

THE ENIGMA OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF JUDAS ISCARIOT

by

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(Under the Direction of Wayne Coppins)

ABSTRACT

This thesis evokes a genuine and historical curiosity about the life and work of Judas Iscariot beginning with the New Testament Gospels and continuing to modern times. It is an attempt to draw a composite picture of Judas in light of a thorough examination of the data and research garnered from such a study.

INDEX WORDS: Judas Iscariot, Gospels, Church Fathers, Gnosticism, Greek apologists, Middle Ages, Legends, Passion plays, Anti-Semitism, Renaissance, Reformation, Martin Luther, Modernism

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Joseph Allen Pennington, who cupped the little spark of my dream in his hands and blew it into a living flame. You nurtured it, encouraged it, and guarded it from burning out. You never lost faith in me. Such a teacher is co-creator with God. You helped to shape a mind, a life, a destiny.

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PREFACE

This is a study on the life of Judas Iscariot beginning with the New Testament Gospels and ending with modern-day ideas of him. This study includes some thoughts from early Christian writings, a survey of the *Gospel of Judas* itself, continuing on through the legends and passion plays of the Middle Ages, and then a brief look at the thoughts of the Reformer, Martin Luther, anti-Semitism, and ending with an Enlightenment and a modern-day approach to Judas from both the secular and sacred points-of-view.

I chose this topic because of the impact Judas Iscariot has had on world history, as well as my own curiosity to learn more about a character I knew to be important, but about whom I knew little else.

The enigma of Judas Iscariot is that he is a two-sided coin, one could say. He can be imagined as a better-unborn demon working Satan's will, but at the same time, he can be imagined as a divine agent facilitating the resurrection of God's Son and the salvation of humanity.

I used the comparative literature method to conduct this study.

The composite picture which I set out to construct of Judas from my research has resulted in one which must be viewed through a kaleidoscope. From hated to hero, time rotates the tube, thus giving each era a slightly different picture.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I have always been interested in Judas Iscariot. As a child when hearing the Easter stories of how he betrayed Jesus, I thought, “He’s a bad guy.” Later when I began to read and study the Gospels, I became intrigued about Judas’ role in the Passion. What made Judas different from the other apostles? Wasn’t he as pious and devoted as the others? If so, how did this happen?

As a scholar I determined to learn all I could about Judas because of the impact which he has had on subsequent world history. I believe this evokes a genuine and legitimate historical curiosity. If this topic interests you as well, come with me on this quest that spans 2,000 years of history. This thesis will use a comparative literature method. We begin building our foundation with the Gospels themselves.

Why should we go to the canonical gospels for historical information? It is because they are the earliest known sources which speak of Judas. The earliest sources more than likely reflect greater historical reliability. Each of the four gospels records two of the same events in the life of Judas: 1) Judas was one of the twelve disciples, and 2) he betrayed Jesus. The betrayal tradition is too widespread and is not the kind of story that the Church would fabricate.

The first chapter of this thesis will survey each New Testament Gospel individually, focusing on any and all references to Judas, after which we will look at a synthesis of Judas from all four gospels.

In order to garner more information about Judas, we turn to early Christian writings in chapter two. One such body of literature is known as the Apostolic Fathers. They are a group of Christian writers of the first few generations after the apostolic age. Several of these writers have given us additional information about Judas which I introduce in this chapter.

Some New Testament apocrypha literature was produced by Christians who held beliefs that were later condemned and suppressed by the majority Church. I talk about several of these texts in chapter five. Another variety of Christian literature is known as apologetic. Christian apologists wrote to defend their faith. These men were deeply involved in the political and social struggles of their time, such as persecution and internal turmoil. They spoke out against all heretics including Gnosticism. Irenaeus spoke of an existence of a gospel of Judas in his famous treatise that is commonly entitled *Against Heresies*.¹ This gospel was recently recovered, and I provide a treatment of it in the next chapter.

The recently discovered *Gospel of Judas* can be classified as a Gnostic gospel. It was made public by the National Geographic Society in April 2006. It has stirred controversy among all those brought up on the story of Judas, the betrayer. Why? Because it appears to suggest that this Judas, far from being merely a villain, is the only disciple who understands Jesus. The text probably does not give us any historical information about Jesus or Judas, but it is helpful for understanding the early history of Christianity.

Our journey leads us next into the Middle Ages. For various reasons such as limited education and the prevalence of superstition, the people of this time were readily persuaded to believe in the legends and myths of Judas which circulated among them. The Middle Ages were perhaps the heyday depiction of Judas as the epitome of evil. This chapter offers a survey of

¹ Irenaeus himself entitled the document “On the Detection and Refutation of the Falsely Named Knowledge” (cf. 1 Tim 6:20).

some of the legends that proliferated during this time. Passion plays and festivals were also very popular. The message of the Passion plays was reinforced by the powerful visual stimulus of medieval Christian art.

Our coverage of this era will include the introduction of Christian authors and theologians who vehemently denounced Judas. Among them are John Chrysostom, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, and Leo the Great. Excerpts from their works will be provided. We will also look at two “preachers of passion” (my name for them) from a slightly later time. Martin Luther wrote disgustingly filthy lies about the Jews. Sancta Clara was an eloquent pulpit preacher of the seventeenth century who was obsessed with Judas. He preached against him every Sunday for ten years. He was very anti-Semitic.

I must admit that these preachers turned me against them. They teach horrible, disgusting lies about Judas. Instead of causing me to hate Judas as they intended, their teachings had the opposite effect – I began to have great empathy for him.

Our final leg of this journey brings us to the Enlightenment and the age of Modernism. These ages refer particularly to the intellectual and philosophical developments of the eighteenth century and beyond. These new ideas had an impact on moral and social reform. Reason was advocated as the only infallible guide to knowledge and wisdom.

This chapter will look at these new perspectives which challenge and change the received interpretation of the Gospel narrative of Judas. Some scholars even suggest that he never existed at all, but was a narrative device used as an anti-Semitic myth. We will also reflect briefly on a few theological thoughts of the time. As we will see, in an effort to free Judas from the damning indictments and caricatures that existed in the past, he is framed in a new light by a new age.

CHAPTER 2

JUDAS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

2.0. Introduction

This chapter on the life of Judas examines the events and focus of his life from the perspective of the Gospel writers. Although some events in the life of Judas are recorded in all four canonical Gospels, there are only two events about which the four evangelists agree: 1) he was one of the twelve apostles, and 2) he betrayed Jesus, thereby precipitating a chain of events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus. It is fairly certain that it was Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus and turned him over to the Jewish religious authorities. The tradition is too widespread in the Gospel narratives and is not the kind of story that the church would fabricate, that one of Jesus' trusted followers betrayed him for a sum of money. This logic falls under what historical Jesus scholars call the criteria of embarrassment.²

What must be borne in mind when reading the canonical gospels for historical information? First, they are composite documents, the final products of long and creative traditions. They are witness to the faith of their individual writers and their first-century communities. Second, we must remember that they were written a number of years after the death of Jesus. However, a foundation for the study of Judas can only be laid by first examining the texts of the four gospels of the New Testament. The general scholarly consensus for preference of the New Testament Gospels is based on the followings reasons: 1) the earlier the source is, the more likely that the source will reflect greater historical reliability: 2) multiple witnesses authenticate the material as likely: 3) contextual credibility counts: and 4)

² Stanton 2002, 175.

controversial or embarrassing statements may contain facts precisely because of their incongruity. With this information in mind, we begin with the Gospel of Mark.

2.1. Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark does not identify its author but many argue that it is John Mark, Peter's interpreter, and that it was written ca. 65-75 CE. Mark is the shortest and most compact of the four Gospels. Although placed second in the canon, recent scholarship has hypothesized that Mark is the earliest Gospel and a primary source for Matthew and Luke. According to some Church Fathers, Mark is writing for the Christian community of Rome, which either was experiencing the great persecution by Nero, or was caught up in the apocalyptic fervor occasioned by the Jewish War. If the latter is the case, it may also have been written elsewhere such as Syria or Palestine.

We first read of Judas in the list of the disciples (3:19). Jesus appoints the twelve of whom Judas Iscariot³ is named last and as the one who betrayed him. All the gospel writers not only list Judas' name last, but immediately identify him with an action. And it is significant that he is never mentioned without some reference to his great betrayal. In all other ways, Judas resembles the other apostles in his appointment, his mission, his companionship with Jesus, his unbelief, and his infidelity.

William Klassen's translation, "Judas Iscariot, who handed him over" (the Greek *παραδίδομι* could also mean "delivered over"), would soften the epithet and thus blur a condemnation that places a hard-and-fast distinction between Judas and the other eleven. The rich complex of ideas involved in *παραδίδομι* is intermingled in Mark 14:41-42 and Matthew

³ Klassen 1996, 34. The theories that try to explain "Iscariot" diverge so widely from each other that nothing can be built on them.

26:45-46 where, in the context of Jesus' obedience to the will of God, the verb is used first for God's action and then for Judas' action.⁴

Jesus' appointment of the twelve has great significance as the first symbolic step in his constitution of the people of God. The names of the twelve are mainly traditional and nothing is known of most of them. They are the task force on whom the extension of the mission of Jesus would depend. This is the foundation on which the new community was to be built. Written some thirty years after Judas' defection and death, Mark may have been tempted to strike from the list of the twelve a name that has caused such scandal. That he does not do so is a testimony both to his historical veracity and to his understanding of the church.⁵

Two days before Passover, the chief priests and scribes were looking for "a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him" (14:1).⁶ While Jesus was at Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came with a jar of very costly ointment, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment over the head of Jesus. But some there objected to the ointment being wasted in this way. According to D.J. Harrington,⁷ the anointing of Jesus' head was an acknowledgment of his messianic dignity (see 2 Kgs 9:6). She alone, in contrast to the chief priests and scribes and even Judas, has correctly perceived his identity and the special significance that his physical presence had. It is only in Mark's Gospel that Judas is said to have gone to them "in order to betray him," and they "rejoiced and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him" (14:10). Judas' betrayal consists in his willingness to tell the authorities where the disciple group may be found at night and to lead them there in person and to identify Jesus so that they can arrest him. This is the service they most need from him.

⁴ Klassen 1996, 47-48. See also Brown 1994, 213.

⁵ Edwards 2002, 284.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from the NRSV.

⁷ D.J. Harrington, "Mark" (NJBC; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990) 675-721.

Later as the disciples sat at supper, Jesus predicted that one of them now eating with him would betray him. He does not reveal who that person is but he does say “woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born” (14:18-21). It is noteworthy that Judas is not mentioned, still less condemned, and there is no suggestion that the disciples have any notion of who the traitor might be. No one among the rest of the disciples had any inkling that Judas was potentially untrustworthy. It did not occur to any one of them to say, “Is it Judas?” They were all dumbfounded, but to their credit, let it be said, each one turned his eyes within as if aware of latent possibilities of unfaithfulness in his own heart. Each one looked humbly into the face of Jesus and said, “Surely not I?” (14:19). Jesus indicated that the betrayal is fated and necessary, yet woe is upon that man and he would have been better unborn. Is the usage of “woe” here simply the regret and pain that Jesus feels towards the one who has been chosen to carry out this role, or is it a curse that becomes a strong factor in the negative portrait of Judas? At an unspecified moment during the meal, Judas departed.

The account of Jesus’ agony in Gethsemane is one of the most powerful and poignant stories in the whole of the gospel tradition. Its historicity has been questioned. The story probably has firm roots in the tradition.⁸ While Jesus is praying at Gethsemane the disciples fall asleep.⁹ He awakens them and says to them, “Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand” (14:42). Suddenly, Judas appears with a crowd holding swords and clubs. Mark again characterizes him as “one of the twelve” (14:43). Judas went up to Jesus and immediately said to him, “Rabbi!” and kissed him (14:45). Mark leaves the greeting of Judas and the kiss unanswered. Once Judas has played his part, he fades into the background.

⁸ Tuckett 2001, 917.

⁹ An interesting contrast here is that while the disciples are sleeping, Judas is wide awake. Note Luke 16:8, “...for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.”

In summary Mark says very little about Judas. He attributes no particular motive to Judas' action although he does seem to associate it with money. He is seen as fulfilling Scripture.

2.2. Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's Gospel is longer and a more developed composition than Mark. It is similar to Mark in the Passion narrative but adds accounts of Jesus' resurrection and appearance. It is generally agreed that it was written after the fall of Jerusalem to the armies of Titus (70 CE) and the widespread acquaintance with it which is exhibited in all the Christian literature of the second century makes it difficult to place its composition any later than the opening decade of that century.¹⁰ John Nolland even submits that it was written before the Jewish War which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 CE.¹¹ But most scholars date it ca. 80-90 CE give or take a decade.¹² Whatever its date, it is believed that it was written in and for a community in which the relationship with Judaism was of crucial importance. That community may have been in Antioch. Some indications suggest that the church for which this Gospel was written was relatively wealthy. Matthew makes no comment on his sources. The general assumption is that Matthew had available the Gospel of Mark or something like it. It probably also drew on oral tradition and may have had other sources such as "Q" at its disposal.

We first hear of Judas Iscariot in the list of the twelve disciples (10:2-4). Of the twelve, Peter is "first," by which is meant not just on the list, but of privileged status. Judas, the most dishonored, is last.¹³ Immediately after the loving act of the woman anointing Jesus, Judas went to the chief priests. It is Judas who asked for money as a reward for turning Jesus in. This is a

¹⁰ Beare 1981, 858.

