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# Jesus the historical

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

JESUS THE HISTORICAL

Submitted by

Sylvia James Burden

(A.B., Albion, 1925)

In partial fulfilment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of

Arts

1930

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JESUS THE HISTORICAL  
Outline

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Thesis -

To examine some of the data offered as proof that Jesus was an historical character; likewise the chief arguments presented by those who deny such historicity and to observe some answers to these negative arguments; also to show, in some measure, the kind of Character Jesus was.

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## JESUS THE HISTORICAL.

### Introduction.

The purpose of such an exposition as this is to set forth some data as a reasonable basis for acceptance of belief in the existence of an historical Jesus. Recognizing that traditional faith is not valid evidence, we approach the problem by an attempt at a fair minded examination of the chief documents, both scriptural and non-scriptural, setting forth the figure of Jesus. In this presentation we shall be critical observing the chief arguments purporting to disqualify the best evidence.

The practical importance of such a consideration is evident when one thinks of the place of Jesus in modern Christianity, which is becoming more increasingly Christocentric. Some of the chief emphases of the Reformation were Pauline so far as their sources were concerned, likewise much of the authority of Modern Christianity has been found in the Old Testament. Today the cry is "Back to Christ." Jesus becomes our chief authority for the character of God. All of this gives us a fresh interest in the question of the Historical Jesus.

Some may think it ridiculous to raise the question

of Jesus' historicity, but the very fact that scholars do raise this question, and mean to be taken seriously, causes us to go into the matter deeply to see what grounds there are for our belief or these doubts. Drews says "Since David Frederick Strauss in his 'Life of Jesus' attempted for the first time to trace the gospel stories and accounts of miracles back to myths and pious fictions, doubts regarding the existence of an historical Jesus have never been lulled to rest."<sup>1.</sup> He adds that it has been reserved to the present day (1910) to attain to more startling results.

As we have no eye witness who ever saw Jesus, and we do not possess the written statement of anyone who did, we are forced to rely upon such records of his activities as seem from the most careful examination to be reliable. Some of this evidence is indirect or what is usually called circumstantial. It is quite generally agreed that circumstantial evidence is admissible when the circumstances are so related to each other as to convince a reasonable man. The most important element involved is the examination of the various records. There are so many technical questions here that no untrained person could be competent to offer

1. Drews-The Christ Myth p.7.

an opinion as to what may be relied upon, we must therefore make use of the most expert testimony we can find.

In criticizing the sources we find we have a double task; first, to ascertain what the sources are, from what time they date, from whom they come; and second, to form an opinion as to their value. We shall now consider the evidence.

The evidence for the historical Jesus.

A. Evidence of early writers outside the canon.

We are somewhat embarrassed at the scantiness of material which we find when we search early writings for proof of Jesus' earthly existence, and yet after due deliberation, we are not surprised. To us, who live almost 2,000 years after Jesus, his life because of the resulting movement of Christianity is the greatest event of all time, but we must remember that in the early days it was important only to the Christians themselves, and that the rest of the people of the Roman world looked upon Christianity as just an insignificant sect within Judaism itself, not worthy of mention. The secular historians had no interest in writing about the various religions of the time unless the adherents were particularly hostile to the state, therefore the casual

Roman observers did not perceive any necessity for treatment of the Christians whose attitude was about the same as the Jewish position and the Jews for some time had been viewed with suspicion for refusal to identify themselves with Roman society.<sup>1.</sup>

## 2. Testimony found in Roman writers.

Though the references here are few, they are worthy of our attention. Burkitt would give to Tacitus the honor of being the only one, independently of Christian tradition, to give us any information about the life and career of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>2.</sup> More recent writers have mentioned others, some of whom we will consider later, but Tacitus at least seems to bear unequivocal testimony to the existence of the Jesus of gospel history even though by his testimony he shows his unfriendliness toward the Christians. Rhees says "The Roman's scornful judgment failed to grasp the nature and power of the movement whose unpopularity invited Nero's lying accusation, yet it emphasizes the significance of him who did not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street, whose influence, nevertheless, was working as leaven throughout the empire."<sup>3.</sup> A translation of Tacitus'

1. Case-Historicity of Jesus p.242.

2. Burkitt-Earliest Sources for the Life of Jesus p.1.

3. Rhees-The Life of Jesus of Nazareth p.3.

definite statement in his Annals written about 115-117 reads thus:

"The originator of that name, one Christus, had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by order of the administrator - Pontius Pilate." 1.

Here Pontius Pilate occupies the same place that he occupies in the church's creed, he marks the date of the Crucifixion.

Before we can accept this as proof of Jesus' existence we must determine whether it can be considered as a genuine part of the original author's work, or whether it is an interpolation by the hands of some Christian copier. Hochart, one French scholar, who is very skeptical would assign not only the sentence and chapter here in question but a much greater portion of the Annals to the pen of Poggio Bacciolini who brought to the light our most important manuscript of the annals. 2. Hochart, with his extreme skepticism, has failed to win any substantial following.

The definite arguments against the genuineness of the statement quoted above are: that in writing of Tiberius, Tacitus would have been expected to use the word princeps and not imperitante, and also in writing - per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum no statement is given as to where he is procurator. In regards to the first, while we

1. Tacitus-Annals 15:44 - From Burkitt op.cit. p.1.  
2. Case-op.cit. p.247.

might have expected him to use the term princeps we can not prove that he did, or that he would not have used imperitante, for this same word is found in other of his writings. The second contention - per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum - is thought to need some explanation as to where Pilate was governor, but a sentence follows closely saying that the malady sprang from Judea.

