

Communing with the Betrayer: The Presence and Significance of Judas at the Last Supper among Patristic Sources

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Introduction

“Our Lord Jesus Christ on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks he gave it to the disciples . . .” Ask which disciples and the usual and quick answer is the twelve apostles. This is certainly the dominant answer given by the traditional artistic presentations of the scene, for example, by Fra Angelico (1440), Leonardo da Vinci (1498), Lucas Cranach the Younger (1565), and Tintoretto (ca. 1592). The Gospel of John, however, reports that Judas left at some point during the meal to betray the Lord (John 13:30). In fact, arguments about who rightly receives the Holy Supper often appeal to the “fact” that Judas either was or was not present.¹ What does the tradition of the church say to this question? As the early church fathers took disparate positions on the question, we find that they did so to draw important spiritual and pastoral conclusions from the presence or absence of the betrayer at the first Lord’s Supper. Goran Sekulovski, who has

¹ A quick internet search illustrates how this question is yet alive for Christians today, including among the Reformed, Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and Lutherans. See, respectively, Joseph R. Nally Jr., “Did Judas Take Communion?” *Thirdmill*, accessed May 19, 2020, <http://thirdmill.org/answers/answer.asp/file/40562>; Robin A. Brace, “Did Judas Take Communion before Betraying Jesus?” UK Apologetics, November 30, 2011, <http://www.ukapologetics.net/11/judascommunion.htm>; Ryan Erlenbush, “When a Priest Refuses Communion to a Public Sinner,” EWTN, March 29, 2012, <http://newtheologicalmovement.blogspot.com/2012/03/when-priestrefuses-communion-to-public.html>; William P. Terjesen, “Crypto-Calvinists and Open Communion,” accessed February 14, 2016, <http://www.ourredeemerlcms.org/crypto%20calvinism.pdf>. Interest in this question in the Reformation period is reflected by Heinrich Bullinger, who desired to demonstrate both that Judas participated in the Lord’s Supper and that he did not thereby receive Christ’s true body and blood because he did not attain to the benefits of union with Christ. Heinrich Bullinger, “Ob Judas der Verrätter im Abendmal noch am Tisch gesessen sei als der Herr Jesus das Sacrament seines Leibs und Bluts den Jüngern geben: Und ob ers auch Jude geben hab,” in *Heinrich Bullinger Werke* (Zug: Inter Documentation Co., 1985), Microfiche, 2–3. The Lutheran Confessions twice describe Judas as a recipient of the Lord’s Supper (FC SD VII 33, 60). Although these references presuppose that Judas communed, they do nothing more than use the reference as an illustration, as Judas here is simply a type of unbeliever who “receives” (present tense) Christ’s body and blood in the Eucharist, although to his harm.

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provided an overview of the history of interpretation, notes this pastoral aim, particularly in John Chrysostom.² A fuller consideration of the patristic passages will demonstrate that contextual pastoral concerns help to account for differences in interpretation in the church's first six centuries.

The Testimony of Scripture

To determine whether Judas received the Lord's Supper at its institution, the church fathers had to handle an ambiguity in the scriptural witness.³ The Synoptic Gospels narrate Judas's preliminary visit to the priests before the Supper (Matt 26:14–16; Mk 14:10–11; Lk 22:3–6). John first tells of the devil's success in convincing Judas to betray the Lord in the context of the Supper. Matthew and Mark place the Twelve at the table; Luke identifies the guests as the apostles—John, as disciples (Matt 26:20; Mk 14:17; Lk 22:14; Jn 13:5). John, who does not record the words of institution, reports the foot washing and then the Lord's announcement that the betrayer is in their midst. This climaxes in the question of the betrayer's identity from the beloved disciple and Jesus' reply that it is the one to whom he gives the morsel of bread. Upon receiving the bread from Jesus, Judas departs, hearing the Lord's charge, "What you are going to do, do quickly"⁴ (Jn 13:27). The text does not indicate whether the morsel was itself the Supper or whether the Supper took place before or after the departure.

Complications arise in any attempt to harmonize John with the other Gospels. Matthew and Mark locate the prediction of the betrayal and the interaction between Jesus and Judas before the Supper; Luke reports the prediction after the words of institution but then ambiguously states that "the disciples" began to question one another (Lk 22:23), leaving us to wonder whether Judas himself was yet present at this point. A full conflation of the Gospels could order the events as follows: the foot washing, the first discussion of the betrayer with a question about his identity, the indication of Judas with the morsel, the departure of Judas, the words of institution,

² Goran Sekulovski, "Jean Chrysostome sur la communion de Judas," *Studia Patristica* 67 (2013): 311–321.

