

THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF CHRIST

Comparing the Settings
of César Franck and Théodore Dubois

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Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Today you will be with me in paradise.

Behold your son: behold your mother.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

I thirst.

It is finished.

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

There are some thirty settings of the Seven Last Words of Christ, beginning with Heinrich Schütz's *Die sieben Worte Jesu Christi am Kreuz*, SWV 478 in 1645 and continuing through the most recent contribution to the genre, Michael J. Trotta's *Septem Ultima Verba*, which premiered in 2017. Of these thirty works, twenty-three are extant choral settings. This article will focus on two consecutive settings from the nineteenth century: César Franck's *Sept Paroles du Christ sur la Croix* (1859) and Théodore Dubois's *Les Sept Paroles du Christ* (1867). While the Dubois setting is arguably his best-known work, the Franck languishes in relative obscurity. Beyond bringing attention to the latter, this study aims to identify parallels between the two works.

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Even a rudimentary comparison reveals striking similarities. Both are lengthy works (each approximately forty-five minutes) written by French composers who set this text in Latin during the Romantic era. Not only were they composed in the same temporal vicinity, but they were also composed within the same geographic vicinity—Paris—because Franck and Dubois worked together at Sainte Clotilde in the sixth arrondissement. Dubois was no doubt familiar with Franck’s setting and likely wrote his setting in intentional emulation of the earlier work. Despite the popularity of Dubois’s work, little previous scholarly mention has been made as to what extent Dubois’s *Seven Last Words* leans on the previous work of

his colleague. Howard E. Smither’s four-volume “A History of the Oratorio” devotes two sentences to the commonalities:

Curiously enough, the text that Dubois used appears to depend heavily on that of Franck’s piece, composed eight years earlier. For instance, both begin with an introductory chorus, “O vos omnes” (an antiphon for Matins on Holy Saturday), which is followed by a verse from Ruth, and both select strophes from the sequences “Stabat Mater” as a commentary on the third “last word.”¹



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Dennis Shrock, in his well-known *Choral Repertoire*, outlines the connections similarly briefly:

[Dubois's] oratorio, modeled on Franck's work of the same name, has a Latin text, a prologue that begins with the phrase 'O vos omnes' and ends with a passage from Ruth 1:20, and the 'Stabat Mater' included as part of the third of the seven last words. Dubois' work is more dramatic than Franck's, however, and is distinguished by an orchestral passage that depicts the earthquake following the death of Jesus.²

These four sentences seem to be the extent of the scholarly comparison previously published in English.³ These scholars acknowledge that Dubois's work is modeled off Franck's; this article will examine the overlaps in more detail.

Placing Both Works in Biographical Context

Though he is generally considered to be a French composer, César Franck (1822–1890) was actually born in Liege, Belgium. In 1835 his family moved to Paris so that the young Franck could study at the Conservatoire, then under the directorship of Luigi Cherubini, and he spent most of his life in Paris thereafter. By the time of the composition of *Les Sept Paroles du Christ sur la Croix* in 1859, Franck was both the choirmaster (since 1853) and organist (since 1858) at Sainte-Clotilde. Normally these two jobs were distinct positions: Franck, however, had won the position of organist during a competition for the post after the installation of a new Cavaillé-Coll organ, which at the time was acclaimed as one of the finest in all of Paris.⁴ He would remain at this church for the rest of his life, and his funeral would be held there in 1890. Camille Saint-Saëns and Leo Delibes were among his pallbearers.

As dated on the last page of the manuscript, Franck concluded *Les Sept Paroles du Christ sur la Croix* on August 14, 1859, which was about a year after he had been named both organist and choirmaster at Sainte-Clotilde. As such, it was one of the first major works he would have composed there. He may well have intended it for performance on Good Friday (or during Lent) in 1860,

but as Dubois had taken over the choirmaster duties under Franck at Sainte-Clotilde by that point, this could explain why the work may not have ever been performed. No record exists of any performance during Franck's lifetime, and the manuscript only surfaced in 1954 when it was acquired by the University of Liege Library from a private owner; previous to this, the work was unknown to Franck biographers, and several biographies published since do not even mention it.

Théodore Dubois (1837–1924) was born in Rosnay, a small village near Reims in France, and this remained his spiritual home for much of his life; he would often return in the summer to compose. Like Franck, he too studied at the Paris Conservatoire, starting in 1854. While a student, Dubois worked briefly as the organist at St Louis-des-Invalides (beginning in 1855) but was soon named the choirmaster at Sainte-Clotilde, under Franck (beginning in 1858). He won the Prix de Rome in 1861 and, like most previous winners such as Berlioz, Gounod, and Bizet, spent two years studying in Italy.⁵ He returned to Sainte-Clotilde as choirmaster from 1863 until 1869, and it was during this time that *Les Sept Paroles du Christ* was composed. Thus, these two French compositions of similar title were composed eight years apart, not just in the same capital city, but at the same church.

