

## THE PRAYER OF JESUS ON THE CROSS

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The God of the Bible reveals Himself, in the reflection of faith developed by the inspired authors of the Old and New Testament, as a helpful Presence, a spiritual Nearness<sup>1</sup>. The spontaneous human reaction in the face of this presence and nearness of God is turning to Him in the act of prayer. It forms an expression of the deep aspiration to respond with reciprocity: the praying individual desires to abide with God, to be present before Him, to come spiritually nearer to God and to remain unceasingly in an intimate, life-giving communion with Him.

That desire becomes especially urgent when a person has to face various forms of suffering. Experiencing his own frailty and insufficiency, he seeks to find a support outside of himself and turns with his whole being towards God – the source of true life, inner peace and happiness. Such radical turning to God, such total clinging to Him, may find its expression in a form of prayer that is able to engage all spheres and dimensions of a person.

In the message of the New Testament, the culmination of human experience of suffering is the passion of Jesus Christ. His suffering appears as unique, exceptional and unrepeatable because of His identity and His dignity: He is

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. GROSSOUW – H. HAAG, “Gebet”, *Bibel-Lexikon* (ed. H. HAAG) (Leipzig 41981) 516-522, 516.

a human and at the same time the Son of God. Therefore His suffering on the one hand reflects and incorporates the universal suffering of mankind in history, on the other hand it proves salutary for our world.

Since the passion narratives constitute an essential part of each gospel, all four Evangelists report, in more or less detail, the final events of Jesus' life, His crucifixion and death on the cross. Placing Him in centre stage as protagonist in the passion drama, they present Him not as a passive, silent criminal, condemned to death, but rather as an autonomous individual accomplishing consciously and actively the mystery of salvation.

An outstanding expression of the afore-mentioned consciousness and autonomy of Jesus in His passion is found in His prayer on the cross. Among all the words spoken by the crucified Christ<sup>2</sup> the ones directed to His Father, that is to say the words of His prayer, are presented in the passion narratives as particularly significant. The Evangelists portray Jesus on the cross not only as *Messias patiens* (suffering), but also as *Messias orans* (praying). This long expected Messiah is the one who prays even in the situation of extreme suffering during his crucifixion. In its verbal as well as its nonverbal dimension, that prayer expresses His total submission to the will of His Father and demonstrates that the sacrifice of His life was perfectly voluntary (cf. John 10:18).

In the considerations below we are going to reflect on the gospel texts (passion narratives) portraying the

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<sup>2</sup> In the Christian tradition there is attested since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a collection of seven phrases attributed to crucified Jesus, gathered from the four Canonical Gospels, called "the Seven Last Words of Jesus" (or "the Seven Last Words from the Cross"). Three of the sayings appear exclusively in Luke (23:34a.43.46) and another three occur exclusively in John (19:26-27.28.30). The seventh saying is double-attested (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34), with small divergence in pronunciation – cf. J. JAROMIN, "Siedem słów z krzyża", *Scriptura Sacra* 12 (2008) 117-130; J.D.G. DUNN, *Jesus Remembered* (Christianity in the Making I; Grand Rapids 2003) 777-781; F. RUTLEDGE, *The Seven Last Words from the Cross* (Grand Rapids 2005) (spiritual meditations).

crucified Jesus as an *Orant* and reporting His prayer on the cross. Before we focus our attention, as a main point, on the words and phrases of prayer uttered by the Crucified, we will first consider some nonverbal aspects of His prayer.

## 1. NONVERBAL DIMENSION OF JESUS' PRAYER

All four Evangelists in their passion narratives recount the crucifixion of Jesus using the verb σταυρώω<sup>3</sup>, with the meaning “nail (affix) to the cross” (“ans Kreuz schlagen”<sup>4</sup>). Through that act of brutally affixing the body of Jesus to the wooden instrument of death, the Roman soldiers force Him to assume a specific position on the cross. So the execution’s tool itself determines the bodily posture of the *Messias orans*.

In this regard our particular attention is drawn to the association between crucifixion and prayer, created by the image of extended hands. The gesture of outstretched hands, conveyed in the New Testament by the use of the verb ἐκτείνω<sup>5</sup>, may concern a crucified person<sup>6</sup>, but also can symbolize the disposition of an *orant*<sup>7</sup>. Viewed from

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<sup>3</sup> Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:33; John 19:18.

<sup>4</sup> W. BAUER, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin <sup>6</sup>1988) 1528.

