CREATING JUDAS ISCARIOT:

CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR PRESENTING THE BETRAYER OF JESUS

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Introduction

Even those with only a vague knowledge of Christianity know Judas Iscariot - or think they do. Judas is well represented in the Christian tradition: he is the disciple chosen by Jesus who, for thirty pieces of silver, betrays his master with the proverbial Judas kiss and subsequently hangs himself in remorse for his misdeeds. He is held up as the embodiment of evil and the prototypical betrayer. Despite popular renderings of Judas, this portrait does not do justice to the variety of depictions of him presented in the New Testament and throughout the Christian centuries. Images of Judas have multiplied in stories, poetry, dramas and the visual arts. With regard to Jews, Judas' story was used by Christians for centuries to torment and persecute them. New Testament accounts of the traitorous Judas came to represent the treachery of all Jews: "the character of Judas has mirrored Christianity's attitudes towards the Jews" (Hebron, 2016, p. 3). The modern era has witnessed attempts to rehabilitate his image and role within Christianity. He is seen as a key figure in contemporary attempts to repair relations between Christians and Jews. Religious educators require resources for undertaking the quest to understand Judas Iscariot.

Judas Iscariot and Paul

Paul of Tarsus, whose letters preserved in the New Testament pre-date the gospels by two decades or more, does not mention Judas Iscariot. When Paul writes to the Corinthians to offer an account of the last days of Jesus, he does not refer to Judas:

> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (I Corinthians 15:3-8)

Not only is Judas not named as the one who betrayed Jesus to the authorities, Paul says that the risen Jesus appeared to "the twelve" - among whom he presumably includes Judas. This appears to contradict the subsequent, gospel account of the death of Judas prior to Jesus' execution (Matthew 27:3-10). Paul knows Jesus was "betrayed" but omits to mention the name of the person/s involved. Earlier in his letter he reminded the Corinthians of a foundational creed of the Jesus movement: "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed [*paradidomi*] took a loaf of bread" (1 Corinthians 11:23).

Paul's failure to mention Judas presents a collection of puzzles without obvious solutions. Maybe Paul was not familiar with some of the key facts in the story of Jesus: "Paul seems not to know traditions about Judas" (Fredriksen, 2018, p. 209). He admits in this passage that he is simply "handing on" something he has received from others. In all his letters, Paul says little about the life of Jesus or the

characters known to us from the gospels. Paul's agenda consumed his writings and subsumed interest in the details of Jesus' biography. Paul may have been aware of the demise of Judas, but the idea of "the twelve" was so ingrained in the story of the Jesus movement that "'The Twelve' went by that title whether or not there were twelve of them" (Sanders, 1985, p. 101).

Betrayal or Handing Over?

Another intriguing aspect of Paul's letter is that he uses the same Greek verb (*paradidomi*) to refer to the act of handing over information and to the process of Jesus being handed over on the night he broke bread with his followers. It may have been his intention to identify God as the one who handed Jesus over - rather than any human actor - so Paul intentionally downplays the role of Judas in the drama. When Paul uses the same Greek word, *paradidomi* in relation to Jesus, he refers to the actions of God, not a human. Take, for example, his mention in his letter to the Romans: "If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own son, but handed him over [*paradidomi*] for all of us - how will he not give us all things with him?" (Romans 8:32).

The precise translation of *paradidomi* is contested, with most translators rendering the meaning as "betrayed". The word has a range of meanings: "to hand over, to deliver up, to relinquish/surrender (someone/something), to grant, to hand down, to transmit, to narrate/report" (Renger, 2013, p. 3). It could mean to give oneself up (Fredriksen, 2018, p. 209). Paradidomi could be used to convey a range of meanings – some sinister, others more benign. Some of these benign meanings provide a less pejorative perspective than "betrayal". Klassen (1996) argues there was not one single example in ancient Greek where the word *paradidomi* means "betrayed," and further, that aspects such as deceit and disloyalty are likewise absent from ancient usage of the word. Flavius Josephus used *paradidomi* 293 times in his extensive writings in the New Testament era but never to communicate the word, betray (Klassen, 1996, pp. 47-58). This interpretation implies that, prior to his characterisation in the gospels, Judas' role was perceived in a more neutral light - handing over Jesus to Temple authorities but not operating as a liar, deceiver or betrayer. Judas performs a significant role in the unfolding of Jesus' mission: Jesus needs to contact the Temple authorities and Judas is the one to do what Jesus asks. Far from a traitor, Judas is an essential instrument in God's plan.

The notion of handing over requires clarification concerning what that activity specifically denotes and why a member of Jesus' inner circle might be involved in that process. An intriguing incident in John's gospel is relevant. In John 18:15, "Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus." The identity of this other disciple is not provided by John but this disciple "was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest." The mention of this anonymous disciple has encouraged some to imagine the author of John's gospel is withholding information "which may conceal Judas' role as informer, that is, mediator between Jesus and Temple authorities" (Counet, 2011, p. 3). Other scholars think this unnamed intermediary may be the Beloved Disciple identified earlier in the Fourth Gospel.

Judas in the Gospels

We know surprisingly little about Judas Iscariot from the gospel accounts given the pivotal role he plays in the accounts of Jesus' arrest. When it comes to explaining Judas' motivations for his actions for handing over Jesus to the Jerusalem authorities, the gospel authors are not expansive. This could be because "the gospels assume that readers are already familiar with Judas' role in Jesus' final hours" (Reinhartz, 2007, p. 152). Each author presents Judas in a way that advances his own theological interests. Christian tradition harmonised the four accounts into a general narrative concerning Judas. This distorts the intentions of each author as well as the image of Judas presented in each case.

