

Commentaries on Four Leading Words of Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross*

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Introduction

We know that in the literature of the long Hellenistic period, particular emphasis was placed on the last words of a protagonist, as the manner of his death and his spiritual “testament” confirmed the consistency, character, and ethos of his life¹. In this article, we are focusing our research on four such words of the Lord Jesus, which are well known, as they are widely heard in worship services. In fact, two of them are passages from the *Psalms* of the Old Testament (OT). We will attempt to contribute to their interpretation, taking into account the context, but also the meanings of the terms [specifically of the saying “It is finished” («Τετέλεσται»)], as understood by the Greek-speaking reader.

* For the texts of the Church Fathers and ecclesiastical writers, the database of TLG has been used, <https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/index.php>.

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1. See H. Bond, “A Fitting End? Self-Denial and a Slave’s Death in Mark’s Life of Jesus”, *NTS* 65, 4 (2019), pp. 425-442.

A. Mark 15, 34d:

«ὁ Θεός μου ὁ Θεός μου, εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;»

³³ Καὶ γενομένης ὥρας ἕκτης

σκότος ἐγένετο ἐφ' ὅλην τὴν γῆν ἕως ὥρας ἐνάτης.

³⁴ Καὶ τῇ ἐνάτῃ ὥρᾳ ἐβόησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς φωνῇ μεγάλῃ·

Ελωι ελωι² λεμα σαβαχθθανι;

ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνεύομενον·

ὁ Θεός μου ὁ Θεός μου, εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;

³⁵ Καὶ τινες τῶν παρεστηκότων ἀκούσαντες ἔλεγον·

ἴδε Ἡλίαν φωνεῖ.

³⁶ Δραμῶν δέ τις [καὶ] γεμίσας σπόγγον ὄξους

περιθεῖς καλάμῳ

ἐπότιζεν αὐτόν λέγων·

Ἄφετε ἴδωμεν εἰ ἔρχεται Ἡλίας καθελεῖν αὐτόν.

³⁷ ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἀφείς φωνὴν μεγάλην ἐξέπνευσεν.

³⁸ Καὶ τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ Ναοῦ ἐσχίσθη εἰς δύο ἀπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω.

1. *Psalm 21* (O/ Septuagint) [22 in the Masoretic Text] has not only influenced the phrasing but also the structure of the most ancient narrative of the Passion of the Lord Jesus, as it is also the case with the *Second Isaiah's* (*Δευτεροησαΐα*) fourth song. The crucified Christ's Expolium³ and other elements (such as the escalating ironies)⁴ demonstrate, according to J. D.

2. The «ηλι ηλι» ("Eli, Eli") of the parallel passage from the Gospel of *Matthew* (27, 46) is closer to the original text, known to its Hebrew listeners, and closer to the name of the Paraclete of the dying prophet Elijah, whom those who were present considered to be invoked by Jesus.

3. S. Despotis, *Ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὡς «Χριστός» καὶ ἡ πολιτικὴ ἐξουσία στοὺς Συνοπτικοὺς Εὐαγγελιστῆς*, Athos Publications, Athens 2006, p. 314: "They cast lots for His clothes (15, 24; *Psalm 21* [22], 9), either because they were known to soldiers for their miraculous 'magical' qualities, or because, being unblemished, they were something truly special (*John 19, 23*)". See Theophylaktos of Ohrid, *Enarrationes in evangelia* 3.1101.28-39: «Καὶ μέντοι ἀφέθη ἂν αὐτοῖς τὸ ἀμάρτημα, εἰ μὴ μετὰ ταῦτα τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ ἐνέμειναν. Τίνος δὲ ἔνεκεν διαμερίζονται τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ; Ἴσως μὲν καὶ χορήζοντες οἱ πολλοὶ αὐτῶν, τάχα δέ, ὃ καὶ μᾶλλον ἀληθέστερον, ὕβρει τοῦτο καὶ ἀκολασία ποιοῦντες· τί γὰρ πολυτελὲς ἐώρων ἐν τοῖς ἱματίοις; Γελῶντες οὖν καὶ ὕβριζοντες, τοιαῦτα εἰργάζοντο. Ὅπου γὰρ οἱ ἄρχοντες ἐμυκτήριζον, τί χορὴ περὶ τοῦ κοινοῦ πλήθους λογιζέσθαι; "Ἄλλους ἔσωσε, σωσάτω ἑαυτόν, εἰ οὐτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκλεκτός"».

4. The insults hurled at Jesus from those passing by, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, were recapitulating the accusations leveled against Him at His trial by the

Crossan⁵, that this ancient narrative (of the Passion), which is fundamental to the Gospels, must be characterized as a fundamental element of the Gospels. Crossan, that this particular narrative (of the Passion), which is fundamental to the Gospels, should be characterized as “historicized prophecy”: Since there were no eyewitnesses from Jesus’s circle at the time of His crucifixion, this particular narrative does not reflect historical events, but fulfillments of the Scriptures, especially of the *Psalms* 21. The Evangelist’s ultimate goal is to substantiate the belief (“faith”) that the historical Jesus is Christ—the Messiah who was expected by the prophets.

However, M. Goodacre (G.) –correctly, in my view– counters with the following: Crossan’s claim (that even the Lord’s female disciples observed the events from afar) is based on a statement about the Lord’s complete abandonment in the *Gospel of Mark*, which he considers to be a non-historical document. On the contrary, G. observes⁶ that the most accurate description of the Passion narrative is “Prophesized / Scripturalized history”. In other words, the authors of the Gospels did not invent “stories” to show that the Prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is worshipped as Christ. Simply put, the authors are so deeply imbued with the biblical “style” that their “language” is deeply influenced by the Old Testament. G. bases his argument, among other things, on the fact that there are episodes in the *Gospel of Mark* during the last Holy Week of the Lord’s earthly life which are not prophesied (such as Simon of Cyrene’s pressing into service).

Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate: *Καὶ οἱ παραπορευόμενοι ἐβλασφήμουν αὐτὸν κινοῦντες τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν καὶ λέγοντες, Οὐδὲ ὁ καταλύων τὸν ναὸν καὶ οἰκοδομῶν ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις, σῶσον σεαυτὸν καταβάς ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ. ὁμοίως καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς ἐμπαίζοντες πρὸς ἀλλήλους μετὰ τῶν γραμματέων ἔλεγον, Ἄλλους ἔσωσεν, ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται σῶσαι ὁ Χριστὸς, ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰσραὴλ, καταβάτω νῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἵνα ἴδωμεν καὶ πιστεύσωμεν. καὶ οἱ συνεσταυρωμένοι σὺν αὐτῷ ὠνείδιζον αὐτόν* (Mark 15, 29-32. cf. *Psalms* 21 [22], 7 ff.; 2 *Chronicles* 36, 16; 1 *Mac.* 9, 26; 2 *Mac.* 7, 7. 10).
5. J. D. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus*, Harper, New York 1998, pp. 385-386.

6. M. Goodacre, “Prophecy Historicized or Tradition Scripturalized? Reflections on the Origin of the Passion Narratives”, in: J. Barton and P. Groves (eds.), *New Testament and the Church*, T & T Clark, London & New York 2015, pp. 37-51. Listen also M. Goodacre, NT Pod 53: “Are the Passion Narratives Prophecy Historicized?” (John Dominic Crossan), <https://podacre.blogspot.com/2011/04/nt-pod-53-are-passion-narratives.html>.

2. Various commentators emphasize the fact that the mention of the *Psalms*'s 21 first verse (which is both a lament and a doxology⁷) implies that it should be presupposed in its entirety. Consequently, the Lord does not express “abandonment from the God-Father”, since *Psalms* 21 ends with “redemption” and thanksgiving. To this day, the books of the *Torah* (= *Pentateuch*) are named after their first words (e.g., *Genesis* = *Bereshit*). Indeed, in the second half of *Psalms* 21, although there is no reference to Yahweh’s dynamic intervention on behalf of the suffering righteous, paradoxically, the mood is completely reversed: Absolute pain gives way to the joy experienced in a Congregation. Of course, it should be noted (in response to Crossan’s comments in point [1]) that the righteous man in this particular Lament (*Psalms* 21) does not ultimately taste death – especially the most humiliating and painful one (such as the crucifixion). As it happens in the Old Testament – and, subsequently, in the Koran (which is deeply influenced by Judeo-Christian traditions)–, at the last moment, the Lord redeems His chosen one «ἐκ πασῶν τῶν θλίψεων αὐτοῦ» (*Psalms* 33, 18.20 [O]). At the same time, the paradox elements in the *Psalms* 21 are the following: (a) the Deuteronomistic theology according to which suffering and poverty are necessarily due to the sins of the afflicted is questioned; (b) the enemies of the righteous sufferer (who prey on him like wild beasts) do not ultimately “disappear” – they are not exterminated (as in other *Psalms*), since the dead are also participating in the Eucharist. It should be noted (c) that in Israelite *Psalms*, the Lament usually ended with the “blessing” (= the vow) for a «θυσίαν αἰνέσεως» (“sacrifice of praise”) in the event of divine intervention, whereas in this case the latter one is celebrated as if it had already taken place.