³ Sekulovski, after noting the disparate accounts of the evangelists, concludes that the biblical data "nous obligent à reconnaître la participation de Judas dans le mystère eucharistique." Sekulovski, "Jean Chrysostome sur la communion," 313. "This conclusion disregards the complexity of the accounts which he himself indicates, but appears to rest on the presumption that Judas's ordination to the apostolic office took place at the Last Supper (note 2) and that the whole of The Twelve must have been present at the Institution of the Eucharist" (321).

⁴ All Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

the second discussion of betrayal, and further questions by the disciples about his identity. The plausibility of this ordering is challenged by the necessity of positing a second general inquiry about the betrayer after the first had been answered, at least for John and possibly Peter, too, by the passing of the morsel. Conversely, John is the only evangelist who describes the departure of Judas from the Twelve. The other Gospels indicate his presence at the table and then, as if he had sneaked away at some unknown point, he appears leading the crowd to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus (Matt 26:47; Mk 14:43; Lk 22:47). Adding to the confusion, the text between the institution of the Supper and the betrayal occasionally makes reference to “all the disciples,” “his disciples,” and “the disciples” being present at the Mount of Olives even as Judas rendezvoused with the Jewish authorities (Matt 26:35, 45; Mk 14:32; Lk 22:39, 45). Even John, who has Judas depart, refers to the remaining assembly as Jesus and “his disciples” (Jn 18:1), though one is obviously absent.

Modern Evaluations

Modern commentators interpret the data from the Gospels in disparate ways. Raymond Brown acknowledges that the word used for the morsel given to Judas (τὸ ψωμίον) is later used in Greek Christianity to refer to the eucharistic host; nevertheless, he denies this meaning to John due to the lack of an institution narrative. Rather, he reads John as “describing the dipping of the herbs in the *haroseth* sauce, an action that took place early in the Passover meal before the main course with its blessing of the bread and of the third cup of wine.”⁵ Brown interprets the handing of the morsel to Judas as either a “basic gesture of Oriental hospitality” or “a special act of esteem whereby a host singles out a guest whom he wishes to honor.”⁶ As for Judas, “his acceptance of the morsel without changing his wicked plan to betray Jesus means that he has chosen for Satan rather than for Jesus.”⁷ Kasper Bro Larsen agrees that John’s narrative does not depict Judas as receiving the Eucharist. Positing conflicting reports between the evangelists on this issue, he highlights the differing authorial intentions in the divergent arrangements of the material—Matthew and Mark were perhaps reflecting early Christian liturgical discipline by “suggesting that Judas as an outsider was expelled before the meal,” whereas Luke “sharpens the point that Jesus was betrayed by one of his own by

⁵ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI*, Anchor Bible Commentary 29A (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 578.

⁶ Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 578.

⁷ Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 578.

having Judas participate,” and John does not address participation “due to the absence of the Eucharist.”⁸

On the other hand, Michael W. Martin has recently argued that Judas functions in John’s Gospel as an extreme representative of the secessionists from the Johannine community. This device of using a figure to represent a group, called *genus syncrisis*, was taught in the schools of the day, as evidenced in the basic textbooks of rhetoric (*progymnasmata*). Among the parallels between the secessionists and John’s Judas that Martin finds is the “rejection of the Eucharist.”⁹ As part of his evidence, he reads 1 John 5:6 as sacramental—“This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood”—and he points to the defection which followed the bread of life discourse in John 6. Significantly, this defection concludes in John 6:66 with a reference to Judas as one akin to the defectors. Martin observes that Irenaeus argues against similar opponents whose Christology also led to a rejection of the Eucharist.¹⁰ Judas’s departure from the Passover Supper into the night in John 13 thus echoes the secessionists’ departure from the Johannine community and their rejection of its eucharistic celebrations. In addition to the connection with the defection occasioned by the bread of life discourse, Martin further sees an implicit opposition between the character of Judas and the Eucharist in two other scenes: (1) Judas opposed the honor which Mary lavished upon Jesus’ body at the supper earlier in Holy Week, and (2) in John 13:10–11, Jesus distances Judas from the purifying effects of the foot washing (which Martin reads as an indication of the benefits of the Holy Supper). Finally, Martin points to the psalm prophecy of the betrayal, which he translates, “The one who *chewed* my bread has lifted his heel against me” (Ps 41:9). This singular recurrence of the verb τρώγω connects the table fellowship of the betrayer with Jesus’ command to “chew” his flesh in John 6.¹¹ Cumulatively, Martin’s interpretive argument would lead one to conclude that Judas could only fulfill the prophecy of betrayal if he participated in the meal of Christ’s body and blood. Per Martin, Judas’s presence at, participation in, and departure from the eucharistic

⁸ Kasper Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 164.

⁹ Michael W. Martin, *Judas and the Rhetoric of Comparison in the Fourth Gospel*, New Testament Monographs 25 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 142.

¹⁰ Martin, *Judas and the Rhetoric of Comparison*, 142–144. In the opening scenes of *The Gospel of Judas*, Jesus comes upon the disciples as they are participating in a rite of “thanksgiving” or Eucharist. He laughs at them “because this is how your god [will be] praised.” The opposition of the gnostic author to the sacrament is clear. See Marvin W. Meyer, *The Gospels of the Marginalized* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 85.

