

Bearer of Bad News



A Brief Analysis of the "Gospel of Judas"

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The Gospel of Judas is misnamed



he word "Gospel" means "good news," the message concerning Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation, yet in the so-called "gospel of Judas" we only find bad news. In it we find a Jesus who is out of character with the one we find in the canonical Gospels; a Jesus who teaches "secret knowledge," who dismisses the Eucharist, and shows a condescending, even hostile attitude towards his Apostles. In this "gospel," Jesus denies the God of the Church, ranks Judas above the other Apostles, and embraces a Gnostic cosmology at odds with that of Judaeo-Christianity. This means bad news for everyone around who for 2,000 years have gotten the whole story wrong, if we are to believe this "gospel" of Judas.

I've read the Gospel of Judas, a copy of which the *National Geographic Society* has deemed fit to share with us [here](#). It consists of seven pages of text (Times New Roman 12 point), single spaced with headings. Scholars seemed to have divided the text into three main "scenes" and other subheadings, for a total of 19 sections. A copy of the Coptic original is likewise found [here](#).

What I am going to do is to highlight what I think are the main doctrinal themes and compare these to the doctrinal themes of the canonical Gospels and with what we know of Church conditions in the period immediately following the New Testament, the Church of the "Apostolic Fathers," the Church of second-generation Christians. In this manner, we'll be able to "track" what each text is saying, how they differ in contents and emphasis, and why this is important for our understanding of the primitive doctrines of the Church. That's how we'll see that there is no "good news" in the "gospel of Judas."

The secret teachings of Jesus



he first thing this "Gospel of Judas" establishes is that Jesus imparted a secret knowledge to a select few, and left the rest to reach all the wrong conclusions pertaining his overt teachings. The introduction states:

The secret account of the revelation that Jesus spoke in conversation with Judas Iscariot during a week three days before he celebrated Passover.

The existence of these "secrets" or "mysteries" forms the basis which "authenticates" this "gospel" to the ears of its hearers:

He began to speak with them about the mysteries beyond the world and what would take place at the end.

Jesus said, "[Come], that I may teach you about [secrets] no person [has] ever seen. For there exists a great and boundless realm, whose extent no generation of angels has seen, [in which] there is [a] great invisible [Spirit], which no eye of an angel has ever seen, no thought of the heart has ever comprehended, and it was never called by any name.

...I have explained to you the mysteries of the kingdom [46] and I have taught you about

the error of the stars; and [...] send it [...] on the twelve aeons.”...

Knowing that Judas was reflecting upon something that was exalted, Jesus said to him, “Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the kingdom. It is possible for you to reach it, but you will grieve a great deal.

All these "secrets" and "mysteries" Jesus revealed to Judas alone! However, in the canonical Gospel according to St. John the Theologian we find the following contrary statements:

Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said." When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded. "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" (St. John 18:19-23, NIV).

The high priest wanted to find out if there was a "secret teaching" that Jesus was imparting to his disciples that was different to that he taught publicly. Jesus' clear answer earned him a slap in the face. In the context of Judas' "gospel," Jesus' response to the high priest was a lie!

And Jesus laughed



ook, I don't believe that Jesus was a serious, solemn ayatollah during his earthly ministry, nor is He now. I think Jesus laughed because laughing is part of the human condition. Humor, good, clean humor gets its inspiration from contradictions and in a world fraught with contradictions, humor abounds. I am sure that He laughed with children too because, as we all know, kids say the darnedest things and the canonical Gospels inform us He enjoyed the presence of children around him. If they have a choice in the matter, children don't hang around sourpusses.

Nevertheless, the Gospels never speak of Jesus' laughter – giving rise to some extremes opinion that He, in fact, never did. What the Gospels say with certainty is that **He wept**. (cfr. St. John 11:35)

However, the "Jesus" of Judas' gospel laughed quite a bit. He laughed, but it wasn't a sympathetic, good-natured laughter. It was a sardonic, demeaning, haughty, belittling, mocking laughter:

When he [approached] his disciples, gathered together and seated and offering a prayer of thanksgiving over the bread, [he] laughed. The disciples said to [him], “Master, why are you laughing at [our] prayer of thanksgiving? We have done what is right.”

