

Rehabilitating Judas Iscariot in French literature

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ABSTRACT

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During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, numerous French literary artists, like their counterparts in several other countries, attempted to probe the personality and motives of Iscariot. Among the most prominent were Ernest Renan, François Mauriac, Paul Raynal, and Marcel Pagnol. They evinced noteworthy literary imagination but failed to answer adequately the questions they had posed in their efforts to rehabilitate their long-despised subject. Invariably, such factors as the sparsity of information about Judas in the gospels and inadequate authorial research militated against the success of their experiments. Moreover, the varying portrayals of Judas and the multiplicity of incompatible theories which were advanced to explain his underlying motive underscores the extreme difficulty of discovering what kind of man Judas was and what prompted him to betray Jesus.

For many centuries, Biblical narratives have undergone all manner of transmogrification at the hands of literary and visual artists. In their attempts to flesh out or otherwise elucidate what are often skeletal historical accounts, they have often been guilty of various forms of eisegesis. This long-standing tendency may have reached its apogee during the twentieth century when the cinema prompted overdramatisation of episodes in both the Old and New Testaments. Regardless of the medium, however, the licence which those who have exploited the Scriptures for artistic purposes have granted themselves has drawn mixed reactions ranging from encomiums for bringing what are in some cases obscure texts before the public eye to condemnation for altering accepted interpretations beyond recognition.

French literary history offers lucid examples of how malleable Biblical texts can be when subjected to the imaginations of creative writers. In the present article it is my purpose to examine a representative sample of both fictional and non-fictional writing from France to illustrate various kinds of problems which can arise. The focus will be on nineteenth- and twentieth-century efforts in

France to rehabilitate or at least consider in detail personality and motives of the enigmatic figure of Judas Iscariot, whom artists prior to the Enlightenment generally dismissed as a demonic individual but did not analyse as a fully human being. Primary emphasis will be placed on writers whose works are not yet well known outside France. In his commendable study *Judas: Images of the Lost Disciple* (Paffenroth 1997), which remains the standard survey, Kim Paffenroth provided a useful introduction to the subject in European religious and intellectual history, though one which would have been strengthened had he paid greater attention to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century French dimensions of it.

1 PRE-ENLIGHTENMENT PERCEPTIONS OF JUDAS

In European literature and art, Judas Iscariot was almost invariably depicted negatively until the Enlightenment, when sporadic efforts were first undertaken to create a genuinely human image of him (Paffenroth 1997). Dante Alighieri, for example, described him being eternally eaten by Lucifer at the centre of the Inferno, the ninth circle thereof eponymously labelled *la Giudecca*. Medieval European artists typically portrayed Judas with exaggerated Semitic facial features and surrounded by demons. In other manifestations of his alterity outside the familiar fold of the faithful, he was occasionally painted as a black man at a time when Christianity was regarded – at least by its adherents in Europe – as primarily the religion of that continent’s inhabitants, not as a faith for all the world’s nations. To cite but one fairly representative example of conventional portrayals, the fifteenth-century Florentine Dominican monk Fra Angelico put a conspicuously dark halo above Judas in his San Marco fresco of the Last Supper as well as in another, portraying the betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane. The other disciples in these pictures are adorned with golden haloes (Morachiello 1996:304). The different status of Judas is thus too obvious to overlook. In short, Judas was for many centuries essentially a negative referent, an object lesson for Christians. As Paffenroth has observed, the “negative, frightening, and scolding images” of him were not gratuitous and without purpose but were intended to be “deeply positive and redemptive” as verbal and nonverbal admonitions: “Although Judas is eternally trapped on the other side of the abyss, his story has been used to lead people from the darkness of the cross to the hope and light of the resurrection” (Paffenroth 1997:32).