<sup>5</sup> With exception of Acts 27:30, the object of ἐκτείνω remains always a hand (Matt 8:3; 12:13.49; 14:31; 26:51; Mark 1:41; 3:5; Luke 5:13; 6:10; Acts 4:30; 26:1) or hands (Luke 22:53; John 21:18) – cf. E. FUCHS, “ἐκτείνω”, *TWNT* II, 458-463, 458.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament IV/3; Freiburg 1975) 437-438; FUCHS, “ἐκτείνω”, 461.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. MĘDALA, *Ewangelia według świętego Jana*. Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz (NKB.NT IV/2; Częstochowa 2010) 367-368 regarding the prediction of Jesus uttered to Peter in John 21:18. The author indicates several source texts, which associate both concepts – among other the *Odes of Salomon*: 27:1-3 and 42:1-2. We adduce below both texts in the translation of J.H. CHARLESWORTH (“Odes of Salomon”,

the perspective of this association, we can see in the posture of the crucified Jesus the first form of His nonverbal prayer and at the same time a silent preamble to His words of prayer uttered on the cross.

Another form of Jesus' nonverbal prayer seems to be indicated in two texts of the passion narratives, where all four Evangelists, reporting the very moment of His death, mention a cry uttered by the Crucified Jesus without relating its verbal content. Matthew says: ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς πάλιν κράξας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ἀφῆκεν τὸ πνεῦμα (27:50) and Mark ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἀφείς φωνὴν μεγάλην ἐξέπνευσε (15:37). Both aorist participles (κράξας, ἀφείς) have as their object a "loud voice" (φωνὴ μεγάλη) – the potential medium of an inarticulate but powerful and – in the eyes of both Evangelists – significant agony-prayer uttered in the final experience of excruciation.

## 2. VERBAL DIMENSION OF JESUS' PRAYER

Among the sayings of Jesus on the cross, traditionally known as His "Seven Last Words", only three can be qualified as prayer in the proper sense of the word: Luke 23:34a; Matt 27:46 / Mark 15:34 and Luke 23:46. We will now focus our attention on these sayings, in the above order.

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*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* [ed. J.H. CHARLESWORTH] [New York 1985] II, 725-771, 759, 770):

"I extended my hands  
and hallowed my Lord;

For the expansion of my hands  
is his sign.

And my extension  
is the upright cross.  
Hallelujah" (27:1-3).

"I extended my hands and approached my Lord,  
because the stretching out of my hands is his sign.

And my extension is the common cross,  
that was lifted up on the way of the Righteous One" (42:1-2).

## 2.1. Luke 23:34a

As mentioned above<sup>8</sup>, the first of the traditional “Seven Last Words of Jesus” is the saying recorded in Luke 23:34a. Its form is clearly one of prayer; nevertheless in the narrative introduction to the words of Jesus there appears the verbal form ἔλεγεν (“was saying”), derived from λέγω (“to say, to speak, to tell”) and not from εὔχομαι (“to pray”). His request, expressed through the imperative ἄφες αὐτοῖς (“forgive them”) is directed to God – His Father (the vocative πάτερ).

The present context<sup>9</sup> of that prayer of Jesus might suggest, as noted by Pope Benedict XVI, that it was “spoken almost at the very moment when the act of crucifixion was being carried out”<sup>10</sup>. So His plea for the forgiveness of those who treat Him thus: πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἶδασιν τί ποιοῦσιν (“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”) initiates both the verbal and nonverbal prayer of Jesus on the cross.

The prayer draws upon the Old Testament theological theme of the unjust suffering of an innocent righteous one<sup>11</sup>, while at the same time going beyond the OT concepts. Here Jesus as the “suffering upright one obtains

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<sup>8</sup> See the note 2.

<sup>9</sup> As regards the collocation of the logion, see the explanation of B. M. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart 2000) 154. An exhaustive study – regarding the strongly debated question whether the logion belongs originally to the text – offers 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) II, 975-981 and N. EUBANK, “A Disconcerting Prayer: On the Originality of Luke 23:34a”, *JBL* 129 (2010) 521-536.

<sup>10</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. Holy Week: from the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco 2011) 206; see also A. PLUMMER, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh 1922) 531; EUBANK, “Prayer”, 527, n. 28.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Ps 59; Wis 2:12-20.

forgiveness from his Father for those who make him suffer both physically and mentally”<sup>12</sup>.