¹¹ Nolland 2005, 14.

¹² Brown 1997, 172.

¹³ Allison 2001, 858.

slight change from Mark. Kim Paffenroth states that it is done to give a scriptural allusion (Zechariah 11:12) and especially to provide a link with the later story of Judas' death.¹⁴ The chief priests pay Judas thirty pieces of silver, and from that moment, he began to look for an opportunity to betray him (26:14-16). We do not know what Judas' purposes were. If Judas was as greedy as is often supposed, then it seems that he could have extorted far more than thirty pieces of silver from the high priests.

Matthew's account of the Last Supper is similar to Mark's. The setting of table fellowship makes the betrayal all the more heinous. While they were eating, Jesus said, "One of you will betray me" (26:21). All the apostles worry aloud about betraying Jesus as they had in Mark. But whereas the rest of the disciples ask "Surely not I, *Lord?*", Matthew adds a new interjection by Judas. His, "Surely not I, *Rabbi?*" is answered with the equivocal, "You have said so" (26:22, 25). Then Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to the disciples. He did likewise with the wine.¹⁵

After the Passover celebration, Jesus and his disciples went out to a place called Gethsemane. Judas had presumably slipped away sometime during the celebration to reappear in Gethsemane with the crowd and chief priests and to give the sign of the kiss. Matthew (as well as Mark) preface the arrest through Jesus' saying, "Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand" (26:46). In Matthew, Jesus responds to Judas' greeting and kiss by saying, "Friend, do what you are here to do" (26:50). These words exemplify Jesus' acquiescence to his fate as well as his intimacy with Judas.

¹⁴ Paffenroth 2001, 112.

¹⁵ When Jesus distributed the bread and wine to his disciples (which represent his body and blood), did Judas accept that gift? Those who affirm Judas' participation often point to 1 Cor. 11:27-32, where Paul speaks in strong condemnation of whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily: "That person eats and drinks judgment on himself by not discerning the body. That is why...some have died."

Only Matthew makes the report of Judas' death a part of his gospel. He interrupts the story of the transfer of Jesus to Pilate to tell the readers of the fate of Judas. Judas regretted betraying innocent blood. He returned the ill-gotten gains. The Jewish leaders respond with indifference: "See to it yourself." (27:4). He found there no human sympathy. Judas then threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and went out and hanged himself. Remorse and despair may fittingly express a man's abhorrence for his sins, but in themselves, they do not lead to anything. Repentance, where it is real, has some promise for the future. The chief priests, not wanting to put into the temple treasury money resulting from an evil action, went out and bought the potter's field to bury strangers in.¹⁶

In summary most of the major motifs associated with Judas in Mark also appear in Matthew: Judas delivers Jesus up and is "one of the twelve" and what he does is somehow ordained by, or in accordance, with the Scriptures. Matthew has, however, underlined Judas' greed, his regret/repentance, and told of his bleak end.

2.3. Gospel of Luke/Acts

Tradition holds that the author of the anonymous two-volume work, Luke/Acts, was the physician Luke, traveling companion to the apostle Paul. He was almost certainly a Gentile. In all likelihood, Luke's readers were Gentile Christians. The work was probably written ca. 75-85 CE.¹⁷ In his preface to the gospel (1:1), Luke indicates knowledge of other written sources. Most scholars believe he used Mark as a source. Luke's is the only gospel addressed to an individual, Theophilus, who is a Gentile and a new believer.¹⁸

¹⁶ Paffenroth 2001, 117-118. Matthew uses this story to implicate further the consistent villains of his Gospel, the chief priests: they more than Judas are guilty of rejecting and killing Jesus. By further implicating the chief priests, Matthew has significantly mitigated Judas' sin; and by portraying his death as a suicide, Matthew has made it tragic, perhaps even noble.

¹⁷ Evans 1990, 3. Cf. Brown 1997, 226..

¹⁸ St. Ambrose notes that Theophilus can simply mean any 'lover of God,' and therefore he writes, "If you love God, it was written to you." See Orthodox Study Bible Luke 1:3 footnote, page 1360.

Luke introduces Judas as one of Jesus' twelve disciples (6:16). He is one of two men by that name; the first being Judas, son of James, and the second Judas Iscariot, who is described not as the betrayer but instead and starkly as "a traitor", thus an all-pervasive identity (rather than a single action). This sets him apart as a renegade, a defector from the collectivity of the apostles. Jesus chose the twelve from a great crowd of disciples in the presence of a great multitude of people from all over the area. Whereas Mark and Matthew say that Jesus chose the twelve in order to send them out to preach and heal, Luke records no reason for the choice.

Luke depicts Judas' betrayal in a somewhat different light by attributing his act to a power other than his own. Only Luke, of the synoptic evangelists, reports that Satan entered Judas. As in Mark it is the priests, not Judas, who first suggest a money payment and Judas consented (22:3-5). Unrelated to spiritual, political, or mercenary considerations, Judas' motivation is quite simply satanic possession. No explanation is made as to how this happened or in what lay the particular susceptibility of Judas. A.H. Saari supposes that the eternal battle between good and evil is a central theme in Jesus' ministry. After the tempting of Jesus in the desert Satan removes himself until a more opportune time arises. Though Herod and certain Pharisees work against Jesus, there is no explicit mention of a Satan influencing them. Such is not the case with Judas.¹⁹ This is a strategy related to seeing Judas' actions as fulfilling Scripture. What Judas does is difficult to account for within the Gospel framework, and potentially undermining to its purposes, and so the role of Satan is seen as an explanatory device.²⁰

During the Last Supper, Judas receives a portion of the loaf given as the body of Jesus and a sip of the wine given as a covenant of his blood, after which Jesus sees that "the one who

¹⁹ Saari 2006, 110.

²⁰ Cane 2005, 30.

betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table” (22:21). Judas’ unworthy participation leads to his utter destruction (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-30; and Est 7).

After the meal Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives and his disciples followed him. He went a short distance away from them, and according to some manuscripts,²¹ he prayed with such a serious intent and in such great agony that his sweat became like great drops of blood falling upon the ground. Returning to the apostles he found them sleeping from sorrow. As Jesus was telling them to rise and pray, Judas approached and is here depicted leading a crowd. When he drew near unto Jesus to kiss him, Jesus said to him, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?” (22:48). After speaking to Judas, Jesus says to the crowd that “this is your hour and the power of darkness.” This again emphasizes that what is happening goes beyond human actors involved and includes cosmic evil at work in them.

In summary, Luke’s chief addition to the Gospel accounts is to explain why Judas went to the chief priests; namely, that Satan had entered into him. Merely human opponents are not sufficient for the battle. The figure of Satan provides Luke with an explanation for the transformation of an apostle into an enemy.

In his book of Acts, Luke gives us a little more information about Judas. It seems he purchased a field with the reward of iniquity, and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out (1:18).²² The appointment of a twelfth apostle, Matthias, to replace Judas is narrated early in the book (1:15-20).

²¹ Other ancient manuscripts lack verse 43 so that its originality is debated.

²² Paffenroth 2001, 13-14. The fact that the field is about the only point of connection in Matthew and Acts increases the likelihood that it was part of a tradition that circulated independently.

2.4. Gospel of John

According to Craig Keener, “The authorship of the Fourth Gospel has been vigorously debated, although the traditional consensus from early Christian centuries that the Apostle John wrote it has now given way to a majority scholarly skepticism toward that claim. But this consensus has been ably challenged by some recent conservative commentators, most notably Leon Morris, D.A. Carson, and Craig Blomberg, and it has been challenged with good reason.”²³ Scholars are divided on the question of whether or not John knew one or more of the Synoptic gospels. However, suggesting that the Fourth Gospel is not directly dependent on the Synoptics need not imply that John did not know of the existence of them. Most often the Gospel is assigned a date of 90-95, making it the last of the four gospels to be written.

John does not list the disciples but from the very beginning; Jesus realizes who is predetermined to betray him and states flatly: “One of you is a devil” (6:64, 70). Once again, Judas is introduced as the one who betrayed Jesus. Judas’ betrayal has an air of inevitability. According to Raymond Brown, this is not a denial of free will but reflects the inevitability of the plan of salvation.²⁴ John projects the cosmic battle between Jesus and evil throughout the ministry of Jesus, not just as a final cosmic battle.

John’s revising of the anointing story builds on certain traditional material bringing new information to us about Judas in the episode involving the costly ointment used to anoint Jesus’ feet. This parallel of the woman anointing Jesus (12: 1-8) occurs six days before Passover. Judas is the disciple who protests, the sole objector.²⁵ The evangelist supplies an evaluation: “Not because he was concerned for the poor did he say this, but because he was a thief. He was

²³ Keener 2003, 83-84, 41, 140.

²⁴ Brown 1996, 299.

²⁵ Klassen 1996, 146. According to William Klassen, Judas is demonized here for a very specific purpose: he assists the church in neglecting the poor in order to invest in expensive projects to honor Jesus instead.

the bursar and could help himself to what was put in.” Judas was not simply a greedy traitor; he was first a greedy thief. I have some doubts on this point. Why would Judas have joined a band of poor, wandering disciples if he were a greedy and petty thief?

At the last meal, before Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, we are informed that “the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot to betray him” (13: 2). Along with the other disciples, Judas fully participates in the communal act of foot washing and allows Jesus to teach him about servitude. After declaring that all were clean, Jesus qualifies his statement by warning of an exception. The disciples could have understood Jesus to mean that they had been clean, but not entirely (their feet were dusty), while he really meant that not all of them were clean, for one was a sinner.²⁶ The counterpart to Jesus’ love is Judas’ evil intent which runs as an undercurrent throughout the scene.

After explaining the foot washing ceremony to the disciples, Jesus said to them, “one of you will betray me.” Because they want to know who will betray him, Jesus gives a clear sign by saying at table, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread, when I have dipped it in the dish” (13:26). Jesus identifies the betrayer by dipping a morsel of bread into the dish and giving it to Judas. “After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him” (13:27). Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” This is the decisive point for Judas. He goes out at Jesus’ command and it is night (13:30).

After exhorting the other disciples to remain true in the face of betrayal, Jesus went out with them to a garden. This place was familiar to the disciples and also to Judas (18:2). It is Judas who leads the authorities to Jesus in order to arrest him. He appears with a group of soldiers and police provided by the chief priests and the Pharisees. Jesus came forward to ask them whom they were seeking. They identify their prey as Jesus of Nazareth. His response is to

²⁶ Brown 1966,552.

use the divine revelatory formula, “I Am He.” John reports that the human authorities retreated and fell to the ground. This is the typical human reaction to a theophany. In this narrative, in contrast to the Synoptics, Judas does not take the lead in pointing out Jesus, and there is no mention of a kiss, since Jesus has taken the initiative in identifying himself. The last words about Judas in John are simply, “Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them” (18:5). With these words Judas disappears from John’s account.

In summary, John viewed Judas as totally evil and beyond redemption. He is a/the devil (6:70). He came in from the darkness but failed to remain in the light. Judas aligned himself with the Jewish leaders who also preferred darkness. His collaboration with the equally demonic Jews supports this opinion. He represents those who will not believe. The persecution of Christian communities, specifically to their expulsion from the synagogue during the period when John was being written, probably increases the vilification of Judas and the Jews.

2.5. Conclusion

If the listing of New Testament Gospels is correct chronologically, interest in Judas was progressive. Each of the Gospels gives a slightly different slant to his activities and motives. His story, perhaps more than any member of the Twelve, gathered accretions. Mark states that he was one of Jesus’ disciples and that he helped the authorities to arrest Jesus. Matthew elaborated in various ways including Judas’ repentance and death. Luke ascribes satanic influence to Judas’ action. John agrees with Luke about satanic influence and adds Judas’ role as treasurer of the group. But early Christians could not have anticipated that later on the church would set aside the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John into a special category approved for general use. Therefore I do not believe that the evangelists themselves meant for Judas to be seen as growing

progressively worse. When the gospels are taken together or considered harmoniously, their composite portraits of and plots about Judas generate a number of mysteries. Raymond Brown plausibly argues that a “mysterious, villainous figure” like Judas must have generated “folkloric tales” that influenced the gospels.²⁷

²⁷ Brown 1994, 242.

CHAPTER 3

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS

3.0. Introduction

Historians of the ancient world have found scant information about Judas Iscariot outside the New Testament Gospels. This chapter will focus on Judas as revealed to us in extra-canonical literature. Some ancient documents which were written by early Christians, but were not included in the New Testament, have survived. The writings of the Early Church Fathers are part of this literature. This body of literature greatly increases our knowledge about the development of post-apostolic Christianity. Early Christians held these documents in great veneration.

Scholars have gathered an even larger collection of early Christian literature under the term “New Testament Apocrypha.” Some of these writings date back as early as 150 CE. These documents are patterned superficially after the types of documents in the New Testament. Some of this literature was produced by Christians who held beliefs that were later condemned and suppressed by the majority church. We have been dependent for much of our information about them to references and brief quotations of their literature in the writings of Christian authors who argue against them.

