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Judas Iscariot: The Archetypal Betrayer and DeMille's Cine-Biblical Salvation within *The King of Kings* (1927)

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1. Hollywood's Best-Known Unknown, and the Jesus Genre

- 1 The legendary Cecil B. DeMille¹ (1881-1959), affectionately known to colleagues as "C.B." (DeMille 43), was a cofounder of Hollywood and a progenitor of Paramount studio who helped turn an obscure Californian orange grove into a fully-fledged movie colony that became *the* synonym for filmmaking worldwide, and made DeMille as recognised as his famous actors (Birchard; DeMille and Hayne; Edwards; Essoe and Lee; Higashi *Guide, Culture*; Higham; Koury; Louvish; Noerdlinger; Orrison; Ringgold and Bodeen).
- 2 As a seminal film pioneer, innovative producer-director², and self-confessed pop culture professional (DeMille and Hayne 195), DeMille instituted the "Age of Hollywood" (Paglia 12), helped develop the classical narrative style, and became "the man most identified with the biblical epic" (Lang 13) with his indelible classics: *The Ten Commandments* (1923), *The King of Kings* (1927), *Samson and Delilah* (1949) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956). His views about religion and American society transmitted through this innovative media modality significantly shaped the culture of his country in ways that would be churlish to deny and unsafe to ignore, especially as "an architect of modern consumption" (Higashi *Culture* 203) who "had considerable influence on the craft of motion-picture making and on the popular culture of the United States at large" (Wexman 84).
- 3 Despite public cynicism about religious filmmakers more concerned with selling seats than saving souls, DeMille was "a genuinely and deeply religious man" (Butler 144) from a profoundly religious family. As he proudly claimed near the end of his life: "my ministry was making religious movies and getting more people to read the Bible than

anyone else ever has" (Orrison 108). He achieved that consciousness-raising goal magnificently having become "virtually the Sunday school teacher for the [American] nation" (Beck 27) and the rest of the Western world.

- 4 Although he was "the King of Hollywood" (Louvish 438), DeMille's career and auteur artistry have frequently been overlooked, dismissed or devalued, whilst the numerous social, political and cultural issues surrounding his seventy feature films have not often been debated or documented beyond the regular handful of favourites (Bourget) and sometimes artistic praise (Berthome). Even in the post-millennial period, "Of all the great Hollywood pioneers, Cecil B. DeMille has been the one most commonly neglected and slighted, his importance marginalized" (Welsh 317), in fact, "De Mille rarely receives the serious academic recognition and study that he deserves" (Smoodin 251), thus ironically making him Hollywood's best-known unknown.
- 5 Furthermore, DeMille was often derided by decrying critics and academia alike. For example, Virginia W. Wexman considered his films to be "generally superficial and frequently meretricious ... they added nothing to film art" (83). Giannetti and Eyman claimed that: "It is no longer fashionable to admire De Mille" (40), whilst Norman Bel Geddes complained that: "Inspirationally and imaginatively, CB was sterile. His stories, situations and characters were, almost without exception, unintelligent, unintuitive, and psychologically adolescent" (Green 191). These unflattering views are misleading and thus firmly rejected by the writer. DeMille was a man of profound artistic talents that were frequently unidentified simply because they were subtle, not expected nor actively sought, but then as Henry Wilcoxon had prophesised decades ago: "True recognition for DeMille's greatness will come many years after his death [in 1959]" (276).
- 6 What is urgently needed today is a serious re-examination of DeMille's entire filmic *oeuvre* to reveal the true artistic depths of this quintessential American artist, piece-by-piece if necessary. For example, DeMille's silent New Testament epic about Jesus Christ, *The King of Kings* was a watershed film in the history of world cinema, American film and the Jesus genre. As the "uncontested highpoint of the era of the silent film" (Baugh 12), it had firmly "established the style of the reverent epic" (Walsh *Reading* 2), "became the template for Jesus movies for the next eighty years" (Goldburg 13), and is still considered by many commentators today to be "one of the best religious pictures ever filmed" (Kinnard and Davis 44), if not "the best Jesus movie ever made" (Grace 48).
- 7 DeMille's powerful portrayal of the gentle Jesus (H.B. Warner) was certainly radical in its day wherein *any* cinematic image of Jesus was usually avoided; let alone a full-face slowly emerging on the screen to greet the audience's gaze. Equally noteworthy, if less appreciated, was DeMille's deft construction of Judas Iscariot (played by Joseph Schildkraut), the archetypal biblical betrayer that became DeMille's cine-biblical salvation in upholding his legendary reputation as a "stickler for authenticity" (Mickey Moore quoted in Orrison 96); and to belie those commentators who cannot go beyond viewing DeMille as only "the king of box-office hokum" (Eames 61).
- 8 Consequently, utilising humanist film criticism as the guiding analytical lens (i.e., examining the textual world *inside* the frame, but not the world *outside* the frame—see Bywater and Sobchack), the critical state-of-the-art DeMille, film and religion literature was selectively reviewed and integrated into the text to enhance narrative coherence (albeit, with a strong reportage flavour). This was followed by a close

examination of the construction of DeMille's Judas, a brief comparison of the character with some of his cinematic rivals, and a tentative exploration of DeMille's Christian true believer orientation encoded therein.

- 9 This investigation complements and expands upon the writer's previous research on the theme of Judasean betrayal within DeMille's films (Kozlovic). Furthermore, this renewed critical approach employing old paradigms and traditional methodologies will give new insights into DeMille and the Jesus genre previously ignored.