This supplicatory appeal of Jesus, directed to His Father at the beginning of crucifixion, bears the traits of a programmatic and normative character in respect to His passion. The self-immolation of the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29.36) constitutes an act of expiation for sinful humanity. The words of supplication, spoken by the Crucified: “Father, forgive them”, appear in perfect harmony with the expiatory, concomitant act of redemption on the cross. Jesus is presented as an ideal exemplar of intercession prayer<sup>13</sup> who perfectly fulfils His own teaching concerning love of enemies and persecutors (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27-29).

The plea of Jesus – the divine Intercessor *πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς* (“Father, forgive them”) leads us to ask an essential question: who here is being prayed for? In other words: who are the “they” who “do not know what they are doing”?

Benedict XVI, referring to the scene of crucifixion itself, states initially that the Lord “begs forgiveness for those who nail him to the Cross”<sup>14</sup>. Later on however, the Pope moves on to consider Saint Peter’s sermon in the Acts of the Apostles, citing his words directed to the crowd gathered in the temple of Jerusalem: “You ‘killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead’ (3:15) [...] ‘Now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers’ (3:17)”<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*. Introduction, Translation, and Notes (AB 28-28A; New York 1981-1985) II, 1504.

<sup>13</sup> Reporting His plea of forgiveness Luke uses not the aorist *εἶπεν*, but the imperfect form *ἔλεγεν*, indicating the iterative or durative aspect of Jesus’ action – cf. F. BLASS – A. DEBRUNNER – F. REHKOPF [Bearb.], *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (Göttingen 171990) §318; 325; 327; 329. See also e.g. PLUMMER, *Commentary*, 531 (“while they crucified Him, He in contrast to them was saying”).

<sup>14</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus*, 206.

<sup>15</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus*, 206-207.

Thus, moving in the direction of the Lucan theology<sup>16</sup>, Benedict XVI extends the circle of people referred to in Jesus' intercession to include the Jewish populace and their rulers involved in His crucifixion. The detailed exegetical analysis undertaken by many authors corroborates this opinion: Christ prays both for the Roman soldiers<sup>17</sup> who physically affix Him to the cross (and for Roman authorities represented by Pilate)<sup>18</sup> as well as for Jews, especially the Jewish leaders who are mainly responsible for what was (i.e. the trial of Jesus) and is (i.e. the crucifixion) being done<sup>19</sup>.

Continuing His supplication to His Father for forgiveness, Jesus adds a justification of the perpetrators who "do not know what they are doing" (οὐ γὰρ οἶδασιν τί ποιοῦσιν). In the light of Lucan theology the justification is applicable to the culprits belonging to both the Romans and the Jews, taking into consideration their respective roles in Jesus' death.

It seems necessary, in this regard, to discern two kinds of ignorance. The first one has a rather pure material character and refers to the Roman soldiers and to Pilate<sup>20</sup>. In the theological perspective of Luke they, as heathen, play merely the role of an instrument in the hands of Jewish rulers manipulating the emotions of Jerusalem's populace. The ignorance of the latter is the formal one: they have full

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<sup>16</sup> Further see Acts 13:26ff.

<sup>17</sup> Literally they are mentioned later on in the account, making a mockery of the Crucified in 23:36, but the context clearly indicates them as doers of the physical execution.

<sup>18</sup> BROWN, *Death*, II, 973 observes rightly: "Luke never presents the Romans as solely responsible for the crucifixion" (see e.g. Acts 2:23) and continues: "the chief priests and the rulers and the people" (i.e. the Jewish agents of 23:13) "are the last-mentioned antecedent for any 'they' in the crucifixion".

<sup>19</sup> Cf. PLUMMER, *Commentary*, 531; FITZMYER, *Gospel*, II, 1503-1504; EUBANK, "Prayer", 527-528.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. PLUMMER, *Commentary*, 532; the author indicates Luke 12:48 as throwing some light on Jesus' excuse. BROWN, *Death*, II, 973-974 adduces also some OT (e.g. Jonah 4:11) and apocryphal texts.

material knowledge and theological awareness regarding the messianic prophecies and expectations of Judaism at the time of Jesus. But nevertheless they not only reject His proclamation and despise Him, but also deliberately seek to kill Him. Their ignorance therefore is an obdurate ignorance<sup>21</sup>. However, in the eyes of Luke – the theologian, the representatives of both kinds of ignorance need forgiveness. Therefore the Evangelist, alone among the Synoptics, presents Christ on the cross as Intercessor (*Orant*). In “the Word of Forgiveness”<sup>22</sup> He implores His Father’s mercy for *all* those who contribute to His crucifixion.

