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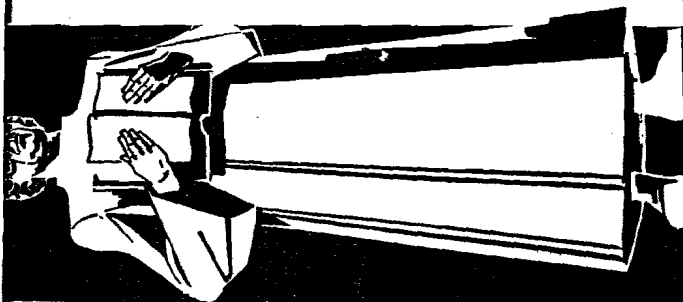
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The "Cry Of Dereliction"— Another Point Of View

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CHRISTIANS TODAY are often confused concerning the methods and opinions of contemporary Biblical scholars. Unfortunately, often some of the most meaningful and theologically significant labor is not well known while less important but more spectacular material is widely publicized and discussed. This brief study seeks to present one example where, in the opinion of this writer, contemporary scholarly methods have facilitated interpreting and preaching on a difficult Biblical passage.

The so-called "Cry of Dereliction" (Mt. 27:46, Mk 15:34) has often been a difficult and perplexing part of the Christian tradition.¹ For the faithful this has been evidence of the completeness of the humiliation of the Lord. Beside the physical torture Jesus suffered the utter rejection of God. For the skeptical or the scoffers however, this has been primary evidence for the frustration and defeat of Jesus.² To such the passage is welcome evidence which supposedly contradicts Christian claims concerning the person and work of Jesus.

The purpose of this note is to demonstrate that a proper understanding of the way the OT is cited in the NT totally discredits those who would claim that Jesus died a defeated, frustrated and faithless man. The suffering, humiliation and rejection of Jesus is not questioned. However, since "modern study of the OT in the NT has emphasized that sometimes the bare allusion to a word is meant to recall a far wider context,"³ it seems likely that the "Cry of Dereliction" is actually an allusion to all of Psalm 22. Psalm 22, in the mouth of Jesus, would be not only a recognition of rejection but terminates as a confession of faith and trust in ultimate vindication.

The possibility that such a way of interpreting the Cry of Dereliction is correct is strengthened when it is observed that Psalm 22 in its entirety not only explains some details in the crucifixion account but also suggests a close relation between the Synoptic and Johannine accounts. If the "Cry of Dereliction" is studied merely as an isolated statement it is difficult to interpret in itself and the reaction of the onlookers is almost inexplicable. Why do the bystanders mock Jesus by speaking of possible deliverance by Elijah? Why does someone seek to give Jesus a drink? What prompts these actions? "He calls for Elijah," can, of course, be explained as mockery based on (incorrect) audition of "Eli, Eli." The command to wait to see if Elijah will come to take Jesus down (Mk 15:36; Mt. 27:49) may simply be ironic scorn using popular Jewish eschatological expectations concerning Elijah.⁴

But how does one explain the action of the certain one who seeks to offer Jesus a drink? Is this spontaneous? If one assumes that Jesus spoke only the words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" there is no satisfactory answer.

However, if one entertains the possibility that Jesus spoke Ps. 22 in its entirety and Matthew and Mark, according to contemporary literary custom, indicate this merely by citing the first verse, then "by this cry of ultimate anguish Jesus not only gave vent to the very real separation from his Father . . . but also indicated . . . that David's utterance was now being fulfilled in the things that (or "what?") were happening to him."⁵

Theologians who study the "Cry of Dereliction" in the context of the entire Psalm quickly see the importance of phrases like:

"scorned by men and despised by people.
All who see me mock at me (6-7)
They have pierced my hands and feet (16)
They divide my garments among them
and for my raiment they cast lots. (18)
They make mouths at me,
they wag their heads;
He committed his cause to the Lord;
let him deliver him." (8).

Against the background of the entire Psalm the reaction of the crowd is also quite understandable. The mockery concerning Elijah stems not only from the (incorrect or deliberately and mockingly distorted) audition of the first words of the Psalm but also from the plea of verses 19-21.

"But Thou, O Lord, be not far off.
O thou, my help, hasten to my aid!
Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!
Save me from the mouth of the lion."

The mocking demand that they wait for the deliverance by Elijah is better understood if these verses are kept in mind.

In the context of the entire Psalm, the action of the one who seeks to give Jesus a drink is also explained. It is a response to hearing verses 14 and 15.

"I am poured out like water
and all my bones are out of joint:
my heart is like wax,
it is melted within my breast;
my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
thou dost lay me in the dust of death."

