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The Authenticity of the Seven Words from the Cross

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THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE SEVEN WORDS FROM THE CROSS

A Research Paper Presented to the
Faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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Approved by: _____

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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

In this paper I intend to give a critical analysis of the "Seven Words" which Christ spoke while on the cross. I will attempt through research chiefly to challenge or support the authenticity of each "Word" (hereafter the term "Word" will be used without quotation marks. When it is capitalized, it refers to one of the utterances which Christ made while on the cross. In some cases it will actually refer to only one word, as in John 19:30. In other cases it will refer to more than one word, as in Matthew 27:46.). I shall examine the seven Words on the following grounds:

1. Witness of the various manuscripts, as indicated in the critical apparatus of Aland's Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum, 1964 edition.
2. Inter-relation of Gospel writers.
3. Stylistic and theological tendencies of the Gospel writers.
4. Relationship of (certain of) the Words to the Old Testament, especially to the book of Psalms.

I shall not employ the traditional sequence of the Words: Luke 23:34, Luke 23:43, John 19:26-27, Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, John 19:28, John 19:30, and Luke 23:46. I shall rather study the Words in the sequence one would find them should he read the Gospels as they occur in the New Testament, beginning with Matthew. This procedure will assist in detecting stylistic and theological tendencies of the Gospel writers, since all of their contributions to the Words will be considered at once, instead of jumping around from one writer to another.

When passages from the Bible are cited in English, the translation of the Revised Standard Version will be used.

I initially chose this area of interest for a research paper out of homiletical interests. Having heard several sermon-series on the Seven Words during Lenten seasons, I wondered what was behind many of the sweeping generalizations of the preachers. I noticed little, if any, concern for textual considerations. Some time afterwards, as I was browsing through the library stacks, I was surprised that I was unable to find any book which dealt with all the Words in an exegetical/critical manner. For these reasons I decided to undertake such an examination myself.

My interests at this time are largely exegetical; yet I am sure that the benefits of this study will find significance in the homiletical field for me. It is my hope that the reader will share in this process, and benefit from it.

The treatment of the Seven Words of Christ is tremendously varied. One only has to glance at available books to catch the diversity of opinion and approach as different authors handle this part of our Christian tradition. Some people would be troubled at what they might observe, e.g., Probleme im Texte der Leidengeschichte Jesu. Others might find themselves portrayed in another's attempt at sermonizing, e.g., Gold From Golgotha. And then there are many who would be pleased only with a title as neutral as The Theology of Saint Luke.

Each of these imaginary readers is indicating a particular mindset. While one might be shocked to imagine that a person could question the genuineness of sayings so dear to the Christian heart,¹ another might be completely contented with a sugar-coating of Christ's Words, and another might not want to consider the Words at all. I also am

approaching this topic with a certain mind-set. I hope to be as objective as I can in considering the question: "Did Christ really say these Words?" I feel that this question cannot be set aside if the Gospel stories are to be read intelligently. The point in debate is not the truth of the saying, but whether, as they stand, they are likely to have been the words of Jesus.²

Another reason that I have chosen this topic is that there are many different, and often opposing, answers to the question at hand. Since it is possible for a reader to come upon such opposing views and feel the bewilderment of not having the time or resources to properly investigate the matter, I will attempt to solve his dilemma by considering the witness of the Bible and the opinions of many scholars who have written on the subject.

There are many reasons why the question of authenticity is a valid one. Of the seven Words we find in the Gospel accounts, only one is shared or found in more than one Gospel (Matthew and Mark). Of the remaining six Words, three are found in Luke, and three in John. The one that is shared by Matthew and Mark is given in two different styles.

The fact that no Gospel contains all seven Words might be surprising to many people. There are valid reasons these people should expect to find such a compilation. Our Lutheran Hymnal, in hymns 180-186, would easily give one the impression of some existing Gospel with all seven Words. Attempts to harmonize the account of Christ's Passion for reading during Lenten services would give this impression. Even the fact that there are seven Words tends to give them an artificial unity. But it is obvious to anyone who will observe the Biblical accounts that there is no

such unity. We have already asked the question "Why?", with the intent of learning if the answer is that Christ did not, in fact, speak these Words. If we should find that Christ did not speak a certain Word, we shall be sure to offer some explanation for its inclusion in the various narratives.

Let us begin our investigation under an assumption offered by Eduard Lohse:

All four evangelists have in common the fact that they want the story of Jesus' passion to be understood in connection with the Christian faith and the preaching of the church, and that their description of the passion therefore receives its stamp from the church's confession and preaching, in which it is the crucified Christ who is proclaimed.³

CHAPTER ONE

MATTHEW 27:46 AND MARK 15:34

English text: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

The Greek texts are found on page 487 of Aland's Synopsis.

Of the seven Words to be considered in this paper, Matthew and Mark record only this one. It is peculiar to these two writers.