3. What the researchers are not usually taken into account is the Lament’s ingenious position in the structure of the entire *Book of Psalms*; it forms an alternative “laudatory Pentateuch”. This (the “Pentateuch”), in turn, poetically retells the history of Israel, as it is “depicted” in

7. A. LaCocque, «Θεέ μου, Θεέ μου γιατί μὲ εγκατέλειψες;» and P. Ricoeur, «Ὁ Ἄθλιος ὡς Προσευχή», in: N. Kazazis (ed.), *Ἄς σχεφτοῦμε τὴ Βίβλο*, transl. Alexandra Papatathanasopoulou – F. Siatistas, Artos Zois Publications, Athens 2005, pp. 251-278 and 279-304.

the Law and the Prophets. At the end of this alternative “Torah”, through the laudatory acclamation of praise – *Alleluia* (*Psalms* 146-150), the nations and the world are invited to praise Yahweh through singing. This fact is also highlighted in the “Epilogue” of the *Epistle to Romans*⁸. More specifically, the first “book” of the *Book of Psalms* (*Psalms* 3-41), after the introductory *Psalms* 1 and 2 (which emphasize the importance of the Torah as Pardes / “Paradise” and the enthronement of the Lord’s Messiah), develops *1 Kings* 1-2: It “narrates” the passions and persecutions of “David” until his proclamation as a king, as it is described in *Psalms* 8. More generally, the Psalmalter has been artfully “designed”, so as to spread the light of hope and “restore” models of imitation in a period that has followed the exile.

More specifically, the lament under consideration (*Psalms* 21), where the verb of exile⁹, dominates, follows the central ones in this particular

8. *Rom.* 15, 6-13: «⁶ἵνα ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν ἐνὶ στόματι δοξάζητε τὸν θεὸν καὶ πατέρα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. ⁷Διὸ προσλαμβάνεσθε ἀλλήλους, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς προσελάβετο ὑμᾶς εἰς δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ. ⁸λέγω γὰρ Χριστὸν διάκονον γεγενῆσθαι περιτομῆς ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ βεβαιῶσαι τὰς ἐπαγγελίας τῶν πατέρων, ⁹τὰ δὲ ἔθνη ὑπὲρ ἐλέους δοξάσαι τὸν θεόν, καθὼς γέγραπται διὰ τοῦτο ἐξομολογήσομαί σοι ἐν ἔθνεσιν καὶ τῷ ὀνόματί σου ψαλῶ. ¹⁰καὶ πάλιν λέγει εὐφράνθητε, ἔθνη, μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ. ¹¹καὶ πάλιν αἰνεῖτε, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, τὸν κύριον καὶ ἐπαινεσάτωσαν αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ λαοί. ¹²καὶ πάλιν Ἡσαΐας λέγει ἔσται ἡ ῥίζα τοῦ Ἰεσοῦ καὶ ὁ ἀνιστάμενος ἄρχειν ἐθνῶν, ἐπ’ αὐτῷ ἔθνη ἐλπιοῦσιν. ¹³Ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς ἐλπίδος πληρῶσαι ὑμᾶς πάσης χαρᾶς καὶ εἰρήνης ἐν τῷ πιστεῦειν, εἰς τὸ περισσεύειν ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἐλπίδι ἐν δυνάμει Πνεύματος ἁγίου».

9. The verb ἐγκαταλείπω – forsake (Aramaic = *shavak*) [*sabachthani* = *you have forsaken me*] is a dynamically charged word, which recalls the concept of exile. The Psalmalter mentions three times that God is far away: a) Why do you stand far away and not save me (*Psalms* 22, 1), b) Do not leave me! (*Psalms* 22, 11), c) But you, Lord, do not stay far from me (*Psalms* 22, 19). In *Deuteronomy*, God says that if His people worship false gods, His wrath will be unleashed against them, He will abandon them and turn away from them (31, 16-17). In this sense, the notion of abandonment is also found in *Deut.* 28, 20, where God sends curses upon Israel because it has turned its back on Him. To the prophet of the Passion, Jeremiah, God states that He has abandoned Israel, rejected His own people, and offered Jerusalem to be dominated by its enemies. Israel is exiled to Babylon. In *2 Chronicles*, when Israel abandoned the Torah, God sent the prophet Shemaiah to warn them: “*You have forsaken me, so I have forsaken you into the hands of Shishak*” (12:1-5). Ultimately, just as Israel was exiled to Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, so too did the Messiah, sharing from the beginning of His earthly life the “fate” of the people, feels the absolute loneliness – God’s abandonment. Christ endures the “exile”

section of the *Psalms*, which exalt the person and the final triumphant “prevalence” of the Messiah (*Psalm* 18-19 & 20 [Septuagint])¹⁰. To this day, these Psalms are the first to be recite in the Matins service, which essentially marks the beginning of the Community’s worship life, when the sun rises after the second crowing of the rooster. This is followed by a “panoramic view” of the psalmodic Pentateuch’s first “part”, so that we may understand the significance of *Psalm* 22 in the Masoretic Bible:

–even more so while He is on the Cross–, the most horrific means of exterminating a life. He is like a refugee far from God, as when He lived in Egypt as a child. His Cross is ultimately the Messiah’s absolute exile, just as Israel experienced the Babylonian exile. See C. Bird, “My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me? Rethinking Psalm 22:1”, 1571 (2022), <https://www.1517.org/articles/my-god-my-god-why-have-you-me-rethinking-psalm-221>.

10. They begin with the phrases: *Οἱ οὐρανοὶ διηγούνται δόξαν Θεοῦ / ποιήσιν δὲ χειρῶν αὐτοῦ ἀναγγέλλει τὸ στερέωμα – Ἐπακούσαι σου Κύριος ἐν ἡμέρᾳ θλίψεως ὑπερασπίσαι σου τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ Ἰακώβ – Κύριε ἐν τῇ δυνάμει σου εὐφρανθήσεται ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ σωτηρίῳ σου ἀγαλλιάσεται σφόδρα.*

Addendum: The first book of the Psalter (Ps. 3-41 Masoretic¹¹)

Psalms 3-14	The historical persecuted and suffering David (see the titles of the <i>Psalms</i> 3-7) becomes a model of prayer and dependence on God's promise for the future (<i>Psalms</i> 9-10).
Psalms 15-24	Only a righteous David can enter the Temple of God in <i>aeternitatem</i> (<i>Psalms</i> 15, 24); he can only be one David of the Last Days (<i>Psalms</i> 18). He will be absolutely faithful to the Torah (<i>Psalms</i> 19); thus, he will be redeemed even from death itself (<i>Psalms</i> 22-23).
Psalms 25-34	David's liberation is "depicted" as a model for the redemption of Israel (<i>Psalms</i> 25 and 34).
Psalms 35-41	David's patience and hope in the midst of suffering become a model for future generations, so that they may patiently wait for their liberation.

11. The material of this Addendum comes from the following Archive: The Book of Psalms – Study Notes <https://bibleproject.com/downloads/all/>. Here we are following the numbering of the *Psalms*, as they can be found in the Hebrew Bible. They are three symmetrical groups: *Psalms* 15-24, *Psalms* 25-34 and 35-41: (*Psalms* 25, 34, 37). *Psalms* 25 and 34 both conclusions are of a redemptive mood; they stand outside the acrostic (*Psalms* 25, 21 and 34, 22) and refer to *Psalms* 1-2. This external framework gives a collective and future orientation to David's lament poems in *Psalms* 26-33, 35-36 and 38-41. David's individual liberation becomes an example of the liberation of the righteous from their problems and enemies. David calls for liberation and vindication before his enemies in *Psalms* 28, 6-9. David's greatest desire is to be in the presence of God's temple (*Psalms* 26, 3-7, 27, 1-5, 28, 1-2). David's own journey toward forgiveness and restoration (*Psalms* 32-33) becomes a model for future generations.