2. The Scriptural Judas

- 10 The biblical character "Judas Iscariot" (Matt. 26:14; Mark 14:10; John 12:4)³, the "Judas surnamed Iscariot" (Luke 22:3), son of Simon (John 6:71) is the infamous rogue Apostle who betrayed Jesus Christ. He is not to be confused with Juda the ancestor of Jesus (Luke 3:30), or Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37), or the Apostle Judas, the son of James, also called Thaddaeus (Mark 3:18), or the "Judas ... not Iscariot" (John 14:22). Nor is he to be confused with one of Jesus' four half-brothers called Judas (Matt. 13:55), or the Judas that Saul of Tarsus resided with (Acts 9:11), or "Judas surnamed Barsabas" (Acts 15:22) who accompanied Paul on his mission to Antioch.
- 11 The world-famous Judas is the quintessential biblical villain who "has become the archetype of traitors for all time, his name an immediately understood reference, in hundreds of languages, for betrayal" (Parris and Angel 140). Within Christian folklore, mythology and Western culture, he is the personification of evil, malice, greed, pride, mistrust, hypocrisy, scheming and betrayal. "His villainy was definitive" (Parris and Angel 139), especially when Jesus claimed: "woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed" (Luke 22:22). However, like Jesus, there is nothing known "about his background, about his physical appearance, or about his personality" (Parris and Angel 140).
- 12 Before becoming reviled throughout Christendom, Judas was selected by Jesus to be an Apostle, "one of the twelve" (Matt. 26:14; Mark 14:10; Luke 22:3; John 6:71), one of the "disciples" (John 12:4) responsible for promoting Jesus' teachings. His apostolic position was so important that after his ignominious death, Matthias took his place and missionary duties (Acts 1:15-26). Within that elite group of Jesus companions, Judas was entrusted with their finances, which has been interpreted within many Bible translations as "in charge of the disciples' funds" (John 12:6 TLB), "keeper of the money bag" (John 12:6 NIV), "the bag (the money box, the purse of the twelve)" (John 12:6 TAB). Since Judas is the group's chosen treasurer, it implies his dependability, trustworthiness and honesty to warrant such a responsible position.
- 13 However, most Christians do not doubt his negative reputation today. He was last on the list of the Apostles and referred to as "Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him [Jesus]" (Matt. 10:4), and elsewhere characterised as "the traitor" (Luke 6:16), "a thief" (John 12:6) and "a devil" (John 6:70-71). However, the Gospel account of his corruption is sparse, incomplete, vague, differing and sometimes ambiguous, with John suggesting that Judas was motivated by greed, which came to a head at the house of Simon the leper in Bethany (Matt. 26:6-14). Therein a "woman" (Mark 14:3), "Mary" (John 12:3), had poured "very precious ointment" (Matt. 26:7), the "ointment of spikenard, very costly" (John 12:3), "very precious" (Mark 14:3) over Jesus' "head" (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3). She also "anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair" (John 12:3), but "when his *disciples* saw it, *they* had indignation" (Matt. 26:8) [my emphasis], "*some* that had indignation within *themselves*" (Mark 14:4) [my emphasis].

Therefore, “one of his [Jesus'] disciples, Judas Iscariot” (John 12:4) spoke up saying: “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?” (John 12:5).

- 14 In the remaining Gospels, Judas was not named or singled out, in fact, there appeared to be a small group of disciples against wasting the precious ointment upon Jesus. For example, “To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor” (Matt. 26:8-9). “Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And *they* murmured against her” (Mark 14:4-5) [my emphasis].
- 15 Jesus defended Mary and her anointing action, in what could be seen as an act of divine self-pampering (Matt. 26:10-13). John goes a step further by casting dispersions upon Judas claiming: “He did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a *thief*, he used to *help himself* to what was put into it” (John 12:6 NIV) [my emphasis]. Alternately, “he took for himself what was put into it” (John 12:6 TAB), “sometimes would steal from it” (John 12:6 TBFT), “he was a thief ... and pilfered what was put in” (John 12:6 Moffatt). After Christ's rebuff of the disciples and/or stinging Judasean putdown after the Last Supper, Judas committed the infamous act that severed him from Jesus, his Apostle peers, and the rest of Christendom forevermore. Namely, “one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests” (Matt. 26:14) “to betray him [Jesus] unto them” (Mark 14:10). So, Judas “went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him [Jesus] unto them” (Luke 22:4).

3. Judas: Crooked or Concerned?

- 16 At this narrative juncture, it appears that Judas was understandably concerned about costs and waste as the keeper of the group's purse, but unlike Richard Walsh who considered that DeMille's “greedy Judas [was situated] between [the] equally greedy Caiaphas and the ethereal Jesus” (*Reading* 35), the writer argues that DeMille's prime motivation for his Judas going to the priest-leaders was rooted more in disappointment and revenge than money. After all, Judas could have worn the chastisement, bided his time and continued to drain the moneybag if he really was a despicable thief as John asserts. Why kill the proverbial golden goose and lose easy money in the long-run by such a disastrous short-term strategy?
- 17 If money was a factor, then it appeared to be only a minor secondary motivation. When Judas met with the high priests, he said: “What will ye give me, and I will deliver him [Jesus] unto? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him” (Matt. 26:15-16). “And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him [Jesus]” (Mark 14:11), “And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude” (Luke 22:6).
- 18 At this fateful meeting, there is no outrageously high price demanded by Judas, there is no compromise counter-offer, there is no haggling process at all for an allegedly greedy man. (DeMille would dramatically show this haggling process between Rameses [Yul Brynner] and Dathan [Edward G. Robinson] in the second *The Ten Commandments* when Dathan, who knew who Baka's [Vincent Price's] murderer was and could ensure Rameses ascendancy to the pharaohship). The strong impression is that Judas would have taken anything offered, or done it for free, if nothing was offered. In fact, Judas does not ask for money *per se*, but rather, the vaguer question: “What will ye give

me"? This request could have included money, but was not limited to it, especially when sex, power, position, gifts and favours are traditional substitutes. In fact, it was *the priests* who first offered Judas money, thus forging another long association between religion, Jews and currency.