Aland's text and critical apparatus give us a curious mixing of Hebrew and Aramaic:¹

1. Matthew preserves the Word for us half in Hebrew and half in Aramaic.

(Aramaic)	⋮	(Hebrew)	
<u>ס</u> <u>ב</u> <u>ק</u> <u>ח</u> <u>נ</u> <u>י</u>	⋮	<u>ל</u> <u>מ</u> <u>ד</u>	<u>א</u> <u>ל</u> <u>ה</u> <u>א</u> <u>ל</u> <u>ה</u>
. ṭ : - :		ṭ ṭ	: : : :

2. Mark preserves the Word completely in Aramaic.

<u>ס</u> <u>ב</u> <u>ק</u> <u>ח</u> <u>נ</u> <u>י</u>	<u>ל</u> <u>מ</u> <u>ד</u>	<u>א</u> <u>ל</u> <u>ה</u>	<u>א</u> <u>ל</u> <u>ה</u>
. ṭ : - :	ṭ ṭ	: : :	: : :

3. The Uncial D preserves the Word completely in Hebrew.

<u>י</u> <u>י</u> <u>ה</u> <u>ו</u> <u>ב</u> <u>ק</u> <u>ח</u> <u>נ</u>	<u>ל</u> <u>מ</u> <u>ד</u>	<u>א</u> <u>ל</u> <u>ה</u>	<u>א</u> <u>ל</u> <u>ה</u>
. ṭ : - :	ṭ ṭ	: : :	: : :

4. The Docetic Gospel of Peter changes the Hebrew reading.

<u>י</u> <u>י</u> <u>ה</u> <u>ו</u> <u>ב</u> <u>ק</u> <u>ח</u> <u>נ</u>	<u>א</u> <u>ל</u> <u>ה</u>	<u>א</u> <u>ל</u> <u>ה</u>
. ṭ : - :	: : :	: : :

That there are difficulties in the text are obvious. It is unlikely that Christ would have spoken the Word several times for the

benefit of the variant readings. Part of the problem certainly lies in the attempt of the Greek mind to provide a transliteration for Hebrew or Aramaic. The context to this passage, however, provides a clue to the wording of the original tradition.

In Matthew 27:47 and Mark 15:35 we read that those around the cross remarked, "This man is calling Elijah." This misunderstanding of the person whom Christ was addressing proves to be the critical point in determining the text.

The Jews at the crucifixion scene were the only people who could have misunderstood Jesus' cry to be directed to Elijah, for they alone knew about Elijah. To these Jews in Palestine the "everyday" language was Aramaic. Since they certainly knew the language, they would not have taken the Aramaic אֵלִיָּהוּ to be the prophet Elijah (אֵלִיָּהוּ). However, the Hebrew word for "my God" could easily have been misunderstood as "Elijah," not only because of the similarity in sound, but also because they weren't that well acquainted with Hebrew. Hebrew was a "technical" language, used chiefly in the temple for services. Wellhausen concludes that the Hebrew form of the Word is correct.²

If we agree that the Hebrew form is correct, how do we account for the hybrid readings of Matthew, Mark, and the Gospel of Peter?

Some would eliminate the problem by eliminating the reading. For example, F. W. Beare concludes that the whole section in Mark 15:34-36 is a secondary formation from start to finish--an elaboration of the simple statement of Mark 15:37 ("And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last.").³ While this is the easiest solution, it is by no means satisfactory to assume that this saying reveals

the interests of primitive Christianity rather than the actual feelings of Christ.⁴ We shall soon see that scholarship will recognize Psalm 22:1 as the basis for this Word. In light of the rest of the material available in this psalm, it is difficult to understand why this verse was selected above the rest.

With the whole psalm at their disposal, it is incredible that the primitive communities should have passed by its radiant affirmations, and should have selected a verse which proved a rock of offense for later Evangelists, copyists, and writers.⁵

Menzies assumes that Mark is the earliest Gospel record, and that Mark originally included the saying in Hebrew. He attributes the Aramaic of Mark 15:34 to a corrector, who reflected perhaps that Aramaic and not Hebrew was spoken in Palestine at the time.⁶

Plummer agrees with Menzies, and assumes that this process of correcting took place before Matthew used Mark's material for writing his own Gospel. Matthew, coming upon Mark's Aramaic, changed the אֵלֵינוּ אֵלֵינוּ to read אֵלֵינוּ אֵלֵינוּ, to be sure of the association with Elijah in the minds of his readers.⁷ Matthew did not change the rest of the Word, and ended up with a reading of half Hebrew and half Aramaic.

I agree with this interpretation of the events, since they most objectively report on the matter. Putting together the information, we come up with the following sequence:

1. Mark composed his Gospel, with 15:34 in Hebrew.
2. A corrector changed Mark's Hebrew to Aramaic.
3. Matthew changed part of the corrector's Aramaic back into Hebrew.

The Docetic Gospel of Peter provides the interesting reading: "My power, my power, you have forsaken me." This reading comes from the substitution of לְחַיֵּי for לְחַיֵּי. These two Hebrew words sound identical to the ear. The view that underlies this reading is that the Divine Christ came down upon the Human Christ at the time of his Baptism. This Divine Christ departed from the Human Christ upon the cross.

"The power" then, so often emphasized in Saint Luke's Gospel in connection with the person of our Lord (1:35, 4:14, 5:17, 6:19, 8:46, 24:49, Acts 1:8, 8:10) is here, by a strange perversion of our Lord's quotation from Psalm 22:1, described as forsaking him: the Divine Christ is "taken up," the Human Christ remains on the Cross. We are thus confirmed in the belief that this was the Gospel, as Serapion tells us, of the Docetists.⁸

The association of Elijah with Christ's cry from the cross was full of meaning to the Jewish mind. They were fully aware of what an appeal to Elijah would mean by a person in such circumstances. To the mind of a Jew, Elijah was a saint or angel who advised, warned, and comforted the faithful in this earth and welcomed them to Paradise, and who was expected to be present at every festival.⁹ Those people who stood around the cross pretended to expect that Elijah would come down and rescue Jesus from the cross. This is the association which Matthew wanted his readers to make (Cf. above, p. 7).