## 2.2. Mark 15:34 / Matt 27:46

While the first expression of Jesus’ prayer on the cross is uttered by Him at the beginning of the crucifixion, the second<sup>23</sup> (and the third<sup>24</sup>) one is pronounced at the end of His being “lifted up from the earth” (John 12:32).

That central phrase of the Crucified’s prayer, colloated between the initial and the final one, belongs to the very heart of the passion narrative. Moving forward towards the report of the death of Jesus it introduces, as antecedent circumstance, the motif of darkness<sup>25</sup> spreading

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<sup>21</sup> Benedict XVI illustrates that “mixture of knowledge and ignorance, of material expertise and deep incomprehension” which can compose a spiritual mystery of human heart, mentioning the autobiographical reflexions of Saint Paul who firstly ‘recalls that he himself’ ‘formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted’ Jesus; then he continues: ‘but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief’” (1 Tim 1:13) (cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus*, 207).

<sup>22</sup> So the first saying of Jesus on the cross is traditionally called.

<sup>23</sup> In the tradition of “The Seven Last Words from the Cross” this is the fourth, middle saying (the second one is Luke 23:43 and the third – John 19:26-27).

<sup>24</sup> Luke 23:46.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the detailed treatment of that theme in BROWN, *Death*, II, 1034-1038. The author handles widely the OT theological background, indicating, among many others, the text of Amos 8:9-10: “And on that day, says the Lord God, the sun shall set at midday, and the light shall be darkened on earth in the daytime. [...] I will make them mourn as for

at noon<sup>26</sup> over the whole earth / over all the earth<sup>27</sup> (Mark 15:33 / Matt 27:45) until Christ's expiration<sup>28</sup> at the ninth hour (i.e. about 3 p.m.).

It is precisely from the midst of this deep darkness that Jesus utters His dramatic outcry of prayer: “«Elōi, Elōi, lema sabachthani”” which is interpreted, ‘My God, my God, why did you abandon me?’” / “«Ēli, Ēli, lema sabachthani”” – that is, ‘My God, my God, why did you abandon me?’” (Mark 15:34 / Matt 27:46). Because of its content as well as its literary form it appears as the most distinguishable and conspicuous one among all *the Seven Last Words of Jesus* and also among all His phrases of prayer on the cross.

Let us enumerate the principal specific features of “The Word of Abandonment” as it was traditionally called.

First of all it is the only saying that occurs in more than one gospel. Then, as witnessed in both Mark and in Matt, the saying is first cited in Aramaic<sup>29</sup> (transcription) and subsequently translated into Greek. And finally the formulation of the prayer as such has its direct source in Ps 22:2.

The fact that both Mark 15:34 and Matt 27:46 contain two wordings of the dramatic invocation of Jesus is proof of its considerable importance in the synoptic

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only son and bring their day to bitter end”. R.E. Brown throws some interesting light on the question of darkness also from the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*.

<sup>26</sup> The “sixth hour” in Mark/Matt text means the sixth hour of the day and is the equivalent of midday.

<sup>27</sup> The essentially theological perspective of Mark/Matt suggests rather the meaning “earth” than “land” or “country” for the noun  $\gamma\eta$  used in the scene – see the excellent discussion in BROWN, *Death*, II, 1036 and R.H. GUNDRY, *Mark. A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids 1993) 964.

<sup>28</sup> See GUNDRY, *Mark*, 947.

<sup>29</sup> It is very probable that both gospels are using rather mixed forms of the phrase – partially Aramaic and partially Hebrew; on details see BROWN, *Death*, II, 1052-1053.

tradition<sup>30</sup>. Mark as well as Matthew report Jesus' final words on the cross (for both of them His only words in this context) in the first place as transliteration of the Semitic in Greek characters and then as translation of the import of the saying into Greek.

The transcribed citation of Jesus' cry<sup>31</sup>, in spite of differences in formulation, indicates clearly Ps 22:2a as its textual source. Jesus' supplication is coincident with the initial verse of Psalm 22 – Israel's great cry of anguish addressed to the apparently silent God<sup>32</sup>. The psalmist prays from the midst of his suffering on account of God's seeming absence: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me (אֵלֹהֵי עַיִן)?" The transcription σαβαχθανι, common for Mark and Matt, resembles the Aramaic version of the verb rather than the Hebrew one, i.e. that of the psalm<sup>33</sup>.