More specifically, the first section, *Psalms* 15-24, which includes *Psalm* 21 (22 in the Masoretic text), has the following chiasmic structure:

A. Temple – Psalm 15: According to the Torah, the prerequisites for entering into the presence of Yahweh are integrity and righteousness.

B. Psalm 16: The king confesses his trust in Yahweh's power to deliver him from sorrow.

C. Prayer for deliverance – Psalm 17: Request for deliverance in the midst of sorrow.

D. Royal Prayer – Psalm 18: The prayer of the king recounting how the Lord saved him from sorrow because (1) he cried out to Yahweh (v. 7 ff.), (2) he "walked" (= lived) with integrity and righteousness (vv. 21-31) and (3) Yahweh promised to redeem "His Messiah [anointed]" (v. 51).

E. Tora – Psalm 19: The king confesses that, by following the Torah, he keeps his own life intact.

D. Royal Prayer – Psalm 20: Prayers for deliverance on behalf of the king + **Royal Prayer – Psalm 21:** Yahweh responds to the king's pleas for redemption.

C. Prayer for Deliverance – Psalm 22: The king's prayer in the midst of mortal sorrow (vv. 1-22) and thanksgiving for deliverance (vv. 23-32).

B. Psalm 23: The king confesses his trust in Yahweh's mercy, who frees His anointed so that he may "ascend" and appear before Him in the Temple.

A. Temple – Psalm 24: The conditions for entering into Yahweh's presence are integrity and righteousness according to the Torah (vv. 3-6) and the proclamation of the Kingdom of the Lord (vv. 7-10).

It is obvious that *Psalm* 21 [22 in the Masoretic text] is inextricably linked to the presence of the liberated Messiah in the Temple and the application of the Torah. In the narrative of the Passion of the Lord Jesus, the veil of the Temple is completely torn apart so that it may

be accessible to the nations, while the Torah's "justice" is expanded as Christ, absolutely "gentle and mild" does not harm his enemies, despite the insults and "last" temptations he is receiving from them.

Even if the Lord, nailed to the Cross, recited the entire Psalm-Lament, which, as it has been proven above, is part of a more general unity, we should not "downgrade" the intensity of the experience of the Lord Jesus's divine abandonment, expressed in the repeated and intense cry "My God, my God". At this point, we disagree with distinguished interpreters such as Joseph Ratzinger, who observes the following¹²:

[...] The early community of the believers understood Jesus's cry – contrary to those who were present but misinterpreted it. Having this as their starting point, they were able to understand it as a truly messianic cry. It is not *a cry of abandonment*¹³. Jesus is praying the magnificent Psalm of the suffering Israel; thus, He receives into the depths of His being all the sorrow – not only of Israel, but of all the people of the world who suffer because of the hidden God. He Himself, before the heart of God, raises the cry of anguish of the world that is tormented by the absence of God. He is identified with the suffering Israel, with humanity that is groaning under the darkness of God, takes on its cry, its ultimate need, the fact that it remains helpless, and at the same time transforms them. *Psalm 22* –as we have already seen– permeates the entire story of the Passion and extends beyond it. The public humiliation, the mockery and the shaking of heads by the mockers, the pain, the terrible thirst, the piercing of the hands and feet, the casting of lots for his clothes – the entire Passion is foreshadowed in this Psalm. By reciting the opening words of the Psalm, He ultimately presented the entire content of this great prayer and the certainty that the one praying will be heard, which would be demonstrated in the resurrection, the establishment of the great church, and the quenching of the poor (cf. v. 25 ff.). The cry in dire need is at the same time a certainty of the divine response and salvation – not only for Jesus himself but also for the many.

12. J. Al. Ratzinger (Pope Bededict XVI), *Ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ τῆ Ναζαρέτ, Β' Μέρος: Ἀπὸ τὴν εἴσοδο στὴν Ἱερουσαλὴμ μέχρι καὶ τὴν Ἀνάστασι, transl. (Greek) S. Despotis, F. Terzakis (ed.), Psychogios Publications, Athens 2012, pp. 211-212. See Theophylaktos's comment in: *Enarrationes in evangelia* 2.671. 57-59 and 2.672.1-4: «Εἰς τί με τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐγκατέλιπες, ὦ Θεέ, ἵνα δεηθῶ Θεοῦ σταυρουμένου ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ; Ἡμεῖς μὲν γὰρ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἤμεν οἱ ἐγκαταλελειμμένοι, ἐκεῖνος δὲ οὐκ ἐγκατελείφθη ποτὲ παρὰ τοῦ Πατρός. Ἄκουε γὰρ αὐτοῦ, τί φησιν Οὐκ εἶμι μόνος, ὅτι ὁ Πατὴρ μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐστίν».*

13. The emphasis is ours.

The fact that Christ strongly and intensely emphasized verse 2 is evident from the following points:

1. Those who were beneath the Cross, precisely because they heard this verse spoken with intensity and emphasis, especially in the Aramaic dialect, assumed that he was calling on Elijah to save him. Having this in mind, they offered him vinegar, the “refreshment” of the plebeians¹⁴.

2. The *Epistle to the Hebrews* (5, 7), preserving ancient traditions about the crucifixion as the High Priest’s “divine Liturgy”, notes the following: «ὁς ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ δεήσεις τε καὶ ἰκετηρίας πρὸς τὸν δυνάμενον σώζειν αὐτὸν ἐκ θανάτου μετὰ κραυγῆς ἰσχυρᾶς καὶ δακρῦων προσενέγκας καὶ εἰσακουσθεὶς ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας» [= “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission”). As it has been demonstrated by Ratzinger, “this particular passage not only recalls Gethsemane, but also the ascension on the Cross, which is described as ‘Report’. Only then does the meaning of «εἰσακουσθεὶς ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας», become clear – an expression which some newer commentators delete as a later addition¹⁵. Most likely, in the *Gospel of Matthew* there is also a sequence – intertextuality between the Lord’s Prayer (where the phrase γεννηθῆτω τὸ θέλημά σου, ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς [6, 10], is added, as well as the καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς

14. Despotis, *op.cit.*, p. 317: “Jesus’s cry *in loud voice* (*Mark* 15, 34) corresponds to this Gospel’s –the most ancient one– initial phrase: *I am [John the Baptist] the voice of one calling in the wilderness* (1, 3). With Isaiah’s voice, the coming of the Lord to earth was announced; with the cry of Jesus on the Cross, He questions the purpose of His apparent abandonment by God. In both cases, the voice is associated with Thesbite’s coming. At the beginning of the Gospel, the voice is attributed to John, who, indirectly through his attire and actions, but also directly by Jesus himself, was identified with “Elijah who had returned” (*Mark* 9, 12). At the end of the Gospel, prompted by the cry of *Eli, Eli*, some of those who were present await the arrival of the zealous prophet in order to take Jesus down from the Cross. It should be noted that, in late Judaism, Elijah had assumed the role of the comforter and savior of the dying, which is probably why Jesus is offered with vinegar (*Psalms* 68 [69], 22), in order for his life to be prolonged”. See J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Scribners, New York 1971, p. 295.

15. J. Al. Ratzinger, *op.cit.*, pp. 166-169.

πειρασμόν, ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ [6, 13])¹⁶, Gethsemane, and Golgotha.

3. Exactly because this cry had caused such an astonishment to the first listeners of the Gospels (who obviously compared Jesus's end to that of Socrates), Luke and John present the Lord giving up His Spirit using other expressions. Of course, when he addresses the noble Theophilus, Luke wants (a) to present his Protagonist (as later Stephen, his imitator did) as “a just one who suffers” (as the centurion confesses beneath the Cross)¹⁷, while (b) from the very beginning of his work, in comparison with the other Synoptics, he “depicts” Elijah and Eliseus in a very special way as counterparts of the Baptist and the Lord Jesus. Let us examine now the Crucified Lord's final cry in the *Gospel of Luke*.

B. *Luke* 23, 43. 46b (i and ii)

⁴² Καὶ ἔλεγεν·

Ἰησοῦ, Μνήσθητί μου ὅταν ἔλθῃς εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν σου.

⁴³ Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῶ·

i) Ἀμήν σοι λέγω, σήμερον μετ' ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ Παραδείσῳ.

⁴⁴ Καὶ ἦν ἤδη ὥσει ὥρα ἕκτη καὶ σκότος ἐγένετο ἐφ' ὅλην τὴν γῆν ἕως ὥρας ἐνάτης.