- 19 Although greed is implied in this scene, DeMille's Judas is not even interested in the money because he is "hunched over his knees, hands clasped, the picture of misery ... [while] Caiaphas counts out the coins on the table in front of him" (Reinhartz 156). One would imagine a covetous eye upon the money and its correct counting, followed by intense personal satisfaction (not misery) if greed was truly Judas' root motivation. Even then, the priestly financial offer was primarily symbolic, not commercial:

Thirty pieces of silver (\$66, if shekels) was the price offered. (Mt 26:14, 15) The sum fixed by the religious leaders appears designed to show their contempt of Jesus, viewing him as of little value. According to Exodus 21:32, the price of a slave was 30 shekels. Carrying this forward, for his work as a shepherd of the people, Zechariah was paid "thirty pieces of silver." Jehovah scorned this as a very meager amount, regarding the wages given to Zechariah as an estimation of how one faithless people viewed God himself. (Zec 11:12, 13). Consequently, in offering just 30 pieces of silver for Jesus, the religious leaders made him out to be of little value (WTBTSP/IBSA 130).

- 20 In short, Caiaphas' (Rudolph Schildkraut's) financial offer was nothing that would even remotely tempt a truly greedy man. As Parris and Angel put it: "Yet for selling his Messiah for only thirty pieces of silver, Judas Iscariot deserves a measure of sympathy. He got a worse deal than countless successors who were to sell less for more" (139). For example, even in the Old Testament, when Delilah betrayed the secret of Samson's strength, she got 1,100 pieces of silver from *each* of the lords of the Philistines (Judg. 16:5), traditionally assumed to be five (Judg. 3:3; 1 Sam. 6:16), thus, 5,500 pieces of silver in total. Judas' thirty pieces of silver was so pitifully small (i.e., 0.5% of Delilah's take) that when he remorsefully attempted to return the money, the scheming Caiaphas refused it and contemptuously said: "What is that to us?" (Matt. 27:4). This callous comment referred to the amount of money or Judas' back-peddalling desire for restitution, or both. Caiaphas' unwavering and villainous rejection of this "easy" money is even more significant given the popularly perceived reputation of the Jew's love of money (and DeMille's intertitle claim of him caring "more for Revenue than for Religion").
- 21 The alleged Judasean greed motivation pales even further because of the scripturally based spiritual cause of Judas' betrayal, and which was *not* presented as symbolic, namely, "supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot ... to betray him [Jesus]" (John 13:2), "Then entered Satan into Judas" (Luke 22:3), "Satan entered into him" (John 13:27). Not only did the devil/Satan enter into Judas, but: "Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly" (John 13:27). This was apparently part of the divine plan for as Jesus said: "And truly the Son of man goeth, *as it was determined*" (Luke 22:22) [my emphasis], "remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man *must be delivered* into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified" (Luke 24:6-7) [my emphasis]. If Judas was possessed by the devil/Satan, with Jesus' knowledge and speed request, can Judas legitimately be held accountable for his subsequent betrayer actions? Judas acted like a cosmic puppet whilst being encouraged, condoned and tacitly approved of by the knowing Christ.

- 22 Alternately, was Judas possessed by the devil/Satan as part of God's larger plan? Similar to King Saul being harassed by God when "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit *from* the Lord troubled him (1 Sam. 16:14) [my emphasis], or when Samson demanded to be married to an outsider/foreigner/Philistine woman instead of one from his own tribe/religion /ethnicity (Judg. 14:1-3). Why? Because "his father and his mother knew not that *it was of the Lord*, that *he sought an occasion against* the Philistines" (Judg. 14:4) [my emphasis]. That is, it was "part of a deliberate divine strategy that might be described as a policy of "pretext," by which Samson's connection with Philistine women was intended to provide him justification for harming the Philistines by a series of annoyances and not by wars of deliverance" (Berlin, Brettler and Fishbane 541). "Samson is an unwitting tool, manipulated by YHWH" (Streete 54), he is a cosmic patsy who subsequently acted like "a Danite Terminator ... It is in fact his God-ordained duty to behave irrationally—he is meant to get the rebellion started, to "begin the deliverance of Israel" [Judg. 13:5]" (Wurtzel 47).
- 23 God/Jehovah/YHWH likewise manipulated the Pharaoh of the Exodus and even told Moses his battle plan, namely: "And *I* will harden Pharaoh's heart" (Exod. 7:3) [my emphasis], which he repeatedly did (Exod. 7:13-14), despite the Pharaoh *repeatedly capitulating* to God. However, God kept interfering with Pharaoh as part of his divine charade for holy exemplar reasons: "*I* have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that *I* might shew these my signs before him" (Exod. 10:1) [my emphasis]. The deliberate hardening of Pharaoh's heart by God occurred after the plague of locusts (Exod. 10:20), and after the plague of darkness (Exod. 10:27), and after the killing of the first born of Egypt (Exod. 11:10; 12:29) utilising Moses as some sort of Hebrew union representative. Then God allowed the Pharaoh to let his people go (Exod. 12:31-32), but soon after the exodus started, God hardened the Pharaoh's heart and of his servants, charioteers and horsemen, yet again (Exod. 14:4, 5, 8, 17), thus leading to the horrendous drowning of the pursuing Egyptians in the collapsing Red Sea.
- 24 The Pharaoh was set-up by God, yet today the Pharaoh is the personification of anti-God recalcitrance! DeMille put his unique spin on this biblical fact within his second *The Ten Commandments* when Nefretiri (Anne Baxter) said: "Who else can soften Pharaoh's heart? Or harden it?" and Moses (Charlton Heston) replied: "Yes—you may be the lovely dust through which God will work His purpose" (i.e., conceding that the pagan Egyptian Nefretiri could be an instrument of God for the salvation of the Hebrews).
- 25 Therefore, is not Judas in the Bible and *The King of Kings* just another example of God's divine charade in accordance with Jesus' prayer to God where he dutifully reported playing his part so "that the scripture might be fulfilled" (John 17:12)? After all, Jesus was aware of his divine destiny: "For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him" (John 6:64). "For he knew who should betray him" (John 13:11), which involved hands, eating, dishes and bread as prophesised from days of old (Psalms 41:9), as confirmed in Jesus' time (Matt. 26:23) and subsequently re-enacted (John 13:26-27).
- 26 Jesus even confirmed Judas as the predicted betrayer: "Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said [it]" (Matt. 26:25), and so one can see Judas-the-martyr being part of God's divine plan for the greater cosmic good. "Indeed, one might even argue that Judas' betrayal had good consequences. His action led to Christ's death, and Christ's death redeemed us, saving

