

Jesus was a Jew - Tony Pearce

And I suggested to Sharon that I might give a talk trying to illustrate perhaps some of the reasons why Christianity has been used for anti-Semitism. Why it shouldn't be, and also, the other side of the coin, why **Christianity has a pro-Zionist point of view and an interest in supporting Israel.**

I'm going to start off by reading from a book by a man called André Schwarz-Bart. It's called The last of the Just. It's based on the Jewish legend of the 36 just men which is a mystical Hasidic Judaism concept that there are 36 just men on the earth whose role in life is to justify the purpose of humankind before God.

In medieval Jewish mysticism, the 36 men came to be known as the Tzadikim Nistarim, or the "hidden righteous ones." Within the rich culture of the Hasidic Jews, this group began to be more and more defined. These secret people are righteous men whose actions are good and compassionate. They do not know that they are among the 36, and their humility is so great that were they to discover that they are indeed these righteous ones, they would cease to be them. Therefore any person who declared himself to be one of the hidden ones would certainly not be one. But God knows who they are and for their sake he spares the rest of us.

The story covers eight generations of the Levy family going back to the execution of a Levy ancestor in 12th century in York, England, and culminating in the story of Ernie 'the last of the just' who is executed at Auschwitz.

In this passage Emerson Reed (Ernie) is about to be taken off to the concentration

camp and he, in this story, actually marries his friend Golda the night before they're taken away. As they're preparing to go to the concentration camp, their conversation turns to Jesus and this is what it says:

'Oh Ernie,' Golda said, 'you know them. Tell me why do the Christians hate us the way they do? They seem so nice when I can look at them without my star.'

Ernie put his arm round her shoulder solemnly. 'It's very mysterious,' he murmured in Yiddish. 'They don't exactly know why themselves. I've been in their churches and I've read their gospel. Do you know who the Christ was? A simple Jew like your father. A kind of Hassid.'

Golda smiled gently. 'You're kidding me.'

*'No, no believe me, and I'll bet they'd have got along fine, the two of them, because he was really a good Jew, you know sort of like the Baal Shem Tov – a merciful man and gentle. The Christians say they love him, but I think they hate him without knowing it. So they take the cross by one end and make a sword out of it and strike us with it! You understand Golda,' he cried out suddenly strangely excited, 'they take the cross and they turn it around, they turn it around, my God...' **'Poor Jesus, if he came back to the earth and saw that the pagans had made a sword out of him and used it against his sisters and brothers, he'd be sad, he'd grieve forever. And maybe he does see it.'***

A moving account and a sentiment which really distresses me actually. As I read it of course, I believe that Jesus was more than a simple Jew, but nevertheless, when we read the Gospels we have to recognize that Jesus was thoroughly Jewish from start to finish. **We also have to recognize that what it says here is true. The professing church has historically done exactly what it shouldn't have done: taken the cross and used it to smite the Jewish people with.**

And as the character in the story says, this is totally contrary to the will and the teaching of Jesus and, He does grieve over it, what has been done in His name.

André Schwarz-Bart



André Schwarz-Bart receiving Jerusalem Prize (1967)

Born André Schwarz-Bart
28 May 1928
Metz, Moselle, France

Died 30 July 2006 (aged 78)
Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe,
France

Occupation Novelist

Notable work *The Last of the Just*

The ceremony of pidyon ha-ben, although not frequently observed today, is one of the oldest in Judaism. It involves the ceremonial “redemption” of a firstborn son from compulsory service to God as a priest or other religious functionary. It has two ancient origins. The first stems from the days of the Temple in Jerusalem where Jews brought their first fruits of the harvest each year—lambs, chickens, calves, fruits, grains, and—yes—their first-born sons—as a Thanksgiving offering to God. An example of this can be seen in the book of Samuel where Hannah, who finally gives birth to a son after many years of infertility, brings him to the sanctuary at Shiloh for service to the Lord.

Let's just have a look at one or two verses which tell us about the Jewishness of Jesus.

The first verse of the New Testament in **Matthew chapter 1**, if read in the Hebrew says: ***Sefer toldoth Yeshua ha mashiach ben David, ben Avraham: The book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.***

In **Luke's Gospel 2.21**, it says that **when Jesus was eight days old, eight days were completed for the circumcision of the child and His name was called Yeshua Jesus.** It also tells us that following that, He went up to Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph to go through the ceremony of the ‘redemption of the firstborn’ service in the Temple.

The only event which is recorded in the life of Jesus as a child is when He is 12 years old and it says in the **Gospel of Luke 2.41-50**, that, when he was 12 years old, they were taken up with the family to Jerusalem for the Passover, and, at that time, He became separated from the large family group and He ends up discussing the issues of the **Torah** with the teachers in the Temple.

Then, in **Luke chapter 4**, it says that at the beginning of His ministry, He goes around Galilee teaching in the synagogues, then goes to His hometown in Nazareth and it says:

¹⁶ So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah.

GOSPEL OF LUKE Chapter 4 verse 16-17

It says: **As His custom was He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath** to read and He read from the prophet Isaiah where it says: **the spirit of the Lord is upon me because He anointed me to preach good news (verse 18).** And He applies it to Himself and His purpose of coming into the world.

We see also that, if you look in the New Testament, all of his disciples are Jewish. **You look at some medieval art and you see that Peter, James, and John who are 'good Christian boys', given Christian names. They all look like English people or Germans, and Judas, the bad guy, he always looks very Jewish. But, in fact, they were all Jewish:** Peter is *Shimon Kifa*, James is *Yakov*, John is *Yohanán*, and they're all Jewish disciples of Jesus.

He tells the disciples not to go to the gentiles but to go to **the lost sheep of the house of Israel**. He tells the Samaritan woman that **salvation is of the Jews** in **John's Gospel**.

He says He's **not come to destroy the Torah but to fulfil it** In **Matthew chapter 5**.

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. ⁶ But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' ⁸ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. ⁹ Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, ¹⁰ nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW Chapter 5 verses 5-15

And he answers the question 'which is the greatest of the Commandments?' by quoting the *Shema* in **Mark chapter 12.28-34** where He says that the first of all Commandments is: **Hear! O Israel! The Lord our God the Lord is one. You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment and the second is, likewise, you should love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these**, a totally Jewish answer to the question: 'what is the greatest commandment?'

He participates in the Jewish festivals the **Sukkot** (the Feast of Tabernacles) in **John chapter 7**, in the Passover and, of course, the last supper is in the context of a 'Seder meal'.

We read in **Matthew 26**, in the context of the Seder meal, that Jesus takes the bread and the wine and applies it to Himself, but this is in the context of the Passover meal and the New Testament connects His death to the Passover, His resurrection also, to the **Bikkurim**, the Feast of the First Fruits.

And, after the Resurrection, Jesus explains what has happened to the disciples in **Luke's Gospel**. It says: **The words which I spoke to you while I was still with you that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms concerning me. This refers to the Torah and the three divisions of the Tanach, the Jewish Bible.**

So, anyone who reads these passages and reads the New Testament has to understand that Jesus is Jewish, that the gentiles play little part in the drama until the final trial before Pilate.

What also strikes me is that all these verses actually don't have any other interpretation; **you can't interpret the fact that Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day any other way.**

Then that's what happened. You could deny that that's what happened, but you can't interpret it any other way.

So, we have this picture which comes through. **Any intelligent reading of the New Testament shows the Jewishness of Jesus.**

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