

Preface

In this new book Dr. Seyed Azmayesh poses a very important question: what *really* happened at the crucifixion? Maybe this question can never be answered definitively and satisfactorily ever, but anyone who dares to make it the focus of his investigations deserves our deepest respect. Azmayesh' story is like one of a detective, scrutinizing all the available and highly well-known data and delivering a brand-new composition. And as is the case with every brilliant detective, we can only be convinced by the probability of what he proposes: what if it really happened that way, what if this reconstruction is right? Then we shall have to change all our views, beginning with the images we hold of Jesus and Judas. And whether we are able to accept his challenging vision also depends on our ability and willingness to change our beliefs.

I met Dr. Azmayesh for the first time in April 2008, when we were both invited as key speakers at a spiritual festival in Zutphen, the Netherlands. The conference focused on four religions meeting each other. Dr Azmayesh represented Sufism, the mystical way of the Islam, as I represented Gnosticism, the inner way of Christianity. We only had one hour, during dinner time, to well and truly meet each other. In that hour we became brothers, recognizing each other's path as our own, knowing that Sufism and Gnosticism share the same source. And we discovered that both of us agree in our divergent opinion about the relationship between Jesus and Judas, and Judas' role. We both believe Judas to be a high initiate and absolute confidant of Jesus. And to us, the whole idea of 'betrayal' seems highly illogical and utterly impossible: ridiculous, to say the least. The newly-found Gospel of Judas supports us in this position.

To me, Judas was a close relative of Jesus, helping him with his mission wherever he could. He belonged to the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, and he was one of the very few people, like Thomas and Mary Magdalene, with whom Jesus shared his secret knowledge. It is no coincidence that in our time the Gospels of precisely those people that the Christian tradition called 'traitor', 'unbeliever' and 'whore' were unearthed again, in order to restore these apostles to their proper status as initiates. In this sense I think an agreement existed between Jesus and Judas about what Judas' role should be. It was, so to speak, an accord between two souls. Whatever the reason may have been for Jesus to think that his mission in Palestine had to come to a closure, we can be quite sure that Judas knew all about it and was helping him to complete it - even to the extent that his fellow disciples and future generations would think of him as a betrayer. And moreover, this idea of 'betrayal' is mainly based on a guilt-ridden translation of the Greek *paradidonai*, which simply means: to transfer, or to hand over.

In the Gnostic scriptures, found in Nag Hammadi in 1945, and dating back to the first centuries of our era, we can meet a Jesus who differs greatly from the traditional one. But he has equally old papers. We find a Jesus who is a teacher trying to awaken us to our true nature, our pearl, our light. There is no trace of a Jesus suffering and dying for the redemption of our sins; it is quite the contrary. We find him laughing at the whole scene of the crucifixion. Here, I will present a few remarkable quotations taken from three different treatises.

'James, do not be concerned for me or for this people. I am

He-who-was-within-me. Never have I suffered in any way, nor have I been distressed. And this people has done me no harm.’¹

So Jesus, here talking to James - who was disturbed by his supposed suffering - explains that there was no suffering at all. And when there is no victim suffering pain, then there cannot be a guilty offender, nor can there be a betrayer. For when there is no effect, there is no cause. Here, Jesus teaches us a lesson in forgiveness: he has removed all the guilt from the scene. And at the same time he points at his true nature: He-who-is-within-me, the Christ. And Christ, by virtue of his nature, cannot suffer at all. He is above pain and death.

‘And I did not die in reality, but in appearance. [...] And I suffered (only) according to their sight and thought. [...] For my death which they think happened, (happened only) to them in their error and blindness. [...] He who drank the gall and the vinegar, it was not I. They struck me with the reed, it was another. Who bore the cross on his shoulder, it was Simon. It was another upon whom they placed the crown of thorns. But I was rejoicing in the height [...] and I was laughing at their ignorance.’²

This is a firm statement Jesus made. He says: it only looked as if I died, but in reality I did not die at all. It can only seem that way, when you are in error and blind, when you believe in the illusion of death, when you look solely at the body and the outer appearances. Again, Christ cannot die or suffer any pain. So when you think that I, Jesus, drank the gall, was struck with the reed, bore the cross and wore the crown of thorns, please look again. And when you have unclouded your vision, rejoice with me, for nothing happened in reality.

‘He whom you saw above the cross, glad and laughing, this is the living Jesus. But the one into whose hands and feet they drive the nails is his fleshly part, which is the substitute. They put to shame the one who came into being in his likeness. But look at him and (look) at me. [...] Therefore he laughs at their lack of perception, knowing that they are born blind. So then the one susceptible to suffering shall remain behind, since the body is the substitute. But what they released was my incorporeal body. I am the intellectual Spirit filled with radiant light.’³

Again, there is this challenging invitation: look at him who is suffering in the flesh, or look at me who is the living Jesus. Choose between the body and the Christ. And the crucifixion seen in this perspective in essence is liberation: they released the Spirit, the light body. And when we look now at the Gospel of Judas, we find the same, where Jesus is saying to Judas:

¹ *Apocalypse of James. NHC V.3.* codex p. 31.

² *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth. NHC VII.2.* codex, pp. 55-56.

³ *The Apocalypse of Peter. NHC VII.3.* codex pp. 81+83.

‘But you will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me.’⁴

So Judas, as an initiate, willingly sacrifices the body of Jesus, which is the garment of Christ. The beauty of it is that Judas becomes the vehicle by which the Christ is liberated from the flesh that is bearing him, a common Gnostic theme as we saw. At the same time, it all points out the way to real resurrection for all of us: to know that what we really are cannot suffer or die, and that our true nature is imperishable divine light.

This is one way to interpret these quotations. But they are open to other interpretations as well, which you will find after reading Azmayesh’ book. So you are kindly invited to read these quotations again in the light of what he is telling you. In conclusion, I would like to state that essentially there are four ways to interpret the crucifixion:

- 1 The traditional version: Jesus died on the cross to atone for our sins.
- 2 The docetist version (from the Greek *dokein*: to seem): Jesus seems to die at the cross, but in reality the Christ was liberated.
- 3 The stand-in version: it was not Jesus hanging on the cross but somebody else, be it Simon of Cyrene, Judas or some other person.
- 4 The survival version: Jesus survived the crucifixion, continuing to live in Syria or India, or returning as the Apostle Paul.

(And of course there is a fifth: there never was a crucifixion, because it cannot be proven historically. This particular interpretation is not considered here.)

Good detectives never give away their plots. Thus, you will have to find out for yourself to which of these four versions Azmayesh’ pioneering book belongs.

Dr. Willem Glaudemans⁵

⁴ *Codex* p. 56.

⁵ Dr. Willem Glaudemans is the Dutch co-translator of the Nag Hammadi Scriptures.