Judas in Mark

Mark presents Judas in neutral tones. Judas is not a prominent figure, appearing only three times. He is named as one of the Twelve (Mark 3:19). He goes to the chief priests to negotiate the handover of Jesus (Mark 14:10-11). No indication of Judas' motivations for this action is provided. The priests promise to give him money for his information, but money is not identified as the reason for Judas to go to them in the first place. The third mention occurs in the garden of Gethsemane where Judas arrives with members of the arresting party, identifying Jesus with a kiss (Mark 14:43-4). The kiss may be fulfilling the teaching of Proverbs 27:6: "Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts, but profuse are the kisses of an enemy." After the kiss, Judas is never heard from again in Mark.

Mark also recounts a conversation at the last supper Jesus shares with his friends. Jesus tells them he is aware of activities of "one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me" but he does not name that person (Mark 14:20). Jesus then alludes to a biblical passage - presumed to be Psalm 41:9 - but does not directly quote it, as a way of explaining the significance of this act: "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9). This reference suggests an explanation for Judas' act in terms of a plan of divine promise and fulfilment. Mark has previously "prepared the reader for these events: betrayal and death in Jerusalem" (Fredriksen, 1999, p. 119) when he quotes Jesus claiming that "the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31).

Judas in Matthew

Matthew's account of the last supper and arrest in the garden mostly follows Mark's account with minor variations. Again, Judas is a bit player in the drama, mentioned only five times. Matthew includes Mark's report of Judas' contact with the chief priests and introduces the motive of greed: "He said, 'What will you give me if I hand him over to you?'" (Matthew 26:15). The thirty pieces of silver appears to be an allusion to Zechariah 11:12 - a story of weighing the price of a person's life and the imminent death of a shepherd marked for execution. Scholars debate the question of what meaning is signified in this reference to Zechariah: his story has confused bible readers over the centuries; Matthew's mention of it clarifies little. Whatever its meaning, Matthew seems to show that, like so many other aspects of Jesus' story, this act of betrayal was foretold in Jewish scriptures and was therefore divinely ordained. Matthew includes a scene not mentioned in any other gospel: Judas hangs himself after returning the money to the chief priests and elders. Discussion of this scene is offered below.

Judas in Luke

Luke features Judas four times in his gospel. Like Matthew, he adopts a denigrating tone in explaining Judas' actions in approaching the chief priests (Luke 22:3-6). He explains Judas' motives by reference to Satan having "entered into Judas called Iscariot" (Luke 22:3). The contest between Satan and Jesus is a theme that runs the length of Luke's gospel. At the start of his public ministry, Luke describes how the devil tempts Jesus in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). The devil is unsuccessful in tempting Jesus, but withdraws from him "until an appropriate time" (Luke 4:13). The betrayal of Jesus by one of his chosen followers seems to be an appropriate time for the devil to re-enter the drama. In Matthew, Judas is motivated by greed; in Luke, the devil made him do it. The offer of money comes later in Luke, as in Mark's story. The betrayal and execution of Jesus is part of an elaborate Satanic plot, where Luke contends that God will have the final word. In Luke, Judas is listed as: "Judas Iscariot who became a traitor" (Luke 6:16). Luke uses a different word from the others - *prodotes* (traitor) rather than *paradidomi* which provides a small insight into Luke's distinctive portrayal of Judas.

Judas in John

Judas is mentioned more often in John than the other gospels - eight times in all. John adopts a similar line to Luke, recounting Jesus saying to Simon Peter that one of the chosen twelve "is a devil" (John 6:71). John relates how "the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him" (John 13:2). At the final meal, Jesus invites Judas to "do quickly what you are going to do" (John 13: 27). John's account balances perceptions about the role of Satan and the requirements of the divine plan. Jesus is the one who triggers Judas' action by inviting him to undertake his task immediately. Only John has provided any interaction between Jesus and Judas, prior to the events in Jerusalem that resulted in his arrest. Judas complains about the price of costly perfume used by Mary of Bethany to anoint Jesus' feet when he visits her home. Judas thinks the money spent on the perfume would be better spent on supporting the poor. The gospel author comments on the insincerity of Judas' comment and says that he was known as the group's treasurer who stole money from the common purse (John 12:1-8). This identification of Judas as the group's treasurer is not confirmed in any other gospel. Likewise, the identification of Judas as a thief is unique to John.

Arguably, we learn more about Judas Iscariot from the Fourth Gospel than we do from the other three. John reveals to his readers details about the public activities of Judas - group treasurer, thief, lacking compassion for the poor - but we are also afforded insight into the inner life of the man. He has been entered by Satan, he is known to be a traitor by Jesus from earliest times in the gospel, he is the "consummate hypocrite" who would, for John the author, "ultimately become the epitome of those who reject the truth" (Thatcher, 1996, p. 448). John's portrait of Judas is more severe than the other three gospels. John takes every opportunity to show Judas as consistently wicked and vicious: "Whenever he acts, he does something shameful, whether it is thievery, disloyalty, or hypocrisy. Every single time that Judas appears or is mentioned in the Fourth Gospel, he is said to be the one who betrays Jesus" (Wright, 2009, p. 559). Like the other gospels, however, Judas' betrayal would not defeat God's plan of salvation.