If we do accept these as genuine we have yet to prove that they are independent of gospel tradition. we know that the gospel tradition had taken form by the year 115 A.D. and had been broadcast over the Roman empire. Case does not think that Tacitus' reliability suffers in any way by admitting that he may have had his information from current Christian tradition,<sup>1.</sup> but Klausner thinks that Tacitus would have had greater value if written earlier than 75 years after the event.<sup>2.</sup>

The Roman historian Suetonius (65-135) is very obscure in his reference to Christianity. In his lives of the Twelve Caesars, from Julius Caesar to Domitian, (written about 120 A.D.) he says that Claudius "banished from Rome the Jews who made great tumult because of Chrestus."<sup>3.</sup>

We know that the names Chrestus and Christus have been confused, but we are sure too that Jesus could not have

1. Case-op.cit. p.249.

2. Klausner-Jesus of Nazareth p.60.

3. Claudius 25 Cited by Klausner op. cit. p.60.

been in the city of Rome at the time of Claudius, yet the natural meaning of 'impulsore Chresto' is that a disturbance was caused by a Jew named Chrestus, living in Rome at this time. "It is also possible that Suetonius did not distinguish sharply the difference between Jews and Christians, and knew so little of the situation as to make his reference to it thus unintelligible."<sup>1.</sup> Klausner after quoting Graetz (Geshichte der Juden III, 423 n.3) who supposes that "Christus" was an apostle of Christian teacher, says "If we suppose with Graetz that Suetonius here refers to a Christian teacher, the fact that only twenty years after the death of Jesus there were to be found Christian apostles, and teachers, is itself proof not only of his existence, but also of the important effect of his personal influence."<sup>2.</sup>

Suetonius also has a statement to the effect that Nero punished the Christians who were adherents of a new and odious superstition. This is easily understood and can be accepted more readily than the former reference because we are familiar with Nero's persecution of the Christians.

Pliny, governor of Bithynia, adds something to our knowledge of the spread of Christianity in his time. In 112 A.D. he writes to Trajan telling the results of an investigation of the Christians which he carried on at the

1. Case-op.cit. p.246.

2. Klausner-op.cit. p.61.

orders of the Emperor. "The chief point of interest in Pliny's report is the statement that he had heard in the course of his inquiries, first of all from heathen sources, that the Christians neither sacrificed to the gods, nor yet offered incense to the Emperor, and that they refused, when bidden, 'to curse Christus'; and, secondly, from the Christians themselves upon examination, that they held early morning and evening meetings, at the former of which they sang songs of praise to Christ 'as if to a god' (quasi deo), and made holy vows, and at the latter partook of common meals."<sup>1.</sup> This seems to show that Christianity had gained a strong foothold in the regions governed by Pliny. Drews objects to using this as evidence of Jesus, stating that "Jesus as an historical person is not once mentioned in the whole letter."<sup>2.</sup> Other writers pronounce the passage to be a Christian interpolation, but critical opinion at present is in favor of holding to its authenticity. Almost every life of Jesus, which treats of the extra-canonical sources, includes Pliny along with Suetonius and Tacitus, as furnishing us a few items of importance.

### 3. Testimony of Jewish writings.

We would naturally expect a fuller treatment from

1. Thorburn- Jesus the Christ p. 128.
2. Drews- op.cit. p. 233.

Jewish writings of the period, but here again we are disappointed. The Talmud, a body of Jewish Civil and Canonical law not in the Pentateuch, was in process of formation at the time Jesus lived, so we might expect to find in it some reference to Jesus. There are many statements that have been interpreted as referring to Jesus, but most of them must be ruled out, then too the rest have little historical value "since they partake of the nature of vituperation and polemic against the founder of a hated party."<sup>1.</sup> However after careful analysis of the oldest manuscripts, Klausner is of the opinion that :

"There are reliable statements in the Talmud to the effect that Jesus' name was Yeshu'a of Nazareth, that he practiced sorcery and beguiled and led Israel astray; that he mocked at the words of the wise; that he expounded the Scriptures in the same manner as the Pharisees; that he had five disciples; that he said that he was not come to take aught away from the Law or to add to it; that he was hanged as a false teacher and beguiler on the eve of the Passover, which happened on the Sabbath and that his disciples healed the sick in his name."<sup>2.</sup>

There are other references which do not stand the test of historical criticism even to the extent that the above do, but even they seem to have some value for us. If Jesus never lived, or there had been any question of his existence, why did the enemies of the Christians admit his existence and confine their opposition to

1. Klausner-op.cit. p. 18-19.  
2. Op.Cit. p. 46.

denying the claims of his unusual superiority which were advanced by the Christians? "It is a notorious fact that no Jewish teacher, or writer, has ever questioned the existence of the Jesus of the Gospels. In all their bitterest controversies with the Christians, throughout the last eighteen centuries and more, no Rabbi has even suggested that Jesus was not an historical character."<sup>1.</sup>

A superficial reading of the Toledoth Jehahu, (Origens of Jesus) shows that it is nothing but folklore in which are woven Talmudic legends and gospel accounts. The book contains no history but it has a value which may be described as historical, for in it nothing in the gospels was denied, it was only perverted into a source of ridicule.

In addition, the works of Josephus and Philo are the only other Jewish writings to be preserved, and Philo in his Therapeutes does not once refer to the Christians. In Josephus' book, 'The Antiquities of the Jews', written during the last decade of the first century, we may find only two references to Jesus, and these have not been considered reliable even by Christian scholars, largely because of the manifest additions made by later Christian copyists. Klausner, however, takes

1. Thoburn- op.cit. p.149.

the position that while a portion is unreliable a portion can be accepted,<sup>1.</sup> and Thorburn is of the same opinion.<sup>2.</sup>

The bracketed words in the following are considered to have been added to the original text.

