

Adrian Schenker OP

University of Fribourg, Switzerland

MARTYRDOM AND SOTERIOLOGY IN 2 MACCABEES 7

THE CLOSEST BIBLICAL PARALLEL
WITH THE SAYINGS OF JESUS IN HIS LAST SUPPER

I. INTEREST OF 2 MACC 7 IN RELATION WITH SOTERIOLOGY IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT

The book of 2 Maccabees in general, and the chapter 2 Macc 7 in particular, are not among the favorites of Bible readers. It is well known that it is an abbreviation, a “reader’s digest” of a longer historical work in five books, now lost, written by a historian, Jason of Cyrene, of whom we know little more than the name, mentioned in 2 Macc 2: 23, in the preface of the book. Jason, a pious Jew, must have composed his work and the history of the Jewish martyrs shortly after the religious persecution of king Antiochos IV. Epiphanes in 167–164 B.C., and the abbreviation of 2 Maccabees may be dated not long after 124 B.C. since this year is the date of the first letter reproduced at the beginning of 2 Maccabees (1: 1–10).

The purpose of 2 Macc 7 is a theological interpretation on martyrdom.¹ Besides other aspects of martyrdom, its soteriological value is essential and this chapter is designed to stress this point. It is the aim of this present paper to demonstrate that this is indeed the purpose of the author, be it Jason or the abbreviator. The idea of martyrdom as salvation for the whole Jewish nation,

¹In this essay the bibliography cited is not exhaustive. Representative contributions with further bibliographical indications are privileged. For 2 Macc 7 cf. R. DORAN, *2 Maccabees. A Critical Commentary* (ed. H.W. Attridge; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012); J.A. GOLDSTEIN, *II Maccabees* (AB 41A; New York: Doubleday, 1983); F.-M. ABEL – J. STARCKY, *Les livres des Maccabées* (Bible de Jérusalem en fasc., 3d reviewed ed.; Paris: Cerf, 1961); F.-M. ABEL, *Les livres des Maccabées* (EB; Paris: Gabalda, 1949); J.W. VAN HENTEN (ed.), *Die Entstehung der jüdischen Martyrologie* (Leiden: Brill, 1989); J.W. VAN HENTEN, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People. A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (JSJ.S 57; Leiden: Brill, 1997).

and the way in which it is expressed, inevitably leads to a comparison with the idea of the saving death of Jesus in the N.T. and its expression, especially in his sayings in the Last Supper, since these words are among the most explicit statements on the redemptive nature of Christ's death in the gospels.²

In 2 Macc 7 martyrdom is intimately linked with the salvation of the whole Jewish nation. Martyrdom has several other dimensions, and it seems to be the goal of the author of 2 Macc 7 to display all these dimensions in a synthesis. However, the principal and foremost one is soteriological and thus the question arises as to whether this soteriological interpretation of martyrdom paves the way for the soteriology of the N.T., especially as implied in Jesus' sayings on bread and wine in his last supper. Paradoxically, this question is either neglected or hotly disputed in present-day N.T. research.³ The reason for this situation is the fact that 2 Macc 7 does not interpret the saving force of martyrdom as a vicarious substitution of the innocent for the guilty while most authors interpret the atoning force of Jesus' death, according to the N.T. in terms of vicarious substitution.⁴ It is the purpose of this paper to show that there is no closer parallel of 2 Macc 7:37–38 in the whole Bible than the synoptic and Pauline passages on the last supper.

I have already published a study on 2 Macc 7 and the Lord's sayings on the bread and the cup.⁵ This present paper goes a step farther than the previously

²This comparison was explicitly made by M. DE JONGE, "Jesus' Death for Others and the Death of the Maccabean Martyrs," in: T. BAARDA et al. (eds.), *Text and Testimony. Essays on N.T. and Apocryphal Literature in Honor of A.F.J. Klijn* (Kampen 1988), 142–151 = reprint M. DE JONGE, *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Collected Essays* (NTS 63; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 125–134.

³U. KELLERMANN, "Zum traditionsgeschichtlichen Problem des stellvertretenden Sühnetodes in 2Makk 7,37f. Otto Plöger zur Vollendung des 70. Lebensjahres," *Biblische Notizen* (1980) 63–83, here 69, shows this clearly: the saving power of the martyrs' death is their intercession which must be distinguished from substitution. H. SCHÜRMAN, *Jesu ureigener Tod. Exegetische Besinnungen und Ausblick* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 1975) 47, discards 2 Macc 7: 37–38 as a theological preparation for the idea of a saving death for others because it is only an intercession for the Jewish nation, not a substitution for it. This opinion is all the more surprising as Schürmann is the author who collected in his book, more carefully than most other authors, all traces in the historically verifiable traditions of Jesus, hinting at the idea of an atoning or beneficiary force of martyrdom for others.