Jann Pasler, the author of the New Grove article on Dubois, makes a connection between his famous *Seven Last Words* and his Roman education:

Musically, Dubois is perhaps best known for his religious works, some of which have remained in the repertory of French churches for decades. The oratorio *Les sept paroles du Christ* (1867), for example, was performed by the Société des Concerts [the community group Dubois himself conducted] twice in 1872 and continued to be used at Good Friday concerts until well into the 20th century. Ernest Reyer, who attended its première at Ste Clotilde, said the score was "as important as a comic opera, its style resembling 16th-century Italian music given new life with modern harmonies and varied rhythms."⁶

As a teacher of composition at the Paris Conservatoire, Dubois composed a fair number of works, but

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aside from his Seven Last Words, they are generally not well known today.⁷ *Les Sept Paroles du Christ* is Dubois's first oratorio and dates from early in his compositional career; in fact, he only has a single major work—an overture from 1865—that predates it. If *Les Sept Paroles* were a compositional experiment on Dubois's part, it was surely a successful one, as this was the work that propelled him to fame in his home country. This makes it more likely Dubois was using Franck's earlier work as a model when he composed his own. Table 1 provides a concise comparison between the two settings of the Seven Last Words.

Textual Connections

The connections between Dubois's and Franck's Seven Last Words can be broadly fit into two main categories: textual and musical. In any setting of Christ's Seven Last Words, the textual constant will be the eight short

sentences that comprise the actual Seven Last Words of Christ. Of even more interest to this study, however, will be the additional texts included in any composition by this title. Seven Last Words settings enjoy a certain textual latitude because composers were not—by definition, *could* not be—restricted to a given Evangelists' version of events and so were free to incorporate extra-biblical sources and be more textually expressive. Table 2 compares the additional textual tropes included by each composer.

Table 2 illustrates seven major points of commonality between the texts used by Franck and Dubois.

- 1) That both works have a prologue at all is already a similarity. While it had been done before—for example, textlessly with F. Joseph Haydn's *Die sieben letzten Worte unseres Erlösers am Kreuze*—there is no established tradition what text might introduce the Seven Last Words. Charles Gounod, for example, in his *Seven Last*

Table 1. A Comparison of the Franck and Dubois Settings

	César Franck	Théodore Dubois
Lifespan of composer	1822–1890	1837–1924
Full Title	<i>Les Sept Paroles du Christ sur la Croix</i> ⁸	<i>Les Sept Paroles du Christ</i>
Year of Composition	1859	1867
Age of Composer at Time of Composition	37	30
Location of Composition	St. Clothild, Paris	St. Clothild, Paris
Language	Latin	Latin
Vocalists Required	ST(T)B soloists and SA(A)TB choir	STB soloists and SATB choir
Instrumentalists Required	two flutes, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tympani, harp, and five string parts	two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tympani, harp, organ, and five string parts
Total Number of Movements	Eight	Eight
Approximate Duration	44 minutes	46 minutes

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Words of 1855, selected Christ's words from the *Via Dolorosa*, the words Christ uttered on the way to the cross.⁹ The fact that both Franck and Dubois insert the same two Old Testament tropes, Lamentations 1:12–13 and Ruth 1:20, cannot be a coincidence.

2) Both Franck and Dubois quote Luke 23:42 in their third movements, which is the verse before Jesus's Second Word where the good thief Dismas asks Christ to remember him. It is a logical verse to include, but both composers use it out of biblical and chronological order. In both of these settings, Christ's response to Dismas comes presciently *before* the good thief has even asked the question.

3) Both Franck and Dubois do not set the entire Third Word. Both set only the last half of it—Jesus speaking to his mother—and omit Jesus speaking to John. Neither composer sets, “behold thy mother.”

4) Franck and Dubois both insert various verses from the *Stabat Mater* after presenting Jesus's Third Word starkly, outside of any narrative context. The Third Word, where Jesus speaks to his mother, is the perfect occasion to include this thirteenth-century devotional text. The medieval poem is made up of twenty stanzas of three short lines, each having only seven or eight syllables and rhymed in Latin according to the scheme AAB CCB. With twenty verses, the complete text of the *Stabat Mater* is too long to include in

Table 2. Textual Tropes in the Franck and Dubois Settings

Movement	Textual Additions to Franck's Setting	Textual Additions to Dubois's Setting
Prologue	“O vos omnes” (Lamentations 1:12–13) + Ruth 1:20	“O vos omnes” (Lamentations 1:12–13) + Ruth 1:20
First Word “Father, forgive them . . .” (Luke 23:34)	Luke 23:33–34 and Isaiah 53:12	John 19:15, Matthew 27:25, and Luke 23:33
Second Word “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43)	Luke 23:42	Luke 23:42
Third Word “Woman, behold your Son!” (John 19:26)	Verses 3, 5, and 6 of the <i>Stabat Mater</i>	Verses 1 and 5 of the <i>Stabat Mater</i>
Fourth Word “My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34)	Job 19:13–14	A portion of <i>The Reproaches</i>
Fifth Word “I thirst” (John 19:38)	Matthew 27:34, Luke 23:36–37, and a portion of <i>The Reproaches</i>	Matthew 27:39–40
Sixth Word “It is finished” (John 19:30)	1 Peter 2:24 and Isaiah 53:4–5	Psalm 88:26
Seventh Word “Father into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46)	Psalm 88:26	Matthew 27:50–53, and “Christ we do all adore thee” as coda

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its entirety, so both composers only selected specific verses from it. As Table 3 illustrates, Franck includes three verses from the *Stabat Mater*, while Dubois only includes two, but they overlap.