His disciples said to him, “Lord, what is the great generation that is superior to us and holier than us, that is not now in these realms?” When Jesus heard this, he laughed and

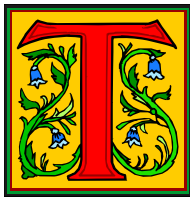
said to them, "Why are you thinking in your hearts about the strong and holy generation?"

When Jesus heard this, he laughed and said to him, "You thirteenth spirit, why do you try so hard? But speak up, and I shall bear with you."

After that Jesus [laughed].

[Judas said], "Master, [why are you laughing at us]?" [Jesus] answered [and said], "I am not laughing [at you] but at the error of the stars, because these six stars wander about with these five combatants, and they all will be destroyed along with their creatures."

The "Jesus" in Judas' gospel mocks the disciples' ignorance with his laughter, mocks their thanksgiving, and their God. This "Jesus" even laughed at Judas, although he thought Judas showed some "promise."



Judas' "Jesus" derides the Eucharist

The summit of Catholic Christian worship is the Eucharist. "Eucharist" is a Greek word transliterated into Latin and English meaning "thanksgiving." The "Prayer of Thanksgiving" has always been the summit of the Eucharistic gathering, what we call "the Anaphora" and "the canon of the Mass." These prayers reflect the sacrificial "thanksgiving" the Church offers to God the Father in Christ. The *Didaché* or "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," a brief catechetical text written at the end of the first century, records one of the oldest Eucharistic prayers:

Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks this way. First, concerning the cup: We thank thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David Thy servant, which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever..

And concerning the broken bread: We thank Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever..

But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs."

In our contemporary Mass, the third Eucharistic Prayer enshrines some of the words and, definitely, all of the sentiments of that ancient Eucharistic Prayer:

Father, you are holy indeed, and all creation rightly gives you praise. All life, all holiness comes from you through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, by the working of the Holy Spirit. From age to age you gather a people to yourself, so that from east to west a

perfect offering may be made to the glory of your name.

And so, Father, we bring you these gifts. We ask you to make them holy by the power of your Spirit, that they may become the body and blood of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at whose command we celebrate this eucharist...

Yet, Judas' Jesus mocks his own Apostles' Eucharist:

One day he was with his disciples in Judea, and he found them gathered together and seated in pious observance. When he [approached] his disciples, [34] gathered together and seated and offering a prayer of thanksgiving over the bread, [he] laughed. The disciples said to [him], "Master, why are you laughing at [our] prayer of thanksgiving? We have done what is right." He answered and said to them, "I am not laughing at you. are not doing this because of your own will but because it is through this that your god [will be] praised." They said, "Master, you are [...] the son of our god." Jesus said to them, "How do you know me? Truly [I] say to you, no generation of the people that are among you will know me."

I don't think that the text of the gospel of Judas is referring to the customary blessing given during Jewish *seder* or Passover meals, which is the type of the Christian Eucharist and the primary occasion of Christ's Last Supper. The blessing or *motzi* is not the central action of the Jewish Passover meal. The central action is the retelling of the Exodus deliverance story or *maggid*. What set apart the Last Supper from the *seder* is precisely the centrality of Jesus' *eukaristos* or thanksgiving, by which He offered himself up to the Father as the Lamb of the New Covenant. Since then, the term *eukaristia* has had a very specific meaning to Christians. This is precisely what the Apostles are doing and what Judas' "Jesus" reproved as misguided act of worship to a false "god"!

Also, the fact that Judas' presupposes a well-developed view of the Eucharistic Prayer betrays its late origin, one in which the Eucharist was an established rite of a Church that gave its participants a common sense of belonging, loyalty, identity, and communion. Judas' Gospel wastes no time in attacking the One Thing keeping the Church together. Judas' aim is to destroy or at least, delegitimize the orthodox Catholic Church by attacking its most intimate bond of unity while propping up the author's own Gnostic views, which I'll discuss later on in this writing.

