

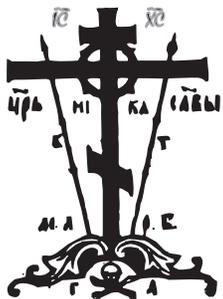
### the Orthodox Church's position regarding it?

The so-called gospel of Judas is a fictional work written down in the mid-second century by a Gnostic writer. It was first mentioned in about 180 by the well-known Church Father, St Irineus of Lyons, in his work 'Against Heresies'. Lost to history ever since, a copy of this 'gospel' was found in Egypt in the 1970s, consisting of 26 pages of manuscript in Coptic.

It belongs to a whole series of apocryphal, that is fictional, writings which are well-known. For example, there are the so-called protogospel of James, the pseudo-gospel of Matthew, the gospel of Peter, the gospel of Nicodemus, the Arab and Armenian books of the childhood of Christ, the so-called acts of John, Andrew and Thomas, as well as the so-called revelations of Peter and of Paul. There is no doubt that this 'gospel of Judas' is an authentic copy of a piece of fiction, dating from the second century. Of course, it has nothing to do with the real and historical, 'authentic', Judas. This we know, because this work has nothing in common with the Gospels of the four Apostles, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Its content, spirit and philosophy are quite different, as it belongs to the Gnostic movement of the second century, not to the Christian movement of the first century.

### 8. And what is the Orthodox Christian Church's position regarding Judas?

As regards Judas, from the Gospels, we know that Judas loved money. It was always his weakness. It also seems that he thought that Christ was a political figure, who would start a Jewish war of liberation against the Romans. Perhaps Judas imagined himself as a sort of minister in some future Jewish government, under Christ. You see, he thought in worldly terms. When he realized that Christ had come not to give outward, political freedom, but inward, spiritual freedom, he was disillusioned with Christ. He realized that he would



obtain neither money nor power through Christ. So he sold Christ, again for money. But after that he fell into despair and killed himself without repenting.

Therefore, Judas is a warning to us all. He was a traitor. But it can be said that every sin, of whatever sort, is a betrayal of Christ. Therefore we must all repent. If we do not repent, we become like Judas in some way.

And this brings me to one final and actually very disturbing point. Why is this so-called 'gospel' being published now?

As you know, this week is the week of the Jewish Passover and also the week of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Easter. Unlike the Roman Catholic and Protestant Easter, our Orthodox Easter always take place after the Jewish Passover.

It seems to me that this writing is being published just before the Roman Catholic and Protestant Easter in order to gain maximum publicity, for maximum scandal. And why? Well, just like the blasphemous piece of fiction, The Da Vinci Code, it is to make money. I find it terrible that people are willing to blaspheme in order to make money. This 'gospel of Judas' is in fact an attack on Christ and a defence of Judas. Just as Judas loved money and made money from selling Christ, so those publishing this work are hoping to make money from selling Christ and defending Judas. The enemies of Christ can always be known - it is by their attitude to Judas. I think these people who are now playing with Judas are in fact playing with fire. It can do their souls no good at all, it is spiritually dangerous.

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# On the "gospel" of Judas

## Blasphemy for Profit

*Following the broadcast on Sunday 9 April on the National Geographic Channel of a programme about the 'gospel of Judas', these are the answers of Father Andrew Phillips to questions in an interview in Russian for Russian Television, on 11 April 2006.*



**1. The 'gospel' of Judas implies that Jesus secretly instructed Judas to betray Him. It suggests that He asks Judas to help Him return to the 'kingdom', and to do so, Judas must help Him abandon His flesh: 'You will sacrifice the man that clothes me', Jesus tells Judas, according to this 'gospel'. But, if Jesus supposedly inspired somebody to assist Him in a kind of suicide - wouldn't that contradict what He preached and also - one of God's commandments - 'thou shalt not kill'?**

Yes, of course, that would contradict the rest of the Holy Scriptures and all the Church Tradition down 2,000 years, as well as the teachings of the Old Testament. But since this 'gospel of Judas' is not a Christian document, that is not surprising.

**2. In the Book of John, Jesus tells Judas at the Last Supper: 'Do quickly what you are going to do'. So, could that be a 'hint' that Jesus 'instructed' Judas?**

Christ has two natures. He is both God and man.

Throughout the Gospel, and this is well-known, there are places where Christ speaks in His human nature, and others where He speaks in His divine nature. Here is a place where He speaks in His divine nature. As God, Christ foreknew what Judas would do. This does not mean in any way that Judas was forced to act as he did. God is in eternity, where there are no past, present or future, and therefore He knows what men, who are free, will do. There is no instruction here, simply divine foreknowledge.

