

# Christ of the Sacred Stories

edited by

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Mohr Siebeck

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# Christ of the Psalms' Story<sup>1</sup>

M. G. SELEZNEV

The Psalter was the most popular and widely read book in the Judean communities at the turn of the Christian Era. It is no wonder the Gospel narratives include many quotations and allusions from the Psalter, both overt and covert. The Psalter accounts for almost a quarter of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. According to the statistics gathered in Archer and Chirichigno there are 67 direct quotations from the Psalter in the New Testament,<sup>2</sup> many more than from any other Old Testament book. Isaiah follows with 63 quotations, and while other works on this topic may contain slightly different statistics, the overall picture remains the same. The distribution of New Testament allusions to Old Testament texts follows in general the same pattern.

A significant portion of these quotations and allusions refer to Jesus Christ. In fact, the imagery of the Psalter has made an important contribution towards the formation of the New Testament image of Christ, which is especially evident in the Passion Narrative.

We shall deal with the immense topic of the Psalter contribution to the Gospel image of Christ by moving, so to speak, in concentric circles. I begin with a general overview of the role of the Psalter for the New Testament, while the main subject of the paper is the role of the Psalter in the Passion Narrative, with a special focus on Psalm 21 (22). Finally, we shall concentrate on just one verse of this psalm: its opening verse.

This concentric arrangement is not arbitrary or haphazard. The Passion Narrative is the climax of the Gospel story and, at the same time, it is the text where the influence of the Psalter imagery is felt more than anywhere else. Of particular importance in this context are the so-called Psalms of the Righteous Sufferer, Psalm 21 (22) being the most important among them. The climactic verse of this Psalm is its opening verse, the last words of Jesus according to Mark and Matthew: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

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<sup>1</sup> The paper was written within the framework of the research project "Reinterpretation of religious concepts of the Hebrew Bible in the Greek translation (LXX)" supported by Russian Foundation for Humanities (RGNF), grant N 014-01-00448. The Deutsche Bischofskonferenz enabled me to consult in 2015 the modern literature on the topic in the Göttingen libraries, which was crucial for my research.

<sup>2</sup> G.L. Archer/G. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament*, Chicago 1983.

## 1. The motif of the Righteous Sufferer in the Psalter

The motif of the Righteous Sufferer can be heard in a group of psalms that is usually called, following Gunkel's form-critical classification, "psalms of individual lament/complaint".<sup>3</sup> Gunkel's classification laid the foundation for subsequent Psalter scholarship. Sometimes the "psalms of individual lament/complaint" are termed "psalms of the Righteous Sufferer".<sup>4</sup> However, one must always keep in mind that texts included in the book of Psalms are too complex to comply with any strict classification.

For example, an important component of the motif of the Righteous Sufferer is the persecution of the Sufferer by his enemies, but in many cases the image of persecution is coupled with and enhanced by the image of illness. Sometimes it is not clear whether the illness is caused by the malicious actions of enemies, or if, rather, the illness just gives the enemies a pretext to mock at the Righteous Sufferer. This ambiguity is the case, for example, in Psalm 21 (22):15–16, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death." Is this a description of torture, or a description of illness, regarded by the Righteous Sufferer's enemies as a sign of God's disfavor?

The psalms of the Righteous Sufferer normally assert or presuppose that the Sufferer is innocent, but sometimes we can also hear penitential notes, so the boundary line between the psalms of the Righteous Sufferer and the penitential psalms is often blurred. The history of translation and exegesis shows clearly how arbitrary are our classifications.

The above mentioned Psalm 21 (22) is usually regarded as a prime example of a psalm of the Righteous Sufferer. However, the Greek Bible changes it (at least in verse 2b) into a penitential psalm. The Hebrew רָחֹק מִשְׁעוֹתַי דְּבַרֵי שְׁאֵלָתִי "Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning" in 21 (22):2b is rendered in the Septuagint as μακρὰν ἀπὸ τῆς σωτηρίας μου οἱ λόγοι τῶν παραπτωμάτων μου "the account of my transgressions is far from my salvation". Which of the

<sup>3</sup> "Klagelied des Einzelnen". Gunkel's list (H. Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels*, Göttingen 1933, 172. H. Gunkel/J. Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms. The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, Macon 1998.) is adopted with slight modifications by almost all subsequent scholarship: Psalms 3; 5; 6; 7; 12 (13); 16 (17); 21 (22); 24 (25)–27 (28); 30 (31); 34 (35); 37 (38); 38 (39); 41 (42); 42 (43); 53 (54)–56 (57); 58 (59); 60 (61); 62 (63); 63 (64); 68 (69)–70 (71); 85 (86); 87 (88); 101 (102); 108 (109); 119 (120); 129 (130); 139 (140)–142 (143). The group cannot be regarded as a fixed entity with well-defined limits; one may question whether some of the psalms listed by Gunkel really belong to it, or whether we should include into it some other psalms, e. g. Psalm 40 (41).

<sup>4</sup> See, e. g., S. P. Ahearne-Kroll, *The Psalms of Lament in Mark's Passion. Jesus' Davidic Suffering*, Cambridge 2007.

two readings is original? The context speaks in favor of MT. It seems that the Septuagint translators may have read the Hebrew  $\text{יִגְאָגֵן}$  not as  $\text{יִגְאָגֵן}$  “my groaning” but as  $\text{יִגְאָגֵן}$  (*παραπτώματά μου*, “my transgressions”). This possibility is strengthened when we look at Psalm 18 (19):13, where the Hebrew  $\text{תִּגְאָגֵן}$  is also rendered in the Septuagint as *παραπτώματα*. Therefore, the reading of the Septuagint in 21 (22):2b is secondary. Still, the Septuagint reading remains of importance for the study of the psalms of the Righteous Sufferer because it demonstrates how unclear, in fact, the boundary line is between the Psalms of the Righteous Sufferer and the penitential psalms.