The translation of the Semitic version of Jesus' prayer into Greek suggests that not only the Marcan audience, but also that of Matthew was no longer expected to understand the original wording<sup>34</sup>. Both Evangelists seem to reach, in their respective formulation of the translation, to the LXX-version of Ps 22:2a (ὁ θεός μου is the common part with Mark, and ἵνα τί με ἐγκατέλιπες – the one with Matt<sup>35</sup>)

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. C.L. BLOMBERG, "Matthew", *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (eds. G.K. BEALE – D.A. CARSON) (Grand Rapids 2007) 98.

<sup>31</sup> On the "Elijah-misunderstanding" presented in the following Mark/Matt context as resulting from Jesus' prayer – See BROWN, *Death*, II, 1058-1063; R. ZAWADZKI, "Ich sende meinen Boten vor dir her" (Mk 1:2): die Gestalt des Elija im Markusevangelium", *Collectanea Theologica* (Fasciculus specialis) 71 (2001) 40-44.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus*, 204.

<sup>33</sup> See BROWN, *Death*, II, 1052 who adds as a side-note that in Jesus' time transliteration of Semitic vowels and consonants was not an exact procedure and therefore can differ more or less from our standardized transcription of the Masoretic Text.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. BROWN, *Death*, II, 1054.

<sup>35</sup> Small modification forms here the changed order of the two last words.

however retaining also some signs of a close relation to the Hebrew.

Introducing Jesus' "at (Mark) / about (Matt) the ninth hour" prayer, Mark and Matthew alike picture it not as a simple calling out or pleading but as a loud shout. Described as experiencing extreme anguish, the Crucified "screamed with a loud cry" (ἐβόησεν φωνῇ μεγάλη) / "screamed out with loud cry, saying" (ἀνεβόησεν φωνῇ μεγάλη λέγων<sup>36</sup>). The striking character of this invocation is of central importance for the message of Mark/Matt passion narratives<sup>37</sup> and corresponds strictly to the tonality of Ps 22<sup>38</sup> as the OT-source of the prayer's wording and messianic prophecy pointing to Christ.

This time however, in contrast to both remaining prayers from the cross (Luke 23:34a.46) He calls the one He speaks to not "Father" (πάτερ)<sup>39</sup> but "My God" (ὁ θεός μου – Mark / θεέ μου – Matt). "Feeling forsaken as if he were not being heard, he no longer presumes to speak intimately to the All-Powerful as "Father" but employs the address common to all human beings, 'My God'"<sup>40</sup> as

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<sup>36</sup> The participle λέγων ("saying") refers here not to the manner in which the prayer was uttered but reflects solely the Semitic syntax of the phrase.

<sup>37</sup> The scream can lend – historically (as not unusual at crucifixion) – desperate urgency to Jesus' petition, but first of all constitutes "an apocalyptic sign similar to the eschatological elements of darkness, rent sanctuary veil, earthquake, and risen dead that accompany the death of Jesus" – BROWN, *Death*, II, 1044-1045. R.H. GUNDRY, *Mark*, 947-948 insists (mentioning it more times) that the loudness of Jesus' cry emphasizes instead His "superhuman strength even as he expires".

<sup>38</sup> The idea of roaring or crying to God comes back (beside of the v.2) in verses 3 and 6.

<sup>39</sup> In Gethsemane, at the beginning of the passion narrative, Jesus addresses God solely as "Father" – Mark 14:36 (αββα ὁ πατήρ), Matt 26:39.42 (πάτερ μου).

<sup>40</sup> BROWN, *Death*, II, 1046. The author refers also (p. 1056) to the rendition of Jesus' last words in the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* 5:19 (see above the note 25) as: "My Power, o power, you have forsaken me", questioning the docetic background of the mentioned rendition (A.T. Robertson).

it does the psalmist at the beginning of Ps 22. In this way Jesus identifies himself with all supplicants of the universe who have to experience an extreme anguish, especially with “all those in this world who suffer from God’s concealment”<sup>41</sup>.

Screaming out His dramatic interrogation from the cross Jesus is not questioning, however, “the existence of God or the power of God to do something about what is happening”<sup>42</sup>. What He is questioning is the silence of “His God”. Nevertheless His prayer isn’t a cry of despair but an expression of hope, a demonstration of an unwavering faith, corresponding to His extreme anguish and helplessness<sup>43</sup>.