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise Man (if it be lawful to call him a man). For he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. (He was the Messiah) and when Pilate at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first ceased not (for he appeared to them alive again the third day as the divine Phophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him); and the race of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct even now.<sup>3.</sup>

Josephus writing as a Pharisee, for the sake of the Romans, would not have wanted to say anything either favorable or detailed about Jesus or about the Christians. As this would not have been to the liking of Christians who copied the writings, they added to them. Rhees thinks that Josephus could not have been ignorant of Jesus, but after giving such an appreciative notice of John the Baptist (Ant. xviii 5.2 ) he could not have mentioned Jesus more fully without some approval of his life and teaching. This would be a condemnation of his own people, whom he desired to commend to Gentile regard; he seems to have taken the cowardly course of silence concerning a matter which was

1. Op. cit. p.57.

2. Op. cit. p.95.

3. Ant. xviii 3.3 ( Klausner op. cit. p.56 ).

more noteworthy even for that generation than much else of which he writes very fully.<sup>1.</sup>

The second mention by Josephus of Jesus says:

"So he (Ananus) assembled the sanhedrin of judges and brought before them the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ, whose name was James, and some others. And when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law he delivered them to be stoned."<sup>2.</sup>

In the opinion of Klausner there is no doubt that this is genuine. He quotes Reville who rightly urges that no Christian would write of Jesus 'who was called the Messiah;' such an interpolation would be <sup>3.</sup>overdone.

It must be admitted that we do not learn much from these fragmentary statements, but at least we have confirmed the existence of Jesus and his brother James, that he had been a doer of wonderful works, a teacher, and had been condemned to the cross by Pilate.

#### 4. Testimony of Agrapha, Apocrypha, and Apostolic Fathers.

We have a group of sayings called the Agrapha or words of Jesus outside the gospels. Of these, Wernle says "There is hardly one which could enrich our knowledge of Jesus, to say nothing of the uncertainty that they are

1. Rhee- op.cit. p. 22.

2. Ant. xx.9.1. Cited by Case - op. cit. 250-251.

3. Op. cit. p.59.

really his." <sup>1.</sup> Wellhausen and Julicher as well as most reputable scholars regard them all as spurious, so it is inadvisable to make use of them.

The apocryphal gospels are all later than the Canonical, and are filled with legends showing the childlike faith of Christian bodies from the second century onward. There is no historical value for us in them, because if they did contain a germ of truth it would be impossible to find it in the mass of legend.

A distinction might be made between the apocryphal gospels and the uncanonical such as the gospel of Peter, of the Egyptians, of the Hebrews, and of the Ebionites, but even these, though containing more of the truth than the apocryphal gospels must be handled with care because since they were banished from the canon, they have not been preserved carefully.

The Apostolic Fathers offer us little about the life of Jesus, but the very fact, that they take the reality of his earthly existence for granted, in this respect, following the current Christian tradition, is valuable.

1. Wernle-Sources for our knowledge for the Life of Jesus  
p. 8.

B. Value of the testimony to historicity of Jesus.

1. Not contradictory to Jesus historicity.

To sum up what we have learned from these extra-canonical sources, we find that we have acquired but two things; (a) We have learned something of the period and environment in which Jesus lived, something of the political conditions, and some of the religious and ethical ideas which prevailed; (b) Though this is secondary and fragmentary, we can conclude from it that Jesus lived and died in Judea during the Roman occupation and that he had an exceptional personality. "All this stands out firm and irrefutable and there is no solid foundation for the doubts of Bauer, Kalthoff and Drews."<sup>1</sup>

2. As Valid as evidence for other characters  
not questioned.

Here may we say that the evidence for Jesus about which we have gone into detail above, is fully as valid as the evidence which we have for other characters not usually questioned. Socrates is an example of this, and here is Rousseau's judgment about the two in his Emile.

"Shall we say that the gospel story is a work of imagination? Friend, that is not how one invents; the facts about Socrates, which no one doubts, are not so

1. Klausner- Jesus of Nazareth p.70.

well attested as those about Jesus Christ.....  
 It would be more incredible that four men should have agreed to manufacture this book than that there was a single man who supplied the subject-matter for it. No Jewish authors could have hit upon its tone or its morality; the gospel has notes of reality which are so great, so striking, so absolutely inimitable, that their inventor would be a more astonishing person than their hero."<sup>1</sup>

(In regard to the question that Socrates existence has not been doubted, it should be noted that a recent philosopher, Will Durant in an article written for the American Magazine has doubted the historicity of Socrates but how far this is being accepted, I am not able to say.)  
 Moffatt, though he admits that an expert would have put the matter more cautiously than Rousseau has done, nevertheless concludes " Rousseau .... has summed up by anticipation in these words the position on which sound criticism of the gospels is steadily converging."<sup>2</sup> We would add with Klausner that those who deny his (Jesus) very existence and the great importance of his personality must deny all historic reality."<sup>3</sup>

1. Moffatt-The approach to the New Testament p.167.
2. Op.Cit. p.167.
3. Op. Cit. p.70.

B. Paul's Testimony in regard to Jesus' Historicity.

1. The genuineness of the letters.

The earliest Christian literature which we have handed down to us is the group of letters commonly attributed to St. Paul, as written to the various churches which he founded on his missionary journeys. While it is very generally accepted that these letters are those of Paul, nevertheless their genuineness has been questioned, so it is best that before we see what evidence they contain concerning the historical Jesus, we shall estimate such facts both external and internal which are submitted in their favor.

The external evidence is slight but not to be cast out for that reason, although it is readily cast aside by those who want to deny the genuineness of the letters. Clement of Rome, writing to the Corinthians in the last decade of the first century A. D. (about 95) says, "Take up the epistle of the blessed apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the gospel first began to be preached? Truly under the inspiration of the spirit, he wrote to you concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos, because even then parties had been formed among you."<sup>1</sup> This refers undoubtedly to I Corinthians.