⁴⁵ Τοῦ ἡλίου ἐκλιπόντος, ἐσχίσθη δὲ τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ Ναοῦ μέσον.

⁴⁶ καὶ φωνήσας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν·

ii) Πάτερ, εἰς χεῖράς σου παρατίθεται τὸ πνεῦμά μου.

Τοῦτο δὲ εἰπὼν ἐξέπνευσεν.

⁴⁷ Ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ ἑκατοντάρχης τὸ γενόμενον ἐδόξαζεν τὸν Θεὸν λέγων·

ὄντως ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος δίκαιος ἦν.

We will focus on two of the Lord's last words on the Cross in the *Gospel of Luke*, which (the words) actually are quoted only in this gospel.

16. A most ancient “commentary” in the Sunday prayer must also be the Prelatic Prayer in *John* 17, just before the Lord's Crucifixion.

17. Cyrillus Alexandrinus (Cyril of Alexandria), *Commentarii in Lucam* 72.940.17-22: «Ἄθρει δὴ μοι πάλιν, ὅτι πεπονηθῶς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τὸ ἐπὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ πάθος, ἤρξατο τοῦ σαγηνεῦν πολλοὺς εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας. Ὁ γὰρ ἑκατόνταρχος, φησὶν, ἰδὼν τὰ γεγενημένα, ἐδόξαξε τὸν Θεόν, λέγων, ὅτι “Ὀντως ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος δίκαιος ἦν”».

These are (a) the words to the grateful thief and (b) the Lord's final cry, «Πάτερ μου [...]» (= "Father [...]").

(a) Jesus's words to the thief seem to contradict the belief of the Church, which is based on biblical passages, stating that after the Crucifixion, the Lord descended into Hades for "three days", yet "the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay"¹⁸. Consequently, the question that arises has to do with how He can simultaneously be in Eden on the same day with the repentant thief. According to M. Reiser¹⁹, with this particular image of paradise, the *Gospel of Luke* introduces an innovation. Jewish traditions believed that paradise was located in the third heaven and that it would appear on earth after the final Judgment to welcome the righteous²⁰. This image clearly shows the influence of the Greek representation of the Elysian Fields and the Garden of Hesperides. In

18. *Acts* 13, 34-37 < *Ψ.* 16, 10.

19. M. Reiser, „Das Jenseits im Neuen Testament“, *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 110, 2 (2001), pp. 115-132: That is, although the established representation is that Jesus descends into Hades to resurrect the sleeping saints, in this case, he emphasizes that today you will be with me in paradise. The biggest interpretive problem with Christ's statement to the thief lies in the fact that in *Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 2, Luke reports that, after His death, Jesus goes to Hades and not to paradise (31-32). In order for the thief to be with Jesus on that day, He would have had to unite paradise with the kingdom of the dead. If Jesus had ascended to paradise at the moment of His death, then His return to life would not have been His Resurrection, but a Descent-return from heaven back to earth. The Resurrection of Jesus only makes sense if He had risen from the Underworld and did not ascend to Heaven until after his Resurrection. Thus, when Jesus addresses the thief, He means that they will go at Abraham's side (*Luke* 16, 22), to a place of posthumous rest for the righteous who are awaiting the Resurrection to happen. That is why Jesus can cry out before he dies: Father, into your hands I commend my spirit (*Luke* 23, 46; cf. *Psalms* 31, 5).

20. In ancient Judaism, there was no distinction between the average state of souls on the one hand, and the state of souls after the Second Coming, on the other. In ancient Hebrew literature, paradise refers either to the Garden of Eden (*Genesis*) or to the heavenly paradise where God dwells. In *Genesis* 2, 8, the Lord planted a garden in Eden, where he placed man. In his *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (12, 1-4), Paul speaks about the third heaven, which he had experienced through a vision, and calls it "paradise". Similarly, in the *Apocalypse*, John refers to the one who will conquer and eat from the tree of life, which is located in God's paradise (2, 7). However, neither Paul nor John enter into the afterlife; they simply envision the heavenly kingdom. See N. Schaser, "Where's the Thief on the Cross?", *Israel Bible Weekly* (2022), <https://weekly.israelbiblecenter.com/do-the-dead-go-to-hades-or-heaven/>.

Luke, we have the first testimony according to which the righteous enter the paradise to experience the intermediate state of souls. While for Adam and Eve it was true that, if they were going to taste the fruit of the tree of Knowledge, they would instantly die, the thief, without performing a single good deed –and only through his Confession–, became the first “theologian” who earned Paradise on the same day, in contrast to the “leading Peter”, who, before the cock crowed (3:00) denied his Master three times. The «*Ἰησοῦ, μνήσθητί μου ὅταν ἔλθῃς εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν σου*», as well as the tax collector’s «*ὁ Θεὸς ἰλάσθητί μοι*» (also material that is unique to Luke), are particularly beloved prayers in the worship of the Orthodox East.

The solutions that have been proposed to this “interpretive problem” – of how Christ descended into Hades and at the same time promised the thief their coexistence in Paradise from that day on, are already recorded in Origen:

1. This passage is considered a secondary addition. In fact, it was deleted by Marcion because it referred to the God of the Old Testament and the Paradise.

2. The comma is moved (during the reading) so that the phrase reads as follows: «*Ἀληθινὰ σοῦ λέγω σήμερον: Θὰ βρεθεῖς (μελλοντικά) μαζί μου στὸν Παράδεισο*» [= “Truly I say to you today: You will be (in the future) with me in Paradise”]²¹.

3. For Origen, the word *today* and its meaning in the Holy Scriptures refer to this century; for the dead, “today” does no longer exist²². The

21. Macarius (Magne), *Apocriticus seu Monogenēs* 3.91.1-12: «*Ἀμέλει τὸν ληστὴν οὐχ ὡς ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλ’ ὡς Θεὸς πιστευθεὶς παρ’ αὐτὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐπὶ τὸν πολυόλβον ἀνάγει παράδεισον, ὃν ἀπορρήτως ἐξ ἀρχῆς φυτεύσας ἐρρίζωσεν. Οὐ γὰρ ὡς μυθεύμενοί τινες ἀποσοφίζονται, γραῶν σαπειῶν μασώμενοι ῥήματα, δυσωδίας μαγειρικῆς καπνὸν ἐρευγόμενοι, κυνῶν παραφόρων λύτταν ἀπομιμούμενοι, γνώμην τοῖς χριστομάχοις ὁμοίαν χαλκεύοντες, ἰουδαϊκῆς μανίας κοινωνοὶ καὶ συνήγοροι, <οἱ> διαστολῇ λέξεως τὸν νοῦν τεμαχίζοντες, τὸ γεγραμμένον καλῶς κακῶς ἀπαγγέλλοντες, φάσκοντες: “Ἀμὴν λέγω σοι σήμερον”, εἶτα διαστείλαντες: “Ἔση μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐν παραδείσῳ” λέγουσιν [ἀντὶ τοῦ: “Σήμερον, σοι λέγω, ἔση ἐν παραδείσῳ μετ’ ἐμοῦ”], ποτέ, ὡς εἰς μέλλοντα χρόνον τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τῷ ληστῇ ἀποπέμπεσθαι».*

22. Origen (of Alexandria), *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* 32.32.395-396: «*Πῶς γὰρ τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας ποιήσει ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς, <ὅς> ἅμα τῇ ἐξόδῳ ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ ἔμελλεν ἔσσεσθαι τοῦ θεοῦ, κατὰ τὸ “Σήμερον μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἔση ἐν*

contradiction mentioned above applies only from an earthly perspective. For the deceased, time-clock does not “run” and therefore there is no issue at all.

4. We can add here the following observations: In the hymns of the Eastern Church, the following troparion is continuously repeated during the Pentecost season: «Ἐν τάφῳ σωματικῶς, ἐν Ἄδῃ δὲ μετὰ ψυχῆς ὡς Θεός, ἐν Παραδείσῳ δὲ μετὰ ληστοῦ, καὶ ἐν θρόνῳ ὑπῆρχες, Χριστέ, μετὰ Πατρὸς καὶ Πνεύματος, πάντα πληρῶν ὁ ἀπερίγραπτος». From the beginning of his Gospel, Luke has presented Christ Jesus as Lord (1, 43. 76); this implies that, as the hymn most aptly points out, He is not limited to the dimensions of space and time.

5. In Luke, this particular scene is part of his strategy to show the Lord offering “here and now” (“today”) forgiveness to people who had been marginalized by the “pious elite” [such as Zacchaeus (19, 5), the tax collector in the parable (18, 14)].

