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SUICIDE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD : A RE-EXAMINATION OF MATTHEW 27:3-10

Caroline F. WHELAN

RÉSUMÉ : La mort de Judas dans l'évangile selon Matthieu a été interprétée habituellement d'une façon négative. Cette interprétation est peut-être due à une vue post-augustinienne du suicide. L'article a pour but de proposer une nouvelle façon de comprendre la mort de Judas par un examen du suicide dans le contexte des valeurs honneur-honte du monde ancien. Ce n'est qu'après une telle étude que l'on peut s'acheminer vers une compréhension des raisons qui auraient poussé Matthieu à parler de la mort de Judas et, plus particulièrement, à la considérer comme un suicide.

SUMMARY : The death of Judas in the gospel of Matthew has been widely interpreted in a negative light, perhaps as a result of viewing his suicide through post-Augustinian eyes. The aim of this paper is to propose a new understanding of the death of Judas by examining the valuation of suicide within the context of the honour-shame values of the ancient world. Only once this has been accomplished can we move toward an understanding of Matthew's motive in recording Judas' death, and more particularly, in recording it as a suicide.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout his Gospel, and in particular in the Passion Narrative, Matthew heightens the role of Peter by making him the representative disciple. He does so by frequently inserting the name Peter (eight times in paralleled material)[1] or the "disciples" (thirty-one times in paralleled material)[2] to set him apart from the rest. Judas is also set apart from the others. Twice, Judas is designated as "one of the twelve," first in the initial consultation with the chief priests (26:14) and second during the betrayal scene (26:47). In both instances the appositive has been moved up to heighten

1. Robert H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982, p. 531.
2. *Ibid.*

the deceit of the deed.[3] Matthew's designation of Peter and Judas in this way cleverly illustrates the cruel irony of the situation. Peter functions as a spokesperson or representative disciple, the first of the disciples to have been called (4:18; 10:2-4), albeit, the first among equals.[4] This is played off against Judas' title as "one of the twelve" which emphasizes the gravity of his crime. By setting them apart in this way, Matthew parallels their roles as disciples in order to contrast their behaviour.[5]

In examining the juxtaposition of Peter and Judas, an important observation emerges. There is a general scholarly tendency to view Peter in a positive light[6], while Judas is almost always negatively cast. Nowhere is this more evident than in the perception of Judas' death.

A survey of literature on Mt 27:3-10 reveals that the life and death of Judas is generally negatively interpreted. Many commentators see his death as a warning to others. According to William Thompson, for example, "his example warns the Christians at Antioch against similar agreements with the Pharisees at Jamnia."[7] For Wolfgang Trilling, the death of Judas was the fitting punitive end to a life of betrayal and deceit: "The death of Judas shows once more that death is in principle the consequence of sin and the ratification of its power."[8] For others, his death was merely the dismal end to a dismal life: "He is further proof that men and nations which are morally and spiritually dead proceed then to be their own hangmen in physical death."[9] Perhaps most striking is the generalization that his life and death were generally agreed upon to be worthless: "The early church was sure that Judas came to a 'bad end'."[10]

Frequently, interpreters connect the death of Judas with that of Ahithophel (2 Sam 17:23). The comparison focusses on the mode of death (hanging) and the political struggles (i.e., between David and Absalom).[11] The comparison, however, is less convincing on further scrutiny. First, in the 2 Samuel account, Ahithophel gives bad counsel to Absalom, but no betrayal takes place. Moreover, Ahithophel commits suicide when "his counsel was not followed" (2 Sam 17:23). As his advice was normally

3. *Ibid.*, p. 522, 536.

4. See J.D. KINGSBURY, "The Figure of Peter in Matthew's Gospel as a Theological Problem," *JBL* 98 (1979), p. 67-83, esp. p. 81-82.

5. Throughout the Matthean Passion Narrative, there are several other parallels at work, i.e., the use of καιρός for Judas and Jesus (26:16, 18); the use of λεγόμενος for Judas and Caiaphas (26:3, 14); the oath of Peter (26:74) and the consistent non-oath of Jesus, etc. See also B. GERHARDSSON, "Confession and Denial Before Men: Observation on Matt. 26:57–27:2," *JSNT* 13 (1981), p. 44-66 who maintains that there is a parallel between the behaviour of Jesus and Peter.

6. See for example, John P. MEIER, *The Vision of Matthew* (Theological Inquiries), New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist, 1978, p. 118; Alfred PLUMMER, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, London: Elliot Stock, 1909, p. 383; and most authors.

7. William G. THOMPSON, *Matthew's Story*, New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 1978, p. 136. In addition, see GUNDRY, *Matthew*, p. 552-553 who also sees Judas' death as a warning to other Christians.

8. Wolfgang TRILLING, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1969, 2: 248.

9. Sherman E. JOHNSON, and George A. BUTTRICK, "Matthew," *Interpreter's Bible*, New York/Nashville: Abingdon, 1951, 7: 591-593.

10. *Ibid.*

11. For example, see GUNDRY, *Matthew*, p. 553; MEIER, *The Vision of Matthew*, p. 338.

acted upon (16:23), Ahithophel's honour is at stake here. His death illustrates his choice to die for honour rather than live in shame.

The second point of comparison is contingent upon the mode of death, hanging. But again, we should not assume a dependency upon the Old Testament text. According to Yolande Grisé : "La pendaison semble avoir été l'une des formes traditionnelles de suicide dans les classes inférieures de la société romaine."[12] Hence, Matthew recorded the death in the form most familiar to him, and, the most likely form of suicide for a non-elite person such as Judas.

While a negative interpretation of the death of Judas is widely assumed, no explanation is offered. Rather, his death is simply assumed to be disreputable.

This widespread negative evaluation can be explained by Augustinian influence.[13] For Augustine, there is no legitimate reason for committing suicide, not even to avoid sinning.[14] Suicide stands in direct violation of the fifth commandment, "Thou shall not kill," by which "no one is understood to be excepted, certainly not the very man to whom the order is addressed."[15] The death of Judas is understood by Augustine in the same way, for :

> When Judas hanged himself, he increased rather than expiated the crime of that accursed betrayal, since by despairing of God's mercy, though he was at death repentant, he left himself no place for a saving repentance.[16]

Moreover :

> He did not deserve mercy ; and that is why no light shone in his heart to make him hurry for pardon from the one he had betrayed, as those who crucified him were to do. In that despair he killed himself.[17]

Augustine's rejection of an expiatory interpretation of Judas' death is connected with his own introspective view of guilt. As Stendhal has shown, however, Augustine is likely the originator of this view.[18] In fact, as we shall illustrate, in keeping with the honour/shame polarity, suicide in the first three centuries was deemed an acceptable, even

12. Yolande GRISÉ, *Le suicide dans la Rome antique*, coll. "Noêsis", Montréal : Bellarmin ; Paris : Les Belles Lettres, 1982, p. 108.