I conclude that the original tradition included this Word in Hebrew. Although Matthew reflects this tradition, he is not in possession of it. His reading is due to a fortunate interest in his reading audience.

Our next step in investigating the authenticity of this Word is to

consider the interpretation of this text. We shall also see that this concern has a bearing on the omission of this text from the Gospels of Luke and John.

This Word is the most difficult of the seven to interpret. Its meaning has challenged the mind of nearly every Christian who has come upon this passage. One might well find himself in the Docetist camp if he accepts it at face value, for Christ would then be completely devoid of divinity, a dead man on a cross. Martin Luther comes close to making this statement. He says, "Look at Christ, who for thy sake has gone to hell and been abandoned by God as one damned for ever."¹⁰ This interpretation has been called the "Cry of Dereliction," and almost immediately draws its own cries of dereliction from many Christian readers. The reluctance to admit this possibility has led many to other interpretations.

It is generally admitted that Psalm 22:1 is somehow connected with this Word from the cross. The text for Psalm 22:1 reads:

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה, identical
with the Hebrew reading which was indicated above to be behind the original tradition of this Word.

There are many scholars who deny a "cry of dereliction" on the basis of Psalm 22. F. W. Beare gives the reason for not understanding this passage as a cry of despair.

This conclusion (Cry of Dereliction) rests upon the erroneous assumption that the Church which transmitted the tradition interpreted the words in isolation, apart from the general purport of the psalm.¹¹

If one reads the entire 22nd Psalm, he soon realizes that the first verse by no means sets the thought for the entire psalm. Of the 31 verses in the psalm, only nine clearly speak of a man in such a plight. Its thought is by far that of hope and confidence in God. The psalmist is completely confident in the ability and intent of the Lord to help him through his affliction.

The interpretation of Christ's Word from the cross is very similar to that of the Introit in our Lutheran services: the words strike the tone of the service, and everything that follows is included in that opening statement. Those who claim that this Word intends to portray the thought of the entire psalm gave no indication of a precedent for this type of understanding. I could find no substantiation for such a practice in Judaism during the time of Christ. The only possible remnant of such a practice lies in the use of the Introit. Nevertheless, there are many who employ this interpretation. Menzies states:

He who quotes the first words of a poem may be thinking not of those words only but of some later part of the poem or of its general course of thought, and the 22nd psalm, while it opens with a cry like that of despair, is not by any means a psalm of despair, but of help and salvation coming to one brought very low.¹²

In addition to this interpretation, Jones relates another insight from the usage of this psalm:

In Christ's mouth, indeed, the words are not even a complaint because his intention is simply to show that the fruitful martyrdom of the innocent psalmist was a shadow of His own.¹³

Due to the highly subjective nature of this argument, along with the inability to document any procedure in line with this type of treatment, I reject this attempt to remove the cry of dereliction.

There is another way to look at it. It is a way which not only concerns itself with the interpretation of this Word, but also reaches into the basics of our theological framework. It begins at the point when our theories of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ cannot allow this saying to be adapted to our theologies.

From the Word which is recorded by Matthew and Mark we should conclude: this saying expresses a feeling of desolation, a sense of abandonment by the Father, an experience of despair and defeat. If, however, this conclusion does not agree with our theories, we ought to form these theories in accord with the saying. We should begin with the direct implications of the saying, and work toward a theology, instead of the opposite direction.

As we have seen, much scholarship is reluctant to draw this conclusion. There is a tendency to explain away the difficulties in terms of a foregone conclusion, or to fall back on the view that we do not or cannot know exactly what was in the mind of Jesus, and are face to face with the "supreme mystery of the Saviour's Passion."¹⁴ Is there not a real danger of reverent agnosticism becoming critical evasion?¹⁵

The desolation is felt because Jesus loves sinners, and in loving them comes so near to their plight as to feel in His spirit the shadows of the Divine judgment upon sin. The implications are theological: the desolation is historical fact.¹⁶

From all these considerations I have come to the conclusion that this Word from the cross is authentic. I consider the following points important to this decision:

1. The text itself is very difficult to establish. An early concern for the genuine tradition has been shown as early as the writing

of the Gospel of Matthew. The fact that there is so much concern for the text displayed by the manuscript writers is a strong point for its authenticity.

2. The fact that such a difficult saying even was reported by Mark speaks to its authenticity. We do not know how Mark himself may have interpreted the Word, but we can be fairly certain that he thought about its implications. However he dealt with the Word, he considered it as authentic.

3. The implications concerning the Person of Jesus Christ inherent in the "cry of desolation" are refreshing to a mind bogged down with academic concerns of attributes, genera, and other communicated bits of knowledge. Jesus Christ died "for me." These two words set off in quotation marks have come home because of Another's plight.

A summary statement on this first Word should include the following thoughts. The Word as recorded by Matthew and Mark is authentic, and was most likely passed on in the Hebrew language. Matthew was especially concerned to supply the Hebrew so that his Jewish audience would catch the full implications of a reference to Elijah. Jesus Christ, in quoting Psalm 22:1, was expressing a feeling of utter desolation of spirit, a sense of abandonment and momentary despair. He felt the horror of sin so deeply that for a time the closeness of his communion with the Father was obscured. The implications of such a feeling on the part of Christ should not cause theologians to shudder or dread some loss to the Divinity of Jesus, any more than the removal of one of the seven

Words from Christ's mouth would reduce our Lenten services from seven to six. It is only a closed, dogmatic mind that will require Scripture to fit its own theology; the process should be quite reversed.

