

The Expository Times

<http://ext.sagepub.com>

The Gospel of Judas

Simon Gathercole

The Expository Times 2007; 118; 209

DOI: 10.1177/0014524606075050

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://ext.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/118/5/209>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *The Expository Times* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://ext.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://ext.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

The Gospel of Judas

By SIMON GATHERCOLE
University of Aberdeen

This article gives a brief account of the literature already produced on the recently published Gospel of Judas, and of the manuscript's character and contents. A discussion of the work's historical and theological relevance shows that while this new 'Gospel' does not provide any reliable information about the historical figures of Jesus and Judas, it does nevertheless afford a fascinating glimpse into the conflicts between Christianity and Gnosticism in the second century.

KEYWORDS

Gospel, Judas, Gnosticism, Jesus, New Testament, Second Century

Introduction

'One of the greatest historical discoveries of the twentieth century', writes New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman.¹ 'Greatest archaeological discovery of all time', announced the *Mail on Sunday*.² In April 2006, when the English translation of the *Gospel of Judas* was finally published, it provoked a flurry of media attention in which journalists tried to talk scholars into saying that the work would overturn the traditional picture of Christianity. Most scholars resisted the temptation, although Bart Ehrman went so far as to say, 'It will open up new vistas for understanding Jesus and the religious movement he founded.'³

Several books on the *Gospel of Judas* have either already been published or are in the pipeline. The volume containing the official translation also has several essays on the interpretation of the text and its historical origins.⁴ This has been published by National Geographic (who hold the copyright to the text), as has a journalistic account of the manuscript's discovery and tortuous journey from

an Egyptian tomb to its final publication.⁵ Another book, written by James Robinson, appeared at the same time as the two 'official' publications and offered a very different side to the story.⁶ Tom Wright, the Bishop of Durham, has written a short book arguing that the *Gospel of Judas* exposes just how incredible Gnostic portraits of Jesus are, given that they detach Jesus from his Jewish origins.⁷ Bart Ehrman, a contributor to both of the National Geographic volumes, is producing his own book with the US division of Oxford University Press,⁸ and the UK Oxford office is also producing a volume.⁹ The *Gospel of Judas* bibliography will no doubt continue to burgeon.

What has attracted the most attention in the publicity surrounding the *Gospel of Judas* is its radical re-interpretation of the betrayal of Jesus. This betrayal did not, according to this new Gospel, lead to Judas being cursed by God, but was in fact

⁵ H. Krosney, *The Lost Gospel: The Quest for the Gospel of Judas Iscariot* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2006). See also the National Geographic DVD documentary, *The Gospel of Judas*.

⁶ J. M. Robinson, *The Secrets of Judas: The Story of the Misunderstood Judas and his Lost Gospel* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

⁷ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Gospel of Judas* (London: SPCK, 2006).

⁸ B. D. Ehrman, *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁹ S. J. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Judas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹ R. Kasser, M. Meyer and G. Wurst (eds.) (with additional commentary by B. D. Ehrman), *The Gospel of Judas* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2006), back cover.

² *The Mail on Sunday*, 12 March 2006.

³ B. D. Ehrman, 'Christianity Turned on its Head: The Alternative Vision of the Gospel of Judas', in Kasser, *et al.* (eds.), *The Gospel of Judas*, pp. 77–120 (80).

⁴ Kasser, *et al.* (eds.), *The Gospel of Judas*.

an action to which Jesus gave his blessing. Jesus tells Judas that, by comparison with the other disciples and the rest of humanity, 'You will exceed them all. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me' (codex p. 56).¹⁰

The Manuscript and Its Origins

The *Gospel of Judas* is copied in the ancient Egyptian language of Coptic on twenty-six papyrus pages – twenty-six fairly short pages, since the work is only about as long as Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. It is found in a codex, a bound volume similar to those found near Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945–46. The papyrus has been carbon dated to the third or fourth century CE, and our copy seems to have been made somewhere not far from where it was discovered – about 100 miles south of Cairo. The language bears the influence of the dialect of Coptic local to this region.¹¹

But in fact the *Gospel of Judas* goes back considerably earlier than the third or fourth century. Our Coptic version of the text is not the original; the first edition of the *Gospel of Judas* was almost certainly written in Greek, probably sometime between 140 and 200 CE. And there is a reasonable chance that we have reference to it in the Church Fathers, although this is by no means as certain as some of the literature so far has assumed. Irenaeus refers to a work of the same name, and to the group behind it, in his *Against Heresies*:

Others again say that Cain came from a higher Power, and claim that Esau, Korah and the Sodomites and all such people are their ancestors. They also claim that because of this, they have been attacked by the creator, but that none of them has actually been harmed. For Sophia snatched away from them what belonged to her. They say that Judas the betrayer knew these things very well, and that he alone – more than the other disciples – knew the truth and so accomplished the mystery of the betrayal. So they say that through him all things, both earthly and heavenly, were dissolved. And they put forward a fabricated book to this effect, which they call the 'Gospel of Judas'. (*Against Heresies*, I, 31, 1–2).