13. The discussion of suicide in Christian literature before Augustine is rare. Droge cites Clement of Alexander, *Stromata* 4.17.1. For a discussion of the relationship between suicide and martyrdom see Arthur J. DROGE, "*Mori Lucrum* : Paul and Ancient Theories of Suicide," *Novum Testamentum* 30 (1988), p. 276-278.

14. AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, 1:27.

15. AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, 1:20. On the Augustinian equation of suicide and murder, see Jacques BELS, "La mort volontaire dans l'œuvre de saint Augustin," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 187 (1975), p. 147-180, esp. p. 180.

16. AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, 1:17. It is interesting that Augustine understood Judas to be repentant at the time of his death.

17. AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 352.3.8 ; [PL 39 : 1559-1663] ; Christopher KIRWAN, *Augustine*, London/New York : Routledge, 1989, 1991, p. 205.

18. See Krister STENDAHL, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *The Writings of St. Paul*, Wayne A. Meeks, ed., New York/London : W.W. Norton, 1971, p. 422-434, esp. p. 425.

honorable course of action. It was the Augustinian view that marked a turning point in the Christian understanding of suicide, as his teaching found its way into Church doctrine.[19]

How then may Matthew's view of Judas' death be ascertained? Here Matthew's redactional techniques regarding his overall treatment of Peter and Judas must be taken into account. Having served as a key figure throughout the gospel, Peter is rather abruptly dropped after his denial and bitter weeping. There is no repentance and no reinstatement. Undoubtedly, Matthew and his audience are well aware of Peter's continued and exalted role in the Christian Church. Nevertheless, that Matthew chooses not to reinstate Peter expressly — even when his source Mark does (Mk 16:7; cf. Lk 24:12) — must be viewed as significant.[20]

By contrast, it appears that Judas' role has been fulfilled once the betrayal has been carried out. Yet Matthew, unlike the other gospel writers, first has him witness the final condemnation of Christ, and then records the final events of his life in some detail.

Our last glimpses of both Peter and Judas are of the utmost importance. That Matthew sees fit to conclude his portrait of Peter not with a heroic reinstatement, but with bitter weeping, forces us to take a second look at the positive/negative juxtaposition often taken for granted. Moreover, he concludes his portrait of Judas not with the betrayal in Gethsemane that would clearly have left him in an unfavorable light, but with a curious story about his regret and suicide. In Matthew's account then, both Judas and Peter sin; both realize the repercussions of their sin; and both feel sorrow or regret[21] for their actions. While Peter reacts with bitter weeping, Judas turns back to his fellow conspirators, and in a final step commits suicide. The key to our understanding of Matthew's perception of the death of Judas lies in this final step.

This paper addresses that very question: How did Matthew perceive the death of Judas? The question is a complex one, but the answer is not irretrievable if we systematically remove the obstacles that have clouded this question for some time. Hence, the remainder of this paper is divided into three parts. Part 1 examines the preliminary question of the source of Mt 27:3-10. The ultimate origin of the passage is controverted, but much light can be shed on the issue by redirecting the questions. Part 2 consists of a detailed analysis of suicide in early circum-Mediterranean culture.

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19. On the influence of the Augustinian view of suicide in Christian doctrine, see Anton J.L. VAN HOOFF, *From Autothanasia to Suicide: Self-Killing in Classical Antiquity*, London/New York: Routledge, 1990, p. 196-197. Suicide was officially condemned at the Council of Orleans in 533 C.E. and again in 562 C.E. at the Council of Braga. The condemnation was extended to include attempted suicide at the council at Toledo in 693 C.E. On this, see KIRWAN, *Augustine*, p. 208.
The early Jewish view of suicide is difficult to ascertain as few writings existed before the later rabbinic period. According to Droge: "In Hellenistic and Roman periods pious Jews are often portrayed as willing to take their own lives rather than betray their religious principles." He cites Razis in 2 Macc 14:37-46; 4 Macc 12:1-19; 17:1; Philo, *Legatio*, 233-236 as the best example. See DROGE, "Paul and Ancient Theories of Suicide," p. 275-276; Sidney GOLDSTEIN, *Suicide in Rabbinic Literature*, Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1989.

20. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, p. 548-551, 589.

21. Note that Peter does not repent. Matthew, like Luke, has added "bitterly" (πικρός) to describe Peter's weeping. Πικρός does not indicate a remorseful weeping. See LSJ, p. 1404; BAGD, p. 657.
Similarly, in 27:3 Matthew uses not the usual word for repentance (μετανοεῖν) but μεταμεληθείς, although the later is usually translated as "repented." Μεταμεληθείς is a rather rare word used only three times by Matthew (21:29, 32; 27:3), all three insertions, and not used at all by Mark or Luke. See LSJ, p. 1114; BAGD, p. 511 which observes that "[21:30, 32] in these places it can also mean simply change one's mind."

Here we deal not only with the opinion of major philosophers, but we uncover specific examples of suicide and how they were perceived. In Part 3, we reevaluate the original question in light of new evidence and present our conclusions.

I. THE ORIGIN OF MATTHEW 27:3-10

A thorough examination of the ultimate origin of Mt 27:3-10 has been carried out by Douglas Moo. His analysis of the texts to which the origin of the Matthean passage is frequently attributed, namely Zech 11:13 ; Jer 19:1-13, as well as the suicide of Ahithophel in 2 Sam 17:23 and Acts 1:18-19, illustrates that the parallels are tenuous at best. We accept then, his conclusion that "the influence of the Old Testament on the narrative has been slight," and that:

> The most reasonable explanation of the composition of Mt 27:3-10 is that Matthew was dealing with a tradition that came to him substantially in the form in which we now have it in 27:3-8 and that he has been the first to connect the tradition with the Old Testament passages.[22]

One point, however, requires further comment. The synopsis in Table One shows that the one most fundamental element in the Matthean account, i.e., suicide, occurs in none of the other three sources. Moreover, the only other known account of the end of Judas does not record the death as a suicide, but as an "accident" or divine punishment. The simplest and most logical conclusion is that Matthew, familiar with a story of Judas' death, added the element of suicide. The same is likely true for the reference to the rejection of the money from the temple treasury. A third pivotal element in Matthew's account, innocent blood, is found in Jer 19:4, but in a vastly different context. In Jeremiah, the reference is to the death of innocent people, perhaps even the practice of child sacrifice that existed in the Near East at the time.[23] For Matthew, the mention of innocent blood is one strand of a well developed pattern of innocent blood woven throughout his gospel and culminating in the Passion Narrative. Because the elements that are distinctive to Matthew are also integral to the significance of his narrative, we must acknowledge the role of the Matthean creativity in any discussion of the source of 27:3-10. Hence, we conclude that 1) the account of Judas' death in Matthew's gospel is based on tradition (perhaps oral), brought in tandem with