1. Clement 47:1 (Translation by Hayes-Paul and his Epistle p. 225).

Marcion mentions Paul, giving him the place, too, of being his main scriptural authority.<sup>1.</sup> Ignatius, also, seems to be well acquainted with Paul's letters though this evidence is less specific. Moffatt quotes, "Ignatius must have known this epistle by heart", referring to I Corinthians.<sup>2.</sup>

This extra-biblical evidence is slight, still we can consider ourselves fortunate that we have this much. In the early days when manuscripts were written so laboriously, few were made, and it was easy to destroy them. Rival schools often destroyed each others books consequently, as some authors have said, "every manuscript was at the mercy of the least accidents; its preservation or destruction was merely a matter of chance."

But this external evidence, convincing as it may seem to some (in spite of its slowness) is nevertheless cast aside as spurious by those who deny the genuineness of Paul's letters; so if we would present any proof to them it must come from considerations based on the content of the literature itself. One question we must ask ourselves is--Were these letters written by Paul or do they seem to be written by an impersonator? Van Manen leads the extreme Dutch critics, saying that all Pauline epistles are pseud-

1. Case P.179

2. Moffatt-An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament-P. 115.

epigraphic, and merely express views of a second century  
 1. champion. When a book is written by a pseudonymous person, he will make the character of the person impersonated have the point of view of himself, and of his age in which he is then living. He would hardly put into the mouth of his hero, ideas such as are discredited at the time he is writing, and as the eschatology of Paul was not in good repute at a little later date, it seems to be a fine piece of internal evidence which we can accept in favor of Paul being the author.

Again the minute details of biography are given naturally-not artificially nor stiffly, as would be the case if invented. Of course they are meager and do not give us the whole life of Paul but we would agree with Case who thinks that the very incompleteness of the story  
 2. is a credential for the genuineness of the letters. Glover concurring in this sentiment says that the many gaps, needless references to unknown persons, and the constant occupation with questions which we can only dimly discover from his answers; all bear testimony to their stamp of genuineness. A novel or collection of letters written  
 3. merely for general reading would not be like this.

The personality of Paul that we see revealed in his

1. Case p. 52-note 1.
2. Case pp. 184-185
3. Glover-The Jesus of History-p. 8.

writing seems to ring true to reality. We see, passing through the range of human experience, an actual person, emotional--now on the heights, now in the depths--now condemning, now flattering, influenced by his own experiences, but through it all doing a particularly vital piece of work in propagating a new religion. Such a character could hardly have been created by a later writer. "Norden, in his Kunstprose says there is much in Paul that he does not understand but he catches in him again after three hundred years that note of life that marks the great literature of Greece. That is not easily forged. Luther and Erasmus were right when they said--each of them has said it however it happened--that Paul"Spoke pure flame."<sup>1.</sup> So we would agree with Case that in view of the above, "the historicity of Paul, and the genuineness of the principal Pauline letters are supported by the data of both external and internal testimony."<sup>2.</sup>

Granting the authenticity of the major Pauline letters we would expect, in view of the fact that Paul is the earliest literary witness to Christianity, to learn much of the person and life of Jesus. But we are doomed to disappointment; the references are few, and some who do

1. Glover-op.cit.p.8.

2. Case-op.cit.p.190.

not doubt the authenticity of the Pauline letters, nevertheless, have not been able to find in his letters any evidence that he knew of and preached a Jesus who had lived. Drews goes to the extreme in saying "no one would find such a person in them if that belief was not previously established in him."<sup>1.</sup> Is Paul so completely silent? Let us examine his letters closely to determine what facts or data he gives us in regard to Jesus.

We find a reference to his birth in the natural way,<sup>2.</sup> also that he came of the line of David,<sup>3.</sup> we learn of his life of obedience,<sup>4.</sup> his poverty,<sup>5.</sup> his meekness and gentleness,<sup>6.</sup> the crucifixion,<sup>7.</sup> which became Paul's cornerstone for interpretation, the resurrection,<sup>8.</sup> resurrection appearances,<sup>9.</sup> the teaching of Jesus in regard to divorce,<sup>10.</sup> then a few other references which show a knowledge of general teachings and events in the life of Jesus-<sup>11.</sup> also a specific event,<sup>12.</sup> namely the last meal with his disciples, and the betrayal. Scanty though these are, we can draw from them that Paul knew of a human Jesus, born of a Jewish mother, suffered, crucified and was seen after death. Not very much but nevertheless, we cannot draw from Paul's seeming silence that he knew nothing more. There was no need of his telling more.

- |                                 |                          |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Drews-The Christ Myth-p.208. | 7. I Cor, 2:2.           |
| 2. Gal.4:4.                     | 8. Gal. 1:1.             |
| 3. Rom.1:3.                     | 9. I Cor. 15:3-8.        |
| 4. Rom.5:19, Phil.2:5-11.       | 10. I Cor. 7:10-11.      |
| 5. II Cor.8:9                   | 11. I Cor. 7:12,25,9:14, |
| 6. II Cor.10:1.                 | IThes. 4:15.             |
|                                 | 12. I Cor. 11:23 ff.     |

He was talking to people who were near enough to the time of Jesus to know about his personal life. Paul seems to be primarily interested not in the facts of Jesus' life but rather in showing to his converts the greater meaning of his life, death and resurrection.

Paul was living in an age when the people who lived, and walked and talked with Jesus were still living. After his conversion, he had stayed in Damascus with the Christians there, some who had been considered worthy enough to demand his attention as a persecutor. He went up to Jerusalem and Barnabas took him to see Peter and the other disciples—they must have talked about Jesus because Paul would want to know about the one who had so graciously saved him. Paul worked in Antioch, and on his first missionary journey, with Barnabas who seems to have been intimately acquainted with the first disciples. This would have made it impossible for Paul to mistake the primitive belief in an anthropomorphized God for belief in an actual historical person,<sup>1</sup> Thorburn says, "these visits and conferences with his brother apostles alone preclude our taking St. Paul's references to the life and death and teaching of Jesus in any mythical or merely ideal sense."<sup>2</sup> Paul himself tells the Corinthians, he delivered to them

1. Case op.cit.p.197.

2. Op.cit.p.92.

3. I Cor.11:23.

1.  
what he received.