Some authors use the concept of the Righteous Sufferer with regard to a vast body of Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish literature that includes not only the Psalms, but also, e.g., “Servant songs” of Isaiah or the Qumran texts speaking about the Teacher of Righteousness. The validity of this approach, heavily criticized in recent decades, will not be discussed in the present paper, which concentrates on the New Testament usage of the Psalter.

It would be more effective to speak not about the psalms of the Righteous Sufferer as a separate *group of psalms*, but rather about the *motif* of the Righteous Sufferer, which applies to a number of psalms, interacting within these psalms with other motifs.

The enemies of the Righteous Sufferer in the Psalms are not easy to identify. Are they rich people, oppressing the poor, or members of a hostile and triumphant political party, or representatives of a rival religious movement? The difficult and sometimes tragic history of the Jewish people has also influenced the motif of the Righteous Sufferer. At times it seems that the Righteous Sufferer is a collective image of the Jewish people; in this case his enemies are the surrounding peoples, hostile to Israel. Most likely, various experiences have jointly contributed to the images of the Righteous Sufferer and his enemies.

The lament of the Righteous Sufferer is intermingled with hope for deliverance and praise to God for being delivered. Peculiarities of the Hebrew verbal system often make it unclear whether the deliverance is hoped for or already enacted. For example, looking at Psalm 21 (22), we see that it consists of two parts: the first part is lament (verses 1–22) and the second one is thanksgiving (verses 23–33). The dissimilarity between the two parts is so prominent that they may even be regarded as two completely different texts, joined together to form one psalm.

Underlying the image of the Righteous Sufferer is the problem of theodicy: why do people suffer? In particular, why do *righteous* people have to suffer? No rational explanation is given, but the Righteous Sufferer provides an example of hope and prayer – despite the pain, the mockery of the enemies, and being abandoned by God.

This complex network of images and associations should be taken into account when we turn to the use of the Psalms in the New Testament.



## 2. Psalms of the Righteous Sufferer and the Passion Narrative

The Psalms of the Righteous Sufferer do not just illustrate the Gospel events; they actively shape the Jesus story as it is told in the Gospels. One image after another in the Passion Narrative is taken from these Psalms. The influence of the Psalter can be seen on two levels. On a more obvious level the Passion Narrative as a whole is a story of the Righteous Sufferer, inspired by the Old Testament image of the Righteous Sufferer. On a more subtle level we may discern the similarities (often even on the lexical level) between individual lines of the Psalms and individual verses of the Gospels.

The use of the Psalms in the Passion Narrative is distinctive in different Gospels. Concerning the Gospel of Mark, all the allusions to the Old Testament in the Passion Narrative are implicit, without any explicit references to or citations of the Psalter or any other book of the Old Testament. In my view, the reason for the lack of obvious references is that the motifs borrowed from the Psalter are so deeply and seamlessly incorporated in the Markan Passion Narrative that any explicit indication of an external source would have distorted this fluid inclusion of the Psalter within the Markan context. Matthew and Luke follow in this regard the pattern of Mark.

In John, however, the picture is significantly different. Many of the allusions of the synoptics are omitted by John, many new allusions are added, and, contrary to the synoptics' method, John's references to the Psalter are mostly explicit quotations, introduced with the formulae ἵνα ἡ γραφή πληρωθῆῖ or ἵνα τελειωθῆῖ ἡ γραφή. Obviously, John presents a completely different approach to the hermeneutics of the Old Testament.

The allusions to and quotations of the Psalter in the Gospels are situated at key moments of the Passion Narrative, including Judas' betrayal, the prayer at Gethsemane, the false witnesses against Jesus, the crucifixion, the last cry of Jesus. Below we shall look at these key scenes in succession, according to the Passion Narrative as told by Mark.<sup>5</sup>

### *Betrayal of Judas*

Mark 14:18

καὶ ἀνακειμένων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσθιόντων ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν παραδώσει με ὁ ἐσθίων μετ' ἐμοῦ.

And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me."

(//Mark 14:20, Matthew 26:23, Luke 22:21, John 13:18)

<sup>5</sup> In identifying parallels between the Gospels and the Psalms, I largely follow D. J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, Sheffield 1983 and R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave. A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, New York 1994, 1453–1465.

The traitor from among the Sufferer's friends is identified through a phrase borrowed from Psalm 40 (41):10.

καὶ γὰρ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς εἰρήνης μου ἐφ' ὃν ἤλπισα ὁ ἐσθίων ἄρτους μου ἐμεγάλυνεν ἐπ' ἐμὲ πτερνισμόν.

For even the man of my peace, in whom I trusted, who is eating my bread, lifted up his heel against me.

The fact that the early Church associated Psalm 40 (41):10 with Judas' betrayal is confirmed by its explicit quotation in John 13:18.

### *Gethsemane*

Mark 14:34

καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἕως θανάτου· μείνατε ὧδε καὶ γρηγορεῖτε.

And he said to them, "My soul is cast down, even to death; remain here, and keep awake."

The rare and poetic expression περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχὴ μου is an unmistakable borrowing from the Psalter, where it occurs three times as a refrain, cf. Psalm 41 (42):6 // 41 (42):11, 42 (43):5):

ἵνα τί περίλυπος εἶ ψυχὴ καὶ ἵνα τί συνταράσσεις με; ἔλπισον ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν ὅτι ἐξομολογήσομαι αὐτῷ σωτήριον τοῦ προσώπου μου ὁ θεός μου.

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why do you trouble me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him; he is the salvation of my countenance.