CHAPTER TWO

LUKE'S THREE WORDS FROM THE CROSS

When we move from the Gospel of Mark to the Gospel of Luke, we notice that we are in quite different territory. While it is true that Mark provided much of the material which eventually found its way into Luke's Gospel, the treatment which Luke gives the material is highly characteristic. This is especially true in the account of the Passion Narrative. Luke has given a different tone to the scenes. Jesus' love for the sinner, powerful in death as during life, and his unconquered trust in the Father's providential care, lighten the unrelieved gloom of the Marcan narrative.¹

Luke contributes three Words to our study. His words are not recorded in any other Gospel in the New Testament tradition. The three Words are heavily challenged by the manuscript witnesses in Aland's critical apparatus.

Our study of Luke's three Words will largely concern itself with the witness of the manuscripts, the particular theological stamp of Saint Luke's Gospel, and, in the case of his third Word, the influence of the Old Testament.

CHAPTER THREE

LUKE 23:34

Greek text: Πάτερ ἄφεες αὐτοῖς· οὐ γὰρ οἴδουσιν
τί ποιοῦσιν.

English text: Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

This text is given on pages 482 and 483 of Aland's Synopsis.

This Word is severely attacked by textual criticism. Creed interprets the manuscript evidence to indicate that this Word was not in the original text. He cites the weighty combination of B with D* and a b in omitting the phrase.¹ Streeter points out that although the manuscripts B W 579 include the words, possibly giving the earliest Alexandrian text, they do not preserve the original words of Luke.² We should realize, of course, that this Word of Luke could have been passed on in a genuine tradition, even if not recorded by Luke. But its claim to be an authentic part of the original text of Luke's Gospel is doubtful.

This Word is peculiar to the Gospel of Luke. We find elsewhere in Luke-Acts the thought of this Word. In Luke 6:27 and 28 we read: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." In Acts 7:60 we read of Stephen's reaction to the men who are in the process of stoning him to death: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

Though the manuscript witness would indicate that this Word is doubtful in Luke's original text, many commentators consider its similarity to Lucan thought to be sufficient for inclusion. The truth expressed

in the saying has become the determining factor. Hort, for example, argues for its authenticity on the grounds that the Word is truly Christ-like.

Few verses of the Gospel bear in themselves a surer witness to the truth of what they record than this first of the Words from the Cross.³

Beare, however, disregarding the heavy weight of manuscripts against the reading, concludes that there is sufficient early support to justify us in regarding it (the Word) as an integral part of the text.⁴

The interpretation of this Word has played an important part in determining its authenticity. To understand the difficulty created by the text, the question is asked: "Whose sin is Jesus forgiving?" Another question immediately comes to mind: "Who was responsible for the death of Christ?"

The traditional interpretation is that Christ was speaking about the Jews. Pope Paul VI's recent statement exonerating the Jews for the murder of Christ is a modern reaction to this tradition.⁵ Why were the Jews blamed? Throughout the trial of Jesus one reads of the insistence of the Jews that Christ be crucified, at times in direct opposition to the court's inclination towards acquittal.⁶ It is evident that the Jews wanted Christ crucified, and the fixation of the blame to their account follows naturally. Much to the dismay of Christians who hated the Jews for the execution of Jesus, Jesus prayed for their forgiveness. It is precisely this exoneration which may have led to the omission of this Word from many manuscripts.

Some years ago the suggestion was made, I think by Dr. Rendel Harris, that the passage had been deleted

because some Christian in the second century found it hard to believe that God could or ought to forgive the Jews, since they were the chief instigators in all the persecutions, and, unlike the Gentiles, had no excuse for their villainous conduct--being originally called to be the chosen people and the possessors of the scriptures that spoke of Christ. One might add, it would have appeared to a second century Christian that, as a matter of fact, God had not forgiven the Jews. Twice within seventy years Jerusalem had been destroyed and hundreds of thousands of Jews massacred and enslaved. It followed that, if Christ had prayed that prayer, God had declined to grant it.⁷

A prayer for the forgiveness of the Jews was intolerable to the sentiment of many who wrote the manuscripts. Conzelmann, however, states that this sentiment was based on misunderstanding the motivation in the Jewish mind. The Jews certainly heard Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. But they didn't believe this claim, for they considered such a statement to be blasphemy. We must believe that the Jews were honest in their rejection of Jesus. They considered Jesus to be a false pretender, and therefore from a subjective point of view, they were not aware that they were killing the Messiah.⁸

This interpretation is not the only possible solution to the matter of the recipients of the forgiveness. There were other races of people present at the scene of the crucifixion. Schlatter, unaware of Conzelmann's explanation for the Jews' ignorance, places the same ignorance in the mind of the Roman government, specifically those soldiers present at the scene. He states that they knew nothing of the Sonship of God that Christ claimed, nothing of Christ's dedication to God's people, in that he could have escaped such a death, nothing of the love that kept him in Jerusalem and saw him die there.⁹

One can notice in an examination of stories throughout the four Gospels that there is a tendency to speak well of the Roman government and its employees (Cf. Mt 27:24, Mk 15:12-15, Lk 23:22, Jn 18:38-39, Mt 22:15-22, Mk 12:13-17, Lk 20:20-26, and other places).

The New Testament gospels, and particularly Luke, are kinder to the Roman authorities than they may have deserved. Doubtless this was to shield the feelings of Gentiles whom New Testament writers wished to convert.¹⁰

This request on the lips of Jesus is coherent with the picture of Christ in Luke. Christ, at the brink of death, turns his attention to those about him. And more surprising, his attention is directed initially to those who have nailed him up to die. Jesus still views himself as serving man, a motif ever present in the Gospel of Luke.