The Apostles Betraying and Betrayed



It is interesting to read that in Judas' gospel, the Apostles betrayed Jesus who in turn deserted his Apostles, whereas Judas embraces Christ and Christ promotes Judas over the other Apostles. According to this "gospel," when the disciples heard Jesus' reproof on their Eucharist, "they started getting angry and infuriated and began blaspheming against him in their hearts."

Blasphemy is a serious offense for Christians and Jews:

According to Suarez, blasphemy is "any word of malediction, reproach, or contumely pronounced against God. St. Thomas says that it is to be regarded as a sin against faith inasmuch as by it we attribute to God that which does not belong to Him, or deny Him that which is His. ([Source](#)).

In the Old Law the blasphemer was punished by death. So God appointed on the occasion of the blasphemy of Salumith's son: "The man that curseth His God, shall bear his sin: And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, dying let him die: all the multitude shall stone him, whether he be a native or a stranger. He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, dying let him die" (Leviticus 24:15-16). Upon hearing blasphemy the Jews were wont in detestation of the crime to rend their clothes (2 Kings 18:37, 19:1; Matthew 26:65). ([Source](#)).

There's no record in the canonical Gospels or in any of the other books of the New Testament of the apostles blaspheming against God or Jesus, but in Judas' we find one serious instance of blasphemy, which would rob them of any moral claim to speak authoritatively in Jesus' name.

Challenging apostolic authority is another way that the author of Judas' gospel uses to undermine the authority of the orthodox Catholic Church of his time, for it also presupposes the existence of a Church conscious of the apostolic origin of her rulers and doctrine. This high view of the Church as a continuation of the faith and authority of the Apostles is grounded in the New Testament:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:19-20, NIV)

I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. (2 Peter 3:2, NIV)

The wall of the city [the Heavenly Jerusalem] had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (Revelation 21:14, NIV)

By 110 AD we find the full expression of the Church's apostolic authority and its transmission to the Catholic bishops in the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch, particularly in his [Letter to the Smyrnaeans](#):

See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution⁵⁵ of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper⁵⁶ Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing to God, so that everything that is

*done may be secure and valid.*⁵⁷

See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Christ Jesus does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles. Do ye also reverence the deacons, as those that carry out [through their office] the appointment of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper⁵⁸ Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as where Christ is, there does all the heavenly host stand by, waiting upon Him as the Chief Captain of the Lord's might, and the Governor of every intelligent nature. It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize, or to offer, or to present sacrifice, or to celebrate a love-feast.⁵⁹ But that which seems good to him, is also well-pleasing to God, that everything ye do may be secure and valid.

Note the intimate connection St. Ignatius makes between the apostles, the bishops, and the Eucharist. They are all links in a chain, a single thread in Christ's seamless garment. If one were to undermine one link, if one were to pull on the single thread, the Church's claims and authority would fall. The author of Judas' gospel saw this reality in the mid second century, understood its significance and its connections, and proceeded to rent it.

Judas' confession displaces Peter's in the "gospel" of Judas



Ye're all familiar with St. Peter's Confession of Faith. It is preserved in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, Chapter 16, verses 13-19:

And Jesus came into the quarters of Cesarea Philippi: and he asked his disciples, saying: Whom do men say that the Son of man is? But they said: Some John the Baptist, and other some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets. Jesus saith to them: But whom do you say that I am?

Simon Peter answered and said: Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answering, said to him: Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven. (Douay-Rheims)

Well, it so happens that the gospel of Judas records another confession, that of Judas, also accompanied by a set of promises made by "Jesus" to Judas:

When Jesus observed their lack of [understanding, he said] to them, "Why has this agitation led you to anger? Your god who is within you and [...] [35] have provoked you to anger [within] your souls. [Let] any one of you who is [strong enough] among human beings bring out the perfect human and stand before my face."

They all said, "We have the strength."