Judas and the Priests

Interaction between Judas and the priests occurs off-stage in all four gospels. In the absence of direct gospel evidence, speculation among commentators has multiplied. Judas might have revealed to them Jesus' identity. He might have informed them where Jesus could be found and arrested without anyone noticing (Ehrman, 2006, p. 21). He might have pointed out to the priests that Jesus claimed himself to be a king (Sanders, 1985, p. 328). He might have revealed to the priestly authorities that it was Jesus who was responsible for the raucous incident in the Temple (Crossan, 1995, p. 81). He might have communicated that Jesus was ready to allow himself to be handed over and that Jesus had authorised him to help do so (Klassen, 1996, p. 69). He might have told them Jesus believed himself to be the messiah and that he was seeking to force Jesus into an open acknowledgment of his messiahship (Bond, 2004, p. 12). Or, he might have said that Jesus intended to die for the cause of liberation of humanity enslaved to sin (Bieringer, 2011, p. 307).

One guess is as good as another given the silence of the gospel authors. Unfortunately, "there is no final, satisfactory theory about why Judas should perform this act of irrational refusal" (Williams, 2015, p. 33). Teachers are free to allow their students to join the scholarly speculation about this aspect of the gospel story.

Was Judas One of the Twelve?

The gospel authors agree that Jesus commissioned twelve men to constitute an inner circle of followers. The number twelve symbolised the hopes of Israel and the message of Jesus concerning the restoration and salvation of all Israel - all twelve tribes - in the last days (Sanders, 1985, p. 102). John does not give a

complete list of the names of the twelve disciples specifically commissioned to promote Jesus' mission. He does mention that there *are* twelve disciples, and also the fact that Judas Iscariot is one of them (John 6:70-1: "Did I not choose you, the Twelve?"). The lack of specific names for the Twelve is odd but may reflect the reality that "a tradition about the Twelve may have had some importance in the early Johannine community but apparently holds no interest for the Fourth Evangelist" (Meier, 1997, p. 653).

Scholars have discussed the nature of the relationship between Judas and Jesus. Few clues exist to indicate the nature of that relationship. Some have pointed to Judas' approach to Jesus in the garden - a kiss - as an indicator of closeness between the two men: "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard" (Mark 14:44). The synoptic authors all relate a kiss (though Luke's account introduces a note of ambiguity since he implies a kiss but does not describe it - Luke 22:47-8). Some form of identification is necessary since the arresting officers do not seem to know Jesus; Judas' role is pivotal in identifying him. In John, there is no kiss and Judas does not identify Jesus. His role is to locate Jesus but not to reveal his identity. Jesus reveals himself to the arresting contingent in John (John 18:1-9).

Judas is mentioned in all three disciple lists: in Mark 3:13-19, Matthew 10:1-4 and Luke 6:12-16. In each, twelve men are named albeit with minor variations. In each, Judas Iscariot is the final name. This is not an indication of the order of appointment but a technique to place Judas at the periphery of the chosen Twelve. The listing of Judas as one of the Twelve has not convinced everyone; some doubt the historical authenticity of these disciple lists. Crossan (1995) considers Judas to be "a follower of Jesus but not one of the Twelve" (Crossan, 1995, p. 81). He argues the institution of the Twelve was a feature of life after the public ministry of Jesus, not during it; Judas was placed in the group of twelve by Christians, not by Jesus during his public ministry. These ideas have been challenged: "there is no cogent reason why the early church should have gone out of its way to invent such a troubling tradition as Jesus' betrayal by Judas, one of his chosen Twelve" (Meier, 1997, p. 665).

Some of those who question the role of Judas as a member of the Twelve raise further questions about his historical existence: "given the way in which New Testament texts developed the character of Judas, it is difficult to ascertain the precise history, if any, underlying his role in the passion and death of Jesus" (Boys, 2013, p. 74). Meier (2001) concedes that we know very little about Judas, despite the boundless theological speculation about him and the elaboration of his story in Christian imagination. Judas is "like a bird flying through the night, he darts for a moment into the lighted hall of Jesus' ministry, only to plunge again into the dark" (Meier, 2001, p. 630).

Some support the view originally proposed by Phillip Vielhauer in the 1950s that the early Church created the legend of Judas' betrayal for theological reasons, that no circle of twelve disciples existed in Jesus' public ministry and that, while a disciple did betray Jesus, no identification of who did this was known to them, so they used references in the Hebrew bible to create Judas (Sanders, 1985, pp. 98-101). Contemporary manifestations of this view have been expressed by Paffenroth (2001) who argues that Judas was little known to the first generation of Christians. For subsequent generations of Christians, Judas was a necessary character in the drama they wished to portray. He became "the perfect cipher on which to practice their art, shaping him into the man or monster that their individual stories needed" (Paffenroth, 2001, pp. 14-5).