### *Trial of Jesus and False witnesses*

Mark 14:57

καὶ τινες ἀναστάντες ἐψευδομαρτύρουν κατ' αὐτοῦ λέγοντες.

Some stood up and bore false witness against him.

"False witnesses" figure prominently in some of the Psalms of the Righteous Sufferer.

Psalm 34 (35):11

ἀναστάντες μάρτυρες ἄδικοι ἃ οὐκ ἐγίνωσκον ἠρώτων με.

There stood up unjust witnesses, and asked me of things I knew not.

Psalm 26 (27):12

μὴ παραδῶς με εἰς ψυχὰς θλιβόντων με ὅτι ἐπανέστησάν μοι μάρτυρες ἄδικοι καὶ ἐψεύσατο ἡ ἀδικία ἐαυτῆ.

Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations.

*Silence of the Righteous Sufferer*

Mark 14:60–61, 15:5

καὶ ἀναστὰς ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς εἰς μέσον ἐπηρώτησεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν λέγων· οὐκ ἀποκρίνη οὐδὲν τί οὗτοί σου καταμαρτυροῦσιν; ὁ δὲ ἐσιώπηα καὶ οὐκ ἀπεκρίνατο οὐδὲν ... ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς οὐκέτι οὐδὲν ἀπεκρίθη, ὥστε θαυμάζειν τὸν Πιλάτον.

And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” But he was silent and did not answer ... Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

The silence of the Righteous Sufferer before the wicked is common both to the Passion Narrative and to the Psalter, though the correspondence is not verbal.

Psalms 38 (39):2–3

εἶπα φυλάξω τὰς ὁδοὺς μου τοῦ μὴ ἀμαρτάνειν ἐν γλώσσῃ μου ἐθέμην τῷ στόματί μου φυλακὴν ἐν τῷ συστῆναι τὸν ἀμαρτωλὸν ἐναντίον μου <sup>3</sup> ἐκωφώθην καὶ ἐταπεινώθην καὶ ἐσίγησα ἐξ ἀγαθῶν καὶ τὸ ἄλγημά μου ἀνεκαινίσθη.

I said, “I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked is in my presence.” I was dumb and silent (LXX: humbled), not even saying anything good. And my sorrow grew worse (LXX: was renewed).

Psalms 38 (39):10

ἐκωφώθην καὶ οὐκ ἤνοιξα τὸ στόμα μου ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ποιήσας με

I am mute; I do not open my mouth, for it is you who have done it (LXX: made me).

Psalms 37 (38):14

ἐγὼ δὲ ὡσεὶ κωφὸς οὐκ ἤκουον καὶ ὡσεὶ ἄλαλος οὐκ ἀνοίγων τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ.

But I am like a deaf man; I do not hear, like a mute man who does not open his mouth.

*Dividing clothes, casting lots*

The climax of the Passion Narrative, the crucifixion, is pervaded with the language of the Psalm 21 (22).

Mark 15:24. Καὶ σταυροῦσιν αὐτὸν καὶ διαμερίζονται τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, βάλλοντες κλῆρον ἐπ’ αὐτὰ τίς τί ἄρη.

And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

Psalms 21 (22):19. διμερίσαντο τὰ ἱμάτιά μου ἑαυτοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν ἱματισμὸν μου ἔβαλον κλῆρον

They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.

In the Psalter the two sentences are parallel and depict the same action (parallelism membrorum, typical of Hebrew poetry). In Mark the poetic organization of the text has gone, but, “dividing clothes” and “casting lots” refer to the same

action by the soldiers (different interpretation of the Psalm's poetic imagery is seen in John 19:23–24).

### *Crucifixion*

Victims of crucifixion were either tied or nailed to the cross. Speaking of Jesus' crucifixion, none of the synoptic Gospels specifies the method of execution, while John 20:25–27 presupposes that nails were driven through Jesus' hands (and probably feet as well). Though the Gospel of John is usually dated half a century later than Jesus' death, there is no obvious reason to doubt the tradition. In this case Psalm 21 (22):17 according to the Septuagint might have been associated with Jesus' crucifixion from very early on.

The Masoretic text reads:

כִּי סָבְבוּנִי כְּלָבִים עֲדַת מְרַעִים הַקִּיפּוּנִי כְּאֵרֵי יָדַי וְרַגְלָי:

Dogs surround me; a pack of evildoers encircles me, like lion – my hands and my feet.

The enemies of the Sufferer are depicted as wild animals throughout the Psalm: “Many bulls have surrounded me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me; they open wide their mouth at me, as a ravening and a roaring lion” (verse 13); “Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen” (verse 22). Against this background, the reference to “lions” in verse 17, in parallel to “dogs”, should not surprise us. Still the absence of any verb from the last clause of the Masoretic text makes the syntax difficult. Traditional Jewish commentators suggest that a verb like “maul” is implied: “like lions they maul my hands and feet”; indeed, omissions of this kind often occur in Hebrew poetry.

The Septuagint reads differently:

ὅτι ἐκύκλωσάν με κύνες πολλοὶ συναγωγῇ πονηρευομένων περιέσχον με ὥρυσαν χεῖράς μου καὶ πόδας.

Many dogs have surrounded me; a pack of evildoers has encircled me, they have dug my hands and my feet.

The Greek text obviously presupposes כָּרוּ in the Vorlage instead of כְּאֵרֵי (the verb כָּרָה is translated by ὀρύσσω 8 times in the Septuagint: Gen 26:25, Gen 50:5, 2 Chr 16:14, Psalm 7:16, Psalm 57:7, Psalm 94:13, Prov 16:27, Prov 26:27). The Septuagint is supported with the reading כְּאֵרוּ in 5/6<sup>H</sup>evPsalms (DJD XXXVIII, pp. 141–169, plates XXV–XXVII), dated c. 50–68 CE. Another scroll, 4QPs<sup>f</sup>, appears to read כָּרוּ [וְ] יָדַי וְרַגְלָי, though the line is badly damaged (DJD XVI, pp. 85–106, plates XIII–XIV); the manuscript is dated c. 50 BCE.