¹⁰ All translations in this article are drawn from Kasser, *et al.* (eds.), *The Gospel of Judas*, pp. 19–45.

¹¹ On all this, see R. Kasser, 'The Story of Codex Tchacos and the Gospel of Judas', in Kasser *et al.* (eds.), *The Gospel of Judas*, pp. 47–76.

Epiphanius then makes the next mention of the *Gospel of Judas*, in his *Medicine Chest Against the Heresies*, written in the 370s CE. He contributes the information that it was a 'short work' (*syntagmaton*), and also notes the name of the group which made use of it – the Cainites, who derived their name from their reverence for Cain (*Panarion*, 38, 1.5).¹² Theodoret in the fifth century CE is the last of the Fathers to discuss the work, and seems to argue against its authenticity on the grounds that Judas hanged himself shortly after the betrayal, and so would not have had the opportunity to write a gospel (*Compendium*, I, 15). It may well be that this *Gospel of Judas* talked about by the Fathers was substantially the same as our own. The mention of it as a short book might be a point in favour. But on the other hand, there are certain striking differences from the patristic accounts. Certainly the surviving *Gospel of Judas* has no interest in Cain: on the contrary, it is Seth who is the ancestor of the Gnostics in our Coptic text. Nevertheless a connection can certainly not be ruled out.

The Gospel of Judas: Its Content and Meaning

In fact, the new view of Judas and the betrayal is not the central focus of the new Gospel. The main attention in the work is actually to the secret revelation about the nature of the world and salvation that is communicated by Jesus to Judas. The principal subject matter of the *Gospel of Judas* is *gnōsis* – the secret knowledge by which one is liberated from the slavery of this present ill-formed world and returned to the spiritual light from which one's true self came. Because of this misconception about the *Gospel of Judas*'s centre of gravity, some space is devoted here to expounding the content of the work. Thereafter we will address some of the claims made about its significance.

The *Gospel of Judas* can roughly be divided (as far as we can tell, given its fragmentary state) into two main sections. The first half consists of a dialogue between Jesus and all his disciples, and the second half principally of a dialogue with Judas – with one long stretch of that second half being

¹² These Cainites are already known from third-century writers, but although their name is often included in modern editions of Irenaeus, it almost certainly does not go back to Irenaeus himself.

a discourse by Jesus. Before the main body of the text there is a prologue and a summary of Jesus' ministry, and at the end an epilogue in which the 'betrayal' of Jesus is described, followed finally by the title of the work.

Prologue (codex p. 33)

The *Gospel of Judas* begins with an announcement of its contents: 'The secret account of the revelation that Jesus spoke in conversation with Judas Iscariot during a week three days before he celebrated passover' (codex p. 33). This makes clear the kind of work it is: a gospel similar in some respects to the Gospels of Thomas and Mary. It is not a narration of Jesus' public ministry, death and resurrection as per the four Gospels in the New Testament, but is instead a secret revelation to an individual. The revelation to Judas comes to an end 'three days before ... passover' probably because the traditional account of the passion has the plot against Jesus being set in motion when passover is two days away (Mark 14:1).

Summary of Jesus' Ministry (codex p. 33)

The *Gospel of Judas* is further introduced with a paragraph describing Jesus in reasonably orthodox terms as a wonder worker and saviour, and mentioning the calling of the disciples.