So the Crucified appears as the Intercessor *par excellence*: all those who feel they must suffer under “God’s darkness”, i.e. suffer God’s absence, God’s abandonment, in a painful forlorn state, who experience loneliness and alienation, should be certain and convinced that He, God’s Son tormented on the cross, suffers this abandonment together with them.

### 2.3. Luke 23:46

The final prayer<sup>44</sup> of Jesus on the cross coincides with the culmination of the Lucan passion narrative. Its climax is formed by the report of the very moment of Christ’s death.

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<sup>41</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus*, 214.

<sup>42</sup> BROWN, *Death*, II, 1046; see also A. PACIOREK, *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza* (NKB.NT I/2; Częstochowa 2008) II, 666-667.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. R. PESCH, *Das Markusevangelium* (Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament II/2; (Sonderausgabe) Budapest 2000) II, 495.

<sup>44</sup> According to John 19:30, before Jesus “gave over the spirit” (παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα), said: “It is finished!” (τετέλεσται) and this was His last word on the cross. But this word, as regards his form, isn’t one of prayer” – cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus*, 223.

Agreeing that “in any good drama the last words of the main character are especially significant”<sup>45</sup> we should see the essential difference between Mark/Matt and Luke. While the moribund Jesus in Mark/Matt expires crying out to God the desperate “Why?” of His abandonment, Luke – in contrast – portrays the dying Christ instead with a strong, trustful prayer on His lips, free from apprehension<sup>46</sup>. So the Lucan portrayal of Jesus’ *ἔξοδος* (Luke 9:31) from this world, His transit to the Father, scarcely evokes in the reader’s mind any potential association with the “terror of death” that would be the case regarding the dramatic presentation in Mark/Matt.

Another difference, this time a compositional one, is Luke’s joining (in 23:44-45, *before* Jesus dies) of “the darkness over the whole earth with the rending of the sanctuary veil – two signs that Mark had inclusively placed on either side of the death. Through this rearrangement the two ominous divine interventions constitute one vignette to which Jesus reacts by an act of confidence in God’s loving care”<sup>47</sup> as He prays: “Father, into your hands I commend (entrust) my spirit” (23:46).

These words of deep trust appear however, at the same time, as words expressing the (spiritual) strength of the Crucified. The latter feature of Jesus’ final prayer is expressed by the Lucan introduction to it: *καὶ φωνήσας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν*<sup>48</sup> (lit. “and having voiced with a great voice, Jesus said”)<sup>49</sup>. Using the hendiadys *φωνήσας φωνῇ* Luke on the one hand emphasizes the

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<sup>45</sup> BROWN, *Death*, II, 1045.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. FITZMYER, *Gospel*, II, 1512, 1515.

<sup>47</sup> BROWN, *Death*, II, 1033.

<sup>48</sup> It is not very probable that the phrase indicates two different actions i.e. crying out (wordless) and subsequent uttering of the prayer’s words. In this case the relative past (towards final verb) expressed usually by aorist participle is not valid and the latter qualifies the same action as the main verb – see BLASS – DEBRUNNER – REHKOPF [Bearb.], *Grammatik*, § 339,1; 420,3.

<sup>49</sup> A similar phrase, as regards the vocabulary employed, occurs also in Acts 16:28 (Paul calling with a loud voice).

strong character of Jesus' calling with a loud (μεγάλη – lit. “great”) cry<sup>50</sup>, on the other softens the Marcan ἐβόησεν (“screamed”) introducing the prayer of dereliction (15:34). In contrast to the prayer in Luke 23:34a, introduced by the imperfect form ἔλεγεν, indicating the iterative or durative aspect of it<sup>51</sup>, here Luke uses the aorist εἶπεν expressing the punctual, unreiterated<sup>52</sup> character of Jesus' confiding declaration.

Its wording is identical with the LXX version of Ps 31:6 save for the form of the verb (present tense παρατίθεμαι instead of παραθήσομαι – future tense) and addition of the vocative πάτερ (“Father”) as part of the citation.