3.1. Early Christian Writers

This section will address the Apostolic Fathers and some other writings from the Early Church. Historians have assigned the phrase “apostolic fathers” to a narrow collection of early Christian texts dating from the first and second centuries CE. These texts, which were written by

leaders of the early church over the course of nearly one hundred years, originally did not circulate as a single collection. Instead, they were assembled into one form or another over the centuries; ultimately they became a vaguely unified selection of materials.²⁸ These documents were not gathered together under that title until recently. They are a primary resource for the study of early Christianity, especially the postapostolic period (ca. 70-135). They provide significant and often unparalleled glimpses of and insights into the life of Christians and the Christian movement during a critical transitional stage in its history.

Many different forms of early Christian thought, worship, and church organization are represented in this small group of writings. The most common form is the letter or epistle.²⁹ They preserve early sources and traditions that otherwise would have been lost, such as ancient hymns and creeds. In many respects, the apostolic fathers preserve an additional piece of history about the course of early Christianity following the death of the first apostles.

Papias, a Bishop of Hierapolis, is first referred to by Irenaeus and then by Eusebius, as an important figure in the early Christian movement of the second century.³⁰ His *Interpretations of the Sayings of the Lord* in five books, published ca. 130, has not survived and is known only through fragments quoted in later writers. Eusebius dates Papias to the time of Trajan, making him a contemporary of Polycarp and Ignatius. He lists him among the successors of the apostles and devotes a long chapter to him, to which we owe some of the most important fragments. Fragment 3 illustrates the account of the end of Judas the traitor.

²⁸ Jefford 1996, 1.

²⁹ These writings include: Letter of Barnabas, Didache, Letters of Ignatius, Letter of Polycarp, Martyrdom of Polycarp, 1 Clement, 2 Clement, Shepherd of Herman, and Letter to Diognetus.

³⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.33.4. Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 2001, 103.

Fragments of Papias concerning Judas:

From The Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord

Judas walked about in this world a sad example of impiety; for his body having swollen to such an extent that he could not pass where a chariot could pass easily, he was crushed by the chariot, so that his bowels gushed out.³¹

One of the most striking claims that Papias makes in his work is that when trying to uncover details concerning the life and teachings of Jesus, he much preferred the “living voice” of companions of the apostles to stories “that came out of books” (fragment 3). This may embody the view typical among ancient writers (not shared by scholars who study antiquity), that live testimony that can be queried and cross-examined is superior to accounts entombed in writing.³²

From Apollinarius of Laodicaea

Judas did not die by hanging but lived on, having been cut down before he choked to death. Indeed, the Acts of the Apostles makes this clear (1:18). Papias, the disciple of John, recounts this more clearly in the fourth book of the *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord*.³³

The work of Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, is one of the most valued remains of early Christian antiquity. In chapter XXXI –Doctrines of the Cainites – he writes:

Others again declare that Cain derived his being from the Power above, and acknowledge that Esau, Korah, the Sodomites, and all such persons, are related to themselves. On this

³¹ Fragments of Papias 3 (ANF 1:153).

³² Ehrman 2003, 86-88.

³³ Fragments of Papias 18 (AF, 583).

account, they add, they have been assailed by the Creator, yet no one of them has suffered injury. They declare that Judas the traitor was thoroughly acquainted with these things, and that he alone, knowing the truth as no others did, accomplished the mystery of the betrayal; by him all things, both earthly and heavenly, were thus thrown into confusion. They produce a fictitious history of this kind, which they style the Gospel of Judas.³⁴

Origen in *Against Celsus* Chapter XI states:

And if we must make a statement regarding Judas which may overwhelm our opponents with shame, we would say that, in the book of Psalms, the whole of the 108th contains a prophesy about Judas, the beginning of which is this: ‘O God, hold not thy peace before my praise; for the mouth of the sinner, and the mouth of the crafty man are against me.’ And it is predicted in the psalm, both that Judas separated himself from the number of apostles on account of his sins and that another was selected in his place.³⁵

This appears to state the reason Judas betrayed Jesus; it was his predestined fate, just as in the Oedipus Rex legend.

Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 310-402) describes all the heresies he has known in *The Medicine Chest* 38.1.2-5; 38.3.1-5. Concerning Judas we read:

The Cainites say that Judas was their kinsman and count him among those possessing the highest knowledge, so that they also carry around a short writing in his name which they call the Gospel of Judas... Some of them say that it was because Christ was so wicked

³⁴ *Against Heresies* 1.31 (ANF 1:358).

³⁵ *Against Celsus* 2.11 (ANF 4:435).

that he was betrayed by Judas, because he, Christ wanted to distort what pertains to the law.³⁶

Tertullian of Carthage *Against Marcion* 2.28.2; 4.41.1

Tertullian confronts Marcion who says that the Old Testament god is proven to be deceitful and a fraud because he knowingly chose Judas as Jesus' betrayer. Marcion then suggested that, because of this, Judas should be granted impunity.³⁷

3.2. New Testament Apocrypha

Scholars have gathered a diverse collection of early Christian literature under the term "New Testament Apocrypha." The term was first used to refer to documents whose use was restricted only to a few people. They were the elite group who were "spiritual" enough to have access to the mysteries contained in the documents. But the writings were "hidden" from the rest. Later the term was expanded to include a broad range of extra-canonical literature (but not the Apostolic Fathers and some other Early Christian writings). Many writings in the New Testament Apocrypha are patterned (superficially), after the types of documents in the New Testament. So there are gospels, acts, epistles, and apocalypses.

Some of this literature was produced by Christians who held beliefs that were later condemned and suppressed by the majority church. Later Christianity did its best to eliminate all traces of these heretical (not orthodox) beliefs. So we have been dependent for much of our

³⁶ Epiphanius, *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius*, 134.

³⁷ *Against Marcion* 2.28 (ANF 3. 320) and *Against Marcion* 4.41 (ANF 3.419).

information about them to references and brief quotations of their literature in the writings of Christian authors who argue against them.

Other literature included in the New Testament Apocrypha was the product of popular Christian piety and curiosity. As time went on Christians wondered about people who were mentioned only briefly in the Old Christian traditions. They let their imaginations fill in what might have happened in what they considered were gaps in the stories about Jesus and the earliest church. Such fictionalized embellishments and expansions stimulated popular interest. They are pious attempts to novelize.³⁸ I will present several of these texts in chapter five.

3.3 Apologists, “Heretics” and The Gospel of Judas

The apologetic age flourished during the second century. Christian apologists wrote to defend their faith against popular slander and official repression and also against rival forms of belief and worship such as Judaism and Greek and Roman paganism. Among the apologists were Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hippolytus, Eusebius, and Epiphanius. Historians, by reading these apologies, can see the main objections that pagans raised against Christianity, the manner in which the church responded to them, and how Christian theology developed as a result.

The word “heretic” denotes those who deviated from the line maintained by the leaders of churches which claimed to have been founded by apostles. The many converts who joined the early church came from a wide variety of backgrounds. This resulted in widely differing interpretations of that method, some of which threatened the integrity of the church. None was felt to be as dangerous and threatening as the phenomenon that scholars categorize under the

³⁸ Nickle 1980,168.

term “Gnosticism.” This was not a well-defined organization in competition with the church but rather it was a vast and amorphous movement that existed both within and outside the church.³⁹

The existence of a gospel of Judas is first attested by the late second-century bishop Irenaeus of Lyon,⁴⁰ who mentions it in his famous treatise entitled *Against Heresies*, which was noted in section 3.1. According to Irenaeus, Gnostics claimed that Judas Iscariot was acquainted with the ways of the true God; that Judas alone knew the truth, and as a result he performed the mystery of the betrayal of Jesus. A copy of the *Gospel of Judas* was found in Middle Egypt in the 1970s. I will present this amazing find in chapter four.

The most substantial cache of Gnostic documents conveniently available in English translation is from the Nag Hammadi. Discovered in the late 1940s, the works disclose a very different world from that of the New Testament. Those who collected this library were Christians, and many of the essays were originally composed by Christian authors. Gnosticism was ultimately eradicated from Christendom, except for occasional underground movements.⁴¹

3.4 Conclusion

Early Christian writings show different concerns and emphases. Examined in a historical way, these writings are among our earliest witnesses to Christian faith. But there is something shared at the core of these traditional writings. The importance of instruction by tradition and a missionary link between communities are two dynamics that Gnosticism did not develop in the same manner as the Early Christian Fathers. Gnostics appealed to new revelation and special knowledge whereas the Christianity that prevailed referred to itself as emerging from Judaism

³⁹ Gonzalez 1984, 58.

⁴⁰ Irenaeus' exposition of Christian theology developed out of his critique of the Gnostic systems. He is considered by many to be the first systematic theologian, as well as the founder of Christian theology.

⁴¹ Robinson 1988, 3.

and still hoped in promises of the God of Israel. These roots explain the consistent appeal to the role of oral or written tradition being passed down.⁴²

The teachings of the Gnostics and other heretics called forth replies and refutations from defenders of the apostolic tradition. There had to be an institutional structure if Christianity was to survive. Men like Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Origen, and Tertullian formulated the orthodox reply. According to them Gnosticism was a recent development and could not be traced to teachings of Jesus. For support they called upon apostolic tradition. These men claimed that because they stood in the steps of the apostles, they alone had the authority to interpret the mind of Jesus and of his first disciples. Irenaeus claimed to be in a particularly good position to advance this claim for he had come to Lyon from Ephesus where he had been a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John the author of the Gospel. As bishop and successor of an apostle, he understood himself to be in the strongest position possible to know what the apostolic teaching was.⁴³ The Orthodox Church developed as it did, in part, due to Irenaeus' success in giving the church an understanding of itself and its doctrine.

⁴² Bock 2006, 32-35.

⁴³ Urban 1986, 79.

CHAPTER 4

GOSPEL OF JUDAS

4.0. Introduction

In a newly discovered manuscript found in Egypt containing the *Gospel of Judas* the traditional picture of Judas may be seen in a new light. In this text, which survives in the ancient Egyptian language of Coptic, Judas, far from being merely an infamous villain, is actually Jesus' special chosen disciple, and the recipient of secret knowledge.

In April 2006, the National Geographic Society made public the *Gospel of Judas*. After the unveiling of the Codex Tchacos⁴⁴ numerous books and articles were written on and about the *Gospel of Judas*. Some scholars supported the National Geographic interpretation that Judas is the hero of the text, while others interpreted the text as portraying Judas to be as evil as ever. This chapter purposes to analyze this gospel in dialogue with the views of other scholars.

4.1. Background Information

Sometimes in the 1970s, a copy of the *Gospel of Judas*, translated into Coptic from its original second-century Greek, had been found in Middle Egypt near Al-Minya. It is rumored that peasants accidentally came upon a burial cave containing a limestone box that for centuries had carefully preserved ancient writings. One of these was a papyrus book (the Tchacos Codex) that dates approximately to the fourth century.⁴⁵ Over the years, dealers secretly showed these

⁴⁴ DeConick 2007, 62. Codex Tchacos are the books' modern designation named after the Zurich antiquities dealer Frieda Nussberger-Tchacos, who bought it after it had been on the market for twenty years. In 2001, she brought the codex to Switzerland, met the famous Coptologist Professor Kasser, and set up a foundation to aid the restoration of the codex. Eventually the National Geographic Society became involved and appointed a team of scholars to complete the restoration, translation, and interpretation of the codex.

⁴⁵ Gathercole 2007, 8. The papyrus has been carbon dated, and even the ink analyzed. The carbon dating was overseen by Dr. Timothy Jull, Director of the University of Arizona's Accelerated Mass Spectrometry facility, using

writings to a number of people in efforts to sell them at an extraordinary price. Moved from place to place and improperly stored – first in a humid safety-deposit box in Hicksville, N.Y. for almost seventeen years, and later frozen – the Tchacos Codex suffered considerable damage from the time it was found until 2001. It then came into the able hands of the philologist Randolphe Kasser, who, along with the conservator Florence Darbre and the historian Gregor Wurst, labored hard over the fragments for five years to restore the text as close as possible to its original condition.⁴⁶ Because of the fragmentary nature of the manuscript and portions of the text that remain unaccounted for, there are several rather long lacunae with a substantial number of lines missing.

The *Gospel of Judas* is the third tractate of Codex Tchacos. This twenty-six page tractate is in various states of preservation. There is no title written at the beginning. On the last page, however, there is a titular subscript: “the Gospel of Judas.” About eighty-five per cent of the Coptic text survives, while about fifteen per cent is either inaccessible at present or lost.⁴⁷

Both the transcription of the Coptic text and an English translation were made available by the National Geographic Society on their website⁴⁸ in March 2006 as the result of an extremely difficult restoration, accomplished since 2001 by a team of scholars hired by National Geographic to reconstruct and analyze it. In May 2006, R. Kasser, M. Meyer, and G. Wurst in collaboration with B.D. Ehrman published a volume entitled the *Gospel of Judas*, containing an introduction, a translation and a commentary (published in Washington, D.C. by National Geographic). Square brackets, [], indicate a lacuna in the manuscript. Such a lacuna may be

samples of the pages and a small piece of the leather binding material. Jull’s analysis revealed a date, to an estimated 90 per cent degree of accuracy, of 280 CE, plus/minus 60 years. In other words we are looking at a time-frame of between 220-340 CE.

⁴⁶ Pagels and King 2007, xi-xii.

⁴⁷ Kasser and Wurst 2007, 178.