Part I: Dialogue between Jesus and the Disciples (codex pp. 33–43)

The action of the dialogue in Part I breaks naturally into three parts, each taking place on a different day. Day 1 involves Jesus coming upon the disciples celebrating 'eucharistia'. This is the first indication that elements of this new Gospel may be somewhat anachronistic, although one could take the disciples merely to be giving thanks over a meal. In any case, there is a bigger surprise in the shape of Jesus' response to the disciples here: he laughs. He is laughing, he says, not at the disciples themselves, but is rather pouring scorn upon their *practice*. They may think that they are worshipping the true God through this eucharist, but in fact their worship is really a form of idolatry. Here we encounter the all-important distinction in the *Gospel of Judas* between the true supreme divinity, called the 'Great Invisible Spirit', and the lesser, evil demiurge Saklas. The disciples here have been deceived, by errant heavenly powers, into

worshipping this false deity. It does not require an overactive imagination to see the real-life backdrop to the text at this point. Clearly what we have is a polemic against what the pagan philosopher Celsus called 'the great church' – the Christianity which saw itself as founded upon the twelve disciples, and which claimed that its teaching was rooted in the doctrine of the apostles. The *Gospel of Judas*, on the other hand, reflects the voice of a dissident Gnostic group implacably opposed to this 'great church'.

After the events of day 1, Jesus disappears. Day 2 begins with Jesus reappearing, and he explains that in his absence from the disciples he has been visiting a 'great and holy generation' – clearly a breed far superior to the idolatrous disciples. The disciples ask him about this generation, and Jesus laughs again, this time at the folly of the attempt to inquire into what is infinitely beyond them. This clearly continues the polemic: the Gnostics are the superior race, incomprehensible to the inferior false believers who merely merit Jesus' mockery.

On the third day, the disciples receive the heaviest blow of all. They recount to Jesus a vision which they have collectively experienced, in which priests are offering sacrifices in a temple. These priests are no ordinary pious servants of God, however. They are seen in the vision as guilty of murder, homosexual behaviour, child sacrifice and other unsavoury activities. Jesus then delivers an interpretation of the vision: the priests are the disciples themselves. Again, then, the attack on the non-Gnostic church continues: the leaders of the unenlightened pseudo-Christians are corrupt priests who lead the poor ignorant masses astray.

In the course of these three days of rather strained discussions between Jesus and the disciples, there has nevertheless been one of the twelve who has begun to grasp Jesus' esoteric teaching. Judas has recognized who Jesus really is – not a son of the god worshipped in the eucharist, but rather an emissary from the aeon of Barbelo, despatched by the supreme deity. (Barbelo is a female or androgynous divinity, one of the highest in the Gnostic hierarchy, though not herself the supreme God.) Since Judas has proven himself worthy to receive further *gnōsis*, Jesus takes him aside: 'Step away from the others, and I shall tell you the mysteries of the Kingdom' (codex p. 35).

Part II: Dialogue between Jesus and Judas, Including Monologue on Creation (codex pp. 43–57)

Judas, then, becomes detached from the hopeless band of disciples. Although he once shared in the eucharist, he has begun to see the error of his ways and separated himself from the others. (There is a strong contrast here with the account in Acts 1, which also talks of Judas defecting from the twelve, but in very different terms.) It is this second half of the work which really seems to fulfil the promise of the prologue, and to deliver the secret revelation of Jesus to Judas.

The focus of the revelation is primarily on the events of creation. The drama of this creation opens with a great cloud of light, probably a representation of the Great Invisible Spirit, and from this cloud emerges a great angel called Autogenes (literally ‘self-generated’). He is called the ‘light-god’, and is therefore another figure who embodies the supreme reality of the sacred. This Autogenes creates a number of luminaries (the term used for the sun and moon in Genesis), myriads of angels to minister to him, and – those distinguishing marks of Gnostic creation accounts – the ‘aeons’. These aeons are heavenly spheres or time-zones with a twist: they are also divine characters who in some sense have personhood. Twelve of these aeons, for example, coalesce to form a descendant of Autogenes, the heavenly primal Man ‘Adamas’. This Adamas brings further creatures into being, and the luminaries further generate more luminaries as well.

So thus far there are two major differences between the account of creation here and that of Genesis. First, the focus is not on the creative activity of a single figure, God, but on successive creations who in turn become creators. It is more akin to a genealogy: A creates B, which creates C, and so forth. Second, our Gnostic author considers that the author of Genesis has jumped far too precipitately into describing the creation of the physical world. As any good Platonist knows, there must be an ideal heavenly world before the material creation, modelled on it, can come into being.