Maccoby (1992) is often quoted as the source for the idea that there never was, in fact, an historical Judas: he was an invention created by those with an interest in opposing Jewish influence in the Jesus movement by telling stories of a prototypical Jewish enemy and betrayer. In this view, Judas is a character invented by later sources to account for a necessary link in the narrative chain connecting Jesus' public ministry with his arrest and interrogation by authorities in Jerusalem. This idea has been robustly contested in scholarly discussions

Identifying Judas Iscariot by his Name

We can surmise very little about Judas from his name, in spite of numerous attempts by Christians to re-construct his back-story from inferences about his name. The designation "Iscariot" is used twelve times in the New Testament to identify Judas and to distinguish Judas Iscariot from others with the same name mentioned in the New Testament: Judas, one of the brothers of Jesus (Mark 6:3); another of Jesus' disciples, "Judas son of James" (Luke 6:16) or "Judas, not Iscariot" (John 14:22); and, an author of one of the shorter letters of the New Testament - Jude/Judas.

In the gospels, Judas' name appears in two forms: nine times in the New Testament (Matthew, Luke and John) the Greek is spelled, *iskariothes* and three times *iskarioth* (the Jewish version). Scholars differ as to which form is the original, though many accept that the Greek ending is more likely to be the original. Regrettably, no New Testament author offers a meaning for the word, Iscariot. One possible reason for the lack of an explanation is that the authors were aware of the meaning of Iscariot and were confident that their readers would likewise be aware, so no need to re-state the obvious. Alternatively, it may be "that even the gospel writers - some thirty-five to sixty-five years after Judas's death - no longer knew what it meant" (Ehrman, 2006, p. 146). Most scholars - though not all - accept that Iscariot is a descriptor rather than a surname, similar to the example of Mary of (the town of) Magdala, a title that distinguishes her from four other Mary's mentioned in the gospels. Unfortunately, no consensus exists on the meaning or significance of Iscariot. A quick survey indicates the range of possibilities.

Some have claimed that Iscariot is a name derived from *sica*, a Latin word to describe a dagger. This gives rise to the Latin *sicarius* and Greek *sikarios* to mean something like, dagger man, or bandit. These observers have linked Judas the Dagger-man to the Zealot movement, a radical Jewish revolutionary group associated with political assassinations and kidnapping. Scholarly interest heightened with the realisation that the head of the *sicarii* in Jerusalem was Abba Saqqara (Ehrman, 1978). This would make Judas a violent, revolutionary figure who advocated the overthrow of Roman rule from the Jewish homeland. Nothing in the New Testament hints at the involvement of Judas in such activities. The identification of "Zealots and *sicarii* is a historical blunder that should have long since been laid to rest" (Meier, 2001, p. 211). The *sicarii* arose as an identifiable group in 40s and 50s CE and not during Jesus' lifetime. We are left to imagine why Judas the supposed dagger-man did not simply stab Jesus in a crowd, the usual *modus operandi* for the *sicarii*, rather than hand him over to Jerusalem authorities. Further, the linguistic relationship between the Latin *sica* and the Greek *Iscariot* is weak, even non-existent.

Sica, a curved dagger favoured by sicarii assassins in 40s and 50s CE.

Some argue for a geographical reference, a guess that was first floated in antiquity. Some pointed to Issachar, one of the twelve tribes of Israel and the name given to a northern region of the united kingdom. Judas was therefore an "Issachariot." Others have suggested that the term refers to his home town, Kerioth (*ish Kerioth* would be, a man from the village of Kerioth). The book of Joshua 15:25 mentions a town with this name in the region of Judea. So, Judas was a Judean from Kerioth, which, if true, would make him the sole southerner identified among Jesus' named followers. If true, this would add to an aura of Judas as an "outsider" to the Jesus movement that essentially comprised Galileans. However, archaeologists have not been able to confirm the contemporary existence of Kerioth: Brown (1994) observed that "there is no evidence that cities mentioned 1,200 to 600 years before were still extant in Judas' time" (Brown, 1994, p. 1414). Another Kerioth is mentioned in Jeremiah 48:24 (see also Amos 2:2) but this town is in Moab. It is implausible to imagine a Moabite man as a member of a Galilean Jewish reform movement.

Less popular suggestions include the idea that the word derives from an Aramaic term, *isqar*, meaning redhead or possessing a ruddy complexion. Nothing in the New Testament hints at any aspect of the appearance of Judas. The red beard, red hair or ruddy features (or sometimes all three) became a standard feature of art in northern Europe in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance. The redness of Judas is not a feature of the literature or iconography from the early Christian centuries. Scholars have offered guesses as to the purpose of depicting a redheaded Judas in Christian tradition: it may have been to set him apart from his peers, especially the other chosen disciples; to associate him with disdain for and fear of foxes; to associate him with the pagan god, Thor, whose attributes were transferred to Christian notions of the devil; or, to play on the relationship between red hair and the conquering Danes (Mellinkoff, 1982). Whatever its derivation, the tone of Judas' complexion does "not help very much in attempting to understand his role in the gospels" (Cane, 2000, p. 45), although it may reveal the attitudes towards Judas of Christians from a later era.

Some have traditionally argued for a connection to another Aramaic word, *saqqar*, meaning liar. Among the difficulties of this suggestion is that "no New Testament account has Judas lie about Jesus" (Brown, 1994, p. 1416). To hand someone over to authorities does not require or imply lying to them.

Nineteenth century scholars associated the Hebrew word, *skr* (meaning to stop up, or suffocate) with the fact that, in Matthew's rendering, Judas died from strangulation - his throat was stopped up when he hanged himself. Others offered *scortea*, a word derived from Latin that described a coat or leather apron. The Greek would be written *Iskortia*. The suggestion was that such aprons had purses woven into them for carrying money and that Judas had the title of "purse bearer" within Jesus' entourage (in reference to John 13:29: "Judas had the common purse"). Doubts have been raised about the likelihood that a purse would have been called a *scortea* (Cane , 2000, p. 45).