⁴M. WOLTER, "Der Heilstod Jesu als theologisches Argument," in: J. FREY – J. SCHRÖTER (eds.), *Deutungen des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2005; unveränderte Studienausgabe UTB 2007) 297–313, especially 303–304, expresses a *caveat* concerning terms like substitution or atonement as definitions of N.T. ideas about a saving death for others. However Wolter denies the saving value of the martyrdom in 2 Macc 7 with quite insufficient arguments, p. 298, n. 4, as will be seen below.

⁵A. SCHENKER, "Das fürbittende Martyrium 2 Makk 7,37–38 und das Kelchwort Jesu" (*Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 50 [2003]) 283–292, reprinted in:

published one because it deepens the arguments offered there and adds new bibliographical material in dialogue with the ongoing research.

2. LITERARY AND THEOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF 2 MACC 7

The literary structure of the whole chapter is meaningful in itself: it consists of *ten sayings* on martyrdom. The first seven sayings are placed in the mouths of the elder sons; after them the mother speaks twice, and finally the youngest son concludes with the tenth and last saying. This is the longest one, it recapitulates the nine preceding ones, and adds, as its climax, the *soteriological* value of martyrdom. The soteriological value and effect of martyrdom for the Jewish nation bear the main weight of the whole chapter. It must be noted also that only one other protagonist in the narrative, who remains anonymous, is given a direct speech, 7: 7. Thus, principally, the mother and her seven sons, the martyrs, are quoted in sayings in direct speech. The extensive space given to the words of the martyrs in this story makes it clear that its weight does not consist in what is happening but in what is being said, i.e. on the *meaning* of what happens.

The *number ten* of the sayings suggests that the discourse on martyrdom is complete: what is essential in the matter has been touched upon. The ascending movement towards the culminating point of the sayings cited, arrived at in 7: 37–38, with a *ritardando* immediately before the climax with the insertion of a recapitulation in 7: 30–36, suggests the prime importance of this ultimate saying of the verses 37–38.

3. THE SERIES OF THE FIRST SEVEN SAYINGS, 7: 2, 6, 9, 11, 14, 16–17, 18–19

The first saying: 7: 2

This is the definition of martyrdom. The speaker is here the spokesman for all the brothers. He addresses himself to the king, who, by the way, is not named, no more than the martyrs themselves. This lack of personal names bestows on the story an exemplary, general meaning, independent of specific historical circumstances:

What do you intend to ask and learn from us? We are ready to die rather than to transgress the laws of our fathers.

A. SCHENKER, *Anfänge der Textgeschichte des Alten testaments. Studien zu Entstehung und Verhältnis der frühesten Textformen* (BWANT 194; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011) 225–234.

The laws of the fathers correspond of course to the *Torah*, the Law of God. Here it is designated as “laws of the fathers” in order to show that the loyalty to God’s revealed will creates the Jewish nation in history. This loyalty gives it its deepest identity through all generations.

Martyrdom is the preference given to death over betraying the Lord God in order to save one’s life. In other words: when faced with the alternative either to live while being disloyal to God, or to die while maintaining loyalty to him, the martyr prefers the latter over the former. Thus the plot of the narrative of 2 Macc 7 is propounded.

Second saying: 7: 6

These are the words of all the brothers and their mother together, addressed to the first son in his torment. They encourage him to persevere in his loyalty to the Lord:

The Lord God is watching over us. And in truth has compassion on us, as Moses clearly declared in his song that bore witness against the people to their faces, when he said, “And he will have compassion on his servants” (Deut 32: 36).

The citation of Deuteronomy follows the text of the Septuagint, 32: 36, line 2. God feels pity for those who are faithful to him. The compassion of the Lord is a pledge for hope amidst persecution and suffering. This certainty is founded on the prophetic word of Moses in the Torah. It is not an uncertain *human* wishful thinking. On the contrary, it is a divine promise; it is made by God and attested to in Scripture. However, how his compassion will become effective is not yet explained.