countless human beings from eternal damnation. If any action in the history of the world has produced the greatest good for the greatest number, surely this one did!" (Lannstrom 249). "Of course, theologically, Jesus' death was part of God's plan. For, had Jesus not been persecuted and crucified, there would be no redemption" (Deacy 121) and maybe no Christianity as we know it today.

- 27 The greed motivation for Judas' betrayer behaviour also fails for a second time. After Judas betrayed Christ in the garden of Gethsemane with the now famous Judas kiss, Jesus was arrested and forcibly taken away (Matt. 26:47-49; John 18:1-13). Consequently, Judas felt great remorse for his deed and the following day repented, admitted his sin of betraying innocent blood, and tried to return the thirty pieces of silver to the high priests and their henchmen to get some absolution. Yet, they refused him and the money, so Judas threw away the pieces of silver into the temple and proceeded to kill himself (Matt. 27:1-5).
- 28 This was hardly the selfish act of a greed-infected person, but more understandable if Judas really was devil/Satan possessed. Why? Because after the evil deed was done, presumably once the possessing entity had departed, Judas reverted to "normal" and realised the enormity of his (evil spirit-inspired) treacherous deed. He then tried to correct it, was rebuked, and so failing in that self-cleansing task sought to punish himself with a deed commensurate with his perceived crime. Judas' self-sacrifice for personal reasons had therefore prefigured Jesus' self-sacrifice for cosmic reasons.
- 29 Alternately, if the treacherous motivation was truly an evil intent, whether a literal devil/Satan possessing Judas, or just a symbolic metaphor for revenge (whether psychologically or emotionally induced), financial greed is still a very weak motivation for betraying Jesus. Some biblical scholars even argue that Judas was Jesus' friend and was grossly misunderstood (see Klassen); however, few biblical scholars go beyond the traditional greed-based interpretation, but very refreshingly, *not* Jesus filmmakers. How one cinematically portrays Judas is ultimately rooted in whether one is a Christian true believer or not. As Gerald Forshey argued:

Did God plan to have his son murdered? According to the Gospel accounts, Judas caused the crucifixion because that was his role in the divine plan. But for those who do not believe that the supernatural intervenes into the natural order, Judas loses his legitimacy. This raises the question of why Judas betrayed Jesus—complicated by an additional consideration: Was it possible that the infallible Christ made a mistake in choosing Judas as a disciple? Or given divine foreknowledge of his fate, did Jesus masochistically seek self-destruction? Various film interpretations of Judas's role seek to resolve those perennial questions (801).

4. DeMille's Judas: Disaffected, Diseased or Demonic?

- 30 But what of DeMille's Judas played by Joseph Schildkraut? DeMille-the-lay-biblical-scholar did not believe that "thirty pieces of silver" (Matt. 26:15) was sufficient financial motivation for Judas to betray Jesus (Solomon 113). Consequently, his Judas only expressed political disappointment with Jesus after he rejected his king-making attempts and when "all hope of earthly kingdom gone," not because he could no longer pilfer from the Apostle's money bag, or make a financial killing with the High Priest's contemptuously small amount of silver. Indeed, DeMille's Judas already looked rich and wealthy as indicated by his dapper appearance and ability to afford the company of such high-class courtesans like Mary Magdalene (Jacqueline Logan) operating within her sumptuous palace with multiple handmaidens, servants, animals and exotic zebra-drawn chariots. This wealthy Magdalene thought Judas so important (and rich?) that

she left her palace (and presumably her other paying customers) to pursue Judas who found the company of some wandering carpenter from Nazareth preferable to her own attentions (i.e., the defection of a paying customer worthy of her time, financial losses and personal reputation). In short, DeMille's Judas simply did *not* need such a small amount of blood-money.