Another possibility presents itself. Paul has been accused of deliberately creating this historical character. It seems strange though and hardly to be believed that he would engage in such serious disputes as he had with the legalists- and worry about their undoing his work, when their claim that they had been personally acquainted with Jesus was all a fairy tale.

Then too, can it be imagined Paul said, "In prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in death oft-of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep, in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my country men, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness, and besides these things which are without there is that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches."<sup>2</sup> Could it be imagined that any one would go through all this for a mere fictitious Christ that he had created out of his imagination? It is hardly possible.

Those who deny the historicity of Jesus seem to think

1. I Cor. 11:23.

2. II Cor, 11:24-27. cf. I Cor. 4:9-13.

it necessary to assume that Paul's letters are spurious- but they do not bring forth definite proof that they are, again there are those who think that the letters are historical but that they have been worked over by the Christians later, and that all the passages that point to an historical Jesus are interpolations. (This shows as Case says the convenient elasticity of the critical method.)<sup>1.</sup> Drews attempts to explain Paul's Christianity thus-Paul had heard of a Jewish sect God, in Tarsus. It was none other than a Judaized and spiritualized Adonis cult. Paul opposed it but suddenly received enlightenment. The dying Adonis became the self-sacrificing God, surrendering his life for the world.<sup>2.</sup> This is too highly fanciful and has too many omissions to bear much weight.

We feel that in view of the above testimony we can draw this important conclusion. Though the testimony is restricted it is very clear-Paul is a genuine personality, and the historicity of Jesus is a prerequisite to his Christian life and work.<sup>3.</sup> While the apostle freely interpreted, and at times no doubt greatly idealized the person of Jesus, there never was a time when to deny the reality of Jesus would not have been a fatal shock to Paul's entire interpretive scheme.

1. Case-op.cit.p.73.
2. Drews op.cit.-p.187-199.
3. Case op.cit.-p.200.

C. The evidence for Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels.

1. Radicals contend that the gospels are worthless.

We turn now to the Canonical gospels which are considered by many authorities the primary sources in giving us knowledge of the life and teachings of Jesus, though there are some who feel that they are too prejudiced to be as worthwhile as the extra-canonical evidence. In consideration of the fact that John presents a (different problem than) Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we will focus our attention for the present on these three which are usually called the Synoptic Gospels.

To be sure, a school of radicals, of which Bruno Bauer is a typical representative, would set aside all these gospels as being worthless and entirely unhistorical. Bauer rejected Mark saying that it could be explained on purely literary grounds, and of course, accepting the proposition that Matthew and Luke were expansions of Mark, it followed that they too must be rejected. So for Bauer and his followers, these canonical gospels, instead of proving Jesus' historicity, rather deny his existence.

2. Examination of evidence for genuineness of gospels.

What answer can be given to these radicals? Have we proof to offer that is strong enough to make reasonable a belief in the authenticity of the gospels themselves?

1. Schweitzer-The Quest of the Historical Jesus p.137-160.

a. Internal Proof.

First let us turn to the gospels themselves. Here we do not find a great deal. Not one of them, for instance, mentions an author as Peter is mentioned in the false gospel of Peter. Apart from the tradition which grew up - it would never have occurred to anybody that Matthew the publican had written our gospel of Matthew, or the gospel of Mark had been written by the companion of Paul and Barnabas on their mission.

We are glad that Luke, following the Greeks, has given us his aim and plan, but even here we are not told the name or origin of the writer himself. He says:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed.<sup>1</sup>

From these four verses we learn that there were three stages in the handing down of this tradition; 1. the eyewitnesses who recorded by word of mouth what they had seen and heard, 2. those who tried to preserve what they heard by writing it down, some more accurately than others, 3. the author himself, who strives to select the best and arrange it in order.

1. Luke 1:1-4 (Standard American Revised version)

This lack of definite data seems to indicate genuineness rather than otherwise, because in the case of pseud-epigraphic writings, as was shown later, the authors thought to win a hearing by assigning them to the apostles. Various writers, from Tatian unto modern times, have tried to write a harmony of the gospels. This experience teaches us it cannot be done, not only because of conflicting data, and gaps in the stories, but also because of the disagreements in the time and place, when and where events occurred. At first thought it would seem that these contradictions and omissions testify against the veracity of the gospel contents; on more thorough consideration it appears that the authenticity is strengthened by the very discrepancies which appear. This makes the gospels true to life, true to the nature of the reports of the eyewitnesses for an event. No two people see or report any experience the same. If they did, we would suspect that they were writing according to pre-arranged agreement and not of things they had witnessed. Therefore these disagreements in dates, places, and details of story testify to the authenticity of the gospels rather than against them.

When it comes to the internal evidence of the gospels

representatives of the radical movement, who commonly ignore the external testimony to be considered below, lay great stress on the many passages to which they seem to find parallels in the heathen literature of the day. But according to Case, "No amount of parallelism .... disposes of the genuineness of these writings unless it can be demonstrated that the personal note, contained in them is not genuine, and that the idea of newness is itself fictitious" and then he concludes "In general this radical rejection of the New Testament evidence seems to rest on unreliable grounds, and is not sufficiently thoroughgoing to touch the heart of the <sup>1.</sup> problem.

No matter what the faults of the gospels are, and we admit that there are traces occasionally of a Jesus that might have been drawn from folklore, nevertheless, these accounts present on the whole a Jesus who is "true to life" even though he "tower to heaven".<sup>2.</sup> Nowhere in all literature do we find the creation of a character who even approaches Jesus.