- 5) *The Reproaches* is another troped commonality between the Franck and Dubois settings; it appears in Franck's Fifth Word and Dubois's Fourth. While no textual overlap exists precisely between which verses of *The Reproaches* appear on both settings, no previous setting of the Seven Last Words includes *The Reproaches*; Franck was the first, and Dubois was the second.
- 6) While at first glance the textual tropes used by each composer in the Fifth word share no overlap, a closer examination reveals that the verses from different Gospels actually describe the same incident. Table 4 quickly compares the texts used by these two movements. Franck and Dubois both selected verses where the crowd mocks Christ from the Synoptic Gospels.¹⁰ Dubois even uses the same text as Franck, Luke 23:37: "If you are the King of Jews, save yourself then," instead of Matthew 27:40, which says, "Son of God." Dubois switched Gospels in the middle of

his Fifth Word, perhaps unintentionally.

- 7) Franck's setting of the Seventh Word is interesting because once the tenor soloist has completed Christ's words, the soloist continues with a bold textual interpolation (mm. 28-35). Franck inserts into this movement an affirmation of faith from Psalm 88:26: "You are my father, my God..." but the phrase is left unfinished. It remains for the chorus to finish the sentence begun by the tenor soloist with "and the rock of my salvation" (mm. 36-43). This division of Psalm 88 is perfectly mirrored by Dubois when he sets it in his Sixth Word. (Coincidentally, the hand-off between tenor soloist and chorus also happens in m. 36 in Dubois.) Not only did Dubois select the same Old Testament verse, but he also split it in half between the tenor soloist and the choir in the same manner as Franck.

The structure of Dubois's Sixth Word can be divided into either halves or thirds, depending on whether one prioritizes the music (two sections) or the text (three sections). In a three-part division, there is further evidence in favor of a palindromic five-part

Table 3. *Stabat Mater* verses interpolated into the Third Word (in English translation)

Textual Source	Franck – <i>Sept Paroles du Christ sur la Croix</i> (1859)	Dubois – <i>Les Sept Paroles du Christ</i> (1867)
<i>Stabat Mater</i> Verse 1		Deep in sorrow stood the mother By the cross in tears lamenting While her son in torture hung.
<i>Stabat Mater</i> Verse 3	Oh what bitter pain she suffered as she saw her Son contending with the bitter pangs of death!	
<i>Stabat Mater</i> Verse 5	Who could witness without weeping Christ's own mother standing watching Broken hearted in her grief?	Who could witness without weeping Christ's own mother standing watching Broken hearted in her grief?
<i>Stabat Mater</i> Verse 6		Who could fail to share her sorrow feel as his her heart's deep anguish as she watched her dying Son?

Table 4. A Comparison of the Fifth Words

Franck				Dubois			
Measures	Text	Biblical Source	Translation	Measures	Text	Biblical Source	Translation
1-10	<i>Sitio</i>	John 19:38	I thirst	1-15	<i>Sitio</i>	John 19:38	I thirst
11-80	<i>Dederunt ei vinum bibere cum felle mixtum Et milites acetum offerentes ei blasphemant dicentes: Si tu es Rex Judaeorum, salvum te fac</i>	Luke 23:36–37	They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall. And the soldiers also offered him vinegar and mocked him, saying: "If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself."	16-139	<i>Judaei praeteruntes blasphemabat eum, moventes capita sua et dicentes: Vah! Qui destruis templum Dei, si tu es Christus, Filius Dei, descende nunc de cruce, ut videamus et credamus tibi. Si tu es Rex Judeaorum, salvum te fac.</i>	Matthew 27:39-40	The Jews as they passed by, blasphemed him, wagging their heads and saying "Bah!" You who will destroy the temple of God, if you are the Christ, the Son of God, come down now from the cross, so we might see and believe in you. If you are the King of Jews, save yourself then.
80-86	<i>Sitio</i>	John 19:38	I thirst	140-141	<i>Sitio</i>	John 19:38	I thirst
87-138	<i>Popule meus, quid feci tibi? Aut in quo contristavite? Popule meus, quid feci tibi? Responde mihi. Quia eduxi te de terra Aegypti: parasti crucem Salvatori tuo</i>	Text taken from <i>The Reproaches</i> for Good Friday	Oh my people, what have I done to you? How have I hurt you? Oh my people, what have I done to you? Answer me! Because I brought you out of the land of Egypt: you prepare a Cross for your Saviour	142-206	<i>Qui destruis templum Dei, si tu es Christus, Filius Dei, descende nunc de cruce, ut videamus et credamus tibi. Si tu es Rex Judeaorum, salvum te fac.</i>	Matthew 27:40	You who will destroy the temple of God, if you are the Christ, the Son of God, come down now from the cross, so we might see and believe in you. If you are the King of Jews, save yourself then.
139-191	<i>Si tu es Rex Judaeorum, salvum te fac</i>	Luke 23:37	"If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself."				
				207-209	<i>Sitio!</i> <i>Vah!</i>	John 19:38 Matthew 27:40	I thirst. Bah!