Third saying: 7: 9

This is the word of the second son, addressed to the king:

You accursed wretch! You dismiss us from this present life, but the king of the world will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we die for his laws!

The king of the universe will restore life to those who have lost their lives for his sake. Death accepted for God’s sake leads God to create a second life as compensation. This is not a possibility embedded in human nature. It is a special gift of God, king of all things, for his faithful servants. An extraordinary generosity on the part of the martyr *must* earn, as it were, the extraordinary grace of a new superior life on part of the Lord God.⁶

⁶Martyrdom and resurrection is the special aspect of 2 Macc 7 treated in the monograph

Fourth saying: 7: 11

The third son spontaneously stretched out his tongue and his hand saying:

I got these (limbs) from heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them. From him I hope to get them back again!

This saying repeats the preceding one on the resurrection, and as it is repeated, it is accentuated. It is still more important than the preceding ones. The tongue and hands are the specific privileges of men among the other living beings on earth. They represent language and human work in all its achievements.

Fifth saying: 7: 14

It is the fourth son who directly addresses a last word before dying to the king. The next two sayings (sayings 6 and 7) are destined to be said to the king as well. They will develop the theme “*de morte persecutorum*”, i.e. the responsibility and punishment of the persecutors of the faithful.

It is preferable to die by the hands of men, and to trust in God and hope to be raised again by him. For there will be no resurrection to life for you.

For the third time, the conviction in the resurrection of the martyrs is stated. It is a special grace for them. Sinners, like the king, will be excluded from this extraordinary divine gift. Thus the second part of this fifth speech alludes to the punishment of the king who is responsible for the death of the martyrs.

Sixth saying: 7: 16–17

The fifth son continues to speak to the king:

You have power over men though you also are mortal. Therefore you do what you please. However, do not think that our nation has been abandoned by God! Keep on, and see how his great power will torture you and your descendants.

This is a warning and a threat to the torturer of the pious Jews. He will have to account for his bloody persecution. Human power always tempts the mighty to forget that they are but mortal, and not almighty. Because of their power, tyrants run the permanent risk of believing that they are like God. This is an important biblical theme, from *Genesis* to *Revelation*.

of U. KELLERMANN, *Auferstanden in den Himmel. 2 Makkabäer 7 und die Auferstehung* (SBS 95; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1979).

Seventh saying: 7: 18–19

It is from the lips of the sixth son and brother:

Do not deceive yourself in vain: we are suffering on our own account since we have sinned against our own God. This is why such astonishing things happen (to us). As for you, do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God!

Thus the series of sayings by the first six brothers concludes with two final theological meanings of martyrdom. First, it may be itself a divine punishment for sin because, despite their martyrdom, the martyrs are not free of sins; second, the persecution of faithful persons is an onslaught on God himself. The Lord identifies himself with the persecuted believers, like Jesus identifies himself with the persecuted Church in Acts 9:4. According to the author, Jason, or the abbreviator, it is important to recall that the martyrs also are sinners, thus deserving punishment. While this is true, it is only one minor aspect in the whole picture, it is not central, and more importantly, the sin of the martyrs does not impede their intercessory grace and power in the presence of the Lord.

4. THE TWO SAYINGS OF THE MOTHER (SAYINGS 8 AND 9),
7: 22–23, 27–29

The narrator, probably Jason of Cyrene, now introduces three longer speeches, two from the lips of the mother, and the last and final one from the youngest son and brother. Obviously, they bear special weight. The words of the mother are inserted into a specially developed narrative framework, which, however, shall not be commented upon here. It suffices to say that the particular literary presentation of her words underscores their importance.

The two sayings of the mother of the martyrs follow a similar pattern. The first one is addressed to each one of her sons before they die, the second one to the youngest, after the death of all other brothers. In both her discourses she touches on two realities which she puts into a relationship with each other, and she concludes both sayings with an exhortation to persevere in loyalty to God's laws.

First she recalls her pregnancy, when she bore her sons, to whom she is speaking, in her womb. She describes the miracle of a new human being appearing in the womb of a mother, and she recalls thus to her sons the mystery of their origin and personality. The two descriptions are beautiful pieces of literature and sensibility. Second, she compares the origin of a baby with God's creation of the whole world, out of nothing, 7: 23, 28. I will not discuss here the famous

v. 28 (the only place where an equivalent of the term *creatio ex nihilo* seems to be used in the Bible).⁷ The two speeches of the mother, repeating the mystery of the origins of human persons and of the universe, produce a striking effect. They serve as foundation of the belief in resurrection granted to martyrs. According to v. 23, the creative power of God, together with his pity, explain why God is going to restore the life the martyrs had given up for him, the Lord. Moreover, in v. 29 the mother adds a further important dimension of that faith in the resurrection of the martyrs: the mother will find again her sons, in the restored life of resurrection. Life in the resurrection implies ties of human affection and love. They will be preserved by God, undoubtedly because they essentially belong to personal human life.