But there are still further divergences from the biblical version of events. At some point in the cascade of creations, things go bad. This might be because of a fall of some kind: these are a common

feature of Gnostic creation stories. Perhaps more likely, however, is that we have the other explanation of evil found in Gnostic accounts: not a single fall, but rather a gradual dilution of the light the further away one gets from the original source, the great luminous cloud. After the first few rounds of creation, we encounter the *cosmos* – not the physical world, because we are still in the realms of the heavenly idea of the physical world which will be a copy of it. Nevertheless, even this archetypal pattern of the *cosmos* is corrupt: the *Gospel of Judas* calls it ‘the cosmos, that is, perdition’ (codex p. 50). When the material form of this *cosmos* comes into being, it is populated by Adam and Eve, as one might expect. But Adam and Eve are not the products of the supreme benign deity as in the Old Testament. They appear on the production line just after the rulers of the underworld and chaos, all made by the evil deity Saklas (*sakla* is Aramaic for ‘fool’) and his angelic minions. As in Genesis, Adam and Eve are the final creatures to appear; but in the *Gospel of Judas* they are at the end because they are the dregs, rather than the pinnacle of creation.

But to return to happier things, we have already mentioned in passing the creative activity of Adamas. In Genesis, the earthly Adam’s true heir was Seth, through whom the line of humanity continued. Adamas, the heavenly counterpart of Adam, also has a heavenly son called Seth, and in the *Gospel of Judas* – as elsewhere in Gnostic tradition – he is the first of the great holy generation mentioned by Jesus in Part I. The descendants of Adamas and Seth are no less than the true heavenly selves of Gnostic believers. The true holy generation which spiritually towers above the corrupt ‘apostolic church’ has its true identity in the primeval spirits descended from Adamas.

By no means the least of these spiritual descendants is the disciple *par excellence*, Judas. Judas will show himself to be a true priest of the Great Invisible Spirit: rather than being a corrupt priest like the rest of the disciples in the temple vision of day 3 above, Judas is an ideal servant because he will perform the ultimate sacrifice. The other disciples are described as ‘those who sacrifice to Saklas’; Judas will sacrifice the physical body which carries around the spirit of Jesus (codex p. 56). As a result of this, Judas’s stock goes up considerably. He will take his place as the supreme star, and now that at the end of this discourse he

has received the full course of *gnōsis*, he is ready to ascend to the great cloud of light.

Epilogue: The Betrayal (codex p. 58)

After the abstruse revelation communicated to Judas and his subsequent transfiguration in the great light-cloud, the action moves back to earth. The betrayal is actually described very briefly, and so the conclusion to the text is quite abrupt. The high priests are looking out for a way to arrest Jesus, but are also nervous about his popularity among the people who consider him a prophet. They approach Judas, who takes his payment from them and delivers Jesus: 'he received some money and handed him over to them' (codex p. 58). End of story. This strikes us as odd if we are familiar with the New Testament Gospels, with their lengthy accounts of the cross and resurrection. But the apparent anti-climax in the *Gospel of Judas* only serves to highlight the point made in the preface: that the focus of the work is not historical events, but 'the secret account of the revelation'.

Title (codex p. 58)

The title 'the Gospel of Judas' is not a modern invention, but the title given – as is often the case in Coptic texts – at the end of the copy in the manuscript itself. So the 'good news' or 'Gospel' does not consist of Jesus dying for our sins, but rather in the appropriation of the 'knowledge' mentioned at several points in the text, and explained by Jesus to Judas particularly in the long discourse on the nature of the world and salvation. In taking the title of 'Gospel', the work locates itself among both canonical and non-canonical works similarly entitled. We do not know how many other accounts of Jesus had been produced prior to the *Gospel of Judas*, but its relationship to them would not have been the same in each case. The *Gospel of Judas* is clearly intended in large measure to supersede the four canonical Gospels, whereas it may have sat more happily alongside other Gnostic works such as the *Gospel of Mary*.

The Significance of the Gospel of Judas

We have already mentioned the stir caused by the publication of the *Gospel of Judas*, and so for many people it is clearly not just another Gnostic work contained in an Egyptian codex. We have a good number of these from the same period, and yet *Zostrianos*, *Hypsiphrone*, and the *Trimorphic*

Protennoia have not been the subjects of eye-catching books which have spent weeks on the New York Times bestseller list. Clearly the *Gospel of Judas* has caught the public imagination to some extent, while also attracting a lot of scholarly attention. Nevertheless, some of the claims that have been made on its behalf by its admirers need to be taken with a pinch of salt. We will begin by looking at that for which the *Gospel of Judas* is most direct evidence, and then work back in time to Jesus.