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22. See Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, Sheffield: Almond, 1983, p. 189-210, esp. p. 206-207. For similar views see also Meier, *The Vision of Matthew*, p. 338; Gundry, *Matthew*, p. 553. For an interesting argument on the connection between tradition, Mt 27:3-10, and Jeremiah, see Pierre Benoit, *Jesus and the Gospel*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1973, 1: 189-207.
Other suggestions as to the origin of this passage fall broadly into two categories: 1) that Matthew's account is a combination of two Old Testament texts, Jer 19:1-11 (cf. 18:2-4; 32:7-8) and Zech 11:13. See Meier, *Passion Narratives*, p. 106; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, Atlanta: John Knox, 1975, p. 504; for a slightly different view see Trilling, *Matthew*, p. 247-248; 2) that the story is a product of Matthean creativity, with only minimal influence from outside factors. Perhaps Donald Senior comes closest to this view as he allows Matthew a large degree of "creative activity" in this passage. See Donald Senior, "A Case Study in Matthean Creativity: Mt 27:3-10," *Biblical Research* 19 (1974), p. 35; *The Passion Narrative According to Matthew: A Redactional Study* (BETL), Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975, p. 391-397.

23. Guy P. Couturier, "Jeremiah," *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990, p. 282.

certain Old Testament texts by Matthew, and most importantly, shaped by him to further his own theological agenda, and 2) the elements peculiar to Matthew's account were purposely added by the evangelist.

Table One

Acts 1:18-19	Mt 27:3-10	Zech 11:7-14	Jer 19:1-13
	30 pieces of silver	30 pieces of silver	
	innocent blood (Jesus)		blood of innocents
	silver cast into temple treasury	silver cast into treasury	
	money into treasury rejected		
	suicide		
horrible death			
purchase of field	purchase of potter's field		purchase of field 32:7-8
	potter		potter 18:2
Field of Blood	Field of Blood		Valley of Slaughter

1. *The Purpose of Matthew 27:3-10*

Having discerned the likelihood that Matthean creativity and tradition are the major sources of this passage, we must now address ourselves to the question of purpose. Why did Matthew include this account in his gospel narrative ?

One popular solution among those who treat the question is that the narrative serves an etiological function to explain the name Field of Blood.[24] There are two difficulties with this solution. First, it better explains the less elaborate account of the death of Judas in Acts, than in Matthew. For Luke, the passage fulfills a double etiological function : 1) it explains how the name Field of Blood came into existence. In fact, this is the main point of Acts 1:18-19, 2) it explains why the selection of a new apostle (1:20-26) was necessary.

The second difficulty is that the etiological explanation accounts for only one element in Matthew's passage : the name Field of Blood. It does not help to explain the more important elements that are peculiar to his account.

The key to the question of Matthew's purpose lies not in etiology. Nevertheless, given that the elements most important for our analysis (i.e., suicide, return of the money, innocent blood) are those likely composed by Matthew, we must examine the passage under the heading of a Matthean composition.

24. See for example Benedict T. VIVIANS, "The Gospel According to Matthew," *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 671 ; SCHWEITZER, *Matthew*, p. 502-505.

2. *The Function of the Matthean Composition in the Passion Narrative*

As a Matthean insertion, 27:3-10 fulfills an important function. Its placement is critical. The passage is inserted into the narrative following the conclusion of the Sanhedrin when Jesus is bound and delivered to Pilate. Immediately after the insertion (27:11), the narrative resumes with Jesus standing before the governor and being questioned by him.

Three other Matthean narratives are inserted into his Passion Narrative ; one during the trial of Jesus, the second immediately after his death, and the third between Jesus' death and the centurion's confession.[25]

The first is the dream of Pilate's wife (27:19).[26] Again the placement is crucial. Occuring during Jesus' hearing before Pilate, it delays the choice between Jesus and Barabbas.[27] Matthew has rewritten his Markan source to bring the narrative to a dramatic brink, juxtaposing the plea of the gentile woman for Jesus and the plea of the Jewish leaders for Barabbas (27:20).[28] In this way, he requires us to assess guilt through the situation of the "major players" on stage : the bantering of the crowd ; the ominous plea of Pilate's wife ; the fierce exhortations of the Jewish hierarchy ; the weakness of Pilate ; and most of all, the innocence of Jesus.

The second occurs at 27:24-25. The context has parallels in both Mark (15:6-14) and Luke (23:17-23), but Matthew has inserted Pilate's handwashing to fulfill a specific function in his narrative. He breaks the narrative after Jesus' hearing before Pilate amid the cries of the crowd to "Let him be crucified," and before Pilate's final decision to release Barabbas. Again, the interruption immediately before a crucial decision forces us to pause in retrospect and assess the status of the situation. Can it be that the same crowds who once shouted in exultation for Christ (i.e., 21:9) now rally for the crucifixion of an innocent Jesus ? The answer comes with the release of Barabbas.

The third insertion is the rather curious passage concerning the earthquake, the opening of the tombs, and the resurrection of the holy ones in Mt 27:51b-53.[29] The

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25. We concentrate here on the primary insertions during the trial and immediately afterward. For a discussion of the special material in the Matthean Passion Narrative, see Donald SENIOR, "Matthew's Special Material in the Passion Story," *ETL* 63 (1987), p. 272-294.

26. That 27:19 is an insertion is strongly evidenced by the number of Mattheanisms present. See GUNDRY, *Matthew*, p. 562. For a full treatment of the origin of 27:19 see SENIOR, *A Redactional Study*, p. 242-248 who accepts the argument of Trilling that the passage is indeed a Matthean composition.
Dreams play an important role in Matthew. Through them, characters often receive heavenly instruction as to what to do regarding the Messiah (i.e., 1:20 ; 2:12, 13, 19, 22). Because Joseph and the magi pay attention to the dreams they receive, Herod cannot destroy the infant Jesus. In a sense, Pilate too obeys his wife's dream when he washes his hands of the situation (27:24).

27. For a discussion of the textual variant in 27:17, see Bruce M. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (3rd ed.), Stuttgart : United Bible Societies, 1975. See also SENIOR, *A Redactional Study*, p. 240-241.

