

MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?" OR "MY GOD, MY GOD, HOW THOU HAST GLORIFIED ME!"?



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A fairly large number of Biblical and several Qur'ānic texts indicate that various prophet figures or messengers of God committed acts and made statements that ill accord with any straightforward notion of their being guarded from sin or infallible (*ma`ṣūm*). A number of such prophets or messengers mentioned in the Bible and the Qur'ān, most notably Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad, are, like Bahā'u'llāh, regarded by Bahā'īs as infallible Manifestations of God (*mazhar-i ilāhi*) -- a belief which has its roots in Shī'ī prophetology and imamology. Thus, certain stories about or words attributed to them pose problems for the Bahā'ī theologian or apologist. Indeed, both Bahā'u'llāh and `Abdu'l-Bahā' addressed themselves -- often in response to questions from Bahā'īs of a Shī'ī Muslim or Christian background -- to such issues as Moses' murder of an Egyptian overseer (Exodus 2:11f; Qur'ān 28:15f), Muḥammad's virtual liquidation of the Jews of Banū Qurayza (cf. Qur'ān 33:26) and to the difficulties posed by statements attributed to Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad that imply their limited humanity, lack of faith, sinfulness or ignorance (e.g. Qur'ān 4:105; 40:57; 47:21; 48:1f).¹

For some Christian and Bahā'ī exegetes Mk 15:34 (= Matt 27:46), Jesus' words "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?", have, taken literally, been regarded as perplexing, theologically problematic. They imply that Jesus thought that God had forsaken him in his hour of distress and humiliation on the cross. Though, as far as I am aware, Bahā'u'llāh makes no reference to Mk 15:34 and `Abdu'l-Bahā' and Shoghi Effendi have only briefly referred to this verse, one Bahā'ī writer and a few well-known Bahā'ī speakers have, in the light of their notion of the transcendental nature of Jesus

¹ See Cole, 198X which is an excellent introduction to the Bahā'ī concept of the Manifestation of God and includes a brief but informative discussion of questions of infallibility. On the various Bahā'ī concepts of infallibility see, for example, Bahā'u'llāh, *Aqdas* (Bombay ed.) 51 = 199X ed. ; *Ishrāqāt* in *Majmū'a* (1980) 6ff; *Lawḥ-i sirāj* in *Mā'idih* 7:46f; `Abdu'l-Bahā' in *Mā'idih* 9:4-5; *Mufawadāt* (= SAQ 1908), 129-133 on Bahā'u'llāh's mention of *isḥmat-i kubrā* ("the most great infallibility") in his *al-Kitāb al-aqdas* ("Most Holy Book"). On Moses' murder of an Egyptian overseer see Bahā'u'llāh's commentary on the eighth stanza of his *Qasida-yi varqā'īya* in AQA 3:198; *Kitāb-i Iqān* (1980) 41f. On muḥammad and the episode of the Jews of Banū Qurayza see the Tablet of Bahā'u'llāh addressed to a certain Mahdī in *Iqtidārāt* 116ff. In his *Mufawadāt* ("Some Answered Questions") `Abdu'l-Bahā' discusses the "addresses of reproach" addressed by God to the prophets, argues that the Manifestations of God are "free from sin" and explains that the "sins" of Muḥammad mentioned in Qur'ān 48:1-2 really refer to the sins of the people.

the 'Manifestation of God', explained away or denied that Jesus ever uttered the words attributed to him at Mk 15:34 (= Matt 27:46).

Richard Backwell, for example, in his *The Christianity of Jesus* writes in the course of a summary of the life of Jesus, "Had He (Jesus) failed His father? No, he had done all that could be done in the time. Small wonder that he cried out, as he foresaw the spreading radiance of his glorious spirit carried through the planet by his devoted followers destined to grow to multitudes, "Lord, how Thou hast glorified me!" (Backwell 1972:13, cf. III f). The latter quotation is Backwell's "rewrite" of Matt. 27:46 which he regards as "clearly erroneous" on the grounds that "the link between Christ the son of God the Father is of a kind that could never be broken" (ibid 122 fn.3). As he sees it the "best explanation" lies in supposing that those present at the time of Jesus' crucifixion ("some of those who stood there" Matt. 27:47a) "misheard or misquoted a cry which, with a very slight change, can be translated as, "My God, My God, how thou hast glorified me" (ibid).