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structure depending on whether or not one considers the textless instrumental introduction or conclusion to be separate sections. All three different possible divisions are supplied in Table 5.

Dubois used “Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit” (Luke 23:46) as his text for the Sixth Word and “It is finished” (John 19:30) as his Seventh, which is the opposite to what most previous settings of the Seven Last Words did. In this sense, Dubois’s use of Psalm 88:26 corresponds even more precisely with Franck’s, as it complements the same saying. Again, the overlaps between the Franck and Dubois settings are striking. Out of 2,526 verses in the Book of Psalms, both Franck and Dubois selected the same one to include in this New Testament story.

Musical Connections

Beyond these textual overlaps, there are also several strong musical connections between these works. To start, both Franck and Dubois use full orchestras of similar size; Dubois’s orchestra differs from Franck’s in adding five players: two clarinets, two horns, and an organ.¹¹ The two composers also use the same three solo voices, STB. This is further evidence of liturgical intent, as all three of these roles would have been sung by males in nineteenth-century Catholic churches. We can also observe a similar amount of overlap in the musical forces employed in each movement (Table 6).

The Use of Soloists

Both composers use two male soloists for the Second Word—a logical choice when Jesus speaks to Dismas on the cross but a device not previously utilized by other



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Table 5. The Structure of the Sixth Word of Dubois's *Les Sept Paroles du Christ*

Two-part division	Section for Tenor Soloist			Choral Section		
Three-part division	A—exposition (Sixth Word proper)		B—development (textual trope)		A—recapitulation (Sixth Word repeated)	
Five-part division	A textless introduction	B New Testament text	C Old Testament text		B New Testament text	A textless conclusion
Text	none	Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit (Luke 23:46).	Thou art my father, my God...	...and the rock of my salvation (Psalm 88:26).	Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit (Luke 23:46).	none
Bars	1–12	13–28	29–36	37–44	44–62	63–69
Orchestration	Instrumental	Tenor Soloist, harp, low strings, and flute	Tenor Soloist and full strings	Choir a cappella	Choir, Tenor Soloist, and full orchestra	instrumen- tal

Table 6. The Scoring of the Movements in the Franck and Dubois Settings

Movement	Franck	Dubois
Prologue	Soprano Solo	Soprano Solo
First Word "Father, forgive them..."	SATB Choir	T + B Soloists and SATB Choir
Second Word "Today you will be with me in Paradise"	Two Tenor Soloists ¹²	Tenor and Baritone Soloists
Third Word "Woman, behold your Son!"	S + T + B Soloists and SATB Choir	S + T + B Soloists and SATB Choir
Fourth Word "My God, why have you forsaken me?"	SATB Choir	Baritone Soloist
Fifth Word "I thirst"	B Soloist and SATB Choir	T + B Soloists and SATB Choir
Sixth Word "It is finished"	T Soloist and SATB Choir	T Soloist and SATB Choir
Seventh Word "Father into your hands I commit my spirit"	T Soloist and SATB Choir	S + T + B Soloists and SATB Choir

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composers. In fact, it is easier to enumerate the differences that Dubois made to Franck's scoring: he adds two soloists to the First and Seventh Words and one soloist to the Fifth. If we do not consider adding a soloist or two as changes, Dubois's scoring only differs from Franck's in one out of eight movements: the Fourth Word, where he has replaced Franck's SATB choir with a baritone soloist. Even considering that Dubois's Seventh Word is Franck's Sixth, the above statements are still true, as Franck's orchestrations of his last two words are the same. Dubois's addition of the other two soloists to his seventh movement allows him to use all the available performing forces in his grand finale.

In the use each composer makes of the soloists employed in each movement, we see here too that Dubois emulates Franck. In the oratorio tradition, soloists usually play a specific role, but that expected consistency is not apparent in either of these works. It might be logical, for example, to have one soloist act as the narrator and another say the words of Christ, but neither Franck nor Dubois employed a consistent characterization. Table 7 compares the soloists' roles in these two settings.

Dubois perfectly emulates Franck's use of soloists in the Prologue, Second, Third, and Fifth words; in other words, not only are the forces employed for these movements identical as outlined in Table 7, but so are the characterizations. Additionally, in the Third Word the soloists appear in the same order—baritone, soprano, and then tenor—singing from the same text, the *Stabat Mater*.

Franck gives the Tenor and Bass soloists the words of Christ twice each. Dubois perhaps shows a greater penchant for Bach's *vox Christe*, with five movements given to the Bass soloist to sing Christ's words. Yet the two times that Dubois allots Christ's words to the Tenor soloist, it is for the same texts as Franck: the Second Word, and "Father, Into Thy Hands," which is Franck's Seventh and Dubois's Sixth Word. Neither Franck nor Dubois ever have the soprano soloist sing Christ's words, unless the Old Testament text from the Prologue is interpreted metaphorically as Christ's introductory utterance. Dubois also never has the choir sing the words of Christ unless they are first presented by a soloist. This preference by Dubois for solo presentation of the words of



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Christ is further underlined by his changing two of the movements where Franck used choir to present Christ's words: the First and Fourth words. Dubois gives Christ's words instead to the Bass.