These scrolls supply us with a missing link between the MT and the Vorlage of the Septuagint. It is not clear which of the two readings (if either) should be regarded as original. The editors of DJD XVI suggest that 4QPs<sup>f</sup> “may well have had the grammatically correct reading כָּרוּ... The mater lectionis was inserted in

כארי by 5/6HevPs ..., and the Masoretic tradition probably misread a waw for a yod: כארר". In evaluating this suggestion one must bear in mind that the bold and vivid metaphor of wild dogs "digging" (= mauling) legs and hands of their victim is otherwise unattested in the Bible (metaphorical usage of כָּרַח in Psalm 39 (40):7 has completely different meaning).

In any case, in the Septuagint we have a parallel to ὀρύσσω in the sense of piercing, gouging, or mutilating someone's limbs:

Judges 16:21 (Codex Alexandrinus and related manuscripts):

καὶ ἐπελάβοντο αὐτοῦ οἱ ἀλλόφυλοι καὶ ἐξώρυσαν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ.

Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes.

The interpretation of the Psalter image of enemies "digging" the hands and feet of the Righteous Sufferer as a reference to Jesus' Crucifixion was a commonplace of Patristic exegesis. It is not inconceivable that this exegesis goes back to the Early Christianity, or even to the time of the writing of Mark's Gospel.

### *Deriding and mocking*

Mark 15:29–32. Καὶ οἱ παραπορευόμενοι ἐβλασφήμουν αὐτὸν κινούμεντες τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν καὶ λέγοντες· οὐὰ ὁ καταλύων τὸν ναὸν καὶ οἰκοδομῶν ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις, <sup>30</sup> σῶσον σεαυτὸν καταβάς ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ. <sup>31</sup> ὁμοίως καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς ἐμπαιζόντες πρὸς ἀλλήλους μετὰ τῶν γραμματέων ἔλεγον· ἄλλους ἔσωσεν, ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται σῶσαι. <sup>32</sup> ὁ χριστὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰσραὴλ καταβάτω νῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἵνα ἴδωμεν καὶ πιστεύσωμεν. καὶ οἱ συνεσταυρωμένοι σὺν αὐτῷ ὠνείδιζον αὐτόν.

<sup>29</sup> Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, <sup>30</sup> save yourself, and come down from the cross!" <sup>31</sup> In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. <sup>32</sup> Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also scorned him.

Psalms 21 (22):7–9

ἐγὼ δὲ εἶμι σκώληξ καὶ οὐκ ἄνθρωπος ὄνειδος ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἐξουδένημα λαοῦ <sup>8</sup> πάντες οἱ θεωροῦντές με ἐξεμυκτήρισάν με ἐλάλησαν ἐν χεῖλεσιν ἐκίνησαν κεφαλὴν <sup>9</sup> ἤλπισεν ἐπὶ κύριον ῥυσάσθω αὐτόν σωσάτω αὐτόν ὅτι θέλει αὐτόν

<sup>7</sup> But I am a worm, and not a man; scorned by men, despised by the people. <sup>8</sup> All that saw me mocked me: they spoke with their lips, they shook the head, saying, <sup>9</sup> He hoped in the Lord: let him deliver him, let him save him, because he delights in him.

The scene of the mockery of the crucified Christ is influenced by the Psalter not so much on the level of individual words (κινούμεντες τὰς κεφαλὰς, σῶσαι ἑαυτόν, ὄνειδος/ὄνειδίζω), as on the level of the plot. Both in the Psalm and in the Gospel the mockers find it especially funny that the Sufferer used to regard himself as the one close to God ("He hoped in the Lord", "the Lord delights in him", "He

saved others”, “Messiah, the King of Israel”). This is a good occasion for them to demand, mockingly, that God save the one he loves. In addition to the allusions to Psalm 21 (22), one can see here influence from other Old Testament texts, e. g. Psalm 41 (42):11, Psalm 108 (109):25, or Lam 2:15.

### *The cry of abandonment*

Mark 15:34

καὶ τῇ ἐνάτῃ ὥρᾳ ἐβόησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· ελωι ελωι λεμα σαβαχθανι; ὃ ἐστιν μεθερμηνευόμενον· ὁ θεός μου ὁ θεός μου, εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;

At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

This is a quotation from the opening verse of Psalm 21 (22). The Psalm is quoted in Aramaic, with a Greek translation that follows the Hebrew / Aramaic wording (not that of the LXX).

Psalm 21 (22):2 (LXX):

ὁ θεὸς ὁ θεός μου πρόσχες μοι ἵνα τί ἐγκατέλιπές με; μακρὰν ἀπὸ τῆς σωτηρίας μου οἱ λόγοι τῶν παραπτωμάτων μου

O God, my God, attend to me: why have you forsaken me? The account of my transgressions is far from my salvation.