The two speeches of the martyrs' mother have one and the same conclusion. It resumes the fundamental meaning of martyrdom: loyalty to God's laws must be preferred to temporal earthly life against God's revealed commandments.

5. THE LAST SAYING 7:30–38: MARTYRDOM AND INTERCESSION

The youngest son pronounces the final and conclusive speech. It is the tenth word on the meaning of martyrdom in this chapter and he addresses it to the king. First he summarizes anew what his brothers and his mother have said: v. 30 corresponds to vv. 2 and 23; v. 31 resumes v. 1; vv. 32–33 take up v. 18; vv. 34–35 recall vv. 17 and 19, while v. 36 repeats vv. 9, 11, 14, 22–23, namely the prominent theme of the resurrection. In vv. 37–38, at the end of his discourse, however, he adds a *new dimension* of martyrdom. It is propounded for the first time and represents the climax of the theology of martyrdom in 2 Macc 7. It is its *soteriological* meaning.

It is best to translate each phrase of vv. 37–38, and to comment on each of its elements.⁸

v. 37a: As for me, like my brothers, I will give up both my body and my life (soul) for the laws of the fathers

The martyrs “give” their body and life (or soul): the verb “to give” is in Greek “*prodidónai*.” The preposition *pro-* suggests either to *give in advance* or to hand

⁷The text of v. 27 is not entirely certain, and the interpretation is controversial, cf. U. KELLERMANN, *Auferstanden in den Himmel* (n. 6), pp. 72–78; R. DORAN, *2 Maccabees* (n. 1), p. 161 with n. 44.

⁸J.W. VAN HENTEN, “Jewish Martyrdom and Jesus’ Death,” in: J. FREY – J. SCHRÖTER, *Deutungen des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament* (n. 4) 139–168, similarly offers a close analysis of the two verses on the level of vocabulary. Strangely enough, the vocabulary of prayer or intercession, central in v. 37, is missing.

over, to deliver, to give up; it may also mean: to do without, to dispense with. The double expression, a merism, “body and soul”, or rather “body and life”, may mean the whole person in this earthly existence, or more probably here “my body and my life”, cf. 2 Macc 14:38: 15:30.⁹ The circumstantial phrase “for, *perì* in Greek, the laws of the fathers” explains the reason for abandoning life on this earth: in order to save, or to protect these revealed laws against transgression, in pious fear of God.¹⁰ Their integrity is more important than life on earth. They are worth that extremely high price, namely the loss of life.

The seventh son cannot imagine a life outside, or against, the Law, which is the revealed will of the Lord. Such a life would exclude him from God, his creator, and from his people as well as from his family, mother and brothers. This resumes the decision the martyr is taking.

We ought to draw our attention already to the similarity of the expression in v. 37: “I will give my body for...” with Jesus’ saying in the last supper on the bread: “This is my body that is for you,” according to Paul (1 Cor 11:24), and Luke (22: 19): “This is my body given for you.”

v. 37b: calling on God

This second phrase of the verse is construed in Greek as a *participium coniunctum*: *epikaloumenos tôn theón*. As an accompanying action, the martyr’s calling on God inseparably belongs to the main one, the giving up of body and life. To call on God means to pray. While the martyr is giving up his body and soul, at the same time, he is appealing to God in prayer. He adds this calling upon the Lord God to the giving of his person, prayer and gift go together. Since the prayer will be heard by God, as the events following the death of the martyrs prove,¹¹ the readers of 2 Macc 7 understand that the martyrdom together with the prayer of the martyrs in favour of their nation is beneficiary for them. The prayer of the martyrs linked to their death assumed has the reconciling and atoning effect for the people.¹²

⁹The translations of v. 37 generally prefer “body and life.”

¹⁰The free will of the martyrs to prefer death over transgression of the Law is accentuated in 2 Macc 6: 30.