The Gospel of Judas and Gnosticism

One of the most complicated questions in the history of earliest Christianity is that of how the Gnostic creation myth develops. We know of it from the several different versions preserved – in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, in the various texts of the *Apocryphon of John* and in works newly discovered near Nag Hammadi such as *Eugnostos the Blessed* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*.¹³ Now the *Gospel of Judas* enters the picture. Those who favour the idea of a pre-Christian Gnostic mythology, such as Marvin Meyer, are likely to be interested in the question of what in the *Gospel of Judas* goes back to 'Jewish Gnostic lore'.¹⁴ On the other side, scholars who are not convinced of the Jewish Gnosticism theory will be more interested in locating the *Gospel of Judas* in relation to other second-century versions of the myth.

'Gnosticism' and 'Christianity' in the Second Century

The reappraisal of Gnosticism in the past generation has strongly argued for the position that Gnostics were Christians just as much as the orthodox – both groups were part of the great melting pot of earliest Christian faith. The problem with this thesis, however, is that often neither side really regarded the other as part of the same movement at all. Irenaeus, for example, certainly did not regard the Gnostics as Christians, but similarly neither did the Gnostics regard themselves and the 'orthodox' as together constituting one big (even unhappy) family. To impose the single category of 'Christian' upon

¹³ These traditions have been meticulously analysed above all in A. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

¹⁴ M. Meyer, 'Introduction', in Kasser *et al.*, *Gospel of Judas*, pp. 1–16 (10).

all of them may serve a contemporary ideological purpose (as, to be sure, does keeping Gnostics and Christians distinct), but does little to help us understand them.

The *Gospel of Judas* is an interesting example of this tendency to highlight the ugly ditch between Gnostics and orthodox in the second century. The 'great church' is, as we have seen, lampooned as a corruption. It is noteworthy that while Jesus occupies a central place in the document, he is quite separate from another figure called 'Christ': this title refers to one of the gods of the underworld created by Saklas. So Jesus' credentials as Jewish Messiah have been swept aside in preference for his role as Gnostic revealer.

Evidence for First-Century Christianity?

As is widely recognized in the scholarly work on the *Gospel of Judas* thus far, the chances of the document going back to, or even telling us much about, first-century Christianity are slim indeed. The overwhelming scholarly consensus is that the *Gospel of Judas* dates to the mid-second century.¹⁵ The most telling evidence for the majority of scholars has been the presence of motifs such as the 'aeons', and of figures such as Barbelo, Autogenes and Adamas – all of which are the bread-and-butter of second-century Gnosticism but unknown in the literature of the first century.

To the evidence that has already been recognized by scholars one can add the picture of the church's structure presupposed by the *Gospel of Judas*. We have already mentioned the temple vision in which the disciples see themselves as depraved priests: here the leaders of the emerging orthodox church are portrayed as priests performing sacrifices in a temple at an altar. This characterization of Christian worship is hard to imagine before the end of the first century; we see the beginnings of it in the *Didache* and *1 Clement*.

Gregor Wurst has argued that the separation of Judas from the disciples and his subsequent replacement shows that our author was aware of the account in Acts of Matthias taking Judas's place, and this may well be right.¹⁶ Perhaps clearer,

¹⁵ See e.g., Meyer, 'Introduction', p. 5.

¹⁶ G. Wurst, 'Irenaeus of Lyon and the Gospel of Judas', in Kasser, *et al.* (eds.), *The Gospel of Judas*, pp. 121–35 (132–33). The parallels are between Acts 1:21–26 and the top of page 36 in the codex.

however, is the probable dependence of the *Gospel of Judas* on the Gospel of Matthew. This is suggested by influence of Matthean redaction at the end of the work: 'But some scribes were there watching carefully in order to arrest him during the prayer, for they were afraid of the people, since he was regarded by all as a prophet' (codex p. 58; cf. Matt 21:46). Another indication in this direction is the *Gospel of Judas*'s use of the phrase 'way of righteousness', found in the New Testament only in Matthew 21:32, and there are other similar examples.¹⁷ So if the *Gospel of Judas* post-dates Matthew, this reinforces the view that it is a product of the second century.

Evidence for Jesus?