- 31 He openly signalled his non-greed interpretation in an intertitle that did not identify Judas the Greedy, but rather: "Judas Iscariot ... the Ambitious, who joined the Disciples in the belief that Jesus would be the nation's King, and reward him with honor and high office." The crucial turning point for DeMille's Judas occurred when Jesus preached about a heavenly kingdom, not an earthly one, which severely disappointed Judas-the-ambitious and led him to betray Jesus to the High Priest. His ambitious desires were also indicated earlier when Jesus cured the blind child and Judas lamented: "Would He [Jesus] but shun the Poor, and heal the Rich, *we* could straightaway make Him King—with *me on His right hand!*" [my emphasis]. DeMille also captured the expression of the utterly baffled Judas who appeared unable to grasp the notion of a transcendental kingdom, and so when the promise of an earthly political kingdom evaporated and Judas' ambitions were well-and-truly dashed, he spiralled into depression-filled decline.
- 32 Although Judas' character was initially portrayed as being situated "between greedy, earthly Caiaphas and unearthly Jesus" (Goldburg 13), DeMille-the-film-artist reflected Judas' personal and political disappointment as a king-making wannabe via his rapid physical deterioration on-screen. Judas' usually neat, combed hair become tangled and unkempt as he slowly dissolves into a dishevelled lunatic bordering upon insanity prior to betraying Jesus to the High Priest, and then despairingly choosing suicide—the ultimate act of personal deterioration. By resorting to psychologically-induced deterioration instead of spirit possession by the devil/Satan, DeMille had opted for a religiously safer, if more mundane cause. This dramatic choice also reflected his auteuristic trademark of engineered ambiguity because it could be argued that the evil devil/Satan idea was just a metaphor for psychological infirmity using a medical model of illness.
- 33 DeMille-the-fundamentalist-and-Christian-true-believer should have portrayed the spirit possession interpretation according to an uncomplicated literal reading of Scripture, but DeMille-the-rational-modernist won this interpretative battle. In either case, DeMille accurately showed that Judas' betrayal was due to "other" forces than the traditional greed motive. Thus, in this sense, he is more authentic to the scriptural accounts than those who cannot transcend the greed interpretation of Judas' betrayal. DeMille was also biblically accurate in depicting his Judas being remorseful, guilt-ridden, and throwing the money back at the temple to repudiate his deal with the Jewish religious hierarchy. This was followed by his suicide, with the implication that it was a momentary aberration of peak grief, excessive depression or temporary insanity (spiritual possession?) which bore tragic consequences. If DeMille disappoints it is because he did not follow traditional anti-Judas folklore, but chose sacred fact over secular accretions. At least, DeMille was more truthful in his cinematic depiction than the second-century Bishop of Hierapolis in Papias whose description of Judas with a swollen body, recessed eyes and repellent genitals is so hyperbolic that it is unbelievable (see Parris and Angel 140-41).

- 34 DeMille-the-master-synthesiser foreshadowed Judas' betrayal by employing shifty eye movements, lack of attention to Jesus' words, and by placing him in dark, shadowy corners as opposed to Jesus who is in well-lit, centred areas. This gives the impression that Judas is in the background plotting for power with, and then later against, Jesus. DeMille accentuated the difference between the earthly-focused Judas and the heavenly-focused Jesus in three ways. Firstly, Judas held children back in an unkind way, whereas Jesus lovingly embraced them with fatherly compassion, including fixing a child's broken doll. Not only is DeMille's Jesus the mender of dolls, but this physical act spiritually resonated with the Gospel function of Jesus-the-heavenly-Father compassionately mending human souls.
- 35 Secondly, the doll scene also resonated with God as the maker and shaper of humankind's form in his role as divine Creator, and with the accompanying image of an interventionist God who fixes things if asked, and which Jesus' physical incarnation on Earth dramatically demonstrated. DeMille's doll scenes made Jesus look majestic and humble, heavenly and earthly, ethereal and pragmatic at the same time.
- 36 Thirdly, within the New Testament, good children figuratively represent those exercising faith in Christ and are worthy of being called "the children of God ... heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:16-17). Jesus endearingly referred to his disciples as "Little children" (John 13:33), "the children which God hath given me" (Heb. 2:13), and argued that: "whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me" (Matt. 18:5). Rather than being a kitsch scene mired in the mundane (although it works well on this level), DeMille's on-screen children made an important, if indirect, theological point. Namely, as Judas had rejected the children, the "joint-heirs with Christ," DeMille was saying that Judas had rejected Jesus and the "good" disciples, thus reinforcing the overall Judasean theme of betrayal and separation. Indeed, the biblical harsh punishment for rejecting children (Matt. 18:6) paralleled the harsh punishment for rejecting Jesus (Matt. 26:24). Judas rejected the children in the doll scene and later he died a grisly, regretful death (Matt. 27:5; Acts 1:18), thereby confirming Jesus' word and divine status. It was another brilliant example of DeMille's multi-layered meaning-making, albeit, frequently ignored by decrying critics all too eager to deride him for his kitsch aesthetics and so did not actively look for any deeper theological meaning.
- 37 Indeed, DeMille engaged in his own subtle form of Judasean character assassination, which jibbed with his auteur penchant for fusing the comic with the serious. This occurred when Judas attempted to mimic the Masters' divine healing ability. As Gordon Thomas described the scene:
- During the miracles that make up the first half of the film, Judas ... can be charmingly befuddled. In his best scene, while waiting for Jesus to show up, he attempts to cure a demented (retarded?) child; he passes his hand over him in the exact manner of the Master, but it's a no go. There's a lighthearted feel: the other disciples are bemused by his efforts (*there he goes again*), an even Judas is exasperated only fleetingly, like he's trying to fix a busted radio and can't—but only because Jesus has access to better parts (3).
- 38 DeMille-the-harmoniser's construction of this scene allowed for at least five different interpretations. Firstly, for the anti-Judas forces, Judas was presumptuous and impertinent for trying to out-do the Master (i.e., Judas thought that he was as good as Jesus), which acted as a highlighter of Judas-the-ambitious and a binary precursor to his subsequent downfall.