The psalmist, praying for deliverance from enemies and expressing his confidence in God, invokes Him in the second half of the verse 6 as “Lord, God of truth”<sup>53</sup> (κύριε ὁ θεὸς τῆς ἀληθείας – קַדְוֵה אֱלֹהֵי אֱמֶת). This form of addressing God used by the psalmist, in the Lucan citation of Ps 31:6 is substituted by the intimate address “Father” on the lips of Jesus, and placed emphatically at the beginning of His prayer. It is not the first time in Luke that Jesus, praying, addresses God in such a way (using the vocative πάτερ)<sup>54</sup>. As regards the Lucan passion narrative, the ad-

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<sup>50</sup> Taking into consideration that, between many prayers of Jesus reported hitherto by Luke, there is no one in the form of a “loud cry”, the Lucan emphasis appropriate for Jesus' last word becomes greater – cf. BROWN, *Death*, II, 1067 n. 96.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. the note 13.

<sup>52</sup> See BLASS – DEBRUNNER – REHKOPF [Bearb.], *Grammatik*, § 318.

<sup>53</sup> *La Bible de Jérusalem* (Paris 2003) *ad loco* (899-900) subdividing the verse introduces (maybe under influence of the masoretic accent *r<sup>e</sup>bi<sup>a</sup>*) a full stop after “Yahvé”, and the subsequent phrase “Dieu de vérité” (“God of truth”) connects with the following verse (7). Anyhow it seems probable that some caesura between קַדְוֵה and אֱלֹהֵי אֱמֶת is intended by the author of the Masoretic Text.

<sup>54</sup> The first time, in 10:21 (where at the end appears also ὁ πατήρ as substitution for the vocative πάτερ), “Father” occurs accompanied by the title “Lord of heaven and earth” (κύριος τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τῆς γῆς); in the subsequent occurrences (11:2; 22:42; 23:34a) the term “Father” remains independent. To the trustful prayer with the address “Father”

dress “Father” in Jesus’ prayer creates two inclusions<sup>55</sup>. The broader one is opened in 22:42 when He, entering His passion, prays on the Mount of Olives: “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me”, while the nearer one opens with the prayer of Crucified: “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (23:34a). Both inclusions terminate in His death cry expressing the final words of trust (23:46); “now the climax of that mode of filial prayer is reached”<sup>56</sup>.

The figurative expression “into your hands” (εἰς χεῖράς σου) belongs to the category of “hebraisierende Umschreibungen präpositionaler Begriffe”<sup>57</sup> and forms a literal translation of the Hebrew construct  $\text{ךָ לְיָדְךָ}$  contained in the source of citation (Ps 31:6). The meaning of the expression can be rendered as “in your power (authority)” or simply “to you”<sup>58</sup>. So the Son of Man who was going to be handed over to the power of (sinful) men (εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων (ἀμαρτωλῶν) – Luke 9:44; 24:7), proclaims at the fulfilment of His mission that it is into the hands of the Father himself that he “placed over” (παρατίθημαι) His spirit (τὸ πνεῦμά μου)<sup>59</sup>.

The term τὸ πνεῦμα (πῆ in Ps 31:6) is to be understood not “partially”, as a component of the human being. It is the whole of the living person<sup>60</sup>, “the living self or life

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on Jesus’ lips there corresponds, as a compatible, dialogical counterpart, the declaration of a “voice from heaven” at the baptism of Christ: “You are my beloved *Son*; in You I am well pleased” (3:22) – cf. C.G. BARTHOLOMEW – R. HOLT, “Prayer in/and the Drama of Redemption in Luke: Prayer and Exegetical Performance”, *Reading Luke. Interpretation, Reflection, Formation* (eds. C.G. BARTHOLOMEW – J.B. GREEN – A.C. THISELTON) (Grand Rapids 2005) 358.

<sup>55</sup> BROWN, *Death*, II, 1068 widening his view on the whole gospel, indicates also an extensive inclusion reaching from the first words of Jesus in Luke (2:49) to His last words on the cross (23:46).

<sup>56</sup> FITZMYER, *Gospel*, II, 1519.

<sup>57</sup> BLASS – DEBRUNNER – REHKOPF [Bearb.], *Grammatik*, §217.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. BLASS – DEBRUNNER – REHKOPF [Bearb.], *Grammatik*, §217,2.

<sup>59</sup> BROWN, *Death*, II, 1068.

<sup>60</sup> FITZMYER, *Gospel*, II, 1519.

power that goes beyond death”<sup>61</sup>. Taking into consideration the particular stress placed by Luke on the unique role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ life and mission, the expression “my spirit” (τὸ πνεῦμά μου) on His lips may suggest an intended, delicate allusion to the singular union between the *spirit of Jesus* and the Holy Spirit<sup>62</sup>.