⁴⁸ <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/document.html>.

restored with Coptic letters within the square brackets if a restoration of a lacuna is judged by the editors to be plausible. Otherwise, dots are placed within the square brackets to indicate the approximate number of letters missing. In the case of larger lacunae, the space between the brackets is left blank.

Due to its intriguing title and contents, special emphasis has been placed by the media on the *Gospel of Judas* and much scholarly attention has been devoted to this document. It is a major find that attracts the interest of historians of late antiquity because it sheds new light on Christian origins as well as Gnostic trends in the variegated context of early Christianity, and their relation with Jewish and pagan worlds in the first centuries of our era.⁴⁹

4.2. Observations from the *Gospel of Judas*

The *Gospel of Judas* is about the disciple Judas and the secret revelation given by Jesus to him alone. The text covers only the eight days before Passover. As in the New Testament Gospels, Jesus called twelve disciples. But in this gospel Jesus laughs at the disciples for blessing bread and he condemns the god to whom they are offering the prayer of thanksgiving. Jesus says to them, “You guys are not worshipping the supreme God but the lesser Demiurge.” They all cry out to Jesus, “You are the Son of *our* God.” (cf. Mk 8:30, Mt 16:16, Lk 9:20). “Our god” is the creator and ruler of this world, not the Supreme God of the New Testament Gospels. When Jesus laughed at the disciples, they became angry. Jesus challenged them to stand up to him if they were strong enough. Only Judas was able to do so. He knew who Jesus was and from where he came. Because of this, Judas is chosen to receive the full mysteries of the kingdom. “Not so that you will go there, but you will grieve a great deal” (35.26), Jesus said to Judas.

⁴⁹ Scopello 2006, xi

April DeConick inserted subheadings in her translation of the *Gospel of Judas* to assist the reader through the unfamiliar narrative.⁵⁰ They are as follows:

33.1-21 Opening Salutation

33.22-34.10 Jesus Critical of the Eucharist Offered by the Twelve Disciples

34.11-36.10 Jesus Critical of the Confession Made by the Twelve Disciples

36.11-37.20 Jesus Critical of the Holiness of the Twelve Disciples

37.20-39.5 The Twelve Disciples Tell Jesus About Their Nightmares

39.6-40.26 Jesus Interprets the Disciples' Nightmare

41.1-44.14 Jesus Instructs the Disciples and Judas

44.15-45.12 Judas Tells Jesus About his Dream

45.12-46.4 Jesus Interprets Judas' Dream

46.5-47.1 Jesus and Judas Disagree About the Meaning of Judas' Dream

47.1-53.16 Jesus Instructs Judas About the Sethian World

53.17-56.10 Jesus Answers Judas' Questions About the Fate of Human Beings

56.11-58.8 Jesus Predicts Judas' Fate

58.9-58.26 Judas Betrays Jesus

The longest portion of the document is a prophecy given to Judas alone. It is not only about the end-times of the earth but begins at a point long before the creation of the earth (47.5, 6 - 55.2). After the other disciples tell Jesus about their dream, Judas tells Jesus about his own dream. In the vision he saw the disciples stoning and persecuting him. He saw a heavenly place to which he is not admitted. Jesus replied to Judas, "Your star has led you astray. No person of mortal birth can enter the house you have seen. But I will show it to you, but you will grieve much" (46.12). Then Judas replied, "What is the advantage that I have received? For you have

⁵⁰ DeConick 2007, 66-91.

set me apart for (or from) that generation.” Jesus answered, “You will become the thirteenth and you will be cursed by other generations and you will come to rule over them. In the last days, you will not ascend on high to the holy [generation]” (46.13 – 47.1). Jesus continues, “You will exceed (do worse than) all of them for you will sacrifice the man who bears me. Already your horn has been raised, and your wrath has been kindled, and your star has passed by⁵¹ and your heart has [become strong]” (56.18-24). Judas asks, “What will those who have been baptized in your name do?” Jesus responds but the next ten lines are missing.⁵²

What *did* the baptisms do? The Sethian *Holy Book of the Invisible Spirit* tells us that Gnostic baptism alters the initiates place in the cosmic drama, defeating the cosmic and demiurgic grip on the person’s spirit or, in other words, the soul was freed from the Archons and the fate of their stars. The baptismal theology is highlighted by Clement of Alexandria, who quotes the Valentinian Gnostics as saying, “Until baptism, Fate is real, but after it the astrologists are no longer right.”⁵³ Jesus had said to the disciples in 42.7-8, “Stop struggling with me. Each one of you has his own star.” From this statement, I assume that we are witnessing a Gnostic doctrine of pre-destination.

After a lacuna, the text states that Jesus went into the “guest room for his prayer” (58.14-26) where he is arrested. Some scribes were there watching carefully in order to arrest him during the prayer. For they were afraid of the people, since he was held by all to be a prophet. And they approached Judas. They said to him, “What are you doing here? Aren’t you the disciple of Jesus?” He answered them as they wished. Then Judas received some money. He handed him over to them. Here ends the *Gospel of Judas* as far as we have it. There is no trial,

⁵¹ DeConick 2007, 59. This means that Judas is locked into this fate. He will bring about Jesus’ death and there is nothing he can do to stop his involvement in the affair.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 124. DeConick suggests that baptism is believed to be ineffective in overcoming fate and one’s connection with one’s star, given the criticism of sacramental practices of apostolic Christianity.

⁵³ Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpts of Theodotus*, 78.1-2.

crucifixion, or resurrection account, thus differing from the New Testament Gospels which all lead up to the death and resurrection of Jesus for the salvation of humankind. This gospel does not deny that Judas handed over Jesus, but it was for the salvation *from* the world and not salvation *for* the world. In fact, Jesus is the first person to experience this “salvation”; this release from the bondage of the spirit trapped in the body. In this sense, Judas *is* the hero because he helps Jesus achieve “salvation.”

According to Elaine Pagels, the *Gospel of Judas* does more than champion the disciple which the four New Testament Gospels regard as the villain; it also sharply condemns “the twelve.” This radically reverses the traditional gospel story.⁵⁴ At its beginnings, the Christian movement was fragile, often wracked by strife, as the New Testament documents show.⁵⁵ The author of Luke-Acts no doubt intended his picture of the early Church’s harmony to nurture the spirit of unity – precisely because he recognized that what we call the early church actually consisted of diverse and scattered groups of believers.⁵⁶ The *Gospel of Judas* gives us a more detailed and complex account of the history of Christianity. It helps us realize how hard countless church leaders had to work to create the impression that Christianity actually was a single, static, universal system of belief. Recently discovered texts, including the *Gospel of Judas*, show us what was lost when church leaders consolidated these institutions and silenced so many early Christian voices.

Pagels goes on to say that only in the second half of the second century do we see a single bishop elevated over the rest.⁵⁷ However, Paul’s letters and Acts indicate that leaders were concerned to argue about what constituted right belief from the onset. Pagels’ question is

⁵⁴ Pagels 2007, 13.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, xx.

why do many people have the impression that the early church was a unified and harmonious communion of believers? In answer she suggests, “The impression was no accident. Instead it was carefully constructed by the author who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. For this author wanted to stop disagreement from leading to schism, so he chose to gloss over the harsh infighting between Peter and Paul”⁵⁸ (See Acts 15:1-35). James, the elder statesman of the group, stood up and proposed a compromise solution which the whole congregation accepted and then circulated in a letter to all Gentile believers – to nurture the spirit of unity because he recognized that what we often call the early church consisted of clusters of diverse and scattered groups of believers.⁵⁹

Marvin Meyer states that the *Gospel of Judas* proclaims a way of salvation through wisdom, knowledge and enlightenment. The gospel highlights the figure of Judas Iscariot, who is acclaimed in this gospel as the disciple closest to Jesus, who understands Jesus completely and does all that Jesus asks of him. It includes features that reflect Jewish and Greco-Roman – and particularly Platonic – themes, and in the end Jesus approaches his death, with his friend Judas, in a way that is somewhat reminiscent of Socrates in the *Phaedo*. For Jesus, as for Socrates, death is not to be faced with fear, but is to be anticipated with joy, as the soul or inner person is to be freed from the body of flesh.

By turning Jesus over to the authorities, Meyer suggests, Judas shows that he is the best friend and most faithful disciple of Jesus. Whereas Judas was vilified and marginalized in much of Christian tradition, he is rehabilitated and redeemed in the *Gospel of Judas*. With its mystical

⁵⁸ Pagels 2007, 42.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 42.

message and its sympathetic portrayal of Judas Iscariot, this gospel will help scholars rewrite much of the history of the church during the early period.⁶⁰

Bart Ehrman offers that the *Gospel of Judas* will be fascinating to scholars as well as to non-scholars for it is centered on a figure widely known, much maligned, and broadly speculated about. What makes the newly discovered gospel famous – or infamous – is that it portrays Judas quite differently from anything we previously knew. Here he is not the evil, corrupt, devil-inspired follower of Jesus who betrayed his master by handing him over to the enemies. He is instead Jesus' closest intimate and friend, the one who understood Jesus better than anyone else, who turned Jesus over to the authorities because Jesus *wanted* him to do so. In handing him over, Judas performed the greatest service imaginable. According to this gospel, Jesus wanted to escape this material world that stands opposed to God and return to his heavenly home.⁶¹

Ehrman goes on to say that there will be no resurrection. A resurrection of a dead corpse brings the person back into the world of the creator. Since the point is to allow the soul to leave this world behind and enter into “that great and holy generation” – that is, the divine realm that transcends this world – a resurrection of the body is the very last thing that Jesus, or any of his true followers, would want.⁶²

Some scholars look at the *Gospel of Judas* in a different light. James M. Robinson, general editor of *The Nag Hammadi Library* relates that this recently published gospel does not add any new information about what happened in Jerusalem around 30 CE. Although it is an important text for specialists in second-century Gnosticism, such as himself, it has been misrepresented so as to sensationalize it in order to make as large a profit on its investment as

⁶⁰ Meyer 2007, 10-13.

⁶¹ Ehrman “Christianity Turned on its Head” in *The Gospel of Judas* 2007, 79-80.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 110.

possible.⁶³ With the *Gospel of Judas* lost for more than eighteen hundred years, the story of its discovery and marketing has proven to be very colorful, replete with smugglers, black-market antiquities dealers, religious scholars, backstabbing partners, and greedy entrepreneurs meeting secretly over the course of two decades across the borders of two or three continents.⁶⁴ The Coptic transcription made available on the National Geographic Website was intended to prevent others from publishing their own translations, as the lawyers of the National Geographic have made all too clear.⁶⁵

Robinson goes on to say that the introduction and conclusion are the only parts of the *Gospel of Judas* that sound like a gospel. The body of the text consists only of second-century Gnostic thought with a focus on criticizing the emerging Orthodox Church. Of course, Gospel material, canonical and non-canonical, written and oral, was well known in Christian communities of the second century. The *Gospel of Judas* does not call for us to assume dependence on a written source, but it seems to echo Luke-Acts.⁶⁶

N.T. Wright states that this new *Gospel of Judas*, while a spectacularly interesting archaeological find, tells us nothing about the real Jesus, or for that matter, the real Judas. In particular, it does not (as some have claimed) “rehabilitate” Judas over against the charges laid against him in the New Testament. It lays bare the real agenda which has been driven by a scholarly quest for an alternative Jesus and also the popular eagerness for sensational material.⁶⁷

Wright goes on to ask, what is going on in the present time when scholars not only make texts like the *Gospel of Judas* freshly available, for which all of us who are interested in the ancient world are profoundly grateful, but also urge it upon us, commending it as a new and

⁶³ Robinson 2007, 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 207-209.

⁶⁷ Wright 2006, 13.

exciting angle of Jesus and Christianity? Part of the answer, to be sure, lies in the publishers' desire to make money. Which would you prefer, he asks: to publish the text in an academic monograph which will sell a few thousand copies to libraries and scholars, or to set it out in a racy, now-at-last-we-know-the-truth presentation which will hit the bestseller lists?⁶⁸

April DeConick, a historian of early Jewish and Christian thought, challenged the interpretation and translation of the *Gospel of Judas* published by the National Geographic team. The team's translation and interpretation appeared to be in error. Their (mis)translation of several key phrases supported their provocative and sensationalist interpretation, while her "corrected" translation did not. In fact, the "corrected" translation showcased an evil Judas who remains separated from the holy or saintly generation, unable to ascend beyond the cosmic girdle and the realm of Ialdabaoth in the thirteen aeon.⁶⁹

DeConick's examination of the *Gospel of Judas* has led her to see that Judas is not a blessed figure, but the opposite – a corrupted and tragic figure who becomes connected to Ialdabaoth, operating as his human henchman to destroy Jesus in the archonic war against the Father. In her opinion, the author of this gospel creatively uses the villain Judas and his tragedy to assess and harshly critique features of mainstream Christianity, (in particular the confession of the Church), its tradition of apostolic authority, and its coveted atonement theology.⁷⁰

Stanley Porter states that the earliest documents written by the apostles (or those close to them) should take precedence over every other subsequent document. In other words, the criterion for defining Christianity in the second century was not simply the privilege of whoever won the battles (the "lucky winner" thesis), but whose view of the Christian faith was based on

⁶⁸ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁹ DeConick 2007, 240. In the typical Sethian narrative of creation, it is Ialdabaoth who emerges as the prime creator god responsible for crafting our entire universe.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 247.

the teaching of the earliest and apostolic writings. That being the case, the orthodox rejection of anything that differed from the original apostolic message seems to be quite justified. For those who know their church history, there is good reason to believe that the Orthodox Church, not the Gnostics, is the holder of the apostolic tradition. The Orthodox Church's texts, creeds, documents, and tradition all pre-date Gnosticism by generations.⁷¹

Madeleine Scopello held a conference in October, 2006 at the University of Sorbonne and at the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art in Paris in order to give an opportunity to scholars specializing in the field of Gnosticism to exchange their ideas and discuss the *Gospel of Judas*. The two-day conference tried to decipher the complex nature of this unique text. The papers offered at the conference highlighted two major approaches, one in favor of an interpretation of Judas as the most faithful disciple, entrusted with secret revelations, while the other figured him as enslaved to the schemes of the Demiurge. The followings are highlights from a few of those papers.