Psalm 21 (22):2 (Hebrew):

אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי לָמָּה עָזַבְתָּנִי רְחוֹק מִיִּשְׁוּעָתִי דְּבַרֵּי שְׁאֵתָתִי

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

Psalm 21 (22):2 (Aramaic Targum, a word-for-word translation of the Hebrew text):

אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי מִטּוֹל מָה שְׁבַקְתָּנִי רְחוֹק מִן פּוֹרְקֵי מִלֵּי אַבְלִיּוֹתֵי:

Both the Aramaic quotation and its Greek translation in Mark concur with the MT and with the manuscripts of the Aramaic Targum – but not with the Septuagint – in two regards: (1) they do not have the words “attend to me” (LXX: πρόσχες μοι, probably an insertion by the LXX translators); (2) they use the possessive pronoun twice (My God, my God, ὁ θεός μου ὁ θεός μου), while the Septuagint uses the possessive pronoun only once (ὁ θεός ὁ θεός μου). The affinity of the quotation with the Masoretic text is in sharp contrast to other quotations from/allusions to the Psalter in the Passion Narrative, which otherwise presuppose the Septuagint.

The usage of Aramaic in the quotation as well as the usage of the Hebrew / Aramaic text-type in the Greek translation of the quotation may be regarded as strong arguments for the presence of this scene already in the pre-Markan Aramaic oral tradition. The question of whether these words were actually spoken by Jesus on the cross lies outside of the scope of a philological or literary-critical

investigation. However, in my view, there are sufficient grounds to assert that this episode belongs to the earliest recoverable layer of the Jesus tradition.

*The “reversed contextualization”*

The allusions to different verses of the Psalm 21 (22) are represented in the Gospel of Mark in the reverse order: first verse 19 (dividing clothes, casting lots), then verses 7–9 (deriding and mocking), and finally verse 2 (the cry of abandonment). In some recent studies, starting with Robbins 1992 this is understood not as an accident, but rather as “reversed contextualisation”.<sup>6</sup>

According to this view, the opening words of the Psalm – “O God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” – were the main link between the Psalm and the Passion Narrative. As the Passion Narrative moves towards its culmination, namely the death of Jesus, so the Gospel writer moves through Psalm 21 (22) towards the words of his cry. However, for the Psalm this is a backward movement, since the cry is reported in the very first verse. The movement of the writer and the readers through the Psalm begins with verse 19, proceeds to verses 7–9, and concludes with verse 2.

The perspective of “reversed contextualization” lends credence to further possible allusions to Psalm 21 (22) in the Passion Narrative. For example, it gives additional weight to the above-mentioned suggestion that the words of Psalm 21 (22):17b “they have dug my hands and my feet” were associated with Jesus’ crucifixion already by the time the Gospel of Mark was written.

A faint allusion to Psalm 21 (22):17a (“a company of evildoers encircles me”) may be seen in Mark 15:27, in the description of the bandits, that are crucified on either side of Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

The setting of Jesus’ cry, as it is described in Mark 15:33 is the night (darkness) that came over the whole land in the plain day (from noon until three in the afternoon). The context of the Righteous Sufferer’s cry is described in Psalm 21 (22):3 as “I cry to you by day, but you do not hear, and by night ...”. Robbins draws our attention to the parallels between the two settings.<sup>8</sup> These allusions fit well into the picture of “reversed contextualization”.

The following table summarizes both the strong and more faint allusions to Psalm 21 (22) in Mark’s Passion Narrative.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> V.K. Robbins, *The Reversed Contextualization of Psalm 22 in the Markan Crucifixion. A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis*, in: F. Van Segbroeck (ed.), *The Four Gospels*, Leuven 1992, 1161–83.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, *Death* (Anm. 5), 1461. H. J. Carey, *Jesus’ Cry from the Cross. Towards a First-Century Understanding of the Intertextual Relationship between Psalm 22 and the Narrative of Mark’s Gospel*, LNTS 398, London 2009, 147.

<sup>8</sup> Robbins, *Contextualization* (Anm. 6), 1178. See also Brown, *Death* (Anm. 4), 1460.

<sup>9</sup> Largely following Brown, *Death* (Anm. 5), 1460 f.

Mark 15:24 διαμερίζονται τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, βάλλοντες κλῆρον ἐπ' αὐτὰ τίς τί ἄρη.	Psalm 22:19 διεμερίσαντο τὰ ἱμάτιά μου ἑαυτοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν ἱματισμόν μου ἔβαλον κλῆρον
Mark 15:25 ἦν δὲ ὥρα τρίτη καὶ ἐσταύρωσαν αὐτόν	Psalm 22:17b ὤρυξαν χεῖράς μου καὶ πόδας
Mark 15:27 Καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ σταυροῦσιν δύο ληστές, ἓνα ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ ἓνα ἐξ εὐωνύμων αὐτοῦ.	Psalm 22:17a συναγωγὴ πονηρευομένων περιέσχον με
Mark 15:29–32a Καὶ οἱ παραπορευόμενοι ἐβλασφήμουν αὐτὸν κινοῦντες τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν καὶ λέγοντες· οὐὰ ὁ καταλύων τὸν ναὸν καὶ οἰκοδομῶν ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις, <sup>30</sup> σῶσον σεαυτὸν καταβάς ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ. <sup>31</sup> ὁμοίως καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς ἐμπαίζοντες πρὸς ἀλλήλους μετὰ τῶν γραμματέων ἔλεγον· ἄλλους ἔσωσεν, ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται σῶσαι. <sup>32</sup> ὁ χριστὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰσραὴλ καταβάτω νῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἵνα ἴδωμεν καὶ πιστεύσωμεν.	Psalm 22:8–9 πάντες οἱ θεωροῦντές με ἐξεμυκτήρισάν με ἐλάλησαν ἐν χεῖλεσιν ἐκίνησαν κεφαλὴν <sup>9</sup> ἤλπισεν ἐπὶ κύριον ῥυσάσθω αὐτὸν σωσάτω αὐτόν ὅτι θέλει αὐτόν
Mark 15:32b καὶ οἱ συνεσταυρωμένοι σὺν αὐτῷ ὠνείδιζον αὐτόν	Psalm 22:7 ἐγὼ δὲ εἶμι σκώληξ καὶ οὐκ ἄνθρωπος ὄνειδος ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἐξουδένημα λαοῦ
Mark 15:33–34a Καὶ γενομένης ὥρας ἕκτης σκότος ἐγένετο ἐφ' ὅλην τὴν γῆν ἕως ὥρας ἑνάτης· καὶ τῇ ἐνάτῃ ὥρᾳ ἐβόησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς φωνῇ μεγάλῃ·	Psalm 22:3 ὁ θεὸς μου κεκράξομαι ἡμέρας καὶ οὐκ εἰσακούση καὶ νυκτὸς καὶ οὐκ εἰς ἀνοίαν ἐμοί
Mark 15:34 ὁ θεὸς μου ὁ θεὸς μου, εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;	Psalm 22:2 ὁ θεὸς ὁ θεὸς μου πρόσχες μοι ἵνα τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;