(b) As we have already emphasized in the previous section, Luke omits the phrase «Θεέ μου, Θεέ μου» and replaces it with a psalm verse (*Psalms* 30, 6), which belongs to the Psalter’s first “book”. This psalm, according to the Septuagint, is as follows:

τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ”; οὕτω δὲ ἐτάραξέν τινας ὡς ἀσύμφωνον τὸ εἰρημένον, ὥστε τολμῆσαι αὐτοὺς ὑπονοῆσαι προστεθῆσθαι τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ ἀπὸ τινων ῥαδιουργῶν αὐτὸ τὸ “Σήμερον μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ”. Ἡμεῖς δὲ φαμεν ἀπλούστερον μὲν ὅτι τάχα πρὶν ἀπελθεῖν εἰς τὴν λεγομένην καρδίαν τῆς γῆς ἀπεκατέστησεν εἰς τὸν παράδεισον τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν εἰπόντα αὐτῷ· “Μνήσθητί μου ὅταν ἔλθῃς ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ σου”. βαθύτερον δὲ ὅτι πολλαχοῦ τὸ “σήμερον” ἐν τῇ γραφῇ καὶ ἐπὶ ὄλον παρατείνει τὸν ἐνεστηχότα αἰῶνα ὥσπερ δὲ καὶ ἐν τῷ “Ἐφημίσθη ὁ λόγος οὗτος παρὰ Ἰουδαίους μέχρι τῆς σήμερον” καὶ “Οὗτος πατήρ Μωαβιτῶν μέχρι τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας” καὶ “Σήμερον ἐὰν τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ ἀκούσητε” καὶ “Μὴ ἀπόστητε ἀπὸ Κυρίου ἐν τῇ σήμερον ἡμέρᾳ”».

Psalm 30 (O' / Septuagint) [31]: 1 Εἰς τὸ τέλος Ψαλμὸς τῷ Δαυΐδ ἐκστάσεως²³

² Ἐπὶ σοί, Κύριε, ἤλπισα μὴ κατασχυνθεῖν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα·

ἐν τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ σου ῥῦσαί με καὶ ἐξελοῦ με.

³ Κλῖνον πρός με τὸ οὖς σου, τάχυνον τοῦ ἐξελεῖσθαι με.

Γενοῦ μοι εἰς Θεὸν ὑπερασπιστὴν καὶ εἰς οἶκον καταφυγῆς τοῦ σῶσαί με·

⁴ ὅτι κραταιώματά μου καὶ καταφυγή μου εἶ Σὺ

καὶ ἔνεκεν τοῦ ὀνόματός σου ὠδήγησες με καὶ διαθρέψεις με.

⁵ Ἐξάξεις με ἐκ παγίδος ταύτης, ἧς ἔκρυψάν μοι,

ὅτι Σὺ εἶ ὁ ὑπερασπιστής μου.

⁶ Εἰς χεῖράς σου παραθήσομαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου·

—ἐλυτρώσω με, Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς τῆς ἀληθείας.

⁷ Ἐμίσησας τοὺς διαφυλάσσοντας ματαιότητος διὰ κενῆς²⁴.

Ἐγὼ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ Κυρίῳ ἤλπισα.

In this particular *Psalm*, we should stress the importance of the meaning of the verb *παραθήσομαι* (< *παρατίθημι*)²⁵ as it is daily experienced in

23. Asterius Sophista, *Commentarii in Psalmos* 6.5.6-16: «γὰρ καὶ στέφανος ὁ σταυρός· ὄπλον διὰ τοὺς πολεμοῦντας, στέφανος διὰ τοὺς νικῶντας· ὄπλον διὰ τοὺς ὡς στρατιώτας συγκακοπαθοῦντας, στέφανος διὰ τοὺς συμβασιλεύοντας. Ἐπειδὴ οὖν καλὴ ἢ κληρονομία, οὐρανῶν γὰρ ἦν βασιλεία, καλὴ δὲ καὶ ἢ κληρονομία, ἢ ἐξ ἐθνῶν γὰρ ἦν ἐκκλησία — Ὁλη καλὴ ἢ πλησίον μου, καὶ μῶμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν σοί — διὰ τοῦτο λέγει — Ἐγὼ ῥήματά μου ἐνώτισα, Κύριε». Ἄλλ' ὁ Ἰουδαῖος τὸν ὑπὲρ τῆς κληρονομίης οἰκτιροῦται Ψαλμὸν λέγων “Ἐμοὶ ἔθετο ὁ Θεὸς τὰς διαθήκας”. Μὴ γὰρ ὁ διαθέμενος δοῦλος τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἐστὶ διαθήκης;».

24. Vamvas: «Ἐμίσησα τοὺς προσέχοντας εἰς τὰς ματαιότητας τοῦ ψεύδους· ἐγὼ δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν Κύριον ἐλπίζω», <https://ebible.gr/mnb/psa.1>; Ἑλληνικὴ Βιβλικὴ Ἑταιρεία/Helliniki Vivliki Hetairia: («Ὅποτε ἄφησα στὰ χέρια σου τὸ πνεῦμα μου, Κύριε, με λύτρωσες, Θεὸς ἀληθινέ. Ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀπεχθάνομαι αὐτοὺς ποὺ σέβονται τὰ τιποτένια εἰδῶλα· ἀλλὰ ἐγὼ στὸν Κύριο στήριξα τὴν ἐλπίδα μου»), <https://greek.global.bible/bible/d09e9a676bf6592d-01/PSA.31>.

25. See Theophylaktos of Ohrid, *Enarrationes in evangelia* 1.472.29-45 for an interpretation of *παρατίθημι*: «Κράζει μεγάλη φωνὴ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἵνα γινῶμεν ὅτι ὄπερ ἔλεγεν, ὅτι “Ἐξουσίαν ἔχω θεῖναι τὴν ψυχὴν μου”, ἀληθὲς ἦν. Κατ’ ἐξουσίαν γὰρ ἀφίησι τὴν ψυχὴν. Τίς δὲ ἦν ἢ φωνή; “Πάτερ, εἰς χεῖράς σου παρατίθημι τὸ πνεῦμά μου”. Οὐ γὰρ βεβιασμένως, ἀλλ’ ἐκοντὶ ἀφῆκε τὸ πνεῦμα. Τοῦτο γὰρ σημαίνει τό, *Παρατίθημι*· ἐμφαίνει δὲ καὶ τὸ μέλλειν αὐτὴν πάλιν ἀπολήψεσθαι τοιοῦτον γὰρ ἢ *παραθήκη*, πάλιν ἀποδομένη. Χάρις δὲ τῷ Κυρίῳ, ὅτι ἐκεῖνον ἀποθανόντος, καὶ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ εἰς χεῖρας τοῦ Πατρὸς παρατεθέντος, ἔκτοτε καὶ αἱ τῶν ἁγίων ψυχῶν εἰς χεῖρας τοῦ Θεοῦ τίθενται, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὡς πρότερον ἐν τοῖς τοῦ ἄδου μυχοῖς. Ὅστε ἁγιασμός ἡμῶν γέγονεν ὁ θάνατος τοῦ Χριστοῦ· διὸ καὶ μεγάλη φωνὴ προσκαλεῖται

the life of the faithful Jew. In this case, we draw information from the interesting article by E. Lizorkin Eyzenberg, “Rethinking Jesus’ Words from the Hebrew Original”²⁶. His “Orthros” (= Matin [Morning Prayer]) includes the Prayer “Modeh Ani”, which expresses the gratitude of the persons praying for the extra day of life that God has given to them.

מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם, שֶׁהַחַיּוֹת בִּי נִשְׁמָתֵי בְּחַמְלָה. רַבָּה אֶמְוֶנְתָּהּ

(*Modeh anee lefanecha melech chai vekayam, she-he-chezarta bee nishmatee b'chemla, raba emunatecha*).

“I thank you, living and eternal King, for you have mercifully restored my soul within me”.

With these words, the persons praying imply that they had entrusted their spirit to the Almighty as a deposit for safekeeping the previous night, so that it would not be affected by the “dark sleep of sin and every dark and nocturnal lust”²⁷. This is why many Jews use the phrase: “Into your hands I commit my spirit” (*Psalm* 30, 6 O' / Septuagint [31, 6]), already at the end of the Compline. More specifically, the Hebrew word for “commit” “דִּקְפָא”. This particular word means “to deposit money or things for safekeeping” – something that implies future recovery. Therefore, taking into account the translation of our verse in the Septuagint (where we do not simply have “deliverance” but “commitment” – therefore, the meaning of “deposit”), the following important conclusion emerges about Jesus’s words on the Cross: He entrusts His spirit to God, Whom He calls His “Father” until the very last moment, so that He may receive it back at His Resurrection, proving at the same time that He grants death, as if it were sleep, the power to “visit” Him.