This "explanation" seems to presuppose that Jesus' hearers transmitted his dying words incorrectly such that the (supposedly) Hebrew/Aramaic for *glorified* was received by the Evangelists ("Mark" and "Matthew") as *forsaken*.¹ There are definite grounds for maintaining that Backwell's statement is rooted in late Bahā'ī (oral) tradition stemming from 'Abdu'l-Bahā'. It can be seen to say more about the Bahā'ī notion of Jesus the Manifestation of God, than any historically verifiable notion of Jesus' last words. The factors which lead me to the latter conclusion will be set down here in the course of a discussion of the relevant texts and their interpretation in the light of modern Biblical scholarship and a few passages from the Bahā'ī writings.

□ **THE TEXTS: MARK 15:34 / MATT 27:46 (= PSALM 22:1 [2]).**

MARK 15:34a = ἐλωὶ ἐλωὶ λαμὰ σαβαχθάνει

Translit. = *elōi elōi lama sabachthanei*

Various ancient manuscripts

B = ελωι ελωι λαμα ζαβαφθανει (Codex Vaticanus)

Ⲭ = ελωι ελωι λεμα σαβακτανει (Codex Sinaiticus)

¹ It is not clear to what extent Backwell would have realized that Jesus would have most likely uttered his final words, his "cry of dereliction" in Hebrew-Aramaic (see below).

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| A | = | ελωι ελωι λιμα σαβακθανει (Codex Alexandrinus) |
| D | = | ηλει ηλει λαμα ζαφθάνει (Codes Bezae) |
| @ | = | ηλει ηλει λαμα σαβαχθανι (Codes Koridethi) |
| Syr^{sin.} | = | ܐܠܝ ܐܠܝ ܠܝܡܐ ܣܒܚܚܬܢܝ |

(Sinaitic Syriac)

MATT 27:46a = ἡλί ἡλί λεμὰ σαβαχθάνιTranslit. = *elī elī lema sabachthani***MANUSCRIPTS****B** = ελωει ελωει λεμα σαβακτανει**κ** = ελωι ελωι λεμα σαβαχθανει**A** = ηλι ηλι λιμα σαβαχθανει**W** = ηλι ηλι μα σαβαχθανει (WashingtonCodex)**D** = ηλει ηλει λαμα ζαφθάνει**@** = ηλει ηλει λαμα σαβαχθανει**Mk 15:34b** = ὁ Θεός μου, ὁ Θεός μου, εἰς τί με ἐγκατέλιπεςTrans. (RSV) = "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" ¹**Matt 27:46b** = Θεέ μου, Θεέ μου, ἵνατί με ἐγκατέλιπες

Trans. (RSV) = "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

PSALM 22:1[2]: the vast majority of modern Biblical scholars recognise that Mk 15:34 and Matt 27:46 present -- as Jesus' "cry of dereliction" -- a Hebrew / Aramaic transliterated "quotation" of Psalm 22:1 [2] and its Greek translation.

Massoretic Text = ܐܠܝ ܐܠܝ ܠܝܡܐ ܣܒܚܚܬܢܝ

Translit. = 'elī 'elī lāmâ 'azabtānī

Trans. (RSV) = "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

LXX (22:2) = ὁ Θεός ὁ Θεός μου, πρόσχεσ μοι, ἵνατί ἐγκατέλιπέσ με (Septuagint)

¹ It may be noted here that Codex Bezae (D) -- as well as some Old Latin Mss -- reads ὠνειδισαs (= 'reproach') where the other early mss have ἐγκατέλιπεs (= 'forsaken').

Trans. = "O God, my God, give heed to me; why hast thou forsaken me?"

Targum = אלי אלי מטול מה שבקתני
(Aramaic)

Trans. = "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Peshitta (OT) = (Syriac)

Trans. = "My God, my God, hast thou forsaken me?"

□ Textual Notes

Mk. 15:34 and Matt. 27:46 present two slightly different transliterated forms of Jesus' cry from the cross; the Greek σαβαχθάνε = *sabachthanei* ("thou forsaken me") represents the transliterated Aramaic שבקתני which means "thou [God] forsaken me". It will be observed that considerable confusion exists in the mss. versions of this transliterated verse (Mk. 15:34 and Matt 27:46), "partly through lack of knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic, and partly through intentional changes" (Stendhal, n.d. [1968]:85) -- though Matthews transliteration is identical to that of the (Aramaic) Targum (Wilcox, 1992:457).

