



There is ongoing controversy about the Son's ignorance about the last times. This issue explores whether Irenaean doctrine of the incarnation sheds light on this problematic text, and reviews a book that discusses the significance of the gospel according to Judas.



Mark 13:32 and Irenaeus

Christ's knowledge and the kenosis of the Son

In light of the Arian controversy, this verse had been understandably troublesome for the patristic writers who took seriously the deity of Christ and asserted that the eternal Logos knew all things, including the hour and the day of the *parousia*. Quite obviously, this had an integral relation to the doctrine of the incarnation, and Origen, Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria and others connected it to the attendant idea of the *kenosis* of the Son (Phil 2:7). None of these patristic writers, however, implied either the full or partial relinquishment of divine nature or its attributes by the Son as was the foundation with the well-known nineteenth-century kenotic theologians as G. Thomasius (1802-75), W. F. Gess (1819-91), C. Gore (1853-1932) and P. T. Forsyth (1848-1921). Even though such premise, the relinquishment of a part of the divine attributes, has generally been rejected, one can still recognize the astounding tenacity of the intense concern of these kenotic theories—saving Jesus' human self-

consciousness.¹ For example, in the highly acclaimed recent commentary on Matthew, U. Luz makes the following remark on the passage Mt 24:34-36:

In terms of the time, Jesus was mistaken in his expectation, and that is troubling for many people. While for earlier exegesis v.34 ["all this will happen in this generation"] appeared to be in tension with v. 36 ["even the Son"], today v.34 appears to confirm v. 36 in an unexpected way. Jesus' error about the time makes clear that as a matter of fact "even the Son" did not know the time. Together the two verses constitute a pointed reference to Jesus' humanity—to err really is human!²

Certainly it is difficult, if not impossible, to explain the nature of the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ. Yet we can perceive this unity from the perspective of Jesus' historical reality. In this regard, Luz's comments clearly incline toward the view that makes little room for Jesus' divinity both in consideration of Jesus' resurrection as well as the incarnation, the initiative of which event is with God. Luz's comments above fail to do justice to this unity as if Jesus were just a man who gave a false prophecy.

The most prevalent view held by patristic writers, however, was that the Son was ignorant only according to his

human nature.³ Although Davies and Allison say Irenaeus, unlike others, have taken the verse 'at face value,' even Irenaeus would be included in this view that Jesus' humanity was ignorant, but with an important qualifier. Irenaeus's interpretation of Mk 13:32 revolves around his doctrine of the incarnation. Without using the term *kenosis* or deriving its conception from Phil 2:7 he expresses it this way:

And through the Word Himself who had been made visible and palpable, was the Father shown forth, although all did not equally believe in Him; but all saw the Father in the Son: for the Father is the invisible of the Son, but the Son the visible of the Father. (AH 4.6.6; ANF 1:469)

Thus when he says 'the unmeasurable Father was Himself subjected to measure in the Son' (AH 4.4.2; ANF 1:466), Irenaeus is not referring to the limitation in the qualitative nature of the divine Logos, but rather that we can see a measure of the unmeasurable Father in the palpable, visible humanity of the Son. Indeed, the Son in his human nature was ignorant of the hour of the *parousia* (AH 2.28.6). The important qualifier, however, is that his position differs from Athanasius and others in that Irenaeus does not begin from the premise that the 'Son's humanness cannot know.'

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¹ P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2d ed., 1910), 319, despite the two wills of Christ defended as orthodox by Maximus the Confessor, asserted: "There could not be two wills, or two consciousnesses, in the same personality, by any psychological possibility now credible. We could not have in the same person both knowledge and ignorance of the same thing. If he did not know it he was altogether ignorant of it."

² Luz, Ulrich. *Matthew 21-28* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 209.

³ See W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 3:379, for a succinct summary; Cf. Luz, *Matthew*, 213.

Reviews & Annotations

April D. DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says*. (NY: Continuum, 2007) 224 p. hardcover \$24.95

A manuscript of the Gospel of Judas, thus known only through ancient witnesses surfaced only a few years ago. The document contained the Coptic text of a second century apocryphal Gospel that is extremely critical about traditional Christianity. *National Geographic* (hereafter, NG) took advantage of the worldwide interest in anything that had 'fallen victim to Church censorship.' They bought exclusive publication rights and engaged a team of specialists to restore the manuscript and translate and interpret its text. Only a handful of elect scholars were allowed to look over their shoulders. The apocryphal book that was eventually shown to the world in 2006 was unmatched and shocking: in this alternative gospel the apostles have no idea of Jesus' intentions. While the apostles were convinced to serve God, in reality they brought sacrifices in their cult to demons. Only Judas understood Jesus correctly. When he handed his Master over, he was obeying an express command of Jesus himself, to set free the divine being which had been locked up in Jesus' earthly body.