It quickly becomes apparent that both of these settings lack consistent characterizations—which is atypical for an oratorio—but that their characterizations are remarkably similar to each other. The soloist who sings the words of Christ in these settings changes from movement to movement, but Dubois followed Franck's lead in

determining which soloists should be used in each movement and what parts they should play.

Further Musical Correspondences

Detailed musical similarities between the Franck and Dubois settings also deserve consideration. These happen primarily in the Prologue, Second, Third, Fifth, and Sixth Words.

Table 7. The Roles of the Soloists

Movement	Franck	Dubois
Prologue	Soprano soloist sings "O Ye People"	Soprano soloist sings "O Ye People"
First Word "Father, forgive them..."	No soloists: choir sings the words of Christ	Baritone sings Christ's words; choir takes on crowd's role and tenor acts as narrator
Second Word "Today you will be with me in Paradise"	Tenor I soloist sings the words of Christ; Tenor II (or Baritone) sings the words of the thief (no choir)	Tenor I sings the words of Christ; Baritone sings the words of the thief, which the choir soon repeats
Third Word "Woman, behold your Son!"	Bass soloist sings the Third Word; choir, soprano, and tenor soloists sing verses from the Stabat Mater	Bass sings the Third Word immediately echoed by choir; soprano and tenor soloists sing verses from the Stabat Mater, later accompanied by choir
Fourth Word "My God, why have you forsaken me?"	No soloists: choir sings the words of Christ	No choir: Bass soloist only
Fifth Word "I thirst"	Bass soloist sings the Fifth Word and continues with narrative; choir plays the role of the mocking crowd. Bass soloist continues with the Reproaches (Christ speaking but non-biblical)	Bass sings Christ's words; tenor acts as narrator, and choir takes on crowd's role
Sixth Word "It is finished"	Choir sings Sixth word and chorale meditation; tenor soloist sings meditative text from New Testament	Tenor solo sings Christ's word (Seventh in most settings); choir repeats these words accompanying the soloist
Seventh Word "Father into your hands I commit my spirit"	Tenor sings the Seventh Word; choir joins on this text	Soprano solo acts as narrator, bass solo sings Christ's words (Sixth in other settings), which are echoed by the choir. Tenor acts as the narrator. The choir concludes with a troped chorale.

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Prologue

We saw earlier how both composers use “O vos omnes,” set for soprano solo and orchestra, for their first movements, but there are further commonalities in the music. Both composers’ prologues are short da capo arias. In each prologue the soloist begins after an orchestral introduction (20 bars for Dubois, 14 in Franck) and sings a four-bar phrase that ends on the second scale degree (a minor in Franck, see Figure 1; g minor in Dubois, see Figure 2). Franck’s soprano soloist enters with a slow-moving melancholic melody that, when subjected to Schenkarian analysis, does not require much simplification in its V–I descent.



Figure 1. Césaire Franck, *Sept Paroles du Christ sur la Croix*, “Prologue,” mm. 15–18.
Soprano

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Figure 2. Theodore Dubois, *Sept Paroles du Christ*, “Prologue,” mm. 21–24.
Soprano

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Figure 3. Césaire Franck, *Sept Paroles du Christ sur la Croix*, “Prologue,” mm. 40–47.

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Both composers set the opening section from Lamentations (“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?”) in minor followed by the second section from Ruth (“The Lord hath made me desolate and faint all the day. Call me not Naomi, call me Mara”) in the relative major. Both transition back to the recapitulation of the opening melody using romantic chromaticism, each using a descending chromatic line ending on the third of the dominant to conclude the second section (compare bar 43 of Figure 3 to bar 55 of Figure 4). Both composers end their prologues with a brief orchestral codetta: 4 bars in Franck, 10 in Dubois. Dubois brings back the opening brass chords at the very end, boldly ending on a Picardie

third, simultaneously referring us back to the stately and solemn mood in which he began this movement while also offering a glimpse of hope for redemption.

The 89 bars of Dubois’s first movement is a perfect Fibonacci number, the twelfth in the series of numbers wherein each is the sum of the previous two (0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, etc). The golden mean, or *phi* of Dubois’s first movement, therefore, occurs at the end of bar 55 (another Fibonacci number) in Figure 4. Bar 56 commences the recapitulation, and thus the architecture of his first movement correlates precisely to the Golden Mean. The musical form of the two Prologues is also identical, ABA. The Lamentations 1:13 and Ruth tropes together form



Figure 4. Theodore Dubois, *Sept Paroles du Christ*, “Prologue,” mm. 52–57.
Soprano



Figure 5. César Franck, *Sept Paroles du Christ sur la Croix*, “Second Word,” mm. 22–34.
Solo parts only

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Figure 6. Theodore Dubois, *Sept Paroles du Christ*, “Second Word,” mm. 42–49.
Solo parts only

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the B section of each movement before recapitulating to “*O Vos Omnes*.” Both composers commence the B sections with the continuation of the verse from Lamentations. See Table 8 for a comparison of both settings.