#### b. External Proof.

Several writers of the second century whose reliability is not successfully questioned bear testimony to

1. Case-Historicity of Jesus- p.68.
2. Rittelmeyer-Behold the man-p.135.

the existence of the gospels and the high place they held. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, in a book written about 185 A.D. is the first to expound the doctrine of the necessity of the fourfold gospel. Although his reasons are fanciful, it shows that the four canonical gospels had a position entirely by themselves in his estimation.<sup>1.</sup>

About the year 150, Justyn Martyr speaks of "memoirs - so he translates the word 'gospel' for readers who were not Christians - composed by the apostles of Jesus and their companions."<sup>2.</sup>

Tatian, a pupil of Justyn, thought the four gospels inconvenient and incorporated them into his Diatessaron about 170 A.D.<sup>3.</sup>

In the Muratorian Canon, the four gospels were evidently enumerated at the beginning of the list of New Testament books.<sup>4.</sup>

Streeter in "The Four Gospels"<sup>5.</sup> gives us four pieces of evidence which seem to have direct bearing on the origin and dates of the gospels.

1. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, on his way to martyrdom at Rome (c. 115 A.D.) wrote seven letters. In them are to be found a dozen or more reminders of material found in the

1. Hastings-Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels-p.122.
2. Wernle-Sources for the life of Jesus-p.12.
3. Hastings-op.cit. p.122.
4. Case-op.cit/ pp. 205-206.
5. Streeter- pp.7-17.

synoptics. Some must be from Matthew, therefore it must have been a standard work before 115 A.D.

2. Marcion put in his Canon our third gospel, thus by 140, Luke must have been a church classic of standing.

3. Eusebius, Father of Church History, (c.325) had a fortunate habit of quoting from authorities verbatim; his accuracy has been checked by those which survive, therefore justifying us in believing he can be trusted in regard to those which do not, He quotes from Papias, bishop of Hieropolis, from his Exposition of Oracles of the Lord.

"And the Elders said this also - Mark having become the interpreter of Peter wrote down accurately everything that he remembered, without however recording in order what was said or done by Christ. For neither did he hear the Lord, nor did he follow Him, but afterwards as I said, (attended) Peter who adapted his instructions to the need (of his hearers) but had no design of giving a connected account of the Lord's oracles. So then Mark made no mistake while he thus wrote down some things as he remembered them, for he made it his one care not to omit anything that he heard or to set down any false statement therein."

We also have an interesting statement from the preface of Papias' work: "And again on any occasion when a person came in my way who had been a follower of the Elders, I would enquire about the discourses of the Elders, what was said by Andrew, or by Peter or by Philip, or by Thomas or James, or by John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples and what Aristion and the Elder John, the disciples of the Lord say."

4. Eusebius adds a remark about Matthew - "so then Matthew composed the oracles (τὰ λόγια) in the Hebrew language and each interpreted them as he could."

From these considerations we are warranted in drawing three conclusions; 1. the gospels were in existence before the second century, 2. they had been canonized, 3. they had been given first place in the New Testament collection.

3. The historical connection in which the gospel materials took shape.

a. The Synoptic Problem.

The first three gospels, because they are all constructed on a common plan, and from first to last amid minor differences present the teaching and work of Jesus from the same point of view are called the Synoptic Gospels.

After reading the gospels we see because of the many likenesses on the one hand, and the many discrepancies on the other, that the Synoptic Problem must deal with the questions: when were they written? which was written first? Did any one know of the existence of the others? what language were they written in? what sources did they use?

A great deal of research has been done on this question. There are many books which go into the matter in detail, but in our paper we feel that a summary of their results is all that is necessary.

1. The two-source theory is almost universally accepted.
2. Such evidence of dependence between them that the presumption is almost unavoidable that one, Mark, served as a source for the other two.
3. All material may be grouped into two classifications, narratives and sayings.
4. The narration of Matthew and Luke are so closely allied to Mark that inference is almost self-evident that they must have used as a source a gospel so similar to Mark that it could reasonably have been our Mark.
5. Hence Mark is best adapted to be used as a source for the other two - is presumably the first or narrative source used by Matthew and Luke.
6. The sayings or discourse material, forming a large common portion of Matthew and Luke, suggest the second source is a document made up mainly of sayings of Jesus and referred to by scholars as Q (from the German word, quelle, meaning source). This second source gives us the well-known two-document theory.

1. This summary is taken from Class Notes - Synoptic Gospels under Prof. Lowstuter in 1927.

In addition to these two great sources, it would seem probable that Matthew and Luke had recourse to others from which they got material common to each. Harnack made a mistake by not allowing for other special sources in addition to the two main ones.

It is not our purpose and intent to dogmatize, and presume that all difficulties are settled by this theory, or to infer that no questions are left unsettled, or to assume that all such questions ever can or will be settled. Our design is just to give a resume of scholars in this field and to find a working hypothesis. This theory appeals to us as being the most reasonable yet offered, as the one which removes most difficulties, answers most problems, leaves the smallest number of questions unanswered.

So though no one our gospels is the immediate product of an apostle, or other eyewitness, they are however based upon apostolic tradition, and at least the gospel of Mark which we have said is the oldest was written down while yet there were some living who had seen and heard the historical Jesus.

b. Approximate dates of the gospels.

Among the more conspicuous indications of Mark's date are references to the overthrow of the Jewish nation, and the destruction of the temple in the year 70 A.D. The Jewish revolution, though a thing of the past, was not very far away, so the authorities for the most part set the date of Mark soon after 70 A.D., although there are some who place it as early as 45 A.D., and others who make it as late as 130 A.D.<sup>1.</sup> In Mark 13:30, Jesus is supposed to have predicted the end of the world in his own generation. This would hardly have been invented after everybody of Jesus' generation had passed away, when history itself had proved it false. So it presupposed a close chronological connection between Jesus and the writers of the tradition.

Since Matthew used Mark in substantially its present form it must have been later than 70 A.D. Ignatius knew of it so we can place it between 70 and 110 A.D. Here again our historical critics disagree. Some place it between 40 and 50 A.D. - others as late as 140 A.D. Peake says , "Nothing forbids the view that this gospel may have been written toward the close of the first century."<sup>2.</sup> we feel that this is the most reasonable time to place it.