Despite the fact that Christ probably intended the Romans as the chief recipients for the requested forgiveness, there is little doubt that the Jews could have used some of it, too. That Christ does not specifically request their forgiveness does not mean that they have no need of it. The Gospel of Peter gives us a reading that indicates a feeling of guilt on the part of the Jews:

Then the Jews and the elders and the priests, seeing what harm they had done themselves, began to lament and to say, "Alas for our sins; the judgment has drawn nigh, and the end of Jerusalem."¹¹

Schlatter, concerned with the guilt of the Jews, reminds us that their assertion of blame (Matthew 27:24-25) was not binding on them forever. The mission of Christ's church after the Easter event was also directed to those in Jerusalem.

Allein der Schlus^z des Evangeliums gibt diesem 2/1/065 den mächtigen Klang; es endet mit der Sendung der Apostel an Jerusalem, mit der Anbietung der Vergebung und der Einladung zur Umkehr und der Verheissung des kommenden Reichs. Das ist 2/0665, Tilgung des an Jesus begangenen Verbrechens, die das ungeschehen macht, was Jerusalem tat, und die zerrissene Gemeinschaft erneuert. Der Christus wird aufs neue der Bringer der Gnade für Jerusalem.¹²

CHAPTER FOUR

LUKE 23:43

Greek text: ἀμὴν βοῶ λέγω, σήμερον μετ' ἐμοῦ ἔσθη
ἐν τῷ παράδεισῳ.

English text: Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

The Greek for this text is found on page 487 of Alands' Synopsis.

There is very little challenge to this word in the critical apparatus. Some manuscripts exhibit difficulties on word order in this verse and the preceding, but no evidence concerning authenticity is offered. The unsupported evidence of D in replacing the entire Word with θαίρεται is at best interesting.¹

There are two other factors to be considered in the investigation of this Word's authenticity. The first factor is that Luke's material has the difficulty of showing a complete change of personality in one of the thieves. Matthew and Mark agree against Luke that both thieves joined in mocking Christ. In Matthew 27:44 and Mark 15:32 we read that "those who were with him (the robbers) also reviled him in the same way." Luke not only states that one robber didn't mock Jesus, but he also states that the robber admitted his own guilt and deserved to be crucified. If we would conclude that Luke's Word was authentic, we would have to admit that Mark's tradition was totally mistaken. This is a difficult statement to support. However, we would also have to somehow account for the fact that this man recognized Christ as his

personal Savior, the true Son of God. We could not merely say that this man desperately grabbed at this chance to get out of his difficulty, not having a real faith in who Christ was. For Christ, according to Luke, offered this man salvation full and free. We could, of course, guess that somewhere in this man's life he had contact with Christ, and that this man then had faith all along. How fortunate, then, for this man that he was by coincidence crucified next to Jesus. This process of reasoning is a very popular treatment which frequently occurs from the pulpit.

Martin Luther preached an interpretation very close to this one. He stated in his twelfth sermon of a Lenten series that the malefactor obtained his faith while dying on the cross.

Christ begins to pray, and says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The malefactor catches this little word "Father." People were not in the habit of speaking with God in this way. Christ is the only One who can speak thus to God, and He it is who has taught us thus to speak. The malefactor hence concludes that Christ must be God's Son, and recognizes Him, by His praying for sinners, as the true Messiah, or Christ.²

The second factor, alluded to by Dr. Luther, is that Luke's presentation of the penitent thief is consistent with his motif of Jesus as the Savior of the world who delivers from all distress and who has appeared for all men, particularly for the poor and sinful.³ Creed points to other similar stories in Luke's Gospel, such as that of the Pharisee and the publican, the penitent harlot and the penitent Zaccheus, and concludes that it is impossible to say how much is to be set down to the Evangelist's own account.⁴

Taylor warns against rejecting Luke's historical accuracy on account of the excellence of his gifts as a literary writer:

On many points criticism has been compelled to revise sceptical judgments....Our ignorance of the character of the tradition as Luke found it precludes dogmatic affirmations.

CHAPTER FIVE

LUKE 23:46

Greek text: Πάτερ, εἰς χέραις σου παρτίθειμι τὸ
πνεῦμά μου.

English text: Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!

The Greek for this text is found on page 488 of Aland's Synopsis.

The only considerations apparent in Aland's critical apparatus are for word order. There is no challenge to this Word's appearing in the text of Luke's Gospel.

There is considerable agreement among scholarship that this Word in Luke is a substitution of Psalm 31:5 for the verse from Psalm 22 of Matthew and Mark. The reason for this substitution lies in Luke's emphasis on Jesus' unconquered trust in the Father's providential care, as mentioned above in Chapter Two. Many find it improbable that Luke found tolerable the tradition that the last words of Jesus were a cry of dereliction.¹ It seems appropriate that Luke would place the words of Psalm 31:5 in the mouth of Jesus, thereby bringing the bitter path of suffering to a conclusion that is replete with divine peace.²

This conclusion assumes that Luke had access to the Passion Narrative as Mark reported it. But Wikenhauser points out that Luke departs from Mark chiefly when reporting words and sayings of Jesus, in which case he makes use of a special source at his disposal.³ Assuming that this special source is in evidence for this Word, Taylor

dismisses the argument of substituting Psalm 31:5 for Psalm 22:1.⁴

An alternative theory is proposed, which is developed from Luke's report that Jesus issued this Word "with a loud voice." In Matthew 27:50 and Mark 15:37 it is reported that just prior to his death, Jesus "cried again with a loud voice...." Matthew and Mark do not give the content of that cry. If we ask what other cry is referred to by the "again" given in Matthew, we notice that four verses earlier Matthew uses the exact wording of 27:50, φωνῆ
μεγάλῃ, to introduce the Cry of Dereliction. In other words, Matthew and Mark tell us that there were at least two "loud cries" which Jesus made from the cross.