28. SENIOR, *A Redactional Study*, p. 247.

29. Like 27:19, that this passage is primarily a Matthean composition is supported by the number of Mattheanisms in it. See GUNDRY, *Matthew*, p. 575-577.

significance of the signs[30] and the origin[31] of the passage need not be discussed here as they do not directly affect our analysis. More important for our purposes is the placement of the passage.

The passage is inserted between the death of Jesus (27:50) and the confession of the centurion and his soldiers that "Truly this was the Son of God" (27:54). Matthew has significantly altered his Markan account with the addition of a number of apparently unrelated supernatural events. Here, Matthean redaction is functioning on two levels: 1) in terms of theology, the additions transform the death of Jesus into an apocalyptic event to be witnessed by all; 2) in terms of the narrative framework, the insertion forces us to pause after the death of Christ and to assess what has taken place. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, has been put to death. The drama culminates in v. 54. Nowhere is the innocence of Jesus more emphatically stated than in the confession of the centurion and his soldiers — the gentile persecutors of Christ — that this was indeed the Son of God.

Matthew 27:3-10 functions similarly. It interrupts the narrative from 27:2 (the handing over of Jesus to Pilate) to 27:11 (Jesus before Pilate). For Matthew, guilt is clearly in view. Once the Jewish trial has ended, the reader is in a position to reflect on guilt, and now that Jesus has been handed over, (27:2; cf. the "woe" of 26:24), Judas' role can be evaluated. The "pause" allows guilt to be assigned and assessed.

On a literary level then, the purpose of all three insertions is identical: they function as a narrative pause. At crucial stages in his narrative, Matthew deliberately postpones the action to give his audience time to assess guilt. In fact, as the trial progresses, the onus on the audience to recognize the innocence of Jesus and the guilt of the Jewish leaders is more and more pronounced. Hence, each time the action is delayed, tension is heightened. But how exactly does Judas fare? We turn now to the Matthean element most important for our original question concerning how Matthew understood the death of Judas: suicide.

II. THE PERCEPTION OF SUICIDE IN THE FIRST CENTURY GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

I propose that the key to our uncovering how Matthew understood the death of Judas lies in his recording the death as a suicide.[32] Our next step is to determine the cultural perception of suicide at the time when Matthew wrote his gospel.

30. Two important works that express opposing views on the meaning and significance of the signs are D. SENIOR, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones," *CBQ* 38 (1976), p. 312-329 and D. HUTTON, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Mt 27:51b-53): A Study of the Theology of the Matthean Passion Narrative," (Diss. Ph.D.), Harvard University, 1970. For a succinct summary of the relevance of the signs, see SENIOR, "Resurrection of the Holy Ones," p. 312-329, esp. p. 313.

31. For a good treatment of the origin of this passage, see SENIOR, "Resurrection of the Holy Ones," p. 314-321 who analyses the hypotheses of D. Hutton and W. Shenko. Senior himself concludes that 27:51b-53 is primarily a Matthean construction (p. 321).

32. Our contemporary word "suicide" did not exist in ancient Greek and Latin. The word originated in the 12th century. See VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 136. In addition to Grisé and Van Hooff, other important works on suicide include R. HIRZEL, "Der Selbstmord," *ARW* 11 (1908), p. 75-104, 243-284, 417-476; [repr. *Der Selbstmord*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967]; J.M. RIST, *Stoic Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, esp. p. 233-255.

An understanding of any sort of cultural perception in the first century society necessitates an understanding of the honour/shame values around which the culture revolved. Circum-Mediterranean cultures were agonistic, which meant that all social interactions were viewed as a contest for honour.[33] Honour, "the apex of the pyramid of temporal social values,"[34] was defined not only by how one viewed oneself, but more importantly, how he/she was evaluated by his/her society.[35] The role of honour as a primal social value must not be underestimated, as it influenced virtually every sphere of life — social, economic, political, religious. According to Bruce Malina, one acquired honour:

> [...] by excelling over others in the social interaction that we shall call challenge and response [...] a sort of social pattern, a social game [...] in which persons hassle each other according to socially defined rules in order to gain the honour of another.[36]

At the opposite end of the spectrum was shame.[37] In keeping with their dyadic personality, shame was measured primarily by others' evaluation of a person, although one's assessment of self worth was clearly a factor.[38] Hence, one who was not successful in attaining honour was "shamed," or "shamed" by their "dishonour." Because it is from this cultural milieu that the perception of suicide arises, we shall examine suicide within that framework. The key issue is whether suicide was perceived as honorable or dishonorable (i.e., shameful).

1. *Opinion of Philosophers and Philosophical Schools*

A good starting point for our analysis is the opinion of major philosophers and philosophical schools of thought.[39] Plato's position on suicide derives from his philosophical dualism i.e., the idea that we transcend this material world and all its trappings for the eternal world of abstract ideas. The body belongs not to us but to God and we must not interfere with God's plan for his divine property.[40] Nevertheless,

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33. Bruce J. MALINA, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, Atlanta: John Knox, 1981, p. 33. My thanks to Prof. Malina for his generous and helpful comments on this topic.
34. J.G. PERISTIANY, *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 10.
35. Julian PITT-RIVERS, "Honour and Social Status," *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, J.G. Peristiany, ed., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 21.
36. MALINA, *Insights*, p. 33.
37. See Uni WILKAN, "Honour and Shame: A Contestable Pair," *Man* 19 (1984), p. 635-652.
38. MALINA, *Insights*, p. 55.
39. For a succinct discussion of theories of suicide from Homer to Paul, see DROGE, "Paul and Ancient Theories of Suicide," p. 263-286. See also his interesting article, "Did Paul Commit Suicide?" *Bible Review* 5 (1989), p. 14-21, 42.
40. PLATO, *Phaedo* 62 BC. See also H.R. FEDDEN, *Suicide: A Social and Historical Study*, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972, p. 71-73; Norman PERRIN and Dennis C. DULING, *The New Testament: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982, p. 9.

he outlines three circumstances under which suicide is not wrong, and hence, should not be punished.[41]

Philosophical opinion, for the most part, came to accept suicide as a justifiable alternative to a painful life and altogether preferable to a dishonorable one.[42] The Stoics were especially vocal:

> The best thing which eternal law ever ordained was that it allowed to us one entrance in life, but many exits. [...] This is one reason why we cannot complain of life: it keeps no one against his will. Humanity is well situated, because no man is unhappy except by his own fault. Live, if you so desire; if not, you may return to the place whence you came.[43]

Opposition to suicide was, in fact, confined to two schools: the Pythagoreans and Peripatetics.[44] Significantly, neither Pythagoras nor Aristotle objected to suicide on the grounds that it brought shame upon a person. While they did not speak of suicide as an honorable act, there is no indication that they thought it dishonoured a person.