- 39 Secondly, because his fellow disciples looked down upon his fumbling efforts, this implied that Judas was “stupid” for misunderstanding his place and/or role in the grand scheme of things (i.e., Judas was the Apostle’s equivalent of a village idiot).
- 40 Thirdly, Judas was ineffectual in his divine healing efforts (i.e., a failure; possibly a poor or slow learner), which further served to highlight Judas’ demonstrable difference-cum-outsider status.
- 41 Fourthly, Judas’ behaviour indicated that he was not made of the “right stuff” to be a “good” disciple (i.e., presumptuous, low frustration tolerance; a lack of personal persistence, foolish, gullible, ineffectual), which further underscored his “bad” disciple status and associated character assassination.
- 42 Fifthly, for anti-religionists and atheists, Judas’ attempt to mimic Jesus implied his naivety because he foolishly assumed these healing powers were literally real and could be duplicated by “normal” others. It also implied Jesus’ potential chicanery because the healing feat could not be duplicated (with repeatability being a scientific criterion of truth).
- 43 Overall, the audience could view this scene selectively and find some support for their differing personal biases. The satisfaction of so many customers simultaneously would have made DeMille-the-businessman happy as he nattily executed his Jesus business plan.

5. A Bunch of Betrayers: Some Rivals of DeMille’s Judas

- 44 There are many on-screen Judas characters to choose from and discuss (see Goldberg; Paffenroth, *Depictions, Images*; Reinhartz; Telford; Walsh *Myth*), and thus many root motivations to explore, but if one briefly examines some selected examples, what is found, and how do they compare? For example, Judas (Robert G. Vignola) in Sidney Olcott’s *From the Manger to the Cross* was rebuked by Jesus when he complained about the waste involved when a woman anointed Jesus’ feet with costly perfume. Consequently, a miffed “Judas goes out after Jesus scolds him, suggesting it was at this point that he decided to betray Jesus” (Lang 46).
- 45 Judas (Ian McShane) in Franco Zeffirelli’s *Jesus of Nazareth* was more concerned with the politics of Roman oppression than Jewish prophecy. He was unaware of the Sanhedrin’s plot to kill Jesus and wanted to use Jesus as a vehicle for Jewish political aspirations, the rejuvenation of the Israelite kingdom, and an earthly reign of peace and stability, just like DeMille’s Judas. Zeffirelli’s Judas did not see Jesus as the Messiah of the spiritual arena, nor did he comprehend the transcendental aspects of his ministry. Rather, he saw him as a local messiah, a political deliverer of superior intellect and ability who had brilliant tactical strategies against the Romans. When Judas realised that Jesus was not interested in earthly political power, he abandoned loyalty and devotion to him. This turning point is clearly given via the fictional character of Zerah (Ian Holm) when he refers to Jesus’ lack of political shrewdness, therefore, Zeffirelli’s Judas betrayed Jesus as a test of his true Messiahship, but which backfired badly (Barclay 92).
- 46 In Charles Robert Carner’s *Judas*, Johnathon Schaech portrayed Judas Iscariot as a hot-headed, cynical, embittered, manipulative political zealot who chaffed under Roman tyranny, who did not understand Jesus’ spiritual mission, and repeatedly wanted Jesus (Jonathan Scarfe) to follow *him* rather than the other way around. He desperately advocated the path of anti-Roman violence rather than the path of peace, and

eventually betrayed Jesus as a form of revenge when his revolutionary aspirations were dashed and he became disenchanted. To accentuate Judas' difference, he was characterised as a city sophisticate whilst the other Apostles were rural disciples, almost country bumpkins in demeanour.