Stephen Emmel writes that the author of the *Gospel of Judas* presupposed on the part of his readers the crucifixion of Jesus and the preceding betrayal. He disagrees that Jesus requires Judas' act in order for his spirit to be freed from the prison of his body. Jesus is already a remarkably "free spirit" throughout the *Gospel of Judas*. He comes and goes as he pleases, apparently dividing his time according to his own free choice between his disciples on earth and "some other great and holy generation." Jesus did not instruct Judas to hand him over, but predicted that he would.⁷²

Another contributor, Einar Thomassen, stated that the figure in the *Gospel of Judas* can be understood in two ways. According to one interpretation, Judas Iscariot is the hero of the

⁷¹ Porter 2007, 112-113, 117.

⁷² Stephen Emmel. "The Presuppositions And The Purpose Of The Gospel of Judas," in the *Gospel of Judas in Context*. (ed. Madeleine Scopello 2008), 33, 38.

gospel. He understands Jesus and Jesus favor him. He is entrusted with the painful but necessary task of handing Jesus over to the authorities, in order that the Savior may be liberated from the prison of his earthly body. This is the interpretation of the *Gospel of Judas* that was promulgated together with the publication of the text on April 6, 2006, and which no doubt contributed to the sensationalism surrounding the event of the publication: here is an ancient gospel that turns on its head what the Church has always taught by making the greatest villain of the canonical gospels into the hero of the passion story.

There are, Thomassen continued, dissenting voices being heard that contest this interpretation of the new “gospel.” Even though Judas is granted a knowledge that is denied to the other disciples, he will not profit from it. He will not attain the kingdom. Jesus tells Judas that his star has led him astray. He will betray Jesus because he is controlled by a particular star. When Jesus tells Judas to lift up his eyes and look at the cloud (57.16), Judas enters it, becomes invisible, and a voice is heard from the cloud. Here again crucial text is missing, but by entering the cloud, Judas is apparently somehow assimilated to his star and is initiated, as it were, into his destiny as the betrayer who sacrificed Jesus.⁷³

4.3. Conclusion

The opening lines of the *Gospel of Judas* betray its Gnostic character. An apparent method of Gnosticism is to reinterpret the obvious to make it obscure, or in this case, to reveal that something that has been thought to be obvious – that Judas was evil – is in fact the opposite. Nevertheless, in whatever way one may evaluate the *Gospel of Judas*, it does allow insights into second century discussions about theology. It makes one sensitive to the fact that Christianity was expressed with differing levels of diversity. It leads scholars to wrestle with the question of

⁷³ Einar Thomassen. “Judas: Hero or Villain?” in the *Gospel of Judas in Context*. (ed. Madeleine Scopello, 2008), 157, 160, 162, 166.

what the church was like and how Christians made the case for their identity in the period before the widespread use of what we now call the New Testament. It is clear that this gospel reflects the bitter struggle over the identity of Jesus in that period. Alternative expressions of Christian claims in the second century affected the emergence of a carefully defined orthodoxy of the third and fourth centuries. And finally, awareness of early Christianity outside the academic world has risen dramatically probably because of popularized texts such as the *Gospel of Judas*.

CHAPTER 5

JUDAS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

5.0. Introduction

One must imagine that a mysterious, villainous figure like Judas would have been the subject of Christian popular imagination and folkloric tales. Legends and myths are not merely spun out of thin air; rather they often develop from a historical actuality. The ultimate source lies in the narratives of the four Gospels. The earliest extension of the canonical accounts is to be found in the apocrypha and Earliest Christian writings, with their curious mixture of the canonical accounts, oral tradition, folk-lore, and fancy. They add from tradition or imagination, details and incidents to satisfy curiosity, or to support a particular interpretation.

From antiquity on, a number of stories and images circulated to fill in the biographical blanks in the Gospels' account of Judas' life and death or to resolve their multiple paradoxes. The Middle Ages were perhaps the heyday depiction of Judas as the epitome of evil. Here we find stories about the childhood of Judas, prefiguring his later treachery; he also begins to be charged with sexual enormity; and we even find Judas with a wife who shares in, or perhaps instigates, his wrong-doing. Marvin Meyer offers representative selections from ten of these texts that give a vivid picture of some of the imaginative ways in which the Judas legend developed through the centuries (see Meyer's *Judas, the Definitive Collection of Gospels and Legends about the Infamous Apostle of Jesus* 2007, 109-138). He arranged the texts in such a manner as to allow for a general narrative flow from the account of Judas as a naughty boy to texts that depict the final fate of Judas in hell and interpret him as someone walking in the

footsteps of Oedipus Rex. I find his arrangement helpful; therefore, I will to use it to some degree as an outline to present a brief summary of these legends.

5.1. Legends

Arabic Infancy Gospel

This gospel, originally written in Arabic in the fifth or sixth century, was later translated into Latin and published in 1697. It includes a story of the encounter between the young boy Jesus and his ultimate nemesis, the young Judas. The boys were playmates in Bethlehem. In this gospel, even at this young age, Judas is often seized by Satan and driven by him to bite anyone who comes near. When he cannot find anyone to bite, he bites his own hands and limbs. His mother brings him to Mary and Jesus, hoping that he can be cured. Jesus is taken out to play at a stream, and Judas comes up and sits beside him “at his right hand.” But just then, as is his wont, Satan intervenes. He enters into Judas, making him want to bite Jesus. He is not able to do so and ends up only hitting him on his right side, causing him to cry. Satan, though, is driven from the child, fleeing from him in the form of a mad dog. And that same side on which Judas struck Jesus, the Jews transfixed with a lance (“Arabic Gospel” 116-17). It seems strange that in the synoptic Gospels, Jesus is not pierced with a lance; and in John, it is not Judas or the Jews but a Roman soldier who “pierced his side, and at once blood and water came out” (19:34).⁷⁴

Narrative of Joseph of Arimathea, or a Pilate text, 1-2

Joseph of Arimathea tells the story of how he requested the body of Jesus from Pilate in order to bury it, and for this reason, was confined in prison by the Jews. Seven days before Christ endured his passion, two condemned criminals were sent from Jericho to the procurator Pilate. Jesus was also taken into custody on the third day before Passover. But for Caiaphas and

⁷⁴ For more information on this legend, see *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library* vol xvi, 116-117.

the Jewish multitude it was no Passover, but rather it was a time of great mourning, because of the plundering of the sanctuary by one of the thieves who had stolen the Law. They called in Judas Iscariot and spoke with him. He was the son of the brother of Caiaphas the priest. He was not personally a disciple of Jesus, but the whole Jewish multitude urged him, in an underhanded way, to follow Jesus, not that he might be obedient to the signs done by him or confess him, but that he might catch him saying something false and hand him over to them. They gave him gifts for such audacity, together with two drachmai a day. He did this for two years until an opportune time presented itself to hand Jesus over to the authorities. On the third day, before Jesus was taken into custody, Judas said to the Jews, “What are you willing to give for me to hand over to you the one who has overthrown the law and has pillaged the prophets?” “Thirty gold coins,” they said. Judas led the officers to Jesus and said to them, “Arrest the one I shall kiss.” They then seized Jesus and handed him over to Caiaphas and the high priests, and Judas said, “This is the one who has stolen the law and the prophets.”⁷⁵

Sedulius, Paschal Hymn

Sedulius wrote his influential *Paschal Hymn*, or *Carmen Paschale*, in the early part of the fifth century as a gospel epic in imitation of classical epic poetry, such as that of Virgil. Meant to introduce Christians to beautiful Latin prose in Christian form so that they would not have to read pagan writers, this epic influenced the attitude of educated Christians for almost thirteen centuries. The poem presents Judas as a cruel betrayer, a vicious traitor, and merciless thief. Sedulius ranted against Judas, the “blinded one who bore so much wickedness,” exclaiming “If only that damned one had, on account of a sterile womb, / Been unable to experience a birthday”

⁷⁵ Meyer 2007, 169. This translation is based on the Greek text in Constantin von Tischendorf, ed., *Evangelia Apocrypha*, 459-64.

(II 43, 50-51). This epic was required reading in schools throughout the Middle Ages and a source for Latin and vernacular biblical epics well into the seventeenth century.

Sedulius was only one of a number of Christian poets in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries who set about retelling biblical narratives in longer hexameter poems. Christian Latin authors had written in prose during their first centuries of their movement's existence, but after the Edict of Toleration (311) and the so-called edict of Milan in 313, which marked the end of the persecutions begun during the reign of Diocletian, they began to experiment with verse. The biblical epic was one of the earliest and most popular of the new Christian poetic forms.

Sedulius' biblical epic is an important and fascinating cultural artifact. It provides a more representative picture of the popular piety and culture of the age than the more exhaustively studied *De trinitate* or *De doctrina Christiana* of Augustine.⁷⁶ In my view, the *Paschal Hymn* is a synthesis of the gospel accounts of Judas.

Gospel of Bartholomew

There exists a whole series of texts associated with the name of the apostle Bartholomew. In addition, an abundance of Coptic fragments, recently found in various libraries, have been assigned to the gospel of Bartholomew. These Coptic fragments are from before the fifth and seventh century. One of the points noted in these fragments is that Judas is excluded from distributing the bread to feed the five thousand. The subject of another is the betrayal by Judas. It relates that Judas' wife induced her husband to treachery. She was only happy when he brought home enough money to satisfy the evil in her eyes and her insatiable greed. One day she said to him, "Look, the Jews are pursuing your master. Get up and hand him over to them. They will pay you a lot of money, and we shall use it for our life and our house." Judas listened to his

⁷⁶ Springer 1988, 1, 5, 149.

wife, and he became estranged from the things of heaven and the things of earth, and he reached the realm of death, the place of weeping and groaning. Another fragment describes how the seven-month-old child of Joseph of Arimathaea, to whom Judas' wife served as nurse, besought his father to send the woman away since she and her husband had accepted blood-money.⁷⁷

Gospel of Nicodemus

Sometimes known as the Acts of Pilate, this legendary account of Jesus' trial, death, and descent into hell is full of great stories. This gospel as a whole appears to stem from a written document of possibly the fourth or fifth century. The story about Judas is not found in every manuscript of the Gospel of Nicodemus. In one particularly intriguing manuscript we find that after the betrayal, Judas goes home to find some rope in order to hang himself. When he comes into his kitchen, he sees his wife there, roasting a chicken on a spit over a charcoal fire. He tells her to prepare a rope for him to hang himself with. In her perplexity, she asks him why. He tells her that he has handed his teacher Jesus over to evildoers to be killed but that Jesus will rise on the third day, to their woe. His wife tells him to speak and think no such thing: "For it is just as possible for this cock roasting over the charcoal fire to crow as for Jesus to rise again, as you are saying." And immediately, as she finished speaking, that cock spread its wings and crowed three times. Then Judas was convinced even more and immediately he made the noose of rope and hanged himself.⁷⁸ Perhaps *The Gospel of Nicodemus* is a spin-off from the New Testament Gospel accounts of Peter denying Christ three times before the cock crowed.

⁷⁷ Meyer 2007, 122.

⁷⁸ Ehrman 2006, 46-47.

Acts of Andrew and Paul

The *Acts of Andrew and Paul* is one of numerous examples of early Christian narratives that relate the adventures and mission of the apostles and disciples of Jesus after the resurrection. It now exists only in fragments, epitomes, and derivative recensions. The oldest testimony for the existence of the apocryphal gospel is in Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Several aspects of the *Acts of Andrew* indicate that its author wanted to write a Christian *Odyssey*. The *Acts* begins with Andrew, the former fisherman, sailing with the aid of his god from Archaea to rescue Matthias from the Myrmidons, Achilles' clan in Homer. Like Odysseus, the worst of the Myrmidons visit the netherworld and see the wicked punished.⁷⁹

Paul went to the underworld. He saw Judas undergoing great and grievous torment. Paul asked him, "What are you doing being punished like this? Why did not the Lord take you away with all the souls that he released?" Judas answered that he had begged Jesus to forgive him and not abandon him. So Jesus sent him into the desert and said to him, "Fear no one but God alone. If you see the devil coming, do not fear him, nor anyone except God alone." Judas then went off to fast. Satan approached him in the form of a dragon with his mouth opened and about to devour him. Judas became afraid and worshipped him. Because Judas "had destroyed his own hopes by worshipping Satan and killing himself," he is "sent back till the day of judgment."⁸⁰

Gospel of Barnabas

In an Islamic-influenced *Gospel of Barnabas* that could have been read by or to medieval or early modern Italians and Spaniards, Judas is actually mistaken for Jesus, taken to Herod, mocked, scourged, and finally crucified instead of Jesus because of their uncanny resemblance.