¹¹ Martin, *Judas and the Rhetoric of Comparison*, 148.

meal furthers an important function of the Gospel in its polemic against the secessionists. Their parallel trajectory marks them as faithless and self-condemned followers of Judas.

This sampling of modern scholarship has served to demonstrate how questions over the presence of Judas at the Supper have continued without resolution. Modern skepticism regarding the historical veracity of the Gospel narratives has shifted the discussion to the pastoral intentions of the supposedly anonymous Gospel authors and editors in their differing community contexts. Consequently modern scholars tend to eschew clear assertions about whether Judas actually communed. Nevertheless, the clear testimony of the early church indicates that the canonical Gospels were written by apostles and their associates. Founded on eye-witness accounts, the Gospels depict nothing other than the real words and deeds of the Lord Jesus.

Patristic Positions

Modern divergence about whether the Gospels report the Lord Jesus communing his betrayer only continues a long history of conflicting answers to this question. As we survey the early fathers, we find that they, too, differed among themselves and, in so doing, drew important theological and pastoral conclusions from their positions.

As the earliest one recorded to address the question, Tatian had to resolve the problem for the sake of constructing his harmonized narrative of the Gospels in the *Diatessaron*.¹² He placed the conversation about the identity of the betrayer at the table of the Supper before the institution of the sacrament.¹³ Furthermore, between the “it was still night” of Judas’s departure and the “while they were eating, Jesus took bread” of the institution narrative, he inserts John 13:31–32 to interpret the moment: “Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.’” This placement of this passage may look forward to the Eucharist as an expression of the glory of the Father and of Jesus. More likely, however, it functions as it does in the Gospel of John as a reference to the approaching passion. Thus, Judas’s movement toward betrayal initiates the sequence of events that culminates in the crucifixion. Placing Jesus’ words here reveals him as accepting, welcoming, and even controlling his mission as the Savior whose death brings life to the world.

¹² Sekulovski astutely indicates that the awkwardness of explaining the story of Jesus’ betrayal by one of his closest associates moved various early authors like Justin, Hermas, and Clement of Alexandria quietly to avoid the topic. Sekulovski, “Jean Chrysostome sur la communion,” 313.

¹³ Tatian, “The Diatessaron of Tatian,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Allan Menzies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 10:112 (hereafter ANF).

In Tatian's ordering, there is no further discussion of the betrayer after the institution narrative, though the predictions that the disciples will abandon their Lord and that Satan will sift Peter follow directly. Tatian accomplishes several things with his ordering of the words and events: Judas clearly removes himself before the Holy Supper is distributed, Christ remains in control, and the outcome, even of Judas's betrayal, serves the glory of God and of his Christ.

Less than a century after Tatian comes Origen's careful treatment of Judas. In contrast to much of the tradition both before and after, Origen depicts Judas as an initially good disciple who only at the end suffers a satanic attack, temptation, possession, and finally fruitless remorse.¹⁴ The pertinent passage in Origen's *Commentary on John* clearly identifies the "morsel" as the eucharistic host but leaves undetermined whether Judas ate it:

Jesus says, "Upon dipping the morsel" and He grants that it be taken in the bowl. For so you will understand that "upon dipping the morsel" as meaning there was no delay in taking it. Then it is said, "He gives it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. And after the morsel Satan then enters into him." "After the morsel" indicates that it is not quickly eaten by Judas, since Satan entered into Judas anticipating the benefit of the morsel, so that Judas would not be helped by Jesus' gift of the morsel, for it had beneficial power for the one using it. But Satan, having put it into his heart to betray his teacher, was afraid lest, through benefit of the morsel, the plot would be cast aside from the one in whom it was cast. Anticipating that Judas would take the morsel, he entered at the same time, even when it was said, "What you do, do quickly." Having taken the morsel, Judas "immediately went out." So, not unreasonably, it can also be said at this point that the case is as the one who eating the bread of the Lord or drinking his cup unworthily eats and drinks to his judgment, since the singular great power in the bread and in the cup produces the better [effect] for one with a better disposition but works judgment for the worse. Thus, the morsel from Jesus was of the same character for the one to whom it was handed as for the rest of the apostles when He says, "Take, eat." To those [it worked] for salvation but to Judas for judgment since after the morsel Satan entered into him. Let the bread and the cup be understood rather simply according to the more common view of the Eucharist, but for those who have learned to listen more deeply [let it] also [be understood] according to the more divine promise about the nourishing word of truth. Thus, by example, I would say that bread which is very nourishing in a physical way strengthens the vitality within one,

¹⁴ For a careful reading of Origen's evaluation of Judas, see Samuel Laeuchli, "Origen's Interpretation of Judas Iscariot," *Church History* 22 (December 1953): 253–268.

leading to health and vigor. Even so, a true word given to a sick soul not fit for such food often destroys it and the soul's condition becomes worse. And so even to speak the truth is perilous. This is what I would say about the morsel which, dipped, "He gives to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot." And we have given a reason for each case, whether it is necessary to say that he took it and ate it or whether Satan, entering into Judas, prevented him [from eating].¹⁵

Our understanding that Origen posits Judas's reception of the Eucharist rests on this line: "Thus, the morsel from Jesus was of the same character for the one to whom it was handed as for the rest of the apostles when He says, 'Take, eat.'"