But their spirits did not dare to stand before [him], except for Judas Iscariot. He was able to stand before him, but he could not look him in the eyes, and he turned his face away.

Judas [said] to him, "I know who you are and where you have come from. You are from the immortal realm of Barbelo. And I am not worthy to utter the name of the one who has sent you."

Knowing that Judas was reflecting upon something that was exalted, Jesus said to him, "Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the kingdom. It is possible for you to reach it, but you will grieve a great deal. [36] For someone else will replace you, in order that the twelve [disciples] may again come to completion with their god."

Judas said to him, "When will you tell me these things, and [when] will the great day of light dawn for the generation?"

But when he said this, Jesus left him.

Note that the gospel's author paints Judas as the only one who dared to speak to Jesus as an *equal*. Observe also Judas' confession and Jesus' reaction:

"I know who you are and where you have come from. You are from the immortal realm of Barbelo. And I am not worthy to utter the name of the one who has sent you."

Knowing that Judas was reflecting upon something that was exalted, Jesus said to him,

"Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the kingdom. It is possible for you to reach it, but you will grieve a great deal.

Later, in another exchange in which Judas asks Jesus about his own fate, Jesus promised that Judas would be exalted over the other disciples and be the receiver of special teachings to which the other disciples would not be privy:

Judas said, "Master, could it be that my seed is under the control of the rulers?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Come, that I [—two lines missing—], but that you will grieve much when you see the kingdom and all its generation."

When he heard this, Judas said to him, "What good is it that I have received it? For you have set me apart for that generation."

Jesus answered and said, "You will become the thirteenth, and you will be cursed by the other generations—and you will come to rule over them. In the last days they will curse your ascent [47] to the holy [generation]."

Now, observe this statement Judas "confession" about Jesus: *You are from the immortal realm of Barbelo*. Who or what is this "Barbelo" character? According to the [Wikipedia](#),

Barbelo refers to the first emanation of God in the various Sethian gnostic cosmogonies. This figure is also variously referred to as 'Mother-Father' (a moniker that hints at her apparent androgyny), 'First Human Being', 'The Triple Androgynous Name', or 'Eternal Aeon'.

In the Apocryphon of John, a tractate in the Nag Hammadi Library containing the most extensive recounting of the Sethian creation myth, the Barbelo is described as "The first power, the glory, Barbelo, the perfect glory in the aions, the glory of the revelation." All subsequent acts of creation within the divine sphere (save, crucially, that of the lowest aeon Sophia) occurs through her co-action with God.

But Judas' Jesus associates his own disciples with "Saklas," a name the Gnostics reserved to "the Demiurge," the lower deity who created the world—different from "Barbelo" or the "high God" or "aeon" from which Jesus supposedly came from, as confessed by Judas. Again, Jesus is made to explain this cosmogony in the gospel of Judas:

"Then Saklas said to his angels, 'Let us create a human being after the likeness and after the image.' They fashioned Adam and his wife Eve, who is called, in the cloud, Zoe. For by this name all the generations seek the man, and each of them calls the woman by these names. Now, Sakla did not [53] com[mand ...] except [...] the gene[rations ...] this [...]. And the [ruler] said to Adam, 'You shall live long, with your children.'"

It is also interesting to see other scattered mentions of Gnostic "aeons" in the gospel of Judas, such as "Sophia," who features in many of the Gnostic stories of the creation of the world. These observations highlight the Pagan character of this "gospel" and its decidedly anti-Christian tone.



Gnosticism defined

Who are these "Gnostics" who keep creeping up throughout the text? What's "Gnosticism" exactly?

Again, from the [Wikipedia](#):

***Gnosticism** is a historical term for various mystical initiatory religions, sects and knowledge schools that were most active in the first few centuries C.E. around the Mediterranean and extending into central Asia.*

These systems typically recommend the pursuit of mysticism or "special knowledge" (gnosis) as the central goal of life. They also commonly depict creation as a mythological struggle between competing forces of light and dark, and posit a marked division between the material realm, typically depicted as under the governance of malign forces (such as

the demiurge), and the higher spiritual realm from which it is divided, governed by God (the Monad) and the Aeons.