It is not difficult to assume that for some reason what was undiscernable to the ears of Mark and Matthew (or their source's) was picked up by someone who later had connections with Luke. That is to say, Luke is filling us in on the unidentified cry of Matthew 27:50 and Mark 15:37. Taylor adopts this consideration, and supplements his case with a statement of likeness to a Lucan motif.

To suggest that both cries are historical is more than a harmonizing expedient, for the death of Jesus is not immediately recorded in Mark after the cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?". It is a credible suggestion that the discord of an unparalleled experience was resolved into the harmony of habitual confidence and trust.⁵

It is difficult to assert that Luke had no knowledge of the Cry of Dereliction. It would seem more plausible that Luke went his own way in reporting what to all the Gospel writers was the most important traditions they contained: the accounts of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Luke saw to it that his

particular stamp was explicitly manifest. Christ may well have spoken both cries; Luke saw fit to include one of them, and our knowledge of his thought patterns will allow his choice.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY OF LUKE'S THREE WORDS

In our investigation of Luke's contributions to the Seven Words from the Cross, we have seen a man's style and purpose showing itself. This was true much more than in the cases of Matthew and Mark. We have also seen evidence of historical concern giving way to theological truths. This is part of the stamp of Luke, and should reveal to some extent the impact that the God-man had upon him. These considerations make it difficult to affirm the authenticity of Luke's Words in the mouth of Christ.

On the basis of the manuscript witness, in addition to the heavy Lucan stamp evident, I consider the first of Luke's Words to be unauthentic in the mouth of Christ. I consider Luke 23:34 to be an expansion of a motif evident in other parts of the Gospel, and appropriate especially to the Lord Jesus Christ in his last hours on the cross. Although the statement of 23:34 has traditionally been interpreted in reference to the Jews, I consider it primarily directed by Luke to the Romans. This is in keeping with a general tendency among the Gospel writers to speak well of the Roman authorities. Luke does not, however, consider the guilt of the Jews as unforgivable. He sees hope for them in the expansion of the Christian church after the Easter event.

The difficulty of reconciling the contradiction in Luke 23:43 of Mark and Matthew's tradition is the chief reason for my dismissing of this word as authentic. The motif of Luke's concern for the poor and sinful also betrays Luke's alleged expansion of the text, as Luke in this instance found an excellent opportunity to show his insight into

a facet of Christ's personality.

I consider Luke 23:46 to be authentic. I base this decision largely on the strength of its relation to Matthew 27:50 and Mark 15:37 as outlined above in Chapter Five. A further consideration in its authenticity is the fact that it is not as typically Lucan as the other two Words, and therefore is less likely to be an insertion into the tradition by Luke.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JOHN'S THREE WORDS FROM THE CROSS

Much evidence could be given to support the view that the Gospel of John is quite separate from the Synoptic Gospels. Although John deals with many of the same events of the Synoptics, not one pericope has been borrowed from them. Although most of John's material is in discourse, not one Synoptic discourse appears in the Gospel of John.

John also has motifs which contrast with Synoptic thrusts. The Synoptic Gospels attempt to reconstruct the original language and form of Christ's Words, while John uses his own modes of thought and language. The love for sinners which is stressed in the Synoptic picture of Jesus, especially in the material of Luke, is not present at all in John. The Fourth Gospel is a self-contained narrative with few allusions to the Synoptic Gospels, and it is possible to understand John without reference to them.¹ We might express these differences with reference to our present day and age by saying that while the Synoptic writers were producing their material for "Newsweek" magazine, ~~John~~ John is writing for "Christianity Today."

This brief sketch of John might lead some to conclude already that absolutely nothing John reports is likely to have a basis in historic fact, and therefore a study of authenticity is out of the question. But there are valid reasons why we can perform such a study.

First of all, and most obvious, John contributes three of the seven Words from the cross. Secondly, we have seen that the criterion of style is valuable in establishing authenticity; John's Gospel is

full of evidences of style, including his section in which the Words of Christ appear. Thirdly, a case can be made, in deference to Wikenhauser, for a relationship of John with the Synoptic Gospels in John 19:28.

John presents Christ as neither alone, nor suffering greatly, nor being mocked while on the cross. Jesus is in full control of the situation, from his arrest in Gethsemane until he finally surrenders his life and dies.

CHAPTER EIGHT

JOHN 19:26-27

Greek text: γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου ... ἴδε ἡ
μήτηρ σου.

English text: Woman, behold your son! Behold your mother!

The Greek text is found on page 484 of Aland's Synopsis.

There is nothing in the critical apparatus to challenge this text in the Gospel of John.

However, the entire pericope of John 19:25b-27 can convincingly be challenged on the grounds of context, content and theological character.

This pericope has two features which make it stand out from the events at the crucifixion. First, it breaks the unity of time and space, as we are obliged for the moment to leave the scene of Golgotha of Good Friday afternoon and place ourselves at the home of the Beloved Disciple in the time following.¹ In the second place, this pericope shows an interest in the welfare of subordinate characters at the scene. These features are typical of the Matthean insertions to the Passion Narrative.² The Passion Narrative in John receives much of its force from its concentration upon one on-going theme, with no room for subordinate interests. John conveys an unbroken march of events to Christ's moment of triumph in death.