The preceding examples demonstrate the extent to which scholars have multiplied possibilities for the meaning of Iscariot and its potential to reveal something of the life and career of Judas. Yet, no single suggestion has proven decisive. Taylor (2010, p. 383) observed that "there is no simple, attested word in the current lexica" that explains the meaning of Iscariot. Questions concerning the identity of Judas based on his name are destined to remain unresolved.

Two Accounts of the Death of Judas

The New Testament records Judas' death in two places. Both relate the death of Judas in horrendous circumstances; both are broadly contradictory. In fact, only Matthew and Luke - the author of Acts - show any regard for the fate of Judas after the arrest of Jesus. Mark and John find no further need for him in their narratives after his role in Jesus' demise as has been related.

The account in Matthew 27:3-10 is the version that has featured in most Christian re-tellings of the fate of Judas. Judas returns the money paid for handing over Jesus and with it, the Jerusalem authorities purchase "the potter's field" with the "blood money" - money connected with the execution of a convicted criminal. This field is named and known "to this day" as the "Field of Blood" and used as a place to bury foreigners. Judas commits suicide immediately after returning the money by hanging himself. Specific details of the hanging are omitted - a tree? a rope? - though these details are standard features of Christian depictions. The image of the purchase of a field comes from the Hebrew scriptures. Jeremiah 32:9 mentions buying a field for silver and Zechariah 11:12-13 recounts throwing thirty pieces of silver into the treasury in the Jerusalem Temple. Matthew interlaces both incidents to produce a quote he attributes to Jeremiah not found anywhere in the Jewish scriptures (Matthew 27:9-10). These scriptural allusions continue Matthew's technique of fulfilment quotations where incidents in the life of Jesus are prefigured in the Hebrew bible and thus assume a divine mandate.

Matthew's account of Judas' actions after handing over Jesus demonstrates an aspect of Matthew's theological agenda: Judas, the betrayer immediately recognises the innocence of Jesus and the injustice of his deed. A similar theme will play out in Matthew when Pontius Pilate, after interrogating Jesus, likewise can see no fault in Jesus and absolves himself of any responsibility: "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves" (Matthew 27:24). For Matthew, if Jesus' betrayer sees Jesus as innocent, if the one who condemns him to death does likewise, then the only guilty parties remaining are the Jerusalem priestly authorities and the Jewish crowds who urged them on. The priestly authorities do not allow Judas to atone for his actions. In this sense, Judas is used by Matthew as a foil to advance his agenda. He seeks to shift blame for the execution of Jesus onto the Jewish people and their leaders and away from Roman officials.

The question of the validity of the act of suicide has been discussed by scholars, some of whom argue that Judas' death by hanging is not to be understood as a negative phenomenon within the context of the first century CE but rather "as a noble one in which he atoned for his sin of betraying 'innocent blood'" (Reed, 2005, p. 51). This perspective challenges traditional Christian notions of suicide. Saari (2006, p. 13) observed that people today speak "as though all the gospels relate that Judas killed himself, when in fact only Matthew does." Saari (2006) thought that "many of the ideas Christians have about suicide and about the figure of Judas come not from the scriptures themselves" (Saari, 2006, p. 13).

An alternative account of the demise of Judas is found in Acts 1:18-20. After the disciples have met with the risen Jesus and after he has ascended to heaven, the decision is made to re-constitute a body of twelve men for the sake of the mission. They must replace Judas. Here Luke features a speech by Peter proposing a replacement for Judas within the Twelve. Peter begins his speech in a manner that accords with Luke's agenda concerning Jesus: the betrayal of Judas was itself a part of God's ultimate plan - "Brothers, it was necessary for the scriptures to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus" (Acts 1:16). In other words, everything is fine since King David had predicted the betrayal by Judas and everything is proceeding according to the divine plan. This accords with a theme in Luke's writing where the audience is reminded "that the course of events is under the complete control of God and not Jesus' enemies, no matter what those enemies themselves might think" (Reinhartz, 2011, p. 33). No human obstacle, not even the betrayal by a friend, could prevent Jesus' mission coming to fruition.