1. Moffatt-op.cit. pp. 212-213.

2. Peake-A Critical Introduction to the New Testament p. 123.

It is thought that Luke used Mark, but was unacquainted with our Matthew. If that is the case, the date of the gospel must lie near the date of Matthew. Von Soden favors this conclusion - "The want of acquaintance with the gospel of St. Luke shown in St. Matthew favours the assumption that the two gospels were fairly contemporary in origin."<sup>1.</sup>

### c. Setting.

Mark, who is thought to be a Palestinian Jew, nevertheless has written his gospel for the gentiles, perhaps for the Romans. Tradition contends it was written in Rome, though even tradition itself is not certain that in its original form it was written there.<sup>2.</sup> Mark presents Jesus as a Doer of deeds, one who rises triumphant over his enemies.

Matthew, also a Palestinian Jew, writes for Jewish readers. His purpose is to give a historical and biographical background, to prove the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, to prove that Jesus was the true Messiah. This was probably not written as a piece of literature, but to answer the demand for something about Jesus for the Jew.

We have already stated the purpose of Luke, the beloved physician. He writes for gentile readers, attempting to show Jesus as a friend of publicans, sinners and a great humanitarian.

1. Von Soden-History of Early Christian Literature p.200.  
2. Class Notes.

So we find that the heart of the Synoptic Gospel tradition took shape among Jesus' own country men, at a time when the new religious movement was being sponsored by leaders who claimed to have been personally acquainted with Jesus.

#### 4. The testimony concerning Jesus.

##### a. Representation of Jesus realistic.

Though the synoptics be admitted genuine, what can be said of their claim to know a Jesus who lived historically? Certainly these documents contain historical details about a person who lived in this world, and left traces of himself; the originality and ring of genuineness in his sayings show this. Rittelmeyer feels this and remarks, "the record persuades us that we are confronted in it by an imposing human being fully alive."<sup>1</sup> The earliest tradition gives us a more realistic picture, The later tradition, taking shape when the risen Christ is being exalted, and when people were trying to make the earthly Jesus more consistent in their minds with such a divine personality, is not so realistic.

Then too, according to Mark, Jesus was not understood by his contemporaries, by his family nor by the

1. Op.cit. pp.133-134.

1.  
 Twelve. Later writers and interpreters thought he should have made a greater impression, and so explained that it was because of the blindness of his followers that they failed to see the wonderful manifestations of his personality.  
 2.  
 If Jesus had been a mere figment of someone's imagination a situation would not have been created that had to be so carefully explained. Instead we would have had an idealized Jesus who constantly performed miracles, manifested no weaknesses and was perfect in all ways from the very beginning. Glover says:

"The central figure of the gospels must impress every attentive reader as at least a man of marked personality.... It is hard to imagine the possibility of his being a mere literary creation even if we should conceive a joint literary creation by several authors writing independent works. Indeed when we reflect on the character of the gospels, their origin and composition, and then consider the sharp, strong outlines of the personality depicted, we shall be apt to feel his claim to historicity to be stronger than we supposed." 3.

As the years passed, his worshipers found themselves more than once embarrassed by the records, which had statements that did not seem to be creditable to the exalted Christ, whom they were preaching. The incident that gave the interpreters the most trouble was his baptism by John the Baptist. Mark, Matthew and John each try to

1. Mark 8:17,21. Mark 3:21.
2. Case-op.cit. p.226.
3. Op.cit. pp. 16-17.

explain it so as to give Jesus the supremacy, but the acknowledgement of these and similar difficulties show that they were dealing with a real person, the facts of whose life did not always harmonize with the interests of primitive Christology.

b. Jesus historicity was never doubted by early critics.

As we have seen above, the early writers of the tradition brought Jesus upon the scene at a time when those who would have been his contemporaries were still living. It was also produced in the land where he was supposed to have lived and wrought his wonderful works. How utterly absurd this would have been if his character had merely been invented! Yet we have no record that his historicity was ever doubted in the first centuries. The earliest arguments and theological battles which were waged were over Jesus' resurrection, messiahship, virgin birth and miracles, but his actual existence was accepted as a matter of course.

c. Further evidence is revealed in the character of his teaching.

Although we have no evidence that Jesus wrote anything and it is quite certain his disciples did not take notes

on the things Jesus said, nevertheless, it is probable that the sayings of Jesus which we have are quite accurate; at least they are more so than would be expected if we moderns, who are used to depending on writing, should try to do the same thing. The oriental mind was especially trained to memorize, and accurately reproduce the words of the religious teacher. It is thus that the words of the Jewish rabbis were handed down. In addition, Jesus was a master of expression, and his striking words were more easily remembered than the words of ordinary conversationalists. "Moreover, the unconscious reaching after the effective, which inevitably influences a twice-told tale, has less scope where what is repeated is already expressed in an arresting way."<sup>1</sup>

In this connection if one is inclined to doubt the ability of the disciples to remember Jesus words it may be interesting and helpful to recall Mr. Bruce Glasier's experience when writing his Memoir of William Morris as much as twenty-five years after his death.

"I have found that my memory is on many occasions subject to what seems to be a sort of 'illumination' or 'inspiration'. Thus when I have fixed my mind on one, say of the incidents recalled in these chapters the scene has begun to unfold itself, perhaps slowly at first, but afterwards rapidly and clearly. Medi-

1. Streeter-The Historic Christ - From Foundations p.84.

tating upon it for a time I have lifted my pen and begun to write. Then to my surprise the conversations, long buried or hidden somewhere in my memory, have come back to me sometimes with the greatest fulness, word for word, as we say. Nay, not only the words, but the tones, the pauses and the gestures of the speaker."<sup>1</sup>

Surely the sayings of Jesus were written down by the disciples in the early documents, before twenty-five years after the death of Jesus. Thus Mr. Glasier's experience helps us to imagine the process by which Jesus' words were preserved. Nevertheless the fact that there may be this element of historical uncertainty keeps us from making them legal enactments and forces us to ask "what is the spirit?" rather than "what is the letter?"

d. Existence of group of believers is a strong argument.