NG had asked absolute secrecy of all participants till the project was finished. This secrecy enhanced the hype, but also fed a growing opposition that came mainly from scholars who had been denied access to this important source of knowledge about the early stages of Christianity. They felt that the monopoly of NG hindered research from different perspectives. Only when the Coptic text was finally released could they start evaluating the work of their privileged colleagues. April DeConick was one of the experts who had impatiently awaited the end of the embargo. When she finished her own translation, she was extremely tough in her censure of the NG team: their representation of Judas was entirely corrupted by scores of mistranslations. DeConick's reading of this apocryphal gospel shows us a Judas who is as vicious as the one we know from the NT, and quite unlike the enlightened Christian the NG team had depicted. In her translation:

- Jesus doesn't call Judas a 'spirit' (NG), but a 'Demon' (DeConick)
- Judas is not 'set apart for,' but 'separated from' the holy generation.

- Jesus does not announce Judas' ascent to the holy generation, but assures him that he will not ascend.
- Judas doesn't ask: 'Could it be that my seed is under the control of the rulers?' but he protests: 'At no time may my seed control the archons!'
- Jesus doesn't promise: 'You will exceed all of them,' but he predicts: 'You will do worse than all of them.'
- Jesus doesn't say: 'Your star has shone brightly' (i.e., 'you deserve honor'), but 'Your star has ascended' (i.e., 'you're locked into your fate').

According to DeConick these mistranslations have not only spoiled the portrayal of Judas, they have ruined the entire plot. Most of her objections to the translation of passages and to the resulting plot are well argued. Nobody will deny that there is still a lot of work to be done.

What does DeConick put instead? According to her reconstruction the Gospel of Judas is a Gnostic parody in which apostolic Christians are ridiculed. Judas, the wickedest among the wicked, still has a better understanding of Jesus and his ministry than his fellow apostles. However, this understanding is not the spiritual discernment of an enlightened Christian. On the contrary, he is a demon who is well aware of Jesus' true character, just like the demons in the traditional gospels. The Gospel of Judas is a sharp rejection of sacrifice theology, i.e., of interpreting Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind. According to this apocryphal document Judas (who is bringing the sacrifice) and the apostles (who commemorate it in the Eucharist) are in fact serving the cause of the demonic rulers of this world. The true meaning of Jesus' death—and here DeConick is in full agreement with the NG team—is the liberation of the divine being that was imprisoned in a human cocoon.

DeConick's severe criticism of the work of the NG team will have to be taken into account. In this way her book substantially contributes to the discussion. However, she should not have claimed to show the reader 'What the Gospel of Judas Really Says.' Too many loose ends are left unexplained. For instance, even in DeConick's version of this gospel Judas is still the privileged receiver of an extensive revelation (33.1-3). He is the 'perfect person,' who is able to stand before

Jesus (35.4, 10, 11). When Judas says 'I know . . .' (35.15) he proves himself a Gnostic. He is recognized as such by Jesus, who immediately charges him to separate from the others (35.24) to be told the mysteries of the kingdom. The luminous cloud Judas is invited to enter at the end of the story is taken by DeConick to belong to the demonic realm—to fit her reconstruction. However, that is not at all the most natural way to read the text. DeConick's reconstruction may create as many riddles as it solves.

It is impossible to discuss a second century apocryphal gospel without drawing a picture of the larger Christian world to which it relates. The most serious flaws in DeConick's book are precisely in her representation of early Christianity in general. In her view the 'Apostolic Church' was not an important—let alone the most important—faction among Christians. Apparently DeConick feels no sympathy at all for this faction, while she expresses her approval for each of its rivals: Marcion was 'a very astute biblical scholar' and 'an active Christian missionary' (p. 10-11); the Ebionites 'took seriously the ethic of poverty that had been the foundation of Jesus' movement' (p. 12); the Montanists reclaimed for women the leadership roles they had held in the original form of Christianity (p. 14-15); and the Gnostics 'challenged the apostolic Christians to reassess their faith, to listen to their own reason and consciences rather than blindly accept their faith' (p. 20-21). The Apostolic Christians on the other hand were 'argumentative,' suppressed other forms of Christianity (p. 9), became secularized (p. 14), occupied themselves with 'simplistic creeds,' 'petty bureaucracy,' and submitted to the 'bombastic pedagogy' of their leaders' (p. 22). DeConick consistently puts them in an unfavourable light, while dissidents at both ends of the spectrum are warmly applauded. This is tendentious and unfair.

DeConick has demonstrated that NG failed to produce the final interpretation of the Gospel of Judas. However, her alternative does not satisfy either, and her book is disfigured by the caricature she draws of opinions within early Christianity.

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