The Second Word

Franck’s setting of the Second Word provides contrast to his First Word by setting the text in C major (the first time we hear a major key in this work), a different meter (now triple), and the initial appearance of two male soloists. The soloists represent Jesus (Tenor I) and the good thief (Tenor II). Franck elides the soloists’ phrases, and the effect is that the thief interrupts Christ (see m. 27 in Figure 5).

According to the biblical story, the thief spoke first,

but here that order is reversed: Christ presciently promises salvation to the thief even before he asks for it. This might be interpreted as illustrative of how one might model their life after Christ, as to present the thief’s words first as they are in the biblical story would be to have Christ emulate a condemned criminal. Franck’s mono-thematic movement concludes with a duet for the two soloists (generally in parallel thirds or sixths).

Dubois’s Second Word is also set for two male soloists, specifically tenor and bass (Franck specifies two tenors, but one could use tenor and baritone soloists, see note 12). Dubois emulates Franck in his use of a compound triple meter, which provides contrast with his previous movement, and a major key. Dubois also has the tenor sing the words of Christ and the lower part the words of the thief, and, like Franck, after giving each a chance to

Table 8. The First Movements of Franck and Dubois Seven Last Words

Composer	Franck				Dubois			
	A	B		A	A	B		A
Section	A	B		A	A	B		A
Bars	1-27	28-35	36-43	44-59	1-39	40-47	48-55	56-89
Text	<i>O vos omnes qui transitis per viam attendite et videtete si est dolor sicut dolor meus.</i>	<i>Posuit me, Domine, desolatam tota die maerore confectam.</i>	Ne vocatis me Noemi sed vocate me Mara.	O vos omnes...	<i>O vos omnes qui transitis per viam attendite et videtete si est dolor sicut dolor meus.</i>	<i>Posuit me, Domine, desolatam tota die maerore confectam.</i>	<i>Ne vocatis me Noemi sed vocate me Mara.</i>	O vos omnes...
Biblical Source	Lam 1:12	Lam 1:13	Ruth 1:20	Lam 1:12	Lam 1:12	Lam 1:13	Ruth 1:20	Lam 1:12
Translation	O ye people who pass by Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.	He [the Lord] has made me desolate and faint all the day.	Call me not Naomi (Pleasant), but call me Mara (Bitter).	O ye people...	O ye people who pass by Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.	He [the Lord] has made me desolate and faint all the day.	Call me not Naomi (Pleasant), but call me Mara (Bitter).	O ye people...

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sing solos, Dubois brings them together for a duet at the end (mm. 42–49). Figure 6 provides a rare example of polytextuality in Dubois's most famous oratorio.

The Third Word

Dubois, like Franck, also has the bass soloist sing the words of Christ ("Woman, behold thy Son!"), and then the chorus repeats them (mm. 13–25). Dubois follows Franck's assignments of which the soloist sings Christ's



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words, alternating like Franck, as it was the tenor who sang Christ's words in the previous movement. Dubois also has the soprano enter with a chromatic descending line (mm. 26–45) on the words of the *Stabat Mater*—just as Franck did, only with a different verse of the *Stabat*

Mater. Dubois's chromatic descent here is similar to Gounod's Fifth Word ("I thirst"); compare m. 17 in Figure 7 to mm. 26–27 in Figure 8.

14

S *f* *p* *f* *p*
Si - ti - o, si - ti -

A *f* *p* *f*
Si - ti - o, si - ti -

T *f* *p* *f* *p*
Si - ti - o, si - ti - o,

B *f* *p* *f*
Si - ti - o, si - ti -

18 *cresc. molto* *p*
S o, si - ti - o, si - ti - o.
A *cresc. molto* *p*
o, si - ti - o, si - ti - o.
T *cresc. molto* *p*
si - ti - o, si - ti - o.
B *cresc. molto* *p*
o, si - ti - o.

Figure 7. Charles Gounod, *Sept Paroles du Christ*, "Fifth Word," mm. 14–21.

26 *molto espr.*
S Sta - bat Ma - ter do - lo - ro - sa Jux - ta cru - cem la - cry -

33
S mo - sa, Dum pen - de - bat fi - li - us, Dum pen - de - bat fi - li - us,

Figure 8. Theodore Dubois, *Sept Paroles du Christ*, "Third Word," mm. 26–37.
Soprano Solo Part Only

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The Fifth Word

Both Franck and Dubois include in the fifth word some of their most dramatic writing. Both composers commence with Christ saying “I thirst” (the Fifth word proper), and then juxtapose the unhearing clamour of the *turba* chorus mocking Christ. Both composers include a recitative near the beginning of their Fifth Word (Franck mm. 1-27, Dubois mm. 16-24, Figure 9); Franck even supplies an aria in the middle (mm. 80-138), which results in a Passion oratorio in miniature, as his Fifth Word comes in essentially recitative—chorus—aria—

chorus form.