Given the evidence that the *Gospel of Judas* originates in the second century rather than the first, it is very difficult to have any confidence that it preserves any tradition about Jesus which is independent of the four NT Gospels. The eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry had long since died out by the time the *Gospel of Judas* is composed. One particularly clear illustration of the distance between the *Gospel of Judas* and the historical Jesus is in his detachment from Judaism in the work. Jesus is not portrayed as in any sense the fulfilment of Jewish expectation, nor is Jesus' Jewishness integral to his personality at all.

In fact, humanity is not integral to Jesus' person either – this is another theological theme which shows that he has moved a long way from his Jewish roots. The already well-known reference to Judas's destiny of sacrificing the man who 'clothes' Jesus (in fact, perhaps better translated 'the man who carries me about') highlights the fact that we have a docetic christology in the *Gospel of Judas*: Jesus is not truly human, but remains a purely divine spirit uncontaminated with the flesh even in his earthly existence. As a result of this, the *Gospel of Judas* has nothing about Jesus' self-giving love on the cross. Indeed, there is no mention of love – divine or human – in the whole of the book.

Conclusion

The *Gospel of Judas* offers us, as we have said, a fascinating window into the turbulent relationship

¹⁷ On this, see further my discussion in chapter 6 of *The Gospel of Judas* (see n. 10 above).

between Christianity and Gnosticism in the second century CE, and its account of the Gnostic creation myth will no doubt add further complexity to the task of those brave souls who try to trace its development. However, one should be extremely sceptical of claims that ‘it will open up new vistas for understanding Jesus’. It has very little that can

be regarded as historically reliable: indeed nothing that is new in the *Gospel of Judas* can be said with any confidence to go back to historical bedrock. In addition, it is difficult to imagine a twenty-first-century reader who would find its vision of a somewhat loveless Jesus detached from a body in any way theologically attractive.

CHURCH AND SWASTIKA: ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Robert A. Krieg, *Catholic Theologians in Nazi Germany* (London: Continuum, 2004. £16.99. pp. 234. ISBN 0-8264-1576-8).

‘The church’s silence on the horrors perpetrated in the East,’ commented Father Alfred Delp, SJ, in 1943, ‘was endangering its moral influence’ (Krieg, 160). Father Delp’s view of what we have come to call the Holocaust – a view for which he was willing to risk and lose his life at the hands of Nazi executioners – was highly uncommon among Catholic clerics and theologians living and operating in the National Socialist (NS) state (1933–45). In a series of interpretive essays based on published primary and secondary sources, Robert A. Krieg, Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame (IN), writes about five major Catholic theologians at German universities during the NS period: Karl Adam, Karl Eschweiler, Romano Guardini, Engelbert Krebs, and Joseph Lortz. These five figures, who ran the spectrum between zestful enthusiasm for Nazi ideology, to selective disagreement laced with accommodation, to outright condemnation, allow Krieg to illustrate that theological notions endorsed by the Church had and have broader social and political implications.

The neo-Scholastically oriented twentieth-century Roman Catholic Church operated out of three dominant theological models which impacted the thinking and behaviour of its flock, argues Krieg: (1) church as perfect society (most dominant); (2) church as body of Christ (also highly prevalent); and (3) church as moral voice (a new theology developed only in rudimentary form by a very few radical thinkers in Imperial, Weimar and Third Reich Germany). The first two models contributed to what Krieg calls an ‘impoverishment of scholarship’ that prevented the papacy, episcopacy, scholars and laity from conducting critical reflection on ‘the character of modernity and on the church’s nature and mission in the contemporary world’ (Krieg, 171). Theology is politics, argues Krieg, and within politics beats the heart of social policy and, ultimately, tolerance.

The inquiry into the worldview of prominent and path-breaking Catholic theologians operating for ill and for good in Nazi Germany – how their ideas were formed, how ideas became actions and inactions – is a critical one, and this series of essays marks a beginning into a scholarly inquiry most fruitfully undertaken by theologians in tandem with historians. The devil, after all, is in the details. The historical context within which these actors operated justifies careful treatment and full footnoting. When paired with recent books coupling nineteenth- and twentieth-century German Catholic cultural, political and religious history (Margaret Stieg Dalton’s *Catholicism, Popular Culture, and the Arts in Germany, 1880–1933* and Kevin Paul Spicer’s *Resisting the Third Reich: Catholic Clergy in Hitler’s Berlin* come to mind), Krieg’s study begins to illuminate why so few Nazi-era Catholics withstood the ultimate moral test.

SUZANNE BROWN-FLEMING
Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum