **Eucharistic Cup of the Last Supper**: as there is between the Blood of the New Covenant shed on Calvary *for the many* and **Eucharistic Holy Communion**.

e. The special formula: ***the Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners*** [Mk 14:41]: this offers great insight into the drama of the Agony of Gethsemane-

- Some would truncate this verse right after the words: ***the Hour has come***. In this case, the word **Hour** would simply mean the chronological moment of betrayal.

- However, this **Hour** is the same one mentioned earlier: ***He threw Himself on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, this HOUR might pass Him by*** [v.35]. In this connection, the **Hour** would seem to be something unique and awesome: **that eschatological moment of God's acting in the Person of Jesus**: the **Hour** of the definitive divine intervention in Salvation History has sounded: that instant when Jesus is **handed over**, by Judas – by the Jews to the Roman soldiers – and as He is also by the Merciful Father, in this totally mysterious mystery of Divine Mercy. The ***Father did not spare His only Son, but handed Him over!*** [Rm 8:32].

- The word **sinners** is not to be understood in the rather 'bland' sense of the Pharisees, in the reference to the non-believers of the Law [cf. Mk 2:15, par.]. this word on the lips of Jesus is much more universal, and includes Gentile as well as Jew. It could refer to the Chief Priests and Scribes [cf. Mk 10:33] – to the Gentiles [cf. Ac 2:23; 3:13]. However, without entering into all these particulars, it would be sufficient to note that in the Agony scene, Jesus has His look ***fixed on the Father***, who has indicated the **Hour** – and Who has given Him a most difficult cup to drink.

- In giving Jesus the **Cup**, and in establishing the **Hour**, the Merciful Father **hands over** His only begotten, Most Beloved Son, but has **handed Him over for all of us** [Rm 8:32; cf. also Jn 3:16]. Therefore, '**sinners**' means all of sinful humanity of all time.

- All of this remains such a mystery, 'unheard of' – that God would thus **hand over to sinners His Own Son, the Holy One, the Just One** of all time. Jesus is His own natural Son, the One Who had never been dominated by the Power of Darkness – the Son of Man who possesses the ***exousia*** [the power] of God, is given over into the Powers of Darkness. On the human level, this is all beyond explanation.

- this extraordinary mystery had already been predicted by Is, in his Book of Consolation:

*... who could have believed what we heard, and to whom has the power of Yahweh been revealed? ... Yahweh burdened Him with the sins of all of us ... He was bearing the sins of the many ...* [Is 53:1, 6,12].

The Prophet seems to be fully aware that he is stating realities that seem to be unthinkable. He describes the unique martyrdom, willingly accepted and chosen by the mysterious Suffering Servant of Yahweh, for the deliverance of his culpable human beings.

- This extraordinary prophecy is the key, and also the anticipated commentary on the Agony of Gethsemane – or, even more precisely, of the entire Passion, inaugurated by the Agony in the Garden.

### Conclusion

[1] The Agony of Gethsemane is an episode in the life of Jesus which pertains to its culminating mysteries. It is much like the offertory of the sacrifice of His life, in Eucharistic terms – the oblation of the Gifts in the New Covenant of Mercy. For Catholic theologians, the Last Supper, the sacrifice of the Cross, and the Liturgy of the Eucharistic sacrifice and Communion – are one.

[2] The explanations of the Agony in the Garden have not abounded until perhaps more recent times. Some of the modern studies have gone far to fill this void - even though some of them are considered somewhat overly impressed by literary criticism. In the excess, this tendency could 'relativize' considerably the historicity of the Gospel narratives. This could lead to rather grave doctrinal consequences.

[3] A number of modern studies may insist too excessively that there are three distinct theological conceptions of this account. While there is no doubt that each Evangelist has had his own point of view, sometimes this fact is presented as almost to all separate, disparate theologies, or distinct revelations.

[4] The fundamental truth of the scene of the Agony of the Garden is basic: the son of God, in His Agony, not only suffers **human fear**. This is the dramatic conflict with the Powers of darkness – the **Hour** of Judgment has come, and **Jesus is called to 'drink' the Cup of Condemnation**, to enable human beings thereafter to share in the **Chalice of salvation**.

[5] The Christian idea of suffering is not, then, for a believer, just one more explanation, or theory about the perplexing mystery of recurring suffering. All

suffering is meant to be related in some way to a unique event in Salvation History: the redemptive, salvific life of Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A.Feuillet, 'Il significato fondamentale dell'Agonia nel Getsemani', in: *La sapienza della Croce oggi.* I, Torino: LDC, pp. 69-85, *passim*.

## II.

## THE SYNOPTIC ACCOUNTS OF THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

[cf. Mk 14:32-42; Mt 26:36-46; Lk 22:39-46]

**Presentation**<sup>26</sup>:

[1] In this conclusive moment of His earthly sojourn, Jesus offers the synthesis of His **sacrifice of Praise** that began at the Moment of His Incarnation ... *The Father consecrated Me and sent Me into the world* ... [Jn 10:36]. On the Cross, Jesus reproduces in unmistakable dedication **the praise** which as the Eternal Word He expressed from all eternity, in the name of all creation, that would ever come into being.

[2] From the moment of His Incarnation, this **oblation of praise** is extended throughout every aspect of His earthly existence. By a few and continuing acts of His own will, Jesus continually offers this Gift of Himself, in response to the Father's 'hidden plan', for the restoration of humanity in the Holy Spirit.

[3] In this sense, the whole life of Jesus may be thought of as an **oblation, consecration, holy communion** – an eminently priestly sacrifice. Gethsemane is the special offertory of abandonment. In this moment, Jesus shows the way through the darkness, offers the 'Light', the 'Way', the Truth and the Life'. For all, who forever afterward would endure the **Night**, the long **spiritual winter**, the **agony** of their own garden, the drama of Jesus is a Sign of **Hope**.

[4] In no way, prior to this drama of Gethsemane, had Jesus manifested by His own personal experience, such anguish, such dolor. And yet, all His previous life – in fact, the entire Incarnation, seems to have been geared in this direction. He spoke of this moment, these final days of His earthly existence,, as the **Hour** for which He was sent, the **Chalice** that He had come to drink [cf. Lk 12:50; Mt 20:22; Mk 18:38]. Yet, the **Will** is not the whole human being – there are other faculties, spiritual and physical, which are meant to be brought into harmonious union with God. Even in these who are really most sincere in their **quest for the Lord**, and who obey Him without reserve, there is found a totality of faculties that reject the 'unknown', struggle in faith, hope and love – are more pronounced in their instinct of self-preservation and gratification. Gethsemane offers the great gift of **life for others**.

[5] The emphasis in Gethsemane seems also to be the interior, spiritual, moral sufferings. Calvary will show aspects of both, while the emphasis here might be more on the physical aspects. The Gethsemane story introduces the final drama – following the Last Supper, Gethsemane and Calvary, immediately are presented as what is

<sup>26</sup> Cf. B. Ancilli, 'L'agonia e la morte di Gesu', in: *RvItSp* 26, 1972, pp. 461-471

required for **Holy Communion**. Jesus has come to the Garden – as He was led into the desert, to conquer the **Powers of Darkness**, to transform all the weakness of human nature, by identifying His will with that of the Father. As was learned in the temptation scene of Mk [cf. 3:27], the Powers of Darkness can never overcome **the One who is stronger**. In Gethsemane, Jesus manifests our weakness as He offers His own strength.

[6] By the mere fact that no other human nature could ever be united to the Father as Jesus was, no one could ever experience **the mystery of holy abandonment** as Jesus did. The simultaneous presence of this beatifying union, and the awesome **abandonment BY God** [cf. Ps 22] can never fully be explained – but, by the same token, should never be denied. This pervading sense of union with the Father, evening Gethsemane, remains the hope of the suffering servants of all time. While the reality of Gethsemane continued in the lives of so many of the followers of Jesus [the **Dark Night**] is never diminished by any theological response – this union with Jesus enables one to **see the future, difficult [made so by God's mystery] good of hope, to be indeed possible, made so by God's Mercy**.

[7] By being baptized **INTO** Christ Jesus [cf. Rm 6:1, ff.], each one is likewise **crucified with Him** – this is not merely 'along-side' of, but **together with** – this intimate '**configuration**', '**incorporation**' into the very filiation of Jesus, assures each one of the Presence of God in His apparent absence – this is the Divine word, in the deafening silence – this is the **presence**, the **immanence**, when all seems transcendence.

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#### A. MARK'S ACCOUNT OF THE AGONY IN GETHSEMANE

[14:32-42]<sup>27</sup>

##### Introduction:

[1] In our own time, there are more and more studies on the Passion of Christ according to Mark.<sup>28</sup> It is increasingly apparent, therefore, that Mk, in his simplicity has gathered various traditions that have been synthesized in his unmistakable style. There are those scholars who are able to distinguish the 'Pre-Markan' material from his own theological insights, that enable the student to penetrate more profoundly into the Gethsemane story.

[2] From the point of view of the Tradition and Redaction in Mark, some traits come immediately to the fore: two separate times he mentions the name

<sup>27</sup> Von Werner Mohn, 'Il Gethsemani secondo Marco', In: *ZNW* 64, 1973, pp. 194-208.

<sup>28</sup> *The Passion in Mark*. ed. W. H. Kelbert, Philadelphia: Fortress 1976 203 pp.

**Gethsemane**, [cf. Mk 14:26, 32] – which some interpreters read as being an indication of two separate hands at work: that of the **Tradition**, and that of the later **Redaction**. This is also evident in the slight difference noted in the Apostles' position: the 12 remained 'here' while the three were called to go and be 'with' Him. Three separate times Jesus comes back to the Apostles who had accompanied Him – and the experts are able to discern the theologizing of Mk from the regular biblical account.

[3] The central ideas are the **Hour** which Jesus must face alone – and the **sleep** into which the Apostles unwittingly fall. The Hour has several interpretations: with **apocalyptic** overtones, and implying the impending **Passion**. The **sleep** is also interpreted as 'pertaining to the past era, or to belong to the **darkness**. Thus, Jesus is conscious of the fact that His death is the expression of **divine judgment on sin** – and a most extraordinary revelation of Divine Mercy. This **sleep** also manifests the thought that Christians may not as yet have realized sufficiently the requirements of the fact that **NOW** is the **Hour**. They belong to the **darkness**, if they do not allow themselves to be awakened to the apocalyptic announcement of the Church.

[4] Of the 12 Apostles, Mk emphasizes that there are **three chosen** to be the **witnesses** to the Agony in the Garden. Paul [cf. 1 Co 15:5] shows that the Apostles are **the Witnesses of the resurrection** – and Mk seems to be insisting here that they are also in a particular manner called to be the **witnesses of the Passion**. Once more, through their **sleep** the closest followers of Jesus show themselves still not understanding Christ's message: to **sleep** is failure to await the return of the Bridegroom.

[5] Jesus returns three separate times to find His closest ones sound asleep - as shortly afterwards, His chosen **Vicar**, would decisively deny Him three separate times [cf. 14:30]. Mk tries to bring out in this way the three-fold admonition of Jesus for the whole Church of all time: **Watch and Pray!**

[6] Many believe that Mk's rendition of the Agony scene is a **summary of Jesus' teaching**: He had given here predictions of His Passion [cf. 8:10, 52] – and also His eschatological Discourse [c.13]. this teaching had already foreseen the betrayal of Peter [cf. 14:66-72], His own death [cf. 15:34]. The over-all idea is the great need to penetrate the message of Jesus, to fathom its 'Messianic Secret'. There is a clear warning that even the Disciple of Christ, one who may want to learn His message, must take every more seriously: **the following/ imitation of Christ, the putting on of His mind**. This is translated here as: **Watch and Pray!**

## 1. Gethsemane and Temptation

The concept of *Temptation*, which has appeared in any minute study of this Mystery of Gethsemane as one of the key words, particularly for the understanding of the threat being made on disciples of all generations. While expressly in the text this refers specifically solely to the Disciples, yet the manner of Jesus' Prayer [which asks that the **Cup** be taken away, and then He accepts the Father's Will, leads to the question whether the term **temptation/ trial** might also help to understand better the great mystery of the Agony in Jesus' experience in the Garden.

## 2. The Disciples and the *temptation/ trial*:

a. The context would indicate that the salvific intervention of God is also what brings about the scandal to the disciples: ... **And Jesus said to them: 'You will all lose faith in Me, for the Scripture says: 'I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered ...'** [Mk 14:27]. This prophecy begins to be realized as part of the divine plan, in a particular manner, from Gethsemane to Calvary. These scenes repeatedly show the Messiah as beaten, defeated, humiliated, powerless. And Jesus, in Gethsemane, tells the disciples: ...**pray not to be put to the test ...** [v. 38] i.e., **not to enter into**, not to **penetrate**. This would mean that they should pray also not to consent to temptation. The powerful appeal of God is also that those would accept freedom, should not then become prisoners of the Powers of Darkness. This **temptation/ trial** temptation, cannot come from God, but always from **the world, the flesh, or the devil**.

b. There is a task for the exegete in seeking to present the data of divine revelation for reflection, to bring together two apparently unconnected ideas:

- the whole context here is centered around the opening aspects of the drama of the Passion;

- whereas the **Greek word** is a one that is generally associated with the English **temptation**, which could present a struggle with the flesh, the world, or the devil. In this connection, it would be useful to compare two texts from this [Mk 14: vv. 38 and then 27:

### 1.] verse 38:

**... you should be awake and praying not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak...** [v. 38].

- According to the evident meaning of the terms, the disciples are almost 'defined' by this formula: **the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak**. They are now being confronted with a situation that even the 'readiness of the spirit' cannot win out unless it is helped – they are facing difficulties which can only be met and conquered

by serious prayer. Two separate times Jesus comes back and they have not obeyed His request [cf. vv. 37, 40]. There is implied in this that they have given in to the demands of the flesh, and that as flesh they have proven to be incapable to handle the difficulty, and therefore, they have entered into temptation, they are in the terribly difficult area of the **temptation/ trial**. There is here a kind of literary form: the antithesis between **flesh/spirit** and the **temptation** when the **flesh** dominates. The source of this combination may be sought in the sources that have shaped Mk.

- **The OT:** the idea of the **spirit/ flesh** has deep biblical roots:

*... I will put a new spirit in them...* [Ezk 11:19].

*... I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you...* [Ezk 36:26]

This **new spirit** is something of a **share** in God's own spirit, and enables one to keep the word. The **spirit** is always a gift of the Lord:

*... God, create in me a clean heart, put into me a new and constant spirit ... do not banish me from your presence, do not deprive me of your holy spirit ...* [Ps 51:10, ff.].

There is a conscious effort to ask this of God, whenever one asks to be graced with a *ready, prompt spirit*. These texts do shed some light to illumine this passage of Mk: **the spirit is ready**. It is admitted that the OT does not see the full picture, by ever bringing together " **spirit/ flesh/ temptation**."

- **St. Paul:** one might very usefully compare this Apostle to the Gentiles and his recurring contrast between **flesh/ spirit** [cf. Rm 7:5, ff.; 8:1-6,9, 13; Ga 3:3; 6:8, 17]. Yet, even here, there might not be a perfect result, or conclusion drawn. In St. Paul, the **spirit** has a variety of meanings:

- **the Holy Spirit:** interpreters are not in agreement whether in Rm 8:1-13, the 12 times the word recurs it always means the third Person of the Trinity. Some read a few of the passages to mean: the spirit of a human being renewed by the active presence of God.

- **a gift of God:** to humanity. It is the **spirit** which enables one, or bestows on one, the capacity to act in accord with God. Even with this gift, one might still be free and could still choose to be regulated according to the flesh, rather than through the Spirit [cf. Rm 8:5-13; 5:5].

Therefore, in St. Paul there is not an aspect of the antithesis between **spirit/ flesh** that would assist us here. The Christian ideal, though, for Paul is to act according to the Spirit of God which dwells within, the Holy Spirit indwells – or, one can still act according to the **flesh**, and thus **sadden the Holy Spirit** [cf. Ep 4:30]. Perhaps closer to Mk's thought would be this passage from Paul:

*... I am unspiritual .. a slave to sin ... I cannot understand my own behavior. I fail to carry out the things I want to do, and I find myself doing the very things I hate ... I know of nothing good living in me – living, i.e., in my unspiritual self – for, though the will to do what is good is in me, the performance is not – with the result that instead of doing the good things I want to do, I carry out the sinful things I do not want. When I act against my will, then, it is not my true self doing it, but sin which lives in me ... what a wretched man I am! Who will save me from this body doomed to death? ... I who serve in my unspiritual self the law of sin ... [Rm 7:7-25].*

All his effort does not seem able to accomplish the good which he wants to do, because of the **power of sin**, the **carnal** aspect of his humanity. Paul prays for the **rescue, redemption**. So, some would translate: **the flesh is weak**, just the opposite of inferring; **the flesh is too strong!**

- **Qumran**: this would merit a whole study. One is **faithful** because of the **spirit of truth**, which dwells within, and which determines one's right doing. Through this Spirit of the truth in Qumran, one was believed to give him/ herself generously, with promptness to the fulfillment of the commandments of God.

**Application to Mark**: Mk's idea that **the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak** [14:38] shows the real emphasis to be on the **weakness** of the flesh, its **spiritual incapacity, incapability** – meaning that unaided, wounded human nature is unable to do the 'great' and 'difficult' tasks, that of tending toward, or accomplishing the divine challenge. Yet, the Apostles are charged with the basic Christian response to **watch and pray** [14:34, 38]. They are clearly placed before their responsibilities, and their 'giving in', their lack of 'acting against' the natural tendency, does not seem totally without fault.

There is a clear difference between Mk's account and the ideas that pervaded Qumran: in this early Community of the Essenes, this weakness was due to the **spirit of wickedness**: that battled always in the hearts of human beings. Along with the teachings of the NT, **evil** in the last analysis, in some way, was traceable back to Satan – but, in Mk's account of Gethsemane, the immediate reason given for the 'fall', is the **weakness** of the Apostles, the weakness of the **flesh**.

This does not mean that Mk does not recognize the intimate connection between the tendency to evil which is in the heart of each person, and Satan. However, in Gethsemane, Mk's interests seem to lie in another direction. The idea here is that the disciple who 'gives in' also 'enters into temptation', which renders one a 'prisoner', 'slave' of Satan [cf. Mk 1:13].

Mk, however, in his entire account of the Passion of Jesus, makes no explicit reference to this action of Satan. His narration is entirely dominated by God's activity – and it seems that he is presenting the disciples in their relationship to the salvific

action of God. The disciples are surely under the solicitation of the 'flesh', and in the last analysis, of Satan himself. Mk, however, leads the reader back to the Plan of God that is being enacted in all of this drama.

## 2.] Verse 27:

*... You will all lose faith in Me ... [you will be scandalized because of Me – Mt] for the Scripture says: 'I shall strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered ... [Mk 14:27].*

- There is here the citation from the Prophet Zechariah [13:7]- whether this is to be interpreted in an **accommodated sense**, or in a **typical sense** - one thing is sure: the death of the Shepherd is part of the Divine Plan. It is God Himself who is in the background, Who does not hesitate to hand over His own Son [cf. Rm 8:32], into the hands of sinners [cf. Mk 14:41]. In this way, the Plan of Salvation will be realized [cf. Mk 10:45]. Mk had already referred to this earlier:

*... And He began to teach them that the Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously to be rejected by the Elders and the Chief Priests and the Scribes, and be put to death, and after three days to rise again ... [Mk 8:31, par.].*

*... yet, how is it that the Scriptures say about the Son of Man that He is to suffer grievously and be treated with contempt? ... [9:12]*

*... Yes, the Son of Man is going to His fate, as the Scriptures say He will, but alas! for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!... [14:21, par.].*

These passages show the **Death of the Shepherd** as playing a central role in this extraordinary Plan of God. With Gethsemane and the Cross there is begun the situation of the 'scandal' and humiliation, the extreme powerlessness which the Messiah shows, in a context in which Jesus is presented so far from the popular ideas of **the Royal Messiah**, Who was expected. The 'temptation' of the disciples is, too, that they will abandon the 'helpless Jesus', in that they will lose confidence in Him, and will abandon Him: He surely does not seem to be the long-awaited Messiah in this situation of such humiliation.

But, this is the Plan of God: to save the world, even through the scandal of the Cross. In Mk, this is shown in all of its tragic reality. They are being asked to accept as savior, this Christ Who appears to them now in the utmost humiliation, anguish, defeat, sadness and powerlessness.

- In His first prediction of the Passion [cf.8:31-33], when He referred to Peter as 'Satan', for remonstrating with Jesus regarding His prediction of His suffering – this **way of thinking which is not God's., but man's**, is unequivocally rejected by Jesus. This inability to accept a suffering Christ is a work of the flesh or, of Satan: the

Apostles in this scene are incapable of seeing in this ‘weakness’: ***the power and wisdom of God*** [cf. 1 Co 1:24].

- The action of God, leading to salvation in this most unexpected way, has become a ‘scandal’, a stumbling-block, a motive for the failure of the disciples.

- There is one way to bridge the enormous gap between **the way of God, and the way of humanity** – and that had been suggested to the Apostles: **watch and pray:**

- the **vigil**: puts one on the alert against the tendencies of the flesh;

- **prayer**: makes one adhere to God, and assists one to know, through the faith, the work of salvation, realized by Jesus in His suffering and powerlessness.

- Despite the fact that the Apostles have a ‘ready spirit’, they do not obey the invitation of Christ, and they give in to the solicitation of the flesh, and to Satan and withdraw from Christ [cf. Mk 14:50, 66-72].

- The situation of ‘temptation’ in which they found themselves, won out, and brought them to **lose faith, to be scandalized** this **Night** in Jesus, in the divine action – not unlike the Israelites in the desert. Thus, the disciples did enter into ***periasmos***, they became literally **prisoners of sin**.

- Peter’s eloquent reaction to all of this is representative of all the Apostles, when they came to the full realization of what had happened in their lives, despite their promises: ***and Peter burst into tears*** [14:72].

With this sense of culpable weakness, one might see the implications of the effort to ‘explain’ their unsympathetic sleep: ***...And once more He came back and found them sleeping, their eyes were s heavy, they could find no answer for Him ...*** [cf. 14:40]:

- Even though Mk does try to offer an attenuating reason for their not having understood – as their full understanding would come only after the resurrection – this still does not take away entirely their culpability. Their ***not knowing what to respond to Him*** is a sign that they still are reasoning more ***according to the flesh*** - and hence, are not yet capable of receiving His revelation, and of being totally united to Him: ***He did not know what to say*** [9:6]. This is still thinking according to ‘man’s way’. Throughout the Gospel, a variety of reasons are given for this:

- **Lack of Faith:**

*... How is it that you have not faith? ... [4:40] - ... He reproached them for their incredulity and obstinacy, because they had refused to believe those who had seen Him after he had risen ... [16:14].*

- **Hardness of Heart:**

*... they had not seen what the miracle of the loaves meant; their minds were closed...! [6:52] - ... Do you not yet understand? Have you no perception? Are your minds closed? ... [8:17; 16:14].*

- Precisely, for their hardness of heart, which provokes the lack of faith, three separate times Mk attributes their negative reaction to the Self-revelation of Jesus, through His deeds and words. This 'hardness' impedes them from understanding the sense of the miracle of the bread [cf. 6:52] - the meaning of the words of Jesus concerning the leaven of the Pharisees [cf. 8:17] – and keeps them from recognizing Him in His resurrection.

- It is often stated in Scripture that one's heart has been **hardened**, or that one **hardens his own heart**. In Exodus [cf. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:17] – this is attributed to Yahweh – but, also there are many cases where the Pharaoh **hardens his own heart** [cf. Ex 7:13, 14,22; 8:11, 15, 28; 9:7, 35]. This language is somewhat understandable: the Pharaoh hardens his own heart taking up a position against the events that are unfolding before his very eyes. However, these extraordinary happenings would not have taken place without the direct intervention of God. In this sense, in those early traditions, in the last analysis, everything is attributed to God. These Exodus events are in the hands of god – through them, God offered warnings, opportunities, made concessions so that the Pharaoh might change. The Pharaoh simply over-looked them all, and reveals his deepest dispositions, his basic attitude of haughty refusal. He **hardens his heart** by simply not ceding to the evident presence of God. The early texts underline his responsibility – there are similar cases, as well, in Dt [cf. 2:30; 29:3; Jos 11:20; Is 6:9, f.; 63:13; Jr 5:21; Ezk 12:2].

- Similarly, in the Gethsemane scene, there is intended to impute to the Apostles a sense of responsibility and culpability. As the Pharaoh of old hardened his heart, manifesting his will of not ceding to the divine pressure [cf. Ex 7-9] – similarly, non-believers are presented by Paul as being far from God, because of their **hardness of heart** [cf. Ep 4:18]. All of this is intended as a warning to believers to learn from these examples and not to talk in their hardness of heart.

- In the Document to the Hebrews, the faithful are invited with a phrase taken from Ps 95:8: *... Do not harden your hearts ... [Heb 3:8, 15] - ... If only you would listen to*

**Him ... Today!...** [Heb 4:7]. This is a fervent exhortation to be open, available to hear the voice of God.

- One means of avoiding this hardness of heart is **vigilance**. Their sleeping is rather weakly explained as **their eyes were so heavy** [Mk 14:40]. This might be understood as the hardness of heart, the closing of one's ears, an unwillingness to open them, a not wanting to experience and see the reality of what was being revealed before them.

### SUMMARY

The disciples of Gethsemane are being confronted with a grave danger. If they do not keep **vigil** and **pray**, if they do not **obey** the voice of the Master, the solicitation of the **flesh**, the wiles of the **Devil**, impede them from hearing the message of God. They will be **scandalized** – they will **lose faith** in the sufferings of Jesus, and they will fall into the terrible **periasmos**. They will become **prisoners of sin**, and will reject the heavenly Father's salvific plan.

This is the situation of the disciples – and the implications are evident: now, in the light of the resurrection, such would be the situation of every believer in front of the drama of the Cross. Without an adherence of faith, it is all **stupidity** and a reason for **scandal**, the loss of faith.

### 3. Christ and the *temptation/ trial*

a. The real trial of the Disciples who had been personally invited by Jesus has been made clear. There is likewise a message here for the disciples of all time: **watch and pray** are the sole means of overcoming the terrible ordeal.

b. The question, then, comes immediately to mind, to seek to discern the true nature of the **temptation**, the **trial**, or the **ordeal** that Jesus has suffered here: **... Now the Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up! Let us go! My betrayer is close at hand!** [Mk 14:42].

- The **Hour** as has already been noted, is not merely a chronological annotation. The whole context makes it pregnant with a religious sense. There is indicated here **that moment, pre-established by God, to realize in Jesus, His great plan of salvation**. This is the moment when God Himself will also take the active hand in a special manner.

- There is an evident connection between the close of the **Eschatological Discourse** in Mk [c. 13], which comes to a close with this clairvoyant warning:

*... So, stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming – evening, midnight, cock-crow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find*

*you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!* [13:35, ff. – these are the last lines of the Chapter immediately preceding Mk's Passion account].

- There are great parallels in Mk 13 [the Eschatological Discourse] and Mk 14 [the Passion account]: there is a repeated use of the verb *paradidomai* [it appears 3 times in c . 13, and 10 times in cc. 14,ff.]; there is the repeated statement that the **Son of Man comes on the clouds** [cf.13:26; 14:62].

- These similarities and other indications have led many interpreters to see that, in the Garden, Jesus has begun the terrible **ordeal**, the awful **eschatological trial**, and that His **watching and praying** is His recipe for conquering.

- This is the moment of the **temptation** . As in the Petition of the **Our Father**, this does not merely mean a time of some **trial** for the pious believer. What is being revealed here is the sphere of satanic power, and the time of his apparent domination against which there seems to be no protection. The **Hour** in which Jesus is **handed over** into the hands of sinners, is truly the **Hour of darkness**. However, it would be excessive to say that there is no remedy: **to watch and pray in union with Christ** assures ultimate victory.

c. In other Gospel accounts [e.g., Lk & Jn], the Darkness of Gethsemane is also attributed to Satan. Mk, however, has other interests. Mk nowhere explicitly mentions Satan – but Jesus is presented as carrying out the Plan of God. This is Mk's insight. In the imminence of the Passion, Jesus is working for the Plan of the Father, who surrenders His beloved Son into the hands of sinners [cf. Rm 8:32; cf. also Is 53:6]. The Prayer of Jesus comes to a close with a total acceptance of this 'incredible' [cf. Is 52:1] action of the Heavenly Father. The entire Passion, as Mk presents it, becomes an **act of total adherence to the Father**. In His anguish, and in His Prayer to the Father, Jesus carries it through to the end. There is no explicit reference here to Satan – and this is one of Mk's and Lk's traits: for Mk, Gethsemane, at least explicitly, is not the work of Satan here.

d. In His first prophecy of the Passion in Mk's Gospel [8:31-33], there is great parallels with what actually happens:

- the revelation of a suffering Messiah [cf. 8:31; 14:33-36];

- the negative reaction on the part of the disciples, represented by Peter [cf. 8:32, f. – **turning toward His disciples, He rebuked Peter...** ];

- the statement that the response of Peter is motivated much more by the way **men think** [cf. 8:33; 14:38] – where the negative reaction is attributed to the weakness of the flesh.

1.] In the first prediction of the Passion [cf. 8:32, ff.], the refusal to accept a suffering Messiah is transformed into a real effort on the part of the disciples to distance themselves from the necessity of the Passion, which – in the long run – is the clear manifestation of the father’s will. Christ qualifies such thinking as ‘diabolic.’

2.] In Gethsemane, the situation is very similar. In the moment in which the Father has chosen to carry out His Plan of Salvation, and offers the Son the **Chalice**, the will of Jesus grapples with that of the Father. The **trial** would be to reject the Father’s Plan, an innate struggle in Jesus, revealing in His anguish, **the divine horror for sin**, and **the infinite love of God for humanity**.

3.] While the temptations in the Desert are very clearly presented by Mk as originating with the Devil [cf. 1:12, ff.], Gethsemane is not directly attributed to Satan. Here the enormous struggle is the revelation of the Father’s Plan – the enormous sense of weakness of Jesus is due also to the innate **weakness** of His **flesh**. However, the mystery goes even further.

e. A deeper insight is derived by the attentive examination of the Prayer of Gethsemane in the light of all the previous announcements of the Passion and of the **Messianic Consciousness** of Jesus. These sources reveal openly what the Messianic function truly is.

1.] In the first announcement [cf. 8:31]: ... ***And He began to teach them that the son of Man was destined to suffer grievously...*** - Jesus makes it clear that He ***must suffer***, and that He cannot withdraw from the **Plan** at any cost. He makes it clear that this is one of the divine dispositions from which it is absolutely not licit for Him to withdraw. The expression ***was destined*** – indicates the unavoidable ***sorrowful*** and ***glorious*** destiny of the Son of Man.

2.] There is a further indication in the next chapter: ... ***how is it that the Scriptures say about the Son of Man that He is to suffer grievously and be treated with contempt...*** [9:12].

3.] He expresses the same destiny a few lines later:

***... He was instructing the disciples; He was telling them: ‘The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men; they will put Him to death; and three days later after He has been put to death, He will rise again.***’ But they did not understand and they were afraid to ask Him... [9:31, ff.].

This, too, clearly seems to indicate that all of this is to happen in the accomplishment of the Divine Plan. This seems to be the fulfillment of the Prophecy of the Suffering Servant of Yahweh: ... ***We had all gone astray like sheep, each taking his own way, and Yahweh burdened Him with the sins of all of us...*** [Is 53:6].

4.] And still another indication of this destiny, and the reason for it, is in Jesus' identifying Himself as the Servant: ... ***For the Son of Man Himself did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a Ransom for many...*** [Mk 10:45]. All of these passages would indicate, in the simple reading of these lines, a clear idea in the mind of Jesus of what lay in store for Him, and the underlying reason: **the universal salvific will of God.**

5.] And one last announcement before the event began to unfold: ... ***Yes, the Son of Man is going to His fate, as the Scriptures say He will, but alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! ...*** [14:21].

f. These various passages indicate that His **Messianic Destiny** is not so much of a question of a state, as it is one of a drama, an action, that will unfold, in accord with the Father's Plan, in the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Jesus is most conscious of being the Messiah through this work of salvation. His Messianic Role is His destiny, long prepared for, and most recently predicted repeatedly. This destiny is what He has come to fulfill, this is what He most willingly does, and is willing to carry out by means of His abandonment to the Father. Jesus carries out His destiny with **filial love**. His full Messianic Role is ultimately understood when His destiny is complete.

g. This over-all context might shed some deeper insight into His Prayer and into some of its expressions:

- there is the **conditional**, with which He addresses His Father: ***IF it is possible...***

- but perhaps even more revealing, is His declaration of **powerlessness** before the Father. Jesus repeats **an old antiphon** declaring that to God ***all things ARE possible*** [Abraham: Gn 18:14; Moses: Nb 11:33; Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17, 27; Zechariah 8:6 – Mt 19:26; Mk 9:23] – ***take this Cup away – but, let it be as You – not I – would have it!***

1.] The whole prayer begins with the **conditional**: ***IF it were possible*** [v.35]. There is clear knowledge of a Plan of the Father, and also an indication of His own **Messianic Consciousness**, for many interpreters.

2.] ***Let this Cup pass*** - seems to be the indication of the heart of the terrible temptation/ trial. This is the role ascribed to Satan in Peter's remonstrating with Jesus about going on to His harsh destiny [cf. 8:32]. This would be the suggestion to distance Jesus from the **Messianic Destiny** included in the Passion.

3.] It is true that Mk does not use here the technical Greek word **pariasmos** in relation to Jesus. This seems to be because the Evangelist seems to want to bring out for his audience the **weakness** and **humiliation** of the Master.

Furthermore, Mk does not want to lose sight of the image of the Shepherd **struck** and **tried by God**.

4.] Certainly, in the distant background there is implied the Satanic suggestion to turn away from the **Chalice** which the Father is offering Him. This is the counter-part of the disciples with whom Jesus has identified Himself. The weakness of the **flesh** manifests the underlying presence of Satan – but, the Gospel account does not make his present explicit.

### Summary

Jesus and His Disciples find themselves in Gethsemane in a situation of **temptation/ trial**, which is similar, but not identical. Before Jesus, there stands the task to be performed that was given to Him by the Father, the Passion and Death, to be followed by the resurrection and Ascension. Before the Disciples, there is Jesus: in His extreme humiliation, He appears to them as one **struck by God** and **humiliated** [cf. Is 53:4; Zc 13:7].

Both Jesus and the Disciples are placed before the divine manner of acting:

- for the disciples, this is an occasion for falling, because they do not **watch and pray**;
- for Jesus, this plan increases the attachment of His will, to that of the Father. It is through His prayer that His **flesh**, His humanity – which is totally powerlessness, finds the strength from the Heavenly Father to carry out His will.

Jesus, being subjected to this terrible ordeal, does not present a Father with a divided will. The lesson here is also that whoever prays, and as long as one prays – he/ she is not separated from God, and will not enter into this trial. Jesus asks for deliverance – and this reveals the terrible reality of the divine confrontation with human sin. While His humanity is manifested here in all of its reality, there is also an expression of the divine horror for sin, and of the divine love for the sinner.

In Gethsemane, Jesus reveals Himself as ‘every person’ – He is indeed one with His sleeping disciples, and those who would follow Him. In and through His prayer, Jesus finds the strength to carry out to the very end the Father’s Plan of Abandonment: **But, let it be as you – not I – would have it** [v. 36].

In this, Jesus has conquered the trial: He has not sinned, showing that indeed he is **like us in all things, save sin**. The Passion according to Mark is not so much to be considered as a terrible struggle against Satan – it is much more **an extended act of loving obedience to the Father**. Because the Greek word that occurs here can have a two-fold meaning [temptation/ trial], in Mk it is seen that there is a slight shift of emphasis with important implications:

- **temptation**: in the formal sense, would seem to be a **trial** from Satan soliciting one to sin;
- **trial**: or **test** - could represent a divine visitation for the ultimate benefit of humanity.

It is true that in v. 38 when Jesus speaks to the disciples, the translation could be **temptation** : ***You should be awake praying not to be put to the TEST.*** However, throughout the entire context of Mk's account of Gethsemane, the real struggle here seems to be the father's will. There is further the great **trial** for the Apostles, being **tested**, in that they are being asked to accept a humiliated Christ. This **Messianic Trial** for Jesus is that he is asked to carry out to the end the Messianic Destiny precisely as willed by the father. The Greek word, therefore, could either mean: **temptation** –or, **Messianic Trial**.

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#### 4. Reflections on Jesus' Agony

##### Introduction

[1] In any reading of the Passion narrative, when the **Hour** arrives, the moment of the apparent victory of the **Powers of Darkness**, Jesus is about to be **handed over** into the hands of sinners. He is overwhelmed by an **agony** that He expresses in His prayer and in some aspects of Calvary. The account from Mk does not specify the reason for this extraordinary expression of the agony, most understandable to those who come into contact with this Gospel.

[2] What is had here, though, is that Mk makes use of rather well known OT expressions to present the anguished messiah, carrying out a divine destiny. The real fact of Gethsemane can be looked upon from a variety of points of view:

- here Jesus is carrying out the Plan of Salvation, as will led one established by God;
- there is also here a real identification of the humanity of Jesus with every human being;
- there is also here an extraordinary 'ex-expression' of divine revelation, concerning the very nature of God Himself – and the extent of His love in His Plan of Salvation.

[3] As is known, the 'causes' of the Agony in the Garden are much discussed and quite variously interpreted. Perhaps here the old adage finds full sway: ***tot capita, tot opiniones!*** It might be, too, that after all the years and effort dedicated to giving some satisfactory response, this mystery will remain hidden with God until the consummation of time. However, it is interpreted, it is most true that in this great

example of Gethsemane – along with the scandal that many might have known from this episode, countless others have found in this scene a clear possibility of being truly ‘one’ with Jesus in the experiences of life.

**[4]** Just a brief listing of some of the major opinions that have come [and, in many instances, already gone!] over the years:

- this is the **wrath of God** falling in all its weight upon Jesus;
- this is **the divine judgment on sin**;
- this is a vivid portrayal of **divine punishment**;
- this is a vivid portrayal of **Jesus’ human fear in the face of death**;
- Jesus is **destroyed** by the **abandonment of the disciples**;
- a sense of **failure** that His work has not succeeded;
- the deep feelings of Jesus of **being rejected by humanity**;
- the fact that the Chosen People did **not choose Him**;
- Gethsemane is a **glimpse into** hell, Jesus suffers the torments of the damned;
- Gethsemane **simply reveals the sins of humanity in graphic imagery**.

**[5]** There can indeed be elements of truth in many of these views – clearly, we are before a Mystery. Basing the reflection solely on the data of Sacred Scripture, the text of Mk seems to be based on two ancient prophecies: ***struck by God*** - and ***rejected by men***.

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**[I] *Struck by God:***

- a. In Mk 14-15, the reader finds OT references on the lips of Jesus 3 times:

**Mk 14:27:**

***... it is Yahweh Sabaoth who speaks: I am going to strike the Shepherd so that the sheep might be scatted, and I will turn My hand against the weak*** [cf. Zc 13:7 – this verse supplied the reason for the ‘scandal’ of the disciples – Jesus seems struck BY God!].

**Mk 14:34:**

***... When My soul is downcast within Me ...*** [Ps 42:6].

**Mk 15:34:**

***... My God, My God, why have YOU deserted Me ...?*** [Ps 22:1].

1.] The text from Zc 13:7 is introduced with the formula: ***for Scripture says...*** - and this formula is taken up a bit more generically in Mk 14:49: ***...this is to fulfill the Scriptures ...*** These formulae seem to locate the narration of the facts under a doctrinal perspective. The clear implication is that these events are being presented in full accord with the divine plan. Most particularly, though, these expressions emphasize how God Himself is present in the Passion scenes.<sup>29</sup>

2.] The other two texts, however: Ps 42:6; Ps 22:1, ff. Simply describe the situation in which Jesus finds Himself in His Personal Mission of loving obedience to the Father.

3.] In Mk's context, it readily appears that one of his 'traits' is to clarify his material with OT citations. In both of the Psalms quoted, the 'anguish' of the OT faithful is brought about by a certain '***yearning***', '***thirst***' for the face of God:

***... Deep is calling on deep, as you cataracts roar; all your waves, all your breakers have rolled over me ... Let me say to god, my rock: Why do You forget me...?*** [Ps 42:8, 10].

***... It is You, O God, who are my Shelter: why do You abandon Me?*** [Ps 43:2].

This '***abandonment***' by God is also explicit in Ps 22:

***... why have You deserted me? I call out all day, my God, but You never answer me, all night I call, and cannot rest...***

The suffering ***faithful*** is jeered:

***... and all day long men say to me: 'Where is your God? ... and all day long, they ask me: 'Where is your God?' ...*** [Ps 42:3, 10].

***...Yet, here I am now ... scorn of mankind, jest of the people – all who see me jeer at me, they toss their heads and sneer: 'He called on Yahweh, let Him save him! If Yahweh is his friend, let Him rescue him...'*** [Ps 22:6, ff].

4.] The sudden fear and great distress [cf. Mk 14:33] might also be read in the light of the OT, perhaps also the Psalter. Some would read these lines to mean that Jesus was 'amazed' to find out at long last that He was the Suffering Servant long before predicted, by Isaiah. This sense of 'wonder' is found elsewhere in Mark [cf. 1:27; 9:15; 10:24, 32; 16:5, ff.]. However, this reading would hardly stand up

<sup>29</sup> C.F.D. Moule, 'The Fulfillment theme', in: ***The Origin of Christianity***. London: Cambridge University Press 1978, pp. 127-134.

because Jesus repeatedly has shown Himself to be aware of what is coming, and that His Passion is intimately united to the Father's Plan [cf. Mk 8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:33, f., 45; 14:8, 24,27].

5.] Therefore, it might be much better to read this profound anguish that comes over Jesus in the light also of OT revelation – particularly in those contexts in which God Himself is at work, or in which emphasis is given to the relationship which is being established in particular circumstances, between God and humanity.

a.] Such a circumstance is found in which fear and panic spread over the enemies of Israel, and the land, because of the wondrous salvific intervention of God [cf. 1 S 14:15; 2 K 7:15].

b.] The fear that falls so heavily on Saul and his companions is because of the salvation that has been accorded to David [cf. 1 S 26:12].

c.] It would seem that it is this kind of **fear** and **trepidation** that is being realized here, as in Pss 22 & 42. The **hand of God** is somewhere present, salvation is coming from the terrible punishment of sin.

b. A further confirmation might be afforded by **Is 53** – the connection of the **Suffering Servant of Yahweh with Gethsemane** cannot be overlooked. In addition to the nearly explicit citation: ***the son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners*** - of the Servant being given up as the **ASHAM**, the **Atonement** - there is also the fact that the description of the Servant is being realized in the Passion scene:

*... a thing despised, rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering ... he was despised ... Yahweh has been pleased to crush him with suffering ...* [Is 53: 3, f. 10].

1.] The **Servant**, therefore, is one who in his own experience lives the reality of dolor. This is not a merely physical suffering, but one accompanied and constituted by affliction and awesome fear. This is not just any kind of great discomfort, but this is an extraordinary realization of destiny accomplished by God through long preparation, through the revelation of **OT Sacrifices** and **Servants**. What happens here in Gethsemane is the opening scene of the ultimate reason why Jesus came: **He comes to bring unique glory and praise to the Father** - He has come in the fulfillment of this destiny:

*... we thought of him as someone punished, struck by God, and brought low. Yet he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. On him, like a punishment that brings us peace, and through His wounds, we are healed ...* [Is 53:4, ff.].

2.] The similarity with this description offered by the anonymous II-Is is very open, and evidenced even more by a protracted comparison between the texts:

- in Mk there is the announcement that **God will strike the Shepherd** [cf.14:27], and there follows immediately the description in graphic terms that the Good Shepherd has begun to feel the awesome burden of the divine presence in this mystery: ... ***And a sudden fear came over Him and great distress*** ... [Mk 14:33]. The **Hour** has come, that will eventually culminate in a glorious exaltation. The reaction of the disciples in their weak humanity is almost one of incredulous indifference at the aspect of a suffering messiah [cf. Mk 14:37, f., 40]. The end of all of this is that the son of Man, the Servant of God, is ***handed over, betrayed*** to sinners.

- In Is 53 God intervenes revealing His 'power' [Is 53:1], a work of salvation is beginning to unfold, which gives ample proof of the power of God. This power though is manifested through a **Servant** undergoing supreme humiliation [vv.2, ff.]. Yet, ***who could believe this*** [v.1] – and, in fact, the Servant is **rejected** as someone **struck by God** – the same verb used by Zc [13:7] concerning the Shepherd – who is 'humbled', 'despised'. Such suffering is indeed a scandal. Yet it is Yahweh Himself ***who burdened Him with the sins of all of us***. A further similarity between these two passages is the underlying spirit between Mk and Is 53: behind it all is the action of God Himself, ***Who has been pleased to crush Him with suffering*** [Is 53:10]. Christ, as the Servant before Him, appears under the guise of supreme humiliation, in carrying out the work of God.

## [II] ***Rejected by Men*** [Is 53:3].

a. This expression is likewise read in the context of the light also offered by the OT. This fact of **rejection** appears in Mk as another fulfillment of the **Servant**. Jesus is **rejected** repeatedly in Mk's Gospel:

### During His Public Life:

- the cure of the man with the withered hand: ... ***He grieved to find them so obstinate, He looked angrily around at them, and said to the man ... and his hand was better...*** [Mk 3:5].

- a visit to Nazareth: ...***He was amazed at their lack of faith ...*** [Mk 6:6].

- the Pharisees ask for a sign: ...***with a sigh that came straight from the heart, He said: 'Why does this generation demand a sign...?'*** [Mk 8:12].

During the Passion: there are likewise three ***rejections*** :

*... I tell you solemnly, one of you is about to betray Me... it is one of the 12*  
... [Mk 14:18, 20; cf. Is 41:10].

*... fear came over Him, great distress ...* [cf. Mk 14:34, par.].

*... My God, My God, why have YOU deserted Me ...?* [Mk 15:34].

**Betrayal by a Friend**: this, too, refers to the Psalms:

*...even My closest, My trusted friend, who shared My table, rebels against Me ...* [Ps 41:9].

b. Mk has further described this aspect of the suffering of Jesus, since this Gospel tends to show Jesus in full control [**the Stronger One**] – or, at least, with full cognizance over the future. However, Mk does describe Jesus with again this reference to the Psalms, bringing out the similarity of a prophetic suffering of an unknown suffering of Israel's history. Jn 's Gospel [cf. 13:18] will make the OT citation even more explicit.

c. Therefore, Mk recurs repeatedly to the Psalms in his presentation of the Passion scene – but, in Gethsemane [cf. 14:34], and on Calvary [cf.15:34], he retains intact the original meaning of the Psalms. So, in addition to the evident human suffering, there is added the endurance of the harsh and cruel rejection:

*... Yet, here I am, now more worm than man, scorn of mankind, jest of the people – all who see me, jeer at me, they toss their heads and sneer ... I have no one to help me ...* Ps 22:6, ff., 11].

*... Where is Your God...?* [Ps 42:4,11].

d. This particular motive for the suffering of Jesus is not as evident in Is 53 – but, is found in the IIIrd Canticle of the Suffering Servant: *...I have toiled in vain, I have exhausted Myself for nothing ...* [Is 49:4]. To many interpreters this passage is read as the expression of one who experiences the useless of a Mission among humanity. Yet, the Servant does not withdraw because of his conviction in the support of God: *...and all the while my cause was with Yahweh, my reward with my God...* [Is 49:4].

**Rejected by men** and apparently **abandoned by God** both the mysterious Servant of Isaiah, as well as the Psalmists, find the sole path to ultimate victory to be in a total **confidence, abandonment in God**. In the Psalms, this confidence is found in a most confident prayer of deliverance:

*... Do not stand aside! ... O My Strength, come quickly to help Me; rescue my soul ... save me ...* [Ps 22:11, 19, ff.].

*... rescue me, O God ... It is You, God, who are my Shelter ...send out Your light and truth, let these be my guide...* [Ps 43:2,ff.]

In Isaiah, **comfort** is found in the **sure trust** in ultimate victory: ***My reward is with God*** [Is 49:4].

e. All of this is summarized in Mark:

- The context in which the Psalms [42 & 22] are quoted makes one think of an **anguish** that is due also to the rejection by men, prophesized by II-Is for the Suffering Servant. This is realized in the following ways in Mk's account:

- the flight of the disciples [cf. 14:27];

- the denial of Peter [14:30];

- the predictions by Christ would be realized that very night [14:50, 66-72];

- the total rejection on the part of the religious leaders of the people [14:64];

- the jeering crowd [16:8, 13,14] –and also the non-believers [15:15-20];

- Jesus was disdained by all, friends and alike: those passing by, priests, scribes and soldiers [15:29-32, 35,f.].

- Perhaps more than the other evangelists, Mk brings out this **total rejection**, due to the lack of faith in the Messianic Mission of Jesus. The underlying motive for the flight of the disciples is presented not only as **fear** – but, there is also the implication that they may have become **scandalized** in Him, they simply have lost faith. In accord with the best of human reasoning, Jesus does not merit faith, because He cannot save Himself, He cannot come down off the Cross [ 15:31, f.].

- Only Mk uses the verb **to believe** in connection with the Person of Jesus, and in two cases, in the negative: ***He was NOT believed*** :

*... come down from the Cross for us to see it and believe...!* [15:32].

*... Lastly, He showed Himself to the Eleven themselves while they were at table. He reproached them for their incredulity and obstinacy, because they had refused to believe those who had seen Him after He had risen...* [16:34].

- Later, Paul, the great *imitator of Jesus*, was willing [by pious exaggeration!] to be *anathema* or condemned, but off [cf. Rm 9:3] – whereas Jesus truly was in a full sense of these terms.

### Summary

It is most realistic to note that much of the great distress that Jesus experienced was the rejection on the part of humanity. This would indeed shed some further light on the Mystery of His Agony, but would not exhaust all of its aspects. There is a totality of suffering in the **Chalice** which Jesus is asked to drink, a fullness of sacrifice and suffering, to fulfill the Father's Plan of Salvation. In both Mt and Mk, the emphasis is on this work of the Father. So, Jesus was not only in Agony because He was struck by a capital indictment – but also because He was **struck by God!**

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## 5. Doctrinal Synthesis

### Premise

[1] Mk does not limit himself simply to offering an account of the Agony in Gethsemane just prior to Jesus' arrest. For Mk, this entire scene, in its brevity, is a further culmination of **his entire 'theology'**. Mk is merely not narrating a fact, but he is offering a valuable lesson also for the early Church, and readers of all times.

[2] In the very first place, Mk is clearly showing that this episode is a salvific action of God the Father: repeatedly he brings out the fact that all of this simply **had to be** [cf. 9: 12; 8: 31; 14: 21, 27, 49]. Jesus is to be **handed over, given up** for our offenses [cf. Is 53].

[3] Jesus is conscious that this is indeed the will of God, and the very reason why He came [cf. 10:45]. He also knows that only by His voluntary acceptance, this activity on the part of the Father can have its full effect. It is only in total conformity with the will of the Father can Jesus show Himself to be the Messiah – for even though this was missed for the most part, it was within the plan of the Father to send a Suffering Servant, and not a triumphant monarch to conquer the **Powers of darkness**.

[4] There is also a kind of 'contrast' between the '**weakness**' of Jesus and the **flesh** of the Disciples. Both are submitted to the **test**:

- i. for the disciples, it was a **test of faith**, which they failed;
- ii. for Jesus, it was a **Messianic Trial**, which he passed!

Jesus is so identified with the disciples of all times: He even shares with them all the terrible weakness and inability on their own, to overcome the '**ordeal**', **the trial** – without the abiding help of the Father.

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## 1] Introductory Verses: vv. 32-33 a:

*... They came to a small estate called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to His disciples: 'Stay here while I pray.' Then He took Peter and James and John with Him ...*

a. They came to a small estate called Gethsemane: this verse is connected with v. 26 just above: *... After Psalms had been sung, they left for the Mount of Olives...* . Jesus takes three of His disciples.

b. Another of Mk's characteristics is that he tends to identify those who were present, as though indicating them as witnesses:

- a few examples prior to Gethsemane [cf. 5:37; 9:2; 13:3];

- as well as in Gethsemane, and afterwards [cf. 15:21, 40, 43-45;16:1].

c. The two or three witnesses seem almost to be a biblical 'constant': *... The evidenced of three, or at least two witnesses, is necessary to sustain the charge ...* [Dt.19:15; cf.2 Co 13:1; 1 Tm 5:19].

## 2] The Agony [vv. 33-36, 39, 41-42]:

*... And a sudden fear came over Him and great distress. And He said to them: 'My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here and keep awake...*

a. His soul being sorrowful unto death is a partial citation of Ps 42:6 – and some see an allusion to the following: *... Yet, you heard my petition when I called to You for help. Love Yahweh, all you devout .. Be strong, let your heart be bold, all you who hope in Yahweh...!* [Is 31:22, f.] *...I have been snatched out of your sight ...!* The anguish is due here to a rather disturbing relationship between God and an individual – this is particularly true of Psalms 42 and later of 42.

b. The verb; *came over Him* - is far more emphatic than simply to translate *He began*. This would indicate the opening of a great drama, with an intensification of suffering in the soul of Jesus. It reaches its culmination in the mysterious **sweat of blood** [Lk]. The spirit of these verses is inspired from the Psalms, and the great Drama has begun.

c. Some would see the drama unfolding this way: the First Part would go from Mk 14:34 [the **arrest**] tp15:32 [**Jesus on the Cross**] – the whole section would be the actions of human beings against Him. However, Gethsemane shows that Jesus is struggling somewhat with the Plan of the Father. It is in this **Hour** that He has been offered the **Chalice** – this is also the Father's **Hour** in which the destiny of the world is being decided, the **Hour** in which salvation is accomplished.

d. When Jesus drinks the **Chalice**, the **Hour** is truly reached in that He is **handed over** into the hands of sinners. In this **Hour**, His **Messianic Destiny** reaches its culmination, explaining why the **sudden fear and great distress came over Him**, just at that instant. Along with the fear that would envelop any human being at such a moment, there is beyond and above this, the great drama of Redemption that is unfolding.

e. The exceptional nature of His anguish, which surpasses the anguish and fear of so many martyrs, would not come solely from the reality of the suffering and death that are awaiting Him – but much more is there being revealed here the fact of the realization of His Messianic Destiny. His **Ordeal** is that of the Son of Man, **struck by God, rejected by humanity** - but who has come to take away the sins of the world.

f. In this, many interpreters believe [e.g. Taylor] that Jesus has here a full consciousness of being the promised **Suffering Servant of Yahweh [Is 53]**. It is only in the reality of the consciousness; can the terrible agony begin to be grasped?

g. Then, Jesus ‘separates’ Himself from His disciples: **stay here, while I go there and pray** [v.32]. He tells them to remain watching and praying – it does not seem that Mk’s account means so much that the Prayer of the disciples would help Him, but it was for their own life-situation, and all who would follow Him after them.

### 3] The Prayer of Jesus

**... ABBA ... if it is possible, let this hour pass ... Everything is possible for you. Take this cup away from Me. But let it be as You, not I would have it...**

a. **The prostration:** ... **Going on a little further, He threw Himself on the ground...** - there is emphasized here a sense of **exhaustion**. This sense of **helplessness** is evidenced in His plea: **IF it were possible ... Everything is possible...!** Jesus presents Himself before the Merciful Omnipotence of the Father in a state of total dependence, seeking His intervention.

b. **And He prayed:** the first part of Jesus’ prayer is presented indirectly – and then the direct Profession of faith: **Everything is possible!** . The term **Abba** as is well known, may also be used by those who have been re-generated by the Holy Spirit [cf. Rm 8:15; Ga 4:6]. However, the use of **ABBA** in Mk is found here alone - and would imply the full sense that Jesus is **indeed** the son of God. For Mk, it seems that the One Who invokes God as **Abba**, is the One who has been called by God as **My Beloved Son** [cf. 1:11; 9:7] – the **Beloved** sent into His vineyard [cf.12:6]. This term seems to go beyond the **messianic consciousness**, but implies as well his divine dignity. Jn’s gospel will express this consciousness of Jesus in a more sublime manner [cf. Jn 13:1, 3] – however, it is said by many scholars that the Gospel of Mk is the revelation of Jesus, Messiah, Son of God [cf. 1:1, ff.].

c. In Gethsemane, the Son of god is presented in the fulfillment of His Messianic Mission. He appears in terrible anguish, over-whelmed with sadness and powerlessness – the Greek word would almost give the impression of being practically **incapable** of sustaining such a task. It is in this total *katabasis*, His *kenosis* [cf. Ph 2:5, ff.] that He asks: ***If it is possible, let this Chalice pass!***

d. And He prayed that:... ***if it were possible, this Hour might pass Him by ... take this cup from me. But, let it be as You – not I – would have it.*** Here the **Hour** and the **Cup** come together: this is the moment in which the great work of redemption culminates through the Passion and Death to be followed by the Resurrection and Ascension. In this context, the **Hour** is the moment when the father intervenes more directly – the **Chalice** is what the Son must drink, in fulfillment of the Father's Will. Jesus is being asked to accept in full this plan of the Father, in all of its consequences. He is called to drink the terrible Cup of Suffering, which the Father in that moment is offering Him.

e. The plea of Jesus: ***take this Cup from Me*** – is not merely the cry of a man who realizes that there is nothing he can do in the face of a terrible danger, or suffering. This prayer implies that Jesus in the fullness of His human nature is struggling with a divine plan that overwhelms Him – and in the fullness of His divine nature, is revealing the terrible contrast between the All Holy and Sin – the infinite 'excess' of divine love, and the abysmal excesses of human degradation. Jesus is in the dregs of the **temptation/trial** being **tried** to give in to 'non-conformity'. Earlier, the Powers of Darkness had employed the services of one close to Jesus, to have Him give up the Father's plan – and on that occasion, Jesus refers to Peter with Satan's name [cf. 8:32, ff.]. Here, though, Mk's interest is not in Satan, but in the situation of Jesus and the Father's Plan. In the terrible situation of the **temptation/trial**, the response to Jesus' Prayer is had: ***Not as I would have it, but as You...*** The attitude of Jesus in the **Hour** of **trial** is that of Prayer. Jesus' lesson here is that whoever prays, is in union with God – and that whatever the separations, if the prayer is persevering, none of the separations can be definitive.

f. The situation of Jesus here is quite similar to that described in Hebrews [5:7]: ***... During His life on earth, He offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, to the One Who had the power to save Him out of death ...*** The text also adds that ***He became for all who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.*** In this text Jesus reaches the perfection of His Priesthood, in bringing to fulfillment the Father's Plan.

- Also in Mk, Jesus' '**vigilance**' in adhering to God in prayer obtained for Him from the Father the power to formulate in the weakness of the moment **the voluntary acceptance and abandonment of Himself to the Father's Will.**

- ***Let it be as You – not I – would have it!*** In this, Jesus accepts in full His messianic mission. The **IT** means the **totality** of the Father's Plan, the expression of the eternal will of God. The Prayer of Jesus is here heard – and this serves for the Church as the great Model of Prayer, and the ultimate response of Jesus to the request of disciples of all ages: ***Lord, teach us how to pray ...*** [Lk 11:1].

g. The actual 'hearing' of the prayer does not appear as clearly – yet, throughout the entire Passion scene, interspersed with the terrible sense of **abandonment**, Jesus keeps in contact with His Father. The lesson on prayer here might also be that of **adherence** to His Father in His **anguish** and **supplication**, cannot be limited to the first moments of the trial. Repeatedly Jesus goes back to prayer: ***Again, He went away, and prayed, saying the same words ...*** [14:39]

1.] The attitude of Jesus in Gethsemane is one of **continual invocation** for assistance and of intimate adherence to the Father – this will all culminate on Calvary. The value of this prayer is inestimable, since the Prayer of Jesus is the expression of His intimate union with the Father, it is His expression of Messianic Mission. This is all summarized in the extraordinary revelation of the very intimate nature of God Himself, as Jesus gives His life for the salvation of the world as an act of expiation for sin, and much more – as a **revelation of divine love**.

2.] It would not be enough to say that in this whole scene, it is the Father who is acting. It is also most necessary that His Faithful Servant would willingly make the gift of His own life, in fulfillment of the prophecy of centuries before: ***... If He offers His life in atonement, He shall see His heirs .. and thorough Him, what Yahweh wishes will be done ...*** [Is 53:10].

3.] In this Revelation, it is not the sacrifice alone which counts, but much more what is demanded is **the interior submission, abandonment to god**. Jesus has realized the **sacrificial act** in and through His loving obedience, expressed evening His tragic humiliation and anguish. In this terrible **Hour**, by partaking of this bitter **Chalice**, the Scriptures have been **fulfilled**, i.e., the will of the Father has been carried out. Jesus here shows Himself to be the authentic Messiah, the One promised through the Prophets.

h. All of these circumstances offer much insight into the underlying purpose of Mk's writing. His scope seems to have been to announce that precisely in this terribly dark and awesome event, the Will of God was fulfilled, that of saving the world. All that is included in the Agony episode serves for this purpose. The terrible struggle in the Prayer of Jesus was not something that should have been 'glossed over' for fear of 'scandalizing' other generations of disciples - who would have seen other martyrs face terrible deaths with apparently more hope in the One who seemed to be so weak in Gethsemane. The Gethsemane scene is not a point of

scandal – but, much more a glimpse into god Himself, and a better understanding of the infinite love that inspired the work of redemption. Jesus is presented as stumbling under His Cross, but getting up to carry the work of Redemption to completion. He rejects the offer to **come down off the Cross** - and this is merely the continuation of His Prayer in Gethsemane: **Let it be as You would want it ...**

i. In Gethsemane, Jesus ‘seals’ His decision with a free act of His will to be **abandoned** to that of the Father. **Here the *Our Father* is enacted once more**, in the great instruction on Prayer. Jesus has accepted fully to carry through to the end His messianic task [cf. 8:33; 10:45]. It is also His choice **to pour out His Blood FOR the many** [14:24]. In His profound prayer, His acceptance of the **Cup** of the Father’s will is **total**. This complete **self-giving** in Gethsemane is but a glimpse of the **eternal process from the Father**, the Son of God, being the full and complete ‘expression’, the ‘Word’ of the Father’s Plan. This is the offertory of His oblation, consecration and communion.

**4] Lessons from the Prayer of Gethsemane:**<sup>30</sup> this scene of Gethsemane opens the final chapter of the Mystery of Redemption – everything so far has led up to this **Hour** to the drinking of the **Cup**. This is indeed the ‘Moment of Truth’. In the life of a human being, all of one’s interior strength, projects a conception of life – all ‘peaks’ here. The moment prior to death is a particular period of grace – experienced in life with repeated acts of abandonment. This is the time of dedicated prayer in the life of Jesus. As the Great Witness of the Father and Model for all believers, Jesus offers His entire life before the Father.

a. **The Mystery behind the Prayer of Gethsemane:** Jesus had already on three separate occasions, anticipated the meaning of His death. Furthermore, the Prayer of Gethsemane also projects forward to the terrible moment on the Cross and the Prayer is also found in John – where Jesus is presented as expressing the deep anguish of soul – and He asks whether He should ask His Father to be saved from this **Hour**. It was the entire reason for His coming, so His prayer is: **Father, glorify Your Name** [Jn 12:27, f.; 13:21]. There can hardly be much doubt left about the presence of the real humanity of Jesus in Gethsemane – but, furthermore, the Prayer also brings out aspects of the Mystery of God Himself and His Plan for salvation. The love of God extends this far the willingness to give all for the People He has chosen, and who betrayed Him. Despite it all, God takes this offering. Also, in Hebrews [cl.5:7], Jesus’ solidarity with humanity is brought forth – and also the fact that His prayer is heard.

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<sup>30</sup> cf. R. Fabris, ‘La preghiera del Getsamani’, in: *ParVi* 19, 1974, pp. 258-267.

By reflecting on the Mystery of Gethsemane, a deeper insight into the overall mystery of the Passion itself comes to the fore. **Jesus' Self-offering is His willful acceptance of the Father's project.**

**b. The Prayer itself:**

1.] This prayer is much like that of other great Mediators of Israel – as Moses [cf. Dt 32 32-34]. Then, as death approaches, the great Mediators offer their lives for the people. Mk's account is most realistic in his presentation of Jesus in fear and trembling, a profound anguish and fear. It seems that Mk and Lk will slightly shift the emphasis on these 'human' passions of Jesus – which reveal to such an extent this mystery of Redemption here in its culminating moments. Jesus' prayer is an extraordinary act of abandonment, perhaps first expressed in the NT by Mary: ***Let it be done according to Your Word!*** This is then repeated in Jesus' lesson on prayer – but, here in Gethsemane, the prayer is acted out, it is expressed not only in words, but also in deeds.

2.] A fervent prayer directed to the Father: in the prayer of Jesus, there is present the loving confidence that He taught to His disciples as their expression of their [adoptive] share in His own Filiation. This idea of 'possibility' is already present in Mk's Gospel: ***Everything is possible to God*** [10:27] - ***Everything is possible to one who believes*** [11:22-24].

3.] **A prayer of great Fidelity:** the themes that dominate here are; the **Hour** decided by the Father – and the **Cup** that Jesus **must** drink. It is in this climate of intimate communion that Jesus makes **His ultimate choice:** the **Father's Will**. Jesus chooses again freely His unity and solidarity with the Father – thereby making known His Father's infinite horror for sin, and infinite love for the sinner. Gethsemane brings us to the depths of the mystery of sin and evil, and to the height of the Divine Will, choosing to save all humanity.

**c. A Lesson for all times:** the repeated appeal of Jesus to be **vigilant and to pray**. Only prayer enables one to be truly docile to the action of the Father – it withdraws human beings from the innate weakness of the **flesh**. Prayer brings one to other levels, to a **greater availability** and grasp of the **divine will**. It has been said that the Prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane offers at least these insights:

- **Christological:** in this prayer of Jesus are concentrated all the power and decision of His freely chosen fidelity to the father. One can see in this prayer the intimacy between the Father and the Son – and much of the divine 'mind' concerning sin and the divine heart, concerning love.

- **Ecclesial:** there is here Jesus' great lesson for the Church of all times. The distraction and the 'losing of the faith' by the disciples are lessons intended to be

noted. The lesson is that in union with the Father, the 'Gethsemane's of all time might be overcome.

5] **The *handing over* :**

***... You can sleep now and take your rest. It is all over. The Hour has come The Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners ...*** [vv. 41, ff.].

a. This is the long-awaited and feared 'moment', in which God would realize the salvation of the world, by fulfilling far beyond any possible dreams the OT typology involving persons, places and things. By Jesus' abandonment, His messianic ministry and mission reach their culmination.

b. Both Father and Son are presented as most active in this: the Father ***does not spare His only Son***, and Jesus perseveres in His total acceptance of the Father's Will in His regard. The arrival of the betrayer is the sign that the **Hour** has indeed come in its fullness.

c. With the title, the Son of Man being ***handed over***, many interpreters believe that there is in this text the fulfillment of the prophecies of both Daniel and, of course Isaiah 53. The formulation of the phrase is very similar to what has been read above: ***... The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men...*** [Mk 9:31] – with the evident shift from ***men*** to ***sinner***s.

d. The use of the passive form: ***will be handed over*** - is found repeatedly in these predictions, showing also the 'powerlessness' as is seen in these texts:

***... we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man is about to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes ... they ... will hand Him over ...*** [Mk 10:33, ff.]

***... the Son of Man is going to His fate ...*** [Mk 14:21]

Beyond and above all the human agency, there is the clear implication of a destiny, a plan that is being worked out for the benefit of the world.

e. On close analysis of this entire section, the presence of the **Father** is more than implicit. This 'presence' is noted in the OT passages referring to **Yahweh striking the shepherd** [cf.14:27] - and the allusion to the '**fulfillment of the Scriptures**' [cf. 14:49]. The references to the **Psalms** are also to be read, unless clearly indicated to the contrary, that they should be understood as they stand.

f. The active form of the verb is found in the prophecy which lies behind this entire scene, namely that of the **Suffering Servant**:

*... Yahweh **burdened Him with the sin of all of us** .. Yahweh has been pleased to **crush Him with suffering** ... [Is 53:6, 10, f.].*

Then the passive is found further on: *letting Himself be taken for a sinner* [Is 53:12]. Is 53 is read by many as an announcement of the salvific work of God – and it is in this light that the darkness of Gethsemane is seen.

**g. Into the hands of sinners** - this might be read better: 'those who refused belief', as well as those who betray Him, such as Judas. The unfaithful disciple went to the authorities for the express purpose of making an offer **to hand Jesus over ... and he looked for a way of betraying Him when the opportunity should occur** [14:10, f.]. The ones who actually arrest Jesus were those who had been sent by the **priests, scribes and elders** [14:33]. These are the ones who actually then hand Jesus over for the crucifixion to the Roman authorities.

**h.** The word **sinner** has a broad usage in Mk [2:15-17; 8:38; 14:41]:

- in the first case, it refers not only to the non- believers, but **to all** [in the judgment of the Pharisees] who do not follow the Torah;
- in the second example, it means **those who have not accepted Jesus**.

It would seem that this would be the implication of the Gethsemane scene – it would mean those **opposed to God**. It is in this sense that Jesus would soon be **struck by God, rejected by humanity**.

**i.** On deeper analysis, it is seen also that Jesus is not absolutely powerless in this drama: He has chosen freely to carry out the Father's plan. The Father works out the plan of salvation, and Jesus gives Himself totally to it.

**Summary:** There is an evident Christological style to this whole passage: Jesus refers to His Father with the familiar **ABBA**, and His called the **Son**. There is here the indication of **full consciousness on the part of Jesus of His messianic and divine dignity**. Yet, Jesus indeed is **one of 'us'**, throughout this entire scene. In His humanity, He is tried as would any human being be, **in all save sin** - and further, there is a revelation of the deepest mystery of God.

As will be seen, Mt and Lk lessen the impact of **fear and trepidation** much more than Mk does: Jesus is presented here as being overwhelmed with **anguish**, near **despair, sadness** and **powerlessness**. St. Paul [cf. Ph 2:7, ff.] and Heb [cf. 4:15; 5:7] develop Mk's presentation, it seems in a doctrinal manner. Mk simply presents the historical fact – he in no way attenuated the circumstances, but simply presents the way Jesus looked that terrible, tragic night.

There is one important doctrinal aspect, however, that is seen in Mk's treatment of this mystery: he shows how in this awful humiliation of the Son there is worked out the divine plan of the salvation of the world. He also shows Jesus as the fulfillment of a number of OT prophecies, and that only a Messiah of this caliber – even though not understood so by the disciples – was the only One Who would be **faithful to the Scriptures**.

## 6] The Disciples:

*... He came back and found them sleeping and He said to Peter: 'Simon, are you asleep? Had you not the strength to keep awake one hour? You should be awake and praying not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak ... once more He came back and found them sleeping, their eyes were so heavy; and they could find no answer for Him. He came back a third time and said to them: 'You can sleep now and take your rest. It is all over. The Hour has come ...*

a. The conduct of the Chosen Disciples is in such contrast with the Agony of Jesus. The Master is **watching and praying**, and the disciples are not. Just a little while earlier, Peter was so sure: ... ***Even if all lose faith in You, I will not ... If I have to die with You, I will never disown You ...*** [14:29, 31]. The lesson given here is the flesh is weak, further stimulated by Satan – and the lacking of **watching and praying** will lead eventually to their flight and total denial: ***they all deserted Him and ran away.*** [14:50].

b. The words addressed to Peter are intended for all – and this scene is written with evident effort to involve the reader in the scene. Peter in a way, is 'Every-One', the reader may very easily identify with him. When one thinks of the courageous act of faith made just earlier by Peter, the contrast now in his relationship to Jesus is striking. After professing that he was willing to die with Jesus, Peter is shown unable even to **watch and pray** with Him. In His statement to them about the willingness of the spirit, or the weakness of the flesh – it does not seem that there is sarcasm here, or irony, on the lips of Christ. He is simply trying to make His disciples respond to His urgent appeal, vocation.

c. to have a **ready spirit**, i.e., to make the profession to follow Him unto death – alone is not enough. In this context, Jesus is only asking for **vigilance** and **prayer**. Jesus is asking first the disciples – the Chosen Ones, and a privileged three among the rest – to accept Him as a **humiliated Messiah**, One Who seems powerless in the face of evil, One immersed in suffering in His **total abandonment to the Father's Plan**. The 'flesh is weak', i.e., it is simply incapable of seeing in all of this a divine work of redemption, and ***the Power and Wisdom of God*** [cf. 1 Co 1:224]. Later, when Paul would contemplate all of this, he would see in it all the '**scandal, the folly of the Cross** and its **stupidity** – yet, paradoxically, surpassing all the **wisdom** of this world. But here in Gethsemane, it is the terrible **temptation/ trial** that leads to

the willing disciples eventually to succumb to their weakness. This is the **trial** that threatens to have them **all lose faith in Him**.

d. Jesus suggests the only 'way' to overcome the terrible **trial**, the **ordeal: watch and pray**. This is not presented as a kind of *a priori* message, but one that is being enacted before them, witnessed to them, in **His unique relationship and communion with the Father**. **Vigilance** is required to understand the insidious suggestions that come from 'without' as well as from '**within**', which seems to be the emphasis here. **Prayer** is an absolute requirement, in that the omnipresence of God has prepared secondary causes for the fulfillment of His Plan. The promise here is that while prayer will not necessarily remove the Cross, but will insure divine help, to avoid the 'scandal' and to conquer the **trial**. Jesus is clearly placing the Chosen Disciples before their responsibility. They are being shown an important aspect of their calls as disciples, that of adhering to God through prayer.

e. The appeal of Jesus falls on ears that have been closed. Mk offers a kind of explanation: **their eyes were heavy** - but, they did not know how to respond to Him. There is no defensible reason for their conduct. The 'sleep' that had overtaken them - the 'weakness' of the **flesh** to which Jesus refers, had rendered them unable to comprehend. Finally, Jesus admits their defeat: **it's all over!** The **test** has been failed - from here on, their flight seems inevitable. No further reaction of the disciples is offered - the last contact with them in Gethsemane is their sleep, their weakness and their lack of comprehension.

f. It is difficult to know whether Mk accuses these disciples or not - but many believe that the whole context would render them culpable. After all of Jesus' forewarnings that the terrible Passion was coming - after His explicit direction to them to **watch and pray**, and their failure to correspond to those explicit suggestions - would show them culpable for their failure to comprehend. **The Christ in Agony** was not really the Christ they would have chosen: far more desirable would be **the Christ of the Transfiguration**, of the **miracles**.

g. Yet, implicit also in Mk's account is some feeling for these disciples. They really did love Jesus, and before the harsh reality struck, showed themselves to have a generous spirit to follow Him through to the end. Mk seems to present these pages as a particular lesson for the Church.

h. The key word in all this is the Greek word for **temptation/ trial**. It is toward the overcoming of this **ordeal** that all the exhortations and directions given by Jesus are orientated: **keep awake** [v. 34] - **be awake and praying** [v. 41] - **it's all over!** [v. 41] - **Get up! Let's go!** [v. 42].

i. The great **temptation/ trial** now for the Christian will be that of overcoming the scandal, stupidity of the Cross. The real danger is not so much that one would be 'sleeping' at the time of the Second Coming. There seems to be a sharp difference between the *kairos* of the Eschatological Discourse [cf. Mk 13:33-37] – and this **Hour** in which the Son of Man is **handed over**. It is with a view to this terrible **Hour** and the awesome trials which are part of it that the disciples have been invited to pray. This **Hour** is now, and all Christians – for whom the Gospel of Mk has been written- are being called to live it.

j. This is the **Hour** of the Father, chosen by Him. It is the **Hour** in which God offers as the sole means of salvation to be the **scandal, stupidity, weakness of the Cross** [cf. 16:16]: ***Go out to the whole world and proclaim this Good News ...!*** This **Hour** will be recognizable only by those who react against the weakness of the flesh. The lesson here is:

**WATCH and PRAY!**<sup>31</sup>

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## B. MATTHEW'S ACCOUNT OF GETHSEMANE

[Mt 26:36-46]

### [I] Matthew's Christology

Of the many aspects that might be considered here, there are two that deserve particular attention:

- a study of **the content of the prayer**, through which Jesus adheres to the Father's will;
- the sense of **solitude** experienced by Jesus as this is so strongly emphasized by Mt.

#### 1. ***Your will be done!***

a. The culmination of the Gethsemane scene seems to be the moment of the ***Son of Man being betrayed into the hands of Sinners*** [26:45]. It has been said that v. 45 presents the scope of the narration.

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<sup>31</sup> For three pages, cf. M. Galizzi, *Gesù nel Getsemani*. Zurich: Pas-Verlag 1972, pp. 61-89, *passim*.

1.] With His prayer of acceptance of the Father's Will, His **abandonment** is perfect. To grasp the full significance of this prayer, of necessity – one would have to ponder deeply on the ***Thelma tou patros***, the **Father's Will**.

2.] According to Mt, Jesus acts because of the recurring formula: ***how would the Scriptures be fulfilled*** [v. 54]: ***Now, all this happened to fulfill the Scriptures*** [v. 56]. This note is already present in the last prophecy of the Passion:

***... From that time, Jesus began to make it clear to His disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day ...*** [16:21].

3.] Just prior to the Agony scene, Jesus predicts the denial of Peter, and He does so, quoting Scripture:

***... You will all lose faith in Me this night, for the Scripture says: 'I shall strike the Shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered ...*** [26:32; Mk 14:27 – has the same expression without the additional ***sheep of the flock***. This is a citation from the old prophecy].

4.] The citation is from Zc 13:7: - and it qualifies Jesus as **Shepherd** [cf. Jn 10]. In Mt, this title is not something that is isolated, but is an integral part of the presentation of this Gospel: **Jesus is the Good Shepherd** also here.

b. In Mt, Jesus looks on Israel as ***sheep who did not have a shepherd*** [9:36; Mk 6:34]. Jesus manifests concern often for the **flock** and He sends His Apostles to the ***lost sheep of Israel*** [10:6 proper to Mt alone]. The reasoning behind this text is this fact: ***... I was sent ONLY to the lost sheep of Israel*** [15:34- proper to Mt alone]:

1.] For this reason, Jesus shows Himself to be most interested in the sheep- just as the Prophet Zc long before, had been charged with ***the flock of His People*** [Zc 9:16] – showing deference to Yahweh, the real Good Shepherd: ***... the Lord will pasture His people like a flock ...*** [9:16] - ***... the people wander like sheep, they stray because they have no shepherd ... Yes, Yahweh will take care of His flock ...*** [10:5].

2.] However, Jesus, the **Good Shepherd** *par excellence*, is a **rejected** and **despised** by the people, and considered to be worth ***thirty pieces of silver*** [26:15; 27:9]. This was all foreseen long before by the Prophet when he spoke of the two shepherds: ***... And they weighed out my wages: 30 sheckels of silver ... taking the 30 sheckels of silver, I threw them into the temple of Yahweh ...*** [Zc 11:8-14].

3.] The parallel with Zc permeates this entire scene:

*... I am going to **strike the Shepherd**, so that the sheep may be scattered ... that two-thirds in it will be cut off ... I will **lead** the remaining third into the fire and refine them as silver is refined ... [13:7, ff.].*

The People became truly 'His' only after the **striking** of the Shepherd, and the purifying fire – then Yahweh will say: ***these are My people and each will say: 'Yahweh is my God!'*** [11:9].

4.] this is what we have in Mt: in Jesus' prophecy of events following the **betrayal**, He states: *... **after My resurrection, I shall go before you into Galilee...*** [v. 32] – and this is where Jesus will meet His 'own' once again. Jesus will gather His 'own' around Him, after they have been **scattered**, as sheep of His flock, and after having been **struck by God** in the eschatological **trial**.

c. The image of Jesus as Good Shepherd was already predicted, then, in Zc – but there applied to **Yahweh**. This prophecy is in some way, then, connected with other passages of this part of Zc: *... **See now, your King comes to you; He is victorious, He is triumphant, humble and riding on a donkey ...*** [Zc 9:9]. This is found in Jn's Gospel [12:15] and also in Mt [21:5] – but it is very interesting to note that Mt omits the words: ***victorious ... triumphant***. this omission has no foundation either in the Hebrew original, nor in the Greek translation.

1.] There can be no other explanation here other than the fact that Mt wants to emphasize that Jesus comes as a very **humble King**. Jesus is the King Who presents Himself in extraordinary **humility** and **lowliness**. Jesus is the One Who presents Himself on the way of the Cross, **in the renunciation of the exercise of all power and splendor**.

2.] Mt has shown himself to be an apt student of Lk 4 and Zc 9. the idea of greatness And of humility are undividedly united in the fact of the entrance into Jerusalem. They are most present in the immediate context of Gethsemane.

3.] The **powerful** Jesus presents Himself as **weak** - He sets aside His power, even of calling on His Father for ***12 legions of angels***. Jesus presents Himself as the One associated with Yahweh in the care of the flock: *... **awake sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man Who is MY companion ...*** [137].

d. From this reflection on **Mt's use of Zc**, the emphasis seems to fall not as much on the fact of ***being struck***, as it does on the **lowliness**, the **meanness** and on being **esteemed at such little price**. Along-side the idea of the greatness and the power which dominate the narration of the Passion:

- Jesus' referring to the Power of the Father [cf. 26:53, 61];

- the referring to him as the Christ, the son of God [26:63, f.; 27:17,22, 54];
- the happenings on Calvary that place this as a kind of *theophany*.

There is continually the theme of His being treated as **vile**, His **Humility**, His being **rejected**. The reason for all this insistence on the **lowliness** of Jesus seems to stem from the over-all intention of Mt: that in accord with the Scriptures, the *thelma theou* [the will of God] asks this of Him. The contrast between the **greatness/lowliness** is brought out several times by Mt: ... *Here is My Servant, Whom I have chosen, My Beloved, the Favorite of My soul ... He will not bawl, or shout out ...* [12:18, ff. – quoting Is 42:1-4; Mt 8:17 & Is 55:4]. Mt is much taken up with the fact that in addition to the **greatness** to which Jesus has every **right**, His **humility** is in full accord with the Scriptures, and is an act of loving obedience to His Father.

e. Once more, as has been noted, Mt connects Jesus with the **Suffering Servant of Is**: ... *Jesus cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah: 'He took our sicknesses away, and carried our diseases for us...* [Mt 8:16,f. & Is 53:4]. These words are offered as a commentary for a number of **healings** Jesus performed:

- the leper [8:1-4 – Jesus appears as **Kyrios**. 82 = Lk 5:12];
- Peter's mother-in-law [vv.14, ff. – Jesus is then **served** as a 'master', 'lord', by the cured woman];
- the centurion's servant: [vv. 5-13 – Jesus in His **power**: cures by His word].

1.] These manifestations of **power** are accomplished by Jesus in His **fulfillment** of the Prophecy of Is. Therefore, these 'works' are both the intervention of the **Kyrios** but also of the **Servant** of Yahweh. Mt thus presents the Christ as the **Lord**, in the highest sense of the word – and yet, at the same time, characterizes Him precisely in the fact that He accomplishes the **Father's will** by adhering to Him in love. Jesus has the creative power to heal, but He exercises this in **obedience** to the Scriptures. He takes on 'our maladies', showing His **power** through **renunciation** and **humility**. This alone is for the true good of humanity, in accord with the Father's will.

2.] The other citation of Is [42:1-4, found in Mt 12:17-21] is an addition made to the controversies concerning the **Sabbath**, of which Jesus is the **Master**. The Pharisees 'watched' the picking of the corn and the **cure** of the withered hand [cf.12:1-14] – with their complaints. Jesus 'withdrew' from there, and He asked all those He cured not to make it known.

3.] As the Son of Man, He is the '**Master**' of the Sabbath [cf. 12:8]. He is **the One Who cures** [cf. 12:9-13] – but, even more, He is the **Servant** of God,

the **Beloved** in Whom Yahweh is well pleased [cf. 12:18]. Yet, He does not resist the wicked, but rather – in accord with the Scriptures, and hence, the **Father's Will** - He acts in **submission**, presents Himself in **lowliness** and **meekness**: *...till He has led the truth to victory* 12;20].

4.] His work of salvation is described here almost as an intervention of **power** – but it is carried out by One Who is **humiliated**, the **Servant of Yahweh**. It is in His **Humility**, even though He is endowed with power, that He carries **out His Father's Will**.

f. There are many passages in Mt where the **will of God** is in the background, but remains the motivating **power** of Jesus' interventions:

*... Now all this took place to fulfill the words spoken by the Lord, through the Prophet: 'A virgin will conceive ...'* [1:22 & Is 7:14].

*... this was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the Prophet; 'I called My Son out of Egypt ...'* [2:17, f. & Nb 23:22; Ho 11:1].

*... It was then that the words spoken through the Prophet Jeremiah were fulfilled ... A voice was heard in Ramah ...* [2:17 & Jr 31:15];

*... There He settled in a town called Nazareth. In this way the words spoken through the Prophets were to be fulfilled: 'He will be called a Naxarene...'* [2:23 & the ancient traditions].

*... In this way, the Prophecy of Isaiah was to be fulfilled ...the People that lived in darkness has seen a great light ...* [4:14-16 & Is 8:23; 9:1].

*... This was to fulfill the prophecy: I will speak to you in parables ...* [13:55 & Ps 78:1].

1.] While all of these do not specifically refer to the loneliness and baseness of Jesus, it is true – nonetheless, there is given the distinct impression that **the entire 'drama' of Jesus is being acted out in accord with a 'script', namely, the Scriptures, manifesting the will of the Heavenly Father**. Mt does seem to appeal to the Scriptures when he wishes to manifest the renunciation and the humility of Jesus.

2.] All of this does agree perfectly with the over-all expressed thought of Jesus that He had simply come to **carry out all justice** [3:15], **to fulfill the Law and the Prophets** [5:17]. These two phrases seem to say the same thing: Jesus does **fulfill** 'justice' when He presents Himself among the many sinners for His Baptism – and He completes this in the vilification of His Passion, bringing to perfection all that the Prophets had said [23:56].

3.] The '**object**' of the Father's Will is now clear also in its modality. The Messiah has been called **to drink the Chalice**, presenting Himself as One who has been **struck by God**, and reduced to **total abasement** and **humiliation**. Having known the object and the modalities, it is easy to enter in greater detail, into the profound meaning of Jesus' Prayer:

- **Your Will be done!** [26:42]: this is a phrase that is typically 'Matthaean', and is modeled on the Father's Will, by the use of **AS**. This **Will** is the dominating reality of Jesus' life, and is the third Petition of the *Our Father* [6:10].

- **Let it be done as You – not I would have it** 26:39] – much emphasis, therefore, on the Father's Will.

4.] There are serious scholars who see | this **fulfillment** as fundamental:

... But, I am suggesting that the application to Jesus of the more superficial sort of fulfillment, in which Scripture is merely *vehicular*, is explicable only by the discovery of the deeply *relational* and organic sort of fulfillment, in which Jesus is the One who is the *Fulfiller* in a supreme sense ... he is the One Who fills the cosmos and fulfills God's design for all creation ...

5.] There are repeated references to this **Will of the Father**, along with those already noted in the expression: the **fulfillment of the Scriptures**:

... *It is not those who say to Me: 'Lord, Lord', who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of My Father in heaven ...* [7:21].

... *Anyone who does the will of My father in heaven, he is My brother, and sister and mother ...* [12:50].

... *Similarly, it is never the will of your Father in heaven that any one of these little ones be lost ...* [18:14].

... *Which of the two did the father's will...?* [21:31].

These passages and their profound doctrinal content must be taken into consideration in any contemplation of **Your will be done!**

6.] In some of these passages [cf. 7:21; 12:50; 21:31], it is a question of **doing** the Will of the Father. The subject of this is humanity. In other passages [as 18:14], there is a variation: **it is the will of My Father** – and here the Father is the subject.

7.] In the connected passages of the *Our Father* and the Prayer in Gethsemane, we have the same words: **Your will be done!** [6:10; 26:42]. The whole context would make the content of the Father's will predominant, even though the

subject is not specifically mentioned. So, the **Agent** in the Passion, in some way, is the **Father's Will** – it is **He** Who asks Jesus **to drink the Chalice** : in the OT citation from Zc, the **striking of the Shepherd** is referred back to the **Father: let it be as You – not I – would have it!** [26:39].

8.] In the Petition of the *Our Father*, the subject is also the Father, since this Petition is also connected with: **Your Kingdom come!** Here the principal **Agent** surely is God. Humanity is asked to **seek** the Kingdom of God [cf. 6:33,, par.] – it can be inherited [cf. 25:34] – it will come from heaven [cf. 6:10]. One is asked to enter into” the Kingdom [cf. 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23,f.] – but, the Kingdom cannot be realized, unaided. The Kingdom is simply a gift of God [cf. 21:43]: the Kingdom is given to us without our bringing it about. Yet, it is already ‘present [cf. 3: 2; 10:7], it has been bestowed, achieved, through God [cf. 12:28]. It is the Kingdom which bestows salvation – so, it does come from God under this aspect. The casting out of Devils is one sign that the Kingdom has already come [cf. 12:28].

9.] Therefore, the Kingdom is eminently a salvific reality, a soteriological one, and is not only *theophanic, or epiphanic*, the mere manifestation of the glory and the Sovereignty of God.

10.] In a similar vein, is the **thelma tou theou, the will of God**, to be interpreted. Mt uses this expression in an eminently ‘theological’ manner. While it may refer to the creative Will of God it seems that Mt reserves his use of the term to express **the universal salvific will of God: not one of these will ever be lost** [18:14]. This Will of God just as His ‘Kingdom’, is something that tends toward salvation. A human being ‘does’ the Will of God when he/ she listens and puts into practice all that Jesus says [cf. 7:21, 24; 12:50]. The will of God is that one will **accept being a part of His Kingdom** [cf. 21:30,f.]. this means: **believing in Jesus**.

11.] So, **to do the Will of God** and: **to accept the Kingdom** : are equivalent terms, as the words ‘sovereignty’ and ‘will’ of God mean the same. God, however, will not be ‘sovereign’ – Jesus will not be fully ‘Lord’ – until His will is realized among all human beings.

12.] Thus, when one prays: **thy Kingdom come! They Will be done!** – the principal Agent seems to be God. This is the Prayer of the Pilgrim Church, asking God to intervene. In all of this, humanity is called to be the secondary Agent, to ‘cooperate.’ It is God Himself who realizes His Will and brings about His Kingdom – but, it is missionary humanity that ‘conditions’ its fulfillment. In this sense, God has ‘prepared’ secondary causes to carry out His salvific will. For Mt, the reign of God is achieved only when human beings do not block the way to the Divine Will, but when believers submit to Him with humility and obedience. [In this sense, one might agree with Jurgen Moltmann, who says: the original sin is not the titanic desire to be like

God – but, more the refusal to be what God likes! And in the saying of St. Ignatius: ‘Only God knows the wonders we would achieve, were He not thwarted by human beings in His Plan].

13.] It is with human cooperation that the reign of God is gradually achieved here and now. The ‘Kingdom’ is surely a gift of God, but it does not become a full realization on earth unless the free choice of cooperating human beings plays their role. In the prayer: **Your will be done!** - there is also intended the real prayer and hope that the will of God might indeed be achieved through the action of divine grace and the free cooperation of human beings.

### Summary

[1] In Gethsemane, Jesus chose a voluntary solitude: **Leaving them there, He went away ...** [v. 44]. There is also the indication that He does this with absolute freedom, and in dedication to the Father’s will. This is His **Hour**, and only Jesus can carry it out. He shows His abandonment to His Father in His Prayer: **Your will be done!** In this prayer, Jesus offers the full adherence of His to the salvific will of the Father to the coming of His Realm. The Father’s Will and His Kingdom are going to be ‘done’ and ‘come.’ The manner for this is established by the Father. This will imply the death of Jesus – and a display of power which can be realized only in the lowliness and the baseness of the Servant.

[2] All this is accomplished in total solitude. Since it is true that the Reign of God is concretely brought about when the will of human beings adheres to that of God - one must deduce that in that night, and throughout the entire Passion, the Reign of God is present on earth, **solely in Jesus**. It is from this that the reflection now passes to the ‘ecclesial value’ of all this.

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## 2. The Ecclesial Implications of Mt’s Agony Scene in Gethsemane:

With the over-all knowledge which scholars have of Mt, there is always the risk of reading **into** [*eis-egesis*] individual passages this whole content of doctrine. However, while there can be no doubt concerning the profound implications that Mt had in mind for the Churches of a later period, it might only stand to reason to think that in these culminating moments of the Mystery of redemption, these implications would be eminently present.

There seem to be at least three points that might only stand to reason to think that in these culminating moments of the Mystery of redemption, these implications would be eminently present. There seem to be at least three points that might be made here that could have been in Mt’s mind, presented here in the order of increasing importance:

- i. Jesus is the **fulfillment of [the antitype], Abraham;**
- ii. Jesus is the **Servant of Yahweh** [these two are implicit];
- iii. Jesus is the **Son of Man** [explicit].

a. **Jesus is the Fulfillment of Abraham:**

**1.]** There is almost a verbal identity in Gethsemane and the **Oblation of Isaac by Abraham:**

*... Then Abraham said to his servants: [Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there; we will worship and come back to you... [Gn 22:5].*

*... Then Jesus came to a small estate called Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples: 'Stay here, while I go over there to pray ... [26:35].<sup>32</sup>*

**2.]** It is highly probable that there is in Mt's text an implicit reference to the parallel. For Mt, Jesus is the One Who realizes in Himself all the promises made to Abraham:

- Jesus is the son of Abraham [cf. 1:1];

- Jesus has come to bring all justice [cf. 3:15], realizing in Himself all that is necessary to a true son of Abraham – not like those who 'presume' to call Abraham their father [cf. 3:9 – John the Baptist used the reference to filiation to Abraham, in order to dispose his listeners to receive the Reign of God – cf. 3:2];

- Jesus has within Himself all the conditions that would be required to be a true son of Abraham, in accord with both the flesh and the spirit, because Jesus lives in total obedience to the Father.

**3.]** Jesus is presented by Mt in sharp contrast with those who believe themselves to be 'children of the Kingdom', only because they are descendants to Abraham according to the **flesh** [cf.3:9]. Such as these will be cast outside [cf. 8:12] and declared as plants not planted by the Father, and therefore, they are to be 'uprooted' [cf. 15:13; cf. also 3:9, 10] – they will be 'deprived' of the reign [cf.21:43].

**4.]** There will be **others to whom the Kingdom will be given** [ 21:31,43], who will take the places of the **carnal** descendants of Abraham, and they will come to share in the Kingdom with their father, Abraham, with Isaac and Jacob [cf. 8:11, ff.]. Such as these, converts, will obtain their lineage from Abraham through their **faith in Jesus**, the only true off-spring of Abraham, the ideal Israel. Jesus becomes the **sole bond**, link of union with Abraham.

<sup>32</sup> cf. James Swetnam, SJ, *Jesus and Isaac*. Rome: Biblicum 1981.

5.] It is such faith as this that is constantly praised in Mt: the great faith of the Centurion – who deeply believed that **he was not worthy that Jesus should even enter under his roof** [8:8] – and the **Canaanite woman**, even though she considered herself not to be a ‘daughter’ of the People of God: such as these find their way to the limitless power of Jesus, and thereby become sharers in the Kingdom with Abraham [cf. 8:13; 15:28; 8:11, f.].

6.] It is solely by adherence to Jesus that the disciples can in any way call themselves to be **children of the Kingdom** [cf. 7:21, 24; cf. also 13:23, 28]. It is through Christ that all become participants in the Promise.

7.] This would clearly eliminate all those who thought of themselves as being the ‘children of the Kingdom.’ There can only be a share in the promises made to Abraham if one lives his/ her faith in Jesus. This renders possible the conclusion that **Jesus is the sole authentic descendant and heir of Abraham, the sole depositary of the promises, the only true ‘remnant’ of Israel.**

8.] Jesus is presented as ‘abandoned’ by the Father when God had already abandoned His Chosen People [cf. 23:38, f.]. the disciples [for they, too, represented the ‘Small Remnant’] in abandoning Jesus, left Him alone in His solitude, as Abraham’s only son, to carry out the Heavenly Father’s will.

9.] Just as Abraham, at the beginning of salvation history was all alone in the carrying out the **terrible sacrifice** – so, now Jesus, the Initiator of the New People of God is all alone in His own sacrifice. Just as Abraham accepted the will of God [cf. Gn 22:3], offered Isaac, his first-born, most beloved, only-begotten – and continued in his faith that the Lord would eventually offer him a descendent through Isaac [cf. Heb 11:17, f.] – and because of this fidelity, Abraham did receive an immense number of descendent – so now, Jesus accepts the Divine Will in solitude, but with deep conviction and certainty of still being able to gather around Himself a new People [cf. 26:31], it is through His fidelity that Jesus is endowed with every power in heaven and on earth [cf. 28:18].