Gnosticism is a variegated religious phenomenon with different schools, philosophies, and theologies. Gnosticism is a manifold phenomenon and it is difficult to make fair generalizations about it, although many of its schools held in common several beliefs and worldviews. If you want to find out more, please refer to the Wikipedia articles I've quoted before, or to that of the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) which is also very informative. I'll limit myself to the "school" we meet through the gospel of Judas, whose author had no love lost for the emerging orthodox Catholic consensus in Christianity.

In the gospel of Judas, the Gnostic Jesus blasts the "priests." Who are these priests?



The Gnostic Jesus says and acts very differently from the Jesus we find in the canonical New Testament. The gospel of Judas records a diatribe by the Gnostic Jesus' against "priests" and "sacrifice." The occasion is a "dream" the apostles had and Jesus' interpretation of that dream. This is the "dream sequence":

Another day Jesus came up to [them]. They said to [him], "Master, we have seen you in a [vision], for we have had great [dreams ...] night [...]." [He said], "Why have [you ... when] have gone into hiding?" [38]

They [said, "We have seen] a great [house with a large] altar [in it, and] twelve men—they are the priests, we would say—and a name; and a crowd of people is waiting at that altar, [until] the priests [... and receive] the offerings. [But] we kept waiting."

[Jesus said], "What are [the priests] like?"

They [said, "Some ...] two weeks; [some] sacrifice their own children, others their wives, in praise [and] humility with each other; some sleep with men; some are involved in [slaughter]; some commit a multitude of sins and deeds of lawlessness. And the men who stand [before] the altar invoke your [name], [39] and in all the deeds of their deficiency, the sacrifices are brought to completion [...]." After they said this, they were quiet, for they were troubled.

Now, the Gnostic Jesus' "interpretation":

Jesus said to them, "Why are you troubled? Truly I say to you, all the priests who stand before that altar invoke my name. Again I say to you, my name has been written on this[...] of the generations of the stars through the human generations. [And they] have planted trees without fruit, in my name, in a shameful manner."

Jesus said to them, "Those you have seen receiving the offerings at the altar—that is who you are. That is the god you serve, and you are those twelve men you have seen. The

cattle you have seen brought for sacrifice are the many people you lead astray [40] before that altar. [...] will stand and make use of my name in this way, and generations of the pious will remain loyal to him. After him another man will stand there from [the fornicators], and another [will] stand there from the slayers of children, and another from those who sleep with men, and those who abstain, and the rest of the people of pollution and lawlessness and error, and those who say, 'We are like angels'; they are the stars that bring everything to its conclusion. For to the human generations it has been said, 'Look, God has received your sacrifice from the hands of a priest'—that is, a minister of error. But it is the Lord, the Lord of the universe, who commands, 'On the last day they will be put to shame.'” [41] Jesus said [to them], “Stop sac[r]ificing [...] which you have [...] over the altar, since they are over your stars and your angels and have already come to their conclusion there. So let them be [ensnared] before you, and let them go [—about 15 lines missing—] generations [...]. A baker cannot feed all creation [42] under [heaven]. And [...] to them [...] and [...] to us and [...].

The text gets too fragmented after that to read coherently, but this is enough to draw some general conclusions. The sacrificial worship scene presented in this dream sequence is reminiscent of Jewish Temple worship. At least, I suppose most scholars will be inclined to interpret it as such, as portraying the apostles as Jewish Temple priests whose cult is rejected by the Gnostic Christ. In my lay opinion, this is not necessarily so. I posit that the worship we see portrayed here is not that of the Jewish Temple, but the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the orthodox Catholic Church. There are some clues in the dream leading me to believe so.

The twelve men that "stand at the altar" in the dream sequence invoke Jesus' *name*. Needless to say that's not, shall we say, *kosher* in Jewish Temple worship, which would've been blasphemous, to say the least. The Gnostic Jesus confirms his apostles' perception: *Truly I say to you, all the priests who stand before that altar invoke my name*. What kind of "altar" is this? I sense that a Jewish altar is not meant, but a Christian one.