¹¹This is shown especially by U. KELLERMANN, “Zum traditionsgeschichtlichen Problem des stellvertretenden Sühnetodes in 2 Makk 7,37f,” (n. 3), p. 72–74. H. SCHÜRMAN, *Jesu ureigener Tod* (n. 3) p. 47, did not take into account that the prayer of the martyrs in 2 Macc 7,37–38 is embedded in a narrative context which shows that God has in fact exauced their prayer, and thus, that it is, together with the martyrdom, effective for the forgiving of the sins of the people and the reconciliation with God. Therefore Schürmann discarded the parallel between Jesus’ martyrdom and the Jewish martyrs of 2 Macc 7 as “merely deprecative,” i.e. not effectively beneficiary for others.

¹²Martyrdom with intercession is the specific difference with the noble death of the ideal

v. 37c: in order to be soon reconciled with the nation and to force you with trials and plagues to confess that he alone is God

This part of the verse discloses the content of the prayer of the martyr in a twofold clause, constructed with an infinitive. Literally translated, the first plea is the appeasement of God, i.e. the atonement granted to the whole people. Since this first plea will be taken up again in the following v. 38 this clearly is the main request of the prayer. "Appeasement" seems to imply human efforts to soothe an angry God. However, the expression as such has this meaning of appeasement or soothing. It refers to reconciliation which is the grace of forgiving and of restoring communion.

In his second entreaty, the martyr asks the Lord to humble the boundless pride of the king, his *hybris*. The first and principal content of the prayer is thus an *intercession* for the whole nation. The martyr adds an intercession for others to his martyrdom.

The intercession joined to martyrdom makes it a blessing, not only for the martyr, but for many others for whom he is interceding. Martyrdom overflows in saving grace for many. The reason for the power of the intercession of martyrs is due to the gift of their life, their faithfulness to the Lord, on the one hand and, on the other, their prayer in favour of others. They do not claim anything for themselves. Thus, there is no possible reason for the Lord to deny a favorable answer to the intercession of martyrs. How could he remain deaf to their prayer since the martyr could not have given more to the Lord than his life for loyalty to him, and since his prayer is for others? In conclusion, martyrdom in connection with intercession is a "sacrament" of salvation, a visible reality in this world which is an infallible source of saving grace.¹³

Hellenistic hero. He dies in a beautiful human achievement, in a high deed of virtue while the Jewish martyrs die calling on God to "use," or to take into account, their generous death in order to grant forgiveness and reconciliation to the whole Jewish nation. It is a *religious* ideal, prepared in the O.T. by the saving role of intercession in the Pentateuch. H.S. VERSNEL, "Making Sense of Jesus' Death. The Pagan Contribution," in J. FREY – J. SCHRÖTER (eds.), *Deutungen des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament* (n. 4) 213–294, here 257–267, in polemical terms, rejects any reconciling effects of the martyrs' death in 2 Macc 7 generally, and in 7: 37–38 particularly. His position suffers from two wrong premises: a death beneficiary for others must be defined as vicarious death for guilty persons; the martyrdom and intercession in v. 37 must be seen as two separate events, see next note.

¹³It is true that the martyrs do not die for others, as Versnel, "Making Sense of Jesus' Death. The Pagan Contribution" (n. 12), pp. 257–258, claims. However, against his interpretation, they do neither die as philosophers for their creed or as patriotic heroes for their *polis*. They die while praying God to save their nation. This does not in the least imply vicarious dying. Atonement is an act of compensation, not of substitution, cf. A. SCHENKER, *Knecht und lamm Gottes (Jes 53). Übernahme von Schuld im Horizont der Gottesknechtlieder* (SBS 190; Stuttgart: Katholisches

v. 38: That the anger of the Almighty might come to an end in me and in my brothers, which has justly burst out against our whole nation.

This last phrase bears the full weight of the last word of the whole story and of all the preceding speeches. It concludes the theology of martyrdom in 2 Macc 7. It consists of the intercession of the youngest brother which explicitly includes the intercession of all others. It expects the salvation of the whole nation because of the martyrs-intercessors. For that reason the catastrophe of the religious persecution will turn out as a time of grace, reconciliation and salvation for the whole Jewish nation.

The term “anger” is here, as in most cases in Scripture, the contrary of “grace”, so to speak “non-grace.” The Israelite nation had lost the grace of the Lord. The martyrs pray to the Lord for the nation while they die for faithfulness to God. This prayer cannot but be heard and answered.