10.] As in the OT, it was solely through Abraham that God exercised His power over the earth - now, the Kingdom is present uniquely in Jesus, **the authentic fulfillment of Abraham.** Even though the indications are not abundant, it would be difficult to exclude altogether the fact that Mt made use of **Gn 22:5** in the writing of his 26:36. It seems that Mt quoted Gn to indicate **the tragic solitude** of Jesus in Gethsemane. **The sole genuine Israel, the Bearer of the Promises, the beginning of the New Kingdom is all alone in Gethsemane, the only One faithful to the Will of the Father.**

### b. The Servant of Yahweh

1.] Along-side the idea of the greatness and power which the greatness and the power which dominate the story of the Passion presented by Mt, there is also continually present that of the abasement, humility and disdain. These are imposed – but, loyally accepted by Jesus. This *binomium* of **humility/ greatness - abasement/ exaltation** is found in outstanding manner in having recourse, as Mt does, a number of times, to the Canticles of the Servant of Yahweh [cf. 8:17; 12:18-21].

a.] Jesus bestows salvation on anyone who will believe in Him, even if such a one comes from outside the confines of the usual believers: as the **Centurion** [cf. 8:5-13]. He and others serve a sign of those who will **come from the East and the West**. In Jesus' response, He carries out the prophecy of the **Suffering Servant**, who takes on Himself our infirmities [cf. 8:17 = Is 53:4].

b.] Jesus will succeed in leading justice to victory, and He will announce this to the gentiles, to anyone who will hope in Him. In this, too, Jesus is presented as the Servant of Yahweh, in His **meekness** and **humility** [cf. 12:18-21 = Is 42:1-4].

c.] Jesus follows this path and sheds His Blood, the Blood of the New Covenant, and He will do this **for the many**, unto **the remission of sins** [cf. 26:29]. Jesus, like the Servant, is **the Covenant of His People** and **the Light of the Nations** [cf. Is 42:6]. Jesus offers His life in **expiation**, in **atonement** [He is the **ASHAM** ], thereby **justifying** the many [cf. Is 53:10, f.].

d.] Jesus follows the way of suffering and humiliation, and therein becomes endowed with all power and glory. He thus becomes able to announce to the People all that He has taught, namely 'justice' [cf. 28:18; 12:18]. The life of Jesus – just like that of the Servant – has been characterized by his unique destiny of **humiliation and triumph – suffering and glory – death and resurrection**.

2.] There hardly seems much doubt that Mt applied these Canticles of the Servant of Jesus. In His Passion and Death, Jesus fulfills what had been predicted about the **Servant**. It might be asked whether Mt really saw all of this in his **ecclesial outlook**.

a.] It is well known that there are wide differences of opinion concerning the interpretations of the Canticles of the Servant. Wise agreement has been given to the idea of **Collective Personality**.<sup>33</sup>

b.] However, in all of the possible interpretations between a national interpretation [all of Israel considered to be the mysterious 'Servant'] – a selective one [either the Prophets, the Priests, or the *Anawim* ] – or an individual [some future, messianic interpretation] – this latter has always drawn significant support.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Cross of the Servant*. London: SCM Press, 4<sup>th</sup> Impression 1965, pp. 57, ff.]

**c.]** The 'Collective Personality' is also applicable: the Servant may also be thought of as the **ideal Israel**, realized solely in Jesus [cf. e.g., Is 42:1-4; 44:1-3] Modern exegesis tends to fuse the collectivity of Israel along with the individual messianic interpretation.

**d.]** It is often very difficult to say with absolute clarity whether the Canticles speak of a whole People, a certain select group within the people at large – or some individual [of the past, present or future]. Very often the interpretation of these Canticles seems to waver back and forth, between various understandings. So, it is most defensible to see in the 'Servant' theme, the People of Israel [at least in their ideal], and the best representative of them, a future Messianic individual.

**3.]** From the totality of Israel, gradually one comes through the history of the Chosen People, to a select, chosen group [perhaps the *anawim* ], and finally one would reach Jesus, the Small remnant, *par excellence*. It is He Who carries out to perfection the Law and the Prophets. Jesus **re-capitulates** the destiny of the Chosen People and with His own **oblation**, gives a new beginning to the Chosen People. Jesus is the link between **the old and the new**, between the People of the First Covenant and that of the **New Covenant**, sealed in His Blood.

**4.]** This doctrine is rather common to the entire OT, but is particularly evident in Mt. By His voluntary solitude in Gethsemane and in His Passion, Jesus presents Himself as the tie between the people of old, now rejected [cf. 8:12; 15:13; 21:43; 23:38] – and even the Small Remnant, which seemed to have remained faithful, and which was represented by the 11 – all of whom were now gone, fled and the 12<sup>th</sup> had already betrayed Him - and a **New Chosen People** which He will assemble around Himself after His death and resurrection [cf. 26:32; 28:7].

**5.]** It is in this vision that the image of the Servant, implicit in Gethsemane, acquires its ecclesial value – which does not immediately appear from a reading of the text itself.

### **c. THE SON OF MAN**

**1.]** Under this image, the ecclesial dimension of the Agony of Gethsemane is more evident. There is much discussion concerning the origin of this concept; while this is true, it seems rather evident that Mt's source was the Book of Daniel. Two reasons are offered for this:

**a.]** **the first is, Mt makes explicit reference to Daniel:** in addition to an express citation [cf. 24:15], there are many expressions in the same chapter [26] that seem to be from Dn:

- **many will fall away, be scandalized** [24:10 = Dn 11:40];

- **the disastrous abomination** [cf. 224:15 = Dn 9:27; 12:11];

- **a greater distress than has even been seen since the beginning of the world** [cf. 24:2 = Dn 12:1];

- **the Son of Man will come on the clouds** [cf. 24:30 = Dn 7:13]. This phrase will be repeated again by Mt 224:30; 26:64 – during the religious judgment: **the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven**. Here there seems to be a fusion of Dn 7 and Ps 110. This is also present in Mt 16:27: the Son of Man will come in the glory of the Father with His Angels.

**b.] the second reason for accepting dependence on Daniel on the part of Mt** is the union in the first Gospel between the concept **the Son of Man** and the **Kingdom** : only Mt does this repeatedly [cf. 13:37, f.,41; 20:18, 21; 25:31, 34]. Mt furthermore unites these two ideas to concepts of **power and glory** [cf. 19:28; 25:31]. The Christ, after the resurrection, is given all power in heaven and on earth [cf. 28:18]. The union of such ideas is found only in Dn [cf. 7:13, f.]. Therefore, this rather unique joining together of different ideas would lead the careful reader to the conclusion that at least for many interpreters, Mt's immediate source seems to have been the Prophet, Daniel.

**2.]** Just as with Dn, the **Son of Man** is the representative of the people of the Saints [cf. Dn 7:17-27]. In Mt's Gospel, Jesus is given this title 32 times – Mt makes explicit reference then to Dn at least twice [cf. 24:30; 26:64].

**a.]** Along with the messianic consciousness of this expression, Mt contemporaneously gives to it an **ecclesial interpretation**, strongly implied already in Dn. This not only holds true when Jesus is considered as the glorious Son of Man – but also when He is presented as the **Suffering Son of Man**, in His **lowliness, rejection: the Son of Man is handed over into the hands of sinners ...** [26:45] – and in the different predictions of the coming Passion.

**b.]** Here there is united the idea of **the Son of Man** and **the Suffering Servant of Is**. Some interpreters, however, would prefer to keep **the Son of Man** theme solely within the writings of Dn: **the Son of Man** [cf. Dn 7:13] ... *his power will be stripped from him...* [cf. Dn 7:25].

**c.]** So, the combination of a **Suffering/ Glorious Son of Man** can be noted, staying within Dn himself. It might also be necessary for one to enter into the Semitic mind, and develop that ability to go back and forth between collective and individual personality. It is quite acceptable to think that this is what Mt may have done.

**3.]** Therefore, the figure of the Son of Man can be identified also with the **People of the Saints**. At least, there is some kind of oscillation between the two. The

'leader' of this **People of the Saints** and consequently, also of the People - does not receive power and glory until after **having handed over into the hand of the persecutor** [cf. Dn 7:25], i.e., until after the **trial**, the **test**.

**4.]** Dn seeks the explanation of the vision according to which he comes to know that the power will be taken from the beasts, and given to the Son of Man [cf. Dn 7:1-14]. These '[beasts' represent the **trial**, the four kings [cf. Dn 7:17, 23], who will put the saints to the **test**. However, [as in Christ's own story], at the end, victory will be achieved, the Kingdom will be given to the saints – or which amounts to the same reality, to the Son of Man. He is representative of the people, and [perhaps] suffers with them. He presents Himself as coming on the clouds to the **Ancient of Days**, in order to receive power, majesty and the kingdom [cf. Dn 7: 18, 22, 27].

**5.]** However, after the terrible trial, He will appear immediately on the clouds of heaven, and all power in heaven and on earth will be given to Him [cf. Mt 26:64; 28:18]. For the 'People of the saints', given over to the hands of the persecutor, in Gethsemane, the great emphasis is given to **solitude**. In the Passion, the 'People' is absolutely reduced to One only: Jesus is all that is left of the Little Remnant. He is the genuine Remnant and from Him the New People of God will have its beginning.

**6.]** Mt brings out his **ecclesial dimension** through the image of the Son of Man in an explicit manner, in the Gethsemane episode. This total solitude does have its **ecclesial aspect**. The theme of Gethsemane is part of a drama then going on – with lessons that reach to the end of time.

### Summary

**[1]** The **solitude** of Jesus in which He alone is in agony, presents Him as the perfect ideal of the people dedicated to Yahweh. Jesus is the **remnant**, *par excellence*, the One Who Alone remains perfectly devoted to God. This is the tragic truth. Jesus realizes that He is absolutely **alone**, representing the whole people – rejected by His 'own', and the only path before Him being the Way of the Cross.

**[2]** Jesus went along this way with perfect and loving obedience to His heavenly Father. Jesus thus realizes perfectly in Himself, the ideal of the **Faithful Servant**. Jesus is the **remnant**, Who has passed the **test** and shown Himself to be **trusting in God**. All the People, called to follow Him – still represented in Gethsemane by the Apostles – eventually given to the People of God, are saved only by the presence of Jesus. It is in Jesus, and in Him alone, that the whole existence of the People of God must begin anew.

**[3]** There is a kind of tragic process of elimination in all this: from all the People, represented by Sinai, they were called to be a **Priestly People** - the 'First-Fruits, the

Chosen'. That these 'pledges' be handed on, there developed a **small remnant**, purified by the hardships of the Exile and Captivity. Eventually, the Servant of Yahweh emerges. He is given a sublime mission even to go to the end of the earth, to the 'distant isles'. The Son of Man is called, having endured the 'grand persecution'. At long last, 'Israel' - all that is left of this once numerous people, is Jesus in Gethsemane. He **re-capitulates** in Himself this whole grandiose destiny, and carries it in His own person right through the last terrible consequences. He gives His own life, offers Himself realizing in Himself the fullness of loving obedience to the Heavenly Father.

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## [II] DISCIPLESHIP IN MATTHEW

1. The exhortation given to the disciples is the same one as offered by Mk's Gospel: ***You should be awake and praying not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak...*** [Mt 26:41].

2. The disciples are in very real danger. If they do not react against the solicitation of the **flesh**, through **vigilance and prayer**, they will enter inevitably into temptation: they will become the prey of temptation and sin. The situation of danger and sin in which they find themselves is brought about here not so much by Satan: also in Mt, there is no explicit mention of him. In the background of this entire scene there is the Plan of God – and the disciples are running the real risk of losing the faith: ***You will all lose faith in Me this night...!*** [26:31]. The extraordinary salvific action of God has decreed to save the world by means of the Cross of Jesus Christ. A consequence of this will be that the chosen ones will be scandalized to find Jesus Christ so reviled, reduced, humiliated.

3. ***You will all be scandalized in ME!*** [26:31: this is slightly different than was found in Mk, which does not have ***in ME***. There is a shift in accent: Jesus realizes that it will be His own Person Who will be doubted. The emphasis is not so much here on the action of God, the Cross, but also Jesus Himself will be the source of their scandal. The question is often asked: just what could there be in Jesus that would lead the disciples to lose their faith. Mt must have had some particular insight in mind.

a. First of all, it needs to be said that this expression: ***to be scandalized, to lose faith in ME*** - occurs several times in Mt:

***... happy is the man who does not lose faith in Me ...*** [11:6].

***... [The parable of the sower] ... let some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, and he falls away at once ...*** [13:21].

... **And they** [the people of Nazareth] **would not accept Him** [13:57] - **and many will fall away ...** [24:10].

b. In some of these instances, the scandal is occasioned by Jesus Himself, and in the last cases noted above – the scandal results from the consequences that the adherence to Christ brings to the believer. John the Baptist sends disciples to see if Jesus really is the Messiah, or should ‘someone else’ be awaited. [cf. 11:2-6]

1.] The inhabitants of Nazareth [cf. 13:54-58] find no reason for denying their faith in anything that Jesus says or does – in fact, they ‘wonder’ at Him. But their difficulty comes from the fact that they are unable to find anything in His Person to believe in, because of His humble origin.

2.] The disciples in Gethsemane had shown their willingness to follow Jesus to the death – but when they are confronted with a Master Who offers no resistance to His own enemies, their faith rapidly wanes [cf. 26:53]. **To be scandalized** in Jesus is the opposite of **believing in Him**.

c. The other side of this expression is shown in the unusually ‘harsh’ statement to Peter: ... **Get behind Me, SATAN! You are an obstacle in My path, because the way you think is not God’s, but man’s!** [16:23]. Here, Jesus is not the center of the scandal, but the disciple Peter is.

1.] There is seen even here a closer resistance on the part of the disciples to accept the idea of a **Suffering Messiah**. In this, the disciples are a ‘scandal’ to Jesus, because they are not listening to the things of God, but only to the wisdom of humanity.

2.] Once again in Gethsemane, the disciples were painfully **scandalized** in Jesus, because they do not react against the weakness of their own **flesh**. They do not accept the fact that Jesus suffers, because of His own loving adherence to the Will of the Father – and that the entire drama unfolding before their eyes is all **in accord with the Scriptures**, and already predicted to them by Jesus [cf. 16:21; 26:54].

3.] When one does not accept this divine plan, or **Will**, this is an expression of a choice to follow instead of merely human ways of thinking. This implies that one is taken over by the tendencies of the **flesh**, and to enter into the temptation means to **choose to be excluded from the Kingdom**.

4.] On the contrary, **to accept the Father’s Will**, or to accept Jesus’ own destiny, unfolding in **accord with the Scriptures**, means to become involved in the same lot as Jesus, to be disposed to offer one’s own life with Him:

*... If anyone wants to be a follower of Mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for My sake will find it ... [16:24, f.].*

5.] There is asked of every disciple to **live out** in him/ herself **the same experience of Jesus** – to **follow** Him on the path of humility, or renunciation and of continual struggle [cf. 8:17-27; 20:21]. The disciples is **called to be WITH Jesus, wherever He goes**.

4. The disciples have made the choice not to get ‘so involved’ in the situation in which the Master is found. The disciples in this instance might be classified among those who have accepted with great joy the announcement of the Word [cf. 13:20], **but they have no root, they do not last: let some trial come, or some persecution on account of the Word, and they fall away at once...!** [v. 21]. They are truly among those who **because of His Name** [cf. 224:10], they take ‘scandal’ in him [13”21; 24:10] and abandon him.

a. This attitude of the disciples in Gethsemane is really **a lack of faith** – not in the sense that they no longer believe in His power, or in the salvific worth of His intervention – but, in the sense that they do not know how to share in this work. The work itself still seems good to them – but the manner of its being realized in Jesus and how it ought to be realized and lived out in the life of each of the disciples.

b. This is the sharp contrast between the disciples and the Master in Gethsemane: **Jesus accepts all that the Father has willed**, and **the whole manner** of its being worked out. The disciples seem to have expressed their faith in the Plan itself [even though they were saddened at the prospect of being separated from them in His announcements of the Passion]. But, even the three privileged Apostles – who truly represent the others, refused to accept the manner of this Will of the Father, both in the life of Jesus and then also in their own lives. More accustomed to thinking of divine interventions in power, they were unable to see **the path of humility** and of **renunciation** of their own power, prestige. For this reason, Jesus reminds them anew of the weakness of **the flesh** [cf. 26:41].

c. There was only one manner of being able to overcome this terrible **trial**: that of **watching with Him in prayer**. They had known of this ‘style’ in His life, but they did not follow Him in this. This time their refusal of prayer became apostasy – in this, they did not ‘know’ [i.e., **experience**] Jesus- in fact, later Peter of a passage like this best would say: ***I do not know what you are talking about ... I do not know the man ... then he started calling down curses on himself and swearing: I do not know the man!*** [26:70, 72, 74]. The disciples lost **totally** to the **temptation/ trial**.

### Summary

The *parenetic* [exhortatory] value of a passage like this becomes more and more evident. The historical situation of the disciples in Gethsemane that night is often the situation of the disciple in every age. Whoever chooses to **adhere to Christ** must prepare to share in His **Chalice**. The ideal disciple is epitomized: ***Master, I will follow You wherever You go...!*** [8:19]. However, the *Sequela Christi* is truly **Costly Discipleship!**

*... renounce yourself and take up the Cross and follow Me...* [16:24]

*... Can you drink the Cup that I am going to drink ...?* [20:22]

*...Many will fall away ... many will be deceived by false prophets* [24:10]

The *sequela Christi* - **putting on His mind – imitating Him:** will not bring any visible, tangible advantage – rather it will lead to renunciation and privation. The true disciple is called to share deeply in the destiny of Jesus Christ.

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### [III] DOCTRINAL SYNTHESIS OF MATTHEW'S GETHSEMANE SCENE

#### Premise

[1] Mt's narrative is not some kind of account here, a mere accumulation of loosely connected events. There is here an effort at chronology [Gethsemane was an event of capital importance, immediately following the Last Supper, preceded by the **singing of Psalms**, and followed by betrayal and capture]. Perhaps even more importantly, this whole scene is steeped in doctrinal content.

[2] The Christ if Mt is the One Who presents Himself among sinners, as having come to bring justice [cf. 3:15]. His Mission is to complete, fulfill the Law and the Prophets [cf. 5:17; 26:54, 56]. In a word, Jesus has come **to do the will of the Father**, both in its objective sense, as well as in all the modalities of its being realized [cf. 6:10; 26:39, 42].

[3] The way that He is to follow, to accomplish this Divine will is that of renunciation of His own power. Whenever He does use this, it is always for the benefit of others – as in His miracles of healing. His 'way' is to be one of **humiliation**, of **lowliness**. This makes shine out in Him the figure of the **Suffering Servant of Yahweh** [cf. 8:17; 12:17-21].

[4] Jesus comes as the One who is **submitted to the Will of the Father**. This makes of Him **the sole authentic descendant of Abraham**. This makes Jesus the genuine heir of the messianic promises – He is likewise the Son of David [cf. 1:1; 9:27;

12:23; 15:22; 20:30, f.; 21:9, 15; cf. also 22:41, f.]. Therefore, Jesus is the bearer of the Kingdom [the **ecclesial aspect**], which He will accomplish by committing Himself to the way of **humility**. He is indeed the **meek** King [cf. 21:5].

[5] Jesus did not want to be **all sole alone** along this new way. Nonetheless, He placed as the absolute condition that He be followed by this way by anyone who would respond to this invitation. Whoever will accept the call **to be a disciple of His**, will have to live out in his/ her own life the same experiences that Jesus knew [cf. 8:18-27; 10:24; 20:21; 16:38, 40]. The **following of Christ** will, of necessity, include Gethsemane and Calvary.

[6] After the events in the Cenacle, Jesus and His disciples find themselves in a situation of **total renunciation of self**, and before the requirement of a **total act of abandonment to the Will of the Father**. In the beginning, it seems as though the disciples – through their spokesman, Peter – are willing to **follow Him even to death**. Jesus spoke about this in the Cenacle Hall, and on the way to Gethsemane – and there is a most appealing profession of a generous faith: ... **Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You! And all the disciples did the same ...** [26:35]. In a very short time, it would be proven that perseverance was indeed lacking - due to the absence, in that instance requiring **vigilant prayer**.

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### 1. Jesus and the Disciples [26:36-46]:

**v. 36:** The Person of Jesus sands out in this episode: **Say here – while I go there**. The Disciples are presented in the ideal as those who are simply meant to be **with Jesus**. They were **with Him** in the terrible storm on the lake [cf. 8:23] – and they are **with Him** now in the terrible agony of the Night: their promise is that they will stay with Him until death [cf. v. 35].

**v. 36 b:** Like Abraham of old, Jesus goes off **alone** for the offering of the Only-Begotten, Most Beloved [cf. Gn 22:5]. Jesus is indeed the true descendant of Abraham [cf. 1:1], in the moment of **sacrifice**. Like Abraham, He will realize the **ordeal alone**. These who shortly before had professed their faith, very often now will be scandalized, will lose faith. Yet, Jesus still tries to prepare them for the coming **ordeal**.

**v. 37 a:** He chooses the three who had been privileged to witness the transfiguration to come **with Him**. These three representatives of the disciples of all times, are invited to share in His **vigil and prayer**. Gethsemane is meant to be lived by all disciples, of all times. Gethsemane is in sharp contrast with the transfiguration scene – here, the three called by Jesus to be **with Him**, after the **ordeal** are not presented as having gone back to the others. In the transfiguration, this is

emphasized: the disciples are called to **accompany Jesus** [cf.17:1], they are separated from the others [cf. 17:14, f.] - then go back to join the rest. Peter is in the group as the most authoritative – the three were meant to be privileged witnesses, representing all the disciples.

**v. 37 b – 38 a:** *And sadness came over Him and great distress. Then He said to them: My soul is sorrowful to the point of death...*

This is nearly the same statement as found in Mk [14:33,f.], but with two small – but rather significant changes:

- Mk uses **then** [tote in Greek ] a good 28 times to begin a statement that introduces a direct discourse – and 14 of these times, it introduces the Words of Jesus Himself;
- the terms used to describe Jesus' **sadness ... sorrow ... distress** : in Mk, the emphasis seems to be on a terrible sadness, anguish – being totally overcome in spirit, being totally bereft of strength. It is that feeling of **total incapacity** to take on the task that lies before one – not unlike an athlete in the ring, or arena, running out of strength

In Mt, the emphasis is slightly different – it seems more [because of the combination of the words] to be a question of **profound sadness**, limited though to the psychological part of a person. Mt presents an attitude of the spirit of Jesus much more so than of His body. His 'anguish' is not yet physical weakness. Mt does not emphasize the physical incapacity of Jesus to respond – but shows Him still strong – but yet, having surrendered this power in that the Father is always His ultimate destiny. This sadness that begins in Gethsemane in Mt's account will accompany Him also through the horrible physical ordeal that is awaiting Him, even to the point of experiencing some kind of divine desertion, or **abandonment** [cf. 27:46].

Jesus 'feels' Himself **struck by God, rejected by all**. This very difficult relationship with the Father in the working out of the Plan of redemption has brought about this anguish. In his statement that His soul is **sorrowful unto death**, Jesus is in profound conformity with the Scriptures, as this attitude is already found in the Psalms [cf. Pss 42:6, 12; 43:5].

**v. 38 b:** *... wait here and keep awake WITH Me... :* before going His way, Jesus pleaded with the disciples to **pray** and to **keep the vigil** with Him. He invited them to remain united with Him, to keep the attitude that He had for the **ordeal** that was about to unfold.

**v. 39:** *...And going a little further, He fell on His face and prayed: My Father, He said, if it is possible, let this cup pass Me by. Nevertheless, let it be as You – not I – would have it...*

a. Jesus prostrates to a position of adoration and prayer. By His very gesture, He makes a visible expression of His **interior submission to the Will of the Merciful Father**. This Divine Will is emphasized throughout [cf. 26: 24, 54, 56]. He agrees fully to accept from the hand of the Father the **Cup** of suffering and death that is being offered to Him. This is symbolic of His messianic death.

b. *To fall on one's face* is frequently used as an expression of extraordinary **obsequiousness**, an indication of **adoration**. [cf. Gn 17:3, 17; Hos 5:14; Ezk 2:1; 3:23; 9:8; 1 Co 14:25; Rv 7:11]. This gesture is often associated with a sense of anguish, pleading, supplication [cf. Nb 16:22; Jos 7:6; Ezk 9:8; 11:13; 1 Ch 21:16; Jdt 9:1].

c. The sadness of affliction suffered here by Jesus in Mt's rendition do not emphasize [as is done in Mk] the utter powerless of Jesus. Rather, Mt simply brings out that profound sentiment, best expressed by **religious oblation** [*obsequium* - LG 25; DV 5] in **Jesus' relationship to the Father**.

d. However, this same sadness and oppression are all part of His messianic task, that of loving, suffering obedience of the Servant. This fact and the freedom with which He acts show that there is absolutely no rejection, contrast, or opposition in His prayer with the Will of the Father.

e. The expression: *not as I would want it* – and the conditional: *IF it is possible* – would indicate no separation from the divine will. Other expressions in this context: *... Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father ... ?* [26:52] - *... My friend* [to Judas] *do what you are here for ...* [v. 50]. These also show His full acceptance. Jesus' Prayer might be interpolated: *If it is possible* [i.e., if something else would be in the order of salvation], *then let this cup pass from Me. In any case, though, as You will, and not as I ...*

f. There is no sense of **powerlessness** here – the **sadness** and anguish are real: it is indeed painful to have been **struck by God**. To **submit** oneself entirely to such an ordeal demands **deep love and self-giving**.

g. The formulation of the Prayer is presented in the terms of the **Our Father**. It is precisely as **Son** [cf. 3:17; 11:27; 17:5; 21:37; 26:63; 27:42, 54]. Jesus addresses the Father, and begs of Him to carry out His salvific Will in its entirety. Jesus does not only accept the **Cup**, but He drinks it to the full, in all of its ramifications, just as this was willed by the Father. This is the acceptance of a pathway of **humiliation, suffering** and **renunciation** – of **total self-giving** to the

**Power of God** [cf. 20:28]. What Jesus is asked to do is to live out the Prophecy of the **Servant of Yahweh**, who was called to give His life in **atonement** as a **ransom** for the many [cf. Is 53:10 = Mt 20:28; 26:28]. This is the supreme trial of fidelity to the Father, to Who Jesus **submits** in absolute liberty and fidelity.

**h.** Jesus' humble **prayer: let this Cup pass from me ... IF it is possible** - sheds some precious light on the terrible struggle and **trial** that He was asked to bear to **adhere** to the Father. Mt's over-riding emphasis seems to be the desire of Jesus to carry out to the hilt, the Will of the Father, and precisely as in the manner as willed by the Father. Mk's emphasis was on the **trial** – Mt's emphasis seems much more to be on the attitude of adoration and of humble acceptance of the Chalice which the Father offers.

**v. 40:** *And the disciples sleep, and Jesus asks: 'So, you had not the strength to watch WITH Me one hour....?' They did not watch and pray WITH Him as He had asked. After all the promises of fidelity [cf. 26:33-335], the facts just do not stand up. Once more, this is a repetition: Jesus received Peter's Profession of Faith concerning Him as the Messiah – and then, sadly, shortly afterwards, Jesus refers to Peter as 'Satan', for simply not understanding what He has just professed.*

In Gethsemane again, Peter shows himself to be incapable to live out his ardent profession of fidelity [cf. 26:69-74]. Yet, Peter can be redeemed: he does follow **from afar** [26:58], loses faith entirely – and then weeps bitterly because of his sin [cf. 26:75].

In this episode, with its emphasis on Peter, in all this – there are also some classical overtones: the flock is being dispersed, and the very one on whom Jesus counted, the one upon whom He would build His Church [cf. 16:18]. Fails Jesus in the very **Hour** of redemption. The implications are: **perseverance in the Kingdom is ultimately associated with Jesus' fidelity to the Father.**

**v. 41:** This is the same text as in Mk [14:8] – **not to enter into temptation** also seems modeled on the *Our Father*. As the prayer of Jesus resembles very much that of the *Our Father*, which He had taught to the disciples, then this should be the great standard also for the prayer of the disciples of all time.

**a.** Here, however, the object is different: Jesus prays for the realization of the Father's will – while the disciples are being asked to pray that they might avoid a serious danger threatening them. The Disciples indeed are in a situation of **temptation/ trial** - this is the moment in which **the decision of the Father's Will** in presenting Christ in a certain way, that of **humiliation** and apparent **powerlessness**, becomes for them a **stumbling block**. In this, the tendencies of the **flesh** –in the last

analysis, of course, ‘Satan’ himself would be implied] move them to be scandalized in Christ, i.e., **to lose faith in Him**.

**b.** The situation is clearly a dangerous one. It is very clear to Christ that the disciples can indeed fall and succumb to it all. But, Jesus offers to them the solution [cf. 1 Co 10:13]: ***Watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation.***

**c.** It is as though he were saying that the temptation [or, **Satan, the moment of the flesh, darkness**] will come upon them. He asks them to be attentive so that they will not be surprised. He directs them to pray so that they might remain faithful, and not be left to be conquered by it. Jesus offers the means not to fall into the trap.

**d.** It is with this exhortation that the Master indeed intends to offer to His disciples a means to come out victoriously from the battle. Their flight was not the real ‘sin’ – it seems that this was merely the effect of **the failure of their faith and confidence** in the humiliated Jesus.

**e.** The *parenetic* [exhortatory] value of this passage is most evident also in Mt. All the disciples are called to **watch WITH Him**, to be disposed to **carry the Cross WITH Him** [cf.16:24]. The disciples were called **to be WITH Him** in His **Hour** and they failed to do so.

**v. 42:** ***Again a second time, He went away and prayed: My Father, He said, IF this Cup cannot pass by without My drinking it, Your will be done!***

**a.** Once again, Jesus leaves His disciples behind for His prayer, which now is even more explicit. Jesus asks only that the Heavenly Father’s Will be done. This is tantamount to accepting the **Cup** of the Passion and the Cross. Jesus accepts the fact that He is **struck by God** [cf. 26:31], **to fulfill the Scriptures**. He is asking the Father to accomplish the work of salvation through His acceptance of this salvific plan.

**b.** With this total adherence, with this decision of Jesus, the Kingdom is now possible. Its realization is a work that is eminently divine. However, for God to realize it, there is needed the consent of Jesus, and human beings. All are being called to adhere to the Will of the Father. It is through the adherence of Jesus, the ‘First-Born’ of many brothers and sisters that the Kingdom of God is inaugurated on earth. Jesus **alone**, in His Passion, realized the will of God. The disciples already had abandoned Him – even His repeated invitation to **watch and pray**, was not heeded.

**v. 43:** ***their eyes were so heavy*** : it seems that the cause of their sleep was natural enough. Yet, those who have recorded the story might offer some lame excuse, but there is a sense of fault here. In the final analysis, they ALL ran away: when Peter encounters Jesus, he comes to ‘weep bitterly’ for his failure [cf. 26:75]. The sleep was

not so bad, perhaps the first time. There almost seems to be something of a sense of deep disappointment in the words: ***And He came back again and found them sleeping... You can sleep now and take your rest...*** Behind all this is the great mystery of the Father's salvific plan. Like the Suffering Servant, Jesus, too, endured His Cross **alone**. The Son of Man **Alone** is betrayed into the hands of His enemies. this **terrible solitude** is also accepted by Jesus.

**v.44:** The third time Jesus went off to pray: ***repeating the same words***. He accepts the Will of the Father, both in its substance, as well as in its manner. This includes the **awesome solitude, humiliation**, along with the terrible physical **agony**. He accepts all this with a clear attestation of His **submission** to the Father. Jesus is the **Little Remnant** now reduced to **One alone**. He **alone** is the authentic Son of Abraham, both according to the **Flesh**, and also according to the **spirit**, because **He alone** carries out the Father's will in the terrible moment of the intense suffering. Jesus **alone** is **the personified Israel in the Suffering Servant of Yahweh**. He **alone** is the Son of Man, the **People of the Saints**.

After the harsh **ordeal**, He will receive the Kingdom, establish the New People of God. This authentic **Servant of the Father** will establish the New Covenant. He will be raised up as the **Light of the Nations**. All this is present **solely** in Christ – as He is ***betrayed into the hands of sinners...***

**v. 45:** ***... Now the Hour has come when the Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners ...***

a. With the third prayer, the narration has about run its course: ***Now the Hour has come*** –is not only an introduction of a conclusion, but something new is being added – a kind of summary that will shed precious light on the over-all meanings of the entire **Agony** scene. All is culminating here in this ***Now is the Hour*** : the **will** of the Father, its **modality**, His **salvific plan**, the drinking of the **Cup**, ***the being betrayed into the hands of sinners***.

b. The passive form of the verb: is to BE betrayed, has behind it the **fulfillment of the Father's will**. After hearing the prayer of acceptance on the part of the Son, the historical drama unfolds. The Son of Man, the Servant of Yahweh [cf.12:18 and Is 54:6 & Dn 7"25] is ***handed over for the many*** .

c. In this **Now** is fulfilled the **kairos** [cf. 26:18], the **Hour** established by the Heavenly Father – through His acceptance, it now becomes the **Hour**, His **Hour**. He IS handed over – the 'sinners' are not only the ones who are immediately present in this scene, but all those who will ever reject Jesus. All of His 'own' have abandoned Him, and He is handed over to those who do not accept Him.

**v. 46: ... *Get up! Let us go! My betrayer is close at hand...!***

a. This is not a simple invitation on the part of Christ – Jesus decisively goes forward to meet His **destiny**. The betrayer being ***already at hand*** is almost a parallel with the ***now the hour has come*** of the preceding verse. The **Hour** really begins with the betrayal of Judas.

b. In this sense, there is a variety of causalities that might be considered in accord with traditional theology: the Father ***hands over*** His Servant, ***struck by God***, so that He might indeed offer His life as a **ransom, in atonement, for the many** [cf. 20:28]. The sinners have a role in this as well – particularly Judas, who simply refuses to see Him as the Messiah.

c. The action of the Father is considered by interpreters to be in conformity with the reading of **II-Is: the Servant is handed over for the many**, the action of the father tends toward salvation – whereas, that of sinners, which would lead eventually to despair, to their own ruin and condemnation.

a. It is hardly probable that Mt would have reflected on all this – and he might even have thought of this verse as one of transition to the new episode in this intensifying drama. It is the Father Who hands His Most Beloved Son over, through the instrumentality of humanity

**Summary**

The drama of the Agony in the Garden gives the rest of the Passion narrative the sense of Jesus' loving willingness in the face of the Father's Plan. Jesus was not simply swept along by events – but, He is the One who willingly confronts them, even though He could have avoided them. Through His **humiliation**, He tends toward **triumph**. It is through His **death** that the **New Covenant** with the people of God comes to life through the remission of sins.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For these pages, cf. M. Galizzi, *Gesù nel Getsemani*. Zurich: Pas Verlag 1972, pp. 161-183, *passim*.

### C. LUKE'S ACCOUNT [22: 39-46]

#### [I] Temptation/ Trial

Lk uses this [Greek] word 6 times in his Gospel, and once more in Ac [20:19] – while in Mk it occurs only once [14:38]. The times Lk uses it [cf.4:14; 8:13], there are no parallel places in the other Synoptics. Like also uses the verb twice in the Gospel [cf. 4:2;11:16], and 4 times in Ac;. It is applied twice in relation to the disciples [cf. 8:13; 11:4; 22:40, 46].

1. In Lk's account of Gethsemane, the emphasis seems to be more on the **temptation/ tial** theme of the disciples [cf. 22:40, 46] but not so much that of Jesus.

a. Some scholars [e.g. Schnackenburg] state therefore that the emphasis that Lk tends to bring out in Jesus is more His **Prayer**. It is true that in Lk's presentation of the scene, Jesus twice exhorts His disciples: **Pray not to be put to the test** [v. 40] - **Get up, and pray not to be put to the test** [v. 46]. This interpretation would see the real emphasis here being on Jesus' contact with His Father: **Jesus knelt down and prayed ....** [v. 41] **...In His anguish, He prayed more earnestly ...** [v. 44]. The entrance of Satan on the scene [cf. 22:3] is seen much more as an indirect insidious presence, as far as Lk is concerned.

b. There are other scholars [e.g., Galizzi] who would look at the over-all situation of Gethsemane and read this presentation of Lk not only [nor principally] from the aspect of Jesus' Prayer – but from the aspect of his **Agony**. The intense Prayer of Jesus is indeed a preparation for the struggle. Jesus indeed here is in a situation described best by the Greek word for **temptation/ trial**.

2. Jesus offers a description of the true Disciple: **You are the ones who have stood by Me faithfully in My trials** [22:28]. The tense of the verb here is far more a recollection of past fidelity – it is also an appeal to persevere. The accent falls most specially in the present moment: they are still with Him because so far, they have never gone away. The sentence does not say that the disciples have yet endured the same **temptations / trails** that Jesus has - but simply the fact that they have been **WITH HIM** . The fact that they have indeed been with Him is becoming a more intense accompaniment now – all that preceded has led up to the present: **...with the disciples following...** [v.9]. **... Pray not to be put to the test...** [vv. 40, 46]. It readily becomes apparent what Gethsemane is going to mean for the disciples. Their **temptation/ trial** arises from the fact that they are called to stand by Him faithfully in His **trials** [v. 28]. This would seem to imply rather forcefully that Gethsemane, and the entire Passion which it introduces, is indeed a severe **temptation/ trial** for Jesus.

3. In this passage from Lk, it is true that there is no specific application of the word **temptation/ trial** to Jesus Himself. Nonetheless, from the over-all context, it

seems relatively clear that is Lk's intention. The Greek word has been interpreted to mean **the continuous danger for a believer in this world**. The real context here for the word would be the idea that would see this present time as an extended period of danger and struggle between God and the Powers of Darkness. The believer is expected to be one who carries on the struggle against Satan in the Name, and with the strength afforded by God. To be **tempted/tried** means to live exposed to the Power of Satan.

4. The Greek word indicates the existential situation. The one who is **tempted/tried** can be thought of in a passive way [i.e., as one subject to the wiles of Satan] – or, actively, in that the faithful disciples is thought of as totally committed to fidelity to the Word of Christ, and to the rejection of the Reign of this world. The disciple is called to look upon all the trials of life as an invitation to increase faith. So, the ideal of the disciple is not a mere passivity – but, the actual and renewed commitment to the things of God. The appearance of Satan in this scene is not one that is reserved solely to Judas [22:3], but his threat is throughout: **...Satan has got his wish to sift you all like wheat ...!** [v. 31]. - **... this is your hour ... this is the reign of darkness...** [v. 53]. Jesus Himself has known these **trials** [v. 28] – in fact, Lk 22 mentions the Greek word three separate times [vv. 28, 40, 46] – and there is a corresponding three-fold use of 'Satan' and 'darkness.'

5. There is evident a connection between Lk's Gethsemane scene [cf. 22:39-46] and the **Temptations of Jesus in the Desert** [cf. 4:1-3]. Lk's temptation scene ends with these ominous words: **... having exhausted all these ways of tempting Him, the devil left Him to return at the appointed time...** [4:13]. As is known, the Greek has several words for time: *kronos* means more a kind of extent of time; *kairos*, on the contrary, means a determined period, or point in time. The *kairos* of Jesus, the appointed time, has come – the entrance into the scene of Satan [22:3] indicates that the decisive moment has arrived.

6. In his use of the Greek word, Lk offers a two-fold aspect:

- in the temptation scene [4:13], the word is used to describe the attacks of Satan as these unfolded in the previous verses [4:1-12];
- in other passages [8:13; 11:4; 22:40-46], the use of the word is presented absolutely, without any indication of the one tempting. The emphasis in these instances seems simply to make known to the believer the real situation in which he/ she can expect to be found, as a result of accepting to be a disciple of Christ.

a. This seems very clear in this passage **... those on the rock are people who, when they first hear the word, welcome it with joy. But, these people have no**

*root; they believe for a while, and in time of trial, they give up ...* [8:13]. This is the *kairos* of the **trial/ temptation**, which comes to be realized in the Gethsemane scene. The responsibility of the disciple is portrayed by the words and example of Christ Himself. The disciples are called to **vigilant prayer**, and **remaining with Jesus**, that the disciples can ever hope to overcome the recurring **temptation/ trial** in the association with discipleship.

**b.** In Lk, the **temptation/ trial** is often associated with Satan and the Powers of Darkness [cf. 8:12; 22:3,31, 53]. It indeed might be looked upon as **temptation**. However, Lk emphasizes this in Gethsemane not so much as from its source, as from the point of view of the **disciples** who must endure it in their call to **follow Christ**.

**7.** It is under this perspective that Lk presents Jesus in Gethsemane. The disciples of all ages are asked to reflect on the conduct of Jesus in His Agony. There are indications that are meant to be translated into life, concerning the manner according to which one must prepare him/ herself for the **trial**. The secret to final victory is **total adherence to the will of the Father** [cf. 22:42, also 4:4, 8]. To achieve this, there is no other way than **intense prayer** [22:44] – only with the strength that comes from God can the disciple ever overcome the terrible **temptation/ trial** [22:43].

**8.** Therefore, the **trial** of Gethsemane is presented in the active sense, as also is the verb [cf. 4:2,12;10:25; 11:16]. This **trial** is not something that passes, but is the **permanent situation of the faithful disciple**. Lk seems to prefer the word AGONY of TRIAL, to describe what happens to Jesus here. Lk intends to present the Jesus of Gethsemane as the One who undertakes the battle of the Lord against the Powers of Darkness. Jesus is shown to be in active struggle against Satan in various places in Lk's gospel. This **Gospel of Gentleness and Mercy** shows through the example of Christ that all those who are sorely tried and suffering are being called to be **with Jesus forever**.

**9.** A real typical example of this terrible struggle is offered by Lk in terms that are almost military: ... *So long as a strong man fully armed guards his own palace, his goods are undisturbed; but when someone stronger than he attacks and defeats him, the stronger man takes away all the weapons he relied on and shares not his spoil...* [11:21,f.]. The over-all context of these lines in Lk 11 is part of Jesus' instruction **persevering prayer**. [cf. vv. 14-22]. Jesus also warns about the return of the evil spirit [cf. 11:22-26], when one would **end up worse than he was before**. The expulsion of a Devil gave rise to a controversy [11:14], concerning the whole Mission of Jesus. He is even accused of having the very power of Satan [cf. 11:15, ff.]. There is the appeal for a 'sign', as this victory over evil does not seem convincing [cf. 4:4, 9]. The Master's explanation is that the Kingdom of God has been exchanged for the Kingdom of Satan [cf. 11:18, 20]. It is precisely against such dominion on the part

of the Powers of Darkness that Jesus is engaged. The ‘strong’ one is not merely the master of the household, but the spirit of these verses is much more militaristic. There is a true engagement of the ‘enemy’ – the image of the ‘spoils’ is associated with complete victory.

**10.** It is true that in Lk’s presentation of the public life, Jesus does not undergo **temptation**. Nonetheless, there are instances when Jesus is contested: ... **a lawyer, to disconcert Him, stood up and said: ‘What must I do to inherit heaven...** [11:16]. This style of Lk does not imply that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gospel considered the life of Jesus already free from the attacks by the Devil. There are some interpreters, in fact, who see the whole life of Jesus as presented by Lk as a long series of temptations. The over-all idea in Lk seems to be that of showing Jesus as the **Dominator**, the **Conqueror**, the **Victor**, over Satan. Thus, Lk seems to show some preference for terms that would favor the idea of Jesus undergoing struggle, rather than the more specific **temptation**. However, at the end of it all, when Lk offers a summary of all that Jesus endured, he uses the word **temptation/ trial** in the plural: ... **You are the ones who have stood by Me in My trials ...** [22:28]. Lk’s emphasis is that Jesus has not been beaten – even though He is not yet totally victorious. His earlier victories [cf. 4:33-37; 8:26-39; 9:37-43; 11:14-23] are not yet definitive. Satan repeatedly returns to the attack [cf. 22:3, 53], both against Jesus, as well as against His disciples [cf. 22:31]. So, Lk shows us **Jesus in Agony** – in other words, in the ultimate stages of preparation for the battle that will bring Him to the definitive victory.

**11.** This is the active attitude of Jesus against Satan that interests Lk in his Gethsemane account. The entire **paranesis** for the disciples of all ages is based on what Jesus does in His **test**. This lesson serves as a valid instruction for all time. The advice from Jesus echoes through the centuries: **Pray not to be put to the test!** [22:40, 46].

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## [II] Jesus in His Anguish

### [A] Lk 22: 44

**... In His anguish, He prayed even more earnestly, and His sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood ...**

**[1]** The response of Jesus in Gethsemane to His situation [especially vv.42-44] offers a model for the disciples of all ages. The following elements might be seen in this context:

He makes an explicit request to His Father;

He receives strength from an Angel;

Yet, He then endures even greater anguish, agony;

He prays even more earnestly;

He sweats Blood.

[2] For a clear idea of this ‘packed’ Gethsemane scene as presented by Lk, it will be necessary to analyze these elements. The **Agony** is the essential word here [translated in the **JB** as **anguish** ]. It is this word that seems to set the tone for the entire passage, and from its understanding, much of the rest of this section flows.

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### 1. The Agony:

a. **Opinions:** this word, independent of any specific context, could be understood in an active, or passive sense. Actively it would mean the reaction of Jesus here to the presence of Satan – and it could indicate that state of mind translated by nervousness, anguish, apprehension, and even fear. This would be the expected reaction of one about to undergo the struggle – or, one engaged in the battle that is coming to the final showdown. According to this understanding of the word, Jesus would be present as One Who willingly prepares Himself for the contest, one that He indeed wants, desires and accepts. In Greek, it is a word derived from **the sacred games of ancient Greece**. It is a technical word, reserved to the culminating phase of a very difficult athletic contest.

Yet, a recent authoritative Dictionary of Greek etymology has stated that **Agony** no longer presents any relationship with the original meaning of this family of words. This word has been taken from the context of the ‘sacred games’, and employed by Demosthenes and Aristotle in the sense of **anguish**, as the **JB** has translated it.

The majority of modern scholars would opt for this second and broader understanding of the word. This would mean that the **anguish** of Jesus is in full accord with the parallel places and their rendition of Jesus’ experience at this crucial moment in His life: *... And sadness came over Him, and great distress ...* [Mt 26:37, f.] - *... MY soul is sorrowful to the point of death ...* [Mk 14:33, ff.]. thus the term **agonia** is understood in the sense of consternation, fear, anguish: which is the result of a serious threat of grave harm in one’s immediate presence. This would indicate then a more passive understanding. The Dictionary presents this meaning for **agonia** : that **fear** before the ultimate decisions, especially the **fear of death**. In the discussion of what Jesus experienced, as truly human, this would also be one element **in His suffering for the world**.

As will be noted in the discussion that follows, it is not easy from this text alone, to discern which of these positions is the proper one. One of the enormous difficulties that the exegete encounters in this question is the fact that the word used by Lk [the doctor?], *agonia*, he uses only here, and no other NT author has it in this sense. Furthermore, in the OT it is found only three times, and all of these are from **2 M [3:14, 26; 15:19]**. The verb *agonian* is also found only three times in the OT: **2 M 3:21; Dn 1:10; and Queen Esther**.

**b. A Discussion of the Opinions:** centers around the two main meanings of the word:

**1.] AGONIA means: fear, being overwhelmed, down-cast:**

**a.]** For many scholars, a close examination of the substantive *agonia* and the corresponding verb, *agonian*, seems to show that they mean: **fear – to be afraid**. A Greek synonym would be *phobia* - but the Latin Vulgate has transcribed the Greek *agonia*. Latin experts have stated that perhaps the closest Latin equivalent would be *trepidatio*.

**b.] A reflection on the OT passages** in which the word appears offers this:

- ... *There was consternation throughout the city ... The appearance of the High Priest was enough to pierce the heart of the beholder, his expression and his altered color betraying the anguish of his soul ... [2 M 3:14, 16 – very close to the **Suffering Servant's** appearance and Pilate's *Ecce Homo!*].*

- This was also the reaction of a deeply believing people at the prospect of Heliodorus who wished to destroy the sacred temple: ... *Those left behind in the city felt a similar anxiety, alarmed as they were about the forth-coming encounter in the open country* ... [2 M 15:19].

- In the LXX version of Daniel, there is a further passage ... *When the Benjaminite arrived, Elli was there, sitting beside the gate, watching the road for his heart trembled for the Ark of God* ... [cf. 1 S 4:13].

- Finally the last conversation between the Prophet Jeremiah and King Zedekiah was this: ... *King Zedekiah then said to Jeremiah: 'I am afraid of the Jews who have already gone over to the Chaldeans: I might be handed over to them, and they would ill-treat me...* [Syriac version of Jr 38:19].

**c.]** Because of these possible parallels, some interpreters would read the condition of Jesus in Gethsemane [cf. Lk 22:44] as an *agony* caused by obsessive fear. Simply being over-whelmed - perhaps not only by the prospect of His own death – but also revealing in this, something of the mystery of God and sin.

d.] In recent times, studies such as: *A Doctor looks at Calvary*, have attempted to analyze Jesus Christ both physically and psychologically. Some reflection has presented the figure of Lk to the believing world as a doctor - and some scholars have deduced from this that the careful and rare word that Lk has chosen would indicate a mental state, for which there are few parallels. The technical word *agonia* could also indicate a terrible mystical **Dark Night** of those suffering intense and apparently endless **anxiety**.

e.] Other interpreters, more simply, would explain this *agonia* of Jesus as presented by Lk, just as another word, a synonym for those found in two other Gethsemane accounts, that of Mt and Mk.