Yet in an earlier historical context the tradition was more contoured than this suggests. Within certain factions of the early church, especially those characterised by anti-materialistic Gnosticism, which denied the reality of the incarnation of God in human form and was therefore denounced as heretical, Judas was lauded as an upright disciple of Jesus. Irenaeus, the influential second-century bishop of Lyon, lamented that some Gnostics regarded Judas as one who “recognized the truth and completed the mystery of betrayal” and accused them of having written a “fictitious history . . . which they style the Gospel of Judas” (Roberts & Rambaut 1868:113). That non-canonical work fell into oblivion and is not extant. Apparently the dissenting Christians who used it believed that Judas had played a pivotal role in the salvation of humanity by handing Jesus over to his enemies for crucifixion in accordance with God’s plan, a notion which harmonised with the accounts in the New Testament. In any case, the widely discussed discovery of Gnostic manuscripts at Nag Hammadi on the east bank of the Nile during the 1940s left no doubt that some individuals in the second century discussed Judas with respect and not as a reprobate irredeemably under the sway of Satan (Robinson 1977:229-238).

2 AMBIGUITIES IN THE CANONICAL ACCOUNTS OF JUDAS

To be sure, the canonical Biblical accounts which mention Judas are replete with ambiguities and inconsistencies, and their authors were influenced no less by theological motives than historical sources. Neither the motives for nor all the details of Judas’ part in the betrayal can be precisely determined, and this is crucial when considering modern literary constructions of them. Mark and Luke reported that Jewish authorities promised him money to betray Jesus, while in Matthew 26:15 one reads that the chief priests paid him immediately when he approached them and offered to collaborate. John 13:18 interprets the betrayal as a fulfilment of Psalm 41:9. Furthermore, in the Johannine account the identity of the traitor is not left in doubt; indeed, in John 13:2 and 27 it is stated in the narrative of the Last Supper that the devil influenced the heart of Judas to commit his crime. In the other gospels the identity is not disclosed until later. For that matter, Mark does not mention the name of Judas in his account of the traitor. What kind of information about Jesus did Judas deliver to the authorities? Did he inform them that Jesus had accepted anointing at Bethany, thereby passively

claiming messiahship, as reported in Mark 14? Or did Judas merely reveal where Jesus was spending the night after the Last Supper? Details of the death of Judas are also unclear. The reason for “Iscariot” as a supplementary appellation is nowhere explained. Among New Testament scholars, however, there is a relatively broad consensus – but by no means unanimity of opinion – that it indicates a man from Kerioth, although the location of that village has never been confirmed archaeologically, and indeed several possibilities for it, chiefly in southern Judea, have been proposed. None of these textual difficulties has impeded various modern writers from creating distinct historical narratives in places clearly at odds with those of the gospels, in which to convey their messages about the tragic humanity of Judas.

Beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing at a quickening pace in the nineteenth, numerous theologians and literary artists sought to come to grips with Judas as a complex human being. In some instances this was essentially a matter of elevating him from the status of a demonic person to that of a fairly normal man – a greedy sinner, to be sure, but nevertheless human and thus not essentially different from either his fellow apostles or modern-day readers. The eminent German poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724-1803), for instance, in his epic poem *Der Messias*, completed in 1773, posited that Judas was envious of John, the beloved disciple, and his own frustrated ambition drove him to betrayal. Other literary artists writing in diverse languages carried the torch further. In *The Greek Passion* (1948) and *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1950-1951), for instance, Nikos Kazantzakis sought to absolve Judas of guilt and went so far as to bestow on him semi-heroic status.

In the scholarly arena, a seminal departure was made by the iconoclastic German theologian David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) in his massive *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*, which appeared in two volumes in 1835 and 1836. Denying the historical trustworthiness of the gospel accounts of Jesus, he categorised them as “myths”, he attributed the betrayal not to direct Satanic influence but rather to covetousness (*Habsucht*), possibly galvanised by the incident at Bethany in which Jesus had rebuked Judas for criticising Mary’s anointing him. But even that, he thought, was improbable, because the treachery seemed to exceed vastly the extent of the reproach which ostensibly wounded his ambition (*Ehrgeiz*) (Strauss

1837:390,394). Subsequently, many New Testament scholars have argued that the betrayal of Jesus was hardly necessary because by the end of his life he was a public figure in Jerusalem whom the Roman authorities and Temple clergy could have found and arrested with little effort. Others, however, suggested that the betrayal may have actually facilitated his nocturnal arrest as it avoided the eventuality of resistance thereto by his followers.