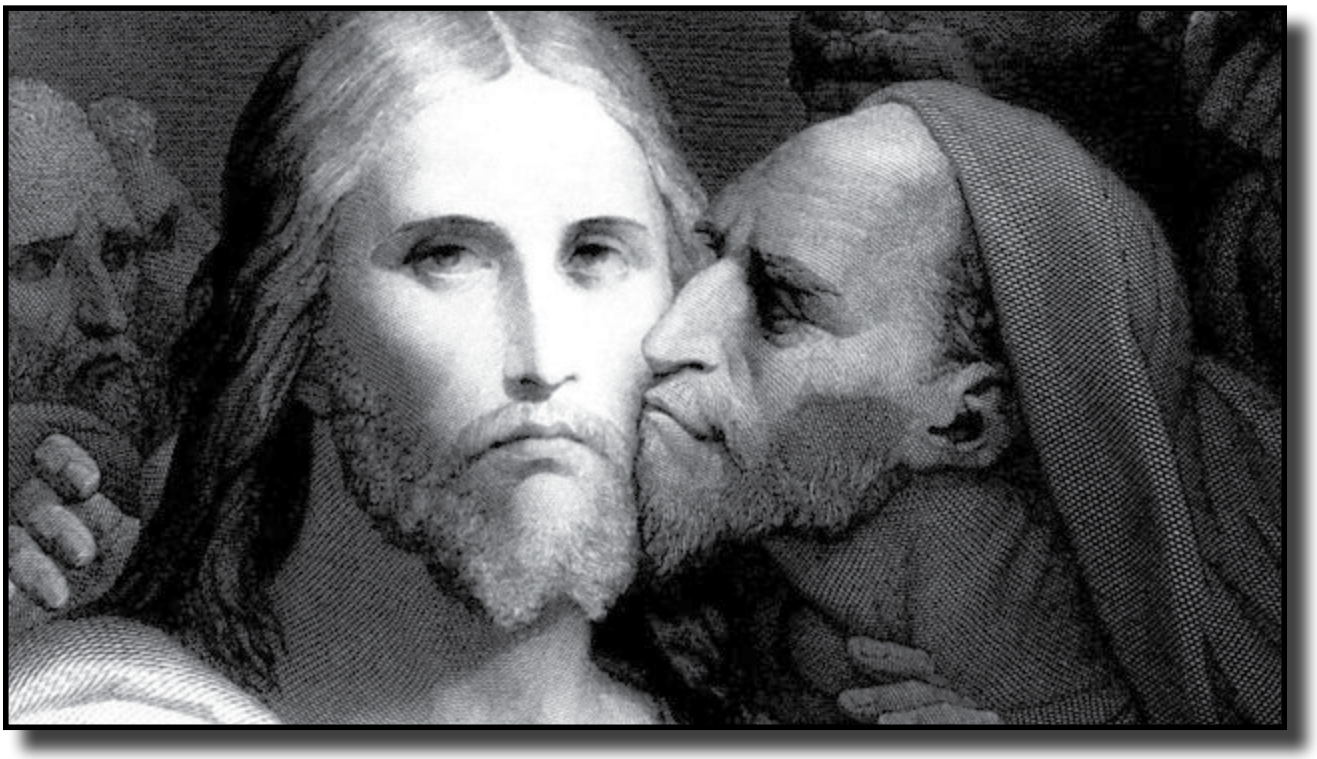
Luke reveals in Peter's speech that after Judas hands Jesus over to the authorities, he takes the money he earned and buys a field. *Contra* Matthew, Luke does not report Judas returning the money. Nothing indicates that Judas repented. He subsequently suffers a catastrophic accident where he falls headlong in his field which results in a massive intestinal trauma and consequent death. We are not informed about the nature of the fall - accidental or deliberate? Because of the incident, the field

becomes known to the residents of Jerusalem as the Field of Blood. The blood referred to here is not that of the innocent man, Jesus (as in Matthew), but rather the blood of the guilty betrayer, Judas. Luke reports Peter saying that this incident fulfils two Psalms: Psalm 109:8, "Let another take his position of overseer" concerns the process for replacing Judas; and, Psalm 69:25, "Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it". Scholars have discussed whether the reference in Psalm 69 was intended to mean that Judas' position as one of the Twelve should remain vacant, or that the field he purchased should remain uninhabited after his death (Novick, 2010).

Both accounts of Judas' death share similarities - the naming of the Field of Blood is an obvious example - but a number of discrepancies cannot be reconciled: the purchaser of the land (the priests or Judas?); why it was called the Field of Blood (for Jesus or Judas?); the purpose of the Field of Blood (a cemetery in Matthew, vacant land(?) in Acts); the nature of his death (hanging or catastrophic fall?); the evidence of repentance (Matthew) or lack of repentance (Acts); the timing of the death (immediate in Matthew, delayed in Acts). While some have tried to harmonise the two accounts, contradictions are not readily resolved. Discrepancies can be understood within the agendas of both authors. The fate of Judas in the New Testament offers teachers scope for examining with their students issues of gospel origins and formation.

Judas, the Jews and Christian Tradition

Despite the lack of biblical information about Judas Iscariot, he has lived an expansive life on the highways and byways of the Christian tradition. New Testament accounts were meshed with motifs from other stories - usually their unfavourable elements - to create legends upon which medieval Passion plays, visual artists and storytellers drew for their own productions. Judas became the stereotypical wicked man whom the devil made even more wicked: "the association of Judas with the grotesque became a staple of Christian preaching and teaching" (Boys, 2013, p. 73). Judas has been portrayed as "greedy or avaricious, qualities associated with Jews in anti-Semitic discourse from the medieval period onward and still evident today" (Reinhartz, 2005, p. 535).



Ary Scheffer, *The Kiss of Judas*, 1862

In medieval literature, Judas became ingrained in the consciousness of Europeans. The fourteenth century seems to have become the high-water mark for interest in Judas when "references to Christ's betrayer permeated everyday life" (Braswell, 1995, p. 307). Ordinary language was peppered with references to, among other things: *Judas kiss* (a hypocritical display of affection), *Judas beard* (a swindler), *Judas trick* (an act of treachery), *Judas tongue* (a liar), *Judas Wednesday* (a day during Holy Week to remember Judas' betrayal), *Judas hole* (a prison), *Judas robe* (the yellow robe worn by a character in a miracle play), *Judas gift* (insincere present), and many more besides. We should also recall the mention of *Judas!* as an act of verbal denunciation. The *Judas tree* (cercis siliquastrum) is a native of Judea and the supposed tree upon which Judas hanged himself.