It is the beneficial effect of the morsel that Satan attempts to thwart by suddenly entering Judas and preventing the consumption. If he could not prevent it, he would at least rob the recipient of its benefit. "Not unreasonably" does St. Paul's warning against unworthy reception (1 Cor 11:29) and the judgment it entails apply in this context. Thus Origen envisions two potential cases: no reception due to satanic intervention or unworthy reception due to Judas's unfitness.

As Laeuchli summarizes Origen's understanding of the role of Judas, it is clear that Origen anticipates a number of themes that would develop in the church's exegesis, but he does this in his own way. Psalm 41:9 foretold the betrayal of Christ with the words, "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me"; its fulfillment demonstrates the authentic identity of Jesus as the Christ, but for Origen it also demonstrates Judas's own initial faithfulness, who had to be a friend to betray his Lord.¹⁶ Judas will fall under Satan's power, but Origen describes a fall of two stages: first, Judas succumbs to the thought of the betrayal, and then he yields to a full possession by Satan. Origen adds that the fall from grace devolved not so much from Judas's greed as from his lack of faith because he did not employ "the shield of faith" which could have quenched "the flaming darts" of satanic attack (Eph 6:16). The betrayal accomplished, Satan departs from Judas and leaves him in shock and bitter remorse.¹⁷ It is the reception of the morsel, however, that brings the final phase of the divine economy¹⁸; it is also the moment of Judas's final loss of all the benefits of Christ, for by taking it unworthily, he is now bereft of his discipleship.¹⁹ Laeuchli concludes that Origen's exegetical concerns in this case demonstrate a willingness to accept ambiguity and

¹⁵ Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 31.306–312 on John 13:30. "Origenes Werke: Der Johanneskommentar," in *Die Griechische Christliche Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte*, vol. 10 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1903), 467–468, accessed February 4, 2016, <https://books.google.com/books?id=6NkYAAAAYAAJ>. The translation is my own.

¹⁶ Laeuchli, "Origen's Interpretation of Judas Iscariot," 255.

¹⁷ Laeuchli, "Origen's Interpretation of Judas Iscariot," 256, 259.

¹⁸ Laeuchli, "Origen's Interpretation of Judas Iscariot," 265.

¹⁹ Laeuchli, "Origen's Interpretation of Judas Iscariot," 257.

paradox rather than any need to unify the texts within a doctrinal system. The divine plan, Judas's sin, the plots of the high priests, and satanic initiative each receive credit for the betrayal of Christ.²⁰ The tensions inherent in this reading are simply left to stand. The coherence of Origen's reading rests in the pastoral concern for depicting inner spiritual life with its urgent opportunities and threatening dangers. The details of Judas's rise and fall serve as a cautionary tale for his students.

In the fourth century, Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315–ca. 367) offered a brief comment on whether Judas received the Lord's Supper in his *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. He surmises that Judas did not commune:

Judas did not take the body of Christ. After these things Judas is indicated as a traitor, without whom the Passover was consecrated with the cup taken and the bread broken: For he was not worthy of communion of the eternal mysteries. For it is understood that he immediately withdrew from this place [the upper room], because it tells that he returns with the crowds. Nor could he who was not going to drink in the kingdom well drink with the Lord: because [the Lord] promised that all who then were drinking from the fruit of this vine would drink afterward with him (Matt 26:29).²¹

The logic of the argument is based first on the unworthiness of Judas to receive the sacred meal, then on the logistics of Judas's movements that night, and finally on the promise of Christ to those present that "I will . . . drink [this fruit of the vine] new with you [plural] in my Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:29). For Hilary, this promise implies that all those present would attain to heavenly glory. Hilary does not need to explain that Judas received the Holy Communion unworthily nor what Christ's motive would have been in giving it to him. Precisely following Matthew, the subject of his commentary, and not glancing at Luke or John, he concludes that Judas was not there for the institution of the Holy Supper. Two other mid- to late fourth-century works, *The Commentary on the Diatessaron* by Ephrem the Syrian and the *Apostolic Constitutions*, likewise deny the presence of Judas during the reception of the Eucharist.²²

In contrast to Hilary, Chrysostom (347–407) accepts that Judas communed along with the rest of the disciples. In his preaching on the Gospel of Matthew,

²⁰ Laeuchli, "Origen's Interpretation of Judas Iscariot," 265.