The Gnostic Jesus demands that all sacrifices "in his name" offered "from the hands of a priest" come from "a minister of error" and should be stopped: *Stop sac[r]ificing [...] which you have [...] over the altar, since they are over your stars and your angels and have already come to their conclusion there*. Then, the Gnostic Jesus adds one statement to his diatribe that I find very curious: *A baker cannot feed all creation [42] under [heaven]*. I think this is very significant.

Why the baker simile? Perhaps if we look at a baker's principal occupation, which is to make and distribute bread, we'll get the appropriate clue. Who is the baker in this "dream sequence?" It is the priest, who distributes the material bread which is an anti-symbol of the inadequate knowledge that, the Gnostic Jesus posits, is insufficient in quantity and quality to feed the souls and intellects of everyone. The Gnostic Jesus links this bread to the "temple sacrifice" described earlier in the sequence, of which the apostles are the sacrifices' vain offering "priesthood." I think that the audience listening to the gospel of Judas being read aloud would've understood the "dream sequence," and the Gnostic Jesus' indictment of "temple sacrifice," as referring to the Eucharistic Liturgy celebrated in orthodox Catholic communities.

I think the purpose of the "dream sequence" is obvious: it is an attack against the orthodox Christian hierarchy that had become dominant in Christianity and to which St. Ignatius witnesses to in his Letter to the Smyrnaeans in 110 AD. The dream sequence is also a purposeful denigration of the central act of worship of the Church over which the hierarchy presides: the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

The diatribe against "temple sacrifice" should not be construed as a new, disconnected "vision" arbitrarily dropped into the text of the gospel of Judas by its author(s). Instead, it should be seen as a continuation of a thread of thought that runs from the initial critique of the apostles "Eucharistic Prayer" to this rendering of Christian "temple sacrifice" of which the apostles are "priests"—An implicit criticism of bishops who claim apostolic succession and authority, and who see themselves as the proper celebrants of the Christian Eucharist.

The Gnostic Jabberwocky Jabbers and Jabbers



I am sure you're probably familiar with Lewis Carroll's poem, *Jabberwocky*. Here are the first two verses, so that you get the taste of it:

*'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.*

*"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"*

What I am saying is that Gnosticism is a lot like this Lewis Carroll's poem. It's part intelligible, part nonsense and the part that is nonsense is like an empty vessel that one can fill with any meaning imaginable or with no meaning at all, making it a pursuit of the obscure and hermetic for its own sake, the words becoming tools to trigger numinous and mysterious, awe-full feelings in one's belly. Many people find "beauty" in mystery, and in the pursuit of hidden knowledge granted only to the few and the patient, not to the rabble who depends on altars, bibles, eucharists and sensible sacraments. To be "cool," one had to be a Gnostic and to be a Gnostic, one had to learn the jargon.

We see the jargon readily in this "gospel of Jude." After tearing into the apostles, demoting St. Peter and promoting Judas, and cutting through the Eucharistic Sacrifice and Liturgy, and delegitimizing bishops and priests, the Gnostic Jesus launched into a cosmology lesson according to Gnostic categories. References to aeons, angels, ruling stars, human generations, astrological influences, gematria; descents from Nebro, Yaldabaoth, Saklas, Seth—who is equated to Christ—down to Adam and Eve, all surrounded with wispy turns of phrase hinting at hidden meanings and hermetic wisdom only available to select initiates. This is the so-called knowledge the writer(s) of this gospel wants to seed in the minds of his/her audience, having prepared the ground previously, so-to-speak, by destroying the claims of the Church via ridicule

and the Gnostic Jesus' own sarcastic laughter.

You might say that the combination of Gnostic skepticism, irony, sarcasm, ridicule, and pseudo-deep rhetoric was quite effective. Otherwise we would not be talking about it now after 1,800 years. Yet, some one understood what Gnosticism and the gospel of Judas meant and what it portended. He struck back, masterfully.