## 2.] *Agonia* in the sense of an extremely difficult struggle:

a.] This interpretation would read *agonia-agonian* in the sense of a most intense reaction, in the terrible struggle, **Spiritual Combat**, of Jesus against Satan. This idea is not unlike alter Patristic reflections that the *monks were the athletes of God*. They went out into the desert to engage the Devil in **moral and mortal combat**, on his home-ground. The arguments in behalf of seeing Gethsemane's **agonia** in this sense are the following:

- The Greek word *agonia* can be understood in an athletic sense, the attitude of one who descends into the arena for the ultimate struggle. This would mean that Jesus comes into Gethsemane much like an athlete called to take on a formidable foe. Like great athletes, who are sometimes described through hyperbole: *he/she has a heart and soul! – he/she gave life's blood to win!*

- One of the remarkable features of this interpretation that there are parallels in Greek literature even to the **drops of blood**. Aristotle, commenting on the sweat of struggling athletes: he saw this as weakening them in the struggle, some even swooning as their life's energy sapped away. He described their situation in all this is one of apprehension, severe nervousness, fear. This could be translated into **anguish** in the presence of a trial eagerly sought, but deeply respected as formidable. While the athlete might experience great anxiety, perhaps it would not really be fear that would ultimately describe the central experience. In general, the athlete would have deep confidence in his/ her ability, while maintaining respect for the capacity of the other contestant.

- In almost philosophical fashion, Theophrastus has written a whole commentary on *De Sudore!*. In this, he distinguishes three kinds of sweat: initial, medium and final. By these terms he distinguished that sweat first appears as watery and tenuous; medium sweat has grater consistency; finally, the ultimate sweat is described by the Greek Doctor, Menas: it comes from deep within, and there are not lacking those

who **compare it to blood**, in that it seem to issue from the over-taxed veins themselves.

**b.]** Therefore, Greek literature of a few centuries prior to Lk, does register the phenomenon of the sweat of a struggling athlete as compared to blood. This description is not unlike that of Lk: the enormous physical exhaustion and struggle settling down over Him in this terrible ordeal indicates the greatest of all Athletes of God. The **drops of blood** are described, however, by a very precise medical term: *thromboi aimatos* – from which the well known **thrombosis** derives. There is also a nuanced expression in the sacred text: *... Jesus' sweat was LIKE drops of blood* - which is very similar to the description left by Theophrastus.

**c.]** St. Paul speaks of the **agony** of the athlete:

*... All the runners in the stadium are trying to win, but only one of them gets the prize. You must run in the same way, meaning to win. All the fighters at the games go into strict training; they do this in order to win a wreath that will wither away, but we do it for a wreath that will never wither. That is how I run, intent on winning; that is how I fight, not beating the air. I treat my body hard and make it obey me...*  
[1 Co 9:24, ff.]

*... I have not yet won, but I am still running, trying to capture the prize for which Christ Jesus captured me. I can assure you that I am far from thinking that I have already won. All I can say is that I forget the past and I strain ahead for what is still to come. I am racing for the finish, for the prize to which God calls us upwards to receive in Christ Jesus ...* [Ph 3:12, ff.]

*...take an athlete – he cannot win the crown unless he keeps all the rules of the contest ...* [2 Tm 2:5]

**d.]** It is possible that the **Agony of the Struggle** is what Lk has in mind here: that terrible tension and the strain of one's energy in a contest that is almost beyond one's ultimate strength. The different nuances of the Greek words and their derivatives might indicate the following:

- the description of the actual struggle itself;
- the state of mind reflecting on the prospects of what lies ahead.

**c. The meaning of the *agony* in Lk:** what is the actual meaning intended by Lk is still very much a matter of discussion. The different authors and interpreters offer a variety of opinions. The following are a few of the texts where Lk uses the word found in 22:44, in derivatives from it:

*... Try your best to enter by the narrow door, because I tell you, many will try to enter and will not succeed...* [13:24].

*... But life to me is not a thing to waste words on , provided that when I finish my race, I have carried out the mission the Lord Jesus gave me – that was to bear witness to the Good News of god’s grace ... [13:24].*

Because of the fact that that the actual word **agonia** is only found in the Gethsemane scene, and the very few texts where the derivatives from it are noted, it is very difficult to argue from Lk alone concerning the ultimate meaning of it.

**1.]** Reflections on the **agonia** terminology:

**a.]** For the Cynics and Stoics of ancient times [such as Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Plutarch] the real athletes are those who **struggle for virtue**. In Philo’s thought, the real athletes are the **biblical heroes/ heroines** [such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph]: in brief all the children of Israel. The ‘Chosen People’ through the gift of the **Torah**, entered in to a kind of vital contest. In which a few of them have stood out as the **athletes of proven virtue**. In Philo’[s thought, the **entire desert experience** is to be looked upon as a kind of ‘contest’ with supremely high stakes for the winners. In this terrible struggle, some of the athletes gave up, others forfeited to the opposing side, and decided to retire from the field. A few, though, decided to see this contest through to the end: those are the martyrs of God, such as Maccabees.

**b.]** For the long distance runners, or those who have to grapple for the victory – they can only hope to achieve the goal if they submit to the terrible regime, realized through the grueling experience of the body. In Philo’s presentation, the purpose of all ethics is **to live solely for God**. This goal is not achieved through the exercise of one’s strength alone, but also with the help of God obtained through prayer.

**c.]** The **martyr** is the one who endures the grueling struggle solely for the interests of God. In St. Paul’s presentation, the scope of the use of the example of the agony of the athlete [cf. Pfitzner], **Paul and the Agon Motif** ] is simply the spread of the Gospel and the faith. In this terrible contest, sustained with prayer, for the increase and the strengthening of the faith, there must be involved the members of the entire community.

**d.]** The following characteristics might be noted in the application of the **agonia** in Judaic piety:

- it is a real **agony**;
- it must be sustained with the help that only God can bestow;
- It is undertaken for the interests of God, i.e., to adhere to His will;

- God is calling all the faithful to this.

God has prepared the whole world like an arena and the play, or performance of each one, and all the fatigue endured in the contest of life, will be adjudicated and evaluated by an impartial judge. As God has called the games with such high stakes, He will reward those who come through it victoriously, with the crown of immortality: all will receive a crown who have struggled for the Gospel: ***... all there is to come to me now is the crown of righteousness, which the Lord – the righteous Judge- will give to me on that day; and not only me, but to all who have longed for His Appearing ...*** [1 Tm 4:8].

**e.]** In Lk, some would seek these parallels in his presentation of Jesus in Gethsemane:

- the imminence of the grueling struggle;
- the contest is sustained by Jesus with help from on high;
- the contest is one of adhering to the will of God;
- Jesus fully accepts the rules of the game, the task that has been assigned to Him.

**f.]** However, as has been noted, the symbolism from the world of athletics is also mixed in here with that from the military and the royal investiture of a king. In Philo's writing, the word *polemos* [*polemics* ] is used to express the struggle the believer would have with adverse desires and passions.

-The use of *polemic* and *agony* come together in ***Sirach: ... Fight to the death for the truth, and the Lord will war on your side ...*** [Si 4:28, 33].

- As might be expected in ***Maccabees***, the symbolism surrounding *agonia* is most associated with the military [cf. 2 M 8:16; 10:28; 13:14; 14:18; 15:9, ff.].

- The Book of ***Wisdom*** offers an insight into Jacob's struggle in the night, often compared with that of Jesus in Gethsemane: ***... In an arduous struggle, Wisdom awarded Jacob the prize, to teach him that piety is stronger than all...*** [cf. 10:12 b].

**g.]** This data would be sufficient to be able to state that the repeated Greek usage of *agonia*, also in Scripture, would be closely associated with the idea of a grueling contest, a harsh and difficult struggle. In Paul, there is also a kind of double usage, that of ***agony in athletics***, along with ***military*** imagery [cf. 1 Co 1:24, f.; Ep 6:10. f.].

2.] A closer look at some of the OT ideas:

a.] In 2 M 15, there is a three-fold usage of closely related words:

**v. 9: agon:** *He put fresh heart into them, citing the Law and the Prophets, and by stirring up memories of the battles they had already won, he filled them with new enthusiasm...*

**v. 27: agoniazomai:** *... Fighting with their hands, and praying to God in their hearts ...*

**v. 18, 19: phobos, agonia:** *... their chief and greatest fear was for the consecrated temple. Those left behind in the city felt a similar anxiety. Alarmed as they were about the forthcoming encounter in the open country...*

- In the first case, it is a reference to past battles. It is Judas, as the terrible struggle with Nicanor approaches, he exhorts his soldiers to confidence in God reminding them of the terrible **agonies** already sustained.

- This exhortation is followed by the account of a vision in which Onias and Jeremiah pray for the people [vv.12-16]. There was indeed apprehension for the women, children and families, but this **phobos** passed into the 2<sup>nd</sup> position: the real concern was for the Temple.

b.] Upon seeing the advancing and formidable army, Judas extended his arms in prayer and recalls the sending of an angel in times past to Hezekiah – and Judas prays for the sending of another good angel, to go before them to spread terror and dismay. Judas is almost like a Second Moses asking for divine assistance to go on before his people in their ordeal.

c.] In this context, **agonia/ phobos** are nearly synonymous. Here, they indicate that state of anxiety, that profound preoccupation in the presence of a threatening onslaught, and those who must engage in it, seek to overcome it with the help of God. The author of this passage does not give much time to the description of the terrible mental state, but stresses more how the victory is won through the help of God [2:19, 22].

d.] In 2 M 3, there is a similar situation: Heliodorus has come with the specific talent of confiscating all the goods of the temple for the treasury of the king. The anguish [**agonia**] was not insignificant [v. 14]. The priests were prostrate before the altar, they raised their hands in supplication. Their faces were all pale, an exterior indication of the detail describing the **interior anguish**. The High Priest was practically overcome with this **ordeal** [cf. vv. 14-25] – the entire populace was engaged in prayers for delivery. The divine power eventually delivered the populace.

**e.]** Throughout this entire passage, the profound sense of anxiety and fear is most emphasized. The reason why the author here so stresses his description of the High Priest is to show that **because of prayer**, the divine power was felt. Even those who are practically overwhelmed with thoughts of their imminent ordeal, they do not allow fear to paralyze them. In their recourse to prayer, they offer the lesson of the **ideal Israel**. It is with the help of God, which they continually request, that they come to victory.

**f.]** Therefore, in trying to determine whether Lk meant either one or the other of the possible meanings, and reflecting on the discussion that ensues in the defense of other possibilities – there are many who would opt for a combination of both meanings. In other words, the **agonia** of Jesus is both **fear** and **struggle**. It might be that the Maccabees offer us the correct insight to describe this situation with the noun and verb: **agon/agonizai** :

- they speak of the **struggle** [cf. 2 M 18:28; 13:14; 15:9, 27];
- they also develop the spirituality of the ordeal of **martyrdom** [cf. also Heb 12:2].

As Jesus faces both His ordeal, and actually begins it – there is no wonder that Lk would use the same word to describe it: **agonia** implying also **phobos**.

### **3.]** An application to Lk:

**a.]** It does seem that Lk would have been most familiar with the tradition manifest in both Mt and Mk: **... And sadness came over Him, and a great distress ... My soul is sorrowful unto death...** Having the advantage of knowing these descriptions of what happened to Jesus, Lk would have had the option to add His own particular insight, while not neglecting this data. Lk offers, then, his own particular insight into the state of Jesus in facing His ordeal.

**b.]** As Jesus is descending into the arena for the decisive combat, His state of mind is aptly described by Lk. As is noted in the spirituality of Maccabees, **martyrs** of old, Jesus is in full cognizance of what it is He must face, and appeal for divine assistance to face His ordeal. As further confirmation of this, Lk adds also a detail concerning the prayer of Jesus that would unite Him to this tradition of the **ordeal of martyrdom, sustained with confident prayer**.

### **3. In His anguish, He prayed more earnestly :**

**a.** Grammatically speaking, this whole passage is taken as a unit – so the comparative here [ *more earnestly* ] is equivalent to the superlative. The emphasis here is that the end result is not to be expected from the heroism of the one engaged

in the **ordeal**, but much more from the **humble prayer**. This more earnest prayer of Jesus remains as the model through the centuries for all the disciples of the Lord.

**b.** This particular adverb, in its comparative form, in such a context, is not found anywhere else in the entire Bible. The simple form is found, also as an adjective and as a noun:

- Simple Adverb:

*... All the time that Peter was under guard, the Church prayed to God for him unremittingly .... [Ac 12:5].*

*... love like brothers in sincerity, let your love for each other be real, and from the heart ... [1 P 1:22].*

*... they draped the very altar in sackcloth and fervently joined together all the inhabitants, begging God not to let their little ones be massacred ... [Jdt 4:12].*

*... Order a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, elders, all... [Jl 1:14].*

*... All are to put on sackcloth, and call on God with all their might ... [Jon 3:8].*

- As an Adjective:

*... Above all, never let you love for each other grow insincere, since love covers a multitude of sins ... [1 P 1:8]*

- As a Substantive:

*... And now it is my hope in the promise that I am on trial; the promise that our tribes, constant in worship night and day, hope to attain.... [Ac 26:7].*

The word is used most often **in prayer**: a reflection on these texts, indicates that this unusual word, in its various forms, is often used to describe the ideal of prayer. The concept of **insistent prayer** serves to qualify the real worth, and that there are some accompanying qualifications that should be present with prayer. The prayer of Jesus serves as a particular model for the disciples of all ages.

**c.** Various texts:

- **Jdt 4** is very similar to **2 M 15**: Jdt uses the word **phobos** while 2 M offers **agonia**. The Israelites are over-taken by **fear and trembling** in behalf of their beloved Jerusalem as it faces mortal peril – in 2 M, the object of their deep concern is the temple, In this state of anguish, they raised up their voices to the Lord with great fervor, and they humbled themselves with **constancy, perseverance**, and they cried out **insistently**: the underlines words are all different uses of the Greek original [cf. 2 M 15].

- In the Prophet **Joel**, the threat is famine – the exhortation is to plead **insistently** before the Lord [ cf. Jl 1:14].

- **Jonah** exhorts the Ninevites to penance , by fleeing from the imminent punishment and by beseeching the Lord with insistence.

- In **Acts** [cf. 12:5], Peter’s imprisonment is accompanied with the insistent prayer of the whole Church.

**d.** In the rounding up of martyrs of old, the **victims** find themselves in a kind of sports arena, bereft of all defense, in the presence of the executors. In this situation, their cries are **incessant**, and their **incessant** prayer went right up to heaven.

### Summary

[1] In all these texts, particularly Jdt and 2 M, the situation that moves the faithful to pray **insistently** is a situation of **extreme anguish**, in which there is absolutely no human means of getting out of the **ordeal**. Along with the nuance of **insistence**, there is the ideal of acting with **quiet strength, constancy, some tension** but with **certitude of ultimate victory**. The recourse of the ancient **martyrs** to God was really a pledge of ultimate success and victory.

[2] There are strong indications that this is the spirit that inspired Lk 22:44. Jesus has entered into His mortal **agonia**, a terrifying situation, characterized also by anxiety, fear, deep nervousness. However, the term employed by Lk also indicates a context of **awesome** and **grueling struggle**. It is a situation in which the athlete, the contestant has willingly accepted to be [cf. 12:50; 22:15, 22, 37]. In the imminence of the **agonia** , the combatant suddenly feels himself lacking the necessary strength to carry him through to the final victory – and he looks for divine support.

[3] The expression chosen by Lk here: *... He prayed even more earnestly* - indicates the extreme anguish on the part of Jesus, as He hangs on to the one means that will infallibly bring Him to ultimate **victory**. It is only through this prayer that He will not be overwhelmed by the terrible anguish, fear and apprehension that are proper to one, facing off against the adversary.

[4] These elements are not lacking in Mk, where the description of the **anguish** follows the recourse to **prayer** on the part of the One Who gives every appearance of being impotent in the face of His enormous Messianic task. The difference is that Lk has described it more intimately, with the use of the most unusual expressions. Lk’s

terms would imply the sense of the contest, the terrible **ordeal** - emphasizing the **enormous struggle needed to win.**<sup>35</sup>

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### [III] The Father's Will and the Appearance of the Angel

*... Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me. Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine. Then an Angel appeared to Him, coming from heaven to give him strength...* [22:42]

It has already been noted that Lk could very well have had recourse to **the OT spirituality of martyrdom** which can shed some light onto the Mystery of Gethsemane. In the record *Acts of the Martyrs*, in addition to the **state of agony**, in which they found themselves, these old heroes/ heroines of those times faced a terrible situation of anguish and fear as the **ordeal** came to them [c f. 2M 3:14, 16, 21; 15:18, f.].

Even though the word **agonia** is not used [cf. Jdt 4:2; 1 M 11:6], there is clearly brought out the incapacity of those who find themselves in such **anguish**. In the terrible **ordeal** descending upon them, the martyrs of old realized fully that they could never have overcome their **trial** unaided. Characteristically, they are all presented a pose of **prayer**, and they are found using expressions that would indicate that their prayer was indeed **insistent**: *... with ashes on their heads, stretched out their hands before the Lord ... they fervently joined together in begging the God of Israel not to let their little ones be massacred ...* [Jdt 4:2] - *... they and the populace begged the Lord with lamentation and tears to send them a good angel to save Israel...* [2 M 11:6]. A number of these texts do not limit themselves to speaking about the **insistent prayer**, but also add the object of their requests [cf. Jdt 9:2, 114;13:4, 7, f.; 2 M 15:21-23].

A further characteristic of all this is that the Lord infallibly hears the prayer of His faithful ones, undergoing such terrible duress: and often, there is the presence of an Angel:

*... Before their eyes, appeared a horse richly caparisoned and carrying a fearsome rider. Rearing violently, it struck ...* [cf. 2 M 2:25].

*... When the battle was at its height, the enemy saw five magnificent men appear from heaven on horses with golden bridles and put themselves at the head of the Jews ...* [2 M 10:29]

<sup>35</sup> For these pages, cf. Galizzi, *Gesu' nel Getsemai*. Zurich: Pas Verlag 1978, *passim*.

*... They were still near Jerusalem when a rider attired in white appeared at the head, brandishing golden accoutrements ... [2 M 11:8].*

Throughout all this ‘wonder’, there is the profound conviction that all unfolds in accord with the divine will. It is noteworthy that these elements of the **spirituality of martyrdom** all are found in Lk’s Gethsemane presentation:

- Jesus, Who is in **agonia**, and finds Himself in deep need of divine assistance, wills that the Father’s plan be fulfilled;
- in response to His prayer, and as a strengthening for even further prayer, an Angel appears to Him;
- He receives ‘comfort’.

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## 1. The Father’s Will

a. There is in these texts depicting **the spirituality of martyrdom** either for a group, or for individuals, some indication of the divined will [cf. Jdt 8:27; 2 M 6:4-16]. Philo used the symbolism of the **stadium** when he wrote that God prepared the whole world as an **arena**. It is God Himself who calls out the names of the contestants, the **martyrs**, for whom He has prepared the **victor’s cup**.

b. In apocryphal works, this symbolism is not rare – the contest will be won by those who remain faithful. The martyr’s crown is in accord with the Father’s will. There is never a prayer that this mysterious will be accomplished – but, in prayers, all that is asked is the help necessary to overcome the trial.

c. However, in Lk’s Gethsemane scene [cf.22:42], there is the specific prayer on the part of Christ. He prays that the Divine Will be accomplished – and perhaps implicitly, there should be seen here, His prayer asking God for the necessary assistance to overcome His **ordeal**, that the divine will indeed be fulfilled.

## 2. Comfort from the Angel:

a. The texts referring to the divine comfort through the appearance of an angel are much more abundant in the **OT Spirituality of Martyrdom**. These texts emphasize much more the victory of one who struggles for the Lord. The victory of the people is possible only with the strength and power coming from God Himself.

1.] **2 M 3:14-26**: in this terrible situation of **anguish**, in which the priests and people find themselves, a **knight** appears in response to their prayer.

2.] **2 M 10:24-29**: there is great supplication addressed to heaven and the response comes in the form of five warriors.

3.] **2 M 11:6-9**: the supplication of the pious soldiers is for a good angel, for the salvation of the chosen people. With the appearance of the good angel the People could praise God and find courage.

4.] **2 M 15:21-27**: the Lord is 'reminded' of the time He sent a good angel in the times of Hezekiah. The Jews were able to rejoice heartily at the manifestation of the divine assistance.

b. There are other texts of early Judaic literature in which the victory is presented as coming through the divine assistance, whether or not there was the insistence on the Prayer of the Faithful Servants of the Lord.

c. The Agony scene of Lk seems inspired by this **spirituality** from Maccabees. The 'spirit' that pervades the **ordeal** of Jesus is that ultimate victory is assured. Jesus' prayer: **Your will be done!** [cf. 22:42] seems to come from a source held in common with Mt [cf. 26:42]. And this Divine Will can do all things.

d. Jesus is the One Who shows the 'paradigm', the model of response for all the faithful of all times caught up with their own share in His **ordeal**. In the intensity of His struggle, He prays with even greater intensity. His prayer is surely heard, and He is strengthened. This new strength He pours into additional prayer. This whole scene, then, is permeated with a great sense of hope, especially when it is read in the OT background that inspired it.

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#### [IV] *Pray not to be put to the Test* [Lk 22:45,ff.]

##### 1. *Temptation/ Trial*

a. There is, then, good evidence in the view of many commentators that Lk 22 is inspired from the **spirituality of Martyrdom**: as presented in the two books of Maccabees, and from other extra-biblical literature. There is a clear contrast with some Stoic writings of the time which never mention any recourse to prayer. It might at least be said that these **martyrdom** writings in some way prepared for Lk's composition of his account of Gethsemane.

b. Lk presents Jesus confronting His difficult **test** with His attitude is one of **model reaction and preparation** for the **ultimate ordeal with Satan**, that will lead

Him to the final victory. Similar situations are described in a series of non-biblical writings that could have had some effect on Lk – or, perhaps on the tradition he followed [e.g., *the Testament of Job*; *The Martyrdom of Isaiah* and texts from Qumran].

c. The Hebrew words used in these compositions are very similar to the Greek of Lk 22: the *dynamis* coming from the Angel, to Jesus in His *agonia*. There are also other texts that seem to be of this same spirit: ... ***You are My Servant, I have chosen you, not rejected you: do not be afraid, for I am with you; stop being anxious and watchful, for I am your God. I give you strength, I bring you help, I uphold you with My victorious right hand...*** [Is 41:9, ff.].

d. The People of God, or their spokes-persons, are often presented as having been 'fortified', sustained by the Lord Himself [cf. Jdt 3:12; 16:20; Ps 147:13; Ezk 30:15; 34:16; Dn 10:1]. There is an instance [cf. Dt 3:28] where Moses 'fortifies' Joshua in accord with the command of God.

e. All of these texts were distant preparations for the deeper understanding of the sense of the **ordeal, test**, present in Jesus' experience in Gethsemane.

## 2. A Summary:

a. It can be concluded that the background for the Gethsemane scene of Lk is the **spirituality of martyrdom**: based primarily on the themes of Maccabees and the extra-biblical, Judaic parallels.

b. Jesus' attitude in Gethsemane is not merely a passive acceptance of a terrible ordeal. His is an active response, seeking the fulfillment of the Father's will. Jesus is presented as consciously, knowingly [cf. 22:21,37], entering into this culminating phase of the battle. There are present, of course, profound sentiments of apprehension and anguish. But, there is the sense of eminent preparation on the part of Jesus for this decisive encounter with Satan and his powers of darkness.

c. Jesus uses the means that are infallible for every Christian in this terrible **anguish**. The infallible means are prayer in the face of conflict. The prayer intensifies as the comfort is brought: this prayer expresses a profound adherence of will, and an implicit request for help. The appearance of the Angel and the bestowing of strength not only emphasize the hearing of the prayer, but they also imply the certainty of the victory to be obtained.

d. Jesus appears here also an eminently human – He, too, needs the help of the Father to overcome the terrible trial that has come to Him.

e. With this style of expression, Lk has achieved a variety of purposes:

- the idea of **anguish** found in Mk [cf. 14:33,ff.] is presented with the added nuance of a **real struggle**;
- the **paranesis** ['encouragement'] for all Christians that teaches disciples of all times, how to confront their own **temptation/ trial**. It is all based on the example of Jesus and His manner of response to the **ordeal**;
- the athletic symbolism found in classical Greek to describe the sacred **Olympic games**, or the **arena** are taken up in Greek-Judaic circles to describe the great athletes of the Lord, **all those struggling for virtue**<sup>36</sup>.

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### [V] Doctrinal Synthesis

From the structure of the passage concerning the Agony in Gethsemane, the word **Prayer** seems to predominate. Yet, an over-all reflection on this passage would give emphasis also to the **agonia**: this is Jesus' positive reaction to the **test**. The combination of these two concepts would show that the disciple is called, following the example of Jesus, to encounter his/her **agonia/ trial**.

### [A] The Spirituality of Martyrdom

1. From the close study of these verses concerning Gethsemane – the **agonia**, the **Angel** and the more intense **Prayer** - it seems that the intention of the Evangelist is to present Jesus about to undertake a most difficult encounter. He is presented as gathering His forces for the definitive response, and with His intense **Prayer**, He obtains the help that is necessary. Jesus is presented here in the security of eventual victory.

a. This seems evident not only from the terminology used, and the increasing drama of the passage, His development of the sure means of victory, **His intense prayer** - but more especially because Jesus is certain to accomplish the **Father's Will**. His prayer is that It be accomplished.

b. For those familiar with the Judaic tradition, this **adherence to God**, to His **Law**, recourse to Him in **Prayer**: are a pledge of sure victory: ... **As the first light began to spread, the two sides joined battle, the one having as their pledge of**

<sup>36</sup> For these pages, cf. M. Galizzi, *Gesù nel Getsemani*. o. c., pp. 170-178, *passim*.

***success and victory, not only their own valor – but, their recourse to the Lord – and the other making their own ardor the mainstay in the fight ... [2 M 18:28].***

c. Lk seems to have had this in mind, in His descriptions of the **glory** of Christ ... ***Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into His glory? ... So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that in His Name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem...*** [Lk 24:26,46, f.].

2. Between these two points - the preparation for the struggle and the actual entrance into the contest – the **agonia** is sustained even to the out-pouring of His Blood:

***... Let us not lose sight of Jesus Who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection for the sake of the joy which was still in the future, He endured the Cross, disregarding the shamefulfulness of it, and from now on, has taken His place at the right hand of God's throne... Think of the way He stood such opposition from sinners, and then you will not give up for want of courage. In the fight against sin, you have not yet had to keep fighting to the point of death ... [Heb 12:2-4].***

a. Lk presents Jesus in this terrible conflict with Satan, as a **Martyr, Faithful Witness** - this insight presents itself to us from the concept of the **tribulation/ trial** [cf. 22:28, 40, 46] – which includes always the idea of real harsh **struggle**; and from the mention of Satan, or the **Powers of Darkness** [cf. Lk 22:3, 31, 53]. However, perhaps even more, the idea of **martyrdom** is evident from the overall style of Lk in presenting this scene.

b. In addition to the formal **agonia**, the following factors are also present:

- the healing of the High Priest's servant [cf. 22:51 b];
- Jesus' look toward Peter [cf. 22:51];
- Jesus sent to Herod [vv. 8-12];
- the Cyrenean is forced to carry the Cross behind Jesus [cf. 23:26];
- the encounter of Christ with the women [cf.23:27-31];
- the fact that two others were to be crucified with Him [cf. 23:32];
- the prayer of Jesus for His enemies [cf. 23:34];
- the dialogue between the Good Thief and Jesus [cf. 23:40, f.];

- Jesus' prayer for Himself [cf.23:46];
- the proclamation of innocence by the Centurion [cf. 23:47].

c. Through these many details, one can deduce that Lk is consciously presenting Jesus as a **Martyr**<sup>37</sup>. The various elements employed by Lk can be found in the literature pertaining to the Martyrs beginning with the Maccabbees.

d. The Book of the Apocalypse describes Jesus in these terms: ... **Here is the Message of the AMEN, the Faithful, the True Witness, the ultimate course of God's creation.** [Rv 3:14]. There is some evidence of the **martyr-motif** has had some impact in the compiling of the NT literature, particularly Lk.

e. The scholars have individuated characteristics that can be considered as proper to the story of a biblical **Martyr**:

- it is Satan himself who engages the martyrs in fierce combat;
- in this conflict, the martyrs **hope in divine help** [cf. 2 M7:6] – this is the so-called classical attitude of the Martyr;
- the appearance of a heavenly being [cf. Dn 3:49];
- political motives are one of the reason for martyrdom;
- the martyr announces the destiny of others [cf. 2 M 7:14, 16, 18, 31-38];
- the martyr promises to others the reward of life;
- the innocence of the martyr is announced – the martyr conquers the esteem and the admiration of his/ her life for the Law in which is revealed the divine will [cf. 2 M cc. 6, 7];
- the reward is the resurrection [cf. 2 M 7:9, 11, 14, 29];
- one of the underlying ideas in the narrations of the martyrs is that of exemplarity;
- the life of the martyr is meant to be imitated [cf. 2 M 6:24, f., 28, 31].

Modern scholarship has compared these points with the following characteristics which distinguish the Passion of Lk from the narration of both Mt and Mk.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Brian Beck, 'Imitatio Christi and the Lucan Passion Narrative', in: **Suffering and Martyrdom in the NT.** ed. By W. Harbury and B. McNeilk. Cambridge University Press 1981, pp. 28-47.

All of these points are found in Lk's account:

a. The examples:

- the presence of Satan;
- strength is obtained through prayer;
- the appearance of the heavenly being;
- the decision of Jesus to accomplish the Father's will;
- the exemplarity of the Martyr: the disciples of all times are being invited to imitate and follow Jesus. This theme of Christ as example recurs in various moments in the History of the Passion:
  - Jesus is presented as an example of the Christian life in His love and prayer for His enemies [cf. Lk 22:51; 23:34];
  - this simply accords with the lessons Jesus gave all during His life [cf. Lk 6:27, f.];
  - this will be carried out also in Stephen's copy of Jesus' martyrdom [cf. Ac 7:60];
  - an invitation to follow the example of Jesus is also noted where Lk transforms the motive of Simon of Cyrene, who is presented as being made to carry the Cross behind Jesus [cf. Lk 23:26];
  - it is very possible in relation with many other verses [e.g., Mt 10:37, f.; Lk 9:23; 14:26, f.], this carrying the Cross behind Jesus might be translated to **imitate Him**.

b. With an abundance of data and cross-references one can 'read between the lines' and see Lk's intention. In the less refined Judaic martyr stories, there are also invectives hurled against the persecutors. However, beginning with the martyrdom of Jesus, there is introduced a brand new approach, which will be continued also in the Martyrdom of Stephen and James: a **prayer for persecutors**.

4. The remaining points of comparison between the OT Martyr stories and the Passion of Jesus continues with other characteristics that are found outside of the Gethsemane account:

- it is much more emphasized in Lk than in Mt [cf.27:11 and Mk [cf.15:2] the aspect of the political motive. The action of Jesus [cf. Lk 23:2, 5]. Against the powers to be is clear;

- the announcement of others' destiny: the Good Thief, the Pious Women [cf. 23:27, ff., 39, ff.];
- the promise of life made to the good thief [23:39, f.], which is found in Lk alone.

While this does not have true and proper parallels in the Judaic martyrs, it finds a correspondence in the fact that the death of the martyr was considered life for others. There is some idea of vicarious expiation at least implicitly [cf. 2 M 7:31-38]. This idea is surely present in the Story of the Passion [cf. Lk 22:19, ff.].

4. In Lk's account, more than in those of Mt and Mk the innocence of Jesus is emphasized. Lk offers a number of hints regarding this: *... I find no cause in Him* [23:4] *... I have found no case against this man ...* [23:14]... *Nor has Herod either ...* [v.15] *... I have found no case against Him that deserves death ...* [v. 22 b]. All of this is lacking in the other two accounts.

a. There is also a slight shift of emphasis in the Profession of faith of the Centurion. In Mt and Mk, Jesus is confessed as the **Son of God** – but in Lk, we read: *... When the centurion saw what had taken place, he gave praise to God and said: 'This was a great and good man.'* *and the people who had gathered for the spectacle saw what happened,, and they went home beating their breasts...* [23:47, ff.].

b. These traits have been inspired by the idea that the **Martyr** would conquer all adversaries.

6. The 9<sup>th</sup> trait of the Martyr is the **reward**, which consists in Jesus' case, in the resurrection [cf.24:26,46,, f.]: *...Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into His glory? ... So, you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead ...*

- these passages show the results of Jesus' suffering – there is here an intimate association between **agonia** and **suffering**.
- there are still two other characteristics that are proper to Lk: the **trial** of Jesus takes place before a King [cf. 23:6-12], and only Lk notes [cf.23:48] how the people were gathered as though for a spectacle.
- Elements such as these are often found in the Martyrs accounts. this idea of the assembled crowd is also a characteristic of the 'fans' assembled for the Olympic Games. This is the symbolism that permeates this whole account.

### Summary

Therefore, Lk surely has his own 'style' in the presentation of this story. The Spirituality of the Martyrs, inaugurated with the Books of Maccabees has made much impact on Lk. The literature of the Martyrs is often presented in the style of a real struggle, an **ordeal**. This is what has impressed Lk in his handling of the materials. The Passion according to Lk is qualified as the **agonia**, understood in the sense of a grueling ordeal, like that of the Martyrs of old. These ancient realities all led to this moment of redemption and salvation for the whole world. Jesus is the culmination of the OT.

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### [VI] Prayer as a Major Theme of Luke

1. this whole passage, then, is powerfully influenced by the Martyrs' accounts from the times of the Maccabees and following. Jesus is presented as the Model to emulate, the **Martyr, par excellence, the long awaited of the ages**.

a. However, if the martyrdom was the only, or the over-riding purpose of Lk right here at the beginning of the Passion of Jesus, it would seem that the unfolding of the events might have been different.

b. The order of events for the Martyrs is something as follows:

- the state of **agony** when the martyr[s] as [are] confronted with the real **ordeal**, or the terrible struggle [cf. 2 M 15:8,ff.];

- the reaction of the one subjected to this **ordeal**, which is generally concretized in a prayer – which assumes different forms: either narrative [cf. 2 M 11:6, 9] – or, a direct form [cf. 2 M 15:21, f.];

- lastly, the prayer is heard by heaven, and assistance is sent leading to victory.

c. Lk presents a different order: the prayer expressed by Jesus is in a very direct form – and this prayer precedes the terrible agony.

2. Some of the Fathers shifted the verse – and had the comforting of the Angel come after His seating of the Blood. This is understandable in that the classical idea of help from heaven would not then normally be followed by an even greater agony. This shift in the verses would also present the whole scene more clearly as one of **martyrdom**.

a. However, it is also possible to look at this phase of the Passion narrative as a lesson in **prayer**. The passage opens and closes with an exhortation to prayer [vv. 44, 46]. The prayer is then formulated in v. 42 with the very words of Jesus

Himself. Verse 44] continues the prayer and shows that Jesus has the same sentiments, even *more intensely* after receiving divine comfort.

b. Therefore, the Gethsemane scene for Lk has this **modeled lesson on prayer**. After Jesus had said to His disciples to pray so that they would not enter into temptation, the text then immediately goes into the prayer of Jesus Himself. The words that are used in Gethsemane, then, are the Third Petition of the **Our Father** [cf. Mt 6:10]. So, we have in Gethsemane, Jesus' exhortation to pray – followed by the concrete example of how to do it. The disciples of all times are being urged to follow this example.

c. There is, then, in Lk presentation a **lesson on prayer in two stages**: the **content** of prayer – followed by the **duty** to pray, and with insistence. There is a similar format in Lk 11:1, ff, where Jesus teaches the **Our Father**. Right after teaching this prayer, the chapter continues: *... He was casting out a devil ... so long as a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are undisturbed ...* [cf. Lk 11:14-22].

3. In Lk's continuing lessons on prayer, he includes the parable of the unscrupulous judge and the importunate widow [cf. 18:1, ff.].<sup>38</sup> The basic antiphon of this lesson on prayer is the last line: *... then He told them a parable about the need to pray continually and not to lose heart ...*

a. The scope of this lesson is not to be found without faith at the comforting of the Son of Man [cf. Lk 18:8] - despair would render salvation out of reach. This image could be extended to include ideas and examples taken from the world of sports: *to get out of shape, to lose heart*. This would render one incapable of striving toward the finish line, of winning the crown for the successful endurance and completion of the full course.

b. This is the sure formula on the only way to overcome all the many obstacles that are along the path leading to salvation: *... watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened ... that day will be sprung on you suddenly ... stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the son of Man...* [cf. 21:34-36].

c. This powerful exhortation underlines the necessity of praying **at all times**, and being able to **stand with confidence** before the Son of Man. Prayer has as its object either the maintaining, or the acquiring of the capacity of salvation, to keep one from being overwhelmed in the tie of the terrible **ordeal**, the **temptation/trial**.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. L. Monloubou, *La prière selon S. Luc*. Paris: du Cerf 1976,

4. All of these exhortations are found throughout the Gospel of Lk and find their confirmation in the Gethsemane scene. The most convincing example of the prayerful Jesus, who pleads before the Father, **expressing His abandonment to His will**. The theme of **prayer**, therefore, corresponds perfectly to one of Lk's great teachings, and his intensifying desire to show Jesus as the example for the Christian life. The praying Christ is a favored theme [cf. Lk 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28, 29; 11:1]. When Jesus exhorts His followers to pray even for those who calumniate them [cf. Lk 6:20], Jesus carries this out in His great prayer on the Cross: **Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing ...** [Lk 23: 34].

5. The fact that God always hears our prayers: is a central theme in Lk [cf. 1:11-13; 3:21,f.; 9:34; Ac 4:31; 10:2-4; 12:2-7; 16:25,f.]. the divine response is noted in a variety of ways:

- the shaking of the earth [cf. Ac 4:41; 16:25];
- the opening of the heavens, a voice [cf. Lk 3:231, f.; 9:34; also Ac 10:11-13];
- the appearance of the angels [cf. 1:11-13; Ac 10:2-4; 12:2-7].

a. Lk does not seem to show any preference among these forms: they are all present and somewhat equally divided. The reason may be that Lk follows form patterns in his presentation of what happened.

b. Thus, Lk 1 [11-13] offers all the characteristics of an annunciation in which also the Angels have their part [as Mt presents an 'annunciation' for Joseph, but in a dream]. It is similar to what happens elsewhere [cf. Jdt 13:3-5;; Mt 1:20, ff.; Lk 1:26].

c. There is a kind of similar action in the Gospel [cf. Lk22:43] and Ac[cf. 12:2-7]: these are situations of the **temptation/ trial**, or of a real **test**, through persecution. The overcoming of this **ordeal** is realized in general, by the sending of the heavenly messengers. Lk writes in this way to show that the Lord indeed hears the prayers of His people – whereas the manner in which Lk indicates all this would show Lk's being influenced by traditions that seem to follow patterns.

### Summary

Therefore, for many interpreters, **prayer** is the real emphasis of Lk in his Gethsemane account. The insights on prayer condition to a large extent the way Lk handles his material here.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For these pages, cf. M. Galizzi, *Gesù nel Getsemani*. o.c.,pp. 184-193,*passim*.

## FIRST EXCURSUS

### Comparison between Mk & Mt

#### [I] Doctrinal Perspectives of Mk

[1] It would be misleading to conclude that since Mk includes many fewer of the discourses and words of Jesus than does Mt, that therefore, Mk would be 'less doctrinal' than Mt. While this does not hold, what is true is the Mk's perspective is quite different.

a. First of all, it can be stated that **Mk is much more Christological than Ecclesial [which Mt is!]**. At the beginning of the Gospel of Mt, for example, we read: *... genealogy of Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham ...* - whereas in Mk we read: *... The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God ...* So, from the outset, Mk takes us into the very presence of the august mystery of the son of God.

b. Furthermore, the Gospel of Mk is at one and the same time a progressive revelation of Jesus, the Suffering Servant and also the Son of God – and Mk's Gospel is likewise an expose' of the obstacles that this revelation encountered.

2. Many scholars compare the beginning of Mk [1:1-13] with the Prologue of Jn [1{1-18]:

a. Like Jn, Mk wishes to bring us immediately right into the Mystery of the Person of Jesus Christ. He places us in the presence of an individual, Whom heaven proclaimed the Beloved Son of the father [cf. 1:11]. The **Only-Begotten** is then **tried** in the desert by Satan, is served by the Angels: and all of this is but an indication of His ultimate **victory**.

b. It is almost as though the evangelists were trying to speak to the astonishment, provoked by the appearance of Jesus, in showing Him speaking with the Devil, as would an ordinary human being. Mk's account of the temptations is extremely brief, only two verses. The implication is that He will win.

3. It is widely agreed among interpreters that the Gospel of Mk is divided into two large sections, both geared to revealing **Jesus' identity**:

- from the beginning to the **Confession of Peter** at Caesarea Philippi [cf. 1:14-8:26];

- and from the **Confession of Peter** to the end [cf. 8:27-16:20].

**a. The Beginning up to Caesarea Philippi:**

**1.]** Both of these sections also emphasize the fact that ‘humanity’ – whether it means the ‘crowds’, or even the ‘disciples’, was simply unable to pierce His secret. Prior to this ‘check’ at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus Himself imposed silence on the demons concerning the identity of His Person, as He did on the sick who had been cured by Him. Only the resurrection will bring the full light of the Church, which will receive it. The Church thus becomes the beneficiary of a knowledge even superior to that which the privileged disciples had enjoyed in the life-time of Jesus. **The post-resurrection Church is presented as more ‘privileged’ than were Peter, James and John, during Jesus’ public life.**

**2.]** Repeatedly, one’s attention is drawn to the facts, the words and the person of Jesus. The understanding of His listeners and disciples is finally enlightened by the resurrection. Because of this ‘style’, **Mk might be thought of as an epiphany of Jesus.**

**3.]** This **epiphany** has two stages:

- **1:14-8:8:26:** this is the epiphany of Jesus’ **power** [*exousia*] – the messianic and divine power of Jesus.

This power is affirmed in both the **teaching** and the **deeds** of Jesus. However, in contrast with Mt, Mk gives to the deeds a certain emphasis in relation to the words or discourses. This makes even more impressive the long series of **miraculous** manifestations.

The accumulation of **miracles** flow one after another. Those around Jesus often interrogate Him, but then understand so very little about His answers:

*... And the teaching made a deep impression on them, because, unlike the Scribes, He taught with authority... [1:22].*

*... most of them were astonished when they heard Him. They said: Where did this Man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted to him, and these miracles that are worked through him. This is the carpenter, surely, the Son of Mary, the brother of James and Jesus and Jude and Simon. His sisters, too, are they not with us? ... And they would not accept Him ... and Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith ... [6:1-6].*

Even His specially loved Twelve, who received such special and prolonged instruction from Him, still remained ‘astonished:

*... When He was alone, the Twelve, together with others who formed His company, asked what the parables meant ... [4:10, f.].*

... *They were utterly and completely dumb-founded* ... [6:52].

4.] Jesus reproached their lack of comprehension: ... *Do you not understand? Have you no perception? Have you eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear? Or, do you not remember... Are you still without perception...?* [8:16, f.] .

2.] **The Scene at Caesarea Philippi:** this incident marks a great turning point in the Gospel, and opens its II<sup>nd</sup> Part, in the view of many interpreters. In contrast with the crowds, Peter has finally ‘discovered’ something about the Messianic and Divine dignity of Jesus, and He proclaims this in the name of the Twelve.

a.] Jesus seizes upon this **Confession of Faith** of Peter to reveal only to the Apostles the other ‘face’ of the mystery of His Person: this transcendent Messiah, is also a **Suffering Servant**, and **He will come to ‘know’ through experience, what He already knows as the Son of God** – a most shameful and painful death.

b.] From this point on in Mk, Jesus repeatedly refers to the tragedy of the Passion. There is in his words a very clear ‘paradoxical revelation’ – the transcendent Messiah must drink a **bitter cup** in His acceptance of the Will of God, and also its ignominious manner: over and over again, Jesus calls this to the mind of His disciples [cf. 8:31-33; 9:12, f., 30-32; 9:35; 10:32-34, 38-39, 42-45].

c.] This revelation has far greater emphasis in Mk than in Mt, where the attention of the reader is always drawn by Mt in the announcement of the coming Passion and death by other perspectives, notably **an ecclesial one**. A good example of this in Mt is Peter’s Profession of Faith [cf. Mt 16:17-19] – this is followed by a long discourse on the Church.

d.] In Mk, therefore,, the announcement of the great suffering and humiliation of the Messiah, Jesus – is also followed by the shameful and total lack of comprehension on the part of the Apostles. At Caesarea, this lack of comprehension is announced by Peter: *taking Jesus aside, he began to remonstrate with Him – but Jesus sternly rebuked him...* [Mk 8:32] :

- this is repeated in the chapters that follow – and not only by Peter, but within the whole group of the Twelve [cf. 9:32, 34-35;10:32, f.].

- Even the transfiguration did not make things any clearer for the three privileged Apostles, Peter, James and John. They were clearly instructed that the way of the Cross would be the only path to Glory [cf. Mk 9:2-8];

- The scene in Gethsemane represents the culminating point in all this lack of comprehension, spiritual blindness of those closest to Jesus.

4. The current opinion today of many interpreters is that this manner of presenting the narration represents an early attempt, a 'primitive' one – whereas Mt's perspective is a kind of dogmatic transformation, or reflection on the facts. Others, however [such as Fr. Feuillet] do not accept this interpretation.

a. Mk's perspectives are already a kind of transformation of the early data and that his happened under the influence of the catechesis of the Author. If this is so, one might the more readily understand why it is throughout the Gospel of Mk the difficulties that Peter [and the others had] in coming to grips with the mystery of the Cross – that led him even to deny, to curse, his kind Master. A god 'side reading' here might be a careful reflection on 1 P – permeated throughout with the thought of Jesus Christ, as the **Servant of Yahweh**. This also might shed some light on Mk's catechesis.

b. For some, the reading of Mk could offer some kind of illustration of this: there is a remarkable difference in the way Mk & Mt present the episode of Jesus walking on water:

**Mk**: ... *Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid! Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind dropped. They were utterly and completely dumbfounded, because they had not seen what the miracle of the loaves meant their minds were closed ...* [Mk 6:51,f.].

**Mt**: ... *Men of little faith, He said, why do you doubt? And as they got into the boat, the wind dropped. The men in the boat bowed down before Him and said: truly, YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD!!!!* [Mt 14:33].

As might be expected, there are wide differences in the reading of these lines:

- One opinion is that Mt has a spirit of synthesis. What he has done in his account is merely anticipated by a few hours- and attributed to the whole group of Apostles the grand profession of faith pronounced by Peter: ***You are the Son of God***. This Profession is found in Jn [cf. Jn 6:68, ff.] at the end of the discourse on the **Bread of Life** – and this, too, follows a walking on the eater.

- Another understanding of this had already been offered by the Dominican scholar, M. J. Lagrange. His reading of this episode is to be sought in the 'style' of Mk, who emphasizes throughout the slowness of the disciples to come to the faith. Furthermore even in Mt, later on [cf. 16:7], the Profession of faith by peter seems to have been the result of a special revelation. [This of course, remains an open question among the scholars]

5. There still remains for reflection the two-fold mystery proposed by **Mk** for meditation: Jesus is at one and the same time:

- a **Suffering Messiah**;
- the **Transcendent Messiah**.

a. There exists a real parallelism in the presentation of Jesus:

- **Mk 13**: this is the Eschatological Discourse where Jesus presents Himself as the Judge of the Universe.

- **Mk 13-15**: Jesus is presented as the **Suffering Servant**, in full conformity with Is 53. Jesus drinks the **Chalice** of chastisement, meant for the culpable world, taking on Himself the faults of humanity, for expiation, in atonement.

b. One might respond that there is something similar in Mt – yet, it still seems much more visible in Mk, and this for two reasons:

- in the Agony of Gethsemane, it is only in Mk's account does one read of the **Hour** in the absolute, the **Hour of Judgment**, that makes one think of this unusual verse: *...But as for the day, or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son; no one, but the Father ...* [Mk 13:32].

- only in Mk do the urgent appeals of Jesus for **vigilance** intimately connected with the parable which concludes the Eschatological Discourse, just prior to the Passion and Resurrection account:

*... Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man raveling abroad: he has gone from home and left his servants in charge, each with his own task' and he has told the door-keeper to stay awake. So, stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the household is coming: evening, mid-night, cock-crow, dawn: if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you, I say to all: **STAY AWAKE!*** [Mk 13:33-37].

Furthermore, there are great parallels between Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Mk [c. 13] and the Passion account [cc. 14-15].