²¹ Hilary of Poitiers, "Commentarius in Evangelium Matthaei," in *Patrologia cursus completus: Series latina*, 217 vols., ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1844–1864), 9:1065 (hereafter PL). Translation is the author's own.

²² Ephrem de Nisibie, *Commentaires de l'Évangile concordant ou Diatessaron* 13:3 (Sources chrétiennes [Paris: Cerf, 1943], 121:333); *Apostolic Constitutions* II, VI 30, 2 (SC 329:391).

positions we have already seen reappear in his exploration of Judas's reception of the Lord's body and blood:

Ah! How great is the blindness of the traitor! Even partaking of the mysteries, he remained the same; and admitted to the most holy table, he changed not. And this Luke shows by saying, that after this Satan entered into him. Satan did not underestimate the Lord's body, but thenceforth laughed to scorn the traitor's shamelessness.²³ For indeed his sin became greater from both causes, as well in that he came to the mysteries with such a disposition, as that having approached them, he did not become better, either from fear, or from the benefit, or from the honor. But Christ forbid him not, although He knew all things, that you might learn that he omits none of the things that pertain to correction. Wherefore both before this, and after this, He continually admonished him, and checked him, both by deeds and by words; both by fear and by kindness; both by threatening and by honor. But none of these things withdrew him from that grievous pest.²⁴

Here Chrysostom does not hesitate to bring Satan's possession of Judas into close connection with Judas's reception of the Eucharist. Whereas Origen would leave the question of Judas's reception open and, as we will see, Augustine could distinguish between the morsel and the Eucharist itself, Chrysostom makes the reception of the Eucharist and the possession by Satan sequential steps in the same movement. He mistakenly attributes this succession of events to Luke, rather than to John, for it is Luke who reports Satan's entry into Judas *before* the Supper, not after the morsel, to explain Judas's initiative in meeting with the priests (Lk 22:3–6). Chrysostom also echoes Origen in stating that it is the unworthy condition of Judas's soul and his unworthy reception that gave entrance to Satan. Yet Christ's action reveals his loving motive in leaving nothing aside that might effect Judas's rescue from his self-chosen path of destruction.

In his homilies on John, Chrysostom remains consistent in describing the relationship between Jesus and Judas in those last hours. Christ does everything to win Judas back—he washed Judas's feet and shared his meal with him,²⁵ he honored him with the chosen morsel,²⁶ and he spoke to him such words as were “capable of softening even a stone.”²⁷ Yet, all of this did not turn Judas. In fact, he persisted on

²³ ὁ Σατανᾶς, οὐ τοῦ σώματος καταφρονῶν τοῦ Δεσποτικοῦ, ἀλλὰ τῆς ἀναισχυντίας καταγελῶν τοῦ προδότου λοιπόν (PG 58:737, 40–41).

²⁴ Chrysostom, “In Matt. Hom.” 82, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, 14 vols., ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969–1976), 10:490 (hereafter *NPNF*¹). Translation slightly modified.

²⁵ Chrysostom, “Hom. 71,” *NPNF*¹ 14:263–264.

²⁶ Chrysostom, “Hom. 72,” *NPNF*¹ 14:271.

²⁷ Chrysostom, “Hom. 65,” *NPNF*¹ 14:211.

his path toward becoming the “worst of sinners”: “He [Jesus] had reason to despise [Judas] most of all, because, in spite of being a disciple, and a companion of His table and hospitality, and an eye-witness of His miracles, and so highly honored, he committed the most serious offense of all.”²⁸ Thus, in addition to using Judas as a warning against unworthy reception, Chrysostom employs the example of Christ to urge his hearers likewise to exercise humble service to all without qualification.²⁹

Not long after Chrysostom, Augustine deals with question of Judas’s reception in two places in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*. First, in Tractate 59, he writes:

[Jesus] knows whom he has chosen to be associated with himself in blessedness. Of such [Judas] is not one, who ate his bread in order that he might lift up his heel upon him. The bread they ate was the Lord himself; he ate the Lord’s bread in enmity to the Lord; they ate life, and he punishment. “For he that eats unworthily,” says the apostle, “eats judgment unto himself” [1 Cor 11:29]. “From this time,” Christ adds, “I tell you before it comes about; that when it is come to pass you may believe that I am he,” that is, I am he of whom the Scripture that preceded has just said, “He that eats bread with me, shall lift up his heel upon me.”³⁰

In contrast to Origen’s hesitation on the issue, Augustine’s position is clear, particularly since he references the obviously eucharistic passage in 1 Corinthians 11. Judas received the Lord’s Supper,³¹ but he did so unworthily and hence to his “punishment” and “judgment.”³² The presence of Judas at the meal in general is instrumental to the fulfillment of the psalm-prophecy, that the one eating bread with the Messiah would betray him. That bread, however, was not mere bread but, as Augustine identifies it, “the Lord Himself,” the consecrated host of the Holy Eucharist. This contrast between Judas’s “unworthy reception” and the blessing

²⁸ Chrysostom, “Hom. 70,” *NPNF*¹ 14:251.