6. JESUS SAYINGS IN HIS LAST SUPPER IN LIGHT OF SAVING MARTYRS-INTERCESSORS

The theology of martyrdom developed in 2 Macc 7 opens an access to a deep understanding of Jesus’ actions and words in his last supper.

Some fifty years ago Heinz Schürmann (1913–1999), the famous exegete of the New Testament at the only Catholic faculty of theology in the German Democratic Republic, in Erfurt, had tried to interpret Jesus’ sayings on the bread and cup in the last supper in light of what Jesus did when he pronounced these words. The historicity, literary development and the authenticity of these words were — and are — disputed in the exegetical debate. In order to widen the perspective Schürmann proposed to complete the analysis of the words in

Bibelwerk, 2002); *id.*, *Douceur de Dieu et violence des hommes. Le quatrième chant du serviteur de Dieu* (Connaître la Bible, 2; Bruxelles: Lumen vitae, 2002). On the level of *penal* law, innocent or righteous people may not be punished for guilty ones in order to restore justice and peace. On the contrary, this would be utterly unjust, today as in biblical Antiquity, cf. e.g. Gen 18: 23, 25 etc. On the level of *civil* law, however, compensation for guilt with its responsibility for damages caused is an *absolute* necessity in biblical law. Martyrdom for faithfulness to God, and intercession for sinners are two forms of compensation for sins, cf. e.g. Exod 32: 7–14 etc. In the realm of “civil” reparation and compensation, there is no injustice at all in a person’s taking on the duty of compensation for others. Moreover, in order to be a martyr and an intercessor there is no need to be righteous. A sinner may be a martyr pleasing to God, and he may pray for other sinners, and if he does this it will be an act of piety, and thus of righteousness, 2 Macc 7: 18, 32, 37. Moreover, it is possible that 2 Macc 6–7 is of a proper literary origin, in the whole book of 2 Macc, nevertheless in the present redaction of the book, these two chapters are the turning point from distress and persecution to a new welfare of the whole nation.

themselves with Jesus' actions with bread and wine at that supper, as they appear in the passion narratives in the synoptic gospels and in Paul. These actions of Jesus are the context for his words and thus they shed light on the words. Schürmann was led to this innovative approach by his earlier researches into the last supper narrative in Luke.¹⁴

In this context of the action, the verbs play an important role: Jesus took bread, broke it, i.e. divided it and shared it with the twelve, gave it to them, and said: take it ...; he took the cup, gave it to them and all of them drank from it (Mark 14:22–23 par). The bread given and Jesus' own cup shared with the twelve in a farewell meal mean the eschatological salvation Jesus is expecting for him and for his disciples, and at the same time his death, namely the body "given" and the blood "offered." Schürmann explained the relationship between the meal, shared by the twelve with Jesus, on the one hand as representing the promised salvation in the kingdom of God, and on the other, as Jesus' death given as nourishment. This implies that the death of Jesus has a role in the accomplishment of the salvation in the kingdom. It is in some way instrumental for the realization of the kingdom of God in favour of the twelve and beyond them.

Schürmann asks in this connection the question whether the disciples might have been able to understand this theology of eschatological salvation and Jesus' death "for" them, implied in the last supper, words and actions, they had shared with him before his arrest and suffering.

Jesus' last supper with the twelve, according to the synoptic gospels and Paul, was a farewell meal, with the eschatological promise that their communion would be restored in the Kingdom of God. Jesus himself divided the bread and offered his own cup of wine to the disciples, accompanying these gestures with the explanation of their meaning. His body and his blood, signifying his martyrdom, were the gifts Jesus gave his disciples. Thus they understood that the eschatological communion promised to them, beyond Jesus' death, was the fruit of these gifts.

It seems that another, complementary answer could have been added: it is the idea of the martyr-intercessor for his people, developed by Jason of Cyrene and transmitted by his abbreviator, possibly, by the way, by the martyrs themselves in the persecution of the religious Jews in the mid-second c. B.C. In this conception of an intercessory martyrdom, reconciling God to sinners because of the martyrs' loyalty to God and their prayer for their nation, the two essential dimensions in Jesus' last supper are already linked together: sharing the eschatological salvation in the kingdom of God, because of the resurrection promised

¹⁴H. SCHÜRMAN, *Jesu ureigener Tod. Exegetische Besinnungen und Ausblick* (n. 3). Here the bibliography of Schürmann's numerous writings on the Last Supper is recorded.

to the martyrs, and sharing the fruit of Jesus' death, the martyr for truthfulness to his Father.