St. Irenaeus killed the Gnostic Jabberwocky



ishop St. Irenaeus of Lyon, Church Father. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*,

Information as to his life is scarce, and in some measure inexact. He was born in Proconsular Asia, or at least in some province bordering thereon, in the first half of the second century; the exact date is controverted, between the years 115 and 125, according to some, or, according to others, between 130 and 142. It is certain that, while still very young, Irenaeus had seen and heard the holy Bishop Polycarp (d. 155) at Smyrna. During the persecution of Marcus Aurelius, Irenaeus was a priest of the Church of Lyons. The clergy of that city, many of whom were suffering imprisonment for the Faith, sent him (177 or 178) to Rome with a letter to Pope Eleutherius concerning Montanism, and on that occasion bore emphatic testimony to his merits. Returning to Gaul, Irenaeus succeeded the martyr Saint Pothinus as Bishop of Lyons. During the religious peace which followed the persecution of Marcus Aurelius, the new bishop divided his activities between the duties of a pastor and of a missionary (as to which we have but brief data, late and not very certain) and his writings, almost all of which were directed against Gnosticism, the heresy then spreading in Gaul and elsewhere. In 190 or 191 he interceded with Pope Victor to lift the sentence of excommunication laid by that pontiff upon the Christian communities of Asia Minor which persevered in the practice of the Quartodecimans in regard to the celebration of Easter. Nothing is known of the date of his death, which must have occurred at the end of the second or the beginning of the third century. In spite of some isolated and later testimony to that effect, it is not very probable that he ended his career with martyrdom. His feast is celebrated on 28 June in the Latin Church, and on 23 August in the Greek.

He is important and relevant to our discussion for two reasons: 1. he knew and rebutted the gospel of Judas and 2. St. Ireneaus' rebuttal sets the latest composition date for the gospel of Judas.

St. Ireneaus is best known for his work entitled, *Against the Heresies*, which he wrote around 180 AD. This is the quote where the saint mentions the gospel of Judas:

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 account, they add, they have been assailed by the Creator, yet no one of them has suffered injury. For Sophia was in the habit of carrying off that which belonged to her from them to herself. 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. (i, 31, 1) (Source)

The saintly bishop's critique was not lost on Brian Handwerk, who writing for the [National Geographic News](#) stated that:

St. Irenaeus's method was to savage alternative theological views and interpretations—including the Gospel of Judas—which he referred to as "fictitious histories."

Handwerk didn't even bother to find out why St. Irenaeus was so peeved at the Gnostics in general and at the gospel of Judas in particular. Of course not, because in order to ascertain the bishop's view one must engage in a compare-and-contrast study of the kind I have attempted in this essay and the conclusions may not have been good for business in the end. The headline "Gospel according to Judas found: research indicates that it does not to transmit authentic memories of Jesus, Judas" would not sell many magazines.

The National Geographic Society slips



One more example illustrates the *National Geographic Society's* sloppy treatment of the facts. Towards the end of the made-for-TV documentary, one of the scholars—I don't remember his name, I guess I'll have to watch this thing again—stated that the gospel of Judas contained—this is not a direct quote— "no authentic historical memories about Jesus or Judas, that its value laid on the insights the document provided on other early Christian movements." They switched right away to Dr. Elaine Pagels, one of the world's foremost experts in Gnostic Christianity for a retort, which was "How does **he** know?"

A scholar of Dr. Pagels' stature should know that *proving the negative* is a logical fallacy, that to demand it from a fellow scholar is unfair and uncouth, and hinting that the lack of negative proof allows for the *mere possibility* that the gospel of Judas records authentic historical memories derives from very sloppy reasoning on her part. Curiously enough, there was no "retort" clip to Dr. Pagels' "how he knows" question. Her fallacy was left hanging as a plausible argument of the gospel of Judas historical accuracy. Her rhetorical question begged for an answer but the producers allowed for none. By failing to challenge Dr. Pagel's fallacious question, the once utterly scientific National Geography Society failed to meet its own scientific and logical standards.