τὸν θάνατον, μὴ τολμῶντα προσελθεῖν, εἰ μὴ κληθεῖη».

26. *Israel Bible Weekly* (2023), <https://weekly.israelbiblecenter.com/rethinking-jesus-words-hebrew-original/>.

27. We have taken this phrase from the prayer “And give us, Lord” from the Compline of the Orthodox Eastern Tradition.

C. The *Gospel of John* 19, 30: «Τετέλεσται»

In the *Gospel of John* (John), the Lord does not necessarily commit His Spirit only to His Father²⁸, but also to the two origins of the Church (the beloved Disciple and the Woman-Mother), using the verb *τετέλεσται* (19, 30)²⁹. This is translated into English as “it is finished”³⁰ (King James Version of the English Bible). However, this rendering will be proved to be extremely incomplete.

Ratzinger has already identified several of the conceptual nuances which arise from the use of the verb *τελειοῦν* in the *Gospel of John*; indeed, in the second section of the work, which describes the farewell and the Testament of the incarnate Word to His own on the last night of His life:

28. Joannes Chrysostomus (John Chrysostom). *In Joannem* 59.462.57-66: «Λαβὼν οὖν φησι, Τετέλεσται. Εἶδες ἀταράχως καὶ μετ’ ἐξουσίας πάντα πράττοντα; Καὶ τὸ ἐξῆς δὲ τοῦτο δηλοῖ. Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ πάντα ἀπηρτίσθη, Κλίνει τὴν κεφαλὴν (οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτὴ προσήλωτο), τὸ πνεῦμα ἀφῆκε, τουτέστιν, ἀπέφυξε. Καίτοι οὐ μετὰ τὸ κλίνει τὴν κεφαλὴν τὸ ἐκπνεῦσαι ἐνταῦθα δὲ τὸναντίον. Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐπειδὴ ἐξέπνευσεν, ἔκλινε τὴν κεφαλὴν, ὅπερ ἐφ’ ἡμῶν γίνεται ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ ἔκλινε τὴν κεφαλὴν, τότε ἐξέπνευσε. Δι’ ὧν πάντων ἐδήλωσεν ὁ εὐαγγελιστής, ὅτι τοῦ παντός Κύριος αὐτός ἦν».

29. “This pilgrimage at the end of the Son of Man’s public ministry, combined with his final rejection by the chosen people (cf. 12, 37 ff.) marks in *John* the completion of Jesus’s public work and the coming of the hour for Jesus to be glorified; not by choosing a new chosen people, but by giving up His spirit on the Cross and crying out on the Cross, it will be proven that the Messiah is truly identified with the suffering Servant of the Lord (as John proclaimed in the Introduction) and the Paschal Lamb, who abolishes the sin of the whole world and becomes the light of the nations. The ecumenical significance of the Cross, from which blood and water flow, is revealed in *John* with the multilingual title: ἔγραψεν δὲ καὶ τίτλον ὁ Πιλάτος καὶ ἔθηκεν ἐπὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ ἦν δὲ γεγραμμένον Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων. τοῦτον οὖν τὸν τίτλον πολλοὶ ἀνέγνωσαν τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ὅτι ἐγγὺς ἦν ὁ τόπος τῆς πόλεως ὅπου ἐσταυρώθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς· καὶ ἦν γεγραμμένον Ἑβραϊστί, Ῥωμαϊστί, Ἑλληνιστί (19, 19-20)”. See S. Despotis, *Δοκίμια στὴν Ἰωάννεια Γραμματεία*, Ennoia Publications, Athens 2017, pp. 243-244.

30. F. O. Parker, “Is the Subject of *τετέλεσται* in *John* 19,30 ‘It’ or ‘All Things’?”, *Biblica* 96 (2015), pp. 222-244.

(a) *Τελειόω* = The culmination of Love, which had already manifested at the beginning of the Passion in chap. 13³¹ with Lord Jesus bowing His knees to perform the washing of the feet. At this point, it should be emphasized that this particular verb in the ancient world also meant “to come to marriage” («ἔρχεσθαι εἰς γάμον» = Paus. *Gram. Fr.* 306); it also meant “I am reaching the prime of my age; I am becoming a perfect man”. Especially in the first four chapters of *John*, the incarnate Word is already presented as Bridegroom. Then, in the Byzantine literature, the verb, obviously under the influence of the passage under consideration, eventually came to mean: “I am reaching perfection though martyrdom”³².

(b) *Τελειόω* = the fulfillment of the Scriptures³³ [meaning also the predictions of the incarnate Word in *John* (17, 12)]³⁴.

(c) *Τελειόω* = ordain (arch)priest, which implies that the Exalted One, apart from being the new Adam and the new King, is also the Great High Priest³⁵.

31. 13, 1: «Πρὸ δὲ τῆς ἑορτῆς τοῦ Πάσχα, εἰδὼς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἦλθεν αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα ἵνα μεταβῆ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα, ἀγαπήσας τοὺς ἰδίους τοὺς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν αὐτούς».

32. All meanings of the word listed in this paragraph have been taken from D. Dimitrakos, *Μέγα Λεξικὸν ὅλης τῆς ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσης*, vol. ΙΔ', Domi Editions, Athens 1964, p. 7140.

33. Cf. Joannes Chrysostomus (John Chrysostom), *In Matthaëum* 58.770.51-60: «Ἐτερος δὲ φησιν, ὅτι γευσάμενος εἶπε, Τετέλεσται. Τί δέ ἐστι, Τετέλεσται; Ἡ προφητεία πεπλήρωται ἢ περὶ αὐτοῦ. Ἔδωκαν γάρ, φησίν, εἰς τὸ βρωμά μου χολήν, καὶ εἰς τὴν δίψαν μου ἐπότισάν με ὄξος. Οὐδὲ ἐκεῖνος δὲ δείκνυσιν ὅτι ἔπιεν οὐδὲν γὰρ διέστηκε τὸ ἀπλῶς γεύσασθαι τοῦ μὴ πιεῖν, ἀλλ' ἐν τι καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ δηλοῖ. Ἄλλ' ὅμως οὐδὲ ἐνταῦθα ἴσταται τὰ τῆς παροιμίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ γυμνώσαντες, καὶ σταυρώσαντες, καὶ ὄξος προσενεγκόντες, περαιτέρω προβαίνουνσι».

34. 19, 28-29: «Μετὰ τοῦτο εἰδὼς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἤδη πάντα τετέλεσται, ἵνα τελειωθῆ ἡ Γραφή (= Psalm 68, 22 Ο'; cf. 19, 24 // Psalm. 21, 19 Ο'), λέγει “Διψῶ”. Σκεῦος ἔκειτο ὄξους μεστόν· σπῳγγον οὖν μεστόν τοῦ ὄξους ὑσώπῳ περιθέντες προσήνεγκαν αὐτοῦ τῷ στόματι».

35. See Ratzinger, *op.cit.*, p. 220. His interpretation is based on Albert Vanhoye, *Accogliamo Cristo nostro sommo sacerdote. Esercizi Spirituali predicati in Vaticano*, 10–16 febbraio 2008, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2008, pp. 71–75.

(d) *Τελειόω* = the completion/fulfillment of the divine Economy's work³⁶. The human species has now been “perfected” according to its Creator's original will.

(e) *Τελειόω* = According to Cyril of Alexandria, the Hebrews' disrespect has now been completed: «Προστεθειμένου τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ τούτου, τετελεσθαι φησὶν ὁ Σωτὴρ τῆς Ἰουδαίων ἀσεβείας δηλονότι τὸ μέτρον, καὶ τῆς εἰς αὐτὸν παροινίας τὴν ὑπερβολήν. τί γὰρ ἦν ἔτι τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις τὸ ἀνεπιτήδευτον, τί δὲ τῶν εἰς ἄκρον ἠκόντων ἀπανθρωπίας οὐ μεμελέτητο; ποῖος γὰρ αἰκίας παρελείφθη τρόπος, ὕβρεως δὲ τῆς ἐσχάτης τί παρέντες ἐφαίνοντο; τοιγάρτοι δικαίως τὸ τετελεσθαι φησὶν»³⁷.

