

This cantata was written in 1645 by Heinrich Schütz, a German composer and organist. In it, passages from the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are linked together to form an account of the suffering and death of Jesus that highlights the seven statements he made as he died on the cross.

The text of the Seven Words of Christ from the Cross is unusual in that it includes elements taken from all four canonical Gospels.

Schütz' setting is organized in the form of an arch, with the two outer movements being meditations on the passion set for five-part chorus. After the first choral movement and before the last one is an instrumental movement (the two instrumental movements are identical). The middle of the arch is a sort of musical play, sung by four evangelists (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) with various voices taking the parts of Jesus, the two thieves, and the disciple John. Solo parts in this movement are sung by Paul Gibson, Mary Cassaday Jones, Mary Wyant, Jonathon McDonald, and Javonta Jackson.

THE SEVEN WORDS FROM THE CROSS Heinrich Schütz

I. OPENING CHORUS

Since Christ our Lord was crucified,
And bore the spear-wound in his side
With pain and anguish cruel,
Keep in your heart the words he spoke
Each like a holy jewel.

II. INTERLUDE

III. PASSION NARRATIVE

And it was close upon the third hour,
When they crucified the Lord, and Jesus spoke:
"Father, Father, Father forgive them
For they do not know what they do."

There stood by the cross of Jesus
Mary His mother,
Mary His mother's sister,
The wife of Cleophas,
Also Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus therefore saw his mother
standing near by the cross
with the loved, the dearest of his disciples, He spoke:
"Lo! Woman, lo!
Woman this is thy Son, thy Son."
Then to His disciple He said:
"Beloved! Beloved! This is thy mother,
Behold her, Behold her, thy mother!"
From that moment forth that disciple took her.

Straight-way, one of the malefactors,
which had been hanged railed on Him and said:
"If thou be Christ, if thou be Christ,
then help thyself and us."

Straight-way answered the other,
Chiding him, and spoke:
"Oh! Thou, oh! Thou, has thou then no fear of God?
Seeing thou the same condemnation has,
Indeed, we are justly condemned;
For we receive due reward for deeds which we have wrought;
But remember, but remember,
Naught amiss hath ever this man done."

And unto Jesus He said:
"Lord, be mindful of me, Lord,
Be mindful of me, when thou to thy kingdom comest."

And Jesus said:
"Truly I say to thee,
You with me shall today in Paradise be."

And at about the ninth hour,
He cried aloud and said:
"Eli, Eli, Eli lama Sabachthanil"

Which is interpreted:
"My God, my God, my God,
Wherefore, wherefore has thou forsaken me?"

And after this when Jesus knew that all things were done,
That the Word might be fulfilled, he said:
"I thirst! I thirst!"
And one among the soldiers present ran in haste,
filled a sponge with vinegar and hyssop;
and brought it, and put it upon a reed,
and to His lips he raised it,
and gave Him to drink.

Now when Jesus the vinegar had received, He said:
"It is finished. It is finished."

And once again He cried aloud and said:
"Father, Father,
My spirit I commend into Thy hands."

And after He had thus spoken,
He inclined His head,
And gave up His spirit.

IV. INTERLUDE

V. CLOSING CHORUS

Now, now ye who honor the woes of God,
And oft recall His seven words,
Will find your God ever present,
Both here on earth, where once He trod,
And there, and there in life everlasting,
And there, in the light of Heaven.