²⁹ Chrysostom, “Hom. 71,” *NPNF*¹ 14:261. Sekulovski observes how Chrysostom desires to warn his hearers against unworthy reception, but it is also important to note how Christ’s relationship with Judas provides a positive model for the Christian’s response to difficult people. Sekulovski, “Jean Chrysostome sur la communion,” 317.

³⁰ Augustine, “Tractate 59 on the Gospel of John,” *NPNF*¹ 7:308.

³¹ In opposition to the Donatists and in order to illustrate that the presence of someone unclean does not make the whole church unclean, Augustine maintains the same position in “Contra Petilian,” when he asks rhetorically, “Was not that supper of so great a sacrament clean and able to give peace, which He distributed to all before [Judas] going out?” Augustine, “Contra Petilian” 2.22, *NPNF*¹ 4, accessed February 18, 2016, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf104.i.html>.

³² Augustine underlines Judas’s unworthy reception: “What he got was good, but to his own hurt he received it, because, evil himself, in an evil spirit he received what was good.” Augustine, “Tractate 61 on the Gospel of John,” *NPNF*¹ 7:312.

which belonged to the rest leads Augustine to a reflection on John 13:18, “I know whom I have chosen.” He joins it together with John 6:70, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” Augustine ruminates about the mystery of Christ’s call to Judas: “Was it that he also was chosen for some purpose, for which he was really necessary; although not for the blessedness . . . ?”³³ More than any before him, Augustine is willing to envision Judas’s treacherous role as the fulfillment of God’s predestined purpose for him, although here he does no more than raise the suggestive question.³⁴

More significant in the tradition of answering this question, however, is Augustine’s lengthier treatment in Tractate 62, which moved none other than Aquinas to concur that Judas was present to receive the Holy Supper.³⁵ Augustine’s reflections begin with the potentially offensive concurrence of the reception of the morsel with the entrance of Satan into Judas. “Was this the worth of Christ’s bread?” Augustine asks on behalf of his interlocutors.³⁶ Akin to Origen, Augustine’s first response is that the character of the recipient determines the benefit or the harm which a gift may bring. In fact, good gifts may do the wicked harm (and here he again cites 1 Corinthians 11 and the danger of unworthy reception of the Eucharist) and, on the contrary, a “messenger of Satan” may serve God’s purpose for a saint, as Paul discovered (2 Cor 12:7–9). However, in this passage Augustine clarifies that the “morsel” which identified Judas and occasioned the entrance of Satan was not itself the Lord’s Supper. Following the order found in Luke, Augustine explains, “We are to understand the Lord had already dispensed to all of them the sacrament of His body and blood when Judas was also present, as very clearly related by Saint Luke.”³⁷ At this point, Augustine does not explain why Luke’s chronology is determinative for him.

In this context, Augustine also explores Judas’s motivations and the consequences of his actions. As is typical for the tradition, he states that Judas

³³ Augustine, “Tractate 61 on the Gospel of John,” *NPNF*¹ 7:307.

³⁴ Similarly, Augustine clearly states the Lord’s mastery of Judas and his use of Judas’s betrayal for his own good purposes in Tractate 55: “[Jesus] knowing that the Father has given all things into His hands.’ And therefore also the traitor himself: for if He had him not in His hands, He certainly could not use him as He wished. Accordingly, the traitor had been already betrayed to Him whom he sought to betray; and he carried out his evil purpose in betraying Him in such a way, that good he knew not of was the issue in regard to Him who was betrayed. For the Lord knew what He was doing for His friends, and patiently made use of His enemies: and thus had the Father given all things into His hands, both the evil for present use, and the good for the final issue.” Augustine, “Tractate 55 on the Gospel of John,” *NPNF*¹ 7:300.

³⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Third Part, Question 81, Article 2, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed on February 18, 2016, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa_TP_Q81_A2.html.

³⁶ Augustine, “Tractate 62 on the Gospel of John,” *NPNF*¹ 7:312.

³⁷ Augustine, “Tractate 62 on the Gospel of John,” *NPNF*¹ 7:313.

betrays Christ because he “thought only of his money gain.”³⁸ In the course of the meal, Judas compounds his sins, adding ingratitude to his greed. The consequence is destruction for Judas but salvation for the faithful. Thus Augustine interprets Christ’s final word to him, “What you do, do quickly” as an expression of Christ’s eager zeal for the work of salvation to be done, foretelling, indeed, “evil to Judas, and good to us.”³⁹ Judas goes, ironically, not to deliver up Christ, for Christ delivers himself up; Judas goes to the loss of his own soul.