Through His final prayer on the cross Jesus expresses His supreme human dedication and ultimate devotion to His Father<sup>63</sup>. Consequently, in Luke’s intention, He becomes an archetype of self-sacrifice for all generations of His disciples<sup>64</sup>, particularly the martyrs<sup>65</sup>.

The Lucan words of confidence (Ps 31:6) instead of the Marcan words of dereliction (Ps 22:2), quoted as the last prayer of Jesus on the cross, possibly have an additional explanation. The later-attested rabbinic tradition uses Ps 31:6 “as part of the evening prayer that a disciple should utter before going to sleep”<sup>66</sup>. If that custom was already in vogue in Luke’s time and was adopted by his community, he could intend to portray Jesus on the cross also as *pious Servant* of God, praying the evening prayer of God-fearing people<sup>67</sup>. However His prayer, uttered be-

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<sup>61</sup> BROWN, *Death*, II, 1068; cf. J. ERNST, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Regensburg 1997) 432; E. SCHWEIZER, „πνεῦμα”, *TWNT* VI, 330-453, 413.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. the corresponding portrayal of Jesus’ death in John 19:30 (παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα) in the light of Johannine pneumatology.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. FITZMYER, *Gospel*, 193, 1519.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. ERNST, *Evangelium*, 432.

<sup>65</sup> A very suggestive example of that pattern–role of the Crucified gives Luke himself in Acts 7:59-60 picturing the martyrdom of Stephen – the protomartyr of Christianity. Dying, he says: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”, and then cries out with a loud voice (ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ) the prayer of forgiveness for his murderers: “Lord, do not charge them with this sin”. Here, as in the passion narratives, we can see a reflexion of the OT *passio iusti* tradition – cf. PESCH, *Markusevangelium*, II, 495.

<sup>66</sup> FITZMYER, *Gospel*, II, 1519. For the rabbinic sources, see H.L. STRACK – P. BILLERBECK, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (München<sup>10</sup>2009) II, 269.

<sup>67</sup> See ERNST, *Evangelium*, 432; FITZMYER, *Gospel*, II, 1519; broader discussion in BROWN, *Death*, II, 1069.

fore the last sleep of death, appears unique as it opened with the address "Father"<sup>68</sup>.

Jesus' death prayer, which takes the form of an announcement and not the one of a request, confidently proclaims that "the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53) has not been able to separate Him from His Father<sup>69</sup>. This "Word of Reunion", as it is traditionally called, constitutes in Lucan theology the concluding fulfilment of Jesus' life and mission as well as the victorious accomplishment of His salvific self-sacrifice.

The crucified Son of God, undergoing His vicarious and expiatory suffering, and at the same time praying on the cross, becomes not only an icon of *Orant*, an Intercessor *par excellence* but also an personified Intercession. The most sublime intercession is vicarious sacrificing of one's own life<sup>70</sup>.

Jesus on the cross, stretching out His arms to embrace the whole of humanity and lifted up from the earth towards His heavenly Father, becomes an embodied, living and life-giving prayer.

### Streszczenie

Narracje o męce Jezusa u synoptyków przedstawiają Jezusa na krzyżu nie tylko jako *Messias patiens*, ale również jako *Messias orans*. Artykuł stanowi próbę ukazania synoptycznego portretu Ukrzyżowanego jako Oranta. Pierwsza część artykułu koncentruje się na niewerbalnym wymiarze modlitwy Jezusa na krzyżu, to znaczy na podstawie Jego ciała wymuszonej przez narzędzie egzekucji oraz na Jego głośnym, nieartykułowanym okrzyku agonii. W drugiej części artykułu przedmiotem analizy są te trzy spośród „siedmiu ostatnich słów Jezusa” (zbiór siedmiu krótkich zdań przypisywanych ukrzyżowanemu Jezuso-

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. ERNST, *Evangelium*, 432.

<sup>69</sup> BROWN, *Death*, II, 1069.

<sup>70</sup> E. BIANCHI, "Modlitwa", *Encyklopedia chrześcijaństwa* (Kielce 2000) 466-469, 468.

wi, potwierdzonych od XVI wieku w tradycji chrześcijańskiej), które posiadają formę modlitwy: Łk 23,34a; Mt 27,46 / Mk 15,34 i Łk 23,46.

**Słowa kluczowe:** narracje o męce Jezusa, krzyż, modlitwa, śmierć Jezusa

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