### *Vinegar*

Mark 15:36 δραμῶν δέ τις [καὶ] γεμίσας σπόγγον ὄξους περιθεις καλάμῳ ἐπότιζεν αὐτόν λέγων· ἄφετε ἴδωμεν εἰ ἔρχεται Ἥλιος καθελεῖν αὐτόν.

And someone ran, filled a sponge with vinegar, put it on a stick, and tried to make him drink.

The image of enemies trying to make Jesus drink vinegar is very likely influenced by Psalm 68 (69):22:

καὶ ἔδωκαν εἰς τὸ βρῶμά μου χολὴν καὶ εἰς τὴν δίψαν μου ἐπότισάν με ὄξος.

They gave me gall for my food, and made me drink vinegar for my thirst.



*By-watchers at the Cross*

Mark 15:40 Ἦσαν δὲ καὶ γυναῖκες ἀπὸ μακρόθεν θεωροῦσαι, ἐν αἷς καὶ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ Μαρία ἡ Ἰακώβου τοῦ μικροῦ καὶ Ἰωσήτος μήτηρ καὶ Σαλώμη ...

There were also women looking on from afar; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.

Cf. Psalm 37 (38):12.

οἱ φίλοι μου καὶ οἱ πλησίον μου ἐξ ἐναντίας μου ἤγγισαν καὶ ἔστησαν καὶ οἱ ἐγγιστά μου ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἔστησαν

My friends and my neighbours drew near before me, and stood still; and my nearest of kin stood afar off.

### 3. The role of the Righteous Sufferer Psalms for the formation of the Passion Narrative

We have identified a number of passages where motifs or even expressions from the psalms of the Righteous Sufferer were used as, so to speak, “construction blocks” for the Passion Narrative. It may even be argued that some of the details of the Narrative have their origin not in the memory of the early Christian community about the events that actually surrounded Jesus’ death, but rather in the application of the Old Testament imagery to the description of these events. This thesis was put forward, among others, by Dibelius: “In certain Old Testament passages ... the Passion of Jesus was found depicted in advance. These passages were read again and again ... and thus these motives which had been at home in the Old Testament came into the text of the Passion”.<sup>10</sup>

Conservative scholars were reluctant to accept the thesis, insisting that all the details of the Passion Narrative go back directly to the eyewitnesses. On the other side, scholars such as J. D. Crossan pushed beyond Dibelius: “It seems to me most likely that those closest to Jesus knew almost nothing about the details of the event. They knew only that Jesus has been crucified, outside Jerusalem, at the time of Passover, and probably through some conjunction of imperial and sacerdotal authority”.<sup>11</sup> The other details, according to Crossan, were added by the Early Church and at least in part were borrowed from Old Testament imagery.

It would likely be wiser to follow the middle path with Raymond E. Brown.<sup>12</sup> For the disciples of Jesus, his death required explanation and it had to be brought in line with the Scriptures; the Psalms provided the link required. At least some of the details of what actually happened (betrayal of a friend, false accusations,

<sup>10</sup> M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, New York 1965, 184.

<sup>11</sup> J. D. Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative*, San Francisco 1988, 405.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, *Death* (Anm. 5), 14–17.

mockery of the “pious”, shameful death) had their parallels in the Psalms of the Righteous Sufferer. These Psalms provided language and imagery to describe the tragedy in Scriptural terms and a framework for understanding what happened. Whether the recourse to this imagery also resulted in some new details being borrowed from the Psalter and inserted into the Passion Narrative is an open question. Most likely, with the material that we have at our disposal the question cannot be settled conclusively.

#### 4. The cry of abandonment on the lips of Jesus

All the quotations of and allusions to the Psalter in the Passion Narrative are to be found in the speech of the narrator except one, which is put on the lips of Jesus in the very climactic moment of the narration: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

The scene is unprecedented and unparalleled, either in Jewish, Greek, or later Christian tradition. Together with Jesus’ prayer at the Garden of Gethsemane it is exactly the opposite of what we read in Jewish or Christian stories of the martyrs.

The tradition of Jewish stories of the martyrdom begins with 2 Maccabees 6 and 7. The Maccabee brothers die one after another, each professing their unwavering confidence in God. The same mood of unwavering confidence governs other stories of Jews and Christians going to death for the sake of their faith.

The world of Classical Antiquity was very different from the world of Jews and early Christians, but the wise men of Greece and Rome met death with the same calm and serenity. Socrates speaks serenely before his death with his disciples, and his last words are a joke equating death with convalescence: “we owe a rooster to Asclepius”.