Schürmann had excluded this possibility.¹⁵ In fact, the parallel between 2 Macc 7: 37–38 and the deeds and words of the last supper of Jesus and the twelve is manifest on the level of vocabulary and of conception. The expression “I give my body” literally occurs only in 2 Macc 7:37 and in Jesus' word on the bread; the prayer mentioned in v. 37 has its parallel in the context of prayer of the last supper;¹⁶ the blessing prayers at the last supper explain the gifts of bread and wine as saving grace “for” you or “for” many; Jesus who is pronouncing these prayers is about to die as a martyr for his truthfulness to his Father. Thus a full parallelism exists between these two sets of narratives in 2 Maccabees and in the accounts of the last supper in the gospels and in Paul. They are too different to be directly dependent on each other; they are too close to be of an independent religious conception of the saving force of the intercessory prayer addressed to God by a martyr.

7. TWO CONCLUDING REMARKS, HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL

Historical remark: the Jewish origin of 2 Macc 7

The abridged book of 2 Maccabees, but also Jason's original work were composed in Greek and in the Hellenistic style. That's why many interpreters see in it a piece of Greek literature, e.g. the historian of Greek literature, H.S. Versnel¹⁷ treats 2 Macc 7 under the heading: “the pagan contribution.” This may help to explain why this chapter is hardly cited in the studies devoted to the sayings of Jesus on bread and cup in the last supper.

In fact, 2 Macc 7 is not situated in the Aramaic speaking world of Jesus and his disciples in the first c. B.C. and A.D.¹⁸ but the martyrdom of the years 167–164 B.C. had taken place in Judea. Its theological interpretation followed the event not only in Greek speaking Jewish circles, as the book of Daniel proves. An intercession which saves the whole nation from the anger of God, is a central

¹⁵ See above note 11.

¹⁶ The last supper is a liturgical meal, and the words of explanation accompanying Jesus' actions with bread and wine most probably correspond to the blessing of the bread at the beginning of the meal and to the blessing and thanksgiving on the cup at the end of it, cf. SCHÜRMANN, *Jesu ureigener Tod* (n. 3).

¹⁷ H.S. VERSNEL, “Making Sense of Jesus' Death. The Pagan Contribution,” in: J. FREY – J. SCHRÖTER (eds.), *Deutungen des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament* (n. 4), pp. 213–294, here 256–276.

¹⁸ M. HENGEL, *The Atonement. The Origin of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1981) 60, mentions this difficulty without proposing a solution. More recently, in the monumental work of J.P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew*, 2 Macc 7: 37–38 is not cited once!

biblical idea, present in prominent places in the *Pentateuch*, Exod 32:11–14, 30–35; 33:12–17; 34:9; Num 14:13–19; Deut 9:25–29, in the prophets, notably in Amos 7 and Jeremiah 7–14, and in particular in the Fourth Song of the Servant of the Lord, Isa 53:12 where the Servant of the Lord is a martyr according to 53:7–8, 9–10. The intercession of martyrs is therefore not a unique idea of Greek Hellenistic Judaism. It is a genuine biblical conviction of the Old Testament in several of its books and in prominent places.

Theological remark: a martyr's saving intercession

The main difficulty modern research finds in the parallel between 2 Macc 7:37–38 and Jesus' sayings on the bread and cup in his last supper is however elsewhere. It is almost always argued that in 2 Macc 7 there is no "vicarious death" of the martyrs for, or instead of, the sinful nation.¹⁹ The vast majority of authors link this idea to the substitution of the guilty by an innocent, the so called vicarious suffering and death. In fact, death beneficiary for others belongs to compensation. Indeed, faithfulness to God until martyrdom may make up for rejection of God, and one martyr may make up for the rebellion of many against God because such a martyrdom is the opposite of apostasy and sin. On the contrary,