⁷⁹ MacDonald 2005, 1, 13.

⁸⁰ Elliott 1993, 302.

The Gospel of Barnabas rejects the assertion that Jesus died and rose again. Readers are instead informed that, “those disciples who did not fear God went by night and stole the body of Judas and hid it, spreading a report that Jesus was risen again, whence great confusion arose. The high priest then commanded, under pain of Anathema, that no one should talk of Jesus of Nazareth. And so there arose a great persecution, and many were stoned and many beaten, and many banished from the land, because they could not hold their peace on such a matter.”⁸¹ The synoptic gospels state that Simon of Cyrene carried Jesus’ cross for him. Perhaps the *Gospel of Barnabas* is built on this.

Book of the resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle

Jesus descended into hell and redeemed Adam and all his children. Then the Savior turned to the man who had handed him over and said to him, “Tell me, Judas, what did you gain by handing me over to the Jewish dogs? To be sure I endured all sorts of sufferings in order to fulfill the will of my Father and redeem and liberate my creation that I had made. But to you, woe to you with woe that is doubled...” (about three or four lines missing). Jesus uttered thirty curses against Judas in Hell.⁸² This legend is probably based on Matthew 26:15, where Judas betrays Jesus for money.

⁸¹ Meyer in *Judas: The Definitive Collection of Gospels and Legends 2007*, 170 states that this translation is based on the Italian text in Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, eds., *The Gospel of Barnabas*, 470-73, 478-81.

⁸² Meyer 2007, 130-133.

Golden Legend

Throughout the Middle Ages, by far the most popular collection of tales about the disciples of Jesus and about the later Christian saints was a book called the Golden Legend, compiled by the Dominican monk Jacobus of Voragine in 1265. Prior to the Protestant Reformation, this was perhaps the most widely read book in all of Christendom, for many people their principal source of “knowledge” about the early medieval church.⁸³

This legend may be a response to a series of questions: who were Judas’ parents, where did he come from, what sort of work engaged him in young adulthood, and how did he eventually become the twelfth apostle? Susan Gubar suggests that because parents, provenance, profession, and motives tend to humanize a character or because such features may factor into stories depicting Judas himself as a victim, Judas-Oedipus began to shed his demoniac persona as he modulates into being the bearer of a horrific but nevertheless poignant because preordained doom.⁸⁴

Before his birth, Judas’ mother had a dream that her son would bring ruin for the Jewish state. Not wanting the dream to come true, the parents put him in a basket and exposed him to the elements of the sea. The basket washed up on the island Scariot. They say this is where he got his name, Iscariot. The queen found the child and pretended that she had given birth to him. As fate would have it, shortly thereafter she conceived and bore a son and the two boys grew up together. Judas was jealous of the new baby and constantly mistreated him. This distressed the queen so at last she laid the whole matter bare. Upon learning this, Judas killed his brother and fled the land. He ran away to Jerusalem and became friendly with Pontius Pilate, who makes him his head steward.

⁸³ Ehrman 2006, 48.

⁸⁴ Gubar 2009, 141.

One day Pilate sent Judas off to steal some apples growing in his neighbor's yard. The neighbor happens to be Judas' real father, Ruben, who appears out of nowhere, surprising Judas. This leads to a fight in which Judas kills the older man. Pilate repays Judas' faithful behavior by awarding him all of Ruben's possessions, including his wife, Cyborea. It was finally revealed to Judas and Cyborea that Judas had married his mother and killed his father.

Out of his guilt and grief, Judas turned to Christ for forgiveness. Jesus accepts him as one of his disciples and entrusts him with the communal purse. Judas became angry when Jesus is anointed by a woman who has just wasted three hundred pence worth of ointment for no reason. As an act of revenge, he agrees with the chief priests to betray Jesus for thirty pence – his share, in his view, of the lost money. Later, overcome with remorse, Judas returned the money and went out hanged himself and burst open in the middle.

Jacobus of Voragine makes a point of stressing that it was appropriate that Judas dies by having his intestines pour out of his gut: he could not have died with something coming from the mouth, which had touched the glorious lips of Christ. And it was appropriate that his bowels poured forth, for he conceived of the idea of the betrayal within himself, that is, in his very bowels. Moreover, it was appropriate that the rope injured his throat, since it was with his throat that he uttered his words of betrayal.⁸⁵ I suggest that *Golden Legend* builds on the statement found in Mark 14:21: "It would have been better for that one not to have been born."

⁸⁵ Ehrman 2006, 49.

Voyage of Saint Brendan

One of the earliest preserved written versions of the legend is in Dutch, written in the twelfth century. Scholars believe it derived from a now lost Middle High German text combined with Celtic elements from Ireland and combines Christian and fairy tale elements. It describes Brendan, a monk from Galway, and his voyage around the world for nine years. The journey was begun as a punishment by an angel who had seen Brendan not to believe the truth of a book on miracles of creation and saw Brendan throw it into the fire. The angel tells him that truth has been destroyed. On his journeys Brendan encounters the wonders and horrors of the world, such as Judas frozen on one side and burning on the other. Matthew Arnold's "Saint Brendan" (1860) recounts the once-a-year "respice" from hell Judas receives to "staunch with ice [his] burning breast" because of an act of charity early in his life.⁸⁶ Rudyard Kipling's "The Lance Chantey" (1892) imagines God on Judgment Day about to "gather up the sea," but determining against such an act when the souls of mariners, of slaves, of the Apostle Paul, and also of Judas plead with him: "Lord, hast Thou forgotten Thy covenant with me? / How once a year I go / To cool me on the flow? / And Ye take my day of mercy if Ye take away the sea" (II. 12-15).⁸⁷

Dante's Inferno

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) wrote his epic poem the *Commedia* during his peripatetic years of exile from Florence in 1302, condemned to death should he ever return. He finished the poem right before the time of his death in Ravenna in 1321. The single poem is composed three parts, or canticles, *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, each describing one of the three distinct realms of the afterlife that compose the single universe comprehended by the divine plan.

⁸⁶ Arnold, 1965, 463-66.

⁸⁷ Kipling, 1989, 159-61.

The vision the poet recounts encompasses God's plan for the world, from its creation through to the Last Judgment. From the divine perspective, time does not exist, for in Dante's theology, as in Augustine's, God existed before time began and will still exist after time ceases. Everything that happens in the world, every thought and action, is known by God beforehand. From the human perspective, however, seeing only at best the deeds of the past, the lessons of history, and the memories of a life, this eternal scheme can hardly be comprehended, much less put into words. The poem's imaginative and allegorical vision of the Christian afterlife is a culmination of the medieval world-view as it had developed in the Western church.

In the landscape of this epic, Dante places Hell within the earth, an inverted cone created when Satan fell from heaven through the southern hemisphere directly opposite the future site of Jerusalem. As Satan was lodged in the center of the earth, land fleeing his presence piled up in both directions. The land escaping to the north created the inhabited world and hollowed out the cone of Hell beneath it. To the south, a passage was created leading to the surface of the southern hemisphere, where the mountain of Purgatory arose, its seven terraces analogous to the nine circles of hell. Dante tells us that the realms of hell are peopled by innumerable souls, but singles out various individuals as emblematic of each sin or quality. One of these individuals is Judas Iscariot. Canto 34 relates that the lowest level of hell is called Judecca, named after Judas and the Jews, where Traitors against their benefactors are fully covered by ice. Amid sinners literally frozen in grotesque postures is Lucifer who has three faces: "He wept out of six eyes; and down three chins / tears gushed together with a bloody froth. / Within each mouth – he used it like a grinder - /with gnashing teeth he tore to bits a sinner, / so that he brought much pain to three at once. / The forward sinner found that biting nothing / when matched against the clawing, for at times / his back was stripped completely of its hide." Dante's guide, Virgil, explains that

the “soul up there who bears the greatest pain is Judas Iscariot who has his head within and outside flails his legs.”⁸⁸ Silenced, half in and half out of the death canal of Satan’s front and central mouth, Judas is eternally gnawed (while the two main conspirators against Julius Caesar occupy the other two jaws).

5.2. Passion Plays

Passion plays were religious drama of medieval origin dealing with the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. Early Passion plays consisted of readings from the Gospel with interpolated sections of the events of Christ’s Passion and related subjects. Use of the vernacular in these interpolations led to the development of the independent vernacular plays, the earliest surviving example being in German. Such plays were, at first, only preludes to dramatic presentations of the Resurrection. The introduction of Satan and the fall of man and the Last Judgment led to the development of cyclic plays similar to the Corpus Christi cycles. The message of the Passion Plays was reinforced by the powerful visual stimulus of medieval Christian art.

The earliest Passion plays of France and Flanders are thought to have their source in a non-dramatic narrative poem of the thirteenth century, the *Passion des jongleurs*. These plays were performed in Spain, Italy, and elsewhere, with local variations. By the sixteenth century, many of the Passion Plays, debased by secular influence, had degenerated into mere popular entertainments, full of crude slapstick and buffoonery. Many were forbidden by ecclesiastical authorities, and many more were suppressed after the Reformation.

The Wakefield Mystery Plays, composed during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, emphasize that the story of the Passion of Jesus was not exclusively a topic for pulpit oration or

⁸⁸ Dante *Inferno* 34.1.53-63.

for clerical meditation, but for the knowledge and guidance and spiritual refreshment of the laity, as well as subject for their recreational dramatic performances. Although there is an unusual adherence to the canonical texts, the author did not fail to include apocryphal incidents traditionally connected with Judas and some of the other apostle. Judas is presented in two scenes in this play. In *The Conspiracy*, Judas is upset about the money squandered on Jesus' anointment for the payment of thirty coins which is rationally the tenth part Judas takes as his standard fee. On account of this, Judas betrays Jesus (284-296). The other scene, *The Hanging of Judas*, is basically a retelling of the *Golden Legend*, but is incomplete, leaving off at the point where the Queen gives birth to a son.

The Oberammergau Play is a passion play performed since 1634 as a tradition by the inhabitants of the village of Oberammergaa, Barvaria, Gerrmany. About half of the inhabitants of Oberammergaa are expected to take part in the play this year. The play originated when the town's residents vowed in 1633 that if God would spare them from the effects of the bubonic plague ravaging the region, they would perform the play every ten years thereafter for all time depicting the life and death of Jesus.⁸⁹

According to Hyam Maccoby, "The Passion plays instilled a loathing and contempt for Jews that finally acquired the force of instinct."⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Wakefield Mystery Plays 1961, 279, 326.

⁹⁰ Maccoby 1992, 163.

5.3. Festivals

Judas figures in many celebrations around Easter throughout Europe, Africa, and the Americas. It is part of the irony of these festivals that their origin is almost certainly pagan, either as a spring purification rite or as a type of imitative magic to induce fertility, but their celebration, which in many places continues until today, is now promulgated and fostered by the church. Almost all of these involve the burning or exploding of effigies of Judas; some instead beat the figure to death. All of these celebrations are intended either to imitate Judas' punishment in hell or to contribute to it. The participants in these celebrations revel in his defeat and punishment and celebrate it as reestablishing justice and equilibrium to their lives, society, and nature.⁹¹

5.4. Conclusion

The Judas-legend expanded in the Middle Ages in free and imaginative detail. Extension of the canonical attempt to find grounds for Judas' treachery in his earlier character is evident. None of these tales give Judas a positive image. It seems that Judas alone of all the apostles became identified as Jewish. The legends are, however, very entertaining. The *Acts of Andrew and Paul* is a fascinating tale of adventure. Also, the *Voyage of Saint Brendan* is very spellbinding. Dante's *Inferno* describes the position in hell of all the great malefactors of the past. Judas is placed in one of the three mouths of Satan. The other two mouths gnaw Brutus and Cassius, whom Dante regards as the sinners who destroyed the possibility of a universal Christian state when they murdered Julius Caesar. Thus Judas is regarded as only one of the *three* greatest sinners in history. The Passion Plays began in the eleventh century. The villains were always the Jews, and their performances were violent, ribald and often obscene. They

⁹¹ Paffenroth 2001, 31.

contributed both to the development of the Judas-image and its potency as an instrument of anti-Semitic indoctrination. Some of the Easter festivals can possibly be seen in a positive light. Perhaps the participants were using the name of Judas to defeat and reject sin in their own lives. I find from studying these legends and passion plays that a historical event may well acquire symbolic meaning and then accumulate imaginative elaboration which carries it far from its original truth.

CHAPTER 6

CHRISTIAN AUTHORS AND ANTISEMITISM

6.0. Introduction

Theologians as well as biblical scholars demonstrate how people in general have always been drawn to the figure of Judas. Many early Christian thinkers vehemently denounced Judas. These stories greatly shaped a Christian culture that became the dominant culture of Europe and later, the Americas. Literary works are only given value by their readership. An artistic product has no real life without some audience at some time who is both receptive to it and appreciates it. The intention of this chapter is to briefly present some of the thoughts about Judas from early Church Fathers and other theologians and the effect they had on the reader/listener.