Many textual critics read ἐλωί at Mk 15:34a and ἡλι at Matt 27:46a and maintain, in the light of Mk 15:35 = Matt 27:47, that Matt read ἡλι (= Heb. אלי) in order to clarify the misunderstanding of the bystanders who thought that Jesus was calling Elijah (Gk. = Ἠλίας = אליהו = אליהו) and not "God..". Since, in other words, Mk.'s ἐλωί provides no basis for a confusion with Elijah, various commentators have believed that Matt's ἡλι was original and that Mk's ἐλωί conforms to the Aramaic element in his Gospel¹ (note though Matt.'s translit. = Targum).

Backwell appears, as we have indicated, to think that the misunderstanding of "some of them who stood there" (Mk 15:35= Matt 27:47) implies a mishearing or

¹ See Stendahl, n.d. [1968?]:84; Grundy, 1967:64. From the textual data quoted above it will be evident that mss. B and א at Mk. 15:34a and א at Matt. 27:46a have ἐλωί (= Aramaic אליהו for Aramaic אליהו = "my God") and that D and Θ at both Mk. 15:34a and Matt. 27:46a have ηλει. B has ελωει (at Matt. 27:46a while A and W have ηλι. Syr^{sin} preserves the difference between Mk. 15:34 (=) and Matt. 27:46a (=). The Massoretic text (Hebrew) at Psalm 22:1 has אליהו and the Targum the Hebraism אליהו for Aramaic אליהו (see Stendhal, op. cit. 84f).

misquoting of 'glorified' which came to be recorded in Mk. and Matt. as "forsaken". The evangelists, however, clearly indicate that it was Jesus' "My God, my God" that was confused with a cry to Elijah (see Mk. 15:35f = Matt 27:47f). The bystanders, hearing Jesus say something like *Elī* or *Elīya*¹ imagined that he was calling on *Elīyah* / *Elīyahu* (= Elijah). Elijah, like the Islamic *Khidr*, was, in primitive Christian and later times, believed to come to the aid of the pious and distressed in times of need. Mk. and Matt. thus indicate that there was a misunderstanding with respect to Jesus' crying "My God, my God" not that his use of "forsaken" was misheard. We may now turn to the "forsaken" itself.

An examination of the textual data given above shows that codices **B** (at Matt 27:46a) α , **A**, **W** and Θ (as well as **Syr^{sin}**) all basically attempt (at Mk 15:34a and Matt 27:46a) to transliterate the Aramaic (σαβακτάνει, σαβαχθανει, σαβαχθανει = Aram. שׁבַּקְתָּנִי, š^ebaqtanī = "you forsaken me") which translates the Hebrew of the massoretic text at Psalm 22:1[2] זָבַחְתָּנִי, ^azabtanī (= "you forsaken me"). Codex Bezae (**D**), however, has ζαφθάνει at both Mk 15:34a and Matt 27:46a and Codex Vaticanus (**B**) ζαβαφθάνει at Mk 15:34a which may be regarded as slightly corrupted transliterations of the זָבַחְתָּנִי ^azabtanī (Hebrew) at Psalm 22:1[2].²

All the major early mss. at Mk. 15:34b and Matt. 27:46b agree in translating the variously transliterated שׁבַּקְתָּנִי (Aram. š^ebaqtanī = "you forsaken me" = Heb. זָבַחְתָּנִי) with the Greek ἐγκατέλιπές ("forsaken" cf. also LXX and Aquila) -- with the exception, that is, of Codex Bezae (**D**) which translates the (Hebrew transliteration) ζαφθάνει with (Gk.) ὠνειδίσας ("reproach") and is followed by some Old Latin Mss. ὠνειδίσας cannot be regarded as a translation of either š^ebaqtanī or ^azabtanī

¹ Guillaume in his 1951 article argues, on the basis of readings in (the Dead Sea Scroll) **IQIS^a** that the Hebrew of the first century CE may occasionally have used the ancient Semitic first person suffix *-iya* and that Jesus might have cried out *Elīya* since the bystanders imagined that he was calling on Elijah. Thus Matthew's ἦλὶ brings Jesus' "My God" (in its Greek transliteration) into line with the later pronunciation of Hebrew.

