

Jesus Christ: Born a Jew, Died a Heretic

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Too many sympathizers, some of them leading Jewish scholars like J. Klausner, author of *Jesus of Nazareth*, have written highly sympathetic books to extol the Jewishness of Jesus. In this they are very much mistaken. The truth is that in spite of the „fact“ that he was born a Jew, Jesus died a heretic.

It is seldom realized that the Gospel Jesus was infinitely more Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Pythagorean than Judaic. The beliefs in Heaven, Hell and the Devil, a Last Judgment, physical resurrection, and an ongoing war in Heaven all originate with the ancient Persian prophet Zoroastra, who lived around 628-551 BCE.

Gautama, who became the „enlightened one“-the Buddha-lived in the sixth century BCE. In just three hundred years, Buddhist missionaries had not only spread to central Asia but also had penetrated and proselytized Syria and Egypt before the time of Jesus. Buddhist elements in the Christian Gospel were the substitution of a communism of beggars for communities that were self-supporting; the emphasis of the importance of charity to support these mendicant communists; and charity to the poor, whose rights and virtues were always emphasized. The Gospel also owes to Buddhism the spreading of the message to heal the sick, the lame and the blind, and to establish a universal kingdom in which private wealth, poverty, and exploitation would be abolished forever. It is also indebted to Buddhism for the renunciation of labor, property, and sex-both procreational and recreational-thereby renouncing the family as the only practical means by which to escape such eternal suffering.

The input of Pythagoreanism to the Gospel is also important, for by the time of Jesus it had transformed itself into the Essene community-with the startling conclusion by some modern scholars that Jesus was a renegade member of that Jewish revolutionary sect. Pythagoras (about 582-507 BCE) was a pre-Socratic philosopher who founded a secret, mystical brotherhood in Italy. Like the primitive Christians of the Gospel, they held all possessions in common. And like Jesus' advice in the Gospels, the Essene community also encouraged celibacy. Their practice of purification through ritual immersion was a significant influence on the development of baptism in the early church. The Essenes believed in the immortality of the soul, another vital strand of the Gospel. They also forbade the taking of oaths, just as stated in the Gospels. The Essenes believed in several messiahs, another major influence in the development of Christianity.

In this cultural environment of high religious tensions, we find several Jewish groups jockeying for power. The two foremost parties were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees, with its long history as the most conservative of Jewry, were in charge of the Temple, believed only in the law of Moses, opposed the oral law of the Pharisees, engaged in the traditional rituals and sacrifices, recruited especially from the priesthood, and were backed by the aristocracy and landowners. Many were members of the Sanhedrin, the governing body of the Jews. Jesus criticized the Sadducees for not believing in the resurrection, and for the same reason the Pharisees also regarded them as heretics.

Their opposition, the Pharisees, replaced the Temple with the synagogue-for the Romans had destroyed the Temple in 70 CE-ousted the priesthood for the rabbi, and substituted sacrificial ceremony with the prayer service. They emphasized the study of the Torah, the growing need for the restoration of their Promised Land, and the preparation for the world to come. They and Jesus clashed because what he was doing and saying were considered heretical to Pharisaic theology.

Another Jewish group vying for power was the Zealots, a fanatical, terrorist, political and religious sect who openly resisted Roman rule. Some authorities trace them to a religious sect from the Maccabean period. They were most influential in Galilee, an area most familiar to Jesus and his band of disciples and women camp followers.

Finally, among other splinter sects was a very small group of off-shoot Jews living east of Jerusalem and near the Dead Sea. They were the above-mentioned Essenes.

So here we have a melee of religious conflict into which Jesus was born as a Jew. The sole sources of Jesus' childhood are the Gospels, for whatever outside information we have has been recognized as myths and legends-much as the four Gospels are thought to be, for they are not history but theological tracts written by believers for believers.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in 6 or 7 BCE, lived in the northern province of Galilee, and was crucified in Jerusalem by the Romans between 30 and 33 CE. His mother Mary was Jewish; his

genealogy in the Gospels supposedly „proves" that he was descended from the Jewish royal dynasty of king David, although the prophet Jeremiah (22.30) states otherwise; like all Jewish boys, he was circumcised on the eighth day; he went to synagogue as a child.

In spite of his reverence for Moses and the prophets, you can see that Jesus had little in common with their basic ideology. Since no nation with a well-developed culture will accept speculative doctrines which contradict those it already holds, there were many reasons why the Jews could never embrace the Gospel Jesus. Note the following:

1. The idea of any actual sonship to God, even if only mystical, violated the Jewish fundamental concept of God's spirituality, unity, and universality.

2. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth, which came later, and which had many counterparts among Greeks, Buddhists, and Persians, was an abomination to the Jews since, for them, it reduced the deity into a vulgar and polytheistic concept.

3. The pagan doctrine of the Eucharist, according to which the literal body and blood of the deity were eaten, was most repugnant to the Jews. To boot, Zoroastrian baptism was nearly as flagrant a violation of Mosaic ideals.

4. After the Persian influence receded among the Pharisees, the Jews as a whole rejected the Zoroastrian eschatology of Jesus *in toto* and re-embraced that of Moses and the prophets, who knew nothing of hell or heaven, of rewards, punishment, or judgment after death.

5. The universalism of Jesus called for the merging of the Jews among Gentiles around them and the consequent destruction of the old, exclusive Judaism. No offense could have been greater than this. One of Jesus' strategies to achieve this was to declare that all Jewish dietary food laws were now void.

6. No one could have been more different from the Messiah expected by orthodox Jews than was Jesus. Neither the disciples nor other early Christians expected a Messiah of moral judgment during the years following the crucifixion. No ordinary Jew could accept the Greek mystery-concept of a savior-god. The Jews expected a militant Messiah who would expel the hated Romans from their Holy Land-not a self-promoted „prophet" who declared that his kingdom was not of this world. When the Jews asked for a sign, he answered them with abuse and denunciation, providing no shred of acceptable evidence to support his messianic claims.

7. Jesus' repudiation of family and marriage was extremely repugnant to the Jews. And his mandate that those who could not practice celibacy without desire should castrate themselves must have appeared as insanity, especially to a people who believed they must increase and multiply as God told them to do so no less than seven times in Genesis of their own Bible.

8. The ethical teachings of Jesus, which required all persons with property to sell it and give the money to the poor, were simply unrealistic. And he made it a cardinal sin to enjoy any comfort or luxury not equally enjoyed by all. Such ethics were incomprehensible to the Jews, who considered them completely subversive.

9. When Jesus repudiated the Jewish Sabbath, the Temple sacrifices, the dietary laws and other ceremonials, he became a criminal and heretic in the eyes of all pious Jews.

Thus those who maintain that Jesus was Jewish to the core have been and are mistaken. Although Jesus was born a Jew, he certainly died a heretic!

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