When we read the Gospel story we see that the picture of Jesus’ death is astonishingly different from how wise and pious men die in Classical, Jewish, or Christian tradition. Before his arrest, Jesus “began to be distressed and agitated ... and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him” (Mark 14:33,35). “His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground” (Luke 22:44). In Mark and Matthew Jesus’ prayer is left unanswered, or at least the answer is not recorded. What follows is the sleeping disciples, Judas, and a crowd with swords and clubs.

In the lives of the Saints one can scarcely find a picture of a martyr being afraid of death or praying that death might pass away from him or her. The Legends of the Holy Martyrs tend to depict them as superhuman beings with superhuman endurance. A good example is Saint Laurentius who, according to the legend, was burned on the gridiron, and while being burned, made the cheerful remark, “I’m well done. Turn me over!” Nothing of that kind of superhuman endurance or heroic serenity is to be found in the Gospels.

And, of course, it is antithetical to their heroic presentation that the last words of a martyr be “My God why have you forsaken me?” But these are exactly the last words of Jesus, according to Mark and Matthew. The Son of God of the canonical Gospels turns out to be closer to suffering humans than the intrepid heroes from the Lives of the Saints.

No eschatological assurance is felt in the last words on the Cross – nothing of the sovereignty of Jesus who was aware of the divine plan and foretold it to his disciples. There is not even any assurance of the afterlife. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Inevitable painful death, disciples running away, bystanders deriding and taunting, sudden absolute darkness around – this is the context of Jesus’ cry of dereliction.

In all other prayers recorded in the four Gospels, Jesus addresses God as ‘Father’. This is the only exception.<sup>13</sup> This may be explained by the fact that the words are a literal borrowing from the Old Testament, but nevertheless it is significant that the last words of Jesus in Mark and Matthew are different in this regard from all his prayers.

Throughout the centuries the words “My God, why have you forsaken me?” were highly problematic for Christian theology. This seems to include even the Gospel writers.

Luke mainly follows Mark in his Passion Narrative. However, describing Jesus’ prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, he adds an important detail: the angel, sent by God from heaven as an answer to Jesus’ prayer, to give him strength. In Luke, the prayer of Gethsemane does not go unanswered and the sending of an angel is a clear sign that God by no means abandoned Jesus. This consoling angel is absent from Mark and Matthew.

Concerning the last words of Jesus, the difference between Luke and his sources is even greater. For the cry of abandonment, a quotation from Psalm 21 (22), Luke substitutes another Psalter quotation.

Mark 15:34

καὶ τῇ ἐνάτῃ ὥρᾳ ἐβόησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· ελωι ελωι λεμα σαβαχθανι; ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον· ὁ θεός μου ὁ θεός μου, εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Luk 23:46

καὶ φωνήσας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· πάτερ, εἰς χεῖράς σου παρατίθεμαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου.

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

<sup>13</sup> I owe this observation to R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids 2002, 652.

Luke quotes, almost exactly, Psalm 30(31):5:

εις χεῖράς σου παραθήσομαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου, ἐλυτρώσω με κύριε ὁ θεὸς τῆς ἀληθείας

:תְּבִיִּי אֶפְקֵד רוּחִי פְדִיתָהּ אֹתִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֱמֶת:

Into your hands (*Hebrew*: hand) I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

The only difference between Luke's text and the Psalm is the substitution of the future tense (παραθήσομαι) with present (παρατίθεμαι), which is necessary to stress that the act described is taking place at the moment of speech. The wording of Luke is dependent on the Septuagint, not on the Masoretic tradition; this is clear from the choice of παρατίθεμαι (παρατίθεμαι is not a standard equivalent for קִיבֶּטָא) and, especially, from the plural form of εις χεῖράς σου (in MT singular תְּבִיִּי).

The description of Jesus having cried out with a "loud voice" (φωνῆ μεγάλη, the same expression in Mark and Luke), the timing (ninth hour), the addressee (God the Father), and the form (Psalter quotation) all support Luke's version πάτερ, εις χεῖράς σου παρατίθεμαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου being a parallel and, most probably, a substitution for Mark's version ὁ θεὸς μου ὁ θεὸς μου, εις τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;

The more traditional approach is to equate Luke 23:46 with the wordless cry of Mark 15:37//Matthew 27:50, this would mean that Mark 15:34//Matthew 27:46 is omitted in Luke, not substituted.

In any case, the theological difference between the last words of Jesus in Mark/Matthew, on the one hand, and Luke, on the other hand, is great: Jesus is not abandoned and he commends his spirit into the hands of his Father with trust and assurance. We have already noticed that Jesus' last words in Mark/Matthew is the only prayer recorded in the Gospels where Jesus addresses God as "my God" and not as "Father". In Luke's version he addresses God as "Father".

The dramatic tension between the future Resurrection and the future Kingdom of God, on the one hand, and the present tragedy of Crucifixion on the other is softened in Luke. Distinct from Mark and Matthew, Luke stresses the other aspect of the image of the Righteous Sufferer in the Psalter: the imminence of his vindication.

In the apocryphal Gospel of Peter Jesus is abandoned not by God, but by his own power:

και ο κυριος ανεβησε λεγων· Η δυναμις μου, η δυναμις, κατελειψας με· και ειπων ανεληφθη.

And the Lord cried out, saying, "My power, my power, you have abandoned me?"

A striking example of an attempt to deal away with the words "why have you forsaken me?" is to be found in codex D (codex Bezae), which changes ἐγκατέλιπές με to ὠνειδισάς με. Most scholars regard this reading as secondary, aimed at

escaping the offensive ἐγκατέλιπές με (though, one must say, ὠνείδισάς με also can be regarded as offensive!). Bart Ehrman attempts to define more precisely the controversy that may have given rise to this reading, suggesting the polemics with the so-called separationist Gnostics as the most suitable context.<sup>14</sup>

Sometimes the Christian exegesis of Mark 15:34 and its parallel in Matthew 27:46, proceeding from the axiom that God cannot suffer, went as far as to strictly separate in Christ the human and the divine. One can find such explanations not only with the Gnostics or with the Nestorian theologians, but also with the Orthodox Church fathers. Ambrose, for example, writes: “It was the cry of the man who because of his separation from divinity is going to die” (*Clamavit homo divinitatis separationem moriturus*”; Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, 10, 127).