2. *Cases of Suicide in the Ancient World*

The opinion of philosophers is helpful in establishing the "theoretical" attitude toward suicide. It is of little help, however, in trying to determine what it was that caused a person to take his/her own life, or how this act was perceived by society at large. In this section then, we shall address these issues by examining select cases. Our primary interest is to discern how suicide was perceived in terms of the broader cultural values of honour and shame.

Our greatest difficulty in this endeavour is that we must infer from examples both the motivation for suicide, and the way in which it was evaluated. While the absence of detail in many cases complicates the task, the real obstacle lies in the fundamental difference between modern Western society and first century society in terms of our self perception. Twentieth century North American and North European societies are highly individual and introspective cultures. We view ourselves from a psychological perspective, evaluating and understanding our behaviour in terms of psychological motivation.[45] In such individual-oriented cultures, suicide is seen within the framework of individual achievement and failure.

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41. That is, when one is ordered to death by the state; compelled by misfortune; or suffers irreversible disgrace. Suicide should, however, be punished when it is derived from "sloth and unmanly cowardice." See PLATO, *Laws*, 873C; cf., *Laws*, 1.5, p. 733-734.

42. FEDDEN, *Suicide*, p. 76-77. Two other philosophical schools were also influential: the Cynics (DIOGENES LAERTIUS 6.18; cf. 6.77 for the suicide of Diogenes) and the Epicureans (LUCRETIUS 3.79).

43. SENECA, *Epistulae Morales* 70.12. On the Stoic view of philosophy see Samuel DILL, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, London: Macmillan, 1937, p. 356, who cites SENECA, *Epistulae Morales* 58.36; 70.8; *De Providentia* 2.10; 6.7; *De Ira* 3.15; EPICTETUS, 1.24; PLINY, *Epistulae* 1.12, 22; 3.7, 9; 4.24; DIOGENES LAERTIUS 7.130. See also VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 189-191; FEDDEN, *Suicide*, p. 70-77; DROGE, "Paul and Ancient Theories of Suicide," p. 268-273.

44. Pythagoras' objection was a practical one: the number of souls in this world and the next is carefully balanced. Suicide upsets the spiritual mathematic. Aristotle, on the other hand, saw suicide primarily as an offence punishable by the state. See FEDDEN, *Suicide*, p. 73; cf. Robert GARLAND, "Death Without Dishonour: Suicide in the Ancient World," *History Today* 33 (1983), p. 34.

45. MALINA, *Insights*, p. 54.

By contrast, ancient cultures exhibited a dyadic consciousness. According to Malina:

> The dyadic personality is an individual who perceives himself and forms his self-image in terms of what others perceive and feed back to him. He feels a need of others for his very psychological existence, since the image he has of himself must agree with the image formulated and presented by significant others, by members of significant and person-sustaining groups like family, village, and even city and nation.[46]

As a result, suicide was not viewed so much as an individual loss, as a threat to the unity and structure of the group as a whole.

A good illustration of this difference is in the understanding of guilt. Guilt is an internal reaction to external events and as such is frequently attributed as a cause of suicide in modern cultures. Unlike shame, however, which is brought upon us by others, guilt does not constitute a cultural value for the ancients and therefore was seldom attributed as a cause of suicide.[47] Hence, we must guard against imposing modern psychological standards upon the ancient personality, particularly in regard to suicide.[48] In fact, an examination of the various causes of suicide shows that the death itself is rarely, if ever, treated as shameful. Avoidance of shame is, in fact, a primary motive.[49]

a) *Shame/Dishonour (*pudor*)*

Approximately one third of all suicides in the ancient world were expressly shame motivated.[50] Dishonour as a motive for suicide was bound by neither gender nor class. Nevertheless, because of certain inherent cultural norms, it functioned variously for different classes and gender.

Upper Classes. Of the material concerning suicide that has survived to us, upper class males form the largest majority.[51] Frequently it was motivated by the fear of losing face before one's social equals, or inferiors; in fact, a person, particularly a person in a position of authority, was expected to commit suicide to save face in desperate situations.[52]

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46. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
47. According to Van Hooff, "the predominance of shame as a motive is the most important difference from the modern paradigm of suicide which concentrates on internal motives like depression and feelings of guilt." See VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 120; MALINA, *Insights*, p. 55.
48. MALINA, *Insights*, p. 59. Note that in her study of suicide, Grisé rarely attributes "sentiments de culpabilité" and "remords" as motives. See GRISÉ, *Le suicide*, p. 34-53. Similarly, Van Hooff ascribes "mala conscientia" as a motive only 13 times or 1% of the 923 cases where the motive is specified. See VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 85. See also his comments on p. 120-121.
49. Examples have been drawn from the lists of both GRISÉ, *Le suicide*, p. 34-53, and VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 198-232. Some of Van Hooff's categories have been adopted (i.e., *pudor*, *desperata salus*, *necessitas*).
50. Based on Van Hooff's statistics of those suicides where the motive is known. The same figure holds true for both male and female suicide. See VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 85-86; 120.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
52. See, for example, AESCHINES 3.212; DIODOROS 31.9.3-7; PLUTARCH, *Moralia*, 198B; *Amelia*, 34.3 as cited in VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 108-109, esp. n. 71.

This "death before dishonour" philosophy is illustrated in the death of Cato the Younger. On the eve of his impending defeat by Caesar, Cato sent for his sword and stabbed[53] himself below the breast.[54] Plutarch describes the reaction to Cato's death by the people of Utica as a spontaneous celebration of his honour and bravery: "With one voice they called Cato their saviour and benefactor, the only man who was free, the only one unvanquished."[55] Their reaction leaves little doubt that his death was an honorable one and, in fact, one designed to avoid dishonour.

Caesar's response was more guarded. Upon hearing the news of Cato's death, he responded: "O Cato, I begrudge thee thy death; for thou didst begrudge me the sparing of the life."[56]

The reaction of Caesar is an illustration of how the honour/shame value functioned. Cato and Caesar were engaged in an honour contest: the struggle was a question about who controlled destiny.[57] Cato chose death rather than to ask for clemency. Caesar's response arose out of his desire to demonstrate publicly clemency toward Cato, (and therefore his honour), and his annoyance at having been denied the opportunity to do so.

Lower Classes. Honour motivated suicide was probably no less frequent among the lower classes, however specific examples of an "average" suicide is harder to find no doubt because literature was written primarily by and for the elite. Stories of the common person rarely were recounted, except when they were needed to enforce a specific point.[58]

We are, nevertheless, furnished with enough information to conclude that common people operated under the same cultural values as their superiors. Plutarch relays a story of a Delphian girl, Charilla, who was humiliated by the King in her request for food during a famine. According to Plutarch, "although the girl was poverty-stricken

53. The most common methods of suicide among the upper classes were opening of veins and poison, although neither was exclusive to the upper classes. Other methods such as hanging and jumping from a high place, popular among the lower classes, were particularly frowned upon by the elite. See GRISÉ, *Le suicide*, p. 104-123; VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 78.