Thus several details from the crucifixion drama are better understood when one interprets this scene on the assumption that Jesus spoke more than the first verse of Psalm 22. On the premise

that the entire Psalm is part of the background, the "Cry of Dereliction" also contains the motif of trust. If Jesus spoke this entire Psalm he is certainly not a frustrated infidel. In the depths of humiliation and rejection he trustingly exclaims;

"I will tell of thy name to my brethern;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee. (22)
For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted;
and he has not hid his face from him,
but has heard, when he cried to him. (24)

It is unnecessary to expostulate on the Christological implications of this interpretation.

It is of further interest, that perhaps such an interpretation indicates a relationship between the Johannine and Synoptic crucifixion account. John, of course, does not cite the "Cry of Dereliction" but does state that Jesus, in order to fulfill Scripture, said, "I thirst." Just what Scripture is being fulfilled? At this late date in history, it is virtually impossible to cite with complete confidence the possible OT background to this scant allusion.

However, perhaps the Nestle text is correct when it suggests that Ps. 22:6 is the Scripture being fulfilled. If this suggestion is correct, the allusion in John may also refer to a broader context and then would be parallel to the "Cry of Dereliction" in Matthew and Mark. Perhaps John chooses to refer to Jesus' recitation of Psalm 22 by citing "I thirst" rather than "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" This is quite understandable if the Gospel of John was written for people who would find the latter citation confusing or offensive either because they did not know Psalm 22 in its entirety or were not familiar with the Christian practice of using key phrases to refer to a larger context. Perhaps the "Cry of Dereliction" was not cited because non-Christians delighted in using this bit of evidence to mock the Christians' faith in a (supposedly) frustrated Lord.⁶

In conclusion, the purpose of this essay was to explore the value of interpreting the "Cry of Dereliction" as an allusion to Psalm 22 in its entirety. When interpreted in this way, the cry is not evidence that Jesus in the hour of ultimate rejection succumbed to temptation and lost all faith. Rather it is a confident prayer—even in the depths of suffering—of ultimate triumph.⁷ This is a comfort and a strength to Christians who today consider our Lord's passion and dare to confess:

"All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord;
And all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
For dominion belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations."

FOOTNOTES

1. Julius Schniewind calls it a "fremdartige und anstössige Wort." *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, NTD, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960, p. 271.
2. Hermann Samuel Reimarus, who is usually considered the father of modern critical life of Jesus study, considered this evidence that Jesus died a frustrated and defeated revolutionary. He writes, "This avowal cannot, without violence, be interpreted otherwise than as meaning that God had not aided Him in His aim and purpose as He had hoped. That shows that it had not been His purpose to suffer and die, but to establish an earthly kingdom and deliver the Jews from political oppression—and in that God's help had failed Him." Cited in Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, translated from the German by W. Montgomery. New York, Macmillan Company, 1961, p. 20. Reimarus' so-called Wolfenbüttel Fragments have now been translated and published by Fortress Press.
3. W. F. Flemington, "Baptism," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, New York, Abington Press, 1962, vol. 1, p. 349. The 1950 Stone Lectures of Princeton Theological Seminary by C. H. Dodd is the pioneer work which set forth the thesis that NT citation of the OT verses (or even an allusion to the OT) is a pointer to the entire context rather than a testimonial to be interpreted out of context and/or without a context. Confer especially the conclusions, as now published in *According to the Scriptures*, London, Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1952, p. 126ff. Barnabas Lindars, in his important monograph, cautiously agrees with this principle when he writes, "Generally quotations in the New Testament have not been selected with complete disregard of the original context." *New Testament Apologetic*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1961, p. 17. As one example, he notes that the short quotation from Is. 53 in Acts 8:32f is probably a citation which refers to "the whole prophecy." *Ibid*, p. 83.
It is important to remember that such a method of citing longer sections was useful because chapter and verse divisions were introduced long after the NT documents were written. F. Danker writes that Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury probably introduced chapter divisions in the Massoretic Text about AD 1204. *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study*, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1960, p. 57.
4. Confer Mt. 17:9ff, Mk. 9:9ff, John 1:21.
cf. Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, München, C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1926, I, p. 753ff and especially, "Der Prophet Elias nach seiner Entrückung aus dem Diesseits," *Exkurse zu einzelnen Stellen des Neuen Testaments*, München, C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1956, p. 764-798. For English readers, Joachim Jeremias' study is now translated; TDNT, II, p. 928-941.
5. Glenn W. Barker, William L. Lane and J. Ramsay Michaels, *The New Testament Speaks*, New York, Harper and Row, 1969, p. 117. These men vividly explicate this pericope by effectively using italics when they cite key passages from Psalm 22.
6. Lindars, *op. cit*, p. 89 suggests that it was for apologetic reasons that Luke and the Apocryphal Gospel of Peter either omitted or altered the "Cry of Dereliction."
7. [Editors' Note: The author's thesis was also held by Luther and others belonging to the heritage of Lutheran Orthodoxy.]