In this case, however, we should also take into account the following concepts:

(a) The Hebrew word for *τελειόω* is associated with “Sabbatism” (the seventh day of the re-Creation)³⁸ and the seal of the life and grace's

36. 17, 4: «ἐγὼ σε ἐδόξασα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τὸ ἔργον τελειώσας ὃ δέδωκάς μοι ἵνα ποιήσω».

37. Cyrillus Alexandrinus (Cyril of Alexandria), *Commentarii in Joannem* 3.94.25-3.96.1. We would like to thank Thomas Mavromoustakos (Doctor of Theology, Professor of Chemistry, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) for pointing this out.

38. Visual Commentary: *John* 1 https://d1bsmz3sdihplr.cloudfront.net/media/Study%20Notes/VC-John%201_Study%20Notes.pdf. Visual commentary: *John* 13: Each interior panel narrates the story of the creation and incarnation of the divine word in a way that sets the basic themes for the narrative that will follow: In 1A-1B-1C, the word is the agent of creation, through which the entire universe was created. To borrow images from *Genesis* 1, 3-6, the Word is the source of life and light. This light, to which John had witnessed, is rejected by some and accepted by others (1, 3-13). In 2A-2B-2C, the word is the divine glory of the temple incarnated as a human being to fulfill the meaning of the temple and the *Torah* (1, 14-17). However, in contrast to *Gen.* 1, which culminates with the seventh day in *Genesis* 2, 1-3, the conclusion in *John* 1, 18, while it provides a literary closure to the prologue, it nevertheless does not provide a conceptual one (1, 18 ends with an incomplete sentence). The “fullness of the seventh day” in *Genesis* 2, 1-3 has to await its parallel in the death and resurrection of Jesus in *John* 19-21, when Jesus will announce that “it is finished” [τετέλεσται, *John* 19, 30 // *Gen* 2, 1 «τελείωσαν», συνετετέλεσθησαν (= were finished) LXX *Genesis*].

fullness that the Creator offers to the new Creation, but also with the life-giving Source that flows from the side of the New Adam as the new Temple. According to the biblical theology, rest was connected with redemption from enemies and the burdens of debts; it was associated with the “return” to an Eden – a Garden (essentially a Temple and a sacrifice) on a sacred Mountain, as happened with Noah after the flood. The anointing with “oil” and the Spirit referred to the re-creation towards which the Messiah leads the world and the universe. A foretaste of this eschatological Shalom (= Peace, Harmony) is the Sabbath. In the *Gospel of John*, «Τετέλεσται» is the first Epilogue, as it is subsequently followed by three other “epilogues”: (1) the “race” between the two disciples, the revelation of the tomb to a woman (!) inside the Garden as an Ark, as we have the presence of two angels «έν λευκοῖς καθεζομένων, ἕνα πρὸς τῇ κεφαλῇ καὶ ἕνα πρὸς τοῖς ποσίν», to be followed by the «Μή μου ἄπτου» to Mary, which refers to the tree of Life (20, 12), (2) combined with the “Touch my side”, and, finally, (3) the crucial question «Φιλεῖς με;».

(b) For the Greeks, the verb *τελειόω* was associated with the final stage of initiation into the Mysteries – especially the Eleusinian ones. It is to these (the Mysteries) that Christ Himself probably refers at the end of His public action in *John* with the parable of the death of the seed and its resurrection (12, 24). The “fulfillment/initiation” in the “Telesteria”³⁹ was accomplished through an ear of wheat, which embodied the “sweet hope” of immortality. During the 1st century AD, this experience was combined with familiarization with the true philosophy: through the «ἐξάιφνης» (= “instantaneous”), is not connected with «γνωρίζειν» (= “knowing”), but with «πάσχειν» (= “suffering”) the divine.

In this case, initiation [admission to the highest grades of the mysteries] is linked to the Exaltation and the “theory” of a suffering body, which before Pontius Pilate has been exposed to the gaze of those who crucified him with the very significant (also for the Roman imperial years) phrase “Behold the Man” («ἰδοὺ ὁ Ἄνθρωπος» 19, 5). The question “You are a King, then!” («οὐκοῦν Βασιλεὺς εἶ σύ;» [“But you (in this pitiful

39. Dimitrakos, *op.cit.*, p. 7142.

state) are the king?” 18, 37]”⁴⁰. In essence, the Roman ruler unwittingly prophesies (= reveals the truth), just like Caiaphas (11, 51). Even the inscription on the cross⁴¹ in Hebrew publicly reveals in all languages⁴² the terrible unpronounceable name of God of the Old Testament: *Yahweh*⁴³.

40. This interpretation of the verses belongs to N. Sotiropoulos, *Tò Eὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Ἰωάννου*, vol. Γ', Ho Stavros Publications, Athens 2012, p. 206. Significant is Cyril of Alexandria's claim, who emphasizes that the time of humiliation has been fulfilled. Christ was crucified as a man, but he conquered death as God. See *Commentarii in Joannem* 2.518.5-10: «... ἔφη Τετέλεσται. πεπλήρωτο γὰρ ἤδη ὁ τῆς ταπεινώσεως καιρός, καὶ ἐσταυρώθη μὲν, ὡς ἄνθρωπος· νενίκηκε δὲ τοῦ θανάτου τὸ κράτος, οὐχ ὡς ἄνθρωπος, ἔτι μᾶλλον δὲ ὡς Θεός, φημί δὴ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν καὶ τὴν ἐπὶ τῷ νικῆσαι δόξαν τε καὶ δύναμιν, οὐ κατὰ τὴν σάρκα».

41. Jesus was crucified on the basis of the perception that he claimed to be “King of the Jews”, which would have been considered a potential political rival to Caesar and his Jewish subjects. The charge was written on the inscription which was placed above his head (cf. *Matth.* 27, 37; *Mark* 15, 26; *Luke* 23, 38).

42. Cyrillus Alexandrinus (Cyril of Alexandria), *Commentarii in Joannem* 3, 85, 14-32 and 3, 86, 1-4: «Τοῦτον οὖν τὸν τίτλον πολλοὶ ἀνέγνωσαν τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ὅτι ἐγγὺς ἦν ὁ τόπος τῆς πόλεως ὅπου ἐσταυρώθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς· καὶ ἦν γεγραμμένον Ἑβραϊστὶ Ῥωμαϊστὶ Ἑλληνιστί. Εὐμηχάνως δὴ λίαν καὶ διὰ θείας τινὸς καὶ ἀρόρητου πάλιν οἰκονομίας ἀνατεθεῖσθαι τὸν τίτλον φαίη τις ἂν τριπλῆν ἔχοντα τὴν γραφήν, Ἑβραϊστὶ, Ῥωμαϊστὶ, Ἑλληνιστί· προὔκειτο γὰρ ἐναργῶς τὴν τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν βασιλείαν ὁμολογῶν διὰ τριῶν τέως τῶν ἀπασῶν ἐπιφανεστέρων γλωσσῶν, καὶ ἀπαρχὴν ὡσπερ τινὰ τῷ σταυρωθέντι προσάγων τῆς περὶ αὐτοῦ λαληθείσης προφητείας. ἔφη γάρ που ἄγων τῆς περὶ αὐτοῦ λαληθείσης προφητείας. ἔφη γάρ που Δανιὴλ ὁ σοφώτατος, ὅτι “αὐτῷ ἐδόθη ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ βασιλεία καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ καὶ γλώσσαι αὐτῷ ‘δουλεύουσιν’”, ἀλλὰ καὶ Παῦλος ἡμῖν ὁ ἱερώτατος ἐπιστέλλει βοῶν, ὅτι “πᾶν γόνυ κάμψει ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων”, καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσεται ὅτι “Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν Θεοῦ Πατρὸς”. ἀπαρχὴ τοιγαροῦν ὡσπερ τις ἀληθῆς τῆς τῶν γλωσσῶν ὁμολογίας ὁ τίτλος ἦν, βασιλέα κηρύσσων τὸν Ἰησοῦν. ἦν δὲ καὶ ἑτέρως τῆς Ἰουδαίων ἀφιλοθείας κατήγορος, μονονουχὶ διαρρήδην ἀνακεκραγῶς τοῖς συνθέουσι πρὸς ἀνάγνωσιν, ὅτι τὸν οἰκεῖον ἐσταύρωσαν βασιλέα καὶ Κύριον, τῆς εἰς αὐτὸν ἀγάπης ἀλόγησαντες παντελῶς, καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἀπασῶν ἐσχάτην ἀναισθησίαν πεσόντες οἱ δέιλαιοι».