² Codex Vaticanus' (**B**'s) ζαβαφθάνει is probably a corrupted form of ζαφθάνει (**D**) which rests on an original ἀζαφθάνει -- the α having fallen out as a result of homeoteleuton -- and which may be regarded as a transliteration of the Hebrew זָבַחְתָּנִי at Psalm 22:1[2]. Refer Grundy, 1967:65. cf. Stendahl 19XX:85.

and the question thus arises as to the origin of this variant reading (refer, Manson, 1951/2:316f; Stendahl, n.d. [1968]: 85) . Though a number of scholars have argued that Codex Bezae's (D's) ὠνείδισαζ is original (at Mk 15:34b) this seems unlikely. It may be seen as a later scribal correction born of "theological uneasiness" with Jesus' "cry of dereliction".¹

Though then, the Greek mss. exhibit considerable textual variation at Mk 15:34 and Matt 27:46 and show signs of "theological uneasiness", there are no obvious grounds for proposing that Jesus originally cried out, "My God, my God, how thou hast glorified me?". This especially in the light of the quotation of Psalm 22:1[2]. While Jesus' supposed "...how thou hast glorified me!" might fit in well with the Johannine notion of Jesus' 'glorification' (δοχάζειν) at the time of his crucifixion, the Fourth Gospel has it that Jesus' last words were, "It is finished" (Jn 19:20). Luke, unlike Matthew who all but follows Mark (15.34) at 27:46 (as we have seen), has Jesus cry out words derived from Psalm 3:5 and not Psalm 22:1[2], "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Lk. 23:46). Though it is not clear whether the author of the Fourth Gospel knew Mk. 15:34 or whether the author of Luke felt "theologically uneasy" with this verse, they may have chosen not to follow Mk. 15:34 in the light of the "Christological difficulty" posed by the 'cry of dereliction'. The very 'problem' posed by Mk. 15:34 has been said to underline its authenticity though it must be borne in mind that texts that raise theological problems today (or for that matter during the Patristic era) need not have done so in NT times: the evangelists were not systematic theologians.²

Did, we may now ask, Backwell originally dream up the aforementioned "rewrite" of Matt. 27:46? It does in fact seem unlikely. As far as I am aware he had no knowledge of Semitic languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic) or Persian though he did read classics at Cambridge. The following theory may explain the origin of the "rewrite", "My God,

¹ The theologians who promulgated the D text (Codex Bezae) -- possibly working in a Syriac milieu -- may have associated the mutilated ζαφθάθει with the root ܩܬܐ (= Heb. 'to be angry / violent' ; cf. Syriac. 'to be indignant') or ܩܝܬܐ (= 'to rebuke') which perhaps led to the ὠνείδισαζ (= 'reproach') at Mk 15:34b (Refer, Stendahl, n.d. [1968]:85. fn.1; Grundy, 1967:65-6 (+ fn's)).

²Arguments about the authenticity of Mk. 15:34 / Matt 27:46 are inconclusive. Though Lindars in his *New Testament Apologetic*, 89 writes, "The genuineness of this saying, as actually spoken by Jesus, can hardly be disputed" other scholars have doubted this in the light of the use of Psalm 22 in framing the passion narratives. Loisy, Bacon, Bertram, Bultmann and others have held that the "cry of dereliction" supplies the "loud cry" mentioned at Mk. 15:37.

my God, how thou hast glorified me!".

Among the various Arabic and Persian versions of Mk 15:34 and Matt 27:46 the following may be noted: ¹

□ **Mk 15:34**

Arabic = ... إلوِي إلوِي لما شبقتني ... إلهي إلهي لماذا تركتني

Persian = ... ايلوِي ايلوِي لما سبقتنى ... آلهى آلهى چرا مرا وا گذاردى

□ **Matt 27:46**

Arabic = ... إلوِي إلوِي لما شبقتني ... إلهي إلهي لماذا تركتني

Persian = ... ايلى ايلى لما سبقتنى ... آلهى آلهى چرا ترك كردى

It will be observed that the Aramaic š^ebaqtanī ("you forsaken me"; קבש = "to forsake") has been transliterated as شبقتني / سبقتنى = shabaqtanī / sabaqtanī: the consonants of the (Aramaic) root of š^ebaqtanī, קבש correspond (correctly) with the Arabic ق + ب + ش. The Arabic ترك (> `taraka' = 'to let be, leave, relinquish, renounce, abandon') and the Persian وا گذاردى (vā-guzardī>vā-guzāshtan = 'to leave, abandon, dismiss, forsake') express the forsakeness.