- 47 Pier Paolo Pasolini's ugly Judas (Otello Sestili) in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* implied that he betrayed the beautiful, black-robed Christ (Enrique Irazoqui) out of deceit, hatred and jealousy.
- 48 Martin Scorsese's Jesus (Willem Dafoe) in *The Last Temptation of Christ* was betrayed by the pushy, red-haired, New York accented Harvey Keitel as Judas, referred to on-screen as "the red devil." His black clothing dramatically contrasted the white/cream coloured robes of the other disciples. Unlike DeMille's or Pasolini's Judas, Scorsese's Judas committed his act of betrayal out of loyalty to Jesus' mission in the tradition of William Klassen's *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus?* Scorsese's wimpish, neurotic Jesus doubts his divinity and mission and so Judas acted as a messianic coach-cum-catalyst, otherwise, Jesus would have failed to get himself crucified for the good of humanity. Therefore, Scorsese's Judas was as important as Jesus for the enfolding of God's divine plan. DeMille's spiritually, morally and physically weak-Judas (but strong-Christ) appears to be more in harmony with biblical sentiment than Scorsese's strong-Judas (but weak-Christ) inversion of the scriptural account.
- 49 Another powerful and physically distinctive Judas was Carl Anderson in *Jesus Christ, Superstar*. He is fascinating because this Judas was a Negro (i.e., not white or an olive ethnic Jew), thus cinematically associating the archetypal betrayer with the black community (instead of that other persecuted ethnic group—the Jews). There is hint of a racial slur here because he is easily differentiated from the rest of the Apostles who are not black. Artistically, it was even more of a revelation to audiences when "this black singer-actor, dressed in a sparkling white disco outfit, boogies down to the beat of the song "Jesus Christ Superstar" while his dancing soul sisters in silvery bikini tops magically appear behind him. To complete this feast for the eyes, a series of bright neon crosses appear, and begin waving back and forth in time to the music" (Medved and Medved 98-99).
- 50 Although not as hip-and-cool as Carl Anderson, DeMille's Judas was also distinctive for his day. DeMille portrayed him as young, handsome, elegant, clean-shaven, richly garmented, a playboy type, and according to Peter Matthews, a "foppish, young blue blood, rising politico" (1). This immediately tagged him as different from the other disciples who were predominantly bearded, less dapper, earthier, older looking, more serious in demeanour and not politically ambitious. He certainly did not match the usually bearded, radical or rough-looking cinematic Judas in the ancient symbolic tradition of beauty-equals-goodness-and-purity, whilst ugliness-equals-evilness-and-immorality (Lorand). Nor did DeMille match the physiognomy practices of Pier Paolo Pasolini in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* whose evil Judas (Otello Sestili) was physically ugly in the symbolic tradition of blight-equals-moral corruption.
- 51 At first glance, it was an uncharacteristic binary inversion for DeMille-the-auteur that implied a "beautiful/good" Judas characterisation, as also indicated by his Judas giving up a bad woman (i.e., Mary Magdalene) to follow a good man (i.e., Jesus Christ). However, this criticism is quickly mitigated when one acknowledges that the biblical Judas was originally good enough for Jesus to select him as one of the twelve Apostles, but who subsequently goes "bad" (for whatever reason). In fact, DeMille-the-cinematic-

lay-preacher had been biblically authentic concerning the palpable decline in Judas' moral career by tracking his inner decay as reflected in Judas' declining outer appearance (i.e., from handsome to dishevelled ugliness). DeMille should be congratulated for portraying this pronounced moral metamorphosis unlike other cinematic Judases who appear to be consistently "evil" from beginning to end, and thus scripturally unauthentic.

- 52 Carl Anderson's Judas in *Jesus Christ, Superstar* is also important from a screen-time perspective. This Jesus film is as much about Judas' passion as it was about Jesus' passion. Both holy characters were treated as if they were just two different sides of the same missionary coin. Indeed, Judas Iscariot (Johnathon Schaech) became the star of his own film in Charles Robert Carner's *Judas*. This film explored his single-parent family and working life as a lowly wine-seller, the crucifixion death of his equally revolutionary father, and the illness-cum-death of his loving mother whom he dearly loved and for whom the High Priest Caiaphas (Bob Gunton) gave him the infamous amount of silver to cover her funeral expenses (but not for betraying Jesus). In a thematically resonant plot twist for this infamous betrayer, Judas was himself betrayed by a close friend to the Jewish authorities and eventually became Caiaphas' spy in Jesus' camp as a consequence.
- 53 DeMille's Judas also gets extra (not scripturally recorded) screen time and other extra-cinematic references indicative of his pivotal role in the filmic scheme of things. Particularly, at the beginning of the film when Mary Magdalene (Jacqueline Logan) was upset because Judas favoured the company of a vagabond carpenter to her own erotic company. Originally, "DeMille was insistent on developing a love story between Judas and Mary Magdalene, which was derived "out of some ancient and little-known German legend of the Middle Ages" (Birchard 219), but the idea was eventually abandoned and only an echo of this relationship remained in the film's opening sequence.
- 54 Nevertheless, DeMille's ranking in the cast list of "The Twelve Disciples" (Ringgold and Bodeen 252) indicated further subtle evidence for Judas' importance in DeMille's schema. Instead of being the last of the twelve according to the Gospel listings (Matt. 10:4; Luke 6:16), Judas is ranked second, just under Peter (Ernst Torrence) and before James (James Neill). Yet, in the Apostle cast list for *Jesus of Nazareth* in William Barclay's novelisation and the *Jesus of Nazareth. The Easter Message* promotion booklet photographed by Paul Ronald (n.p.n.), Judas Iscariot is rightfully placed last on the list of twelve Apostles (128).
- 55 In *Pontius Pilate*, John Drew Barrymore played both Jesus and Judas Iscariot (in back views) which symbolically suggested that the directors thought Jesus-Judas were an intimate pairing beyond time, location and history. In *Godspell*, David Haskell played both John the Baptist and Judas Iscariot, thus suggesting another intimate pairing, whereas the intimate pairing in *The King of Kings* was not between Judas (Joseph Schildkraut) and Jesus (H.B. Warner), but between Judas (Joseph Schildkraut) and Caiaphas (Rudolf Schildkraut). They were a father-and-son acting team and Jews in real life, which had deep symbolic ramifications for DeMille's view on the degree of culpability of the Jews for Jesus' death (see Kozlovic).
- 56 Judas is a fascinating character, the subject of many telemovies, miniseries and feature films (Campbell and Pitts), and a very important fine arts character inextricably linked to Jesus, particularly the Judas kiss betrayal scene (Bernard 210, 211; Dore 205). All of which are important, the focus of DeMille's own intense research, consultative and

artistic efforts (DeMille and Hayne 254-56; Higham 161-62), but beyond the scope of this research.