In the European art tradition Judas has been pictured in accordance with traditional stereotypes: red hair, crooked nose, forked beard, in league with Satan. Medieval artists usually depicted Judas' red hair as unkempt, "an encoded gesture…which should invoke in the mind of the beholder the desolation of the poor and faithless soul of the suicide" (Schnitzler, 2000, p. 107). When Dante wrote the *Inferno* in the fourteenth century, he reserved the final, deepest, darkest round of hell (which he named Judecca) for those sinners eternally encased in ice for having betrayed their benefactors. Here Dante locates the most egregious traitor of all: "That soul up there who has to suffer most/my master said: Judas Iscariot,/ his head inside, he jerks his legs without."

Judas Tree (*cercis siliquastrum*) common in Judea and the source of the myth that Judas hanged himself from a tree of this species, causing its leaves to turn red.

The confluence of names (Judas-Judah-Jew) has encouraged some to associate the treachery of Judas with the responsibility of all Jews for the death of Jesus. This confluence is at least as old as Augustine of Hippo (354-430) whose commentary on Psalm 109 included the following reflection: "so Judas does represent those Jews who were enemies of Christ, who both then hated Christ, and now, in their line of succession, this species of wickedness continuing, hate Him. Of these men, and of this people, not only may what we read more openly discovered in this Psalm be conveniently understood, but also those things which are more expressly stated concerning Judas himself" (Schaff, 1989). This conflation of corruption between Judas and all Jewish people persisted "well into the twentieth century,

Judas was still being used in anti-Semitic propaganda as a stock Jewish character" (Williams, 2015, p. 32). The portrait of the treacherous Judas has facilitated an image of all Jews as treacherous and in league with the forces of evil. Judas has not been presented as *any* Jew; he became representative in Western sensibilities as the personification of "*the* Jew," his actions welded together with Christian suppositions about the motivations of Jewish people in general: "Judas Iscariot epitomizes the Jewish Christ killer, illuminating the monstrosity of the crime against Jesus on the one hand, and the guilt of the Jews on the other hand" (Cohen, 2007, p. 257).

The Search for Judas the Hero

Modern efforts to rehabilitate the image of Judas Iscariot have generated broad interest: "during the course of the previous century, authors from various genres attempted to clear the name of Judas Iscariot, or alternatively, tried to explain why he betrayed Jesus Christ" (Hale, 2011, p. 459). Early in the Christian tradition, gnostics highlighted Judas' elevated, special knowledge that transcended the limited understanding of the rest of the Twelve. Popular modern cultural presentations have joined the fray to explain Judas' emotional and psychological state. Edward Elgar's (1903) oratorio, *The Apostles*, styled Judas as a depressive individual - like the composer himself - showing him manipulating Jesus to force him to reveal his divine power and establish his kingdom. In the end Judas surrenders to despair: "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity. My hope is like dust that is blown away with the wind" (Elgar, 1903, p. 160).

In Nikos Katzantzakis' (1960) novel, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Judas' betrayal of Jesus is represented in a positive, even heroic, light: Jesus tells Judas that of all his disciples, "you're the strongest. The others don't bear up....Did you go speak to the high priest Caiaphas?" (Katzantzakis, 1960, p. 411). In order to fulfil God's plan, Judas has the courage to do what the others cannot. Martin Scorsese's film version plays out this desire for Judas to deliver Jesus to the authorities, which he does, with reluctance. In this rendering, Judas is "indeed the strong one; Jesus has been unable to stay focused and carry through God's plan" (Reinhartz, 2007, p. 176). A similar perspective is enacted in Charles Carner's 1994 film, *Judas*, where a compliant and sympathetic Judas is portrayed as an "unsung hero that is 'told' to betray Jesus by the Jewish leaders for the benefit of all" (King, 2017, p. 27).

Harvey Keitel cast as Judas Iscariot in the 1988 film version of Katzantzakis' *The Last Temptation of Christ*

The 1970s stage and movie success of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's (1970), *Jesus Christ Superstar* encouraged scholarly and popular explorations of the psychology and emotional make-up of Judas Iscariot. This production explored the last week of Jesus' life through the eyes of Judas - played as a tragic figure whose inner turmoil elicited the kind of sympathy from audiences that contrasted with traditional responses to representations of Judas. His sung repertoire is presented with a driving rock beat "that gives Judas an angry, almost disgusted tone....This disgruntled posture follows Judas throughout *Superstar.* Many of his numbers have a frenzied pace that mix uncertainty with an insistent push for action" (Bosch, 2011, p. 55).

The popularity of these movies propelled writers to re-imagine the role of Judas and explore his psychology as a way of understanding his motivations. Fictional accounts emerged, among them the historical novel, *Judas Iscariote: Roman* by Dominique Reznikoff (1993), and Jeffrey Archer and Francis Moloney's (2007), *The Gospel According to Judas*, a novella written in the style of a gospel from the perspective of Benjamin Iscariot, Judas' imagined son. Religious scholars mirrored these revisionist narratives arguing that Jesus wished to die in order to fulfil his mission and that Judas played an appointed role in arranging his death (Klassen, 1996).