54. Surviving this, he re-opened the wound with his own hands and thus died. PLUTARCH, *Cato the Younger*, 70.1-6. On the death of Cato, see also PLUTARCH, *Caesar*, 54.1-2; *Brutus*, 40.5-9; CICERO, *Philippics*, 2.6.12; see also VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 109. For an account of the suicide of Nero, see SUETONIUS, *Nero*, 49; DIO CASSIUS 63.29; GRISÉ, *Le suicide*, p. 50.

55. PLUTARCH, *Cato the Younger*, 71.1-2.

56. PLUTARCH, *Caesar*, 72.1-2.

57. The need to control destiny is further born out in Cato's own remarks. On trying to decide his own fate he resolves: "I must be master of the course which I decide to take." Then, having decided to end his own life by the sword, he replies: "Now I am my own master." PLUTARCH, *Cato the Younger*, 69-70.1. This sort of honour contest figured prominently among the upper classes in antiquity and is verified in a number of instances. Suetonius (*Tiberius*, 71.2-6) reports a case whereby a prisoner awaiting execution, Cornulus, ended his life so as to restore his honour. (Suicide among prisoners was common whether execution was imminent or not. See VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 16-17, for examples.) When the Emperor Tiberius heard of the deed, his reply was "Cornulus has given me the slip." As in the previous example, the person who commits suicide has won the last round. By taking his own life, he has not only chosen for himself an honorable end, but he has robbed Tiberius of the power to control his destiny. The same principle is at work in the case of Libo (TACITUS, *Annals*, 2.31). For more examples of suicide among the upper classes, see GRISÉ, *Le suicide*, p. 34-53; VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 198-232.

58. VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 16-17.

and without protectors, she was not ignoble in character ; and when she had withdrawn, she took off her girdle and hanged herself."[59]

For Charilla, it was preferable to die rather than live with degradation. That her deed was seen as an honorable one is illustrated not only by Plutarch's description of her "not ignoble [...] character," but by the fact that thereafter a festival was held in her honour every eight years.[60]

The greatest difference between suicide among the upper and lower classes is not the motive that lay behind it, but the methods employed. The most popular method among the lower classes was hanging, likely because it was both cheap and relatively easy.[61] It was followed by jumping from a high place, either into water or onto the ground, perhaps popular for the same reasons. Drowning, opening of veins, and poison, were practiced by the common people as well. Starvation and burning alive were known, but rare.[62]

Women.[63] An examination of suicide among women forms an important part of our survey. Elite males and soldiers are most often the subject of suicide reports, but their motivations for suicide cannot easily be generalized to non-elite, non-military persons. Women, however, form a significant percentage of suicides. While their motivation for suicide is often linked to the protection of female modesty, they provide examples which take us beyond the narrow confines of the ruling elites and the military.

In a study of 226 cases of female suicide where the motive is specified, seventy nine times or 35% were explicitly shame motivated.[64] Obviously, shame seldom resulted from military defeat, legal proceedings, or political ruin.[65] Their shame was inextricably connected to sexual matters[66] : rape[67] ; incest[68] ; sexual misconduct[69] ; or even mourning the death of their husband, lover, or loved one.[70]

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59. PLUTARCH, *Moralia*, 293D.

60. *Ibid.* In the same vein, Seneca lavishes praise upon two ordinary men (gladiators) who, when faced with desperate situations, found the most inventive ways to end their own lives, as even "the foulest death is preferable to the fairest slavery" (*Epistulae Morales*, 70.23, 26). Suicide among slaves was common. See VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 16.

61. GRISÉ, *Le suicide*, p. 108.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 104-123.

63. Van Hooff acknowledges at the outset that women, especially Roman women, are under-represented in the statistics. For an explanation, See VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 3-10.

64. Based on VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 86. Interestingly, the statistics for women closely correspond to those for men. Of 652 cases where the motive is specified, 212 or 33% were motivated by shame.

65. Loss of political favour was the cause for the suicide of Mutilia Prisca. DIO CASSIUS 58.4.6.

66. On this, see VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 116-119.

67. For example, Hippo (VALERIUS MAXIMUS 6.1 ext.1); Mallonia (SUETONIUS, *Tiberius*, 45); Phegeus' daughter (*Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*, 245); Spartan girls (PAUSANIAS 4.4.2); girl from Tegea (PAUSANIAS 8.47.6). See Appendix A in VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 198-232.
See also the inscription of Domitilla, a fourteen year old girl who killed herself in 262 or 263 C.E. to avoid rape by Gothic invaders. The inscription reads: "She did not fear death ; preferred it above shameful violation." See W.D. LEBEK, "Das Grabepigramm auf Domitilla," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 59 (1985), p. 7-8; VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 24.

68. For example, Euepis (PARTHENIOS, *Erotika Pathemata*, 31); Halia (DIODORUS 5.55.7); Harpalyke (PARTHENIOS, *Erotika Pathemata*, 13); Kanake (EURIPIDES, *Aiolos*); Kyane (PLUTARCH, *Moralia*, 310C); Niobe

One striking example is Lucretia who, though herself sinless, stabbed herself after being raped.[71] Lucretia's case is important for two reasons. The first concerns her method. While stabbing was frequent among men, particularly among soldiers, it was rare among women.[72] The most popular method among women was hanging. A survey by Van Hooff shows that of 158 cases of female suicide where the method was specified, fifty four instances or 34% were hangings, nearly three times the rate of hangings among males.[73] Moreover, he concludes that the number of hangings is actually far greater than the data is able to support.[74]

Second, partly because of her choice to die honorably rather than to live in shame, and partly because the method — the sword, was considered a "manly exit," — Lucretia became the "archetype of female ideals in Roman society."[75] Her example is emulated time and time again.[76] In fact, so admired was she, that it was with some difficulty that the anti-suicide Christian forces diffused the admiration for her example. Hers and similar cases became the focal point of discussion among theologians evaluating the Christian view of suicide.[77]

Suetonius makes reference to the suicide of a freedwoman Phoebe who hanged herself. While we know little of the circumstances or motive of her death, we are given some indication as to how her death was perceived by Augustus. Disillusioned by the behaviour of his own children, he learns of the suicide of Phoebe and declares "I would rather have been Phoebe's father."[78] The logical inference from Augustus' assertion is that a suicide preserves a family's honour; vices of his children dishonour a family and its male head.