C. H. Dodd concludes from analogy that this pericope did not form part of the Passion Narrative which reached John through oral tradition.³

Dodd also rejects this passage in John's tradition on the grounds that it serves no theological purpose, and the attempts to give it a profound symbolical purport are unconvincing.⁴

There are many preachers, however, who do find a theological purpose in this Word from Christ. It is generally regarded as an illustration of the fourth commandment, which speaks of family ties and includes the promise of long life for such devotion. Martin Luther interprets this promised longevity in terms of St. John himself:

With this accords the fact that John lived longer than the rest of the apostles, namely sixty-eight years after the resurrection.⁵

This homiletical interest of Dr. Luther would be amusing to Dodd and many exegetes of "authentic" taste. But Streeter warns against such a judgment, on the grounds of understanding the mode of John's presentations.

The doctrine taught in the discourses of Jesus was organically related to what Christ taught in such a way as to be the doctrine which Christ would have taught had he been explicitly dealing with the problems confronting the Church at the time when the Gospel was written.⁶

Howard also defends the interpretation offered by Dr. Luther as he demonstrates John's relationship to contemporary situations. He states that it is the Evangelists's style to take a saying of Jesus and render it into an idiom rich in meaning for his own contemporaries.⁷

CHAPTER NINE

JOHN 19:28

Greek text: διψῶ.

English text: I thirst.

The Greek text is found on page 488 of Aland's Synopsis.

There is no discussion of this Word in the critical apparatus.

John mentions that this Word was spoken to "fulfill the scripture." A marginal reference directs us to Psalm 69:22, where we read, "They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." In Mark 15:36 the language of the psalm is woven into the narrative without citation. Mark says nothing of thirst, but inserts the offering of wine as a response to the cry of dereliction. John, it appears, has found a double fulfillment of prophecy: not only the offer of wine, but the thirst which it was designed to quench, is a trait proper to the picture of Jesus as the Righteous Sufferer.¹

In this instance we can offer a possible dependence of the Gospel of John on Mark. The coincidence in the use of the words επιόρυος and ΠΕΡΙΘΕΙΝΑΙ, neither of which comes out of the Old Testament passage, cannot be said to be inevitable if the story was to be told at all.² There are signs of the influence of Johannine theology in the context. If John was acquainted with Mark's cry of dereliction, he may well have wished to avoid it for dogmatic reasons. The thrust of John's material throughout his Gospel as well as at the crucifixion scene is that Christ was fully in control of the situation. The usage of Psalm

22:1 at this time would deny such control. There is, however, another psalm which was certainly in the mind of John or the tradition upon which he developed his material. Psalm 42: 1-2, while it does not mention the word "wine," does more accurately represent the Word as John presents it: "As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." In this psalm there is the same sense of the absence of God as in Psalm 22:1, though expressed with less intensity. Dodd proposes that the "thirst" of the Crucified is in some sort an equivalent (symbolically) of the cry of dereliction.³ The emphasis that John places upon the actual thirst and the actual drinking of the offered wine fits well into his intention of portraying the humanity of Christ. Dodd concludes that John was working upon Mark as a basis, and looking up the reference in the Old Testament to Psalm 22:1 he completed it with Psalm 42:1-2 in mind.⁴

CHAPTER TEN

JOHN 19:30

Greek text: ΤΕΤΕΛΕΣΤΑΙ.

English text: It is finished.

The Greek text is found on page 488 of Aland's Synopsis.

There are no manuscript challenges to this word in the critical apparatus.

All of the evangelists give some indication of a Word spoken by Christ just prior to his death. We have proposed that this Word was undiscernible to Matthew and Mark, and that Luke provided it with a concern for his style. John also provides a Word which is representative of his thought. He gives us the highly significant ΤΕΤΕΛΕΣΤΑΙ.¹ We are almost certainly intended to understand this Word with reference to John 17:4, "I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do." The same Greek word is used for "accomplished" as John's Word of 19:30. This usage closely relates 19:30 to Johannine theology, in that Christ is referring to his task as Redeemer, finishing it so far as he could during His earthly existence.²

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SUMMARY OF JOHN'S THREE WORDS

It is obvious that there is much less research available on the Gospel of John and his contributions to Christ's Words than the other Gospel writers. This is due at least in part to the nature of John's presentation of his material. As we have seen, questions of authenticity and integrity are not primary concerns to him. Perhaps the greatest difficulty we face is removing our methodology of treating the Synoptic Gospels in approaching the Fourth Gospel. It is necessary to treat John's Words as thematic to his purpose. Our question of authenticity then pertains to the appearance of these Words in the Gospel of John.

The first of John's contributions does not seem to fit into his scheme. It breaks into the narrative which is otherwise continuous, and therefore is considered to be an insertion by some hand later than John's.

The second Word offered by John is full of the Johannine style. While its authenticity in Christ's mouth is doubtful, it is certainly a contribution of John. It further indicates a relationship to the Word of Matthew and Mark in its development of Psalm 22:1 and Psalm 42:1-2.

The third Word offered by John is most likely an attempt at filling in Mark's undiscernible cry with a statement referring to Christ's High Priestly Prayer of John 17. While Christ may not have

spoken this exact Word, it is likely that there was something uttered just before his dying. John, like Luke, furnishes us with a Word consistent with his theology.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SUMMARY OF THE SEVEN WORDS FROM THE CROSS

It has turned out that two questions arose in the consideration of authenticity: Did Christ really speak these Words, and/or does the text of each Gospel writer indicate his original intent. I have indicated that the Words recorded in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, and the Word of Luke 23:46 to be authentic in the mouth of Christ. I consider the Words of Luke 23:34 and Luke 23:43, as well as John 19:28 and John 19:30 to be authentic in the tradition of the writer, but not in the mouth of Christ. I consider John 19:26-27 to be neither authentic to Christ nor integral to John's Gospel.