Any reader (or hearer) of these verses with a little knowledge of Arabic and some ingenuity might, if perplexed by the note of forsakeness, propose that Jesus did not say š[s]^ebaqtanī (= "you forsaken me") but (Arabic) سبحتنى = sabaḥtanī, meaning "you glorified me". Such a 'rewrite' seems to have occurred to `Abdu'l-Bahā -- and/or an ingenue Bahā'ī drawing on an Islamic source (?). This especially in view of the frequent exclamation of the *tasbīḥ* (سبحان الله , subḥān Allāh , 'Praise/Glory be to God') by Muslims. ²

¹ The Arabic texts quoted here are taken from *al-Kītab al-Ahd al-Jadīd li-Rabbīnā wa wā Mukhalliṣina Yasū al-Masīḥ*.. (Cairo, 1938) and the Persian from *The Holy Bible in Persian* (reproduced by photography from the edition of 1904), 1978.

² Amongst my papers I have a note to the effect that `Abdu'l-Bahā' mentioned this "rewrite" to a Bahā'ī pilgrim. I have been unable to find the source of this note. In a letter dated 6th April 1982 from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (Bahā'ī World Centre) the following lines are contained: "The Research Department is aware of no authenticated

While this 'rewrite' might be acceptable to such as can accept a textually free 'spiritual' hermeneutic, from what has been said it should be obvious that it is essentially eisegetical. It involves an unacceptable exchange of consonants and ignores the fact that Jesus was quoting Psalm 22:1[2].¹

Though a comprehensive discussion of ancient and modern interpretations of Mk 15:34/Matt 27:46 is beyond the scope of this paper, the following selective and miscellaneous notes may be of interest before brief comment is made on references to the "cry of dereliction made by or attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahā and Shoghi Effendi.

As early as the second century CE. Mk. 15:34 / Matt. 27:46 appears to have been quoted by various (quasi-) gnostic Christians in order to tone down -- in accordance with their own peculiar "Christology" and soteriology -- the note of forsakeness or to illustrate a (quasi-) docetic view of Jesus' ministry and passion. In the non-cannonical *Gospel of Peter* (c.150 CE?) the following version of Jesus' cry from the cross is given:

ή δύναμίς μου, ή δύναμίς, κατέλεψάσο με
("My Power, O Power, thou hast forsaken me?") .

The substitution of "My Power.." for the name of God has been explained in a variety of ways. It may be indicative of a toning down of the "cry of dereliction" possibly with the implication of a (quasi-) docetic type separation of the exalted "Christ principle" from the crucified fleshy body.²

Irenaeus (c.115-c.190), it may be noted at this point, outlining certain

statement by the Master to the effect that the cry of Jesus from the Cross "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" is a textual error and that the actual cry was "My God, my God, how Thou hast glorified me!"..".

¹ None of the Arabic and Persian versions of Psalm 22:1[2] or Mk 15:34 / Matt 27:46 that I have been able to examine give any evidence for the "rewrite" mentioned by Backwell.

² Refer *Gospel of Peter* 5:19 in Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*.. 184. cf. 179-183. See also Rendel-Harris, 1893:34f, 47. It has also been suggested that the Gospel of Peter's "My Power..." is based on reading (Heb.) לִפְיָ ("Power") not (Heb.) לֵאלֹהִים ("God") or on a text of the type found in Aquila (= "My Power, my power, why hast thou forsaken me?") which may have adopted this reading in order to avoid the use of the sacred name of God (cf. Matt 26:64). cf. also Lindars, 1961:89f; Stendahl, n.d. [19XX]:85f; Grundy, 1967:65. fn.7.