43. See Ratzinger, *op.cit.*, p. 209: Of course, the nature of Jesus's crime is different from that of the other two who had participated in the uprising under Barabbas's leadership. Pilate is fully aware that Jesus did not have the same mentality; thus, he formulated in a special way the text on the inscription regarding the crime of Jesus: *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews* (*John* 19, 19). Up to that point, Jesus had avoided using the title of Messiah or king, or had associated it directly with His sufferings (cf. *Mark* 8, 27-31) to prevent misinterpretations. Now, the title of king could be made public. Jesus is publicly proclaimed as king in the three more widespread languages of the time. It is

This is connected with “I am” («Ἐγώ εἰμι»), which (like ὄν), causes astonishment (= shock) to those who, in the *Gospel of John*, attempt to arrest the Messiah in the Garden. We also know from Plutarch (*Περὶ τοῦ Εἶ τοῦ ἐν Δελφοῖς*) that this verb was extremely important in philosophical inquiries about the actual Being⁴⁴.

understandable that the members of the Council are scandalized by this title, in which Pilate certainly expresses his cynicism towards Jewish authorities and subsequently wants to take revenge on them. But this inscription, which is equivalent to a royal proclamation, now stands before world history. Jesus has been exalted. The cross is His throne, from which He draws the world to Himself. From this place of the ultimate self-sacrifice, from this point of truly divine love, He reigns as the true king in His own way – in a way that neither Pilate nor the members of the Sanhedrin are able to understand”.

44. Plutarchus (Plutarch), *De E apud Delphos* 392. E7-393C10: «Τί οὖν ὄντως ὄν ἐστι; τὸ αἰδιον καὶ ἀγέννητον καὶ ἀφθαρτον, ᾧ χρόνος μεταβολὴν οὐδὲ εἰς ἐπάγει. κινήτων γὰρ τι καὶ κινουμένη συμφανταζόμενον ὕλη καὶ ῥέον αἰεὶ καὶ μὴ στέγον, ὡσπερ ἀγγεῖον φθορᾶς καὶ γενέσεως, ὁ χρόνος ὅπου γε δὴ τὸ μὲν ἔπειτα καὶ τὸ πρότερον καὶ τὸ ἔσται λέγόμενον καὶ τὸ γέγονεν αὐτόθεν ἐξομολόγησις ἐστὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος· τὸ γὰρ ἐν τῷ εἶναι μηδέπω γεγονὸς ἢ πεπαυμένον ἤδη τοῦ εἶναι λέγειν ὡς ἔστιν, εὐήθης καὶ ἄτοπον. ᾧ δὲ μάλιστα τὴν νόησιν ἐπερείδοντες τοῦ χρόνου τὸ ἐνέστηκε καὶ τὸ πάρεστι καὶ τὸ νῦν φθηγόμεθα. τοῦτ' αὖ πάλιν ἄγαν ἐνδυσόμενος ὁ λόγος ἀπόλλυσιν. ἐκθλίβεται γὰρ εἰς τὸ μέλλον καὶ τὸ παρωχημένον ὡσπερ αὐτὴ βουλομένοις ἰδεῖν ἐξ ἀνάγκης διστάμενον. εἰ δὲ ταῦτα τῷ μετροῦντι πέπονθεν ἢ μετρομένη φύσις, οὐδὲν αὐτῆς μένον οὐδ' ὄν ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ γιγνόμενα πάντα καὶ φθειρόμενα κατὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸν χρόνον συννέμησιν. ὅθεν οὐδ' ὄσιόν ἐστιν ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄντος λέγειν, ὡς ἦν ἢ ἔσται· ταῦτα γὰρ ἐγκλίσεις τίνες εἰσι καὶ παραλλάξεις τοῦ μένειν ἐν τῷ εἶναι μὴ πεφυκότος. Ἄλλ' ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, εἶ' ἤρη φάναί, καὶ ἔστι κατ' οὐδένα χρόνον ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τὸν ἀκίνητον καὶ ἄχρονον καὶ ἀνέγκλιτον καὶ οὐ πρότερον οὐδὲν ἐστὶν οὐδ' ὕστερον οὐδὲ μέλλον οὐδὲ παρωχημένον οὐδὲ πρεσβύτερον οὐδὲ νεώτερον ἀλλ' εἰς ὃν ἐνὶ τῷ νῦν τὸ αἰεὶ πεπλήρωκε, καὶ μόνον ἐστὶ τὸ κατὰ τοῦτ' ὄντως ὄν, οὐ γεγονὸς οὐδ' ἀρξάμενον οὐδὲ παυσόμενον. οὕτως οὖν αὐτὸ δεῖ σεβομένους ἀσπάζεσθαι [καὶ] προσεθίζειν, εἶ', καὶ νῆ Δία, ὡς ἔνιοι τῶν παλαιῶν, εἶ' ἐν'. οὐ γὰρ πολλὰ τὸ θεῖον ἐστὶν, ὡς ἡμῶν ἕκαστος ἐκ μυρίων διαφορῶν ἐν πάθει γινομένων ἄθροισμα παντοδαπὸν καὶ πανηγυρικῶς μεμιγμένον ἀλλ' ἐν εἶναι δεῖ τὸ ὄν, ὡσπερ ὄν τὸ ἐν. ἢ δ' ἑτερότης διαφορᾶ τοῦ ὄντος εἰς γένεσιν ἐξίσταται τοῦ μὴ ὄντος. ὅθεν εὖ καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἔχει τῷ θεῷ τῶν ὀνομάτων καὶ τὸ δεύτερον καὶ τὸ τρίτον. Ἀπόλλων μὲν γὰρ οἶον ἀρνούμενος τὰ πολλὰ καὶ τὸ πλῆθος ἀποφάσκων ἐστίν. Ἰήσιος δ' ὡς εἶς καὶ μόνος Φοῖβον δὲ δήπου τὸ καθαρὸν καὶ ἄγρον οἱ παλαιοὶ πᾶν ὠνόμαζον, ὡς ἔτι Θεσσαλοὶ τοὺς ἱερέας ἐν ταῖς ἀποφράσιν ἡμέραις αὐτοὺς ἐφ' ἑαυτῶν ἔξω διατριβόντας, οἶμαι, φοιβονομῆσθαι λέγουσι. τὸ δ' ἐν εἰλικρινῆς καὶ καθαρὸν ἑτέρου γὰρ μίξει πρὸς ἕτερον ὁ μαισμός, ὡς πού καὶ Ὀμηρος ἐλέφαντα [τινά] φοινισσόμενον βαφῆ ἡμαίνεσθαι φησί· καὶ τὰ μιγνύμενα τῶν χρωμάτων οἱ

Conclusion

1. Even though the Lord Jesus recited the entire *Psalm 21* (Septuagint) [22] on the Cross, the emphasis he laid upon his abandonment by God should not be overlooked, thus sharing the feelings of “ostracism” of both His people and those individuals who feel that they are not simply living on the margins but are suffering unbearable psychological and physical violence. We should interpret *Psalm 21* by taking into account the broader context of *Psalms 3-41* (and, more specifically, in the sub-section *Psalms 15-24*), since, as it has been demonstrated, the structure of the *Book of Psalms* is artful, while, even today, those who are knowledgeable about the Scriptures know the Psalms in the context of the Kathismata.

2. The «*Μνήσθητί μου Κύριε*» proves to the readers of the *Gospel of Luke* that Jesus Christ was also the Lord, as it has been already stated at the beginning of his two-volume work. He was simultaneously in Paradise and in Hades.

3. Among other things, the «*Πάτερ μου εἰς χεῖράς σου παραθήσομαι τὸ Πνεῦμά μου*» implies the certainty of the resurrection; through the concept of “entrustment”, the faithful Jew murmurs this particular Psalm in conjunction with the falling of night and the rising of the next day.

4. The «*Τετέλεσται*» of the *Gospel of John* bears multiple meanings. Among other things, it signifies the Creation’s “sabbatism” and an alternative initiation into immortality, which the Greek listeners of the Gospel sought in the Mysteries and the Telesteria with particular fervor – especially during the Roman imperial period.

βαφείζ ‘φθείρεσθαι’ καί ‘φθοράν’ τὴν μίξιν ὀνομάζουσιν. οὐκοῦν ἔν τ’ εἶναι καὶ ἄκρατον ἀεὶ τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ καὶ καθαροῷ προσήκει».