In three of the Words we found reference to the Old Testament Psalms. That material included in the Passion Narrative apart from the seven Words is filled with Old Testament references, especially in the area of prophecy and fulfillment. The intent of the Gospel writers is to indicate without a doubt that Jesus Christ is the Promised Messiah.

The evangelists cite so many Scripture passages for every part of the history of Christ's sufferings, in order to combat the offence which occasioned at the sight of these sufferings, which must have sorely tried the disciples in particular. For they left the Scriptures out of sight and had not diligently studied the prophets. If they had studied the scriptures, the fact that it came to pass would have led them to the firm conclusion that this was the Messiah indeed.¹

Each of the evangelists has shaped his narrative of the passion by constant reference to the Old Testament. These references to the scriptures are an expression of the theological interpretation of

Jesus' suffering and death.² This suffering and death of the Son of God was clearly put forth in the pages of the Old Testament, and the assurance of Christ as that Son of God confirmed the evangelists in the tradition of the faith of Israel.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

- ¹V. Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1951), p. 246.
- ²Ibid.
- ³E. Lohse, History of the Suffering and Death of Jesus Christ, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 102.

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- ¹These readings in Hebrew and Aramaic were obtained through the generous assistance of Prof. H. Jones.
- ²J. Wellhausen, Das Evangelium Marci, (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1903), p. 140.
- ³F. W. Beare, The Earliest Records of Jesus, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 238, par. 250.
- ⁴R. Bultmann, Die Geschichte der Synoptische Tradition, (Göttingen: Vandenhoech and Ruprecht, 1957), p. 342. Bultmann advocates the formation.
- ⁵V. Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1951), p. 159.
- ⁶A. Menzies, The Earliest Gospel, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1901), p. 280.
- ⁷A. Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, (London: Robert Scott, 1911), p. 399.
- ⁸J. Robinson, The Gospel According to Peter, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1892), p. 21.
- ⁹Menzies, p. 281.
- ¹⁰Martin Luther, as quoted in Taylor, p. 159.
- ¹¹Beare, p. 238, par. 250.
- ¹²Menzies, Pp. 280f.

¹³A. Jones, The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 313-315.

¹⁴Taylor, pp. 161-163.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

¹J. Creed, The Gospel According to Saint Luke, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 283.

CHAPTER THREE

¹J. Creed, The Gospel According to Saint Luke, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 286.

²B. Streeter, The Four Gospels, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 138.

³Hort, as quoted in Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1951), p. 198.

⁴F. Beare, The Earliest Records of Jesus, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 237, par. 249.

⁵I was not able to secure the information regarding which encyclical of the pope that this was.

⁶Mt. 26:59-60, Mt. 22:23-24, Mk. 14:55-56, Lk. 23:4, Lk. 23:14.

⁷Streeter, p. 138.

⁸H. Conzelmann, The Theology of Saint Luke, (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 80.

⁹A. Schlatter, Das Evangelium des Lukas, (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1960), p. 446.

¹⁰P. Parker, "Trial of Jesus," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, IV, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967), p. 698.

¹¹J. Robinson, The Gospel According to Peter, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1892), p. 22.

¹²Schlatter, p. 446.

CHAPTER FOUR

- ¹J. Creed, The Gospel According to Saint Luke, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 287.
- ²M. Luther, Sermons on the Passion of Christ, translated by J. Idensee, (Rock Island: Augustana Press, 1957), p. 185.
- ³A. Wikenhauser, New Testament Introduction, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1958), p. 215.
- ⁴Creed, p. 285.
- ⁵V. Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1951), pp. 199-200.

CHAPTER FIVE

- ¹F. Beare, The Earliest Records of Jesus, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 238, par. 250.
- ²E. Lohse, The History of the Suffering and Death of Jesus Christ, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 98.
- ³A. Wikenhauser, New Testament Introduction, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1958), p. 210.
- ⁴V. Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1951), p. 200.
- ⁵Ibid.

CHAPTER SEVEN

- ¹A. Wikenhauser, New Testament Introduction, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1958), p. 301.

CHAPTER EIGHT

- ¹C. Dodd, Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel, (Cambridge: University Printing House, 1963), p. 127.
- ²Cf. the fate of Judas, the appearance of the saints in and around Jerusalem; Dodd, p. 128.
- ³Dodd, p. 128

⁴Ibid.

⁵M. Luther, Sermons on the Passion of Christ, (Rock Island: Augustana Press, 1957), p. 191.

⁶B. Streeter, The Four Gospels, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 371.

⁷W. Howard, The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism and Interpretation, (London: Epworth Press, 1945), p. 221.

CHAPTER NINE

¹C. Dodd, Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel, (Cambridge: University Printing House, 1963), p. 41.

²Dodd, p. 41.

³Dodd, p. 42.

⁴Dodd, p. 42.

CHAPTER TEN

¹C. Dodd, The Fourth Gospel, (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 428.

²F. Godet, Commentar zum Evangelium Johannis, (Hannover: Carl Meyer, 1876), p. 269.

CHAPTER TWELVE

¹M. Luther, Sermons on the Pasion of Christ, (Rock Island: Augustana Press, 1957), p. 162.

²E. Lohse, History of the Suffering and Death of Jesus Christ, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press

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