speculations of the Valentinians in Bk.I. (l.16) of his *Against the Heresies* states that it was the passions endured by *Achamoth* (a hypostatization of the *Passion of Sophia* or the *Lower Sophia*) that are indicated by the "cry of dereliction". He attributes to the Valentinians the view that Jesus' cry from the cross has to do with Sophia's desertion by the "Light" (ΦΩΤΌΣ) and her being restrained by *Horos* (Όρου) the "Limit". Valentinian gnostics seem then to have taken Mk. 15:34 / Matt. 27:46 wholly out of context in the light of their abstruse soteriology which all but negates the concreteness of Jesus' passion.¹

Tertullian (c.160-c.220) in his *Adverses Praxeas* (c.210 CE) which is directed against certain forms of modalistic monarchianism (the view that Christ and the Spirit are temporary modes of God's manifestation) attempts to counter the view that the words "Why hast thou forsaken me?" mark the departure or separation of the man Jesus and the Christ-God. He writes,

"The cry is the cry of flesh and soul, i.e. of manhood, not of godhead, and shows the impassibility of the godhead which forsook the manhood in delivering it to death.. However, the Father did not forsake the Son; for the Son commended to him his own spirit; and so to be forsaken by the Father meant that the Son died. Consequently, according to the Scriptures, the Son's death as well as his resurrection was the Father's act." (Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, XXX trans., Evans, 1948:238).

The monarchian interpretation of Mk. 15:34 / Matt. 27:46, as Evans notes, has a "gnostic flavour" to it -- some early "orthodox" interpretations also come near to the "gnostic exegesis". Hilary of Poitiers (c.315-367.) for example, writes in his *Commentary on Matthew* (XXXIII), "The voice of the human body proclaims the departure of the Word." (see Evans 1948; Betterson, 1969:124 fn.3).

About eighty years before Tertullian wrote the words quoted above, Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (c.132 CE?) in the course of a commentary on Psalm 22 taken as a prophecy of Christ, states that Ps 22:1 "foreshewed from the first what was to be spoken in Christ's time." He indicates that the quotation of this verse in Matt/Mk proves that Jesus was "truly made man and sensible of suffering." (Justin, *Dialogue*. 98ff trans. in XXX, 1861:194ff).

The erudite Origen (c. 185-254 CE) in his *Commentary on Matthew* (XXXV)

¹ Refer, ANCL X:? (= *Adv. Haer.* 1.1.116). cf. Evans, 1948:329. On the complex Valentinian speculations see Jonas, 1963:174. ff.

taught that the dereliction of the Son by the Father began when he caused him to take "the form of a servant", this being intensified during the passion. The crucified Christ bore the sins of men in his own body as well as the consequences of these sins; namely, separation from God as indicated in the "cry of dereliction" (Evans, 1948:329-30).

In a homily on Matt. 27:45-8 (No.LXXXVIII) John Chrysostom (347-407) holds that Jesus cried out "My God, my God.." in his last hour in order to bear witness to the truth of the Hebrew Bible ('Old Testament') and illustrate to the bystanders that he honours God and is far from being His adversary. Jesus quoted "the prophet" (Ps 22:1) in order to show that he is of "one mind with that begat him". Since, Chrysostom also argues, Jesus cried out in a loud voice (Matt 27:50) after he uttered the "cry of dereliction", it is evident that he was still alive and that he laid down his life of his own accord (cf.Jn 10:18) (NPNF., I X:520ff).

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) makes several comments on Psalm 22:1 = Mk. 15:34 /Matt. 27:46 in his *Commentary on the Psalms*. Like Gregory Nazianzen (c. 330-390) who argued in his *Fourth Theological Oration* that Jesus quoted Ps 22:1 as one who took on the folly and transgressions of humanity, Augustine holds that it was not exactly Jesus who said "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" but the "old man" (sinful humanity) which is even ignorant of the reason why God has forsaken him.¹ Christ quoted Psalm 22:1 "as if speaking in our name" for, just as he took on the "flesh of sin" (Romans 8:3) so he spoke with the "voice of sin".²

Mk. 15:34/Matt. 27:46 was one of those texts used by Muslim apologists in order to counter the Christian assertion of Jesus' divinity. Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī (1058 -1111 CE) cites the (Hebrew/Aramaic) transliteration of the 'cry of dereliction', *llūl, llūl līmā safakhthānī* which may be translated, "My God, my God, why art thou leaving me?" in his *al-Radd al-Jamīl lilāhiyati` Isā.. Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus*. He argues that Jesus' cry from the cross (among other verses) underlines his subordination to God. Then, arguing for a divergence of wills with respect to Jesus and God he quotes Matt.