For the exegetes who did not want to admit either the separation of the Logos from the Father (Arianism), or separation of Christ’s divinity from his humanity (Nestorianism), the obvious way out was through typological interpretation: Christ gave voice to the suffering of the human race.<sup>15</sup>

However, in Origen we find this remarkable statement:

“Certain people, in an outward display of piety for Jesus, because they are unable to explain how Christ could be forsaken by God, believe that this saying from the cross is true only as an expression of his humility. We, however ... understand that he was indeed forsaken by the Father inasmuch as he who was the form of the invisible God and the image of the Father ‘took the form of a servant’”.<sup>16</sup>

In any case, one must say that throughout two millennia the picture of God the Son asking God the Father “Why have you forsaken me?” was perceived in Christian thought as a stumbling-block that ought to be explained away.

The catastrophes of the 20th Century – Auschwitz and GULAG, bombing innocent citizens in peaceful cities – have changed the picture. Christ’s suffering has come to be seen as the embodiment of human suffering and human suffering is perceived as participation in Christ’s suffering. A quotation from Bonhoeffer demonstrates this radical turn in Christian understanding of the image of the Suffering God: “God allows Himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and

<sup>14</sup> B. D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus. The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, New York 2005, 172 f. B. D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, New York 1996, 143–145. The alternative hypothesis, namely that D reading in Mark 15:34 is original, was suggested by Harnack: A. von Harnack, *Studien zur Geschichte des Neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche*, Berlin 1931, 98–104. Despite the authority of Harnack, it was almost unanimously rejected (among recent literature this hypothesis was most strongly advocated by Rodgers: P. Rodgers, *Text and Story. Narrative Studies in New Testament Textual Criticism*, Eugene 2011, 44–53).

<sup>15</sup> An overview of patristic exegesis with earlier literature is given by E. Bartzis, *Divine abandonment of Christ and the soul in Byzantine exegesis and ascetic literature*, Durham 2008. <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2508/>.

<sup>16</sup> *Commentarii in Matthaem*, 135, quoted from Bartzis: Bartzis, *Abandonment* (Anm. 15), 96.

that is exactly the way, the only way, in which God can be with us and help us. Matthew 8:17 ("he took up our infirmities, and bore the burden of our sins") makes it crystal clear that it is not by his omnipotence that Christ helps us, but by his weakness and suffering. This is the decisive difference between Christianity and all religions ... The Bible directs us to the powerlessness and suffering of God; only a suffering God can help ... Humans are challenged to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world ... It is not some religious act which makes a Christian what he is, but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world ..."<sup>17</sup>

In this new context, for the Christians of the Post-Catastrophic Age, Jesus' cry in Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46 turn out to be invested with a deep meaning and to be astonishingly more contemporary than many other theological notions, images and texts that had been at the center of the Christian thought throughout the previous two millenia.

The substantial scholarly literature of the last two centuries on Jesus' cry in Mark 15:34 may be roughly divided into works arguing *for* the interpretation of Jesus' cry as a cry of abandonment and those arguing *against* it. The latter group is motivated primarily by the theological considerations already discussed, namely, that the Son of God cannot be forsaken by His Father. For example, there have been suggestions to change the text of Jesus' last words in Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46 so that they would express not the despair, but confidence and triumph.<sup>18</sup> Lacking any textual basis, these suggestions appear rather ridiculous.

Much more plausible is the attempt to soften the scandal of Jesus' last cry by treating the initial words of psalm 21 (22), quoted in the Gospel, as pointing to the psalm 21 (22) in its entirety. According to this view, quoting the first line of the Psalm, Jesus (or the Gospel writer) had in mind the whole of Psalm 21 (22), including its optimistic and triumphal ending (verses 23–32).<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, Psalm 21 (22) consists of two parts: the first part is lament (verses 2–21), the second is thanksgiving (verses 22–31).

It is here that the concept of the "reversed contextualization" comes into play: if the Psalm, in the context of the Passion Narrative, is read backwards towards the beginning, then the opening verse becomes *its very end*. As Robbins puts it, "the context of mockery and death into which Marcan discourse places Psalm 22 reverses the sequence of scenes in the psalm and subverts the rhetoric of confidence expressed in it."<sup>20</sup>

Within the Gospel of Mark Jesus' cry is the logical end of the story of his abandonment. Abandonment is one of the main themes of Mark 15: Jesus is

<sup>17</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Letters and Papers from Prison. To Eberhard Bethge, [Tegel] 16 July [1944], [Tegel] 18 July [1944].

<sup>18</sup> For the listing of these suggestions see: Brown, *Death* (Anm. 4), 1048 n. 46. R. H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel. With Special Reference to the Messianic Hope*, Leiden 1967, 66 n. 7.

<sup>19</sup> The most recent and detailed work espousing this view is Carey: *Carey, Jesus' Cry* (Anm. 7).

<sup>20</sup> Robbins, *Contextualiation* (Anm. 6), 1164.

abandoned by the people, by the disciples (15:14–50), by Peter (15:66–72), and finally by God (15:15–34). In this way the words “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” are a necessary and integral part of Mark’s story.

Of course, both the writers and the readers of the Gospels know beforehand that the narrative moves towards the Resurrection. But it can only move towards the Resurrection *because* it passes through death and despair.