The modern discovery of the *Gospel of Judas* has fuelled opinions about the heroic dimensions of Judas' role in Jesus' story. The focus of this gnostic gospel is the secret revelation concerning the nature of the world and the salvation communicated to Judas by Jesus (Ehrman, 2006). The text of this document was composed in Coptic (Egyptian). The manuscript, found south of Cairo in the late 1970s, has been dated to the third or fourth century. In all probability, this text is a translation of an earlier Greek manuscript that may have been originally composed as early as 140 CE. In it, Judas assumes a superior role in Jesus' story: "Jesus tells Judas that, by comparison with the other disciples and the rest of humanity, 'You will exceed them all. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me'." (Gathercole, 2007, p. 210). This document shines light on early Christian communities, but little on the role of Judas in the canonical gospels. Interest in the document has added to the growing regard for Judas as a significant actor in the drama of Jesus.

Others have attempted to move beyond the simplistic, one-word or one-phrase descriptions of Judas as betrayer, thief or misguided revolutionary. Attempts have been made to sketch Judas as a multi-layered, complex individual who operated in a particular social, political and religious culture and was remembered and reconceptualised within other complex human communities over many centuries (Paffenroth, 2001). Judas' betrayal of his beloved teacher was an unfortunate necessity (Stanford, 2016). In these attempts at character rehabilitation, "Judas is not the enemy of Matthew's Passion narrative; instead, he is one of its heroes" (Reed, 2005, p. 58).

The image of Judas as hero of the Christian story has divided scholars. Brown (1998) welcomed efforts to rescue "Judas from two millennia of exaggerated and unwarranted hostile treatment" (Brown, 1998, p. 134), but expressed doubts about how and the extent to which these efforts could progress. DeConick (2007) recognised the value in working towards reconciling the ancient enmities between Jews and Christians stirred by accounts of the involvement of Judas in the death of Jesus, but thought that "manufacturing a hero Judas is not the answer" (DeConick, 2007). Meier (1997) judged efforts at rehabilitating Judas such as Klassen's (1996) as "fanciful reconstructions" that lack a basis in a careful study of the historical evidence: "the quest for the historical Judas, like the quest for the historical Jesus, often ends up giving us a novel" (Meier, 1997, p. 664). These evaluations of Judas' legacy reveal a fundamental ambiguity in the way Judas is remembered and currently understood: "Judas is human like us and yet quite different. He is the initiator of the salvific history and at the same time God's opponent; his deed can be understood either negatively or positively" (Renger, 2013, p. 9).

Responses for Religious Educators

Religious educators who present biblical and historical material to their students concerning Judas Iscariot immediately encounter complications. To respond effectively, teachers require clarity about *what* they are to present, *how* they are best able to respond educationally, and *why* Judas is a figure of importance for Christians. The following reflections on these three issues build on the preceding discussion in this article.

The reason for a balanced examination of the life and career of Judas Iscariot is related to his significance for the entire story of Christianity. Soren Kierkegaard once claimed that we could obtain "a deep insight into the state of Christianity in every age by seeing how it interprets Judas" (Kierkegaard, 1970, p. 512). In the current age, insight into the state of Christianity involves an appreciation of the relationship between Christians and Jews. Judas Iscariot is a key character in the way this relationship is presently perceived and explained to Christians. Constructed images of Judas as evil and grotesque have been associated with Jews throughout Christian history. Christian religious educators have a significant role in critically appraising the perceived relationship between the presumed treachery of Judas and the responsibility of all Jews for the death of Jesus of Nazareth. This relationship is complex and multi-layered. It requires religious educators to probe the available evidence with a greater level of sophistication and precision than previous generations were able to summon.

Modern images of Judas are more complex and textured than the standard fare offered by Christian tradition. Judas has many faces. Religious educators require an appreciation of the questions that attract the attention of scholars concerning Judas Iscariot, as well as the diversity of interpretations of the available evidence. They need to acknowledge the relative poverty of evidence concerning the life and career of Judas that supports many scholarly conclusions. They need to accept that little can be said about the historical circumstances concerning the role of Judas in the passion and death of Jesus. They can point out that discrepancies, inconsistencies and contradictions characterise the available evidence. They can scale back the condemnation and vilification that has accompanied discussions about Judas. The challenge for religious educators is to move beyond the simplistic, negative descriptions of Judas to encounter an opaquely drawn character who operated in a complex cultural environment, who has been reconceptualised in other complex cultural contexts over many centuries. While this task is educationally challenging, it offers a more vibrant intellectual experience for teachers and students than the standard fare traditionally served to students of the bible.

The issue of how to proceed in order to offer these revised educational responses is foundational. Religious educators have access to many useful tools to assist their work. First, they require acknowledgment of some key distinctions. Among these, is the need to distinguish biblical texts from texts drawn from Christian tradition. These latter texts can be visual, literary, cinematic and verbal. These have been firmly lodged in music, art, film, drama, poetry, fiction and non-fiction. They represent the codification of myths about Judas in Christian tradition. With this key distinction in mind, teachers can employ the full range of descriptive, analytical and evaluative means they possess to interrogate the available texts.

Modern efforts to rehabilitate the image of Judas Iscariot have been only partially successful. While attempts to articulate the unspoken intentions of Judas Iscariot are admirable, we need to calm our enthusiasm for romanticised notions of Judas the hero. The New Testament tells us only two basic things about Judas: his place among the twelve chosen by Jesus, and his role in handing Jesus over to the authorities. Judas is a well-established figure in popular culture and in Christian tradition. Religious educators have a challenging role in presenting his life and career to their students.

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