As the Fifth movement is the most dramatic in each of their respective works, both Frank and Dubois have selected this movement as their musical centerpiece. Five and eight are both Fibonacci numbers; 5/8 represents the Golden Mean. It is ironic that the Fifth Word is the largest movement for both composers, because it is the shortest text; “I thirst” is only one word in Latin, “*sitio.*” By contrast, the Fifth Word in Gounod’s *Seven Last Words* is his shortest movement.

16

Ten. Solo
Ju - da - ci prae - ter e - un - tes blas - phe - ma - bant

Vlns. 1
Vlns. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Cb.

20

Ten. Solo
e - um mo - ven - tes ca - pi - ta su - a et di - cen - tes:

Vlns. 1
Vlns. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Cb.

Figure 9. Theodore Dubois, *Sept Paroles du Christ*, “Fifth Word,” mm. 16–24.

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The Sixth Word

Franck sets his Sixth Word *a cappella*, just as Haydn had done, in four-part harmony and with extreme melodic economy. Dubois would later set these same words with a similar rhythm (compare Figure 10 to Figure 11)—and the conclusion of Dubois’s Seven Last Words is remarkably similar in pitches and harmony to Franck’s Sixth Word here (compare Figure 11 to Figure 12).

Figure 10. Theodore Dubois, *Sept Paroles du Christ*, “Seventh Word,” mm. 19.
Vocal parts only

Figure 11. César Franck, *Sept Paroles du Christ sur la Croix*, “Sixth Word,” mm. 5–6.

Figure 12. Theodore Dubois, *Sept Paroles du Christ*, “Seventh Word,” mm. 126–127.
Choral parts only

Final Musical Commonalities

The harp is a featured instrument in both works, likely intended to evoke images of heaven in the minds of listeners. Additionally, the two composers include chorale tunes in their settings, which is hardly rare for oratorio writing, but it is perhaps less common for French Catholic composers to include this German Protestant stylistic development.¹³ Both chorales are parts of movements and not self-standing units themselves. A closer examination of the commonalities of these two chorales is revealing. Franck’s chorale is found in his Sixth Word, a choral meditation taken from both the Old and New Testaments: “He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24) and “Surely he hath borne our griefs” (Isaiah 53:4-5). Dubois’s chorale is found at the end of his entire work, which notably is the same word, “It is finished,” and sets a text long associated with Christ’s Passion. In the practice of Catholic piety, “*Adoramus te, Christe*” is often sung or recited as one moves between Stations of the Cross. In both cases, these chorales end four bars before the completion of their respective movements.

The chorales have much more in common than geographic placement, however, as Table 9 makes clear. Both chorales commence with simple phrases moving in conjunct motion and repeat their opening line. In the third phrase the harmonic rhythm increases and the melody skips around by fourths, and the fourth line returns to the opening melodic material. The two chorales are hardly identical, but they share common structural characteristics.

While the textual form differs (AABB in Franck and AABA in Dubois), the musical form is identical (AABA). Dubois’s musical form mirrors and surely was directly inspired out of the textual form. It is likely that Dubois liked Franck’s inclusion of a chorale near the end of his work and that both composers utilized the device in an inclusive attempt to inspire audience members to further devotion.

Conclusion

Some biblical scholars propose that the Gospel authors Matthew and Luke had the previously written Gospel of Mark in front of them as they wrote, using Mark as a basis to add their own perspective.¹⁴ This can ac-

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count for the word-for-word similarities between the first three Gospels, called the Synoptics. One can envision a similar method for the formation of Théodore Dubois's masterpiece, *Les Sept Paroles du Christ*. Despite the popularity of Dubois's setting of the Seven Last Words, César Franck's *Sept Paroles du Christ sur la Croix* is not as widely known. Yet it is clear from even a cursory comparison that there are striking similarities between the two works on orchestrational, textual, duration, and musical levels.

Franck and Dubois use similar sizes of orchestras, the same three soloists, and lack consistent characterizations for them. Both use the same textual tropes: "O *Vos Omnes*," Psalm 88:26, and quote from both *The Reproaches* and the *Stabat Mater*. Both works include writing for solo cello and harp and a dramatic juxtaposition of Christ's plaintive cry of thirst with an unhearing turba chorus in the Fifth Word. "I thirst" is the shortest word but the longest movement for both composers, and both include chorales in their "It is finished" movement (Franck's

Sixth and Dubois' Seventh Word); both chorales are both in AABA musical form and appear near the end of their respective movements on the "it is finished" text.


While it is important to acknowledge that Dubois wrote entirely his own music for his Seven Last Words (there are no examples of direct quotation here, nor did copyright law exist at the time), the textual and musical similarities are striking. While Dubois's motivations remain impossible to ascertain, it is possible that Dubois was so inspired after encountering Franck's manuscript that he set his Seven Last Words as an intentional homage to his colleague at St. Clothide. It is the author's hope that this analysis sheds light on Franck's previously little-known work while highlighting similarities between it and the Dubois setting in order to identify the scholarly connections between these two works and perhaps even inspire future paired performances. 