Augustine draws a principle for the church from Christ’s dealings with Judas—that Christians should not be overzealous in attempting to purify the church, for this will only disturb the church and put authentic Christians at risk: “The Lord, by His own perturbation of spirit, thought proper to indicate this also, that it is necessary to bear with false brethren, and those tares that are among the wheat in the Lord’s field until harvest-time, because when we are compelled by urgent reasons to separate some of them even before the harvest, it cannot be done without disturbance to the Church.”⁴⁰ Clearly, the presence of Judas at the holy table is useful for Augustine in his polemics against the Donatists and their efforts to maintain a pure Church.

Cyril of Alexandria agrees with his contemporary Augustine that Judas received the Holy Eucharist, but he identifies it with the morsel Christ handed to Judas. The key to the identification is that Cyril refers to it with the term he employs for the Eucharist—εὐλογία or “blessing.”⁴¹ The two key texts are as follows:

Satan entered him completely after the giving of the piece of bread. Now let no one suppose that the piece of bread was the reason that the traitor received Satan. We will not reach such a level of madness or be so bereft of common sense that we imagine that the blessing (εὐλογία) was given as an occasion for the entrance of the evil one.⁴²

³⁸ Augustine, “Tractate 62 on the Gospel of John,” *NPNF*¹ 7:313.

³⁹ Augustine, “Tractate 62 on the Gospel of John,” *NPNF*¹ 7:313.

⁴⁰ Augustine, “Tractate 60 on the Gospel of John,” *NPNF*¹ 7:310–311.

⁴¹ This point is made by the translator, David Maxwell, in his footnotes. See Cyril, *Ancient Christian Texts*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Gerald L. Bray, vol. 2., *Commentary on John*, trans. David R. Maxwell, ed. Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 130. Sekulovski argues that Cyril counts only eleven disciples at the Last Supper, but for that he depends on a dubious text, the remnants of his Commentary on Matthew in the catena tradition. Sekulovski, “Jean Chrysostome sur la communion,” 314. Cf. Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell, vol. 2 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005), 543.

⁴² Cyril, *Commentary on John*, 129.

Now the traitor was not ashamed of the rebuke, which was as yet uttered quietly and secretly, nor was he embarrassed by the invincible might of Christ's love, nor his honor and glory and grace, nor the blessing (εὐλογία) that he received from Christ.⁴³

Much like Origen, Cyril is concerned to develop a proper understanding of the spiritual condition of Judas's soul and Satan's influence upon him. On the one hand, the "mystical blessing" of the Eucharist would have been an "effective antidote to the murderous poison of the devil"⁴⁴; on the other hand, Cyril views the unworthy and ungrateful reception of the morsel as the occasion of Satan's entrance. Christ would lovingly and graciously honor Judas, but Judas clung to his plot of betrayal.⁴⁵ In fact, Satan's concern is that Judas might change his mind; as a result, he possesses him to hasten the deed, "He was probably afraid of his repentance as well as the power of the blessing,⁴⁶ lest this, shining like light in the heart of that man, might persuade him to choose to do good or at least give birth to an honest mind in a man who was seduced into betrayal."⁴⁷ These thoughts perfectly parallel Origen's.

From this narrative, Cyril adds the pastoral admonition that the case of Judas is a warning for his audience lest they allow sin to lead them astray:

Yes, we should rush to cut [sin] off as the beginning of bitterness, and we should want our mind to be untroubled by it. Otherwise, we should know that Satan will prevail little by little with his flattery, and we will experience the same kind of result that the psalmist speaks of: "Before I was humbled, I went astray." Before we succumb to the final sin, first we go astray by assenting in our thoughts and receiving the sin with honor, thereby providing a place for Satan to enter. The case of the traitor will be a type and image for us of the whole matter.⁴⁸

"Before I was humbled, I went astray"—here, the "humbling" referenced in Psalm 119:67 is not the gracious work of God to produce humility but the debasing humiliation caused by a definitive fall into sin. The initial occasions of "going astray," such as Judas experienced in allowing sin more and more room in his desires and thoughts, made an opening for Satan. Again, like Origen, Cyril envisions stages of Judas's fall, thus not only humanizing the paradigmatic betrayer but employing him as a lesson which relates to all of his hearers, even those who have not yet sinned

⁴³ Cyril, *Commentary on John*, 130.

⁴⁴ Cyril, *Commentary on John*, 130.

⁴⁵ Cyril, *Commentary on John*, 129–130.

⁴⁶ Eucharist.

⁴⁷ Cyril, *Commentary on John*, 133.

⁴⁸ Cyril, *Commentary on John*, 130.

scandalously. Even small sins show a kinship with and a movement toward Judas's dastardly deed.

