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Rehabilitating Judas?

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The Times [London] is reporting that the Vatican is considering a proposal to rehabilitate Judas, the disciple who betrayed Christ. Here is the crucial section of the paper's report:

The proposed "rehabilitation" of the man who was paid 30 pieces of silver to identify Jesus to Roman soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane, comes on the ground that he was not deliberately evil, but was just "fulfilling his part in God's plan".

Christians have traditionally blamed Judas for aiding and abetting the Crucifixion, and his name is synonymous with treachery. According to St Luke, Judas was "possessed by Satan".

Now, a campaign led by Monsignor Walter Brandmuller, head of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Science, is aimed at persuading believers to look kindly at a man reviled for 2,000 years.

Mgr Brandmuller told fellow scholars it was time for a "re-reading" of the Judas story. He is supported by Vittorio Messori, a prominent Catholic writer close to both Pope Benedict XVI and the late John Paul II.

More: Father Allen Morris, Christian Life and Worship secretary for the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, said: "If Christ died for all — is it possible that Judas too was redeemed through the Master he betrayed?" The "rehabilitation" of Judas could help the Pope's drive to improve Christian-Jewish relations, which he has made a priority of his pontificate.

Some Bible experts say Judas was "a victim of a theological libel which helped to create anti-Semitism" by forming an image of him as a "sinister villain" prepared to betray for money.

Truth really is stranger than fiction. There is so much to consider here. First, we have the fact that there is no shred of biblical evidence that Judas repented of his sin and confessed Christ. Indeed the book of Acts reveals that God's judgment fell upon Judas and, after buying a field with the money gained from betraying Christ, he fell and "burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out" [see [Acts 1:18](#)].

Was Judas fulfilling a "divine mission" in betraying Christ? Jesus clearly knew that Judas would betray him (a fact mentioned as early as [John 6:70](#)). Furthermore, on the Day of Pentecost Peter preached that the crucifixion of Jesus was "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" [[Acts 2:23](#)]. But does the affirmation of divine sovereignty mean that humans are not morally responsible? Not hardly. The omniscience and omnipotence of God are affirmed in these crucial texts, but the sovereignty of God is never cited to nullify full human responsibility.

More from the article in *The Times*: *The move to clear Judas's name coincides with plans to publish the alleged Gospel of Judas for the first time in English, German and French. Though not written by Judas, it is said to reflect the belief among early Christians — now gaining ground in the Vatican — that in betraying Christ Judas was fulfilling a divine mission, which led to the arrest and Crucifixion of Jesus and hence to man's salvation.*

This just adds greater confusion to an already confused question. Why would the Vatican welcome the translation of yet another spurious "gospel" text? Will the Vatican give it credence?

The report did cite some in the Vatican who questioned the effort to rehabilitate Judas: *Some Vatican scholars have*

expressed concern over the reconsideration of Judas. Monsignor Giovanni D'Ercole, a Vatican theologian, said it was "dangerous to re-evaluate Judas and muddy the Gospel accounts by reference to apocryphal writings.

That is quite an understatement. This issue raises all over again the distinction between Roman Catholic and Evangelical understandings of biblical authority, church authority, biblical interpretation, and doctrinal development.

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