**3. One can still say, "anyway, wasn't Judas' betrayal a necessary part of God's plan, as the 'gospel of Judas' suggests"?**

I find the phrase 'God's plan' very strange. It suggests the existence of predestination and determinism. We Orthodox Christians do not believe in these. God created everything good. But He gave us freedom, free will. Thus, Judas betrayed Christ of his own free will. Nobody, including God, forced Judas to act as he did. It is also true that other disciples also betrayed Christ, they ran away from the crucifixion; Peter denied Christ three times.

However, there is one vital difference between Judas and the other disciples. The other disciples repented; Judas did not. Indeed, he went out and hanged himself. The other disciples repented of their own free will. Nobody forced them too. Judas, however, decided not to repent. He did not believe in God's mercy, fell into despair and destroyed himself. This he did of his own free will. Nobody forced him to act in this way. This is the sin of Judas, whom our Lord Himself calls 'the son of perdition'.

**4. One of the participants of the National Geographic documentary, 'gospel of Judas', suggests that St Irenaeus, the first Christian writer to list all four canonical Gospels (of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) as divinely-inspired, included these four Gospels, and left all other Gospels out only because of the ancient belief that "four" is the number of the organized world: four elements, four seasons, four winds, four corners of the earth. Was that really the reason for including only four, now canonical Gospels, into the New Testament?**

In the second century a whole series of apocryphal writings appeared - this 'gospel' of Judas is merely one of them. The reason for their appearance is that when people in the second century saw that the four Gospels, the accounts of the life of Christ written in the first century, had become, as we might say now, 'bestsellers', they copied their titles and even parts of their contents. However, they did not relate the truth, for their authors



were not eyewitnesses or disciples of Christ. They simply called their writings 'gospels' in order to try and promote their own ideology, which in many cases was actually anti-Christian. However, the saints at the time knew what was authentic and what was not. What was authentic has ever since part of the canon of Holy Scriptures, that we call the Bible, with its canonical books.

The number four simply tells us that only four of the Apostles wrote Gospels. We have to remember that many of the Apostles were very simple people and only some of them knew how to read and write. For example, Luke was educated, a doctor and iconographer, but Peter, was a fisherman. Indeed, some people believe that the Gospel of St Mark was actually dictated to the Apostle Mark by the Apostle Peter, because he himself could not read and write. The same is true of the Apostle Peter's epistles - they were written by others under the Apostle Peter's dictation.

As regards the canon of Holy Scripture, St Irenaeus was not a mere 'Christian writer', but a Church Father, a Saint of God. In the Church, we trust in the judgements of nearly 2,000 years of saints, whose judgements have been formed by the Holy Spirit, not in games with numbers on the part of a contemporary commentator. I am reminded by the saying of the Russian monk St Silvanus the Athonite (+ 1938). He said that even if all the copies of Holy Scripture in the world were to disappear, it would not matter, for holy people would rewrite them through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspires people to write the Holy Scriptures. All other writings are merely human writings. This so-called gospel of Judas is simply one of these human writings, much as any novel.

**5. Is it true that the Church has tried to conceal the 'gospel' of Judas and other apocryphal texts?**

No. Anyone can read the apocryphal writings, which have been edited in many languages, including Russian, over the centuries and published in scholarly editions. I have read the Apocrypha. I have to tell you that they have never been very popular, simply because they are rather dull and clearly untrue. They are simply pegs on which later

ideologies have been hung. I suppose that this is why these writings have only provoked academic interest.

As regards this so-called 'gospel of Judas', it was only found in the 1970s, since when it has changed private owners several times. It has never belonged to any Church. It has taken years to read, translate and conserve, because the manuscript is in very poor condition. The present owner, a Swiss Jewess, who has decided to publish it, has only had the manuscript since 2000.

**6. Why would the Gnostics have been interested in Judas?**

The Gnostics were what we could call today intellectuals. They believed that only a select elite could understand the truth. One of their main ideas was that there is a conflict between the physical and material world and the world of thought, of the human spirit. As pagans, they were horrified by the concept that through Christ, God became man, that He was incarnate, making salvation possible for everyone, the non-intellectual, like the intellectual.

It shocked them that Christ did not say that salvation was only for the elite. Unlike the Gnostics, He said that it is the pure in heart who will see God and purity of heart is possible for everyone through repentance. The Gnostics hated everything bodily. That was why they denied Christ's bodily resurrection. For them the body was gross and coarse. Now since Judas betrayed Christ and caused his death, in other words, caused his soul to depart from his body, for the Gnostics Judas was a hero. For them anyone who removed the body was a hero. For them therefore, Judas' betrayal was not a betrayal, but a positive act of heroism, for Judas was the reason why Christ lost his body.

In the twentieth century we have seen a revival of Gnosticism. Thus, for example, among the Russian intellectuals in Paris, there was the Neo-Gnostic Sophianist movement. For instance, the Russian philosopher Berdiaev was not only an elitist intellectual, but among other things, he hated to see a woman pregnant. This is typical of Gnosticism.

**7. So, what is the 'gospel' of Judas and what is**