

{JANUARY 14 2006}

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE . . .

Judas Iscariot is headed for a makeover. According to news reports, cardinals close to the new pope recommend a change in the Catholic Church's attitude towards him: exit the treacherous Jew who turns the messiah over to the cohorts of the evil High Priest - enter the apostle who simply fulfilled his role in the divine design. After all, it was God who decided that his son should die on the cross.

A well-intentioned effort, but a pathetic one. No Vatican decision can alter the image of Judas in the New Testament: a despicable informer who received "thirty pieces of silver" for his betrayal of the Son of God. No Christian who absorbs this story in his childhood will ever forget the picture of the contemptible traitor who kisses Jesus at the moment of betraying him to his executioners. Nothing will help except changing the biblical text itself, and that is, of course, not so easy.

If one of the other 11 apostles had betrayed Jesus, the consequences would not have been, perhaps, so horrible. But since Judas sounds in many languages like "Jews", the betrayal is associated in the consciousness of Christians with Jews in general. Multitudes of Jews throughout history have been butchered because of this. The Nazi battle-cry "Judah Verrecke!" (Perish, Jews!) paved the way to the gas chambers.

Perhaps this had some influence on the young neo-Nazi, Alexander Koptsev, who ran amok this week in the Moscow synagogue, stabbing and wounding ten people. That act lit up all the red lights. Again, "the rise of anti-Semitism in the world" became a major subject, again the alarm bells shrilled.

There is indeed a growing danger of anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism - two different phenomena that can appear both together and separately. But it is not connected with primitive skinheads like the Moscow knife-wielder. It is much more dangerous, and the fuel that feeds them exists in other places and on other levels.

IN ONE of the stream of speeches in which George W. Bush is now trying to defend his ill-fated invasion of Iraq, this week he let loose a sentence that should light all the red

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lights. In this sentence he castigated his opponents for asserting that he had attacked Iraq “for the oil and for Israel”.

He thus brought to the surface an assertion that had until then been openly voiced only by anti-Semitic marginal groups. They have put together three facts: (a) that the people who most aggressively pushed for the war were the neo-cons who play a major role in the Bush administration, (b) that almost all the important members of this group are Jews, and (c) that the occupation of Iraq has freed Israel from a significant military threat.

Up to now, the American media have treated this allegation with contempt, as a ridiculous “conspiracy theory”. Now that the President himself has spoken about it, it may become part of the legitimate public discourse in the United States and throughout the world.

Therein lies a great danger for Israel. The entire Israeli establishment supported the American invasion. (When we, the opponents of the war, called a demonstration against it in Tel-Aviv, on the day when millions took to the streets all around the world, it was a small event, ignored by the media.) Now it may happen, as so often in history, that those responsible for the disaster will evade responsibility. George Bush will fade from memory in a few years. What will remain is the impression that Israel and the Jews dragged the poor US into a despicable adventure.

BY SHEER CHANCE, this week saw the appearance of a book about the Iraq war that touches on the same subject – “State of War” by James Risen.

Among other things, the book says that the Secretary of Defense and the neo-cons who dominate Washington did not listen to the American intelligence analysts, who advised caution when it came to Iraq, but to the Israeli intelligence people who flooded Washington and briefed high-ranking officials.

According to Risen, it was the hard-line Israelis that Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, were listening to, not the cautious CIA. “CIA analysts were often skeptical of Israeli intelligence reports, knowing that Mossad had very strong - even obvious - biases about the Arab world.” After their visits, CIA officials would generally discount much of what the Israeli intelligence officers supplied, “Wolfowitz and other conservatives at the Pentagon became enraged by this practice,” Risen writes. Wolfowitz is, of course, a very Jewish name.

The obvious conclusion: it was the Israelis and their allies, the Washington Jews, who pushed the US into the war.

AS IF that was not enough, Washington is now rocked by a big scandal that has a close

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connection with Israel. At its center stands a person called Jack Abramoff – again a name that discloses the Jewish identity of its owner.

This Jack is a super-lobbyist, a symbol of the phenomenon that has turned American politics into a dirty stable of corruption, which even the mighty Hercules would have had trouble cleaning up. He skimmed the money of his clients, mostly Native Americans, put some of it into his own pocket and used the rest to bribe establishment figures, senators and congressmen. He gave them generous gifts, junkets around the world, suites in luxury hotels and other perks. Most of the beneficiaries were Republicans, but some crumbs were thrown to Democrats, too.

Up to this point, it's nothing unusual, just bigger than usual. The lobbying industry is very well developed in Washington, which is infested by lobbyists like a hobo with lice. The pro-Israeli lobby is no different from all the others. The lobbyists corrupt everything. They bribe the politicians to make laws that will divert billions of public money into the pockets of their clients. They play a major role in financing the election campaigns of politicians, from the President himself down to the lowliest mayor. Only rarely is one of them caught and sent to prison, as may happen now to that Abramoff.

What is special about Abramoff is that he is a fanatical Zionist. According to the stories published in the States, some of the money that he diverted was transferred to extreme settlers in the West Bank. Abramoff sent them military equipment for use against the Palestinians, and perhaps against the Israeli government. Among other items, he bought them camouflage uniforms, telescopic sights for snipers, night-vision binoculars and a thermal imager.

American publications mention a settler named Shmuel Ben-Zvi from the Betar Illit settlement, a high-school buddy of Abramoff, who received this equipment. Ben-Zvi denied it, but the Senate committee has obtained e-mail messages from him lauding Abramoff for sending him “reinforcement”, while Abramoff wrote him that “if only there were another dozen of you, the dirty rats would be finished.”

Abramoff himself claims that he is simply an idealist, who uses the money “put into his hands by God” in order to help Israel. He also financed a - probably fictitious - outfit of Syrian exiles, supported by Israel. One of the American publications mentions in this context the biblical Mossad motto: “By way of deception thou shalt make war” (Proverbs 24,6 - that's how it sounds in modern Hebrew, but the actual meaning of the words is in doubt. The English Bible renders it thus: “For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war”.)

So that's how it looks to Americans: the man who has become a symbol of corruption is a Jew who supports Israel.