Conclusion



We have reached the conclusion of this analysis, and these are my summary findings.

- The so-called "Gospel of Judas" is a pseudonymous Gnostic tractate, written toward the middle of the second century AD. It was not written before St. Ignatius' *Letters to the Smyrnaeans* in 110 AD and definitely not after St. Irenaeus's *Against the Heresies* in 180 AD. The internal evidence examined here presupposes that the author of this "gospel" was familiar with Church conditions, teachings, and government as they were during this 70-year span. The first generation of Christian witnesses was probably all gone by then; therefore, the "gospel of Judas" does not record any first hand, historical information. This argument becomes decisive if the scholarly consensus dating the gospel of Judas to AD 150-170 holds true.
- I think we can also play the higher-critical game when it comes to the gospel of Judas. I think the gospel of Judas is a hodgepodge of fragmentary notes taken at various times of Gnostic criticisms of orthodox understandings of the Old and New Testament, coupled with positive explanations of Gnostic cosmogony, written together, smoothed, and harmonized into a single work by an anonymous redactor. This redactor is the one who titled the work "Gospel of Judas."
- The aim of the author(s) or better yet, the redactor of the gospel of Judas was to boost Gnostic Christianity at the expense of the emerging orthodox Catholic consensus. The author(s) attempted to achieve this goal by countering the claims of Catholic bishops to apostolic authority, by undermining the apostles themselves, and by propping up Judas against the Apostles.
- The gospel of Judas has historical value in the sense that it highlights the controversies leading to the stabilization and formulation of the Christian biblical canon, and it does offer a new perspective on Gnostic beliefs. It offers no new historical insight into the persons of Jesus of Nazareth or Judas Iscariot; its claim that Judas betrayed Jesus at his bidding is not a historical tradition preserved in this writing; it is, like St. Irenaeus suspected, a work of religious fiction, not written by eye-witnesses, and not sanctioned by disciples of the primitive eyewitnesses and their tradition. Contrary to what Dr. Pagels states, the gospel of Judas offers no new insight on the origins of Christianity.

I end with the words Pope Benedict XVI spoken last [Holy Thursday](#) (AD 2006):

"You are clean, but not all of you," says the Lord (John 13:10). In this phrase the great gift of purification is revealed that he offers us, as he wants to sit at table together with us, to become our food. "But not all"; there is the dark mystery of rejection, which with what happened to Judas is made present and must make us reflect in fact on this Holy Thursday, the day in which Jesus gives himself to us. The Lord's love knows no limits, but man can put a limit to it.

"You are clean, but not all of you." What makes man filthy? The rejection of love, not wanting to be loved, not loving. Arrogance, which believes it has no need of purification, which closes itself to God's saving goodness.

Arrogance does not want to confess and recognize that we are in need of purification. In Judas, we see the nature of this rejection in an even clearer way. He judges Jesus according to the categories of power and success. For him, only the reality of power and success exist, love does not count at all. And he is avid: Money is more important than communion with Jesus, more important than God and his love. In this way, he becomes also a liar, he plays the game of double jeopardy with truth; he lives in lies and loses the sense of the supreme truth, God. Thus he is hardened, makes himself incapable of conversion, of beginning the confident return of the prodigal son, and throws a destroyed life away.

"You are clean, but not all of you." The Lord warns us today in the face of that self-sufficiency that puts a limit to his unlimited love. He invites us to imitate his humility, to trust in it, to let ourselves be "infected" by it. He invites us to return home no matter how lost we feel and to let his purifying goodness raise us and makes us enter the communion of the table with him, with God himself.

What better words than these? Judas rejected love, rejected being loved, and rejected loving. What his rejection of Love led him to do made him unclean and in the end, destroyed him. This is the true message of Judas' life as preserve in the real, canonical Gospels and this is the message that the author(s), redactor, and disseminators of the "gospel of Judas" would rather have you ignore.