Table 9. A Comparison of the Chorales in Franck and Dubois

Franck, Sixth Word				Dubois, Seventh Word					
Text	Measure numbers	Musical Form		Textual Form	Text	Measure numbers	Musical Form		Textual Form
		Two-bar	Four-bar				Two-bar	Four-bar	
Vere, vere	57–58	a	A	A	Adoramus te, Christe,	108–109	a	A	A
languores nostros	59–60	b			et benedicimus tibi	110–111	b		
languores nostros	61–62	a	A	A	Adoramus te, Christe,	112–113	a	A	A
ipse tulit,	63–64	c			et benedicimus tibi	114–115	c		
et livore eius	65–66	d	B	B	Quia per sanctam crucem tuam	116–117	d	B	B
sanati sumus,	67–68	e			redemisti mundum.	118–119	e		
et livore eius	69–70	a	A	B	Adoramus te, Christe,	120–121	a	A	A
sanati sumus.	71–72	f			et benedicimus tibi	122–123	b		

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Scores

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NOTES

¹ Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio*, Vol 4: "The Oratorio in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 538. <http://uncpress.unc.edu/books/12415.html>

² Dennis Shrock, "Choral Repertoire" (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 427.

³ Fluent German speakers can refer to two additional pages: Frank Reinisch, "Das französische Oratorium von 1840 Bis 1870," *Kölner Beiträge zur Musicforschung*, vol. 123 (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1982), 380-82.

⁴ Recent scholarship dates the completion of this organ to 1863, despite Frank's winning of the position in 1859; see Helga, *Schauerte-Maubouet*, "Théodore Dubois and César Franck at Sainte-Clotilde: A new look at the chronicle of the years 1857–1863 through the rediscovered memoirs," *The Diapason* 99 (January, 2008) (1:1178): 25-27 [Eng trans]. Original in French: *L'orgue: Bulletin des Amis de l'Orgue*, (278-279) pp. 7-14. ISSN: 0030-5170. Collected Work: *L'orgue: Revue trimestrielle*. 278–279 (2nd–3rd quarter 2007) as Théodore Dubois et César Franck à Sainte-Clotilde: Chronique revisitée des années 1857–1863 à travers des mémoires retrouvés.

⁵ Dubois's autobiography attests that he shortened his two-year stay in Rome by one month to return to St. Clothilde to assume the choirmaster position in November 1863 when Franck wanted to switch positions and become

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the organist; returning early assured him of his income. Dubois's seven-volume memoir was donated to the Bibliothèque Nationale by his son and rediscovered in 1997 by Christine Collette Kleo. *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶ Jann Pasler, "Dubois, Théodore" in *Grove Music Online* (<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/08232>, accessed March 6, 2011).

⁷ For example, Dubois wrote several operas (at least two remain unperformed), nine scenic cantatas, three orchestral Masses, including one Requiem, eight other masses accompanied by organ, 71 motets, over 100 songs, three overtures, six orchestral suites, two piano concertos and one for violin, three symphonic poems and three symphonies, 35 assorted works for chamber ensembles, 94 piano works, and 88 compositions for organ.

⁸ The title page of Franck's setting was missing from the manuscript and thus the piece lacks an official title, but this is the title by which the work has become known.

⁹ There are thirty settings of the Seven Last Words text. Charles Gounod's setting is the closest setting chronologically (1855) and was one of the first settings of the text by a French composer. It can serve effectively as a "control" in this comparison. For more information on Gounod's work, see Vaughn Roste, "An Unknown Choral Gem: Charles Gounod's 'Seven Last Words of Christ,'" *Choral Journal* 56 no. 3 (October 2015): 10-33.

¹⁰ "Synoptic" is a word formed from the Greek prefix "syn," meaning "together, and the root "optic," meaning "seen." The first three of the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark,

and Luke—are "seen together" because of the large percentage of material that overlaps between them.

¹¹ The scholarship mentioned in note 4 can explain why Franck did not include organ in his setting of the Seven Last Words (1859): the installation of the Cavaillé-Coll organ at St. Clothilde was not completed until 1863.

¹² The second tenor part in Franck's Second Word could be sung by a baritone, as the highest note sung by the second tenor soloist is E4, only a major third above middle C and within the range of most baritones (in contrast to the tessitura of the first tenor soloist, who has an optional high B in bar 23 and many high Gs). This would prevent having one of the tenor soloists appear only in this movement and render the scoring identical between Franck and Dubois for this movement.

¹³ There is a long oratorio tradition in France, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this article. Readers interested in further study are referred to Howard E. Smither's four-volume "A History of the Oratorio" chapters IX & X pages 507-601 (UNC Press). <http://uncpress.unc.edu/books/12415.html>

¹⁴ Historically first proposed by Christian Hermann Weisse in 1838, this theory (notably refined by B. H. Streeter in 1924) still provides the foundation for, and has become the dominant model of, modern biblical scholarship. Austin Farrer published "On Dispensing with Q" in 1955, and this work has been continued by contemporary scholars such as Michael Goulder and Mark Goodacre.

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