6. Jesus had already predicted to His disciples [cf. Mk 13:9-12] that they would be dragged into the Synagogues, that they would be summoned before governors and kings. In doing this, the text puts the same verb on the lips of Jesus [*paradidomai*] – meaning **to be handed over** – that will re-appear in His own tragic destiny:

The Disciples: *And when they lead you away to hand you over, do not worry ... brother will betray brother [hand over] ... but the man who stands firm to the end will be saved ...* [13:9-12]

Jesus: *... Judas approached with an offer to hand over ... Judas looked for a way of betraying Him ... one of you is about to betray Me ...alas for that man by whom the*

*Son of Man is betrayed! ... the Son of Man is to be betrayed ... My betrayer is at hand ... [cf. 14:19, 11, 18, 21, 41, 42]*

*... They handed Jesus over to Pilate ... it was out of jealousy that the chief priests handed Jesus over ... Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified...*

7. In Mk [cf. 13:22,ff.] the coming of the son of Man is predicted. Jesus had warned His Apostles of the false prophets who would come, capable of seducing even the Elect. He once more tells them of **vigilance**: You, therefore, must be on your guard! [13:23]. In Gethsemane, Jesus asks Peter, James and John to **watch and pray** - and when He comes toward His three chosen ones, He finds them sound asleep. Some see in this a kind of anticipated Parousia, comparing these two texts:

*... If He comes unexpectedly, He must not find you asleep ... [13:36].*

*... He came back and found them sleeping ... [14:37].*

8. There is also much to be gained by reflecting more deeply on the parable of the Door-Keeper [cf.13:33-37], the various times suggested as possibilities when the Master of the house-hold might return the evening, mid-night, cock-crow, and dawn. These are the very times that receive prominence in the great divisions of the Passion account:

**evening**: the Institution of the Eucharist [cf. 14:17];

**mid-night**: the Agony in the Garden, the arrest;

**cock-crow**: the hour of Peter's denials;

**the Dawn**: the time of Jesus' condemnation to death.

However, there is always the danger of reading too much **INTO** the passage – and this is the forbidden ***eis-egesis!*** But the possibility, at least is established. There is a much greater possibility to see more in general a similarity between Mk 13, on the one hand, the Eschatological Discourse – and Mk 14-15, the Passion and Death].

9. A point of grater import: in the accounts of the Passion of both Mt and Mk [but, especially in Mk].there is underlines with particular insistence that the Death of Jesus is placed in relationship[with the ruin of the temple of Jerusalem. **The destruction of the temple, as is known, is the point of departure for the eschatological discourse.** Actually, this destruction of the temple is also one of the major accusations brought against Jesus in His trial [cf. 14:57,f.] – when Jesus dies, the ***veil of the temple is rent*** [cf. 15:58]. It was also predicted [cf.13:24] that the destruction of the Holy City would be accompanied with the darkening of the sun and the moon – and when Jesus dies, **darkness** covers the entire earth.

**10.** One final point: the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds means the definitive installation of His Messianic Kingdom. In Mk 13, this is presented as the consoling counter-part of the ‘**terrible tribulation**’ that is coming. The oath of Jesus will also bring about the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and the coming with the clouds of heaven [cf.14:62].

### Summary

**[1]** It is in all three Synoptics that one might note the profound connections between the Eschatological Discourse and the Drama of the Passion. In Mk, this common fact receives slightly greater emphasis. The Parable of the Door-Keeper [cf. Mk 13:33-37] provides one of the more striking points of contact, and this is proper to Mk, at least in the striking form that it is presented.

**[2]** The **Son of Man** Who will come in glory at the end of time, to judge the world, as the Master of history and the universe – is one and the same as the **Servant of Yahweh**, Who suffered humiliation and died in the Passion on Calvary. In Mk13, He already foresaw for His disciples and for the whole Church very harsh trials and persecutions. However, He took these upon Himself to **show the way** and **offered a formula for final victory** – before these trials would come to the disciples and to the Church.

**[3]** The ultimate triumph of Jesus is the message of hope to those who would likewise have to **drink His cup , to share in His Baptism, to carry His Cross** . The great wonder in all of this is the very One, who in Mk 13 will be the protagonist of the *Parousia*, the Judge of the world – also suffered the Agony of Gethsemane and Calvary. The Son of God [cf. Mk 13:32] dies on the Cross [cf. Mk 15]: this is **truly the Son of God**, as the Roman soldier professed [cf. 15:39].

**[4]** In Gethsemane, Mk also brings us to grips with the most sublime mystery of all: that of God Himself, the Most Blessed Trinity – and the extraordinary plan of redemption: to **share in the life of the Trinity forever**.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For these pages, cf. A. Feuillet, *L'Agonie de Gethsemani*. Paris: Gabalda 1977, pp. 135-141, *passim*.

## [II] **ABBA: TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVES IN MARK**

### Introduction:

[1] **The Text: ... *Jesus said: ABBA. Everything is possible for You. Take this cup away from Me. But, let it be as You – not I – would have it!...* [14:36].**

There are many aspects of this prayer that are of great interest – as has already been noted. However, in this reflection, the emphasis will be on two of these:

- on the one hand, the eminently **filial character** indicated by the title **ABBA**;
- then, on the other hand, the astonishing distinction that there seems to be emphasized by Mk between the will of Jesus, Who **submits** so fully to His Father, and His sovereign Will.

[2] The most common opinion is that Jesus spoke and reached ordinarily in Aramean. The word **ABBA** is a transliteration from the Aramean, just as the words: **TALITHA KOUM** [cf. 5:41] is a transliteration for: ***Little Girl, I tell you: get up!*** Many explanations have been offered for the grammatical form for **ABBA**. The most probable is that it indicates an affectionate diminutive, which corresponds to a loving family term. **What is unusual is that Jesus would make use of such language – to address Almighty God!**

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1. The two NT concepts of **divine paternity** and **filiation by grace** received from Jesus Himself are evident:

a. The attributing to the divinity the title ‘Father of Humanity’ is found very often among primitive peoples. This concept was widely spread in the ancient Middle East, as well as in the Greek-Roman world. So, there is no wonder that it would be found likewise in the OT. However, it should be kept in mind that the idea in biblical revelation has special characteristics that are proper to it.

b. ‘Yahweh’ is a unique and transcendent God, and hence cannot be ‘paraded’ along-side the many deities of the ancient world. What would be of interest here is the Semitic world:

- Outside of Israel, in this Semitic world, divine paternity is ambiguous: it seems to resemble quite closely the mere transfer to the divinity of family and social relationships;

- In Scripture, however, it is quite different – the concept of divine paternity develops from the historical fact of the gratuitous creation of the universe, and election of

Israel, manifested in the first place, by Genesis and Exodus. Thus it concerns principally the People of God in its entirety;

- In Dt, and the Prophets, emphasis is given to the essential traits of this paternity: it implies on the part of God an unfailling love and an incessant mercy. It imposes, in return, on the Chosen Nation, an inviolable fidelity toward God and the Covenant. It finds its most perfect expression in the Prayer of Isaiah [cf. 63:7,ff.], where the expression is found 3 separate times: ***You, Yourself, Yahweh, are our Father!***

c. If there is excluded any reference concerning the king [cf. 2 S 7:14; Ps 89:27], the invocation of God as Father is completely absent in the most ancient writings of Sacred Scripture:

- it is not really correct to bring forward the passages from Jr [cf. 3:4,19]: ... ***Even then you did not cry to Me: My Father!*** These passages may not be invocations so much, but inspirations from God directed through the Prophet for the instruction of Israel.

- There may, however, be some exceptions to the above-mentioned principle: ... ***Lord, Father, Master of my life...*** [cf. Si 23L1, 4] - ***..It is Your Providence, Father, that steers the ship...*** [Ws 14:3].

- However, these cases are relatively late, and do indicate a clear religious progress. These are texts tending toward the Christian era and one of the characteristics of this time is that of addressing God in a manner that is more personal.

- However, no one of these OT usages in any way truly prepares one for the unique use that Jesus makes of the familiar term, ***ABBA!***

2. In familiar usage, this term is used to designate one's own father according to the flesh. It is also known as an honorific title.

a. It is not rare to apply such a term to divine paternity – without some suffix or addition, it is never used as an invocation of God. Without some explanation, the use of such a term of intimate familiarity would indicate a lack of respect.

b. One fact seems quite clear: there is not a regular usage of this word in Hebrew prayer. Therefore, the presence of the Word ***ABBA*** on the lips of Jesus in His Prayer of Gethsemane is of immense importance:

1.] In the historical order it is very clear that never would the Christian community, both of Judaism, on its own, have used this term of such familiarity to describe God. Therefore, since the community would not have used the

term, many scholars believe that what we have here is a **clear indication that this is Jesus own word.**

2.] On the theological level, the importance is even more considerable: this is the very 'nerve center' of Jesus' relationship with the Heavenly Father. This is a clear indication for many of the consciousness that Jesus had of being the Son of God in the strict sense. Therefore, by the use of this term, Jesus reveals to us the 'Good News' of His intimate presence in the Most Blessed Trinity.

c. There are a few questions that come to mind:

1.] If, in the Gospels, **ABBA** is found only here [cf. Mk 14:36], what relationship does this term have with the habitual manner of Jesus' prayer to God, and what can one learn concerning the **relationship** between Jesus and His Father? The invocation of the Father with the title **ABBA** in the Agony of the Garden is not absolutely an isolated case. A great number of exegetes believes that **this would indicate Jesus' customary manner of addressing the Father.** There are many texts in which it is believed that the original form behind the present redaction could very well have included this special word of address. The following forms are often presented as possible places where Jesus would have used this word, **ABBA** :

- the nominative, with the article **ho pater** [cf. Mk 14:36; Mt 11:26; Lk 10:21];
- the nominative, without the article [cf. Jn 17:21, 24, 25];
- the vocative, without the interjection which should normally precede the use of **Father** [cf. Mt 11:25; Lk 10:21; 22:42; 23:34, 46; Jn11:41; 12:27, f.; 17:1, 5, 11];
- the vocative followed by a pronoun: **My Father** [cf. Mk 26:39, 25].

Even though these formulae are different regarding form, they do present an identical meaning, by the fact that they owe their origin to one and the same invocation: **ABBA** . In the Agony scene, as presented by the other Synoptics, this conclusion might be substantiated because of the expressions used: [cf. Mk 14:36: **ho Pater** ; Lk 22:42 – **Pater**; Mt 26:39: **Pater mou**]. Perhaps the most significant passage in this connection would be the Hymn of Jubilation:

*... I bless You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him ...* cf. Mt 11:25, ff.;, also Lk 10:21, f.].

This 'Hymn' reveals to us the intimate bond that unites Jesus to His Father, as well as the perfect and absolutely unique knowledge which Jesus possesses of the Father. This unveils as well the mysterious unity between Jesus and the Father which also will be brought out by Jn's Gospel.

**2.]** How is it that Paul would make use of this formula twice?

*... Everyone moved by the Spirit is the child of God. The spirit you received is not the spirit of slaves, bringing fear into your lives again; it is the spirit of sons and it makes us cry out: ABBA, Father!....* [Rm 8:15].

*... The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts: that spirit the cries ABBA, Father; and it is this that makes you a son, you are not a slave anymore; and if God has made you son, then He has made you heir ...* [Ga 4:6, ff.].

The reason that Paul would have these expressions seems to be that in Jesus, and by Him, there have been established **the unique bonds with God** elevating by far, the Covenant of the Old Law. In this, Jesus has fulfilled the prophetic oracles which promised through the generations a full manifestation of the Divine Paternity once the '**era of grace**' would dawn. Present in Christians, the Holy Spirit communicates to them **some participation in filial sentiments of Jesus** in regard to His Merciful Father. He makes them say with Jesus: **ABBA, Father!** These words are not limited, then, merely to Gethsemane: there are serious indications that would lead the careful exegete to conclude that this invocation would have been customary in Jesus' address to the Father.

**3.]** The question is often asked: what would have been the earliest presentation of the *Our Father*?

- that of Mt.: ***Our Father, in heaven...*** [6:9, ff.]

- or, that of Lk: ***Father, may Your Name be holy...*** [11:2, ff.]

There are many interpreters who believe that perhaps **ABBA** was in the opening words of the Lord's Prayer in the original – and, of course, there are many who do not so believe. Some of their reasons are as follows:

- while Jesus was on earth, He alone prayed by using the invocation: ABBA. He often said ***My Father... your Father,*** but never confused His own unique position toward the Father with that of His disciples. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel, the Father of Jesus only becomes the 'Father' of the disciples in the new and fuller sense, after the resurrection. This more unique relationship with the Father is the fruit of redemption. [cf. Jn 20:17].

- consequently, there are many scholars who believe that Mt's formula is the original. Lk's variation is explained by some who theorize that it corresponds to a Greek-Christian formula of the Lord's Prayer. Lk does not seem to have before him the teaching of Paul in these two texts [cf. Rm 8:15; Ga 4:6] - that the Christian makes his/ her own the filial sentiments of Jesus.

One indication that Lk may be later is that he uses the word sins – whereas Mt uses the more authentic Aramean word, debts.

**4.]** Why does Mt [cf. 14:6] follow the words ABBA in the Greek translation for 'Father'? this is also followed by Paul [cf. Rm 8:15; Ga 4:6]. [As for Paul, he might be referring to **a liturgical ceremony of Baptism** in which the *Our Father* would be recited – and there may be a possible trace in 1 P 1:17]. As for the text in Mk under discussion [cf. 14:36], it hardly seems possible that Jesus would have done the translation into the Greek during the His Prayer of Agony in Gethsemane. Some interpreters state that this is one of Mk's characteristics, that of translating foreign words, or the Semitic word [cf. 3:17; 7:11, 24; 15:22, 34]. However, in all of these passages, Mk explicitly points out that he is indeed translating, but he does not do this in Jesus' Prayer in Gethsemane.

Others have said that the formula **ABBA, Father** - was 'born' in the bi-lingual communities of the Early Church – in other words, in the Liturgy, an early attempt might be seen here of the vernacular tendency. This view is possible.

One indeed can maintain that Rm 8:15; Ga 4:6 reflect a liturgical use, but for Mk 14:36, it seems much more likely that he is simply the interpreter of Peter – in the Garden with Jesus. In later years, whenever the Prince of the Apostles recalled the Prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane, he reproduced the Aramean invocation **ABBA** which he himself had over-heard, half-asleep perhaps, in Gethsemane, which had made a lasting impression upon him – but he immediately would translate it for his listeners.

**3.** An invocation of this kind, indicating such personal intimacy with the Merciful Father would make an impression on any believer who would come to realize fully what is happening. However, one's astonishment – and perhaps even theological difficulty - increases when one sees **intimae filiation** on the one hand; and an apparent struggle of Wills on the other: ***But, let it be as You – not I – would have it!*** [Mk 14:36]. To interpret correctly the 'distance' and to seek to fathom somewhat its implications, it would seem useful here to recall the general data relative to the Person of Jesus Christ such as the Gospels present Him, and the NT revelation contemplates and reflects on Him.

**a.** In the Gospels at least 'implicitly', Jesus states that He is indeed the Son of God – the fact that Jesus is the Most Beloved, the Only Begotten, would already be

present in His calling on the Heavenly father as His unique **ABBA!** At the same time, Jesus presents Himself as ‘truly man’. Since He is truly man, it is necessary, in faith, to attribute to Him a human intelligence and will. The heresy known as Monothelism denied the two wills of Jesus.<sup>41</sup> The IIIrd Council of Constantinople responded:

**... And we preach, according to the doctrine of the Holy Fathers, two natural wills and two active principles, inseparably, immovably, undividedly and unconfusedly in Him [Christ]. And two natural wills, not opposing each other ... but His human will following without resistance or reluctance, but subject rather to his divine and omnipotent will... For, as blessed Athanasias says, the human will had to be moved to submit to the divine will ... [D-S # 556].**

**b.** Endowed with human will, by that very fact, Jesus enjoyed human freedom. This implies the power to determine for oneself, without any constraint. It is this power which constitutes one of the most noble prerogatives of the human being. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel, Jesus is presented as saying:

**... the Father loves Me because I lay down My life to take it up again. No one takes it from Me; I lay it down of My own free will, and as it is in My power to take it up again; this is the command I have been given by My Father ... [cf. Jn 10:17, ff.].**

It is clear that Jesus offers the sacrifice of His life to accomplish the prophecy of Is 53, to reconcile sinful humanity with God. One can only ‘merit’ with free acts: it is by meriting that Jesus saves humanity<sup>42</sup>. Thus, the evangelists, especially Mt & Jn, show in His arrest that Jesus **hands Himself over** freely [cf. Mt 26:52-54; Jn 18:4-11].

**c.** One difficulty that is sometimes alleged against these affirmations of Jesus’ freedom is the fact that He is presented consistently as a stranger to the whole sphere of sin: ***Can one of you convict Me of sin...?*** [Jn 8:46].

**1.]** The NT authors agree in understanding in the strict sense and apply to Jesus the oracle of Is 53, concerning the Suffering Servant. He was absolutely innocent, and yet delivered Himself up for humanity, taking on Himself the burden of all sin:

**... Yet He was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. On Him lies a punishment that brings us peace, and through His Wounds, we are healed ... [cf. Is 53:5; 1 P 2:22; 2 Co 5:21; 1 Jn 3:3; Heb 4:15; 7:26].**

<sup>41</sup> cf. M. L. Cozens, *A Handbook of Heresies*. London: Sheed & Ward 1928, 1974].

<sup>42</sup> It should be kept in mind, that merit, satisfaction are not the only categories at work in the salvation of the world. Paul points out that the resurrection also justifies us: ***...For our faith will be credited to us also if we believe in Him Who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, the Jesus who was handed over to death for our sins, and raised up for our justification ... [Rm 4:24, f.].***

**2.]** The Church Fathers and the theologians go even further: drawing all the consequences from the fact of the Incarnation, they teach the ‘impeccability’ of Jesus. For them, the Son of God, in taking on human nature, renders it above all fault. In Jesus, Life does not die; the Light is not extinguished; the Truth will not be corrupted: the humanity of Jesus has remained without sin.

**d.** To harmonize the doctrine with the presence of two wills in Christ, and true freedom, the whole question of liberty offers two aspects:

- the power of choosing: this is not an end in itself, but only a means. It is at the service of the power that follows;
- the power to accomplish for oneself. Free will is essentially this: it is the power enjoyed by a human person in communicating with the absolute.

Hence, it is not meant to be the power of choosing equally between good and evil: it is a power of choosing good for the betterment of human nature – and is also a power of choosing evil, through defect, always to the detriment of one’s nature.

**4.** In the Agony of the Garden, the freedom of Jesus is manifested throughout. It appears particularly in the manner which to Him was habitual, that His human will freely chose the divine will. There is no other indication in the Gospel of any hint, or hesitation on the part of Jesus. Gethsemane, in this sense, is unique. Ordinarily, Jesus had His eyes fixed on the Will of the Father, Whom He knew perfectly, and in Whom He so rejoiced as is brought out beautifully in the ‘Hymn of Jubilation’ [cf. Mt 11:25, ff.; Lk 10:21]. He states that His very nourishment is to do the Father’s Will, the Will of the One Who sent Him. He always does what is pleasing to the Father [cf. Jn 4:34; 8:29]. With all this, how does one begin to pierce the awesome mystery of Gethsemane?

**a.** To respond to Jesus; apparent hesitation in Gethsemane, some theologians [e.g., Franzelein, Petau (*‘Petavius’*)] stated that the Father really did not impose on Jesus with an absolute and imperative will, the sacrifice of His Will. This view maintains that the Father merely expressed a desire – so that Jesus could have given His preference to some other manner of redemption, and still remain perfectly agreeable to the Father.

This view simply does not measure up to the full biblical data as we have it. In the prophecies of the Passion, presented by the Synoptics, the Father’s Will as including the **Cup** of the Passion is simply seen as **a necessity** flowing from **the mysterious plan of God**. It was already prophesied in the OT as a must. In Jn’s Gospel, Jesus even speaks of a **commandment** that He has received from the Father to give His life [cf. Jn 10:18; 14:31].

**b.** Yet, on the other hand, it is not proper to speak of resistance on the part of Jesus, even of a passing nature –to the Father’s Will. The Prayer of the Agony in Gethsemane speaks of Jesus; submission in full to that divine will of the Father, whom He loves and wishes to express this as loving obedience to His Plan.

**c.** In this terrible moment, heaven seems to have been closed, become like bronze. Prior to this moment, the Father had never left Jesus **alone**:

*... Listen, the time will come – in fact ,it is already - when you will be scatted each one going his own way, and leaving Me alone. And yet, I am not alone, because the Father is with Me... [Jn 16:32].*

It was always in this being with the Father that Jesus based His own peace and sovereign independence. This permitted Him to give all to humanity, without asking anything from them, other than their turning toward His Father.

**d.** Now, though, the Father seems to have withdrawn, leaving Jesus bereft of all consolation, without apparent support. Having ceased to experience intimate communion with the Father, Jesus is plunged into the indescribable **Night** of incertitude, distance. Jesus in His Prayer of Gethsemane spoke almost as one to whom the will of the Father was a mystery. The heroic acceptance of the Father’s Will serves as a model for Christian Prayer.

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### [III] A COMPARISON BETWEEN THESE TWO ACCOUNTS OF GETHSEMANE: Mk & Mt

#### 1. Similarities

**a.** The first impression that is given by the successive reading of these two accounts for most is the great similarity that there is between them:

- there is the same formula of introduction, word for word [cf. Mk 14:26; Mt 26:30];
- there is the same conclusion; the resemblance is total, as far as the thought expressed,, and there are even the same words, for the most part;
- there is the same three-fold prayer of Jesus.

**b.** Perhaps the most important similitude would be in the details so carefully noted: the **Cup**, the heroic and freely consented **acceptance** of the father’s Plan; the **vigilance** demanded by Jesus; the antithesis between **flesh/ spirit**; the paradoxical synthesis of the **Son of Man of Dn** and the **Servant of Yahweh in Is**.

2. **Differences:** the major variations noted here are:

- i. the **Hour** as found in Mk and its explanation [cf. 14:35, 41];
- ii. the title **ABBA** [cf. 14:36].

a. **The Hour:** this was marked by the Father Himself [cf. 14:35] – and is the same as noted by Jesus a few verses later: **the Hour has come** [cf. v. 41] – now the Son of man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. In both these instances, the **Hour** is charged with a profound doctrinal meaning. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> instance noted here, the reading is just about the same as that found in Mt: ... **Now the hour has come when the Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners ...** [Mt 26:45].

b. **The title ABBA:** there is a notable absence of this title in Mt, but this lack is compensated by this fact: with even greater force than that found in Mk, Mt seems bent on inculcating within those who have contact with his Gospel the idea that Jesus is not only the Messiah promised in the OT, but further: **Jesus is the Son of the Living God!** This is what Peter had already proclaimed at Caesarea Philippi: **You are the Christ ... the Son of the Living God...!** [Mt 16:16]. It should be noted that only Mt has mentioned this **Confession** in such explicit terms, as it is lacking in the **Confession scene** in both Mk and Lk. And again, Mt has another statement missing from the others ... **No one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him ...** [Mt 11:27].

c. There are also further differences between the two Gethsemane accounts – that of Mk [cf. 14:32-42] and that of Mt [cf. 26:36-46]. While most of these may be classified as *redactional*, here are some of the more important variations:

- in Mk, there is an almost monotonous repetition of the conjunction **and** [*kai*] that binds the various passages one to the other. Mt, though, begins with the more stylish **then** [*tote* - cf. vv. 36, 38, 45]

- Mk opens his account with the third person plural, followed curiously with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person singular: ... **They came to a small estate called Gethsemane, and Jesus said ...** [Mk 14:32].

Mt, from the outset, makes Jesus the subject of the sentence – this is in accord with his style, in that Mt generally places **Jesus** at the head of the action and the dramatic developments. The mention of the Holy Name is much more frequent in Mt than it is in Mk or Lk.

- In Mk, there is a careful mention of the three disciples: Peter, James and John. Mt, though, writes: ... **Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee...** Commenting on this difference, some interpreters see in this Mt's [ecclesial] tendency to emphasize the

person of Peter. Others, though, see no doctrinal overtones here – and others attribute it merely to considerations of rhythm.

- Mt uses a rather generic verb: *lupeisthai: sadness came over Him* - whereas Mk employs the much more poignant: *ekthambesthai: sudden fear, distress, stupor*.

- Mk presents Jesus as *falling on the earth*, whereas Mt writes: *...He fell on His face...* - which seems to be a kind of more biblical expression, characteristic of prayer: *...Abraham bowed to the ground and God said this to him: Here is My Covenant with you...* [Gn 17:3] - *... Moses and Aaron fell down, face to the ground ...* [Nb 14:5].

- When for the third time Jesus comes toward His disciples, in Mt's account, He addresses Himself to all three of them. In Mk [Peter's 'friend'] , though, His reproach is directed more toward Peter.

- Mt does not note, as Mk does, how in the 2<sup>nd</sup> return of Jesus to the sleeping disciples that 'they did not know how to respond to Him.'

3. Other slight differences might also be noted: e.g., Mt writes: *... Stay here, while I go over there...* [26:36]. In Mk, the separation is less explicit: *... Stay here while I pray ...* [Mk 14:33].

a. As has been noted, there are parallels here with the sacrifice of **Abraham and Isaac** in Gn 22: *... then Abraham said to his servants: 'Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there; and we will worship and come back to you...* [Gn 22:5]. Yet, there are serious scholars who would doubt this parallel.

b. Some of the reasons that are alleged for the parallel between the two would be the following:

- in Mt, as in Gn, there is a clear connection between *stay here* and *go over there*;

- linguistically, both texts use a rare Greek word to express *here*, furthering the possibility that Mt's text took inspiration from the LXX version of Gn 22:5. It has been noted that this Greek expression is used only 12 times in the entire LXX, and only 6 times in the whole NT. Furthermore, in Mt, the word is only found here. A further argument might be the fact that the verb used with the Greek *here*, is only found in Gn 22:5 and Mt 26:36: *You remain HERE while I go over THERE*.

c. I In addition to these arguments from language, there might also be a doctrinal support for the parallel with Gn 22. The **typology Abraham/ Isaac/ Jesus** fits in well with the over-all plan of Mt. It may be noted:

- the religion of Christ is the development of that of ancient Israel;

- and the tragic fact that the Chosen people rejected the New Economy of grace. The People of God in Gethsemane are reduced to **Jesus alone**, the **only true child** of Abraham left in the scene:

- Mt emphasizes with much more energy that it is in Jesus Christ and in Him alone, that all the promises made to Abraham are fulfilled. Abraham the great ancestor of the Chosen People peaks in Jesus Christ.

- There is thus explained the genealogy, beginning with Abraham, by which Mt =initiates his gospel: **Jesus, Son of David, son of Abraham** [1:1]: Jesus is introduced as the descendant of Abraham and David, the Depositary of the promises made to the Patriarchs and the New David.

- In biblical language, the verb *to generate* is completed by a broader idea: it implies raising up, **to make appear, to give life in a general manner, to establish in a certain dignity, or service** [cf. 2 Tm 2:23; Ga 4:24; 1 Co 4: 15; Ps 2:7]. Judaic rabbinic writings often apply this verb to the **Master-Disciple relationship**.

- It is therefore possible that Mt is presenting two parallel actions of God for reflection:

- God is raising up a people for Abraham;

- And he is raising up a posterity for Jesus of the spiritual order ,as was already done for the Suffering Servant: **... If he offers his life in atonement, he shall see his heirs, he shall have a long life, and through him what Yahweh wishes will be done ...** [Is 53:10].

**d.** In addition to the analogy of their function that places Abraham at the origin of the First People of God, and Jesus as **the Head of the New People of God**, one might further discern another common denominator between Abraham and Gethsemane. Jesus is **submitted** to a terrible **trial** on the **Mount of Olives** – as Abraham was on **Mount Moriah**: both of these can be thought of as a **temptation/trial** [cf. Gn 22:1]. This particular type of **trial** has as its conclusion a **heroic submission to the Will of God**. Repeatedly in Scripture, Abraham is celebrated for having been **faithful in his trial**:

**... Abraham, the great forefather of a host of nations, no one was ever his equal in glory. He observed the Law of the Most High, and entered into a Covenant with Him. He confirmed the Covenant in his own flesh and proved himself faithful under the ordeal...** [Si 44:19, ff.].

**... Was not Abraham tried and found faithful, was not that counted as making him just?** [1 M 2:22].

**... It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though the promises had been made to him ... he was confident that God had the power even to raise the dead...** [Heb 11:17, ff.].

Elsewhere, in the NT, it is rather the conduct of the Heavenly Father in giving us his Only-begotten Son which is compared to that of Abraham, consenting to hand over Isaac [cf. Rm 8:32; Jn 3:16]. With such support, it can indeed be maintained that the conduct of Jesus in Gethsemane [cf. Mt 26:36] is implicitly at least comparable to that of Abraham on Moriah.

e. As is well known, there are perhaps two stages in the prayer of Jesus as presented by Mt:

- the first time that Jesus speaks of the **Cup**, we read: **...Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, let it be as You, not I would have it...** [Mt 26:39].

- the second time, the prayer is even more simple: **... My Father, if this cup cannot pass by without My drinking it, Your will be done!** [v. 42].

Under this second form, the careful reader is led to think of the great lesson Jesus gave concerning prayer, the **Our Father**.

- this solemnity of Gethsemane would in no way imply, therefore, that this special prayer should be reserved to Jesus alone. The *Our Father* is a prayer of hope for all the Just who are sorely **tried**.

- **Your will be done!** [Mt 26:42] does not find an exact parallel in Mk. Mt's wording in v. 39: **...My Father, if it is possible...** - except for the notable absence of the expression **ABBA** found in Mk, is almost the same as found in Mt: the sense of both prayers is the same.

- it would seem rather exaggerated, as some do, to contrast the two levels of Jesus' prayer in Mt [vv.39 & 42], as indicating a kind of progression in the will of Jesus Christ of the acceptance of the Father's Will. Many commentators maintain that in both verses, Jesus expresses the full willingness to accept the Father's Will, as this is unfolding before Him.

f. In Mt's Gospel, there does seem to be some insistence on the words **with Him: Could you not watch WITH ME...** repetition of the wishes of Jesus that the disciples be **with Him**, the first Gospel brings out the more the **terrible solitude** that Jesus is called upon to suffer. The New People of God begins with Jesus alone – and children of Abraham are all gone now, the People of God in Gethsemane has been whittled down to **Jesus alone**.

#### [IV] Mt's OVER-ALL DOCTRINAL PERSPECTIVE AND ITS EFFECT ON GETHSEMANE

1. While a superficial reading of the Gethsemane account – and other ‘parallel places’ – might lead one to think there is mere repetition, a careful study brings out the doctrinal emphases proper to each Evangelist. This does appear when one tries to compare just the accounts of Mt and Mk.

a. Common to all three Synoptics, the theme of the **reign of God** [or, *of Heaven* ] is most specially a fundamental data of the 1<sup>st</sup> Gospel. The term **Kingdom** is found **55 times in Mt; 18 x in M; 45 x in Lk**. Destined to re-establish the royal authority of God over humanity, this Kingdom is present; it is found in the Church, called to continue Jesus’ work on earth. The whole life of the Church is itself oriented towards a 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of the Kingdom that of its final consummation.

b. The Jerusalem Bible has characterized Mt’s Gospel as a **drama in seven acts concerning the Kingdom of Heaven**:

- its preparation [1, 2];
- the promulgation of its program [3-7];
- the missionary preaching [8-10];
- the obstacles meet [11-13:52];
- the beginning in a group of disciples, under the leadership of Peter [13:53-18:35];
- the crisis that prepares its definitive coming – 19-25];
- the ‘event’ itself, in the sufferings of the Passion, the triumph of the resurrected [26-28].

c. Mt presents Jesus as a **New Moses**, infinitely superior to the old. He is presented as the sole and definitive Master of Humanity. By His actions and words, Jesus establishes the **New Israel**. Just as in the Pentateuch, Mt synthesizes Jesus’ teachings in five Discourses, and each of these ends with the same formula, imitated from the OT: **... Jesus had finished what He wanted to say...** [cf. Mt 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1 – cf. similar expressions in the OT: Nb 16:31; Dt 32:45; 1 S 24:17]. Prepared by narrative sections, these five Discourses each present a different aspect of the Kingdom of Heaven, and they all have the **Church** in mind. This new community is called upon to nourish herself ceaselessly by the examples and the lessons left by her Founder.

d. The Gospel of Mt is the **Ecclesial Gospel**, *par excellence*. In this way, Mt was used by the Primitive Church [and St Dominic, Founder of the Order of Preachers]. It is evident from early Church writers [e.g. St. Irenaeus], Mt served as

**the normative writing** for the Christian life. The basic concern of Mt was that the Church might measure and examine her life on that of Jesus.

e. One might easily conclude, then, how Mt – inspired with t his idea – could here and there impress on the sources that he used, an orientation destined to make this material immediately useful for the early communities. Just 2 examples might bear this out:

**1.]** In Lk [12:57-59], there is the recommendation to come to some understanding with one's adversary before appearing in a tribunal. This is an appeal for **conversion** addressed to the Jewish People in the perspective of Divine Judgment that is about to fall on the nation. When it comes, it will then be too late to **convert**, to do penance. In Mt [5:25, ff.], the same counsel is addressed to humanity of all time – not just to that limited historical context.

**2.]** In Lk [15:2-7] the parable of the Lost Sheep illustrates the extraordinary **Mercy** of Jesus regarding sinners. In Mt [18:12-14] this same parable is used as an invitation to those who are strong in the Christian community to lead back the weak and dispersed. It does not seem to some interpreters that these parables were pronounced twice. If this is accepted, many think that maybe Lk represents the earlier interpretation. What Mt seems to have done is to have made an application, that is quite legitimate, of the words of Jesus to the life of the Church.

**2.** These preliminary ideas concerning the Gospel of Mt in general, may now be applied to the account of the 1<sup>st</sup> Gospel of the Passion in general – and more particularly, to the Gethsemane account.

a. A very important passage in Mt's account of the Passion where the **ecclesial** dimension is pronounced is the solemn declaration of Jesus before the Sanhedrin: *...Moreover, I tell you, that from this time onward, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of Heaven...* [Mt 26:64]. This declaration is at the very heart of the drama, and it is because of this statement that Jesus is subsequently judged as guilty of blasphemy, and therefore, death [cf. Mt 26:54, f.]. However, the **ecclesial meaning** of this text will appear clearly only when it is placed in connection with other earlier data as this unfolds in Mt – such as these three elements:

- the Kingdom of the Son of Man in the parable of the **wheat and cockle**;
- the announcement of the foundation of the Church in the scene of **Caesarea Philippi**;
- lastly, the perspective of the **New Israel**, governed by the Apostles [cf. Mt 19:28]

**1.] The Parable of the Darnel** [cf. Mt 13:24-30, 36-43]: there are many exegetes who believe that in this Parable of the reign of the Son of Man, there are still **offences and evil** [cf. v. 41]. This is a realistic description of the Church, that cannot as yet be perfectly identified with the Kingdom of the Father. The Church, or the seed of the Kingdom within it, has not yet reached its final consummation, where there will eventually be only the *just* [cf. Mt 13:41-43]. Jesus has said that the field where the good seed has been planted is the world [cf. v. 38]. The domain of the Kingdom is meant to invite the whole world – this would eliminate any idea of a community closed in on itself [a ghetto – a ‘Noah’s Ark for just a few].

**2.] The Confession at Caesarea Philippi** [cf. Mt 13:13-19]: the same connection between the Son of Man and the Church is found also here. In Dn’s vision, the Son of Man is inseparable from the Saints of the Most High. In other words, the messianic Community will share in the privileges and the destiny of the Son of Man. In this present passage, there exists an intimate relationship between the recognition of Peter for the transcendence of the Son of Man, and the promise made by Jesus of the Foundation of the Church. Whatever Peter, the Head of the Apostles will do on earth, the Son of Man will ratify in heaven.

**3.] The New Israel governed by the Apostles** [cf. Mt 19:28]: ... ***You yourselves will sit on the 12 Thrones to judge the 12 Tribes of Israel ...*** . While the Son of Man reigns in the heavens seated on His Throne of Glory, the Apostles on earth will participate in His royalty and government in His Name, exercising authority over the 12 Tribes of Israel, i.e., the New Israel, the People of God.

**b.** Once again, it is in this connection between the Son of Man and the Church that can explain the enigmatic declaration by Jesus before the Sanhedrin [cf. Mt 26:64]. Mt adds a precise insight: ... ***From this time onward*** ... - which is absent in Mk. The coming of the Son of Man on the clouds is a symbolic manner borrowed from Dn to affirm the inauguration of His Kingdom on earth. Jesus will be in the heavens, seated at the right hand of the Power. At the same time, He will be coming on the clouds, and will rule the Church until the ultimate stage of the *Parousia*.

**c.** In the **JB** commentary of this passage, the Jews will see Jesus in glory, first in the glory of the resurrection, and then in the glory of the Church. When Mt writes: ***From this moment onward*** - he is showing that the death of Jesus is the decisive moment. This indicates the end of the old era. There is mention of cosmic repercussions: the earth that trembles, the rocks that are rent. All of this marks the beginning of the new era, calling to mind the resurrection. The Confession of Faith of the **Centurion** is also placed in intimate connection with all this upheaval, and it is also extended to His companions. this **confession** is not so much the conviction of an individual, but much more an indication that the faith has come to a representative

of the non-believing world. this movement of **conversion** is destined to have a broad extension.

**d.** There are also **ecclesial perspectives** in Gethsemane:

**1.]** Emphasis on the **WITH ME**: Jesus insists that the Apostles should keep **vigil WITH HIM**, that they should have **watched WITH HIM** [cf. Mt 26:38, 40]. The need of **BEING WITH JESUS** is the ideal presented to the early Church. It is the Lord calling out to his community even today, in Mt's rendition, asking the Church of all time to be **WITH HIM, in VIGILANT** prayer. It is also pointed out that the one who drew the sword to defend Jesus [cf. Mt 26:51] simply showed that he understood so very little of Jesus and His coming. So, the appeal made by Jesus in His prayer of Gethsemane to be **WITH HIM**, can best be understood in the over-all **ecclesial context** of the 1<sup>st</sup> Gospel.

**a.]** One of Mt's first affirmations is that the Coming of Jesus into this world fulfills the oracle of Isaiah concerning the Birth of the Messianic Child, called **Emmanuel**. And Mt spells out what this word means: **GOD WITH US**. [cf. 1:22, f]. this shows that from the outset, Mt is presenting Jesus as a very special presence of God for the **New Israel**. This special presence, then, will be carried on in an effective manner even after the earthly sojourn of Jesus – he will remain in and through his Church. Mt explains what **Church** means later in his gospel: **For where two or three meet in my Name, I shall be there WITH THEM ...** [18:20]. This same truth is found proclaimed under another form by the Risen Jesus, in His **Farewell to the Apostles: ... And know that I am WITH YOU always; yes, to the end of time ...** [28:20].

**b.]** However, while the initiative is with Jesus, the entire work of redemption is not reserved to Him. He appeals for **cooperation**. It is necessary for the disciples that they respond to Jesus' initiatives and that they do all in their part to remain **WITH HIM**. They are called to work **WITH HIM**, and to **watch and pray WITH HIM** through the ages. This is the precise meaning of the parables [cf. Mt 24:45 - the Conscientious Steward; 25:30, the Parable of the Talents] – and they express what ought to be the life of the Church during all the time that unfolds from the Ascension of Jesus to His *Parousia*. The faithful Servant, the Steward of the House of Jesus ought, in His absence to give nourishment to those working in this House. Each of the servants of Jesus is called to develop the gifts that have been entrusted to them. The Virgins are called to keep the candles lit, while they await His coming, the **Messianic Spouse**. In all of this, there is evident a kind of **Eschatological Synthesis**.

**c.]** It seems certain that Mt's scene of the Agony would remind the careful reader of this Parable of the **10 Virgins** – which is proper to the 1<sup>st</sup>

Gospel and whose ecclesial orientation is clear. In both cases, there is an explicit appeal for **vigilance** [cf. Mt 25:23; 26:38, 41]:

- in both instances, **sleep** impedes the **vigilance** [cf. 25:5; 26:40, 43];
- in Gethsemane, the insistence is on **WITH ME** – in the parable, it is on **WITH HIM** [cf. 25-10].

The implication is that in order to merit to enter **with Jesus** into the festive banquet hall, it is necessary to have **watched and prayed with Him** all through one's life.

**d.]** Jesus also insists on His being **with those** who remain faithful: ***I shall not drink the wine until the day I drink with you in the Kingdom of the Father ...*** [cf. 26:29]. The over-all context would also invite one to think of the **sacramental** reception of the Body and Blood of Christ, as the guarantee of being **WITH JESUS** for the **eschatological banquet – forever**.

**2.]** A second manifestation of the **ecclesial** orientation of the Gethsemane scene in Mt is the reference made to the *Our Father*, the Prayer of the **ecclesial Community**. These analogies with the *Our Father* may also be continued and applied to Jn 17.

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**SECOND EXCURSUS: FOUR INTERPRETATIONS OF THE**  
***SWEAT, LIKE DROPS OF BLOOD***

[I] **Mario Gallizzi<sup>43</sup>**

1. Such blood in the old Greek tradition is intimately associated with intense sweat. It is not so much the result of fear as it is due to the fact that one is deeply moved to intense activity. In any case, such intense sweat is always presented as the natural effect of struggle, or of the tension of the athlete. The possibility that it would become similar, like great drops of blood, is one way of bringing out that the struggle or the tension of the athlete is extreme. There are only a few places where the word is even used:

*... With sweat on your brow, you shall eat your bread, until you return to the soil, as you were taken from it ...* [Gn 3:19].

*... For us who have undertaken the drudgery of this abridgment, this has been no easy task, but a matter of sweat and midnight oil...* [2 M 2:26].

2. These two texts show that it is by the ***sweat of one's brow***, meaning only with expending great energy will one bring to term his/ her life's challenge. There is implied here [as also in some apocryphal works] that in the ideal, **martyrdom** is a privileged way to follow the Lord. There is implied the imagery from the world of sports: the great endurance needed in the long-distance runner, the pugilist in the arena. In the apocryphal description of **the martyrdom of Eleazar**, there are many details added not contained in the biblical account [cf. 2 M 6:18, ff.]. In the ancient tradition, **martyrs** were considered 'necessary': there have to be those who will serve the **Torah** faithfully, even to the giving of their blood, and who are willing to struggle through to the end for the faith.

3. While there is not a perfect parallel between this martyrdom of Eleazar and that of Jesus, both are presented in the context of the Greek athletes' *agonia*. Jesus enters His, as He prepares to enter into **the decisive battle**. Like an athlete, He concentrates - harbors all His strength, and with ***even more insistent prayer***, He seeks the help of the **Father** - from Whom alone will come the **final victory**. This ***greater insistence*** even in prayer implies also the idea of struggle and constancy. Lk then offers a kind of description of the intensity of Jesus' struggle: ***His sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood...***

4. The image of Jesus, **reacting energetically and decisively** to the situation of the awesome ***temptation/ trial*** is thus perfect. Jesus enters into the enclosed arena, expresses with supreme insistence His need for help from the Father. His ***agonia*** is

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<sup>43</sup> o.c., pp. 178, ff.

noted by *the sweat that looks like blood*. He gives Himself totally to His ordeal, and thus He is an example for the Christian of all times.

**Gallizzi's Conclusion:** Jesus' sweat is NOT blood – it just looks like it, or, is compared to it.

[II] David Stanley, SJ <sup>44</sup>

[ ... more than probably, Lk 22: 43, f. are not authentic ... ]

The Jesuit scholar brings out the textual problem: he notes that scholars have unearthed in their view strong reasons for considering Lk 22:43,, ff., as an intrusion into the original account – the story of the angels, the sweat falling like clots of blood. There are various [six ?] reasons for saying this:

- first of all, these two verses do not appear in a recent critical edition of the Greek text of Lk. <sup>45</sup> The reason for this omission is that these two verses are missing from some ancient manuscripts. Fr. Stanley concludes: 'From the view point of the science of textual criticism, the passage is certainly inauthentic' – a view that may not shared by all.
- further, these verses seem to disturb an otherwise balanced narrative;
- other than here, in all of Lk's Gospel, Jesus nowhere else manifests any violent emotions. The Lucan Jesus is already markedly different from the Marcan Jesus, showing Jesus angry, impatient. Lk does have Jesus weeping over Jerusalem [cf. 19:4], but in a restrained way;
- in Lk, angels appear only in the Infancy narratives and in the post-resurrection scenes. There seems to be 'poor timing', with the angel strengthening Jesus, but His **anguish** only continues, and leads to the 'sweat of blood';
- in Lk, there is a verse full of ***hapax legomenoi***, words that appear only in this verse.
- it was once argued that these two verses were omitted from some early manuscripts because of the Arianists. However, there is also one major manuscript that pre-dates the Arians by a century, and the verses do not appear.

For these six reasons, Fr. Stanley makes the following observations:

[1] The opinion favoring *non-authenticity* is the more probable.

<sup>44</sup> *Jesus in Gethsemane*. New York: Paulist 1984, pp. 265, ff.

<sup>45</sup> *The Greek NT*. Ed. by Aland, Black, Metzger, Wurtemberg 1966.

[2] Yet, the inspired character of these verses does seem assured – furthermore the Council of Trent has accepted the entire Lucan Gospel, ‘with all its parts’. At the time of the reformation, these verses [along with the ‘longer ending of Mk’ (cf. 16:9, ff.) and the story of the adulteress (cf. Jn 7:53-8:11)] were the subject of debate, but included in the *De Fide* statement that all these verses indeed are revealed by God.

[3] Therefore: Fr. Stanley is convinced that the *sweat like clots of blood*, is introduced merely as a graphic image rather than a realistic description.<sup>46</sup>

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### [III] G.G. Gamba<sup>47</sup>

1. As is already known, this particularity of Jesus’ bloody sweat on the occasion of His Prayer in Gethsemane after the Last Supper, is proper to Lk’s Gospel. It is also true that its presence in the manuscript tradition – as well as the visit of the Angel – has led to much discussion among the scholars preparing the critical edition of the text. It should also be pointed out, however, that even among them, **there is not any uniformity of opinion on the matter**. In earlier critical editions, these two verses of Lk [vv.43, 44] appeared only in the footnotes; in the most recent editions, the verses appear in the text, but in parenthesis. Some interpreters maintain it would be easier to understand the omission of such ‘extraordinary’ language concerning Jesus Christ, than would be the interpolation. Good reasons for the omission/ presence of these two verses is the occasion of much discussion. However, **as other scholars considered thus far, for our purposes, we will accept these verses as part of Lk’s Gospel, and that their proper place is here.**

2. In the Greek text, as it has come down to us, there could be some slight variations, but none of these would affect the discussion of their content. As has been noted, in the one verse ff, Lk uses four separate words that are **nor used anywhere else *agonia, ekstenestron, thromboi, idros***. These add considerably to the wonder of these lines.

3. Furthermore, as has already been noted, the Greek ***agonia*** is a technical term derived from the world of sports, indicating one engaged in most harsh combat, or struggle. The word indicates that particular state of tension deep within the athlete, as the difficult contest is about to get underway. In the classical descriptions, it is presented as showing the athlete poised, perhaps pale, tense, maybe even trembling. As the great struggle gets underway, the seriousness of the event becomes more evident. This is not merely a description of fear in the usual sense - the whole context

<sup>46</sup> Stanley, *Jesus in Gethsemane*. Pp. 219, ff.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Il sudore di snague di Gesu’ al giardino delgi ulivi’, in: *Sangue e antropologia biblica*. Roma: Pia Unione del Preziosissimo Sangue. 1981. Vol II, pp. 689-713.

emphasizes the more the effects of that interior consideration One might be reminded of the 'face-off' [hockey], or the 'kick-off' [football] – the presentation of the fighters, the introduction of the runners. The doctors of classical times termed these manifestations as a suffering, and a passion. The Latin writers translate the *agonia* as *trepidatio*, but this is a technical term.

