WHOSE SAVIOR?
Salvation, Damnation and the Race of Adam in the Gospel of Judas

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One of the striking characteristics of the Gospel of Judas is that it lacks an elaborate soteriological perspective. With the sole exception of the race of Adam, no one seems to be the object of salvation. On the one hand, the human race is heading for eternal condemnation, together with the entire demiurgic reality. On the other hand, the great and holy race does not seem to need salvation. Although Jesus’ death is the goal of the narrative, the soteriological value of his death is barely explored. The main point of the Gospel of Judas is the denial of a specific soteriological interpretation of Jesus’ death. So no alternative understanding is offered. The lack of interest in a systematic soteriology is also reflected in the representation of protology, the creation of the world, and human beings. There is no mention of a ‘fall’ that needs restoration. There are no interventions of divine entities to prepare the human beings for future salvation.

The Gospel of Judas is a highly polemical text whose main concern it is to feature negatively the Eucharist as it is practised in the main church, and perhaps baptism too. The fact that baptism is connected with Jesus’ name might indicate that it is similar to the Eucharist, since it also is understood as a human sacrifice. The priests in the disciples’ dream vision invoke Jesus’ name, which is also used to mislead the races of the pious.1 The ‘apostolic’ character of the church is mocked and its sacrificial understanding of the cross is dismantled with the argument that it is a mere continuation of the Jewish Temple cult. The Gospel of Judas is a writing that fights against certain ideas and practices known to its author and readers. So it often adopts a tone of mockery, harsh criticism, and perhaps even parody.

Some specialists are convinced that there are no literary precedents to see the Gospel of Judas as a parody. If parody is defined as “the

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mocking imitation by one author of another author’s style,” this may not apply to our text.² The text, however, does stand in relation to a subtext that the reader is supposed to recognise, which is one of the most important markers of parody.³ This relation between text and subtext is not a novelty at the time when the *Gospel of Judas* was written.⁴ The Gnostic myth, especially the creation narratives, parody the creation stories found in the book of Genesis. It is not as much the subtext’s style as its contents that are mimicked with a touch of irony. The *Gospel of Judas* can only be understood in relation to the subtext, a subtext identified with a tradition that is associated with Apostolic Christianity rather than a specific writing. This relation to the subtext has an allure of parody.

So the *Gospel of Judas* contains a touch of irony and satire, even what we might call parody. In spite of its title, the *Gospel of Judas* does not seem to communicate any ‘good news’. On the contrary, it talks extensively about the structure of the archontic world and the condemnation of everything that is a part of it.

**Jesus’ Death and Its Significance**

Even if Jesus’ death falls outside the chronology of the frame narrative of the *Gospel of Judas*, its interpretation and its implications are proleptically interwoven into the actual narration, as well as the disciples’ discourse and Jesus’ revelations. The setting of the narrative is a period of eight days preceding Jesus’ passion and death.⁵ The story effectively ends with Judas handing over Jesus to the scribes.⁶ What will happen after this act is common knowledge to the reader. Jesus has predicted his own death by referring to the sacrifice of the man

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² Booth 1974, 71s.
³ Booth 1974, 123–134.
⁵ I take that the eight days refer to the events contained in the text and that the three days are beyond the narrative and refer to the actual passion, death and resurrection. This does not mean however, that the eight days function as temporal markers in the text.
⁶ The role of the High priests remains unclear. Their grumbling at the fact that Jesus went in to pray is mentioned. From then on it seems to be the scribes who take upon them the actual arrest, following Jesus inside and negotiating with Judas.