(PARTHENIOS, *Erotika Pathemata*, 33.3); Pelopeia (HYGENUS, *Fabulae*, 87; 243.8); Phaidra (EURIPIDES, *Hippolytus*, 726).

69. For example, having relations with slaves; Aemilia Lepida (TACITUS, *Annals*, 6.40.4; 46.4) and Albucilla (attempted suicide; TACITUS, *Annals*, 6.48.6; 54.6).

70. See the epigraphical data provided by VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 150-154. See also his description of *dolor*/grief suicide and the inherent fallacies in them (p. 99-105).

71. LIVY 1.58.11.

72. Stabbing is recorded as the method in male suicide 135 times; only 17 times for women.

73. Of 439 cases where the method is known, 57 times or 13% are hangings. See VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 44. Moreover, although there are almost 3 times as many male cases of shame/*pudor* suicide (212 against 79), women surpass men with regard to hanging as the method connected with this motivation (18:14) (p. 110).
Grisé knows of only two examples of hanging among Roman women, Epicharis (TACITUS, *Annals* 6.20.2; 15.57.4) and Phoebe (SUETONIUS, *Augustine* 65; DC 55.10) and concludes: "Chez les Grecs, il en fut autrement." (*Le suicide*, p. 109, n. 114c). Van Hooff confirms that it was indeed different among the Greeks, although he does cite more than two cases of suicide for Roman women, and barbarian examples as well (*Autothanasia*, p. 198-232). For an explanation of the discrepancies in the total number of Greek and Roman hangings, see p. 66-67.

74. For a fuller explanation, see VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 66-67.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

76. See, for example, Arria (MARTIAL 1.13); Mallonia (SUETONIUS, *Tiberius*. 45); VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 50; GRISÉ, *Le suicide*, p. 46-47.

77. AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, 1.19; VALERIUS MAXIMUS 6.1.1; VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 20, 50.

78. SUETONIUS, *Augustus*, 65.

b) *Despair of Soldiers* (desperata salus)

This category refers primarily (although not exclusively) to soldiers and their leaders who kill themselves in battle to avoid imminent defeat or capture by the enemy.

Van Hooff categorizes the suicide of soldiers in two ways: 1) those who act out of despair or hopelessness (i.e., *desperata salus*), and, 2) those who act out of an unwillingness to submit to clemency or an unwillingness to acknowledge a loss of face, as stated in the source (or sources) that records it (i.e., *pudor* suicides).[79]

This distinction, however, does not mean that honour is not an issue in both instances.[80] Soldiers who end their lives in battle because they sense a lost cause are acting to preserve honour whether or not this is explicitly stated by a source. In fact, literary sources tend not to speak in terms of honour and shame, as these values are self-evident to both the writer and the audience. The treatment of soldiers here under a single heading is for two reasons: 1) given the similarity of circumstances under which they died (i.e., in execution of duty, to avoid capture and/or defeat) and the widespread use of a single method (i.e., falling on their sword), it is logical to treat them together, 2) the sheer bulk of suicides among soldiers demands a separate category. In any case, certain examples will illustrate the phenomena.

In 53 B.C.E., the Roman army suffered an enormous defeat at the hands of the Parthians in Carrhae, losing most of its men. Realizing that escape was impossible, the commander, Crassus, followed by his son, his followers, officers and soldiers, chose death. According to Plutarch, Crassus killed himself "in order to avoid anything which did not befit his quality."[81]

Of course not only generals and military leaders committed suicide in battle. Suicide among soldiers was commonplace.[82] Suetonius recounts the incident of "a common soldier" whose task it was to bring news of defeat to the Roman army. Distrusted by the soldiers, he was accused by them of falsehood, cowardice and desertion. The soldier "fell upon his sword at the emperor's feet." Shamed by false accusations, the soldier's action was an attempt to restore honour to himself by proving his worth to his comrades.[83]

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79. VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 90. For the differentiation between his use of "*pudor*" and "*desperata salus*," see p. 91.

80. One important distinction between suicide among soldiers would be between those who die in execution of duty (i.e., honorably) and those who die in evasion of duty (i.e., an unwillingness to fight or defend themselves at all, and thus dishonorably). Since, however, I have found no clear example of the latter, there is no reason to treat the topic here.

81. PLUTARCH, *Crassus*, 25; VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 88. According to ancient historiography, it was more common for Roman generals to end their lives in face of defeat, than for Greeks. Van Hooff knows of only two examples of Greek military leaders in military times, Philoumenos and Diaios (146 B.C.E.), who "preferred not to survive a defeat." Even these two examples, observes Van Hooff, were described from a Roman perspective.

82. The infamous Masada tragedy, for example, underlines the "death before dishonour" thinking, although this was actually one suicide and 900 familiacides.

83. SUETONIUS, *Otho*, 10.

c) *Forced Suicide (*necessitas*)*

One final category remains; forced suicide. As with the example of soldiers, forced suicide belongs in a separate category because the voluntary element has been removed.

Forced suicide refers to those instances where a person who has been condemned to death by the state takes his/her own life. The motive is two-fold: 1) it frees a person from submitting to the will of another and in effect gives one the power to control one's own destiny, and, 2) on a more practical level, it allows the condemned person to bequeath[84] property to his/her family. If executed by the state, one's property was subsumed by the state. Hence, Van Hooff is correct in observing that "in cases of enforced suicide the 'freedom to chose death' (*liberum mortis arbitrium*) [...] only means the liberty to choose the method."[85]

Many examples of forced suicide have survived to us. Perhaps the most famous example of forced suicide was that of Seneca who was condemned to death by Nero. Seneca preferred to die honorably by his own hand, rather than submit to the will of Nero. When he bid his wife Paulina farewell, she announced that she would join him in death. Tacitus describes the incident in some detail:

> Seneca, not wishing to stand in the way of her glory, and influenced also by his affection, that he might not leave the woman who enjoyed his whole-hearted love exposed to outrage, now said: "I have shown you the mitigations of life, you prefer the distinction of death: I shall not grudge your setting that example. May the courage of this brave ending be divided equally between us both, but may more fame attend your own departure!"[86]

One could be forced into suicide by persons other than the emperor. We know of at least one Greek man who was ordered by soldiers surrounding his palace to kill himself[87] and a Roman woman who was made to abstain from food.[88]

While the coercive element in these suicides sets them apart from the rest, they exhibit the same fundamental principle at work in all other cases. Suicide was a mechanism to maintain, achieve, or restore honour. The last known cases of forced suicide occurred in 353 C.E.[89]

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84. Under certain circumstances, women had the right to bequeath property. See Fritz SCHULZ, *Classical Roman Law*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1951, p. 118-119; Jane F. GARDNER, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 168.

85. VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 94.

86. TACITUS, *Annals*, 15.63. On the suicide attempt of Paulina, see TACITUS, *Annals*, 15.74. See also the account of the death of Messalina, who was ordered to death by her husband, the emperor Claudius, in TACITUS, *Annals*, 11.37.

87. DIODORUS 20.21.2; VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 95.

88. VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 95.

89. Magnentius and Decentius. See VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 96.

III. THE SUICIDE OF JUDAS

The role of Judas in the gospel of Matthew is a complex one. Juxtaposed with the representative disciple, he is cast as the archetype of the weak Christian who succumbs to temptation. But Matthew's portrait of Judas does not end here. His addition of the story of Judas' death completes his picture of Judas. Mt 27:3-10 is the decisive piece in the puzzle of Judas and only with it is a full appreciation of Judas' role possible.

A survey of literature has shown that Judas consistently emerges as a hopeless and doomed figure, with no hope of salvation. His suicide is viewed as the final seal of his ultimate demise.

Our examination of the sources behind the passage in question revealed that while some sort of tradition concerning the death of Judas was likely in circulation by the time that Matthew wrote, his own creative input is the formative agent in this pericope. Three elements of the story that are crucial to his account, i.e., rejection of the money in the temple treasury, reference to innocent blood, and suicide, are Matthew's own.

Section 3 illustrates that in view of the ancient perception of suicide, the usual reading of Mt 27:3-10 should be reconsidered. *Of the 960 cases gathered, there is not a single case that clearly affirms suicide as a dishonorable act, or an act of moral cowardice.* In fact, time and time again the evidence showed suicide to be the honorable thing to do.

Why then is the death of Judas almost always seen in a negative light ? I suggest it is the result of viewing suicide through post-Augustinian eyes rather than through Matthean eyes. We have been approaching the death of Judas laden within an ethnocentric bias concerning the stigma attached to suicide that did not exist in the first century.

At this point, we are finally able to address our original question : How did Matthew perceive the death of Judas ? If we start with the option in mind that there is a positive interpretation of Judas' death, then we must determine what that interpretation is. To which category of suicide does it belong ?

Clearly, his was not a forced suicide (*necessitas*), or a military suicide (*desperata salus*).[90] It cannot be categorized among the shame (*pudor*) motivated upper class suicides, nor can it be adequately defined as a shame motivated lower class suicide. Perhaps Judas' suicide is closest to the suicides of women for misconduct in that it serves as an act of atonement and an attempt to restore one's honour. This is supported by his explicit confession (27:4).

If this is so, then Matthew's motive in recording the death of Judas as a suicide becomes clear. He has transferred the guilt for the death of Jesus from Judas to those ultimately responsible : the chief priests and elders. They ignore Judas' confession and

90. Van Hooff categorizes Judas' suicide as a *desperata salus* suicide, not, of course, as a military type, rather as one who had "despaired of salvation." See VAN HOOFF, *Autothanasia*, p. 93, 214. Interestingly, Augustine also attributes the suicide of Judas to "despair of being pardoned." See AUGUSTINE, Sermon 352.3.8 [PL 39 : 1559-1563] ; cf. *City of God*, 1.17 ; KIRWAN, *Augustine*, p. 205.

his atoning gesture and are thereby rendered guilty. This is in accordance with the Matthean logic clearly laid out in 23:29-33 whereby the scribes and Pharisees are implicated in the murder of the prophets because they are "sons of those who murdered the prophets" (v. 31).[91] In each case, Matthew underlines the denial of guilt and how this denial actually functions to bring the guilty parties into sharper focus. Three factors of the passage help to preserve this focus: 1) Matthew's constant attention to the chief priests and elders throughout the passion account (i.e., 27:3 ἀρχιερεῦσιν καὶ πρεσβυτέροις [MattR]; 27:6 οἱ δὲ ἀρχιερεῖς [MattR]; 27:62 οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ φαρισαῖοι [MattR]. In fact, Matthew standardizes the phrase "chief priest and elders" by altering the form of another Markan phrase in the following places: 26:3, 47; 27:1, 12, 20; cf. 27:41)[92]; 2) The shifting of the money (i.e., Judas → chief priests → Judas → temple → purchase of field), which represents the guilt or responsibility of the betrayal; 3) The culmination in 27:4 of the theme of (innocent) blood that has been woven throughout the entire gospel (i.e., 23:30 κοινωνοὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι τῶν προφητῶν [MattR]; 23:35 ὅπως ἔλθῃ ἐφ' ὑμᾶς πᾶν αἷμα δίκαιον ἐκχυννόμενον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος Ἅβελ τοῦ δικαίου ἕως τοῦ αἵματος Ζαχαρίου [Q]; 26:28 τὸ αἷμα μου τῆς διαθήκης [Mk] 27:8; ἀγρὸς αἵματος [MattR; cf. Acts 1:19]; 27:25 τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ ἐφ' ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τέκνα ἡμῶν [MattR]; Matthew associates the phrase (αἷμα) with ἀθῷον in 27:4 αἷμα ἀθῷον [MattR]; 27:24 ἀθῷός εἰμι ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος τούτου [MattR], and with δίκαιον in 23:35 αἷμα δίκαιον [δίκαιον MattR]; τοῦ αἵματος Ἅβελ τοῦ δικαίου[93] [δικαίου MattR]) which contrasts the innocence of Jesus with the treachery and deceit all around him.[94]

The suicide of Judas clearly gives him an honorable ending. By redeeming him in this way, Matthew removes the possibility that the guilt for the death of Christ will rest finally upon Judas and places it firmly upon the Jewish leaders.[95]

91. See Robert J. MILLER, "The Rejection of the Prophets in Q," *JBL* 107 (1988), p. 225-240, esp. p. 227. According to Miller, "the tomb complicity stems from inherited guilt (tomb-builders are guilty because they are the sons of guilty fathers)" (p. 227).

92. On the contrast between Judas' remorse and the conduct of the high priests, see W. SCHWARZ, "Die Doppelbedeutung des Judastodes," *Biblical Liturgy* 57 (1984), p. 227-233.

93. RSV translates δικαίου here as "innocent"; NRSV as "righteous."

94. On the connection between the death of Jesus and the theme of innocent blood in Matthew, see W.C. van UNNIK, "The Death of Judas in Saint Matthew's Gospel," *ATR* Supplementary Series 3 (1974), p. 44-57.

95. The impetus for this paper grew out of a class discussion, and later a term paper, for a doctoral seminar on the Passion Narratives, given by Dr. John S. Kloppenborg in the Fall of 1990. My thanks to Dr. Kloppenborg for his many helpful comments and criticisms during all three stages of this article.