4. Lk's description: *in His anguish, He prayed more earnestly* - coming as it does, immediately on the comfort brought by the Angel, has also caused much discussion. As a result, some would suggest other readings of *in His anguish*. Some suggestions are: *entering into a new state of concentration* - or, *concentrating Himself now all the more*. This would show that this entire passage is but a preparation for the Drama of the Cross. The *trial, par excellence* is coming and this is the Preface. And Lk, with much skill, would merely be showing the interior increase in intensity of the *psyche* of Jesus. Lk makes no distinction of the privileged disciples as do Mt and Mk – the whole episode has all of them in mind. The **Prayer of Jesus is presented as the ideal for all times** – complementing now by his own example, what he had already taught [cf.11:1, ff.].

a. The key aspects of this prayer as presented by Lk would be union with the Father's will, even to the full sacrifice of His own life [cf. 2:49; 4:1-13, 17, 43; 9:31; 18:31-34]. Even here in the *agonia* Jesus never separates Himself from **the divine salvific will**.

b. The implication here is that when prayer is so perfectly brought into harmony with the will of God [cf. 11:1-13; 18:1-8], it will of necessity be heard by God. The first response to the Prayer of Jesus is the **comforting Angel**, emphasizing the fact that prayer is indeed heard by God.

c. Continuing the typology of the world of sport, some read this comforting angel like one of those trained to bring relief, restore the tiring athlete – to restore His strength between 'rounds', or laps' or tennis 'sets' – to enable the long-distance runner to finish the marathon. [In ancient Greece, there were the highly trained 'messengers']. These 'managers', 'handlers', would whisper into the ear certain strategies, encouragement and comfort. Philo described Jacob in his struggle in Gn 22 as the champion of virtue.

d. Lk does not specify the nature of the 'comfort' the Angel brought to Jesus. There may be some insight in Hebrews:

*... Let us not lose sight of Jesus, Who leads us in our faith, and brings it to perfection; for the sake of the joy which was still in the future, He endured the Cross, disregarding the shamefulness of it, and from now on, has taken His place at the right hand of God's throne ... [12:2].*

e. The fact is that immediately following this angelic comfort, there is an increase in the intensity of the Prayer. The athletic symbolism goes on – in that the fighter has received fresh instructions, and returns to the furious fray with added strength. There is here the supreme concentration of the athlete – the grueling contest has entered its final phase.

f. In this symbolism of the athlete, Gamba would read that the **sweat** was so intense that it almost **seemed as though it were drops of blood** coming from the vital spirit of the Champion. Jesus is the supreme athlete, perfectly prepared for this **terrible ordeal**, and is contrasted so deftly from the lesser contestants, His own disciples, who allow themselves to be overcome in the struggle, and simply give up [cf. Lk 22:45, ff.].

g. With this, the betrayer enters the ring. From now on, Jesus more and more seems to come across as the *stronger*, able to defend His own house [cf. 11:20, ff.]. His 'strength' is evident in telling the disciple to put away the sword as unnecessary. In Peter's shameful denial, Jesus just **looks at him** from a position of quiet strength. He never even opens His mouth in self-defense. He offers comfort to the women who pity Him. He prays for those who have hurt Him, they **just do not know that they are doing!** Finally, He assures the Good Thief of a special place in the Kingdom. His whole attitude is one of serene **abandonment** into the hands of the Heavenly Father.

5. The withdrawal of the Angel [the 'manager', the 'coach', the 'handler', in athletic terms] indicates that the harsh contest is about to begin its crucial phase. A certain tension, a silence almost, as Jesus is about to be tried as all of us are to be [cf. Heb 4:15]. Lk emphasizes this last minute scene just prior to the unfolding of the real drama of the Passion and Death. This is why He insists on Jesus' **more insistent prayer**, and drops of sweat **like blood**.

a. The whole section is so full of words that are not used anywhere else in all of Scripture. There might be a kind of 'parallel place' earlier in Lk:

**... Then He started to teach...** [3:15] – a kind of introduction of Jesus into the Agony scene. There is a strong appeal then found in Hebrews [12:1, ff.], that we are all to **keep running steadily in the race we have started**.

b. Lk almost seems to present the gospel era as a kind of Olympic game with all the grueling contests before the crowning of the Champion. All the **followers of Christ** are called to participate in these 'games'. The use of athletic terminology so readily understood in Lk's environment, would seem to be an excellent way of presenting Christ and the struggle of life. A soldier might see Christianity as a **Spiritual Combat** – a lawyer could see it as a challenging **trial** – demanding **Faithful Witnesses**.

Her Lk uses terminology from the popular world of sports. Jesus is presented as the Champion – the point of reference, the legendary hero, Whom all the aspiring champions are called to imitate.

c. Once again, contact from on high appears in Jesus' life in the crucial moments of His Mission. At the Baptism [cf. 3:22], the voice of the Father is heard, expressing divine favor – and then Jesus [after His genealogy] is led out into the desert for the Temptations. The 'Baptized' is truly a child of God, freely delivered from any slavery to Satan.

d. In Gethsemane, Jesus is shown to be at the height of His *athletic career*, taking on the **trial** of His entire life. He is the perfect age – even Aristotle maintained that the heights of a human beings' productive career happened between the ages of 30-35. Once more, sustained by the Power of the Spirit, or the Angel, Jesus goes into the contest with the assurance of final victory. The formidable adversary will be ultimately confronted in this 'showdown': the **appointed time** for the return of Satan, already noted in the temptation scene of Lk [cf.3:13] has come.

e. The earlier 'contests' described in the temptations in the desert [cf.4:1-13], are placed in doctrinal dependence on the culminating drama of the Cross. Both in His Baptism in the Jordan [cf.3:23]. Jesus is prepared by this Baptism of Water for the trials of the desert. Here in Gethsemane, once more comforted from on high, in His Baptism of Blood, Jesus goes forward to meet the foe. In both situations – in the Jordan and in Gethsemane – Jesus is about to face the **ordeal**.

f. The Prayer of Jesus is presented as one of the 'constants' for the great spiritual athlete of all time. This needs for insistent prayer, to keep oneself athletically in shape, for the **spiritual ordeal**, is described by Jesus in His parable of the unscrupulous judge and the importunate widow [cf. Lk 18:1, ff.]. **Insistence on prayer** is a Pauline-Lucan theme [cf. Ac 1L14| 2L42| 6L4| Rm 12:12; 15:30; 1 Co 7:5; Col 4:2; 1 Tm 5:5; Ep 6:17, ff.].

g. This attitude of Jesus warming up for the terrible encounter, through the necessary means of prayer, is not presented as pertaining merely to Jesus, which is done in an excellent manner. This example of prayer is presented by Lk as a lesson for the other athletes: still in training for the decisive encounter.

h. In the Jordan scene [cf. Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10], the Synoptics refer to the Prayer of Jesus in a specific manner. Lk often shows Jesus in this attitude [cf. 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 29; 11:1]. In Gethsemane, Lk does not give much expression to the posture assumed by Jesus in prayer, but he does relate the words that He addressed to His heavenly Father.

i. Lk gives much insistence to the subjective state of mind of Jesus here. The regime that Jesus follows is full of promise for budding athletes who will follow His career, and they are thus assured of being ultimately victorious in the competition. The sleeping disciples, in such sharp contrast to the **alert prayer of Jesus** [cf. 22:45, f.] is full of **catechetical value** for the disciples of all ages.

j. Therefore, the formula used in Gethsemane – and the formula used for the undertaking of His public life are very similar: ... **When He started to teach, Jesus was about 30 years old ...** [3:23] - ... **In His anguish, He prayed more earnestly ...** [22:44].

6. If the foregoing explanations of the athletic symbolism are correct, a closer look at two expressions seems to be in order: ... **He prayed even more earnestly – He sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood...**

a. The last hours of the ‘man’ Jesus, beyond any doubt, would have constituted a unique experience for Him. While there are interpreters who would uniquely accentuate the aspect of anguish, despair, moral fear – there are also deeper levels of interpretation. The disciples were witnesses to this Prayer to some extent. By their astonishment, and their scandal, they were indeed ‘guilty bystanders.’

b. In the crucial hours, Jesus was fully conscious of what was waiting Him. The Mystery of Iniquity was coming to a culminating point in the drama of redemption.

c. This ‘intuition’ on the part of Jesus of what was being prepared for Him, would have had to have had some effect on His physical, human nature. There would of necessity have had to have been gestures, words, physiological phenomena that would not have escaped the weary witness of the Apostles. All of the evangelists attest, in one way or another, to the presence of the disciples [cf. Mt 26:26-46; Mk 14:21-42; Lk 22:39-47; Jn 18:1, ff. 0 cf. also Jn 12: 23, 27-29 – perhaps also Heb 5:7, ff.; I 12:2].

d. Thus, even though Lk alone mentions it, the sweat of blood in great abundance could very well have been some extraordinary physiological experience endured by Jesus in this awful moment- and needless to say, it would have made a profound impression on anyone who might have seen it. Lk here would be a rather unique historian – and yet, would retain his doctrinal and *paranetic* scope. The sweating of blood – even though not mentioned by either Mk or Mt – by no means would have excluded them.

e. The medical *praxis* of the time seems to have shown an extraordinary interest in sweat. It indicated a sign of particular stress, or psychological phenomena.

All agree that sweat accompanies situations of fear and extremely intense **anguish** – and surely these are some of the indication received from Mt and Mk, in their descriptions of Jesus in this terrible moment. Yet, even though Mt and Mk do offer precious insights into this condition of Jesus at this time, they do not mention the bloody sweat. Only Lk mentions it, and he presents it in a context of the athlete posed for the challenging **ordeal**.

f. If this Gethsemane scene is indeed to be read in the light of symbolism taken from the final match for the championship in some extremely grueling athletic event, some would see that in a way, this symbolism might even permeate all of Lk's Gospel. Just as Jesus is **about to being His public life**, He endured the ordeal of the desert- so now, in the culminating moments of His entire Mission, the **ordeal** is even more intense.

g. Therefore, the **bloody sweat** is used by Lk simply to indicate the particular psychological condition, an imagery drawn from Plato, speaking of the ultimate sweat. This is the moment of the final encounter, upon which depends the whole outcome of the long struggle of Jesus' entire Mission. All of the rest of the activities presented by Lk of Jesus' Mission were along the lines of the preliminary bouts, before the **championship match**. Which is about to be fought now, and to show that this Unique, and highly tuned, well prepared **athlete of God** is ready, His concentration, His taking one of the formidable Adversary is described figuratively in the bloody sweat. The implication is that even though it will be an **ordeal**, Jesus is fully confident of **final victory**.

### Summary

[1] If one will accept the symbolism taken from the world of sports, the phenomenon of the bloody sweat is presented as most intimately connected with the **more intense prayer**. All of this simply intends to express, according to Gamba's interpretation, the intense desire, the exquisite preparation of Jesus, and His total commitment to the decisive contest that gets underway in Gethsemane. The real **ordeal** is to accept the Father's will for **the universal salvation of all human beings**.

[2] Lk's main concerns are not historical in the sense of **chronology**. As a doctor [?], Lk would not be taken in by any extraordinary data – Lk would be explaining here a truly human being, confronting a terribly extraordinary situation. The supreme test is coming, the **trial of the Cross**. Lk speaks of this bloody sweat only here in the preparatory phase of the ultimate encounter. In the Jordan, Jesus was only in the early warm-up for the great match. He went through the early phase of training with no sweat.

[3] In Gethsemane, the situation is totally different: the championship match is about to begin. Jesus is here offering His greatest lesson: ... ***There is a baptism that I must still receive and how great is My distress until it is over...!*** [12:50]. Jesus also gives a lesson on **perseverance**: ... ***In the fight against sin, you have not yet had to keep on fighting to the point of death... !*** [cf. Heb 12:4]. Jesus has undergone this **terrible fight** for His 'own' – they are called to **follow the Lamb wherever He goes!**

[4] Paul offers an excellent reflection that might be applied as a Meditation on the Mystery of Gethsemane:

*... Since God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that He will not refuse anything He can give. Can anyone condemn those God has chosen? ... For I am certain of this: neither death, nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height, or depth, not any created thing – can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord ...* [Rm 8:31-39].

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[IV] A. Feuillet<sup>48</sup>

#### ***Luke the Doctor, describes a Real Happening***

[1] The opinions presented thus far are a modern phenomenon. The 'classical' opinion concerning the bloody sweat of Gethsemane is offered by M.J. Lagrange, OP, in his Commentary on Luke. Fr. Lagrange states that Lk writes with the **starkness of a pathologist**, offering us a literal description of what happened in Gethsemane. Lk uses technical language known to the medical profession [cf. Col 4:14], rather than symbolic language from the field of sports. Repeatedly in his Gospel and in Ac, Lk uses **medical language**.

[2] It is true that these two verses [Lk 22:43, 44] are missing from a number of manuscripts of primary importance- but they are presenting many others!

[3] St. Ambrose and St. Cyril of Alexandria in their commentaries on Lk have no mention of these verses. However, Hilary and Jerome do comment on them. The Council of Trent did make a definition concerning these, in that there was much discussion on whether or not these verses were canonical.

[4] Interpretation:

<sup>48</sup> *L'agonie de Gethsemani*. Paris: Gabalda 1977, pp.177, ff., *passim*.

[a] Certain ancient authors have read Lk's words: *like drops of blood* – to mean that copious sweat of Jesus flowed with the profusion of an open wound. This is Lk's figurative expression to indicate a copious sweat. This opinion has been accepted by many modern interpreters [even the evangelical exegete, J. Jeremias].

[b] Others respond by saying that the Greek word used to express: *like* does not necessarily mean that the drops of blood really meant a copious sweat. For many, it would be still somewhat unusual for a comparison of sweat and blood.

[5] Therefore, one can exegetically defend the reality of the bloody sweat in Gethsemane. Some advance the view that because of the unique situation of Jesus in the Garden, His sweat of blood is indeed a miraculous phenomenon. Various insights are offered to interpret its profound significance:

- association with the Baptism of Blood: as has been noted, in Lk's Gospel, Jesus spoke earlier about this: *I have come to bring fire ..There is a Baptism I still must receive ...* [Lk 12:49, f.];

- association with the Blood of the Covenant: earlier in Lk 22:20, Jesus spoke of this at the Last Supper: *This Cup is the New Covenant in My Blood that will be poured out for the many ...*

- association with the Blood from the Side of Christ: *...one of the soldiers pierced His side with a lance; immediately there came out blood and water ...* [Jn 19:34].

A Summary: the **bloody sweat** could also be some kind of 'parallel place' for these various tribulations well known in the early Church.

[6] The Blood of Christ shed in Gethsemane, as well as that poured out on the Cross, is the Blood which reconciles sinful humanity with God. With this outpouring of His blood, here in the beginning of His Agony, Jesus pronounces His total acceptance of the Father's Plan that is asking for **the sacrifice of His life**. By this shedding of His Blood, here in the early phases of His Passion, Jesus has given full testimony to the fact that His Will is in full accord with that of the Father. On Calvary, His Blood is truly taken from Him by the terrible wounds that He endured. Here Jesus gives of His Blood of His own free accord.

[7] The details of the Agony in Gethsemane are intimately associated with what has preceded in Lk's account – and also with what follows:

[a] With what has preceded: there are several connections between Gethsemane and what has gone on before:

- Jesus' struggle against Satan at the beginning of His public life[4:1-13], and particularly at the closing ominous line found in Lk [4:13]- ***the devil left Him to come back at the appointed time.***

- the immediate preceding context: Jesus describes a time of crisis [cf. 22:35-38]: ... ***I tell you, these words of Scripture have to be fulfilled in Me: 'He let Himself be taken for a criminal...'*** [22:37; cf. Is 53:12].

**[b]** These will be considered now in a bit more detail:

- The temptations in the Desert: the time between Jesus in the Desert and in Gethsemane would also call to mind the temptation of Adam and Eve, their expulsion from the Garden into a desert. Between the Baptism of Jesus and His going out into the desert, His genealogy intervenes [cf. Lk 3:23-28]. Jesus comes out of this genealogy as the **New Adam**, Who will triumph and correct the failure of the first Adam.

- Jesus as Servant [cf. Is 53:12]: just before the scene of Gethsemane, Jesus is speaking of a decisive battle: ***...If you have no sword, sell your cloak, and buy one...*** [v. 36]. And the immediately following is where Jesus quotes the **Servant** passage about being taken for a criminal. Jesus quotes the old prophecy of Isaiah to identify Himself as Gethsemane gets underway, as the **Suffering Servant**.

**[c]** Connection with what follows: in Mt and Mk, the concluding words of Jesus telling the disciples to sleep on, is in some contrast with Lk's rendition: ***...Why are you asleep? Get up and pray not to be put to the test...!*** [Lk 22:46]. This would indicate that in Jesus' mind Gethsemane is not a complete unit: this is but the Introduction, the beginning of a frightful ordeal. Throughout this entire terrible matter the disciples are being called upon to keep from sleeping, and to pray with ***more intensity.***

**1.]** Throughout the four Gospels, there are reminiscences of the *Our Father* in the words pronounced by Jesus in the time of His Passion. This is but to be expected: this central prayer in the life of Jesus, His own Prayer Word [**ABBA**] would then be employed by Himself in this **Hour** for which everything in His life was directed.

**2.]** Lk adds this particular [cf.11:1]: it was when one of the disciples saw Jesus Himself at prayer that the request was forthcoming: ***... Now once He was in a certain place praying, and when He had finished, one of His disciples said: 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples...'*** He said to them: ***'Say this when you pray: Father, may Your Name be holy ....***

**3.]** In Mt, the recollections of the *Our Father* are concentrated in the Agony account. Lk refers to the *Our Father* by quoting *verbatim* one of the Petitions of the Lord's prayer: ***Let Your Will be done, not mine!*** [Lk 22:42]. However, before and then after the Agony scene, there are two veiled references to the Lord's Prayer – perhaps a further indication for Lk means to offer this as a connecting link through Gethsemane.

**4.]** The following comparisons seem forthcoming:

- ***Your Kingdom come!*** [11:4] - ***I shall not drink until the Kingdom of God comes*** [22:18];

- ***forgive us our sins*** [11:4] – ***Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing ...*** [23:34].

### Summary

The **Blood** mentioned by Lk in Gethsemane [22:44] is a reference to the redemptive Blood of Jesus Christ. This is a preparation for the flow on the Cross, inflicted through the **Stigmata**. Furthermore, there is an implicit reference to the **Blood of the Cup** of the **New Covenant**, the Eucharist, as an anticipation of Calvary- and from now on, a **memorial** in which the mystery is 're-presented.'. The disciples of all times prepare for their ordeal by receiving the strength of the victory of Christ in and through the Eucharist.

**[END OF SECOND EXCURSUS]**

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### THIRD EXCURSUS

#### LUKE'S STYLE IN THE GOSPEL AND IN ACTS

##### Introduction

[1] As is well known, [cf. Prologue, Ac 1:1, ff.], the Gospel and Ac constitute a single work in two tomes. Even in the Prologue of the Gospel [cf. Lk1:1-4], Lk shows that he is going to base his work on ***what has been handed down*** by the eye-witnesses – and that he is going to write an ***ordered account***. It may be seen that even here, Lk is going to write his story, continuing after the Ascension.

[2] With this two-fold perspective in mind: that of the Life of Christ and then the Life of the Church, after Jesus has ascended to the Father – traces of this may be noted in the Gethsemane account.

[3] All the evangelists were also **theologians**. Along with the historical events and the sayings attributed to Jesus, Lk also presents his own theology: and adds his own personal perspective. In the place of stopping exclusively with the Person of Jesus, Lk's attention goes back to the times of preparation [the History of Israel], and concentrated on where this led the Church. Therefore, Lk, in a particular manner, may be said to have written a **History of Salvation**.

[4] Lk's concept of time might be divided into three periods, keeping in mind that in his view, **Jesus came in the middle of time**:

1<sup>st</sup> The time of **Israel**, and the **Prophets**: John the Baptist represents the last stage of preparation [cf. 16:16];

2<sup>nd</sup> The time of **Jesus**, which constitutes the middle of time: throughout His public life, Jesus spoke only to the People of Israel. However, all along He was preparing the messianic community. The realization of messianic salvation is tied to the Passion;

3<sup>rd</sup> The time of the **Church** which extends from the exaltation of Jesus, until the *Parousia*.<sup>49</sup>

[5] According to Lk, this middle time also peaks in three main events: the **Passion**, the **Resurrection** and the **Ascension**. Everything in Lk's gospel is geared toward these events. In Ac, these events having recently occurred, are the spring-board for all that follows.

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. H. Conzleman, *The Theology of Luke*. London: Faber, ed. 1961. Many scholars maintain the traditional two-fold division of time: the time of the Church really is not to be distinguished from the time of Jesus, but is totally subordinate to it – whereas the time of Jesus was not subordinated to the time of Israel.

1. Form the very beginning of the Gospel, the facts that unfold in Nazareth and Bethlehem are all mysteriously directed **toward Jerusalem**. The terrible **ordeal** is already, although obscurely, referred to: ... ***And a sword will pierce your own soul, too...*** [Lk 2:35] - ... ***Did you not know that I must be busy about My Father's affairs ...?*** [Lk 2: 41] – the first recorded words of Jesus in Lk's Gospel. Lk offers two of the **Sorrowful Mysteries** early in his writing.

a. Scholars denote a similar structure that characterizes the Lucan presentation of the public ministry of Jesus: it is all directed **toward Jerusalem**. Once again, 3 phases might be distinguished:

1<sup>st</sup> the **Galilean** phase: [cf. Lk 1-9:50]: in which the **exodus** of Jesus toward Jerusalem is announced [ 9:31, is proper to Lk];

2<sup>nd</sup> a second phase [cf. 9:51-19:27], called by different titles: the ***going up to Jerusalem***, describing the wanderings of Jesus:

- In the Transfiguration: [Moses and Elijah] ***were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem...*** [Lk 9:31].

- ***How as the time drew near for Him to be taken up to heaven, He resolutely took the road for Jerusalem, and sent messengers ahead of Him ...*** [Lk 9:51].

3<sup>rd</sup> the final phase [cf. 19:28-24:53] which unfolds entirely in Jerusalem. This part may be sub-divided:

- preaching in the temple [cf. 19:28-21:38];

- the Passion and the resurrection [cf. 22:1-24:53].

[It is noteworthy that Lk does not speak of the post-resurrection appearances in Galilee].

b. Therefore, Lk presents the life of Jesus as unfolding in this fashion: from Nazareth, the Good News spreads about, reaching Capharnaum and the region around the Holy City, 'the cradle of the nascent Church', salvation sends out its rays, in successive waves – throughout Judea, to Samaria, through Galilee, to Caesarea, to Antioch - then is carried by Paul to the principal provinces of the Greek-roman world. It eventually gets to Rome, the very heart of the empire. This is the fulfillment of Jesus' own prophecy: ... ***you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and then you will be My witnesses, not only in Jerusalem, but throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth ...*** [cf. Ac 1:8].

3. The whole account of the Passion in general – and the Gethsemane account in particular, must be placed in this context.

a. The main principle to be kept in mind, then, is this: the suffering and the martyrdom of Jesus, begin in Gethsemane, and then consummated on the Cross – are, first of all, in the eyes of Lk, the culmination, the peak of all the persecutions and all the martyrdoms suffered so often in Israel's history. All that the prophets and the anonymous s' just' [the *anawim* ] endured through the long ages of the OT, called to this **Hour** in the life of Jesus.

b. As a very clear consequence of this, all the subsequent sufferings, all the unfairness, the persecutions, unjust deaths that follow the Passion and Death of Jesus, are presented by Lk as being connected with what happened to Him.

c. Once again, a kind of 'tryptic' forms:

1<sup>st</sup> **OT** suffering

2<sup>nd</sup> those of **Jesus**, the King of Martyrs

3<sup>rd</sup> the sufferings of the **Church**.

d. We will do well to reflect on 1<sup>o</sup> and 3<sup>o</sup>, concluding with the sufferings of Jesus:

1<sup>st</sup> **The first scene:** these are the sufferings and the martyrdoms of the Prophets of old – the unknown , and the anonymous 'just' of humanity. The three Synoptics and Jn unite to the humanity of Jesus, the spiritual family of the Prophets:

a.] The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: found in all three Synoptics [cf. Mk 12:1-11; Mt 21:33-34; Lk 20:9-18]. This parable connects the death of Jesus the **son** in the parable, with that of the Prophets of old – the '**servants**'. Jesus also admonishes Jerusalem [cf. Mt 23: 37, f.; Lk13:34, f.] **Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you...**

- In this parallel story, Lk does have data that is particular to him. In Mt and Mk, Jesus begins His preaching with an appeal to conversion, for the Kingdom of God is near [cf. Mk 1:15; Mt 4:17]. In Lk, Jesus inaugurates His ministry in the Synagogue of Nazareth. Commenting on Isaiah [cf. 61:1,ff.], He declares that He has been anointed by the Holy Spirit, to bring the Good News to the Poor [cf. 4:16-21].

- Almost immediately, bitter reaction breaks out – and He responds: **...no prophet is ever accepted in his own country ...** [cf. 4:24]. Jesus cites the examples of Elijah and Elisha: the Israelites were not open to them, so their benefits were bestowed on non-believers [cf. 4:22-27].

- The towns-people take Jesus as though to throw Him over the cliff [cf. 4:28, ff.]. Jesus is simply being presented in the ancient line of the Prophets. What He

encounters leads the reader back in memory to the massacre of so many of the 'envoys of the Lord.' They were all but faint glimpses of the One who was to come, and to right these terrible injustices. Truly, the tragic destiny of so many of the Prophets and Just of all prefigured the coming of Jesus.

**b.]** The resurrection of the only son of the Widow of Naim [cf. 7:11-17]: once again this story is intimately connected with an episode in the life of the Prophet Elijah, and the only son of a Widow. Jesus is thus presented as the **New Elijah**. Lk uses a verb concerning Jesus that describes Elijah's being taken up to heaven: *...now as the time drew near for Him to be taken up into heaven ...*, He resolutely took the road to Jerusalem [cf. 9:1]. Lk also uses this verb in Ac to indicate the Passion, resurrection and Ascension of Jesus [cf. Ac 1:2, 11, 22]. Jesus' destiny to remain in Jerusalem [cf. Lk 113:33] is described by Him in these words: ***it would not be right for a prophet to die outside of Jerusalem*** [cf. 13:33]. Thus, Jesus' sorrowful and glorious destiny led one to recall **Moses** and **Elijah**.

**c.]** The Conversation on the way to Emmaus: ***starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, He explained to them the passages throughout the Scriptures that were about Himself ...*** [cf. 24:25,ff.]. This would unite Jesus with the whole OT tradition in Lk's presentation. He refers to the Blood shed since the foundation of the world [cf. 11L50, f.,; cf. also Mt 23:35, f.]. Jesus is associated with Abel – himself not a prophet, but the first recorded death in Scripture is a violent injustice [cf. Gn 4:2-9; 1 Jn 3:12]. Jesus is associated with Abel [cf. Heb 11:4; 12:24].

**3<sup>rd</sup>** **The third scene**: this would show all the sufferings, the persecutions and the martyrdoms, unjust deaths in the 'time of the Church,' the path that Jesus trod led Him through suffering to glory [cf. Lk 24:26], with the Passion beginning on the Mount: [Jesus had just ascended] *... so from the Mount of Olives, as it is called, they went back to Jerusalem, a short distance away, no more than a sabbath's walk ...* [Ac 1:12]. Gethsemane, therefore, was the scene of the **agonia** – and, it seems, the place where the **Ascension** took place. But even more profound is the bond that Lk establishes between the Passion of Jesus, in which Gethsemane is the point of departure – and the existence of the early Christian community, experiencing as it did, almost continual **trial, testing** and **persecution**.

- Persecuted by their own country-men, the Apostles place this **trial** in strict relationship with the prophetic announcement made by Ps 2, the rebellion of humanity against the Messiah [cf. Ac 4:25,f.].

- The Apostles are the logical heirs of the hateful martyrdom endured by their Master [cf. 5:33; 7:54].

- Throughout the Gospels, there appears rather frequently the fact that Jesus **had** to suffer – that He **must** endure **trial** [cf. 9:22; 17:25; 22:46]; cf. also Ac 17:3]. This **necessity** is found likewise in the other two Synoptics, and also in Jn. However, it is in the Ac where this **destiny** is then applied to **Paul**, and then to all **Christians**: *... I myself will show him how much he himself **must** suffer in My Name... [Ac 9:16] - ... they put fresh heart into the disciples, encouraging them to persevere in the faith. We all **have** to experience many hardships ... before we enter the Kingdom of God ... [cf. Ac 14:22].*

**d.]** Perhaps the most convincing witness to this is the close association of the **martyrdom of Stephen** with that of **Jesus**. Not only are the circumstances of the trial and death presented in such a way as to make one think of Jesus, but it is apparent that the choice Lk makes of the terms and expressions bear this out. **The Passion of Stephen** in Lk is very similar to the Passion of Jesus in Mt and Mk:

- Just like Jesus, Stephen is accused of having hurled blasphemies against the temple [cf. Ac 6:13, ff.]. In his account of the trial of Jesus, Lk omits this particular, but it is reported in the other two Synoptics [cf. Mk 14:55, f.; Mt 26:59, f.].

- Stephen's situation is simply the realization of the prediction made by Jesus in His words concerning persecuted disciples: *... I myself will give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict ...* This was fulfilled in Stephen's trial: *... they found that they could not get the better of him because of his wisdom and because it was the Spirit that prompted what he said ...* [cf. Ac 6:10].

- The last phrases of Stephen's discourse against the Jews show that in a certain manner, the sufferings of the ancient prophet, those of Christ, and those of His disciples of all time: are all before Lk's mind as he records Stephen's words: *... Can you name a single prophet your ancestors never persecuted. In the past, they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. You had the Law brought to you by Angels, and are the very one who have not kept it ...* [cf. Ac 7:52, f.].

- Before being martyred, Stephen contemplates the heavens opened and the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God. This corresponds closely to the declaration Jesus made before the Sanhedrin [cf. Lk 22:69; Mt 26:64, f.].

- Just like Jesus [cf. Lk 23:46 – proper to Lk], Stephen says: *... receive my spirit...!* [Ac 7:59]. The difference is that while Jesus prayed thus to the **Father**, Stephen addresses his petition to **Jesus**.

- It is proper to Lk [cf. 22:41] that Jesus **knelt down** in Gethsemane – the same posture that Stephen assumes [cf. Ac 7:60].
- Like Jesus [cf. Lk 23:34 – proper to Lk] Stephen asks the Lord to pardon those who are executing him [cf. Ac 7:60] – but again, the Prayer of Jesus is addressed to the Father, while Stephen prays to Jesus directly.
- Both Jesus [cf. Lk 23:46] and Stephen expire, emitting a loud cry.

e.] As Stephen was a **copy of Jesus**, this theme is continued in the **martyrdom of Peter and Paul**. There are many parallels, especially for Paul, recorded by Lk:

- At the end of Ac 21:17-27:44 – there is recorded what some interpreters call **the Passion of Paul** – very much like the final chapters of the Gospel records **the Passion of Jesus**.
- In Ac 19:21, Paul decides to **go to Jerusalem**, then to **Rome** – which seemed to correspond to the life of Jesus and a similar decision recorded by Lk [cf. 9:51]: ***Jesus resolutely took the road to Jerusalem.***
- Paul has his own *fiat* of Gethsemane: ***And so, as he would not be persuaded, we gave up the attempt, saying: 'The Lord's Will be done!'*** [cf. Ac 21:14].
- Jesus appeared before the Sanhedrin [cf. Lk 22:54, ff.]; Pilate [cf. Lk 23:1-5, 13-25]; and Herod [cf. Lk 23:6-12 – proper to Lk] – and **Paul** similarly appeared before the Sanhedrin [cf. Ac 22:3-23:1, ff.] – Felix [cf. Ac 24:1-17] and Festus [cf. Ac 25:1-12].
- Paul was accused of fomenting sedition [cf. Ac 24:5], just as Jesus before Him [cf. Lk 23:5].
- Just as Jesus' innocence was abundantly noted [cf. Lk 23:14, ff.; Ac 3:13; 13:28], so also Paul is declared innocent [cf. Ac 23:29; 25:18, 25; 26:31].
- Jesus quoted the Servant Oracles instating that He would be handed over into the hands of sinners [cf. Lk 9:44; 24:7; cf. Is 53]. In conformity with the same Isaian oracle, Paul, too, is **handed over** to the non-believers [cf. Ac 21:11] – into the hands of the Romans [cf. Ac 28:17].

**2º** **And finally, the Central Scene:** this is the principal scene of the **tryptic**: the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ of which the ***agonia*** in the Garden is the Prelude. While not all agree, there are many authors who believe that Lk is trying to present **Jesus as the ideal martyr**.

- the Sufferings and Death of the Prophets are presented as a 'pre-figuration' of those of the Savior. This is already noted early by Lk [cf. 4:16-30]. Furthermore, the martyrdoms of the early Church are seen to be a reflection of that of Jesus. It is also noted that perhaps Lk emphasizes less than the other Evangelists the expiatory value of the sufferings and the death of Jesus. This does not mean that Lk entirely ignores this aspect, in that he does simply imply it in his record of the Institution of the Eucharist: ... ***this is my body which will be given for you ... this Cup is the new Covenant in My Blood, which will be poured out for you ...*** [cf. Lk 22:19, ff.]. However, Lk's emphasis is more on the Martyrdom of Jesus.

- It might be an exaggeration to believe that Lk has simply copied the martyrdom literature – he was rather **inspired** by it.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> For these pages, cf. A. Feuillet, *L'Agonie de Gethsemani*. Paris: Gabalda 1977, pp. 151-161, *passim*.

## IV Excursus: Other Biblical & Doctrinal Reflections

### [I] POSSIBLE JOHANNINE REFERENCES:

#### The GOSPEL and the APOCALYPSE

##### [A] The Gospel

### Introduction

[1] The Johannine account of the Passion of Jesus makes no mention of Gethsemane [nor of the temptation scene in the Desert]. Various explanations have been offered for this unusual omission. Of all the possible reasons, perhaps the best one would be **the doctrinal plan of Jn.** When he came to write, the Synoptic accounts were already well known to the early Church. He did not set for himself the specific scope of completing them, and certainly had no intention of contradicting them. His choice as rather to bring out more certain truths which were uppermost in his heart.

[2] In his account of the arrest of Jesus [cf. Jn 18:1, ff.], it is as clear as day how he brought together all the details to emphasize what had happened:

- it is with sovereign freedom that Jess entered into His Passion;
- He hands Himself over to become a prisoner;
- no one takes His life from Him, but He gives it freely;
- inserted into such a context, the Agony account might have considerably weakened Jn's method of procedure.

[3] Yet, there may be some distant 'traces' of the Agony scene noted by Jn:

- one of Jesus' lines: ***Am I not to drink the Cup the Father has given Me ...?*** [Jn 18:11]. Many scholars think that this line and its imagery would recall to mind Jesus' Prayer of Gethsemane about drinking the **Cup** that the Father had prepared for Him.
- that there is a passage [cf. 12:20-33] that would make the careful reader think of Gethsemane, as the prelude to the Agony, as this was reported by the Synoptics. This is the **anointing at Bethany**.

[4] There is something similar in the Johannine style of presenting the Last Supper. As in the other instance just noted, John does not repeat the data of the Synoptics, but, in some way, he prepares for them. Thus we have:

- Jn 6:26-66, the discourse on the **Bread of Life**, as a preparation for the Last Supper;
- Jesus knowing His betrayer – seems as a kind of prelude for the Agony scene as this is prepared by the Synoptics.

**[5]** Similarly, the 4th Gospel prolongs the information given by the Synoptics:

- after His arrest, Jn has Jesus say what the Synoptics relate as happening in the Prayer of the Garden – that He is disposed to drink the **Cup** prepared by His Father [cf. 18:11];
- Jn continues the Eucharistic climate even after the Last Supper.

**[6]** It might be shown with a kind of analogy with Lk, that as his Gospel is completed in its doctrinal content by the Ac – in like manner, the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel is in some way, ‘completed’ by the Apocalypse.

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### 1. The text: Jn 12:20-33:

*... Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks [They wanted to see Jesus] ... Jesus replied: ‘Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you most solemnly, unless a grain of wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life, loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If a man serves Me, he must follow Me, wherever I am, My servant will be there, too. Now My soul is troubled. What shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to his hour... Father, glorify Your Name...’ [a clap of thunder] ... others said it was an angel. Jesus answered: ‘It was not for My sake that this voice came, but for yours. Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be overthrown. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all to myself ...*

2. It is useful to reflect here on the ;‘historical occasion’ of these words pronounced by Jesus. Furthermore, scholars have noted that there are three aspects of Jesus; **Hour**:

- it is associated with His death [vv. 23-26];
- it indicates an extreme trial [vv. 27-29];
- yet, by it, Jesus will conquer definitively the forces of evil and will attract to Himself all human beings of good will, without distinction [cf. vv. 30-33].

### 3. The historical occasion: certain Greeks wanted to see Jesus:

a. These are 'strangers' to the Jewish mentality, but they have been won over to monotheism. There is some indication that they have come to participate in a Paschal pilgrimage [cf. Ac 10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26, 43, 56; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7]. Inspired perhaps by 'Greek curiosity' [cf. Ac 17:21], they wanted to **see** Jesus more closely – it seems that they wanted to **enter into conversation with Him**. This request was transmitted to Jesus by two Apostles with Greek names: **Philip** and **Andrew**. This seems to have been one of their functions, as they often seem to be bring people to Jesus: Andrew [cf. Jn 1:40-42]; Philip [cf. Jn 1:44, f.; cf. also 6:5, ff. – where they are again associated.

b. In its totality, the response of Jesus seems to be a mediation on His **Hour**. There may not seem to be much connection at first sight, but on deeper reflection, the tie here is profound. Far beyond this innocent request of the Greeks, Jesus looks out on the entire non-believing world, the Church founded by Jesus will open wide its doors to all. His whole reason for coming was to save the whole world [cf. Jn 1:29; 3:16; 4:42; 11:52; 1 Jn 2:2]. His **Hour** is that time when His mission will be realized in its plenitude, that special Mission entrusted to Him by the heavenly Father. The 'Greeks' here represent the entire world of non-believers.

### 4. Jesus' Hour:

a. In Jn, the **Hour** is eminently positive, and indicates **that salvific event in its totality for which Jesus has come**. It corresponds for Jesus to His passage over from this world to the Father, and to His glorification, whole and entire. For humanity, this special Hour means the creation of the New People of God, thanks to the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit.

b. However, this glorious **Hour** described in these terms has a much more somber side as well. It implies the whole mystery of the Cross which Jn never forgets. He presents this, even more than the Synoptics do,. As already radiated with the light of the Pasch. The culminating part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel [cf. Jn 13-21] is consecrated to this **Hour** of Jesus: His terrible Passion and Death, His resurrection and His Heavenly exaltation and the definitive foundation of the Church. This rapid survey of the various indications present in the Johannine **Hour** of Jesus give some insight into the profoundly meaningful passage noted here [cf. 12:23=33].

c. Jesus begins by emphasizing the profound bond that there is between these events: His **glorification** – His **death** - the **foundation** of the Messianic community.

d. This discourse is found at the end of the first part of Jn's Gospel, sometimes referred to as the **Gospel of Signs**. The **Gospel of Glory** opens with Jn 13,

and the washing of the Apostles' feet, with Judas *going out into the night* to betray the **Light of the world**. In fact, in this discourse concluding the Gospel of Signs, Jesus states that He is about to be *glorified*. In Jn, the 'glorification' of Jesus coincides above all with His Resurrection and heavenly exaltation. However, this glorification is already inaugurated with His Death. This is suggested in the formula: being lifted up. this applies first of all, to the Crucifixion. [cf. 3:48; 8:28; 12:32, 34]

e. The elevation and glorification of the Son of Man are intimately united, without perhaps being confused with one another. it had already been predicted of the **Suffering Servant** that he would be elevated and glorified in a sovereign manner [cf. Is 52:13: ... *My Servant shall prosper, He shall be lifted up, exalted...* As is true of the Synoptics, Jn's Christology is intimately associated with this unique oracle.

5. The death of Jesus will be for Him a glorification by reason of the marvelous fruits that it will produce. This is what is meant by the parable of the **grain of wheat** thrown into the ground [as. the **Servant** is compared to a **shoot of Jesse**: some read this example to indicate the Greek nature god, who resurrects each spring-time with the new crops. However, this is, at best, a rather superficial connection]. The resurrection of Jesus has nothing to do with an automatic cycle of the new crops. It would be far more 'biblical' to compare this imagery perhaps with the **Tree of Daniel**: ... *I saw a tree in the middle of the world; it was very tall ... its foliage was beautiful, its fruit abundant, in it was food for all... [Someone shouted: 'Let us cut the tree down, lop of its branches ...! [cf. Dn 4:7,, ff.]*

a. This wording would indicate that Jesus has come near to the end of His public life. This reference to Dn makes even more sense if one keeps in mind the following: there is a most intimate connection between the Person of Jesus and the Kingdom of God which He announces. There is an astonishing parallelism between that which the Synoptics predict about the Kingdom of God, and that which the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel affirms concerning the Person of Jesus:

- In the Synoptics, Jesus does take inspiration from Dn's 'tree' – and He compares the **Kingdom of God** to a **mustard seed**, which then becomes the greatest of all plants [cf. Mk 4:30-32; Mt 13:31, ff.; Lk 13: 18, f.].

- There may be some kind of reference in Jesus' mind when He compares Himself to a **grain of wheat** thrown into the ground. This will establish the community into which non-believers may come and make their home in the branches. This may be what is figured here by the beautiful plant, in which the birds of the air [the 'Greeks' and all non-believers] might build their nests.

b. The **ecclesial** implications for the **grain of the mustard seed** is often admitted by scholars. Therefore, one might now insist equally that the parable of the

grain of wheat has the same meaning. So often this parable is interpreted as an encouragement for Christians **to do penance**, to die to self, and be buried. However, this Grain of Wheat with **Eucharistic** implications, is **Jesus Himself**, the Seed of the world-wide Church. The abundant fruits may be read to include the graining of merit – but, even more so does the parable seem to lend itself to development of the community of believers.

c. The two verses that follow this parable are extraordinary in their own right: ***...Anyone who loves his life, loses it ... wherever I am, My servant will be there, too...*** [12:25, ff.]. These verses are remarkable also for the profound affinity that these words have with those recorded by the Synoptics. It is in all four Gospels that Jesus' destiny imposes itself on anyone who accepts truly to follow Him. Gethsemane and Calvary are necessary for all disciples, then, to enter into glory.

6. Therefore, Jesus has proclaimed with great power the grandeur and the fecundity of His **Hour**. This is the **Hour** of the Passion, the source of life and principle of the New People of God. One would hardly expect that after such a solemn proclamation, that all of a sudden, Jesus would be overtaken by **agony**: ***...Now My soul is troubled ... it was for this very reason that I have come to this Hour...*** [12:27, ff.].

a. Scholars have long noted here the many points of contact between these verses and the **Agony of Gethsemane**. The following may be noted:

- The declaration: ***... Now My soul is troubled...*** : is not unlike what is found in the Synoptics: ***... My soul is sad unto death...*** [cf. Mk 14:34; Mt 26:38]. In both instances, it seems that Jesus' words are inspired by Ps 41, the **Prayer of a Sick and Lonely Man**. The LXX translation would make the parallel even closer: ***Why are you sad, my soul ...?***

- The invocation ***Father*** [Jn 12:27] – parallels ***ABBA*** [Mk 14:36].

- His Prayer: ***save Me from this Hour*** : even though it is presented as a question, in the spirit of the Synoptics, it would be very close to the 'content' of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, where Jesus asks that the **Cup** pass from Him if it is possible.

- The **formula of abandonment**: of Jesus to His father: ***Glorify Your name!*** - calls to mind the First Petition of the *Our Father*, ***hallowed be Your Name***. This would correspond to the allusions made to the *Our Father* in the Synoptic accounts of Gethsemane, especially that of Mt.

- Help from Heaven: there could be some analogy here with the comforting angel of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gospel.

**b.** As striking as these similarities may seem, they do not force the reader to conclude that what we have here is indeed a perfect parallel place for the Agony of Gethsemane. Nevertheless, it is true that a great number of modern commentators do read Jn 12:27-39 as the Johannine version of Gethsemane. To many other interpreters, this conclusion is surprising, as there are also substantial differences:

- The circumstances of time and place differ considerably between the Synoptics and Jn, as well as the manner in which the scene unfolds. The Synoptics present **a long prayer in the night**, and **a terrible struggle** on the part of Jesus. The only witnesses are the three hand-picked Apostles, and even they are **at a distance**. Jesus is **prostrate** on the ground and His **anguished** supplication remains without response **Heaven seems 'closed' to Him**.

- In the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel, all of this episode takes place **in the full light of day**, in the presence of His disciples, and even a crowd. Jesus makes known only to those around Him that He is undergoing some **extreme inner trial**. He shows two aspects of this **Hour**, that it is something **terrible** – and yet, this is the whole reason that He has come. The **voice** from heaven, intervenes to proclaim the glorious destiny of Jesus [cf. 12:28, f.]

**c.** This heavenly intervention [cf. 12:28] is of interest. In the Synoptics, the **Agony** of Gethsemane is totally opposed to the **glory of the Transfiguration**. There is no mention of the Transfiguration in Jn's Gospel. Therefore, there are those who take this sentence of the voice from heaven as is found in John: **... A voice came from heaven: I have glorified [the divine name] and I will glorify it again...** [12:28] - and see this in close parallel with the announcement made during the transfiguration [cf. Mt 9:7, par.]: **this is My Beloved Son. Listen to Him!** - this comparison may be legitimately made - but, in both cases, it is necessary to conclude: Jn 12 is neither a perfect parallel of the **Synoptic Gethsemane**, nor is it a perfect replica of the **Synoptic Transfiguration: neither of these scenes are found in Jn**.

**7.** There are even those who would take the request of the Greeks **... Sir we would like to see Jesus ...** [Jn 12:22] – and somehow make out of this a Temptation, comparable to Gethsemane! [cf. W. Moore]. The Temptation would be to extend redemption to the Gentiles without going through the expiating Passion. Even more common is the assimilation that is made between the consoling angel [cf. Lk 22:43] and the hypothetical angel [cf. Jn 12:29] to explain the **mysterious voice**, thunder [?] that was heard [cf. 12:29].

**8.** In His response to the Greeks, Jesus first of all spoke of the importance and the fruitfulness of His **Hour** and its terrifying character. Jesus' response to the sound from

heaven is that it was not for His benefit that it came. There are three points here that might shed some deeper insight into the Mystery of Gethsemane:

- the idea of **judgment**;
- **victory** over the powers of wickedness
- a hidden reference to **Is 53**.

**a. The Judgment of the World:** the Synoptics and Paul place this at the end of time, in the context of the *Parousia*. One of Jn's more original characteristics is his **anticipated eschatology**. So, the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel represents a rather radical transformation from the earlier conception on Judgment. His view is so strong that there are even some interpreters who think that these lines concerning anticipated judgment must have been interpolated. However, on close analysis, and with much reflection, it seems that the idea of anticipated judgment can also be defended using the Synoptics. Judgment is indeed bound to the Passion and to its cosmic interpretation. Jn did not 'invent' the words of Jesus which express a **cosmic dimension** of the Mystery of the Cross that is **NOW** the judgment of the world.

**b. Victory over the Powers of Evil:** in this matter, one can observe a rather considerable difference between the Synoptics and Jn. In the Synoptics, Jesus is presented as struggling with Satan from the very beginning, in the desert. Then, throughout the course of His public life, He is challenged by a number of possessed persons. Finally, in the scene of the *agonia*, there is a clear indication that this is due to a diabolic assault on exceptional violence. Rather unusually, the Synoptics do not bring out the clear triumph of Jesus over them. Jesus' victory is to be noted in His total abandonment to His Father.

Jn, though, offers a clear insight into Jesus' victory: he does not have any temptation scene, nor the exorcisms worked by Jesus. However, Jn does record Jesus' words that show without doubt that the Passion of Jesus has thrown out the Prince of this world.

**c. Reference to the Suffering Servant:** in the Synoptic accounts of the *agonia*, just as those concerning the Last Supper, Jesus makes reference to the Servant Poems, particularly the 4<sup>th</sup> one [cf. Is 52:13-53:12]. There is likewise some kind of an allusion to the Suffering Servant in the present scene under discussion: ***And when I am lifted up, I shall draw all to myself ...*** [cf. Jn 12:32]. There are many who believe that this language is from Is [52"13]. As was already true for Il-Is, the **sacrificial death** of the Servant will have an unheard of efficacy for all of humanity.

## [B] The Apocalypse

### [Witness/Martyr]

1. Many interpreters are in agreement that in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gospel and in Ac, Christ in His suffering is placed at the center of the religious history of the world. Everything before His coming was inexorably tending toward His arrival: all he persecuted Prophets, all the **Just** [ the *Anawim* ] who shed their blood through the ages, all who died for the cause of God. Since His coming, now all Christian Martyrs in some way reflect His glory.
2. It is also highly probable that Jn dreamed of a History of Salvation in which Jesus occupies the central place. Repeatedly Jn's Gospel turns backward to the OT preparations: and then forward towards the Church in which Jesus continues to accomplish His vivifying action and sanctification through the Holy Spirit.
3. The similarity between Lk's idea and that of Jn appears even greater in that hypothesis which would look on the Apocalypse as a kind of composition that would continue the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel – much like Ac and Lk continue his. There are some ideas in the Apocalypse that would bear specific reflection.

### 2 The Two Witnesses

a. Two separate times in Rv [cf. 1:5; 3:14] Jesus is called the **Faithful Witness**. In the first case, this title seems to all to mind **His Passion and Death** – for the simple reason that this title is followed by several others: **the First Born of the Lord – the Prince of the Kings of the earth**. These titles would logically lead to reflections on the Resurrection and the Ascension.

b. Therefore, it is principally in the Passion that Jesus shows Himself to be there **Faithful Witness**. This title makes one reflect on these passages:

*... It is you who say that I am a King. Yes, I am a King, I was born for this, and I came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth...* [Jn 18:37].