6. The Death of Judas and the Cine-Biblical Salvation of DeMille

- 57 Judas' death is intriguing and where DeMille-the-auteur had proved himself a Christian true believer, an innovative filmmaker, and a master of the American biblical epic. According to Matthew 27:5, Judas "went and hanged himself" in the "field of blood" (Matt. 27:8), but according to Acts 1:18, Judas went "falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out." The place where he died was called "Aceldama ... The field of blood" (Acts 1:19).
- 58 Therefore, which scriptural account is correct—hanging or disembowelment? Traditionally speaking, hanging is the most favoured cinematic option, as dramatically portrayed in *Judas*, however, DeMille did not avoid this apparent dilemma, as George Stevens did in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* via the completely unscriptural depiction of Judas (David McCallum) falling into a fiery pit in the temple courtyard to end it all, and with no hanging rope in sight! Nor did DeMille depict just a hanged Judas or just a disembowelled Judas, rather, he synthesised both scriptural accounts into one credible harmonising whole, even if cinematically favouring the hanging scene a little more than the disembowelling.
- 59 In a series of dramatic intercut scenes, DeMille depicted a despairing Judas watching Jesus' crucifixion from afar whilst high atop the edge of a small cliff face. This spot had a tree with a single thick limb jutting out over a precipice. Judas was palpably shocked by the painful agony Jesus was suffering and so he became increasingly unhinged and slowly prepared to kill himself as a consequence. He deliberately wrapped a rope noose around his neck, stood on the edge of the precipice, and (unseen) launched himself into oblivion (and biblical immortality). His ignominious dead body was seen hanging from the outstretched limb of the tree, which dangled precariously over the precipice. An earthquake linked to Jesus' death immediately demolished the cliff face and uprooted the tree, which plummeted into the cavernous earth below (metaphorically Hell) carrying Judas' body with it to inevitably rupture upon impact at the bottom of the deep ravine (unscreened but strongly implied).
- 60 Overall, it was a cine-biblical depiction of Judas' death worthy of a Christian true believer, a master synthesiser, and an innovative lay biblical scholar that also firmly belied the claim that DeMille's films "added nothing to film art" (Wexman 83). Not only does it justify C.B.'s artistic salvation, but theologically speaking, half-a-century later, DeMille's depiction was deemed a fair and reasonable solution to the apparent biblical conundrum. Why? Because "Matthew seems to deal with the *mode* of the attempted suicide, while Acts describes the *results*. Combining the two accounts, it appears that Judas tried to hang himself over some cliff, but the rope or tree limb broke so that he plunged down and burst open on the rocks below. The topography around Jerusalem makes such an event conceivable" (*WTBTSP/IBSA* 130). Of course, one wonders how much DeMille's cinematic solution helped latter day biblical scholars come to the same conclusion.

7. Conclusion

- 61 Overall, DeMille was technically more accurate, his nuances much subtler and richer, his drama more dramatic, and his cinematic sins less grievous than many of his directorial rivals right up to and including Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, whose own depiction of Judas is equally fascinating (see Lannstrom). Yet, despite

DeMille's legendary status and popular acclaim, his biblical artistry is still grossly unappreciated, let alone applauded or honoured as befitting a master of the American biblical epic. As demonstrated above, his Judas had skilfully encoded many interlocking theological issues and aesthetic layers about this most famous of biblical betrayers, which was unacknowledged previously.

- 62 Further investigations into DeMille studies, Hollywood epics, and the emerging interdisciplinary field of religion-and-film are recommended, warranted, and already long overdue. Areas of specific interest would be the exploration of the diverse reception of his biblical films per religious grouping (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, Jewish) within the United States of America and cultures outside of it. This effort will further broaden the scope of the research, enrich the diverse pluralist content found therein, and significantly renew appreciation of the unsung portions of DeMille's life, art and career as the acknowledged "master of the grandiose and of biblical sagas" (Louvish xiv).

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The Last Temptation of Christ (1988, dir. Martin Scorsese)

The Passion of the Christ (2004, dir. Mel Gibson)

The Ten Commandments (1923, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)

The Ten Commandments (1956, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)

NOTES

1. Many scholars have spelled Cecil's surname as "De Mille" or "de Mille" or "deMille" however, the correct professional spelling is "DeMille" (DeMille and Hayne 6), which will be employed herein along with its concomitant "C.B." as appropriate.

2. There is not one DeMille but many DeMille personas who did numerous jobs and played multiple roles. His career was so long, complex and multi-faceted that to describe, let alone justify each aspect would be prohibitive. Therefore, concise hyphenated compound terms will be used herein to help disentangle his various roles and avoid needless explanation, repetition or reader boredom.

3. The Authorized King James Version of the Bible (KJV aka AV) will be used throughout, unless quoting other translations (i.e., Moffatt, NIV, TAB, TLB, TBFT), because most of the biblical phrases that are embedded in Western culture are from the King James Version, which is one of the most widely used English translation today (Taylor ix, 71).

ABSTRACTS

Cecil B. DeMille, the legendary cofounder of Hollywood, progenitor of Paramount studio, and unsung Christian auteur was a master of the American biblical epic whose indelible classics became the template for numerous ancient epics thereafter. Utilising humanist film criticism as the guiding analytical lens, the critical DeMille, film and religion literature was selectively reviewed and his silent Jesus film, *The King of Kings* (1927) was closely examined to reveal his dramatic construction of Judas Iscariot, which was briefly compared to some cinematic rivals to highlight its frequent superiority. Often unappreciated was DeMille's harmonisation of the conflicting hanging versus disembowelment accounts of Judas' demise. It was concluded that DeMille was a defter biblical filmmaker than has been hitherto appreciated. Further research into DeMille studies, Hollywood epics, and the emerging interdisciplinary field of religion-and-film is recommended, warranted, and already long overdue.

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