¹ Refer, Gregory Nazianzen, *Fourth Theological Oration* (delivered in Constantinople in defence of the Church's faith in the Trinity against the Eunomians and Macedonians) in NPNF, Series II.Vol.VII, 311

² Augustine, *Commentary on the Psalms* in NPNF., Series I.Vol. VIII on Psalm 22, p.58f; on Psalm 50 p.179; cf. also on Psalm 44 p.141; Psalm 42 p.137 and on Psalm 69 p.309.

26:39 and goes on to propose that Jesus' grief implicit in the "cry of dereliction" points to his ignorance of the reason for his crucifixion. This rather farfetched inference is the opposite of Augustine's suggestion that it was sinful humanity which was ignorant of the reason for its separation from God (refer, Windrow Sweetman, 1955: 18, 287).

No reference is made in the Qur'ān to Jesus' "cry of dereliction" and commentators on Qur'ān 4:155-162 (more explicitly the phrase *shubbiha lahum*) have often proposed that it was not Jesus who was crucified but someone who took on his appearance. i.e. Judas Iscariot. Bearing this in mind it is of interest to note that the so-called *Gospel of Barnabas*, most probably the forgery of a medieval Christian convert to Islam, states that Judas Iscariot was crucified naked and did nothing else but cry out, "God, why hast thou forsaken me, seeing the malefactor hath escaped and I die unjustly?" (see *Gospel of Barnabas*, Ch. 217 trans. , 268). This repugnant travesty of the passion is reminiscent of some of the more bizarre gnostic speculations borne of a radical docetism.

A not inconsiderable number of articles and comments on the "cry of dereliction" have been written by modern Biblical scholars and theologians from a variety of standpoints which cannot possibly all be registered here (see Appendix 1). Many who accept the historicity of Jesus' cry from the cross admit their failure to fathom its mystery. Some in varied and subtle ways attempt to tone down what they see as a "terrible and inexplicable utterance". Jesus' quotation of Psalm 22:1 is often taken in the light of the whole Psalm which, though it opens with the cry of an agonised righteous sufferer (verses 1-18(21)) moves on to suggest the vindication and triumph of one who fully trusts in God. Jewish midrashic evidence does indeed indicate that Psalm 22:1[2] was interpreted in the light of the whole Psalm and that its opening words were recited as a prayer for help in time of trouble. Dalman in his *Jesus-Joshua* drew attention to the following passage from the *Midrash on Esther*:

"When Esther instituted for herself her three-day fast, she prayed on the first day "My God". On the second day again she prayed "My God". On the third day again she prayed, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" But when at last she prayed with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" her prayer was answered at once." (Dalman, 1929:206 cited Branscomb, 1937:297).

In illustration of the different approaches modern Biblical scholars have taken to Jesus' "cry of dereliction" it may be noted that while McKenzie maintains that Matt. 27:46 expresses the prophetic fulfillment of Psalm 22:1[2] and is not to be taken as a

"cry of interior abandonment expressed by Jesus" (see JBC., II 1968:112) Fenton in the *Pelican New Testament Commentary on Saint Matthew* writes that these words ".express the sense of being abandoned by God in the face of hostility" (1963:443).

It was earlier noted that, as far as I am aware, Bahā'u'llāh does not refer to Mk. 15:34 / Matt. 27:46. A passage in one of the letters ("tablets") of `Abdu'l-Bahā does, however, contain a paraphrastic expansion of the "cry of dereliction". Speaking of Jesus' rejection by the Jews (in a Tablet to an American Bahā'ī?) `Abdu'l-Bahā notes that he was hung upon the cross and adds that he cried out:

"O My beloved Lord, how long wilt thou abandon me to them ? Lift Me up unto Thee, shelter Me close to Thee, make me a dwelling by Thy throne of glory. Verily thou art the answerer of prayers, and thou art the Clement, the Merciful. O My Lord! Verily this world with all its vastness can no longer contain Me, and I love this cross, out of love for Thy beauty, and yearning for Thy realm on high, and because of this fire, fanned by the gusts of Thy holiness, aflame within my heart. Help Me, O Lord, to ascend unto Thee, sustain Me that I may reach unto Thy sacred Threshold, O My loving Lord! Verily Thou art the Merciful, the Possessor of great bounty! Verily Thou art the Generous! Verily Thou art the Compassionate! Verily Thou art the All-Knowing! There is none other God save Thee, the Mighty, the Powerful!" (SWAB:40).