*... Now, before God, the source of all life and before Jesus Christ, Who spoke up as a witness for the truth in front of Pontius Pilate ...* [cf. 1 Tm 6:13],

**Witness** is one of the major themes of the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel: and an important matter in Rv.<sup>51</sup>

c. In addition to Jesus Who has loved us and delivered Himself u0p for us, washed our sins with His Blood [cf. Rv 1:5], this Apocalypse recognizes other Witnesses intimately dependent on that One Witness, *par excellence*, Jesus Christ. It

<sup>51</sup> cf. A. A. Trites, *The NT Concept of Witness*. Cambridge University Press 1977.

is solely upon Him that they are able to model their conduct on His, and notably to pour out their Blood for the reign of God:

*... They have triumphed by the Blood of the Lamb, and by the witness of their martyrdom... this is why there must be constancy in the saints who keep the commandments of God and faith in Jesus ... [Rv 14:12].*

*... [Babylon the Great] was drunk, drunk with the blood of the saints... the martyrs ... [Rv 16:6].*

d. Particular attention is due to the Two Witnesses of Rv 11: *... I shall send My two witnesses to prophesy for 1260 days ...* [v. 3]. These ‘two witnesses’ refer back to Zc [cf. 4:3, 14], who used the image of the two olive trees, indicating the **High Priest**, Joshua, and the **King** [Zorobabel]. In addition, these two Witnesses might well refer to this **royal priesthood** of the New People of God [cf. Rv 1:6; 5:10 – also noted in Exodus]. The **1260 days** [cf. 11:42] are the **42 months** [cf. Rv 12:14], three and one half years – the time given to the Preaching of the Witnesses: this is a designation of a passing time of **trial** [**the duration of Christ’s public life???**], that would separate the Christians from the perfect establishment of the Reign of God.

- The Two Witnesses are also called the **two candles**, or **torches**, that stand before the Master of the Earth. The totality of the Christian community exercises this function [cf. Rv 2:3, the letters to the 7 communities]. Some would conclude that they represent a part of the Church, those who are called to give Jesus Christ the witness of their blood. This tragic sort is reserved for a privileged few in the Church.

- Much reflection has gone into the number two for the Martyrs. One answer is that these witnesses do not have solely the task of preaching conversion: they also have the role of judgment. There was much OT insistence on the fact that the Two Witnesses were needed in capital cases [cf. Dt 17:6; 19:15; Nb 35:30]. Several NT passages pick this up [cf. Mt 18:16; 2 Co 13:1; 1 Tm 5:19; Heb 12:28; Jn 8:16, f.].

- Other possible interpretations of the ‘two Witnesses’ would be – that as in the Transfiguration, **Moses** and **Elijah** were present for Jesus’ glory, they personified the **Law** and the **Prophets**, who prepared for the coming of the Lord. They would imply the Witnesses and the Martyrs of Yahweh in the OT, now bearing witness to Jesus in the NT.

- These witnesses/Martyrs of Rv are vested in a garment that for some is priestly – and, for others, is prophetic: here they will wear ‘sack-cloth’ [cf. Rv 11:13]. Like Elijah of old, they will close up the sky so that it does not rain as long as they are prophesying [cf. v.6]. And like Moses, they will have the power to bring calamities on hearth, much like the Plague of ancient Egypt: they will be able to turn the water into blood. The Author of Rv must be thinking here of Israel’s ancient history, which is

meant to be a perpetual instruction for the Christian people. Jn communicates this lesson: today, as yesterday, the divine power is great enough to hinder the enemies of the Witnesses from doing what they have been called to do. 'Fire' will come from the mouths of the Witnesses, which can be read as a of ancient Egypt: they will be able to turn the water into blood. The Author of Rv must be thinking here of Israel's ancient history, which is meant to be a perpetual instruction for the Christian people. Jn communicates this lesson: today, as yesterday, the divine power is great enough to hinder the enemies of the Witnesses from doing what they have been called to do. 'Fire' will come from the mouths of the Witnesses, which can be read as a symbol of the power of the irresistible force of their preaching. This image was applied in the times of Jeremiah and Elijah: **... I will make My words a fire in your mouth, and make this people wood for the fire to devour ...** [Jr 5:14] - **...then the Prophet Elijah arose like a fire, his word flaring like a torch ...** [Si 48:1].

- After the assimilation of the Witnesses/ Martyrs to **Moses and Elijah**, after this imagery is applied to Jesus Himself: the Beast comes up out of the Abyss, and kills the Prophets [cf. Rv 11:7], sometimes interpreted as the Power of Rome, or of any totalitarian state that would oppress the People of God. The 'Great City' will apply to Sodom and Egypt: wherever the Lord is crucified [v. 8]. There is no need to look for the city on a map – it means all those places and regimes that have inherited the vices of Sodom, the tyranny of hostile forces. As has happened with Jesus, His death is followed by the resurrection – this will happen to the Faithful Witnesses, God will breathe life into them. While the Witnesses of the Lord are persecuted and hunted, their ultimate destiny is under the sway of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the King of Martyrs, and Witness, *par excellence*.

- Serious scholarship [as L. Cerfaux] has compared Rv 11 to the account of Stephen's trial and Martyrdom [cf. Ac 7]. In both cases, there are similar facts:
- the identity of the destiny between OT Prophets, the death of Jesus and His witnesses;
- the witness of the Holy Spirit;
- the continuity between the persecutions endured by Christians and the Passion of Jesus;
- final glory.

5. Those killed on account of the Word of God: they were killed for witnessing to it. Each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to be patient a little while longer, until the role was complete, and their fellow servants had also been killed, just as they had been [cf. Rv 6:9, ff.].

a. The imagery of the Apocalypse is often explained by reference to the OT. Jn 'sees' the martyrs under the altar of heaven. He thinks of them as so many victims offered to God, for there in the temple of Jerusalem, the blood of animals was spread at the foot of the altar of holocausts.

b. The majority of interpreters think that the text has in mind the Christian martyrs. Some read those 'martyrs' as those who suffered during the persecution of Nero:

- There is a distinction among the martyrs: those who are already dead [perhaps the OT martyrs], and those who are yet to be martyred so that the number might be filled. The Document to the Hebrews makes a distinction between the Christians present here, and their Ancestors in the faith: those were all heroes of the faith... too good for the world ... they would receive what was promised, when they reached perfection in us [cf. Heb 11:37-40].

- Furthermore, whenever Rv means specifically the **Christian martyrs**, the text makes clear that they have rendered their testimony to Jesus, they poured out their blood for Him [cf. Rv 1:9; 7:14;12:11; 19:10;20:4]. Since Rv 6:9 does not make this specification, the supposition is that this passage is not speaking of Christian martyrs.

- The prayer in Rv 6:9 has a kind of OT spirit: **Holy Father, Master ...** - seems much more inspired by Ps 79, the national lament: ... **How much longer will You be angry, Yahweh? For ever? Is Your jealousy to go on smoldering like a fire ...? Where is their God ...?** [cf. Ps 79: 5, 10].

- There is also a great similarity here with Mt [cf. 23:31-35], which refers to the OT: 'you are the sons of those who have assassinated the Prophets.'

c. Therefore, many maintain that the martyrs noted in Rv 6:9-11, are those who have suffered from the wickedness of humanity from the beginning of the world., to the coming of Jesus, exclusively – in Rv, the figure of the **immolated Lamb led to the slaughter .. pierced through for our faults** [cf. Is 53:5, 7]. Martyrs in general are said to be pierced, immolated: ... **In Babylon you will find the blood of the prophets and saints, all the blood that was ever shed on earth ...** [Rv 18:24]. All those who have died unfairly, in some way, are associated with the Blood of Jesus poured out in Gethsemane and on Calvary.

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## II. The Document to the Hebrews [5:7-8]

*... During His life on earth, He offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears to the One Who had their power to save Him out of death, and He submitted to humbly that His prayer was heard. Although He was Son, He learned to obey through suffering ...*

### [A] Analysis of the Text

1. It has long been asked whether the unknown author of Hebrews really had the **Agony** in mind in writing these lines. If this is the case, then he might be the only case outside of the Synoptics [depending, too, on one's opinion regarding those verses from Jn just studied], where specific mention of Gethsemane is made. While the Passion of Jesus is often noted, there is scarce reference – if any – to Gethsemane outside of the Synoptics. One of the characteristics of Heb is that it does make frequent reference to the earthy life of Jesus.

2. This Document differs greatly from those of Paul, particularly in the manner of speaking about Jesus Christ. In the thought of the Apostle to the Gentiles, the resurrection holds a predominant place – whereas in Heb, this mystery is mentioned only once in an explicit manner – and then in terms that are somewhat unusual: *... I pray that the God of Peace Who brought our Lord Jesus Christ back from the dead, to become the Great Shepherd of the sheep by the Blood that sealed an eternal Covenant, may make you ready to do His Will in any kind of good action ...* [13:20, ff.].

a. St. Paul rather rarely gives to Christ His Name of Jesus, without any addition – perhaps in all, only about 15 times. The exact opposite phenomenon occurs in Heb: the simple name **Jesus** occurs very often. The reason is that Heb contains more references to the historical life of Jesus of Nazareth, than all of Paul's Letters put together!

b. There are many specific references to the **trials**, the **temptations** that He endured all through His life [cf. 2:9, 10, 18; 4:15; 10:5; 12: 2, ff.]. No other NT Document of this style affirms in this manner that the sojourn of Jesus among human beings unfolded under the sign of **trial**. Perhaps in some general way, Heb does pick up the statement made by Jesus, recorded by Lk: *... You are the ones who have stood by Me faithfully in My trials...* [Lk 22:28].

c. The author does remember the particular that when Jesus died, the veil of the temple was rent [cf. Heb 10:20; cf. 6:19]. He also recalls the fact that Jesus was crucified outside of the gates of the City of Jerusalem [cf. 13:12; Mk 15:20; Jn 19:17].

d. In a particular manner, Heb refers many things to the account of the Institution of the Supper and the Blood of the New Covenant [cf. 9:11-28; 10:5-18; 13:20].

3. With these many references to the details of the Passion and Death of Jesus found throughout this document to the Hebrews, there are many authors who then conclude that this present text under discussion [cf. Heb 5:7, ff.] is a specific reference to what Jesus endured in Gethsemane. There are reasons for both sides of the discussion:

a. **Reasons against** understanding these verses as a reference to Gethsemane:

- There are many who believe that precisely these verses in Heb are taken from a poem, perhaps some early Christian Hymn. One of the reasons why they think this is poetry is the redundant and solemn sounding: ***He offered up prayer and entreaty*** [5:7], ***aloud and in silent tears***. The reasoning does not dissuade those of the opposite opinion – even if it were an early Christian Hymn taken from the Liturgy, it could be one in which the great mystery of Gethsemane was being recalled to mind.

- A more serious objection may be taken from the traditional character of the language. The ‘doublets’, such as ***prayer and entreaty***, in which the 2<sup>nd</sup> term is added to reinforce the first, without any considerable difference in meaning – may be found throughout Scripture [cf. Jn 20:47]. Likewise the ‘cries’ and the ‘tears’ are the usual manner of translating a prayer that is offered in great distress of soul. There are many biblical examples of this [cf. Ex 2:23; 3:7, 9; 14:10; 17:4; Nb 12:13; Jgs 3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:7; 10:10; 1 S 7:8, ff.]. One would ‘cry out’ in the presence of God [cf. Jgs 20:26; 21:2; 2 S 12:22; 2 K 20:3, 5; Jl 2:32; Zc 7:3; Esd 10:1]. The ‘re-doubled’ expression of Heb [5:7] is found several times [cf. 2 M 11:6].

- Even were one to maintain that Heb 5:7 the cries and tears of Jesus are not all that conventional, for the translating of an anguished prayer addressed to God – nevertheless, this would not seem to be a sufficient reason for denying all connection between Heb 5:7 and Gethsemane.

b. **Reasons in favor** of sustaining the view that Heb 5:7 does indeed reflect Gethsemane:

- The aorist participle that is used in the text [***He offered up***] usually refers to some specific incident, in that a kind of description of the prayer is offered: ***aloud and in silent tear***. In the Gospels, there is only one recorded instance

where Jesus offers such an anguished prayer to the Father, and that was the night of Gethsemane seeing deliverance, if that were possible.

- The expression in Heb is very similar to that of Gethsemane: ***He offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, to the One who had the power to save Him out of death...*** this is very close to the prayer of Mk: ***Abba, Father! Everything is possible for You!*** [14:36]. The cries and the tears would be merely another manner of translating the insistence with which the Prayer of Gethsemane was offered.

4. This matter, of course, will never be resolved, perhaps, to everyone's satisfaction. Nonetheless there are similarities, as has been seen, between Heb & Mk. Fr. Feuillet sees great similarities also here with Lk. It is highly probable that the unknown author of Heb would have had access to a particular oral tradition, coming from eye-witnesses.

There are many other similarities between Heb and some of the Psalms.. But again, there is not much agreement among the interpreters – so, the similarity between Heb and Gethsemane might be sustained with some likelihood of success.

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### [B] A Brief Comparison with the Gospel Accounts

1. Using as a hypothesis that Heb 5:7 does refer back to the Agony in Gethsemane, there may be another problem with this expression from Hebrews: ***...He submitted so humbly that His prayer was heard ...*** In the Gospel accounts, it would seem that at least that part of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane where He asked the father: ***If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me...*** - for some interpreters, this does not seem to have been heard:

- Bultmann and Harnack interpret this whole scene to mean: Jesus was not heard, nor was He delivered from His fear. J. Jeremias does not accept their reading of the text.

- Other interpreters maintain that these words: ***...He submitted so humbly*** as an interpolation, and not pertaining to the original text.

- Others re-translate the passage: His prayer was heard, and He was delivered from His anguish. This is the very old Latin version that saw it this way: ***auditus a metu***. This was offered by St. Ambrose, and defended later by protestant scholars even to our own day.

- Another translation has been suggested: ***He was heard after having endured the agony***. This translation has come to light in an article entitled: Difficult

passages from Hebrews. It was reached as a response to objections brought against the previous translations. It is true that there are elliptical turns of phrase in Hebrews, but it would be hard to find any reading that would be similar to *being heard after being delivered from anguish – He had asked: IF it were possible, the humiliating Cup of His Passion and Death be taken from Him*. Furthermore, divine revelation tells us that Jesus was not delivered from anguish [cf. Mt 27:46] - and in Lk, even after the comforting angel, His anguish increased. Furthermore, should such a prayer have been heard, it would be difficult to equate all this with the Plan of redemption and salvation. Such a prayer would eliminate the powerful solidarity of the High Priest that this same Heb 5 offers:

*... Every High Priest has been taken out of mankind and is appointed to act for men in their relations with God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins; and so He can sympathize with those who are ignorant, or uncertain, because He, too, lives in the limitations of weakness...* [5:1, ff.]. But, as might be expected, this translation would do some violence to the Greek text.

2. The whole context of Heb 5 is priestly. This terrible **Trial** which Jesus is undergoing is to be thought of in a certain parallelism between the offering of gifts and sacrifices – and the offering that Jesus made of His life in prayer and supplication. So, in this sense, it would not only be the Prayer of Gethsemane that would be a **Priestly Offering**, but the entire Passion is looked upon by Heb to be the intervention of the Great High Priest. This might shed some light on the disputed texts, but there are also further considerations:

- In Gethsemane, Jesus' prayer is primarily for His own deliverance from the **Cup**, IF this is possible. The Gospel accounts indicate that there was no immediate response to this prayer. Yet, here in Heb we read [if indeed this passage does apply to Gethsemane] that His prayer was indeed heard. Some would distinguish two intentions here:

- on the one hand, He prays absolutely: **However, let it not be what I want, but let Your will be done.**

- then, on the other hand, the prayer is conditional: IF it is possible, let this **Cup** pass from me.

- What is important here, is what is absolute – this aspect was heard.

3. Jesus certainly experiences all of the human emotions that one would expect in a situation such as this. However, His principal intention, the 'goal' of His entire life, His food is simply **the Father's will be done on earth as it is in heaven**. Because of Jesus' religious fear that He is heard, that the Father comforts Him. The obedience

of Jesus is perfect in this priestly act: He accomplishes the sacrifice of redemption. This religious fear is the **total submission of His Will to that of the heavenly Father.**<sup>52</sup>

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### III. DOCTRINAL REFLECTIONS ON GETHSEMANE

#### [A] Enrichment for Spirituality

##### Introduction

[1] Jesus Christ took on Himself the sufferings and sins of the world. Therefore, the problem of evil can be looked at from various points of view: the great mystery of human pain, and the continued proliferation of sin and malicious evil. In coming to grips with this, modern theology ponders deeply the Mystery of the Cross and its ramifications evening the life of the Most Blessed Trinity.<sup>53</sup>

[2] The Synoptic accounts of Gethsemane signify fundamentally the same truth. All three in substance relate: even before the physical tortures of the Passion were underway, Jesus was suddenly plunged into the deepest, over-whelming anguish. This sudden agony seems to have been in violent contrast with His previous state of mind.

[a] reflecting on this mystery, with the aid of other biblical data, it can be noted that the words used by the Evangelists to describe this extraordinary **Agony**, give the distinct impression that what Jesus endured in the Garden was not merely for fear of His own life. What happened in Gethsemane is more **the extraordinary revelation of the contact of the All Holy with sin**. Gethsemane for Jesus was a **messianic trial** – in fact, this is the culmination of His entire Messianic Mission. This Mission had been inaugurated at the very beginning of His public life, in the two scenes that are intimately connected among themselves and with Gethsemane: **Baptism** and the **temptations**.

[b] Therefore, by common accord, the Gethsemane accounts clearly suggest, on close analysis, that the **trial** of Jesus in Gethsemane is far more than human fear and anguish. Any unfavorable comparison with the ‘calm death’ of Socrates would not stand up, when one reflects on the Mystery of Gethsemane, with the aid of OT texts, and the understanding of what this mystery of the agony rally means. Socrates died stoically for a principle – while Jesus died for the **salvation of the entire world**.

<sup>52</sup> For these pages, cf. A. Feuillet, *L'Agonie de Gethsemani*. Paris: Gabalda 1977, pp. 176-185, *passim*.

<sup>53</sup> J. Moltmann, *the Crucified God*; J. Galot, SJ, *Il mistero della sofferenza in Dio*. Assisi: Cittadella 1975.

[c] The abandonment on the part of His Father in no way indicates Jesus' separation from the divinity in the constitution of His being, His human nature hypostatically united to the divinity. This was never suspended.

[d] From a careful exegesis, the theologian is taught that the whole mystery is intimately tied in with the mystery of human iniquity. Sin is expiated by the death of Jesus – for the One Who suffers here is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. The Jesus of Gethsemane and the Passion in general is the fulfillment of the **Servant of Isaiah prophecy** [cf. Is 53] and **Dn's Son of Man**.

[e] The accounts of Gethsemane further show that this Agony of Jesus in Gethsemane is presented as inseparable from the release without precedent, of the forces of evil. This terrible trial Jesus conquers by His vigilant prayer and abandonment to the Father's Will.

[3] The few lines from Heb [5:7, ff.] might be read as a reflection on the Mystery of Gethsemane. A contemplation on these verses would indicate that the prayer of Jesus had a two-fold intention:

- one was conditional, which concerned Jesus personally: ***IF it is possible, let this Cup pass;***

- the other was absolute, and had as its object the divine plan of salvation. This prayer which expresses what constitutes Jesus, was fully heard. In His struggle, and as the terrible passion looms before Him, Jesus makes an unreserved act of abandonment to the will of His Heavenly Father. Jesus never takes this back.

[4] Even the OT shows a God 'wounded' by the refusal of humanity to choose Him over sin. It shows God almost 'suffering' and yet so full of kindness, slow to anger [cf. Ex 34:6; Ps 103], that the Plan of Redemption gradually is unveiled. It is the sharing of divine love, that will liberate humanity from slavery to sin.

[a] Jesus in His Passion, and first of all, in His Agony in Gethsemane, shows Himself frightfully vulnerable. Motivated by the love of God, He endured in the name of all of humanity, the price of redemption. In His full acceptance of the Father's Plan for redemption, Jesus won for humanity their full acceptance by God.

[b] In the last of the Servant Poems, he is compared perhaps to a leper [cf. Is 53:3, ff.]. We find a prophecy of Jesus in this, livid and bruised for our iniquities, the sins of the world – but, by His wounds, ours are healed [cf. Is 53:4, ff.].

[c] Jesus is also the fulfillment of Ps 69, a lament - ***...more people hate me for no reason that I have hairs on my head...!*** [cf. v. 4]. This lament was traditionally applied to the Messiah. The Ps presents a just person who suffers unfairly – he describes himself as sinking into the swamp.

]d] Therefore, whether it is the comparison to leprosy, or that of being buried in the mud – symbols of the sins of humanity – Jesus is overwhelmed by the mystery of evil, beginning in Gethsemane, culminating on the Cross, but emerging victoriously in the Resurrection.

[5] There is really no parallel in human history that can stand up to this unique situation. Early Christianity did find something of a parallel in Socrates. His death did represent a message of hope and a lesson for his admirers. It is said that Plato took inspiration from Socrates in the description of the just man. However, in the final analysis, Socrates died in a way for his own principles, and the ‘just man’, unfairly treated, as presented by Plato, remains an example of moral goodness. Yet, no other human has ever ‘**re-capitulated**’ all of humanity in himself: by His unique graces, Jesus is the Head of the human race. No other death would have any claim on transforming deep within the spiritual situation of human beings. All of humanity was ‘condensed’ in Jesus Christ. The **whole People of God** were reduced to Him alone in Gethsemane – from this **grain of wheat** that went into the ground and died, the **New Israel** is born.

[6] Yet, along with their fundamental agreement concerning the Mystery of Gethsemane, the Synoptic accounts of the Agony in the Garden are not mere useless repetitions. All of the events of the life of Jesus manifest such a richness that no human description of the expression of them would ever exhaust the mystery. The different evangelists made no pretension of exhausting the meaning of the mystery they were treating. Each one of them concentrated on certain aspects, contemplating various doctrinal realities in their presentation. A prayerful study of each one of them allows the careful reader to penetrate the more the doctrinal perspectives proper to each of the evangelists. A superficial reading might lead one to think that they are all saying the same thing.

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**1. Matthew:** his account espouses in full the general orientation of his Gospel: the Gethsemane account is **eminently ecclesial**. In this account, there seem to be intentional reference to the *Our Father*, that prayer, *par excellence*, of the Christian community as it is turned toward the Heavenly Father. Jesus lived this prayer as He communicated it to others.

a. In Mt [cf. 26:36] one may see at least a veiled reference to the heroic sacrifice of **Abraham** [cf. Gn 22:5]. The **heroic abandonment** of the aged Patriarch then became the standard, the model for the **true** People of God. Each believer, each of the **faithful** is invited to recall how Abraham represented the beginning of the People of Israel, the Chosen People of God. When all had run away, Jesus alone remains as the only one left of the authentic people of God. The New People of God would be born from Him.

b. Mt's Gethsemane account brings out graphically the **BEING WITH** Jesus in the terrible encounter with the **ordeal**. Twice in the relatively brief Gethsemane account Jesus tells His disciples: ***Watch with Me ...Could you not watch with Me one hour...?*** [26:38-40]. The coming of Jesus into this world signifies that God is fulfilling the prophecy of ***Emmanuel*** – God truly wills to be **with his people**, so much so that He **set up His tabernacle** among us. However, this **being with** His People on the part of God is also an **invitation** for some kind of a response. The disciples also have to make their decision to be **with Jesus**. For this reason, Jesus has established a **Church**, making Himself One with the world of humanity, to reconcile its sinfulness with God. Mt's invitation is that the disciples remain close to the Church, which is called to continue His Mission in time. The disciple is called to give him/herself entirely to the Church, its prayer and its mission, contemplating her teachings, and bringing results of that contemplation to the far ends of the world.

2. **Mark:** the second Gospel is not as ecclesial, but the evangelist's approach is more Christological. Jesus is always presented as a kind of epiphany of Messianic Power. In His divinity, Jesus is a proclamation of the scandal of the Cross – the tragedy is that this transcendent Messiah has to come to know the terrible **humiliation** and a shameful death. Mk takes special pains to bring out repeatedly all through His Gospel that the revelation brought by Jesus concerning the mystery of His own Person always runs up against the lack of comprehension by His Chosen Ones.

a. Gethsemane constitutes the summit of this revelation and this total lack of comprehension. The Hour of Jesus has come [cf. 14:35]. It is even implied that the Passion of Jesus serves as a kind of anticipation of this judgment. This is an expiating anticipation, suffered by this Son of Man, who will judge humanity at the end of time.

b. Even the three specially chosen, privileged disciples – the same ones who had witnessed the Transfiguration – remain closed to this mystery unfolding before their very eyes. In the Garden of Olives, Jesus comes when unexpected, just as He will come to humanity, at the end of time. The warning for the disciples of all time is that these disciples in Gethsemane were asleep when He came [cf. 13: 33-37]. In bringing out so emphatically the lack of comprehension of the disciples, Mk expresses consciously a lesson of relying on their strengths alone, to accept divine revelation, and most particularly, the whole Mystery of the Passion and Death.

c. The Christians of all time will be invited to return to this teaching of Mk. The mystery of the Suffering Servant will always be a kind of stumbling block, a **scandal**, a **stupidity**, a **folly** [cf. 1 Co 1:23]. No one will ever be able to fathom this mystery unaided – and even with the elevation of grace and the theological life, no one will ever be able to comprehend this extraordinary mystery of the theological life, no one will ever be able to comprehend the extraordinary mystery of the

**weakness of God.**, His love for humanity, expressed in such poignant terms, from Gethsemane on, in a particular manner. In this sense, in our own times, the account of Mk merits its own particular reflection.

**3. Luke:** is both ecclesial and Christological:

**a. The Gospel:** the Christology and ecclesial perspectives of Lk are particular to him. To come to grips with the profound message of Lk, it might be helpful to keep these factors in mind:

- In this third Gospel, no disassociation may be made from Ac. These two books really constitute a single work in two volumes. The object of the Lucan message is salvation obtained by God for the world, the **New Israel**, in the Person of Jesus Christ.

- Lk has made a personal conception of Salvation History, in three stages:

- the time before Christ;
- the time of Christ;
- the time of the Church – covered in Ac.

These three ‘times’ follow the same plan: the time of Jesus is the central one in the tryptych: this central scene is the recipient of all that went before, and the mirror or open window on all that will come in the future.

**b. The Acts of the Apostles:** in conformity with this idea, the Agony of Gethsemane in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gospel appears at the central scene in the mystery of salvation. All the sufferings of the Prophets and the Just, the *anawim* of the OT, simply announced those of Jesus – and all the sufferings that follow – beginning with the martyrdom of Stephen – reflect those of Jesus, and are united with His. The **martyrdom of Stephen**, the apostolic sufferings of Paul, his and Peter’s martyrdoms : in all of this, the early Church is called to contemplate what it means to be **baptized INTO Jesus Christ**. In Lk’s eyes, Jesus is not merely the most perfect martyr – He is the King of them all, in that in them, all other human beings take strength to endure whatever it is that **discipleship** holds in store for them: that of living and dying for the reign of God.

**4. Modern exegesis:** has contributed immensely to the deeper understanding of these Synoptic accounts of Gethsemane. With the passing of time, and with notable success in our own, the theological exploration of Sacred Scripture has moved with impelling power.

a. The mystical and spiritual writers of the ages have pondered often on this mystery of Gethsemane, and often with great imagination and inspired insight. Modern research has confirmed many of these mystical insights and deepened them even further.

b. The scientific study of Scripture demands great effort and talent on the part of these exegetes. It imposes great sacrifices on them, and long and hard study. Occasionally, one hears that it hardly seems worth the while to go into all this complicated explanation of the Scriptures and that in the past, the Scriptures were read with profit, without bringing up all kinds of troubling and challenging questions.

c. Such reasoning, though, would simply deny one of the fundamental characteristics of the Word of God: its vitality, seeking to be understood, to challenge toward conversion. Precisely because it is God's own word, each age is invited to fathom it, to contemplate, study and experience, in and through fidelity to the Magisterium [DV 8]. This concerted effort in our own time is bearing much fruit.

d. Speculative theology finds itself at the point of encounter between these great biblical discoveries and the application of philosophy. One of the modern accusations is that the theology of the past was not biblical enough. And it can be admitted that sometimes speculative theology found itself referring its own system of rational speculation over the impelling data of God's own word. Today's tendency is the opposite: the emphasis seems to an almost unilateral biblical approach, along with the sociological background of today's world situation. Theology will always seek to understand the faith – and faith seeks to be grasped intellectually and translated morally, spiritually into daily life.

5. The Mystery of Gethsemane makes its strong appeal in every age to those who strive to fathom the terrible reality of human pain. In our own time with all of the immense and laudable developments, the riddle of pain remains one of the most perplexing of all. In our own time, Gethsemane also makes a strong appeal to those who experience the terrible **Dark Night** of powerlessness – the apparent endlessness of mental struggles – the terrible fears for the future. While many might echo the prayer of Jesus that if it is possible, **all of 'this' might pass** – the lesson of Gethsemane will always remain that each follower of Jesus Christ is called to address the **Act of Total Abandonment to the Father**, this lived lesson of the **Our Father** and **Mary's Fiat**: it cannot be as we might will, but as the Lord God wills!<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> For these pages of the notes, cf. A. Feuillet, *L'Agonie de Gethsemane*. Paris: Gabalda, pp. 230, ff., *passim*.

## [B] The Mystery of Christ's Suffering and that of Humanity

1. The problem of human suffering 'embarrasses' the well planned order of Creation, as well as the technological advances of our time. In this perplexing torment of humanity, the need of a sound 'philosophy', an intelligible 'mind-set' to meet what 'is' – and even more, of a profound biblical contemplation, show themselves to be of the utmost importance. In our faith, we believe that divine revelation – understood in its global message, culminating in the Person of Jesus Christ, is the ultimate explanation of human life.

2. As part of our contemplation of Gethsemane, some coming to grips with this mystery of human suffering seems to be in order. All the more perplexing is the mystery when it is human suffering, or the slaughter of the innocents of today, commemorated liturgically so soon after the hope-filled, joyous Good News of the Nativity of the Savior, Lord, of the world.

a. Some attempts to explain' human suffering are the following;

- suffering does remain an 'evil', and should be alleviated at all costs;

- nonetheless, it can afford one the possibility of deepening his/ her understanding of the human condition. In this sense, **suffering is the school of God** –it enables one to progress in the understanding of the sublime Mystery of God. Suffering, therefore, is *paideia*, it can afford a *certain wisdom*;

- suffering **purifies**, it is **redemptive**;

- it **enriches**, bringing one into an ever greater **solidarity** with most others: it can deepen one's relationship with humanity and its Savior;

- it can also open one up toward **eschatological contemplation**: we do not have here a lasting home.

b. Philosophy advances the rather surprising statement that evil in general is not simple absence, but it is a deprivation of a good that should be found in being. Considered as a privation, then, evil does not 'exist' for some philosophers. Yet, anyone who confronts it has a profound experience of this deprivation. Corporal suffering, moral pain, crowned then with death, are among the most terrible realities that human beings have to face. Certain sufferings have led to rebellion, the loss of faith. The problem of massive evil of the innocent provokes terrible questions for thinking humanity.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> cf. Elie Weisel, *The Night*.

c. In a lived experience, the philosophical idea that evil is really an absence, and that it does not have an efficient, but only a **deficient** cause, would not offer much consolation. In our faith, we do believe that God is not the cause of evil.

**3. Abraham Heschel:** this Jewish rabbi has made serious attempts to come to grips with the problem - the Rabbi's beautiful studies have made a contribution of understanding *pathos* in God, as in his *The Prophets*:

... Impressive as is the thought that God is too sublime to be affected by events on this insignificant planet, it stems from a line of reasoning about a God derived from abstraction. A god of abstraction is high and mighty, First Cause, which, dwelling in the lonely splendor of eternity, will never be open to human prayer; and to be affected by anything which it has itself caused to come into being, would be beneath the dignity of an abstract God. This is a dogmatic sort of dignity, insisting upon pride rather than love, upon decorum, rather than mercy.

... In contrast with the *primum movens immobile*, the **God of the Prophets** cares for His creatures, and His thoughts are about the world. He is involved in human history and is affected by human acts. It is a paradox beyond compare, that the Eternal God is concerned with what is happening in time [cf. Is 53:5]. The grandeur of God implies the capacity to experience emotion. In the biblical outlook, movements of feeling are no less spiritual than acts of thought...<sup>56</sup>

**4. The Book of Job:** is consecrated to the Wisdom Tradition and the struggle with the problem of evil, the suffering of the innocent. The conclusion, at least a partial one – is the fact that human reasoning, even that steeped in sacred Scripture, can never appease certain human sufferings: ***For huge as the sea is your affliction, who can possibly cure you...?*** [cf. Lm 2:13].

a. In extremely bold language, Job [and others] curse the day of his birth [cf. Jn 3:1, ff.]. His friends try to calm him down, using the traditional explanations, often based on earlier divine revelation. However, Job still cannot understand his situation. His revolting situation is no way alleviated. Suffering remains, humanly speaking, an intolerable enigma, if one expects that his/ her explanations of it are meant to alleviate it. It is a common human experience that human beings are powerless to offer consolation in the times of terrible distress. This is a drama of salvation that goes on between the individual sufferer and God: hope is that virtue by which the individual meets his/ her human limitations, by abandoning one's existence into the hands of God.

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<sup>56</sup> cf. *The Prophets*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, pp. 259. cf. also 'The Theology of Pathos', o.c., pp. 221, ff.]

b. The Book of Job has been read with immense profit through the ages: for the suffering and distress of the innocent continue to plague human consciousness. Job boldly proclaims the emptiness of all human reasoning to the learned of his own time, and of all times:

*... How often have I heard all this before! What sorry comforts you are! Is there never to be an end to your airy words? What a plague your need to have the last word is! I, too, could talk like you, were your soul in this plight of mine. I, too, could overwhelm you with sermons ... and speak words of encouragement until my lips grow tired. But, while I am speaking, my suffering remains –and when I am not, do I suffer any the less? And now ill-will drives me to distraction ...* [cf. Jb 16:1, ff.]

c. One astonishing aspect of Job is that even after these ‘tirades’ of Job, God still seems to respond. While the divine answers are not directly in response to the problem of suffering, neither are they abstract reflections on the beauty of creation. It is still necessary that even the sufferer admit that he/ she may be talking more out of ignorance [cf. Jb 38-41]. If there is any divine condemnation, it might be more those who would try to offer consolation from their own position of strength. To be pardoned, they have to appeal to the one who has suffered: *... I burn with anger against you and your two friends, for not speaking truthfully about Me as My servant Job has done ... he will offer prayers for you...* [Jb 42:7, ff.].

5. **The Jerusalem Bible:** would associated Job with the **Suffering Servant of Yahweh** [cf. Is 53]. In truth, the image of Job is only one type of the future Passion and Death of the Lord. What they may have in common is that their trial has made their intercession efficacious. Both of these OT figures indicate clearly that God is close to His Suffering Servants. He is part of their human experience. The abyss of creature-hood calls out to the best of human minds and hearts, for coming to a greater sense of solidarity with the world.

6. The extremely cruel situation experienced by **Jeremiah** is also among the OT attempts at an explanation. It is possible, at least in the view of some interpreters, that Is 53 reflects the recently martyred Jeremiah. There are great comparisons that might be made between Jeremiah and Job:

- Jr 20:14-18 and Jb 3:1-16; 10:18, ff.;
- Jr 12:1-13 and Jb 21: 7, ff.

Job seems to echo the complaints of Jr: *... My brothers have been fickle as a torrent, as the course of a season stream ...* [cf. Jb 6:15; Jr 15:18] - applied to God.

7. The People of God needed the NT revelation to take them further along this unveiling of the mystery of human pain:

a. However, it should be noted from the outset that the Son of God did not become incarnate simply to solve the riddle of human suffering, or to give some explanation for it. The Incarnation is much more the **revelation of divine love**, in response to human need – but, basically, it is inspired by absolutely sovereign love.

b. It is true that the God of love **set up His tabernacle among us**, and is like us, in all things, save sin. The Lord has become part of the immense tragedy of human history, bringing to a sanctifying and elevating sublimation.

c. St. Augustine offers an extraordinary insight [although his authorship is doubted by some] in a commentary on the Good Thief. He manifests astonishment that the Good Thief could have recognized the Savior of the world, hanging from a Cross, sharing his wretched fate. His ‘recognition’ of Jesus does not come so much from the studies of the Sages, but far more from the recognition that Jesus gave to him sharing his fate: Jesus had looked at him, and in His look, the Good thief understood!. The Good Thief was able to ‘see’ what had been denied Jeremiah. He is thus offered as a ‘model’ for all suffering Christians and human beings in general. In their trials, human beings are never alone. Baptism gives us the relationship in order to be **crucified with Jesus** – this does not mean: ‘along-side of’, nor, merely ‘in the company of’. This was the situation of the Good Thief. In Baptism we are indeed configured to Jesus Christ, and truly live in Him, and He in us. The Christ of the Agony of Gethsemane and of Golgotha has made His ‘own’ all the sufferings of all times. He is mysteriously ‘present’ in the joys and anguish of His people. Jesus gives to all suffering, all life and all death – a particular meaning and immense value.

8. It is true that with the coming of Jesus Christ, the NT offers an incomparably richer teaching on the sufferings of human beings, far beyond the most sublime heights of the OT. However, far more than this, the NT places one in intimate personal contact with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and truly man. The Jesus of Gethsemane and Calvary is in some way **united to every human being** [cf. GS 22] – and invites each person to respond to this coming of His into our world. In a good sense, it can truly be stated that all the physical sufferings and the moral agony of human beings are present to Jesus in His own Agony.

a. The OT Psalms that treat of the anonymous Just persons who have suffered throughout the OT centuries of preparation, all culminate in the Person of Jesus Christ. They were all figures preparing the way for the Suffering servant/Messiah, Who would take the burdens of the world and all its wounds into His own life. Beginning perhaps with the ‘peak’ point of OT suffering, the Servant Poems with extraordinary clairvoyance speak of One Who was yet to come, Who would make of His own life the **asham**, the **atonement holocaust** [cf. Is 53:10].

b. This Servant has taken on Himself our maladies [cf. Is 53:4: perhaps the full meaning of these *maladies* would be that the word serves as a figure for sin]. The Prophet is thinking that this Servant is taking upon Himself the faults of humanity, was being charged at the same time with their suffering. The over-all biblical idea of suffering is that it does have some connection with sin, either the originating change of orientation, or actual sin. But, this does not mean that all human suffering is punishment for some specific sin.

c. Is 53 [according to A. Eichrodt] indicates basically the ultimate messianic victory. The Servant promises the definitive victory for humanity's over-all suffering, all sin. The '*Proto-evangelium*' has already promised this victory, when the serpent would be defeated [cf. Gn 3:15].

9. The total victory of Jesus over sin, suffering and death, was already anticipated in various ways during His public life.

a. this victory implies a break with sin [cf. Mk 2:1-2, par.; Lk 7:36-59]. Forgiveness of sin is made manifest in seeing a lame person walk – seeing this, it may be easy to believe that sin has been forgiven. The miracles He performed were also signs, teaching expressions. The miracle indicated the power Jesus had to pardon. All His miracles are bound intimately to His message. They express the deeper meaning of His coming, they are the reign of God in act.

b. In healing the sick and in raising the dead, the implication is that the redeemer has taken on human suffering and has conquered it. Sickness and death came into this world through sin – by manifesting His absolute power over them, Jesus reveals his power also over sin, which caused them.

c. In the presence of Jesus, death loses its terrifying aspect. It is almost like a 'sleep' [cf. Mk 5:39; Jn 11:11-15].

1.] There is a special text from Mt [cf. 8:16,f.] which applies a line from the Suffering Servant to Jesus: ... ***Ours were the sufferings He bore, ours the sorrows He carried*** [cf. Is 53:4] ...***through His wounds, we are healed*** ... [v.5]. - ... ***That evening they brought Him many who were possessed by devils. He cast out the spirits with a word and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah ...He took our sicknesses away and carried our diseases for us...*** - The translation found here in Mt is from the LXX which translates 'sins' rather than 'sickness'. It would seem that Mt has taken this translation directly from the Hebrew. Mt does not use the words sicknesses and diseases anywhere as a euphemism to designate the sins of humans. From this, some would conclude that perhaps the idea behind Isaiah's original text of Is 53:4, the Prophet really meant our sicknesses, our physical, and mental, sufferings.

**2.]** This interpretation of what the Suffering Servant bore offered by Mt seems somewhat surprising. It would not seem to be enough to state that Jesus 'took on' our sufferings in this context, merely by some kind of a mental act of 'sympathy'. It is not enough to say either, it would seem, that the motivating force moving Jesus to heal was that He 'felt sorry' for those who suffered.

**3.]** A deeper insight might be the fact that in every suffering human being, there is the face of Christ. Mt's interpretation of Is offers a profound theological reality. Jesus, the Suffering Servant, has come to take on Himself the expiation of all sin. Furthermore, He also comes to alleviate the terrible effects of all sin. Jesus has come to 'heal'. The prophecy may already be present in Is 53:4 – Jesus will also become 'one' with all suffering humanity.

**10.** A statement in Mt [cf. 23:24-36; cf. also Lk 11:49-51] speaks of the suffering of the innocent: *...this is why, in My turn, I am sending you the prophets and wise men and scribes: you will slaughter and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and hunt from town to town...*

**a.** In Lk's perspective of the Agony of Gethsemane, there was implied the union in Christ of the Prophets of all ages, as well as the anonymous innocent just through the OT centuries. All the innocent blood from the beginning of the world, from Abel on down, is re-dressed in the terrible Agony and the ultimate glorious victory of Jesus Christ in the resurrection.

**b.** Lk places the Passion of Christ at the center of religious history of humanity, and sees it as the example and the source for the martyrs of all the subsequent ages, as well as for all those who preceded Him.

**c.** These reflections would lead almost of necessity to the Servant of Is 53 – the culminating pet of both the Martyrs and the prophets of the OT, a kind of idealized Jeremiah. The Agony of the OT centuries finds an extraordinary model in the Servant of the Lord.

**d.** The Passion of the Servant seems to be some kind of **synthesis** of the prophetic movement that preceded him – and perhaps a kind of **type** for the **martyrdom spirituality** [cf. Maccabees] which followed him. The Servant himself was the **Covenant**, and also the **atonement** offering the **expiatory sacrifice**. His offering would have an unheard of fecundity for sinful humanity. His oblation would be of immense messianic benefit for the perfect reconciliation with God.

**11. The Apocalypse:** is to be read in a similar way as this text of Mt [cf. 23:34-36], but with a broader perspective, Keeping in mind its strictly eschatological orientation, it offers a complement to the Gospel perspective. All the blood of the anonymous **just**, shed so unfairly even to the end of the world, all the unjust sufferings that have

ever been endured are now, or ever will be – of all innocent victims, are **recapitulated** in Jesus Christ, the suffering messiah, the **Immolated Lamb**, prior to the beginning of the world. All the despotic powers [symbolized perhaps by the prostitute, Babylon] that will ever shed innocent blood, all of these innocent victims can find their redress in the Lord Jesus Christ, ascended now to the right hand of the Father. John uses the technical word **immolated** : to describe the Passion of the Lamb, but also that of all the other **victims** who have innocently suffered [cf. Rv 5:6, 9, 12; 13:8; 18:24].

### Summary

[1] Christian reflection sees a two-fold participation in the sufferings of Jesus Christ:

- the freely chosen, accepted participation in the sufferings of Christ: effort to be associated with their Master;
- the involuntary participation of so many who have to suffer without ever striving to understand the mystery that overwhelms them.

[2] The saints of all ages have entered into this mystery, willingly trying to offer themselves in union with Christ, striving to penetrate the mystery of His Person and Mission. In their minds and hearts, these believers through the centuries have made the conscious choice to renew their Baptism of being immersed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Agony of their minds and bodies, in the abyss of their apparent dereliction, in faith, they cling to their privileged heritage. The Beatitude announced by Jesus Himself: ... ***Blessed are those who suffer persecution for My sake*** ... These words and the belief that in some mysterious manner, all suffering is a closer imitation of the life of Jesus, sustain so many.

[3] Those who experience this terrible **Night** – the apparently endless **spiritual winter**, those who seem to have been reprovved in their entire earthly existence [cf. Kafka's **trial** ] – are, in faith, called to share in the destiny, to drink from the same **Cup** as the Lord Jesus.

[4] The redemption of Jesus is indeed already complete. The price of salvation has been paid in the death of Jesus. As Head of the human race, Jesus has **recapitulated** in Himself all the sufferings of all human beings. In the mysterious divine will, humanity has not been 'dispensed' from suffering to win its own redemption. However, the mystery of Jesus has made all sufferings meritorious of eternal life. Those who do suffer are never really alone.

[5] All human sufferings in some way have already been experienced in the life of Jesus. By the grace of the theological life, all human existence comes to share

intimately in the very life of Jesus. Human suffering is a **con-crucifixion**, leading toward a **con-resurrection**. The People of God are redeemed and then are called to **participate** in this mystery of redemption, communicating, sharing it, in each passing age. The Cross of Christ remains central to Christianity: ***Ave Crux, spes unica!***<sup>57</sup>

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### [C] Gethsemane and Moral Evil

1. Of perhaps even greater complexity, is the human evil that is chosen. It has often been stated that our age is unique, also because of the loss of the consciousness of sin, in massive and profound proportions. The Agony of Gethsemane reveals a sublime mystery: basically, that of the divine love toward humanity. But, at the same time, it reveals the reality of sin in dramatic manner. Humanity is deeply moved by leprosy, cancer, paralysis, tragedies of all kinds: often the effects of sin, when it is violence, are deplored – whereas, the mystery of iniquity is largely ignored.

2. Plato offered a profound insight when he stated: the just person might be subjected to poverty, to maladies, or other misfortunes. However, the very misfortunes might even prove to have been, in the long run, a good. For anyone who wishes with all his might to be just, cultivates virtues, becomes similar to God, in so far as this is possible for a human being. Plato maintained that it is a far greater evil to commit an injustice than to suffer one.

3. The Greeks had a rather bland sense of sin - even though Pilate, on this point, might have gone further than even Aristotle.

4. It is really only with divine revelation, through firm faith in the one God, Creator of the universe, that one comes to understand that by sin, a human being rebels against God. In so doing, the creature revolts against the Creator, the author of order, and destroys in oneself, in so far as this is possible, the purpose for which God has destined all of creation [Gilson].

a. The revealed concept of sin stems from the unfolding of the divine plan for creation. In creating a hierarchy of values, humanity alone was made to **the image and likeness of God**. The Creator lavishly bestowed His gifts on His specially chosen creatures. When humanity turned from God, He immediately promised a redeemer – and, in the fullness of time, the Savior came, co-equal, co-eternal, with God, His beloved Son.

b. It is in this revelation that humanity comes to understand its mysterious grandeur, despite its innate misery: made from the dust of the earth, but also by the

<sup>57</sup> For these pages, cf. A. Feuillet, *L'Agonie de Gethsemani*. ib., pp. 238-248, *passim*.

hand of God. 'Sin' is an enormous deviation in that it eliminates grace, and the possibility of eternal glory.

5. The perplexing problem for faith in this regard also stems from the fact that Jesus has come, has saved the world, by conquering sin and death. Faith teaches that His redemption is universal and efficacious in a sovereign manner. In this context, the problem of willful evil presents many difficulties to simple faith.

a. In any discussion on sin, or evil, traditionally philosophy has separated God from any 'causality' in it. As Sovereign God, God is in no way responsible for human sin. In the order of nature, He could will, permit, physical maladies and sufferings for the sake of a more perfect good. But, there can be no association of God with moral evil. Traditionally, it is taught that God may 'permit' it – as is noted in the Holy Saturday liturgy: 'happy fault which merited such a redeemer!'. The sole cause of sin is the ill use of the outstanding privilege that God has given to humanity in creation. One of the great gifts that God has bestowed is the faculty of adhering, or not, to the Will of God.

b. Three extremely difficult questions continue to plague the thinker of faith:

1.] **THE INCREASING ROLIFERATION OF EVIL:** With Jesus' total victory over sin and death, how does one explain **the apparent endless, increasing proliferation of evil, violence, injustice?** It seems as though the expiating and redemptive intervention of Jesus had never occurred. There are those who conclude that we are now living in a post-Christian era.