6.1. Early Church Fathers

The eloquent John Chrysostom (ca. 345-407) was virulent in his anti-Semitism and passionate in his denunciation of Judas. This saint, whose sobriquet means “golden-mouthed” is rivaled only by Hitler in his attack on the Jews, according to Hyam Maccoby.⁹² Sometimes Chrysostom uses Judas as a potent lesson against the evils of covetousness and greed: “Harken, all ye covetous, ye that have the disease of Judas; hearken, and beware of the calamity. For if he that was with Christ, and wrought signs, and had the benefit of so much instruction, because he was not freed from the disease, was sunk into such a gulf; how much more shall ye....”⁹³ For Chrysostom and many Christians after him, the Jews as a people epitomize the avarice and

⁹² Maccoby 1992, 101.

⁹³ See John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*. Vol. 10 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*.

treachery of Judas as an individual, and God has ordained and approved the punishments meted out to both.⁹⁴

The church father Jerome (345-420) is famous as one of the great intellectuals of the early centuries and for having produced the Latin Vulgate, which became the Bible of the church down through the Middle Ages. In one of his writings on Psalms 108:2 – “For the mouth of the sinner and the mouth of the deceitful man opened against me; They spoke against me with a deceitful tongue” - Jerome indicates that this is not simply a lament of the psalmist about being maligned by his enemies. It is in fact a prophetic text, referring to Christ. On one level, it refers to that mouth in particular that mistreated him – that of Judas, who gave him the kiss of betrayal. On another level the message refers to “the Jews,” for “at that time they were saying, ‘Crucify, crucify this one,’ so that their mouth was an open passageway of those condemning the Lord.”⁹⁵

At another time Saint Jerome asked, “Whom do you suppose are the sons of Judas? The Jews. The Jews take their name, not from that of Judah who was a holy man, but from the betrayer. No matter how you interpret it, Iscariot means money and price.” “Judas offended the Lord more by hanging himself than by betraying Him,” for “His prayer should have been repentance, but it turned into sin.”⁹⁶ Jerome’s views did not expire in antiquity.

Ambrose (354-430) one-time bishop of Milan states: “Judas kissed the Lord with his lips, this kiss the Jewish people have, and therefore it is said, ‘This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.’”⁹⁷ This is a similar connection between the traitorous kiss of Judas and the Jews.

⁹⁴ Paffenroth 2001,38-39.

⁹⁵ Jerome, Tractate 59.

⁹⁶ Jerome, Saint. *The Homilies of Saint Jerome*, 259.

⁹⁷ Ambrose, *Epistles* 1.14-18.

For Augustine (354-430) Bishop of Hippo, although recognizing that Judas was repentant, concluded that he despaired of God's mercy. Therefore, "He did not deserve mercy; and that is why no light shone in his heart to make him hurry for pardon from the one he had betrayed."⁹⁸ According to Augustine, too, "Judas by hanging himself heightened rather than expiated that crime of dastardly betrayal because by despairing of God's mercy he abandoned himself to an impenitent remorse and left no room in his soul for saving sorrow."

Leo the Great (ca. 395-461) was an Italian aristocrat and was the first pope of the Catholic Church to have been given the title "the Great." According to Leo, love of money, the "root of all evil," motivated wicked Judas, drunken with the poison, who went to the noose while thirsting for profit."⁹⁹ Unlike the eleven in the Gospels, Judas hangs, explodes, or disappears before the crucifixion, unaware that Jesus kept his promise of resurrection. He did not live to see Jesus after he was raised from the dead. This was bad timing for Judas. Leo the Great declared in antiquity (as if to Judas) about the suicide, "If only you had waited for the completion of your crime until the blood of Christ had been poured out for all sinners, you would have put off the gruesome death by hanging."¹⁰⁰ According to Leo the Great, Judas sinned because he "believed Jesus to be not God the Son of God, but only a man of our own race."¹⁰¹

6.2. Preachers of Passion

Because space does not permit me to continue at length in this particular period of time, let us propel ahead to Martin Luther¹⁰² of the sixteenth century and then on to the vituperative Abraham Santa Clara of the seventeenth century.

⁹⁸ Augustine *City of God* 117, 46.

⁹⁹ Leo the Great. *Sermons*. 1996, 263.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁰² Martin Luther was a great leader of the Reformation, the religious revolution that took place in the Western Church in the 16th century. See "Reformation" in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*. 1985, 9: 995.

To Luther, “Judas was an apostle and yet not an apostle” and he was rightfully reviled throughout the history of Christendom, along with “the Jews, Judas people” (*Selected Psalms* 308, 263). Luther attributed Jewish biblical responses and commentaries to the foul influence of Judas. After Judas exploded, with his intestines as well as his bladder bursting, Luther explained, the Jews “caught the Judas-piss and mixed it into the excrement and ate it among each other and drank it so that they developed such sharp eyes that they discover in the Scriptures commentaries that neither Matthew nor Isaiah himself found there, not to mention the rest of us cursed *goyim*.”¹⁰³

In his pamphlet *Against the Jews and their Lies*, he called the Jews “venomous serpents, desperate enemies of the Lord,” and advocated that their synagogues should be burned and that they should be expelled from Christian lands. Also, Luther, who believed “David composed [Psalm 109] about Christ, who speaks the entire psalm in the first person against Judas” (*Selected Psalms* 257), argued that “next to the devil, a Christian has no more bitter and galling foe than a Jew” (278).

Abraham Sancta Clara (1644-1709) has been described as “a very eccentric” but popular monk.¹⁰⁴ In 1662 he joined the Catholic Order of Discalced Augustinians, and assumed the religious name by which he is known. In this order he rose step by step until he became prior provincialis and definator of his province. Having gained a great reputation for pulpit eloquence, he was appointed imperial court preacher at Vienna in 1669. The people flocked to hear him, attracted by the force and homeliness of his language, the grotesque of language of his humor, and the impartial severity with which he lashed the follies of all classes of society. In his published writings, he displayed many of the same qualities as in the pulpit. Perhaps the most

¹⁰³ Luther *Vom Schem Hamphoras* 1992, 214.

¹⁰⁴ A.J. Clark, “Abraham of Sancta Clara,” NCE 1:38-9.

favorable specimen of his style is his didactic novel entitled *Judas der Erzscheml* (Judas the Archknave) in 4 volumes (Salzburg, 1686-95). The fruit of a decade of labor, this work sets forth the apocryphal life of Judas with moral applications for the daily spiritual life of the reader.

Santa Clara was obsessed with Judas. Every Sunday for ten years he preached against him, cursing all parts of Judas' anatomy, beginning with his red hair and ending with his toes. He warned that if one took the host unworthily, one has followed the godless Judas Iscariot, and one has mocked Jesus. That means that one has spewed together with the Jewish functionaries into the most holy face of Jesus.¹⁰⁵

I am in total disagreement with what these preachers of passion advocate. These are disgusting lies, which do not draw me to Christianity, but rather to the plight of the Jews.

6.3. Background Information on the Middle Ages

In order to make an informed decision about this image of Judas based on the Church Fathers and Christian theologians, I feel that it is important to understand the connection between the religious organizations and the social environment of this period. The Middle Ages is the period in European history from the fall of the Western Roman Empire (ca. 395) to the period of the Renaissance (ca. 13th-15th century).¹⁰⁶ The sack of Rome had enormous impact on the political structure and social climate of the Western world, for the Roman Empire had provided the basis of social cohesion for all of Europe and parts of Asia and Africa. Although the Germanic tribes that migrated forcefully into southern and western Europe in the fifth century were ultimately converted to Christianity, they retained many of their customs and ways of life; the changes in forms of social organization they introduced rendered centralized government and cultural unity impossible. Many of these people were ignorant and barbaric, and superstition was

¹⁰⁵ The sermons by Santa Clara were apparently translated into many languages. His complete works were published in twenty-one volumes from 1834-1954 and in a six-volume abbreviated edition in 1904-1907.

¹⁰⁶ See "Middle Ages" *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* 1985, 107-8.

prevalent. Many of the improvements in the quality of life introduced during the Roman Empire decayed substantially. This decline persisted throughout the period of time sometimes called the Dark Ages, from the fall of Rome to about the year 1000, with a brief hiatus during the flowering of the Carolingian court established by Charlemagne. The only force capable of providing a basis for social unity was the Roman Catholic Church.

The Church attempted to rule Europe by two distinct groups of functionaries; the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the imperium, or secular leaders. In other words, the pope and emperor, who were always sparring, disagreeing, or openly warring with each other. This was a period of great change: there was the Muslim conquest of the seventh and eight centuries which eroded the area of the Roman Empire, the Great Schism of the Church in 1054, the Crusades starting in 1095, the Great Famine of 1315, and the Black Death of the 1350s, to name just a few of the major events that took place in this period.

During the twelfth century, a cultural and economic revival took place. The thirteenth century was the apex of medieval civilization. Many different kinds of social units proliferated. Intellectual life, dominated by the Roman Catholic Church culminated in the philosophical method of scholasticism. The breakup of feudal structures, the strengthening of city-states in Italy and the emergence of national monarchies in Spain, France, and England, as well as such cultural developments as the rise of secular education, culminated in the birth of a self-consciously new age with a new spirit, one that looked all the way back to classical learning for its inspiration and that came to be known as the Renaissance.

6.4. Conclusion

Legends, myths, and folkloric-tales were at their height during the Middle Ages. They circulated to fill in the blanks in the Gospels' accounts of Judas' life and death, or to resolve their multiple paradoxes. According to Hyam Maccoby, "anti-Semitic preaching of the lower clergy – never effectively restrained by higher religious authorities – made the common people, who often in earlier centuries had resisted anti Semitic pressure, into fully indoctrinated and unthinking Jew-haters."¹⁰⁷ What is interesting about the Middle Ages is that only orthodox and obedient believers could enjoy the full rights of citizenship. There were always outsiders, even within the geographical area of Western Christendom; at best they were people with very limited rights (the Jews), and at worst they had no right even to live (heretics). But even as a free citizen, a man rarely left his own neighborhood. He lived a very simple and uneventful life. He was often uneducated. Whatever people knew about the past, they had learned either by listening to stories and legends or in their churches. In consideration of these circumstances, it is no wonder then that poor, uneducated, and superstitious people believed what they heard about Judas and probably passed it down to others.

¹⁰⁷ Maccoby 1992, 163.

CHAPTER 7

RENAISSANCE, ENLIGHTENMENT, AND MODERNISM

7.0. Introduction

The Renaissance was a cultural movement that spanned roughly the fourteenth to the seventeenth century beginning in Florence in the Late Middle Ages and later spreading to the rest of Europe. While the spirit of the Renaissance ultimately took many forms, it was expressed earliest by the intellectual movement called Humanism, which emphasized the dignity of man. The effect of Humanism was to help men break free from the mental strictures imposed by religious orthodoxy, to inspire free inquiry and criticism, and to inspire a new confidence in the possibilities of human thought and creation.¹⁰⁸

The Age of Enlightenment refers particularly to the intellectual and philosophical developments of the eighteenth century and their impact in moral and social reform in which reason was advocated as the primary source and basis of authority. Enlightenment thinkers viewed religion as eminently human. Their attempt to define religion was pursued within the context of an effort to discern the essential characteristics of human nature. There was a strong belief in the natural goodness and perfectibility of human nature, along with a conviction that a natural law prescribes the pursuit of pleasure, profit, and property.¹⁰⁹

The term Modernism encompasses the activities and output of those in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who felt the “traditional” forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, social organization, and daily life were becoming outdated in the new economic,

¹⁰⁸ See “Renaissance” in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* 1985, 9:1019-20.

¹⁰⁹ Olson 2003, 5.

social and political conditions of an emerging fully industrialized world. In Roman Catholic Church history, Modernism is a movement in the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth that sought to reinterpret traditional Catholic teaching in the light of nineteenth century philosophical, historical, and psychological theories and called for freedom of conscience.¹¹⁰

This chapter will look at these new perspectives which challenge and change the received interpretation of the Gospel narratives of Judas. Some scholars go so far as to suggest that he never existed at all, but was a narrative devise used as an anti-Semitic myth.¹¹¹ It will also reflect briefly on some of the theological thoughts of the times. We shall see a new side of Judas: a tender man, embracing Jesus as brother; a politically ambitious Judas, heroically struggling to advance his teacher's mission; and finally, a contemporary Judas who doubts the efficacy of that mission.

7.1. Efforts to Challenge and Change

The betrayal kiss became a principal motif in art, appearing as early as the fourth century. Does the kiss suggest reciprocity? A number of medieval thinkers assumed a mutual kiss, perhaps in a last effort to save Judas. Susan Gubar states, "It is interesting that the most benevolent and numerous glimpses of a humanized Judas occur first in the pictorial arts, rather than in theology or creative literature."¹¹²

During the Enlightenment, intensifying secularism diminished the cultural prominence of the Passion narrative along with faith in its literal truth. Creative writers ingeniously reconfigured Judas. There are more frequent attempts to reconsider Judas and his eternal destiny. After all, no Scripture explicitly states that Judas is in hell.

¹¹⁰ See "Modernism" in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* 1985, 8:215.

¹¹¹ Maccoby 1992, ix.

¹¹² Gubar 2009, 207.

The process of repair began by attacking contemporary villains who are worse than Judas. Jonathan Swift's "Bishop Judas" (1731)¹¹³ attacks hypocritical church authorities by insinuating that their lies and abuses of power get away with the crime for which Judas paid with his life. This would seem to castigate an age imbued with the profit motive.