¹⁹This is the exclusive argument of VERSNEL, "Making Sense" (n. 3), p. 257, 259. For J. SCHRÖTER, "Sühne, Stellvertretung und Opfer. Zur Verwendung analytischer Kategorien zur Deutung des Todes Jesu," in: J. FREY – J. SCHRÖTER, *Deutungen des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament* (n. 4), pp. 51–71, here especially pp. 60–66 and 69–70, atonement ("Sühne") also corresponds to vicarious suffering for the guilty. Moreover, according to him, atonement is no biblical idea because there is no specific terminology for it in the Bible. However, besides specific terminologies, there exist specific institutions corresponding to constellations of various terms, such as e.g. kingdom, cult, sacrifice etc. For atonement, the seminal institution is the *composition* (in its juridical meaning), namely the mechanisms of reconciliation, mutual consent and negotiated agreement between conflicting parties. These procedures aiming at putting an end to conflicts through compensation offered and accepted, were vital in all ancient societies and most prominent in the oriental laws in Antiquity. They were to replace punishments, in the interest of a final settlement of conflicts, saving the face of both parties, and beneficial for the peace of the surrounding community, threatened by conflicts in its midst. *Composition replaces punishments* which do not reinforce social cohesion because of the resentments they create. That is why composition is preferable. It is certainly easy to understand why this most important art of composition between humans was transposed to the relationship between God and humans. Indeed, religious guilt corresponds in many ways to guilt against fellow citizens. The risk of guilt in relation with the deity is frequent, and, accordingly, the need of mechanisms and procedures of reconciliation, or propitiation, replacing punishment, is most urgent. Compensation offered and agreed upon are indispensable in such agreements between conflicting parties. Thus atonement corresponds to compensation. As a grace, God grants propitiatory compensations, e.g. sacrifices, intercession, frankincense etc., sinners readily accept and offer them in order to appease the deity, and thus peace may be restored between them. Without such appeasing possibilities the relationship between the deity and men would be impossible. This is the profane and religious institution, everywhere present in the O.T. and N.T., and resumed by the terms "composition" and "atonement."

if a righteous man replaces a guilty one in punishment then this substitution can never restore justice. Such a punishment is simply unjust.²⁰

In 2 Macc 7:37–38 it is the martyrs' death together with their intercession which appeases God's anger and reconciles him with the people. Both elements, the death of the martyrs and their intercession combined, produce salvation. Neither one is superfluous, both are necessary.

Moreover, the martyrs are persuaded that God will raise them after their death to a new, superior life. In the life of resurrection they have immediate access to God's throne in heaven. Their intercession will be powerful for this reason.²¹

Could there be a better conclusion and synthesis for the joint value of martyrdom and intercession than a word of St. Ambrose speaking of Jesus Christ:

Quae maior hostia, quod praestantius sacrificium, qui melior advocatus quam qui pro peccatis omnium factus est deprecatio et animam suam dedit pro nobis redemptionem?²²

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²⁰A. SCHENKER, art. "Sühne", in: *TRE* 32 (Berlin: de Guyter, 2001) 333–338; ID., art. "Sühne", in: *Neues Bibellexikon*, Bd. 3 (Zürich: Benziger, 2001), 720–727; ID., "Du Messie 'maudit' au Messie de bénédiction. Deut 21,22–23 et Gal 3,13," in: E. DURAND (ed.), *FS Michel Gourgues* (Leuven. Peeters) (in print).

²¹U. KELLERMANN, "Zum traditionsgeschichtlichen Problem des stellvertretenden Sühnetodes in 2 Makk, 7,37f" (n. 3), pp. 79–80, has drawn the attention to this important point.

²²ST. AMBROSIUS, *Explanatio Psalmorum XII*, ed. M. Petschenig, *S. Ambrosii Opera* (CSEL 64), p. 369, ll. 25–28 (on Ps 48: 14–15).

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MARTYRDOM AND SOTERIOLOGY IN 2 MACCABEES 7. THE CLOSEST BIBLICAL PARALLEL WITH THE SAYINGS OF JESUS IN HIS LAST SUPPER

S U M M A R Y

The aim of this paper is to show that there is no closer parallel in the whole Bible of the sayings of Jesus on bread and wine in the Last Supper according to the Synoptic gospels and Paul than 2 Macc 7:37–38. In order to achieve this purpose, the author first analyses 2 Macc 7 as a theological interpretation on martyrdom and argues that this chapter focuses especially on the soteriological value of the sacrifice of one's life, linking martyrdom with the salvation of the whole Jewish nation. Such a soteriological interpretation of martyrdom paves the way for the soteriology of the N.T., especially as implied in Jesus' sayings on bread and wine in the Last Supper.

KEYWORDS: 2 Maccabees 7, Last Supper, soteriology, martyrdom, intercession

SŁOWA KLUCZE: 2 Mch 7, Ostatnia Wieczerza, soteriologia, męczeństwo, wstawiennictwo