In mystical literature, classical as well as the more modern, there is profound regret that humanity is not more open to the advances of divine love. In the Ignatian charism, the *sentire cum Ecclesia*, the association with the Church in her struggle to become more and more the reign of God, opens broad horizons for an **ecclesial spirituality**. The revealed message is full of realistic hope: **where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more** [Rm 5:20]. Whatever the actual situation of society responding to the broad variations of view of those who even reflect on it, through it all, is the **merciful love of god**. Gethsemane reveals the horror for sin – and even more, the universal extension of divine mercy. In general, there are the usual extremes:

- **Exaggerated Optimism:** this is sometimes manifest in the non-biblical understanding of **divine mercy**. There is repeated insistence throughout Scripture on the pressing need of conversion – the demands of **a jealous God**. In recent times, the whole dogmatic question of the last ends of humanity has been much under discussion:

**Vatican II:** ‘...Since we do not know the day, or the hour, on our Lord’s advice, we must constantly stand guard. Thus, when we have finished the one and only course of our earthly life [cf. Heb 9:27], we may merit to enter into the marriage feast with Him to be numbered among the blessed [cf. Mt 25:31-46]. Thus we may not be commanded to go into eternal fire [cf. Mt 25:41], like the wicked and slothful servant [cf. Mt 25:26], into the exterior darkness where *there will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth*’...’ [cf. Mt 22:13; 25:30] [LG 48].

**A Recent Letter on Eschatology: Recentiores Episcoporum Synodi, May 17, 1979:** ‘... The more recent Synods, consecrated respectively to the themes of evangelization and catechesis, has taken cognizance of the fact of the necessity of a perfect fidelity to the fundamental truths of the faith ... the Church, in faithful adherence to the NT and to Tradition, believes in the happiness of the just, who will one day be with Christ... She also believes that an eternal punishment awaits the sinner, who will be deprived from the vision of God, as well as the repercussion of this punishment in the whole being of the sinner... She believes in what pertains to the Elect, in their eventual purification which is preliminary to the vision of God. This purification, however, is totally different from the punishment of the condemned. This is what the Church means when she speaks of hell and purgatory...<sup>58</sup>

Hence, it would not be in accord with the ‘integral teaching’ of the Church to maintain that the humiliation of death alone – or, the sufferings inherent in the human condition alone – are sufficient to merit eternal life. Nor is it in accord with her traditional belief and authoritative interpretation of the divine word, that God is merciful and would forgive all. The condition of conversion remains an essential part of the Covenant of God’s Mercy.

- **Exaggerated Pessimism:** there is always the temptation to see all of life in an extremely bleak manner – the ‘Catholic’ view is different as noted by the Holy Father’s reflection on Gethsemane:

... The events of Good Friday and, even before that, the Prayer in Gethsemane, introduce a fundamental change into the whole course of the revelation of love and mercy in the messianic mission of Christ. The one who ‘went about doing good and healing’ [cf. Ac 10:38], and ‘curing every sickness and disease’, now Himself seems to merit the greatest mercy and to appeal for mercy, when He is arrested, abused, condemned, scourged, crowned with thorns, when He is nailed to the Cross and dies amidst agonizing torments [cf. Mt 9:35] ... Christ, as the man who suffers really in a terrible way in the Garden of Olives and on Calvary, addresses Himself to the Father – that Father whose love He has preached to the people, to Whose Mercy He has borne witness through all of His activity ... Indeed, this redemption is the ultimate and definitive revelation of the holiness of God, who is the absolute fullness of perfection: fullness of justice and love, since justice is based on love and tends

<sup>58</sup> *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 6, ## 1528, ff., & 1543.

toward it ... In the Passion and Death of Christ – in the fact that the father did not spare His own Son, but ‘for our sake made Him sin’ [cf. 2 Co 5:21] – absolute justice is expressed – for Christ undergoes the Passion and the Cross because of the sins of humanity. This constitutes a super-abundance of justice, for the sins of men are ‘compensated by the sacrifice of the Man – God.

Nevertheless, this justice which is properly justice ‘to God’s measure’, springs completely from love: from the love of the Father and of the Son, and completely bears fruit in love. Precisely for this reason, the divine justice revealed on the Cross of Christ is ‘to God’s measure’, because it springs from love and is accomplished in love, producing fruits of salvation... the divine dimension of redemption is put into effect not only by bringing justice to bear upon sin, but also in restoring to love that creative life and holiness that comes from God. In this way, redemption involves the revelation of Mercy in its fullness...<sup>59</sup>

**2.] THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY :** this is a second extremely difficult matter for the faith. There is a modern fascination with Personified Evil with films concerning diabolic possession continue to attract the attention of extremely numerous audiences. Some modern exegesis would eliminate the very existence of the ‘devil’ and also of the ‘angels.’

Throughout the public life of Jesus, there are recorded several confrontations with Satan, the prince of this world. It seems that the Powers of Darkness were unleashed in a furious manner in Gethsemane and on Calvary. Underlying the drama of Gethsemane, there is the evidence of the struggle with Satan. Nonetheless, Scripture presents Calvary as the final battle, the deciding contest, in which the Prince of this World is defeated [cf. Jn 12:31; Rv 12:9; Heb 2:14,ff.]. This final victory was already anticipated by the many exorcisms worked by Jesus, and also the many instances in which He so easily forgives sin. In healing the sick, and in raising the dead, Jesus was giving a glimpse of the culmination of the final times: ***no more separation, no more sadness, no more death*** [cf. Rv 21:4]. All of this wondrous activity foreshadowed and clearly promised eternal salvation.

The existence of the Church – just like that of her Founder, runs right through the repeated assaults of the Powers of Darkness and the Satanic forces. The struggle in faith is that this continues to happen [with greater or lesser success]. Despite the final victory, already won by the Founder of the Church. While the ‘spectacular’ manifestations of Satan are extremely rare [Fr. Congar, OP offered several cautions regarding the too ready acceptance as ‘diabolic’ unusual manifestations of evil, or sickness] – the Powers of Darkness indeed live up to their name. So much of their influence is far more subtle, massive, lasting: ... ***The devil was a murderer from the start; he was never grounded in the truth; there is no truth in him at all: when he***

<sup>59</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*. November 30, 1980, # 7.

***lies, he is drawing on his own store, because he is a liar, and the father of all lies ...***  
[cf. Jn 8:44].

The Modern Magisterium has spoken of the powers of darkness with some clarity with a long document published during the Holy Year, 1975:<sup>60</sup>

**... Therefore, it remains certain that there exists a demonic reality, concretely attested to by that which we call the mystery of evil. This remains even today an enigma which envelops the life of Christians. We do not know any better than the Apostles why it is that the Lord permits it, nor how He makes use of it in His designs. However, it could very well happen that in our civilization, taken over by secular horizontalism, the unexpected explosions of this mystery offer a less partial sense of it.**

**Those rampant manifestations of evil oblige human beings to look further, higher, beyond the immediate manifestations. Through the threat and the preponderance of evil, which impede our pathway, we are permitted to discern the existence of a future to be worked out, and therefore, to turn toward Christ, to listen to the Good News from Him, His salvation offered as a grace ... [# 1393].**

The reality of the evil One leads some to doubt the real victory in Gethsemane and on Calvary. To state, without explanation that Jesus has triumphed definitively over the Evil Powers, seems hard to accept when one reflects on the world situation. The Apocalypse – perhaps tempered somewhat from Paul’s enthusiastic explosions in the freshness of his dramatic conversion, offers a hope that is most realistic. In no way does the Apocalypse ‘water down’ the harshness of the **ordeal** that is expected:

***... The great dragon, the primeval serpent, known as the devil, or Satan, who had deceived the whole world, was hurled down to the earth, and his angels were hurled down with him...*** [cf. Rv 12:9].

***... then I saw a beast emerge from the sea .. he had a fatal wound ... but that is why the saints must have constancy and faith...*** [Rv 13:1-10].

***... Then I saw a second beast ....*** [Rv 13:11, ff.] ***... a woman riding the beast ...*** [Rv 17:1, ff.].

Implicit here is the revelation that even though the Powers of Evil will eventually be defeated, before the final battle, the Devil will know many victories. The Immolated Lamb [cf. Rv 5:5], perhaps a symbolic expression of the wounded Servant [cf. Is 53], will definitively conquer the great Dragon [cf. Rv 12: 7, ff.]. Even with the repeated defeats, the Beast comes to emerge again and again. This ‘re-emergence’ of the ‘defeated animal, can in no way be compared with the

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<sup>60</sup> The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, June 26, 1976 in: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 5, ## 1347-1393.

resurrection of the Lamb. The ‘beast’ already is mortally wounded, his/ her days are counted [cf. Rv 12:12]. The final destiny: **...Then, the devil, who misled them, will be thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are, and their torture will not stop, day or night, forever and ever ...** [Rv 20:10].

In faith, we hold that between the power of the son of God and that of the Devil, there is no comparison. The Apocalypse presents this in dramatic fashion in these recurring **ordeals** with the Beast. Although mortally wounded, the power remains formidable. Almost in the very moment of His own supreme **ordeal**, Jesus states: **... I have told you all this so that you may find peace in Me. In the world, you will have trouble, but be brave: I have conquered the world ... !** [Jn 16:33].

We have been created without our cooperation – but, the ‘second creation’, redemption, depends on the free cooperation of the redeemed. In the battle, or the **ordeal**, the Lord has not dispensed these He has called from the struggle. The Chosen People of God are all invited to participate in this terrible struggle for the cause of God in their own and others’ lives. The struggle announced in the message of hope right after the fall [cf. Gn 3:15] will be anticipated in by all. The promise is, though that this struggle will be crowned with success. The Letters in the Apocalypse are a demand for **conversion**, and a promise of **final victory**.

**3.] THE REALITY OF CONDEMNATION:** in this connection, this is the third aspect of this difficult aspect of the faith. There is a very challenging problem of equating this revealed reality with that of divine mercy. In Gethsemane, there is a profound revelation of divine reaction to sin – it can never co-exist in one with the thrice Holy God. The appeal is that all accept the merits and grace of Divine Redemption.<sup>61</sup>

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### Suggested Reading on this Discussion

GEACH, Peter, ***Providence and Evil***. The Stanton Lectures 1971-2. Cambridge University Press 1977.

HEBBELTHWAITE, Brian, ***Evil, Suffering and Religion***. NY: Hawthorne LTD.

HICK, John, ***Evil and the God of Love***. Great Britain: Collins 1979.

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<sup>61</sup> For these pages, cf. A. Feuillet, *L’Agonie de Gethsemani*, o.c., pp. 248-255.

### [D] Gethsemane and the Trinity

1. Gethsemane, as the Passion and Cross in general, reveal the unfathomable mystery of divine love and mercy, on the one hand - and, at the same time, they make known to the person of faith the terrible mystery of iniquity. Those truths: divine love and human sin, the Agony of Gethsemane and the Passion in general proclaim in an astonishing manner. There is no progress possible in the Christian way, unless there is a personal encounter, and a coming to grips with the Passion of Jesus Christ.

2. It has been said [H. Bergson] that the Christian mystics are but imitators and those who continue in an original outstanding – but always incomplete – manner, the mystery of the Suffering Christ, the Christ of the Gospels in all His fullness. In the work of theology, exegesis, all of this is at the service of the word, inviting authentic imitators and witnesses of the unique savior of the world. There is a strong appeal within the word of God itself, to re-present to the world of today the genuine witness of Jesus Christ.

a. There is always a great danger in theology, on the intellectual level, that it remain merely speculative – and on the spiritual level, that it do very little in one's life. The Gospels and the Word of God in general –the divinely inspired Tradition, and the many traditions through the Age of the Fathers, Doctors and Doctresses of the Church, all are a Gift from God Himself. This magnificent doctrinal and spiritual tradition is not intended to communicate abstract thoughts, no matter how beautiful they maybe. This great tradition has as its purpose that humanity might come to know God more profoundly, experience Him more fully. **Jesus is the Icon of the Most Blessed Trinity**, and is the Revelation, *par excellence*, of the inner life of God – the greatest gift of all, for which all of God's gifts were given. **What is called for by these special passages of scripture is the personal encounter with Jesus Christ.**

b. The Incarnate Son of God has given His life for the People His Father had chosen His way of salvation that leads through the resurrection to eternal glory, has to go the Way of the Cross. All the saints had their own *icon*, living image of the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. No one of these was complete, nor were all of them together – but, the Person of Christ became very real, 'incarnate' in their lives. The extraordinary examples of charity, missionary generosity were inspired by the self-forgetfulness of Christ. This aspect of his love, expressed in human terms through the drama of Gethsemane and the Passion in general, reflected the Father's love for His People.

c. In Lk's account Mary is almost identified with Christ: **... and your own soul a sword will pierce...** [2:35]. In this scene, the Passion of Jesus and the Compassion of His Mother come across as one drama. Along-side the New Adam,

Mary is the New Eve. The 'help-mate' promised to the First Adam [cf. Gn 2:18], the 'woman' of Gn 3:15 are fulfilled in the NT revelation where Mary cooperates so intimately in the redemption of the world. Here communion with the suffering Christ, the real sufferings accompanying the birth of the New Israel – are all the fruit of the mystery of the Cross [cf. Rv 12:2; Jn 19:25,ff.].

**3.** In this mystery, and more particularly in its presentation, it has often proved difficult to avoid the excesses of what some authors call *dolorism*. This would be the glorification of suffering as such, almost as though to present it as a separate value. The Agony in Gethsemane, the Passion, the Cross – all of these were milestones to be surpassed on the way to the Father's glory. The over-all scope of this in the divine plan is that human beings be associated with the eternal life and happiness of the Trinity. St. Thomas wrote: The Knowledge of the Trinity in unity, is the end and the fruit of our entire lives.<sup>62</sup>

**a.** The NT never separates Gethsemane and Calvary from Easter- on the Cross, Jesus Himself speaks of Paradise, this day. The resurrection permeates the entire NT.

**b.** All deaths are meant to be united with that of Jesus, Who is united in some way, with every single human being. Suffering is accepted only in the light of association with Christ, who has resurrected and is with the Father for all eternity.

**c.** The Christian is called by the central mysteries of the faith to look on the most harsh sufferings, the most desperate human situations – trying always to change those realities, whenever, wherever possible - to see all in the perspective of the of the redemptive drama of Jesus Christ – all leading toward the resurrection. As Christ has already resurrected, it is in the power of this new life that each believer is called to do all that can be done, to lessen the on-going passion and death in society. The contemplation of faith does not end with the Passion of Jesus – it begins here in a developed life of prayer, to come through the resurrection to reflections on the very nature of God.

**4.** Others might exaggerate suffering from a dogmatic point of view: it is not unusual today to read theologians who make the Cross more of a suffering from a dogmatic point of view: it is not unusual today to read theologians who make the Cross more of a symbol than a reality to convert the believer. Some see that suffering was already 'built in', constituting, the divine act of creation. The suffering of Jesus is but a reflection of **Suffering in God**. A Japanese scholar, Kitamari [after the US dropped atomic bomb on Japan] has written a study on the **Theology of the Pain of God**. The German scholar, Jurgen Moltmann has written **The Crucified God**, Pain in

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<sup>62</sup> I. Sent., c. 2, q. 1.

God is traditionally [from Origen?] connected with the revealed fact that **God is Love** [cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16 – the title of Pope Benedict VI's first Encyclical]/ Jesus is revealed as suffering out of love. This has also as its goal to shift emphasis from the Greek idea of the *a-pathetic divinity*, to the more biblical idea, expressed in the many **anthropomorphisms** and **anthropopathisms**: God as 'angered, regretful, grieving'. It might be said from the outset in this much discussed theological question that the biblical revelation concerning pain and suffering associates it as a deviation [which these theologians criticize in the use of Hellenism as the vehicle for explaining in human terms some grasp of the mystery of God] of applying to the realm of the infinite, *what eye as not seen, nor what has ever entered the human mind*. Nonetheless, some of these insights have opened up further avenues of reflection on the central mysteries of Christianity.

5. Human suffering is indeed **re-capitulated** in that of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, all of Sacred Scripture – explicitly a few times, but implicitly throughout – presents humanity as a unique creation, made to the image and likeness of God: this leads to sublime theological reflection:

a. A human being may 'know' God in a variety of ways:

- through **analogy**: or the *kataphatic* procedure: offering **imagery** to describe God – the way of affirmation, through causality.
- through **negation**, the *apophatic* approach: *nox illuminatio mea...*
- through **eminence**: whatever created perfections, or goodness there may be found – all exist in an eminent manner in God.

b. Some would apply these categories to the mystery of **suffering**, and its presence, or absence in God:

- through the way of **affirmation**: Scripture presents suffering as a disorder, a deviation. Therefore, one would state categorically, as Greek philosophy does that **Actus Purus** cannot suffer, or be passive, receiving, in any way.
- through the way of **negation**: this would respond that God cannot be **indifferent** ['apathetic', in the sense of 'non-caring'] toward the world He made out of love, mercy – He cannot have withdrawn in an 'eternal sabbatical'. Therefore, in some way, God may be said to suffer.
- through the way of **eminence**: there is something heroic and good about any who would suffer **for others**, who would lay down one's life for both friends AND enemies. In this sense, **the sufferings of Jesus Christ offer an insight into the Mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity**.

c. There is something of the ‘image and likeness’ of God in anyone who has to endure suffering, and in all who endure death. Divine revelation would make it impossible for one to think of the God of Mercy, who is also the Supreme Good, as indifferent, unperturbed – *apathetic* - by human conduct.

d. The ‘tireless’ mercy of God, confronting human sin, is one of the truths that appears the more clearly in Sacred Scripture. **Mercy** does imply some ‘feeling’ in the human consciousness, being often compared to maternal love for a helpless child.

... The second word which is the terminology of the OT to define mercy is *rephidim*. This has a slightly different nuance from that of *hesed*. While *hesed* highlights the marks of fidelity to self, and of ‘responsibility’ for one’s own love [which are, in a certain sense, masculine characteristics], *rahamim* - in its very root denotes the love of a mother [*rehem* is the mother’s womb]. From the deep original bond – indeed the unity – that links a mother to her child, there springs a particular relationship to the child, a particular love. Of this love one can say that it is completely gratuitous, not merited, and that in this aspect it constitutes an interior necessity: an exigency of the heart. It is, as it were, a feminine variation of the masculine fidelity to self expressed by *hesed*. Against this psychological background, *rahamim* generates a whole range of feelings, including goodness and tenderness, patience and understanding, i.e., readiness to forgive ...<sup>63</sup>

d. Mercy denotes that one can indeed ‘feel’ the misery of another, and one is thus moved, through com-passion, to bring some alleviation to it. J. Maritain has said that it would be absurd to think of a God Who would be indifferent to human misery. Maritain believed that if the ideas of a God, Who would suffer human ills even more than humanity itself suffers them – such a concept of God could have broad implications for faith in the world. Maritain did criticize St. Thomas’ idea of Mercy [cf. I, q. 21, a.3]. where the Angelic Doctor states that is Mercy in God only according to the ‘effect’ that it produces, not according to the ‘effect of passion’. For Maritain, it is impossible not to attribute mercy to God, as being moved by human misery.

e. A God Who would be ‘inaccessible’ to human trials cannot be the God of Christianity, so fully revealed by Jesus Christ in Gethsemane and on Calvary. While it is truly an **anthropomorphism** to say that God truly suffers, it is also not truly ‘biblical’ to think that He is indifferent, or that He is above all weakness. This would imply remove from God all feeling for humanity. When one admits that **God is Love**, there has to be some effect and affection on the part of God for those He loves.

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<sup>63</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Dives In Misericordia*, # 4 - with its extended Footnote, # 52.

f. Modern theology has found an excellent text from Origen, in one of his *Homilies on Ezechiel*. Origen noted: the Father Himself is not impassible – when one prays to Him. He has pity and compassion. The Father suffers from a passion of love [cf. 6:6]. The late Cardinal DeLubac, SJ in his Commentary on Origen, calls this an ‘astonishing text, most admirable!’ Origen was well acquainted with the idea of ‘impassibility’ in God, and elsewhere, he sustains this. At least in the aspect of God’s love for humanity, there can be attributed something like suffering in God.

g. However, there are some modern theologians who also speak of suffering in the proper sense, as being attributed to God. And that in the life of the trinity itself, there would have to be ‘suffering’ in the proper sense – otherwise, the trinity would be ‘closed in on itself’.<sup>64</sup> So far, such ideas are far from full acceptance by theologians –with the exception perhaps of a number of ‘Liberation Theologians’.<sup>65</sup>

6. The Mystery of Gethsemane and the Mystery of the Cross are associated intimately with the Mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity. This is so by the very nature of these mysteries: they revolve around the over-all Mystery of Divine Love. The Cross and the Trinity shed light one on the other.

a. The Mystery of Redemption is revealed to us as the Son of God becoming Incarnate to offer the price of our salvation. While the human nature of Jesus suffered and died, as assumed by the Divine Person, the Eternal Father, Son and Holy Spirit intervene in this Mystery of Divine Love. The rooting of the Cross in the life of the trinity can go even further. It is not only by reason of human sin that the return of Jesus to the Father implies an abyss of suffering. The whole mystery of the Cross becomes a revelation of the ineffable relationship of love that expresses the intra-Trinitarian life.

b. Another image of this is **the Lamb that has been immolated from the constitution of the world** [cf. Rv 5:6]. This **immolation** might also be understood as designating His **Eternal Mission expressed as loving obedience, constitutional filiation**.

c. The Christological formulas of the NT, particularly those of Jn [which seem to be the most ‘transcendent’ of all, while without ever ceasing to refer first of all to the historical existence of Jesus and to His messianic activity] also reveal to us something of the divine Being which is the source of this salvific intervention of His life. It is thanks to the redemption wrought by Jesus that in Jn [cf. 1 Jn 4:7-16] that we can come to understand the wondrous nature of **God is Love**.

<sup>64</sup> J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Leonardo Boff, OFM, *Passione di Cristo / Passione del Mondo*. Cittadella.

7. In His Passion and Death, Jesus out of love for humanity and the Father, abandons of His own free will, His own human life. This means that through the revelation implicit in this **total self-giving**, Jesus has chosen to merit for us and to communicate to us, something of His relationship toward the Father. By His death and Resurrection, Jesus has bestowed on all, male and female alike, something of His filiation, His unique relationship to the Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit. Through Jesus, God makes of us all sons and daughters of the Most High [cf. Jn 1:12].

a. That which the drama of His Passion and Death reveal is not only how much God loves us but there is in this a revelation of how much Jesus loves the Father – and this leads to the very heart of the Mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity: *...But what the world must be brought to know that I love the Father and that I am doing directly what the Father has told Me ...* [Jn 14:31].

b. In His Passion and death, Jesus ‘experiences’ as man that which He lives eternally as the son of God in the Trinity – i.e., His complete dependence on the Father in love. Between His stripping on Calvary, and the gift that Jesus makes of Himself through the Gift of redemptive Incarnation, Jesus makes of Himself the perfect Gift:

- to the Father, by the freedom with which He offers Himself;
- to humanity, by the **totality** of the Gift.

c. Furthermore, this reveals the perfect Self-giving that exists eternally in the Most Blessed Trinity. The Divine Persons ‘give’ of themselves in some way, thus establishing in human terms, the awesome mystery of their eternal relationships.

d. The Gift of Self to God and to others becomes, then, the fundamental law of the Christian life, and its basic reason for being. This new law has its source in the life of Jesus Himself. In His Self-giving for the redemptive Incarnation, Jesus has provided the ‘source’ for missionary generosity until the end of time.

e. Calvary and trinity can never be disassociated – and in these culminating mysteries of the life of Jesus the faithful are given the most outstanding revelation of the inner life of God Himself, active through all eternity.

8. Most Christian theologians will agree that the Cross of Jesus Christ is the most characteristic element of the Christian life and faith. In the death of Jesus on the Cross, there are made ‘visible’ throughout all of history, **the eternal relationships of love** with God and for humanity.

a. There are **re-capitulated** in Jesus the tragic history of all human suffering and anguish from the beginning, through to the end. Along with being the revelation of the Trinity, Jesus is likewise the ‘model’, the ‘paradigm’ of human life. In

the secularized present century, a sense of 'transcendence' has been lost along with the loss of the sense of sin. In an age of corrosive contestation, all the moral and religious values struggle for acceptance. In the present threat of massive, militant atheism, Christian faith is being drawn back to those 'fundamentals, if recent publications in the field of theology are any indication.<sup>66</sup>

**b.** While remaining throughout life a citizen of two cities, the believer is tending toward **home, eternal life**. In any of the 'scientific' or 'political' insights which the genius of humanity might discover, these will need to be tempered, purified with the vision of the Cross.

**c.** There is no authentic presentation of the faith of the Church that would neglect those aspects of the life of Jesus Christ. Human love which is not a gift of self, and not marked profoundly by the sign and the blood of the Cross, will only be really a caricature of authentic love.

**9.** The urgent demand of conversion of mind and heart before the world situation, that is being pressed on the believer from all sides, asks that this vision be channeled through the Mystery of Gethsemane and Calvary, along the way to the resurrection. It is in contemplating these 'ultimate mysteries' of the Love of Jesus Christ that one will come to the great abyss of Divine Love. In the contemplation of these mysteries, one will come to understand how much each human person is loved by God. Often, in an age of statistics, and massive world tragedy, one loses sight of **the unique image of God in each human being** [cf. GS 22], accustomed as the modern mass media makes one, to think of the masses. The infinite Love of God is poured out [cf. Rm 5:5] for each human being. Furthermore, one will come to understand the terrible effects of sin from reflecting on Gethsemane and Calvary relived by many in our own time. The refusal of the love of God leads to the rejection of other human beings – and the lack of love for others, puts the love of God out of reach.

**a.** The Wisdom of the Cross, the Mystery of divine love in Gethsemane, while remaining pre 'folly' for so many offer profound insights into our ultimate destiny. These mysteries are the source of an invincible optimism – and paradoxically, will show the absolute poverty of human means. While the difficulties which face governments and the Church do seem insurmountable, the mystery of the Cross will assist anyone seeking the Lord, to believe that a better society is still possible. Paul preached this biblical optimism with unflagging zeal [cf. 1 Co 1:22-25; 2:1-5; 2 Co 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 12:9, f.].

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<sup>66</sup> cf. the Document on *Fundamentalism*.

**b.** The Church is called to be a 'leaven' for society, to build the world up into the mystery of Jesus Christ. Should the Church ever lose its savor, and become absorbed by the society which at times seems to be engulfing it, she will indeed become 'irrelevant'. The Hope of the Church is in the Crucified Christ, who has risen!

**c.** The suffering Christ presented to us by the Gospels is not One whose career, or mission ended on Calvary. nor will the Church ever believe that only the 'ideas' of Jesus Christ have resurrected, but not His humanity. He is **truly risen!** The Jesus of the Gospels is not a distant historical personality – nor, merely an idea, a message, that has been raised on high. He is the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity, Incarnate for the Mystery of Salvation, whose self-offering tells us of the Trinity, and offers a model to be followed.

**10.** A task of capital importance is for the Christian to re-discover Christ Jesus. There is the powerful appeal **to adhere personally to Him**, Who in some way is already present in each human being.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> For these pages, cf. A. Feuillet, *L'Agonie de Gethsemani*, ib., pp. 255-263.

## FINAL SUMMATION

### Introduction:

[1] The Synoptic accounts present themselves as faithful witnesses of the oral tradition. They do represent an integral part of the Revelation concerning the Agony of Gethsemane. A number of modern scholars have minimized these accounts:

- some [e.g. Bultmann, Lescow, Ebeling] have written that Gethsemane is a legend created by faith, or by liturgical needs;
- others [the Catholic, R. Brown] state that Gethsemane – as it [and the temptation scene] is presented by the Synoptics – is a kind of ‘synthesis’, of a number of prayers offered by Jesus as presented by the Synoptics – not excluding His prayer actually offered in Gethsemane – all then brought together here.

[2] Without entering into the relative merits [particularly R. Brown’s view] the presentation here has been that these accounts are historical. However, it is also most clear that each of the Evangelists had his own ‘reason’ and audience for writing. For the combined characteristics, it does seem that one could draw these conclusions:

### **[A] Apologetical – Exhortatory Traits in the Gethsemane Accounts**

In general, it can be stated that one of the characteristics of the early preaching of the Church is that it did not present itself as a simple exposition of past events. Much more, these writings are ‘gospels’ – a ‘message’ something that would have particular value for all the listeners, who were far removed in time and space from those capital events of the Mystery of Redemption. To communicate a message would be indeed historical, in that this is the Word of God, communicated to humanity, as an indication of Covenant Friendship, leading to eternal life. However, they would not be history in the precise sense that one would think of that word today. There is a gathering of OT data used artfully to show that Jesus indeed is the fulfillment, that all happened in accord with the Scriptures, and the divine plan.

Gethsemane is presented not simply as a chronicled event, or as something that might be of passing interest, or even something that was meant to increase piety. It is rather an announcement of the message that the Suffering and Death of Jesus was in conformity with the Divine Plan: that this reveals both the enormity of sin, and the infinity of Divine Love.

## 1. Apologetic-Christological Elements

a. From a Christological point of view, the announcement in Gethsemane centers primarily around the two prayers of Jesus: one that is imperfect, and one that is perfected. Jesus is presented as deep in anguish facing His terrible **ordeal** of the Passion and Death. He asks – **IF** it is possible- that this **Cup** might pass from Him. Then, He withdraws His condition, and simply asks for the total fulfillment of the Father's Will in an **act of abandonment**.

1.] This attitude of Christ which is ultimately expressed in the full acceptance of the Father's Will, is inline and fulfills much data from the OT. His anguish is found in an old translation of Ps 42. There is much speculation that other Psalm prayers were fulfilled in this revelation of the Agony and Passion of Jesus. The moment that Jesus is **handed over** into the hands of the enemies of His Father, there is much evidence that this is the unimagined fulfillment of the Canticles of the Servant, particularly the 4<sup>th</sup> one [cf. Mk 14:41; Mt 26:45 – and Is 53:10-12; cf. also Jn 12:23, 34; Is 52:13]. There is likewise recourse to Dn's **Son of Man** theme.

2.] This NT interpretation would bring together the two major OT Christological themes, that of the **Suffering Servant** and that of the **Son of Man**. Many are of the belief that Jesus did indeed see Himself in this light. [Bultmann believed that all of these interpretations were 'post-Easter readings.']

3.] There is hardly any doubt that the Early Church saw Jesus as the Messiah and read His passion and Death in the light of Is 53, and the various Psalms of the **Persecuted Just Man**. Compare the following:

**Mk 14:61; 15:5 & Is 53:7;**

**Mk 15:29, 34 & Ps 22:2, 8;**

**Mk 15:26 & Ps 69:22.**

However, it would hardly seem that the later community would have made these connections, unless they came to it through apostolic authority, which receive this directly from Jesus.

b. this does not mean that regarding the very **Night of Gethsemane** all of this was crystal clear. It is highly probable that when the Evangelists compiled their accounts, after the Event, that they called on the **oral traditions** that went right back to Jesus Himself. Jesus indeed was the **Suffering Servant the Son of God, the Son of Man**.

c. This teaching of the tradition that goes back to Jesus is a departure from the main-line Judaic thought. Here we have an announcement of the Christian

'Good News': the **Hour** has come, the Son of Man is being handed over into the hands of sinners! Up until this moment, the 'Hour' had remained hidden [cf. Is 49:2]. Before the glorious coming of the Son of Man, He now comes in His suffering, in fulfillment of the Father's Plan.

d. Christian preaching, that went right back to that of the Lord Himself, could see in Jesus the suffering Son of Man [cf. Dn 7:25]. Jesus appears at the head of His suffering People, His saints. What is concluded from all this is the suffering messianic people and the son of Man, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh are indivisibly united here.

e. So, the tradition concerning Gethsemane is not merely a 'chronology of facts', but it is a **theological and spiritual interpretation** of this great mystery of salvation, unfolding before their eyes. Jesus had fulfilled in Himself the prophecies – His 'anguish' is in accord with the Divine will, and through it, and the Death which follows the Plan of redemption will be completed, then in the resurrection.

f. Jesus 'begins' here the messianic times with as Son of Man suffers as the Servant of Yahweh. Jesus also makes His own the sufferings of all times – and all those who will come after Him, may find in the Mystery of Gethsemane a great ray of hope.

## 2. The Gethsemane accounts show evidence of a *Paranesis*:

a. In the Book of Dn and in rabbinic Judaism, much mention was made of the **eschatological trial of the saints**. In this tradition, the Messiah, as the Son of Man, handed over, hold the first place. In this tradition, the suffering Messiah, betrayed into the hands of sinners, is the Head of the New People of God. This tradition did not merely prepare for a Christological reality, but it intended to 'move' its adherents to a response in faith, to offer a vital adherence to the message. In this tradition, doctrine is not separated for this exhortatory *paranesis*. This is evident in a number of biblical passages retained in NT revelation [cf. Jn 12:29, f.; Lk 22:40-45; Mk 14:32-42; Mt 26: 36-46; cf. also Heb 4: 15, f.; 5:7]. This application to the faithful of the **tribulation/' trial** of Jesus seems to have been a basic element of the oral tradition, and then it was presented in a different way in accord with the purposes of Mk, Mt, Lk, Jn and Heb.

b. A good part of the *paranesis* centers around the term **temptation/ trial**, used in intimate connection with the **Hour** and the Son of Man. This bestows on the whole passage a kind of **eschatological spirit**. The scene of Gethsemane indicates a kind of **apocalyptic situation** in which the decisive battle with *Belial* occurs, and with this is the ultimate victory, salvation is acquired for the New People of God.

1.] In Dn, the eschatological situation of the People of the Saints is described as a situation in which the saints will have to be put to the **test** [cf. Dn 7:25; 12:10].

2.] The community of Qumran also was deeply impressed with the idea of an **eschatological trial** coming to **test** the faithful. There was to be a terrible conflict between the **Children of Light** and those of the **Darkness**.

c. In this kind of context, one might understand more deeply the urgency of Jesus' words: **Watch and Pray!** This is the exhortation directed also to the community, and to the disciples of all times. With the **Hour** that dawned with the Passion and Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the **Final Times** indeed have been inaugurated. It is not an injunction just to 'wait', but much more **an appeal** to be imbued with the urgency of the eschatological times. The formula is: **watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation.** The watchful prayer is the necessary means for the obtaining of the necessary assistance. Gethsemane, therefore, is a moving lesson of encouragement, a **paranesis**.

d. This exhortatory character of the Gethsemane account might also appear more forcefully when one considers the impact of these passages on the Early Church. This is a dramatic lesson for the Christian community as it waited the 'long time' for the return of the Lord. The whole community is being put on 'emergency measures' to watch and pray, through the centuries, that the little flock might not be put to the test. The Gethsemane Account is a revelation of the awesome eschatological temptation: ... **the man who thinks he is safe, must be careful that he does not fall. the trials that you have had to bear are no more than people normally have. You can trust god not to let you be tried beyond your strength, and with any trial, he will give you a way out of it, and the strength to bear it ...** [cf. 1 co 10:13]

c. The appeals for watchful vigilance and prayer are found throughout the Apostolic preaching:

- **Gospels:** cf. Mk 13:33-37; Mt 24:42, f.; 25:13; Lk 12:37-39; 21:36.

- **Epistles:** cf. Rm13: 11-13; 1 Co 10:11-13; 16:13,21; 1 H 5:5-10; 1 P 5:8, ff.

From this it appears that the exhortations to **vigilance**, not to let oneself be taken over by sleep, and to resist the **Powers of Darkness** through to the end – is one of the main points of early Christian preaching. Thus, Gethsemane is an actual message, perennial in its freshness, needing to be fathomed with each passing generation. Now the son of Man is **being handed over** - **Pray** so that we will not enter into the **temptation/ trial**. All of this is an invitation to **follow Jesus right through to the end**.

### Summary

The Gethsemane tradition is presented as having these following characteristics: **apologetic, Christological, exhortatory**. The inspiring motivation behind the various accounts of the Gethsemane Agony was that of announcing the Mystery of Jesus. He is revealed as the Messiah, who achieved, through suffering, the prophecies of the OT, and carried out the divine will of the Heavenly Father. All of this is presented as an exhortation to the 'post-Easter' community, awaiting the Risen Lord's Return. Gethsemane is an essential part of the following of Jesus Christ.

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## **[B] Gethsemane and History**

### **Introduction:**

**[1]** There can be no doubt for a believer that Jesus prayed in the garden with his disciples, and was arrested there, following the Last Supper. This information unanimously attested to by the gospels [cf. Mk 14:26,32,43,46; Mt 26:30,36, 47, 50; Lk 22:39, 47, 54; Jn18:1,3, 12]. The first reading of these accounts would give the appearance that this is historical – but, it is also more than that. The Evangelists are not only telling us that Jesus went into the Garden to pray, and was captured - they also describe a number of details concerning the Agony in the Garden, in accord with what they, too, had received from the oral tradition of the Early Church.

**[2]** The Gospel accounts were written in the light of the resurrection and of faith, in the Person of Jesus Christ. The early *kerygma* of the Church reflected on the full story of Jesus, as this was further contemplated in the light of His glorious resurrection. Therefore, the early commentators of this tradition presented the life of Jesus for the faith of the Apostles and all who would follow them – and also for the edification, to inspire the **persevering witness** of those who would follow Christ until the end of time. Thus, the account is interspersed with OT citations, very familiar to the early centuries and there is much evidence that these accounts were also meant as **exhortations**.

**[3]** In faithful compliance with the integral teaching of the Church, a believer would not think of Gethsemane as the invention of the early community. There are those who do maintain that so many of the details could not have been 'eye-witnessed' – and, therefore, its 'historicity is doubted. There are those who think of the Gethsemane account as a highly 'tailored' synthesis of some of the teachings of Jesus, inserted here at the introduction of the Passion, as a key to its interpretation.

**[4]** The traditional belief of the Church, though, has seen in Gethsemane great insights into the Mystery of redemption: the encounter of the infinite Mercy of God

with the horror of sin. There is in Gethsemane the great lesson on Prayer, the need to **watch and pray always**, as a kind of urgent message for the Church of all times. The idea of a Suffering servant, the Son of God, the Messiah, goes back to the earliest levels of the tradition. In the last analysis, so much of Gethsemane is based on the convictions Jesus had of Himself.

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## 1. The Agony

a. this aspect of the Mystery of redemption is found only in this particular sense in the Gethsemane accounts. The announcement of His Passion, in which Jesus predicted that He would be handed over into the hands of His enemies is repeated many times. But, the terrible anguish, the particularities of His **ordeal** in Gethsemane, are found only here. There seems to be a conscious reference at least to the LXX tradition of **Ps 42**, seen more as a prophecy. This aspect of the **Messiah** – one who would suffer as **Servant** and also be subjected to the terribly degrading **humiliations**, was indeed a scandal to the faith up to that time.

b. It is precisely these aspects of Jesus 'agony' that represent such a startling 'break' with the pre-Christian tradition. There is evidence on the part of the writings of the Church that this whole mystery is being 'elevated' that it might somehow participate in the eventual 'Lordship' of Jesus [cf. Mt 26:53; Jn18:1-11]. Perhaps this very 'break' with so much that was held as sacred and 'safe' would be one of the strongest arguments for the authenticity of this passage.

## 2. The Witnesses

a. Some of the interpreters who would deny this story [as the account of the temptations] rely on the fact that there were no eye-witnesses. However, some of the biblical data would allow one to contest this to some extent [cf. Mt 16:36, ff.; Mk 14:32, ff.]. the disciples were not always asleep – the fact that Jesus went off a little would not mean that they would have been cut off totally from what was happening.

b. It does seem that the evangelists also wanted to stress the presence of the same three disciples who had witnessed the Transfiguration. This seems to be an effort on the part of the tradition to show that indeed there were witnesses. Lk shows the distance to have been about a 'stone's throw'. This still would have allowed contact with the events of the Garden.

c. There seems also to be the conviction that an event of such drastic implications: the witness of Jesus, the shame He endured, the total departure from all that the Messiah was supposed to have been - would need very authoritative

witnesses. So, we have Peter, chosen by Christ as the **Rock** – John, the **Beloved** – and James, His **brother**.

### 3. The Disciples' Sleep

a. The exhortatory nature of this whole scene presents this 'sleep' in such contrast with the vigilant prayer of Jesus. The words **Hour, temptation/ trial** and **Son of Man** are eminently **eschatological**, as is the frequent contrast between to **watch** – and to **sleep**. This finds its confirmation in the frequent apostolic exhortations that the Church should live in urgent expectation for the coming of the Lord. Paul states: ***this is the hour to wake from slumber*** [Rm 13:11; 1 Th 5:6]. When he speaks of **vigilance** [cf. 1 Co 16:13; 1 th5:6;]. Cf. also 1 P 5:8, the exhortation is not really concerned so much with physical sleep.

b. Likewise, in the Gethsemane accounts, the real appeal is not so much to **wake up** literally: but, to overcome torpor, laziness, tepidity, the lack of comprehension – which demands long attention and continuing effort. To go along in a kind of lived tepidity, the noon-day devil, failing in vigilance, is what would lead to the succumbing to the **final ordeal**.

c. What is found in Gethsemane is not merely some kind of parable, a kind of dramatization of the urgent appeals of the early Church: ***blessed are they whom the Lord will find awake at His coming!*** Gethsemane cannot be reduced to some kind of 'plan' for the early Church. In the traditional acceptance of the Church, Gethsemane was a real happening, and the early Church used it to present the mystery of Jesus Christ as a model to follow.

d. Even the **sleep** of the Apostles - in a time of such crucial importance in the life of Jesus whom they loved dearly – gives the whole account a ring of authenticity. It would seem that if all of this were just some 'pious tale', much would have been done to enhance the authority of those closest to Jesus. For, after all, when these accounts were first being read and pondered, these early Church leaders would be claiming obedience over the lives of the adherents to this **new and demanding way**. rather than presenting themselves as legendary models, the early preaching showed the Apostles – and the Witnesses of Christ of all time – what they truly are: sinners, redeemed by the mysteries in which they participated.

### 4. The Prayer

a. There seems to be no valid doubt that the Gospel accounts truly present Jesus as having prayed, and that He really did ask His Father for the favor that the **Cup** indeed pass from Him. The Evangelists even seem to bring out a certain progress in the Prayer of Jesus, a great **encouragement** for the disciples of all times.

A gradual penetration of the great mystery of the Father's will for the universal salvation of humanity.

b. Once again, there is a element that would indicate a certain surprising weakness in Jesus. He seems at first, over-whelmed with fear – on closer reflection, this 'fear' is no merely horror for what was awaiting Him, but much more the **eschatological ordeal** had arrived. Jesus appears here in supreme weakness, the weakness of the great High priest, chosen from among men, to redeem the world. In this way, Jesus had a real experience of weakness.

c. Therefore, the *Our Father*, the model of all Christian prayer, consigned to the Church in Baptism – shows that this is the central prayer of the Church, indicating intimate familiarity. The Father, through Baptism, also becomes the **ABBA** of all those who will share in Jesus' filiation [cf. Rm 8:15; Ga 4:6]. Jesus addresses His Father using the very words that the early Christian community is instructed to pray to Him: **All things are possible** to the Father, seems found in Mary's **Magnificat**, along with her earlier **Fiat**. There is almost a liturgical acclamation, perhaps going back to the Psalms. [cf. Ps 24:7, ff.]. the Christian community witnesses from the very lips of Jesus, the author of their faith, these fervent words of prayer. This prayer comes to the Early Church, then, as a **special gift of the Spirit**. In all of its weaknesses, the Church is strengthened by the Spirit to use the very words of Christ to express their adoptive relationship to the Merciful Father.

d. Jesus' own prayer – once the object-lesson of His lived example [cf. Lk 11] is thus handed on to the Community. The very prayer of Jesus – His very words, become the expressions of the Early Church. While they may not have heard all that Jesus said to the Father, each of the three times He went back to prayer, they still 'heard enough' to hand on to the Church this extraordinary 'exegesis', presentation of all that the Lord's Prayer really involves. The prayer of Gethsemane is just a 'confirmation by example' of the lessons He taught in His public preaching –cf. Mt 6:9-13, 33; 7:7-11; Lk 11:2-12; 12:31]. Only that prayer that would placed the Father's will as the supreme value has any chance of being heard.

5. The three acts of prayer respond to this superlative, this witness of intensity – there are other *three's* that come to mind:

- three indications of the betrayer [cf. Mt 26:20-25];
- three denials of Peter [cf. Mt 26:29, par.];
- three questions of Pilate [cf. Mt 27:20-23];
- three-fold derision of the Crucified [cf. Mt 27:39, f.];
- three signs after the death of Jesus [cf. Mt 27:31-61].

The three-fold insistence on the prayer of Jesus would indicate to the early Church its redemptive value, its intensity, its perseverance.

**6. The Angel:** in the apocalyptic battles, the divine assistance makes itself present [as is known, particularly from the literature of the Maccabbean martyrs]. God Himself is behind the 'Angel of Yahweh'. The presence of the Angel in Gethsemane would be an indication of the profound reality, the deeper mystery that is being unfolded in Gethsemane. Jesus has conquered, with divine assistance, because of prayer and the Lord God has responded. There is also a catechetical spirit here: **God will be with His Church in her prayer.**

**7. The Sweating of Blood:** Jesus is the ideal 'battler' here, engaged in the **mortal combat of the final ordeal**. The Blood of Gethsemane enters into the **Price of our redemption**. To endure this extreme Agony, Jesus is as the Church is called to be, in her **fidelity to prayer** - is always assisted by the Father. While many would see this **bloody sweat** as a kind of 'athletic euphemism' because of the truly technical, medical terms used by Lk, others see it as an extraordinary phenomenon. Gethsemane is a projection of the ultimate gift of Calvary.

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## CONCLUSION

The Mystery of the Agony of Gethsemane- steeped in the OT traditions, as the fulfillment of all the **innocent Just**, who suffered and died through the centuries of preparation, is also the support and strength of all who will come after. For the Church, Gethsemane offers a realistic hope: the Church and her people will know the **ordeal**, but will be comforted in the strength of the final victory of Jesus Christ.

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**Amen!**

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#### Biblical Comparison of Gethsemane Accounts<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> P. Benoit, OP, *The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd/ NY: Herder & Herder, pp. 2-5.

Mt 26:36-46

Then Jesus came with them to a small estate called Gethsemane. And He said to His disciples: Stay here while I go over there to pray.

He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him. And sadness came over Him, and great distress. Then He said to them: 'My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here and keep awake with Me.' And going on a little further He fell on His face and prayed:

'My Father', He said, 'if it is possible, let this cup pass by. Nevertheless let it be as You, not I would have it.'

Mk 14: 32-42

They came to a small estate called Gethsemane. And Jesus said to His disciples: Stay here while I pray.

Then He took Peter and James and John with Him. And a sudden fear came over Him, and great distress. And He said to them: 'My soul is sorrowful, to the point of death. Wait here and keep awake.' And going on a little further He threw Himself on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, this Hour might pass Him by. 'Abba,' He said: 'Everything is possible for You. Take this cup away from Me. But let it be as You, not I would have it.'

Lk 22:40-46

When they reached the place

He said to them:

'Pray not to be put to the est.'

Then He withdrew from them about a stone's throw away and knelt and prayed:

'Father'. He said, 'if You are willing, take this cup away from Me. Nevertheless, let Your will be done, not mine.'

Jn 18

There was a Garden there...

And He went into it with His disciples.

Jn 12:12  
'Now My soul is troubled!'

What shall I say? Father, save Me from this Hour.

Jn 14:31  
But the world must be brought to know that I love the Father and I am doing exactly as the Father told Me.

Jn 12:27, 28  
But it was for this reason that I have come to this Hour! Father, glorify Your name! A voice came from heaven: 'I have

**[Mt 26:40, ff.]**

He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping and He said to them:

‘You should be awake and praying not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Again a second time He went away and prayed: ‘My Father’, He said, if this cup cannot pass by without My drinking it, Your Will be done!’

And once more He came back and found them sleeping, their eyes were so heavy.

Leaving them there He went away again and prayed for the third time, repeating the same words.

Then He came back to the disciples and said to them: ‘My betrayer is already close at hand!’

**Mk 14:37, ff.**

He came back and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter:

‘Simon, are you asleep. You should be awake and praying not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Again, He went away and prayed, saying the same words.

And once more He came back and found them sleeping their eyes were so heavy they could find no answer for Him.

He came back a third time to the disciples and said to them: ‘You can sleep on now and take your rest. It is all over. The Hour has come. Now the Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up! Let us go! My betrayer is already close at hand.’

**Lk 22:44, ff.**

In His anguish He prayed even more fervently and His sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. When He rose from prayer, He went to the disciples and found them sleeping from sheer grief. He said to them: ‘Why are you asleep? Get up and pray not to be put to the test.

**Jn 12. 27, ff.**

glorified it, and I will glorify it again!’ Others said it was an angel speaking to Him. Then there appeared coming from heaven an angel to give Him strength.

‘The cup that the Father has given Me, am I not to drink it?’

**Jn 12:33**

‘Now the Hour has come for the son of Man to be glorified.

**Jn 14:31**

‘Come now ... let us go.

**v. 30**

... the Prince of this world is on his way.

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