With Cyril and Augustine, we see an increasing tendency to locate Judas at the Supper and among the recipients. As our final witness to this trend, Pseudo-Dionysius, writing around 500⁴⁹ describes the Divine Service as follows:

For the most sacred chants and readings of the Oracles teach them a discipline of a virtuous life, and previous to this, the complete purification from destructive evil; and the most divine, and common, and peaceful distribution of one and the same, both Bread and Cup, enjoins upon them a godly fellowship in character, as having a fellowship in food, and recalls to their memory the most Divine Supper, and arch-symbol of the rites performed, agreeably with which the Founder of the symbols himself excludes, most justly, him who had supped with him on the holy things, not piously and in a manner suitable to his character; teaching at once, clearly and divinely, that the approach to divine mysteries with a sincere mind confers, on those who draw nigh, the participation in a gift according to their own character.⁵⁰

Here, it is the celestial table from which Judas is excluded, precisely because he had indeed "supped with Him on the holy things" on earth but in an impious manner. Again, each communicant receives the gift "according to their own character." Judas was of such a character that the Holy Meal could only bring him harm.

Conclusion

The following table summarizes the positions taken by the Fathers who have been reviewed:

⁴⁹ Kevin Corrigan and L. Michael Harrington, "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, September 6, 2004, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pseudo-dionysius-areopagite/>.

⁵⁰ Ps-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* III III 1, accessed February 16, 2016, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/areopagite_14_ecclesiastical_hierarchy.htm#c3.2.

Church Father	Did Judas Commune?	Conclusions
Tatian	No	When Judas departs, Jesus declares that he is about to be glorified. Christ is going to the cross.
Origen	Perhaps	Judas received the morsel but may not have eaten it because Satan had entered him. If he did, he did so unworthily.
Hilary	No	Judas was neither worthy nor had opportunity to commune. Christ promises that all those communing with him will enter the kingdom.
Chrysostom	Yes	Judas communes unworthily; Christ's love for him models humble service toward all people.
Augustine	Yes	Satan enters Judas, who has communed unworthily. Christ exemplifies the patience we should have toward the "tares" in the church.
Cyril	Yes	Satan enters Judas, preventing the benefit of the blessed host; Judas's fate is a cautionary tale of the danger of sin's consequences.
Ps-Dionysius	Yes	Judas communes unworthily amid the earthly rites but is excluded from the heavenly archetypes. Those of sincere mind receive the blessing.

The ante-Nicene fathers typically concluded that Judas had not communed,⁵¹ while the post-Nicene fathers after Hilary universally concluded that he had, albeit unworthily. The entrance of Satan at the moment of communion or, at least, in the context of Holy Communion is recognized as problematic (note Cyril's objections to the thought the host would have occasioned this). As a solution, Judas himself must provide the cause for the deleterious results, either on account of his lack of faith (Origen) or his greed (Augustine) or his ingratitude (Chrysostom). Throughout, Christ is depicted as seeking Judas's restoration. The gifts and grace he

⁵¹ Commenting on John 13:11, the sixteenth-/seventeenth-century Jesuit Cornelius a Lapide identifies another ante-Nicene father who holds this same view: "Cyprian, however, in his treatise on the Washing of Feet, says that Judas was not present at the washing, nor, consequently, at the Eucharist." Elsewhere he admits that he is not certain of the authorship of the treatise on foot washing. I have not been able to locate his source, as no current editions of Cyprian's work include such a title. Cornelius a Lapide, "The Great Biblical Commentary," accessed February 18, 2016, <http://www.catholicapologetics.info/scripture/newtestament/13john.htm>.

extends toward this end, however, are rebuffed, thus worsening Judas's spiritual condition. The case of Judas then becomes a cautionary tale on the danger of sin, either of some specific vice (e.g., Chrysostom) or of sin in general (e.g., Cyril).

What occasioned this shift in the tradition of the church? It is reasonable to suggest that in the "church of the martyrs" the dangers and discipline of communing with the church made it difficult to imagine that Jesus would have welcomed Judas to the same holy table as those who would give their lives for him. Afterward, in the "imperial church" after the society had become sufficiently Christian (around 400), it became pastorally expedient to utilize the image of a communing Judas as a warning against the careless communing which the pastors deemed more pervasive. Similarly, it appears that Augustine found Jesus' patient acceptance of Judas's presence at the communion to be an expedient contrast to the overzealous Donatists. For all those who identified Judas as a communicant, he came to illustrate, by negative example, the awesome seriousness of right reception. One who partook of the sacred mysteries only to become possessed by Satan and betray his Lord served to heighten the point Paul made about the disobedient Israelites in the wilderness: "All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased" (1 Cor 10:3-5). None of the patristic commentators considered it good for the betrayer to receive the sacrament. If Judas communed with the rest of the disciples, it was because his betrayal was not yet public. The question of whether the betrayer communed underlines for the early church fathers and underlines for us the care pastors and their people need to take in distinguishing between those who should and should not be admitted to communion, and in the proper use of the sacrament.