3 ERNEST RENAN: QUALIFIED SYMPATHY FROM A RATIONALIST

In the history of modern French letters numerous writers have discovered that they could not challenge with impunity canonical or otherwise prevailing notions concerning the national religious heritage, notwithstanding pronounced secularising tendencies since the Enlightenment. To cite one notorious example, shortly after delivering his inaugural lecture in 1862 the noted philosopher and Orientalist Ernest Renan (1823-1892) lost his professorship in Hebrew at the Collège de France; he had been audacious enough to make remarks anticipating his controversial work which appeared the following year, *Vie de Jésus*. Echoing the seventeenth-century French bishop and historian Jacques Bossuet (1627-1704) (Calvet 1941; Le Brun 1970), Renan had called Jesus an “homme incomparable” (*i.e.* an incomparable man), an appellation which to some clerics smacked of Unitarianism. His book subsequently engendered a protracted public controversy, and not until 1870 was Renan allowed to return to his position. Many conservative churchmen in France and elsewhere continued to vilify *Vie de Jésus* for decades thereafter (Pommier 1925; Rétat 1977).

To his credit, Renan, who had abandoned his studies for the priesthood by the mid-1840s and turned his back on orthodox Roman Catholicism before the close of that decade, acknowledged that the “wretch” Judas had been “actuated by motives impossible to explain” and did not venture far out on the thin ice of speculation in this regard. Instead, he focussed primarily on deconstructing the New Testament portrayal of Judas and challenging theories of motivation which more recent writers had advanced. “Legend, which always uses strong and decisive language, describes the occupants of the little supper-room as eleven saints and one reprobate,” Renan observed. “Reality does not proceed by such absolute categories.” He dismissed the common attribution of the betrayal to “avarice” as implausible: “It would be very singular if a man who kept the purse,

and who knew what he would lose by the death of his chief, were to abandon the profits of his occupation in exchange for a very small sum of money.” Turning to another common theory, it seemed to Renan inadequate to explain the betrayal as a reaction to the rebuff he had received after criticising Mary for anointing Jesus. Finally, Renan disputed the Johannine indications (John 6:65 and 12:6) that Judas was “a thief, an unbeliever” from the outset, and stated without explaining why that “there is no probability” for this (Renan 1864:263-264).

Instead, Renan cautiously suggested that the cause may have lain in “some feeling of jealousy or to some dissension amongst the disciples” and found evidence for this in “the peculiar hatred John manifests towards Judas”. In tandem therewith, Renan believed that differences regarding the management of the apostolic funds also underlay difficulties, not least by making Judas “narrow-minded”. “By a caprice very common to men engaged in active duties, he had come to regard the interests of the treasury as superior even to those of the work for which it was intended”, theorised Renan. “The treasurer had overcome the apostle”. In addition to the disagreement concerning the anointing at Bethany, he suggested that the constricted financial straits in which the disciples presumably found themselves created a tense environment in which differences of opinion became magnified (Renan 1864:264).

Renan did not absolve Judas of all guilt in the plot against Jesus but argued that “the curses with which he is loaded are somewhat unjust”. The betrayal, he thought, was characterised by “more awkwardness than perversity”. Clearly assuming that Judas was sympathetic to and possibly involved in subversive activities against the Roman occupation, Renan reminded readers that the political atmosphere of the times was highly charged, indeed, one in which “a trifling spite sufficed to convert a partisan into a traitor”. The outcome of the conspiracy for Judas also evoked Renan’s sympathy. He thought the remorse and suicide of Judas proved that he had not “lost the moral sentiment completely” (Renan 1864:264-265).

4 FRANÇOIS MAURIAC: A CASE OF JEALOUSY

Among the most prominent French *littérateurs* of the twentieth century who tackled the Judas theme in what might be called a relatively conservative literary treatment was François Mauriac

(1885-1970) in his 1936 *Vie de Jésus (Life of Jesus)*, a hybrid work incorporating elements of both biography and fiction. This pre-eminent Roman Catholic author and future Nobel laureate, who had been elected to the *l'Académie française* in 1933, did not venture far from a conventionally negative image when painting a fairly nuanced portrait of the betraying apostle. Mauriac's Judas is, for the most part, a normal but unambiguously self-serving man, one who desired material success and became associated with Jesus in the hope of appropriating some of his spiritual leader's power. Gradually Judas comprehends that the kingdom of Jesus is not of this world and, having accumulated some money which he has withheld from the common apostolic treasury, he seeks to extricate himself from the new messianic movement which he believes is doomed. He is thus revealed to be dishonest and conniving. On a more dastardly level, Mauriac's Judas is guilty of complicity with the Sanhedrin in plotting against Jesus, although very few details about this are given. While waiting for an opportunity to betray him, Judas pilfers from the common purse he administers for the other apostles (Mauriac 1937:205). After accepting money from the priests in Jerusalem, he nevertheless vacillates about betraying Jesus until the last supper, when (echoing a theme from Klopstock's *Der Messias* which had reappeared in some other theological and fictional treatments of Judas) he becomes envious of the status enjoyed by the beloved disciple John and takes his crucial decision when Satan enters him. "Judas raged with jealousy, too astute not to understand that he was kept at a distance, that as John was the most loved, he had always been the least loved" (Mauriac 1937:226).

Mauriac's construction of Judas' specific motive is at this stage faithful to the gospels and entails little authorial imagination. Jesus merely declares: "Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me" (Mauriac 1937:226). Yet Mauriac is sympathetic to Judas and excuses him from the demonisation to which his reputation had traditionally been subjected. The betrayer did not foresee the crucifixion. "There are no monsters; Judas had not believed that things would go very far – imprisonment, perhaps several stripes from the scourge, and the carpenter would be sent back to his bench", Mauriac relates. Calling attention to the Biblical testimony that Judas repented, he speculates sympathetically: "He might have become a saint, the patron of all of us who constantly betray Christ. . . . Judas was on the border of perfect contrition. God might still have

had the traitor needed for the Redemption . . . and a saint besides” (Mauriac 1937:248-249).

5 PAUL RAYNAL: FROM CUPIDITY TO STUPIDITY

Since the 1930s, numerous French authors have evinced more boldness in departing from the fragmentary gospel texts about Judas and used a greater degree of imagination in creating historical moulds into which they have poured their interpretations of his motives. One of the first to do so was the playwright Paul Raynal who, unlike Mauriac, was not renowned for the religious themes in his works. His tragedy *A souffert sous Ponce Pilate* (*i.e.* Suffered under Pontius Pilate) was initially performed in Paris in 1939, but during the German occupation of France it was forbidden from 1940 until 1944. The play re-opened in the French capital in 1945 and was published as a book the following year (Raynal:1946).

Raynal included in this version a two-page “Avertissement” (*i.e.* Warning) which facilitates the task of understanding his purpose and assumptions. He professed that all historians of Jesus had insisted that the case of Judas was “incomprehensible”. That apostle, Raynal assumed, had faithfully followed and served Jesus for three years before “the drama impossible to comprehend” began. Raynal was aware of many previous attempts to explain the motivation underlying the radical change which led to the betrayal. He cited Renan as an example of a scholar who had proceeded from a rationalistic point of departure and the contemporary Italian Giovanni Papini as a writer who had done so from a conventional believer’s perspective. “They incline to pity towards Judas,” he noted, and, apparently alluding *inter alia* to Mauriac, recalled that “more than one thinks that if Judas had not killed himself, he would have become a very great saint, the patron of repentance” (Raynal 1946:9-10).

Raynal stated what he believed was his own contribution to the ongoing debate. “At the base of the diverse explanations, I believe there is to be perceived an inadvertency. One well recognises, as this is undeniable, that the death of Jesus was desired and assured by the lofty leaders of the Jewish religion. But some intentions which one attributes to Judas necessitate an acute and voluntary intelligence on his part”, Raynal reasoned. According to his reading of the gospels, however, this was untenable, “for the evidence of Scripture is that

Judas, like all the Apostles (before Pentecost) was not other than extremely narrow-minded, a very small head” (Raynal 1946:10).

In his stage directions, Raynal mentioned that Renan was one of his sources but did not specify how the latter’s *Vie de Jésus* had informed him. Whether he had also read Mauriac’s fictionalised biography is unknown. Raynal described his Judas as “not having any of his traditional personage as an already mature man with a Satanic mask” but rather as a young fellow who begins to follow Jesus at the age of twenty-six, temporarily leaving his wife, Jeanne, a decade younger than he, in the care of his sister, Jaël, who is eight years his senior. Raynal further defined his complex protagonist as “a small rural person, naïve, dreamer, crafty, talkative, boastful, credulous, tender, good” (Raynal 1946:11,13). Originally from Kerioth, he has become a seller of carpets in the town of Gibea, presumably one of the several places conveniently situated not far north and south of Jerusalem, a location which facilitates otherwise implausible interactions between that city and Judas’ hometown.

Convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, Judas offers to become one of his disciples after meeting him in connection with the wedding in Cana at which the miraculous changing of water into wine occurs. When master and disciple initially embrace, there is a foreshadowing of the betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane which suggests that it is foreordained. Judas innocently comments that Jesus does not really hold him and asks whether that will happen at another time, a query for which no response is forthcoming (Raynal 1946:71). Implicit in this is the notion that the betrayal three years later was not simply a matter of moral failure on the part of Jesus but part of the divine plan of salvation.

Like Renan and Mauriac, Raynal laid most of the blame for the death of Jesus at the doorstep of the Temple priesthood, not at that of the Roman colonial administrators. When these clerics discuss with Judas the turmoil in the city in connection with Passover, they suggest that Jesus could be endangered because of resentment in some quarters and give Judas the impression that they would like to take Jesus into some kind of protective custody. He naïvely accepts their rhetoric while rejecting a large payment for promising to lead the authorities to where Jesus and his small band are encamped. It would not be reasonable, Judas assures them, to take money for doing his Master a favour. The priests thus engage in an act of deception, one which is paired with their disingenuous argument to

Pontius Pilate that Jesus and his movement pose a threat to the stability of the Roman occupation of Judea and that Jesus has delusions of becoming a king. Their argument that political power is at stake thus overcomes Pilate's initial dismissal of the priests' request that he act against Jesus on the grounds that purely religious matters are not within his jurisdiction.

On the day after Jesus is arrested, Judas returns to Gibeon, proud to have been a disciple, relieved to be reunited with his wife and sister, grateful to be able to resume his profession after three years, and boasting that he has saved Jesus and met Pontius Pilate in the process. Jesus was not the Messiah, he tells his sister, but nevertheless for the most part a good and impressive leader. The real Messiah, "when he comes", will be able to accomplish more, Judas believes, but will not be an improvement on the personality of Jesus. That his discipleship has left an imprint on him is beyond dispute. Judas declares that he prefers the Lord's Prayer (which he recites to his wife and sister) to the ancient psalms and insists that the will of God must be done with a "pure heart". Discussing with them how he had "saved" Jesus, he recalls – and believes it mirthfully ironic – that Jesus had predicted that he would betray him. "Look at Peter," Judas relates; "Jesus predicted that he would deny him three times" (Raynal 1946:174,186).

Immediately thereafter, however, his precipitous decline begins when he is confronted with reports of events in Jerusalem. Judas' sister informs him that according to the local butcher, who has also just returned from there, Peter had told him that he had been taken to the court of Caiaphas during the night and denied Jesus thrice. Furthermore, the butcher had seen Jesus bleeding from the forehead when returning to the Temple. Continuing her string of shocking revelations, Jaël informs her increasingly despondent brother that everyone in Jerusalem is whispering that Jesus was condemned in advance, that Judas had sold him for thirty pieces of silver, that the priests had demanded his death, and that he would be nailed to a cross on Calvary at noon (Raynal 1946:188,190).

This epiphany terminates Judas' self-delusion and hurls him into the abyss from which he could not recover. Realisation of his guilt then comes quickly, and he confesses, "Jaël, Jeanne, I have betrayed my Master!" Judas, despairing, ponders his plight and wonders whether it was somehow foreordained. He recalls that when he first embraced Jesus in Cana, he had not seemed to be as warmly

welcomed as some of the other neophyte disciples. This memory now makes Judas question his recent conclusion that Jesus was not the Messiah: “So he knew? Then he *is* the Messiah, since he knew beforehand.” In a state of panic, Judas repeats, “I have betrayed him!” (Raynal 1946:192). Lacking any sense of hope, he leaves and hangs himself. It is implied that the horrified Jaël also commits suicide or dies of shock upon learning of her brother’s sudden death.

In a curious coda, Raynal re-emphasises his conviction that Judas was gullible and well-intentioned rather than nefarious by bringing Mary the mother of Jesus, who had appeared with him briefly at Cana, back into the plot. Shortly after the crucifixion, she comes to Gibeon and converses sympathetically with the widowed Jeanne. In their exchange, Jeanne can assure Mary that far from blaspheming Jesus, in his final hour Judas had asked for forgiveness and that he had begun to teach her the Lord’s Prayer. This seals the matter; Judas, Mary assures the young widow, has received salvation and, accompanied by his sister, would sing eternally. She also tells her that her son is the Son of God and the Messiah, declarations which prompt Jeanne, in a bizarrely anachronistic profession, to fall at her feet and declare, “Saint Mary!” (Raynal 1946:205,207,210).

6 MARCEL PAGNOL: THE BIZARRE EISEGESIS OF OBLIGATORY BETRAYAL

One of Raynal’s better known contemporaries, the celebrated *cinéaste*, playwright, novelist, and fellow member of *l’Académie française* Marcel Pagnol (1895-1974), approached the subject from a significantly different perspective and portrayed another kind of Christian protagonist on the stage. His *Judas* premiered at the Théâtre de Paris on 6 October 1955. In that five-act tragedy he went beyond challenging the ancient conviction in Christendom that Judas Iscariot must be vilified as the quintessential embodiment of mankind’s sinful rebellion against God. To him, Judas was “without doubt the first martyr” in the history of Christianity. Pagnol reasoned prefatorially that “because of the precision of the prophecies, confirmed by the very words of Jesus, who on several occasions announced his death as imminent and necessary, Judas believed in his own predestination and delivered his master, and then followed him in death” (Pagnol 1968:16). His argument, however, which is based on a false presupposition, is severely flawed to the extent that it disproves his case.

Pagnol, to an even greater extent than Raynal, eased the scholarly task of probing the ideational foundation of his play by prefacing it with a lengthy comment about its staging, the tenets of his argument, and his personal assessment of the protagonist. In doing so, he nailed his colours to the mast, explicitly denied the independence of his text, and in effect eschewed any defence that flaws in his reasoning could be defended on the *carte blanche* grounds of artistic licence.

Why did Judas betray Jesus? Pagnol posed this fundamental and unavoidable question. On the one hand, he acknowledged, it was “to fulfil the Scriptures”, although he did not elaborate on this, other than to note obliquely that the price was thirty denarii, “because that was the price established by the prophets” (Pagnol 1968:16). Whether he was consciously alluding to Zechariah 11:12-13 or understood that this had been incorrectly attributed to Jeremiah in Matthew 27:3 is unknown. On the other hand, Pagnol insisted that Judas not merely believed that he was acting in a foreordained way by betraying Jesus, but that Jesus had specifically commanded him at the Last Supper to do so. This, however, was problematical. In twentieth-century French Bibles, the verb in the relevant texts is in the simple future tense, e.g. Mark 14:18: “. . . one of you who is eating with me will betray me” (“l’un de vous, qui mange avec moi, me livrera”). This did not help Pagnol. Consequently, in what may have been one of the oddest ventures ever undertaken in French amateur Biblical exegesis, Pagnol – a former teacher of English and translator of Shakespeare – sought to bolster his argument not by appealing to the original Greek text of the New Testament but rather by looking across the English Channel to the King James Bible of 1611. In the words of Jesus at the Last Supper as quoted in the gospels of Mark and John, he believed he had found the key to unlocking the secret of Judas’ motivation and for justifying the betrayal on spiritual grounds. Appropriating the authority of James I and the “learned theologians” at the University of Oxford, Pagnol quoted the words of Jesus in Mark 14:18 in English: “Verily I say unto you, one of you, which eateth with me, shall betray me.” He further adduced John 13:21: “When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit and said: verily, verily I say unto you that one of you shall betray me”. For Pagnol, the operative word in these citations was the modal verb. “‘Shall’, in the third person of the future tense, expressed an *obligation*, or a *devoir*, or a *necessity*,” he

explained didactically, apparently unaware that in the language of the early seventeenth century that was not necessarily the case (Pagnol 1968:16). Had Pagnol consulted the Greek text rather than resorting to an antiquated English translation thereof, he would have discovered that the verb in question is **Β' Δ' *f F, 4** a simple indicative future form which neither denotes nor connotes any imperative or obligatory sense. It merely states what the speaker believes is going to happen. An awareness of this would have rendered much of the basis of his curious linguistic argument irrelevant.

Throughout the play, Pagnol is at pains to portray Judas as an appealing, talented, and devoted disciple, much more so, one might add, than Raynal's half-witted and spiritually tepid Judas. Asked by his father early on whether he is sacrilegious, a query prompted by the older man's hearing about how Jesus had driven money-changers out of the Temple, Judas replies: "Never, Father! In all the cities, in all the towns, and right to the heart of Jerusalem we have preached with all our heart the truth of the Holy Scriptures and of the glory of the Eternal One!" Judas also seeks to convey the teachings of Jesus to his parents and siblings, imploring them to turn the other cheek and love their enemies and stating that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Pagnol 1968:45,48,51).

Pagnol uses the gathering of the disciples at the tomb of Jesus on Saturday evening to bring out the conflict of opinion among them. Expressing the resentful and censorious attitude apparently shared by several of the apostles, Thomas asks Judas, "What are you doing here? Are you going to sell us, too?" Judas interprets this query as unjust and self-righteousness. "Who would want to buy you?" he counters. "Who would give even a denarius for your courage, for your fidelity[?]" Judas reminds them that instead of acting to protect Jesus, they had fled in fear during the night after the Last Supper. Furthermore, on the following day, when Jesus was crucified, where were they? "Hidden in the cellars of Jerusalem, trembling in fear in the caves of Kidron, lying in the marshes." They had been no more loyal than he to Jesus. His indictment of them is succinct: "All of you, in your hearts, have betrayed him" (Pagnol 1968:143-144). Only then does he learn from his erstwhile colleagues that at the Last Supper, after he had departed, Jesus had made it clear that he was an outcast, a man who would have been

better off had he never been born. In the end, Judas perceives no hope for his life and is certain that his reputation will be forever negative. He believes that because of his misunderstanding he will not be able to earn a living as a potter (the trade to which Pagnol prefatorially assigns him, presumably on the feeble basis of Matthew 27:7) and, in another of the many anachronisms which burden the literature under consideration, that his legacy is hardly such that any subsequent believers would have their infant sons baptised in his name.

7 CONCLUSION

Although some of the French authors in question used their imaginations liberally in their efforts to probe the psyche of Judas and thereby call attention to certain aspects of the betrayal and its context, the ellipses in their treatment of the gospel accounts are equally conspicuous to anyone who is reasonably familiar therewith. As New Testament scholars have long pointed out, the canonical accounts of Judas incorporate an ambiguous interplay of divine providence and free will. This poses a dilemma for which there is no ready solution. None of the authors examined here succeeded in finding one. None of them adequately came to grips with the final impression, emphasised in Scripture, that despite his remorse, Judas did not really accept divine forgiveness and that he died a condemned man.

Moreover, when one turns to the matter of Judas' motivation, the multiplicity of explanations itself illustrates the virtual impossibility of arriving at a clear answer. The gospels simply do not reveal nearly enough about his personality, his relationship to Jesus or, for that matter, his relationship to God before becoming a disciple to allow detailed judgements about his conduct. That he is recorded as having called Jesus "Rabbi" but not, unlike some of the other apostles, "Lord", may be, as some commentators have noted, symptomatic of the limits of his commitment. Of course, one must also bear in mind that the gospels are not the products of disinterested historiography but *inter alia* statements of faith whose galleries of characters are drawn in large measure according to how they are intended to serve as exemplars of fidelity or infidelity.

Finally, in addition to the excessive licence which some of the modern-day writers have taken, their works contain serious gaffes which diminish whatever cogency they otherwise might have. One

need only think of Raynal's reference to "Saint Mary" and Pagnol's to infant baptism. Such blunders cannot be generously attributed to artistic creativity; they are merely the bad fruit of shoddy research on the part of authors who clearly did some reading in secondary literature but evidently not enough. As literary art, the French attempts to rehabilitate Judas are captivating and not without merit as part of an important tradition in religious and European intellectual history. As self-conscious ventures into the realm of theology, however, they all fall short of the mark their authors set for themselves.

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