John Wesley's hymn "God's Sovereign, Everlasting Love" (1868) suggests that the "all-redeeming Lord" grants grace to even the most fallen:

"Thou didst once for all atone

Judas, Esau, Cain, and me."¹¹⁴

Some scholars have hypothesized that Jesus was an apocalyptic Jewish leader preaching the end of the world.¹¹⁵ Seen in this light, Judas works with Jesus to overthrow the Temple authorities as well as the Roman colonizers. He was guilty of presumption because he mistook Christ's spiritual mission to establish a new world order for a political enterprise.

Thomas DeQuincey¹¹⁶ in his 1857 essay "Judas Iscariot" blames "the somnolence of copyists or their blind stupidity, or rash conceit" for the contradictory accounts of Judas' death in Mathew and Luke (195). To resolve the issue of how Judas died, he traces an etymological history of the term "bowels," and then contends that Judas died of a broken heart: "in saying that the *viscera* of Iscariot, or his middle, had burst and gushed out, the original reporter meant simply that his heart had broke" (197). His suicide was a result of despondency. DeQuincey believes "that neither any motive of his, nor any ruling impulse, was tainted with the vulgar

¹¹³ Swift. Ed. Pat Rogers, 1983, 499-500.

¹¹⁴ Wesley 1868 II. 47-48.

¹¹⁵ See Ehrman's *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

¹¹⁶ DeQuincey. "Judas Iscariot." *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*. Vol. 8. (Ed. David Masson, 1987), 177-206.

treachery imputed to him” (177). If Judas was guilty of “spiritual blindness,” so were “most of his brethren” on whom “the true grandeur of the Christian scheme” had not dawned (181).¹¹⁷

By the end of the nineteenth century, when ethical and psychological considerations predominated over religious or political approaches to the Gospels, novelists and dramatists focus on the profound sorrow of Judas at having to endure a mistaken life reviled or abjured. He internalized the verdict that “It would have been better ...not to have been born.” As he incurs eternal hatred, some writers question providence or the efficacy of divine compassion.

After the so-called “death of God” at the end of the nineteenth century and then again after Auschwitz, it was felt that neither punishment nor reward could be attributed to God. The philosopher Paul Tillich in the 1950s made a point that Jesus was compliant in Judas’ treachery because Jesus chose Judas for his intimate group of disciples.¹¹⁸ There was a deepening skepticism in the moral effectiveness of established religions.

The twentieth century was the bloodiest century ever. Could the Holocaust have led to the deification of Judas? According to Susan Gubar, “Instead of expiring, the twelfth apostle was either revived after the war to become an incarnation of omniscient but vulnerable good *or* an incarnation of omnipotent evil. As omniscient good, a victimized Judas joins Jesus, and together they signify a Passion in danger of being betrayed by a history of barbarous atrocities. As omnipotent evil, Judas is personifying a universal principle of betrayal and antithetically embodies the malignant forces that brought into being a history of barbarous atrocities.”¹¹⁹

Gubar goes on to explain, “The fact that the Holocaust occurred executed by the Nazis but stomached by the rest of the world, meant that many Christians had been found guilty of rejecting their messiah, along with his lessons of love. For this reason, the Passion became a

¹¹⁷ See DeQuincey’s “Judas Iscariot.” *The Collected Writings of Thomas DeQuincey*. London: 1897. 8: 177-206.

¹¹⁸ Tillich 1957, 133.

¹¹⁹ Gubar 2009, 261.

vehicle for addressing humanity's capacity for betrayal and the consequences of that betrayal. Because of the Jews' catastrophic demise in the Holocaust, Judas was resurrected as the presiding spirit of a disastrous age."¹²⁰

My own view on the subject of the Holocaust differs somewhat. The Third Reich was ushered in by a complex economic and political situation. Neither Judas nor the Jews were responsible for the Holocaust. But the Germans needed a scapegoat. If any thing had happened differently, (perhaps if more countries had taken in some of the Jews after they were exiled from Germany), the Final Solution would not have taken place. But with the emergence of a new breed of totalitarian politician who advocated the actual extermination of the Jews, it became a reality. Had the Germans not spent so much energy rounding up and killing off the Jews, they possibly would have won the war.

Eventually the Nazis' condemnation of Jewry as a Jewish race led to the Vatican's condemnation of Christian anti-Semitism in 1965. Postwar writers built on the absolved Judas as a knowledgeable collaborator with Jesus as in the *Gospel of Judas*. In Nikos Kazantzakis' *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1960) Jesus asks Judas to help him face the ordained ordeal.¹²¹ The Greek Orthodox Church excommunicated Kazantzakis, the Roman Catholic Church banned the book, and bishops denounced the movie because it dishonored Jesus (presumably by presenting him as weak-willed).

Howard Nemerov in his poem "The Historical Judas" (1980) presents the idea that the normative notion of a demonized Judas could not have been universally held in biblical times, that it did not originate and would not accord with the perspectives of the Roman or Jewish

¹²⁰ Ibid., 261, 263.

¹²¹ Kazantzakis 1960, 186.

authorities or even Jesus' circle in Jerusalem, and that it has been used by later Christians in a morally suspect way: that is, "To make our meanness look like justice."¹²²

7.2. Theological Thoughts

As we have seen, theologians as well as biblical scholars demonstrate how drawn we are to the figure of Judas. One of the most influential early Christian apologists and exegetes was Origen of Alexander (ca. 185-254). He believed in universal restoration of all things. The issue of free will or determinism led to Judas being linked with Oedipus by Origen in the philosopher's *Contra Celsus*. Celsus was a Platonic critic of Christianity against whom Origen defends his religion. According to Celsus, Christianity constructed a perverted divinity, for "God himself conspired against those who ate with him, by making them traitors and impious men"¹²³ In order to disentangle prophecy from causality, to clear Jesus of culpability and establish Judas' free will, Origen refutes Celsus by quoting the oracle who warned Laius not to beget children. The Greek oracle's prediction does not make him responsible for the subsequent impiety and wickedness of Oedipus. Neither does Jesus' predicting his betrayal and John's Jesus giving Judas the sop that allows the devil's entrance make Jesus responsible for the impiety and wickedness of Judas. Jesus, too, had free will, but never used it (Heb 4:15).

Karl Barth was an important theologian in the twentieth century who raised his voice on behalf of Judas, and the one who did so most extensively – although he also paradoxically, condemned him. In Barth's multi-volume *Church Dogmatics*, Judas receives nearly fifty pages of fine print. A summary of his position and a brief critique from a theological lay person's point of view may help us to understand Judas.

¹²² Nemerov 1996, 1520.

¹²³ Origen 1953, 84-85.

The rubric under which Karl Barth deals with Judas is the election of the individual. For Barth, it is important that the problem of the rejected is concentrated and developed in Judas. The rejected one, who is counterpart of the elected one, is not an opponent from outside who opposes the kingdom of God but rather, exists in sinister proximity to Jesus Christ and the apostles. This closeness of the rejected one to Jesus also reveals the relativity of rejection. In my understanding of this idea, Jesus and Judas are two parts of a whole, a composite, if you will. Judas' evil was Jesus' good; Jesus' rejection resulted in humanity's election.

The apostle Judas Iscariot is the special agent and exponent of the handing over of Jesus, as it was decreed necessary in the counsel of God: "Judas is the most important figure in the New Testament apart from Jesus. For he, and he alone of the apostles, was actively at work in the accomplishment of God's will. Yet he is the very one who is most explicitly condemned by the Law of God."¹²⁴

Both Origen and Barth demonstrate that the Jewish rejection of Christ happened in order that there can be an election of the Gentiles, just as Judas' election to betray Christ allows for Christ's work of salvation. In both there is a chiastic move which see the elect reject and become the rejected in order to mediate the election of the rejected.

The present Pope Benedict XVI recalls the fact of the betrayal as already fulfilled: "Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him," says Mark (3:19); Matthew (10:4), and Luke (6:16) have equivalent formulas. The betrayal itself happens in two moments: before all, in the planning, when Judas agreed with Jesus' enemies to thirty pieces of silver (cf. Mt. 26: 14-16), and then, in its execution, with the kiss given to the Master in Gethsemane. I understand this to mean that God is outside time. This was ordained from the foundation of the world.

¹²⁴ Barth 1957, 502.

In this way one moves beyond historical motivations and explanations based on the personal responsibility of Judas, who shamefully ceded to a temptation of the Evil One. The only way to prevent the human heart from being perverted by Satan is to always assume the point of view of Jesus. Do not cultivate an individualistic, autonomous vision of things. When we think of the negative role Judas played we must consider it according to the lofty ways in which God leads events.”

“The word “to betray” is a version of a Greek word that means “to consign.” Sometimes the subject is even God in person. It was he who for love “consigned” Jesus for all of us (Rom. 8:32). In his mysterious salvific plan, God assumes Judas’ inexcusable gesture as the occasion for the total gift of the Son for the redemption of the world.”¹²⁵

7.3. Conclusion

Attempts were made during the Enlightenment and the Age of Modernism to rehabilitate Judas. Intensifying secularism diminished the cultural prominence of the Passion Narrative along with faith in its literal truth. Reason was now the primary source and basis of authority. During this time Judas progressed from disgrace to dignity, thanks to creative writers.

Was Judas a rebel and hero? During an age grappling with the repercussions of the French and American revolutions, Judas may be seen as voluntarily risking himself in service to Jesus’ daring message, and doing so without the anticipation of any personal gain. When he realized that Jesus had been crucified, Judas must have doubted the efficacy of their mission. Although his intentions were well-meant, they were ironically reversed by providential events. Was it at that point that Judas decided to embrace death as a union with his beloved ruler?

Would it have been better for that man not to have been born? Is Judas a symbol to promote enmity between Gentile Christians and Jews? Because the Gospels record Judas as both

¹²⁵ Pope Benedict XVI 2007, 104-107.

called by Jesus and yet better unborn, theologians from antiquity to the present time have grappled with that question and the place of Judas Iscariot in Christianity.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

If the listing of the New Testament Gospels is chronologically correct, Judas gathered accretions along the way. But because they were not read together as a whole from the beginning, I do not believe the evangelists themselves meant for Judas to be seen as growing progressively evil. When they are taken together or harmoniously, they generate a host of paradoxes which early Christian writers had to address in order for Orthodox Christianity to survive.

The Apostolic Fathers is a collection of literature which provides significant and often unparalleled glimpses of and insights into the life of early Christians and the Christian movement during a critical transitional stage. The New Testament Apocrypha is another group of early Christian writings. This term came to refer to all extra-canonical literature (except the Apostolic Fathers). Some of this literature was produced by Christians who held beliefs that were later condemned and suppressed by the majority church. The heretical group known as Gnostics is among them.

Apologists wrote to defend their faith. Historians can see what were the main objections that pagans raised against Christianity, the manner in which the church responded to them, and how Christian theology developed as a result.

The *Gospel of Judas* is a Gnostic response to the teachings of Orthodox Christianity. The text was found in the 1970s buried in a cave in Egypt. In 2006 it was published for the first time by the National Geographic Society. It presents Judas as the hero of the Passion Narrative,

reversing the traditional gospel story. Numerous scholars have commented on this gospel; some agreeing with the National Geographic translators; others, no so much. The text does, however, reflect the bitter struggle over the identity of Jesus in that period.

Legends, myths, and folk-tales were at their height during the Middle Ages. These legends cover all areas of Judas' life. A gospel epic, *Paschal Hymn*, was written about Judas in imitation of the classical epic, *Virgil*. Other gospels and poems were also written. Passion Plays were very popular, as well as Easter Festivals.

I find that a historical event may acquire symbolic meaning and accumulate imaginative elaboration which carries it far from its original truth.

Many early Christian thinkers and theologians vehemently denounced Judas, but perhaps it was partly due to the times they were living in. The fall of Rome had an enormous impact on the political structure and social climate of the Western world. The Germanic tribes migrating into Europe were oftentimes barbaric, superstitious and uneducated. The church attempted to rule during these Dark Ages but conflicts within the Church itself limited its influence.

The Gospel narratives of Judas were challenged and changed during the Enlightenment and Modernism period. Intensifying secularism diminished the cultural prominence of the Passion Narrative along with faith in its literal truth. Creative writers ingeniously reconfigure Judas. They began by attacking contemporary church authorities. The clergy were accused of lying and abusing their power, but they got away with it.

Hymns were written suggesting that God grants grace to all, including "Judas and me." Others saw Judas as working with Jesus to overthrow Roman rule as well as the Temple's authority.

Judas was considered from a psychological perspective, questioning God's providence. After the Holocaust some believed God to be dead. Some theologians argued that the Jews were dispensable because they had completed their part in history. Karl Barth says that it is a matter of election and rejection. The present Pope of the Roman Catholic Church states that the betrayal of Judas is beyond historical motivations and explanations.

By combining many stories and differing points of view, I have constructed a composite picture of Judas Iscariot. However, in my efforts to do so, I have discovered that this composite picture must be viewed through a kaleidoscope.¹²⁶ Time rotates the tube, thus giving a slightly different picture of Judas at each turn. But in order to see the real Judas, we must return to our original sources, the New Testament Gospels.

¹²⁶ A tube containing mirrors and pieces of colored glass, plastic, etc., whose reflections produce changing patterns when the tube is rotated.

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