`Abdu'l-Bahā thus transforms the "cry of dereliction" into a prayer of Jesus to God. The opening line of this prayer indicates that it was not that Jesus thought that God has abandoned him in his last hour but that God had abandoned him to a people ("*to them* ") who rejected and crucified him. Jesus longs to ascend into the "realm on high" and, far from being in despair, loves and regards the cross as a means of release from the mortal world which is too narrow to contain the magnanimity of the crucified saviour. ¹

The following words are attributed to Shoghi Effendi (c.1897-1957, the late Guardian of the Bahā'ī Cause and great-grandson of Bahā'u'llāh) in the (unpublished) *Pilgrim Notes* of May Maxwell taken during January-March 1939,

"Christ's words: "Why hast thou forsaken me?" Bahā'u'llāh says Jesus was overwhelmed and the human element in Him became impatient. Jesus had his moments of fear and agitation; and the human element is

¹ This letter was probably written to an American Bahā'ī. Abdu'l-Bahā's interpretation of Jesus' cry of dereliction may have been influenced by certain lamentations contained in the writings or prayers and meditations of Bahā'u'llāh. cf. below on the 'Fire Tablet' and see Bahā'u'llāh's reference to Mk. 14:35b = Matt 26:39b= Lk 22:42b in (Shoghi Effendi, trans.) *Prayers and Meditations*.. 42.

always there in the Prophet." ¹

This remark, though it is not authoratative for Bahā'īs and probably does not record Shoghi Effendi's exact words, is of considerable interest. ²[34] Jesus' "cry of dereliction" is taken at face value. It is admitted in the light of the humanity of the Prophet that Jesus was impatient and that Prophets do have their moments of fear and agitation. Jesus' "cry of dereliction" does in fact remind us of a number of passages in the writings of Bahā'u'llāh in which He unburdens his soul to God. Perhaps the passage which most readily springs to mind are the following words of Bahā'u'llāh contained in his *Qad-iḥ tarāq al-mukhlisūn* ("Fire Tablet") :

قد تركت وحدة في ديارالغربة أين مشارق وفائك يا وفاء العالمين

"I have been *forsaken* in a foreign land: Where are the emblems of Thy faithfulness, O Trust of the worlds?..

Bahā is drowning in a sea of tribulation: Where is the Ark of Thy salvation, O Saviour of the Worlds?..

This Youth is lonely in a desolate land: Where is the rain of Thy heavenly grace, O Bestower of the worlds?"

(*Abwāb al-malākūt*, 56; *Qad Iḥ tarāq*, x).

The Arabic verse used by Bahā'u'llāh to express his being forsaken in the first line quoted above, ترك, *taraka*, is the same as that used in many of the Arabic translations of Jesus' "cry of dereliction" (see above).

We may conclude this examination of Mk 15:34/Matt 27:46 by proposing that a Bahā'ī interpretation of Jesus' 'cry of dereliction' might take into account both 'Abdu'l-Bahā's paraphrastic rewrite of Mk. 15:34 / Matt. 27:46 and Shoghi Effendi remarks that give weight to the often ignored or forgotten human aspect of the Manifestation of God. The 'rewrite' mentioned by Richard Backwell in his *The Christianity of Jesus* and accepted by a number of Bahā'īs has little real foundation, ingenuous and interesting though it is.

¹ Words attributed to Shoghi Effendi in 'Haifa Notes of Shoghi Effendi's Words, taken at Pilgrim House Table during the pilgrimage Mrs. May Maxwell and Miss Mary Maxwell (Jan. Feb. Mar. 1937) vol 1:9.

² Bahā'īs do not regard 'pilgrim notes' whether taken in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahā or Shoghi Effendi as authoratative expositions of Bahā'ī doctrine. cf. *Principles of Bahá'í Administration..* 34f. cf. also Ishrāq Khāvarī, (ed.) *Mā'idih*, 2:68.

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■ Appendix One -- Some selected articles on the 'Cry of Dereliction'.

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