The existence of the Christian church, and the group of early believers is a strong argument in favor of Jesus' historicity. We must account for the Apostolic church in some way, for it is the great witness to its Founder, and no life of Christ which fails to account for Christianity can be adequate.<sup>2</sup> It has been said that a group of people would not worship one whom they had known in his human limitations, but as Case says, this faith needed an earthly Jesus as well as a heavenly Christ.<sup>3</sup> They must have had

1. Gore-Jesus of Nazareth-p.207.

2. Headlam-op.cit. p.3.

3. Case-op.cit. p.234.

a high estimate of Jesus while on earth to so readily believe and have faith in the resurrected Christ.

5. Conclusion-An historical Jesus is necessary to the new religion.

The historical Jesus is necessary to the new religion, Christianity. In no other way can we account for the zeal and ardor of the disciples, the rapid spread of the believers and the continuance of an institution through the centuries, which has moulded and dominated the mind of mankind.

The fact, that the gospels furnished the incentive power and authority for the first believers, gives us strong reason for the acceptance of their genuineness. By the middle of the second century, the chief churches must have had access to all four gospels and already regarded them as authoritative. Stanton strikes the keynote in this respect when he says, "The gospels could hardly have made their way at the early time at which they must have begun to do so, if they had not come with good credentials. There were the means still of testing their claims."<sup>1.</sup>

1. Stanton-The Gospels as Historical Documents- Part I p.275.

#### D. The Gospel of John.

1. Historical character too much a matter of debate.

The Fourth Gospel was written considerably later than the first three. It is an entirely different type of document. It is reasonably certain that the author did not intend it to be a biography or a historical document in the same sense as the others. Harnack says, "The Gospel of John can in no wise be considered a historical source"<sup>1.</sup>, and Wernle says, "As an historical source, John must make room for the Synoptics. Jesus was such as the Synoptics depict him, not such as he is displayed in John,"<sup>2.</sup> and Klausner would call it a religio-philosophical book rather than a religio-historical one,<sup>3.</sup> Its object is to interpret the highly exalted Jesus, consequently it passes over details in the life and death of Jesus as would appear too human. "The interpretation of the personality of Jesus made in this gospel is a revelation of the experience that men were having, as they sought, like Paul, for direct spiritual acquaintance with Jesus glorified in the heavens."<sup>4.</sup>

<sup>5.</sup>  
The writer of the gospel of John sets out to interpret

1. Nuelsen-Recent Phases of German Theology p.59.
2. Wernle-op. cit. p.46.
3. Klausner-op.cit. p.125.
4. Bosworth-Life and Teachings of Jesus p.22.
5. There is so much controversy about the author that we feel it not wise to go into the matter seeing it will not further our thesis to any degree. Renan, though he is not considered authoritative from the standpoint of scholarship, nevertheless voices

the universe and sees in the historical Jesus, a bridge whereby we may cross to the Eternal; he is the way, the Truth, and the Light. If he tells a story, it is not because it happened, rather because he sees in it something which belongs to the Eternal. For instance, in Mark, the feeding of the multitude is a striking story; John sees in it the eternal principle - Christ as the Bread of Life.<sup>1.</sup> Again, take the raising of Lazarus; for John it is an illustration of the application of the principle - "I am the Resurrection and the Life."<sup>2.</sup>

Likewise, we find it hard to separate the words of John from the words of Jesus; John no doubt regarded himself a prophet, as a result, when putting down the words of Jesus, if substitutions came to him, he felt they came from a risen and glorified divine Jesus, and should be put down to help interpret the earlier sayings. Headlam feels that the teaching represents a development and has been translated into the language and forms of thought of a later time; that it is influenced by the theological ideas and expressions which grew up in the apostolic church.<sup>3.</sup>

the opinion of a large number of reputable scholars when he summarizes the controversial aspect of it thus: "This question of authorship stands alone in literary history. I know of no question of criticism in which contrary appearances are so evenly balanced, and the mind is held more completely in suspense." (Renan - Life of Jesus pp. 474-475.

1. John 6:1-40

2. John 11:1-44

3. Life and Teachings of Jesus p. 41.

2. It adds nothing of vital importance to our subject.

We are interested though in discovering the historical Jesus, wherefore, while we believe that there are certain elements in the gospel of John which are historical, it adds nothing of vital importance to the Jesus of history, as given us in the synoptics. After a complete and careful study of the value of the Fourth Gospel, Renan has concluded "If his material information is more exact than that of the Synoptics, his historic colouring is much less so, - so that in order to seize the general physiognomy of Jesus, the Synoptic gospels, despite their omissions and their errors, are still the most trustworthy guides."<sup>1.</sup> The gospel of John is not a history nor a biography, but a book of devotion to be read like Thomas A' Kempis book, "Imitation of Christ."

1. Renan - op.cit.p474.

### Portraits of Jesus .

#### A. what kind of a character have we?

Suppose we accept the fact of Jesus' historicity the question still remains, "what kind of a character is he?" To try to picture what he was actually like is a rather difficult task calling for both critical insight and constructive imagination. This is true for two reasons; the scantiness of the material from which we have to draw, and secondly, the conflicting impressions which one receives from the materials themselves.

One writer, as an introduction to his brief sketch of the life of Jesus says, "The firmness, clearness, and even fulness with which the figure of Jesus is delineated in the sources, and the variety of activities through which it is dramatized, do not insure that the data given should suffice for the drawing up of a properly so-called 'life of Jesus'".<sup>1.</sup> we wonder how he can say "even fulness with which the figure of Jesus is delineated", for the facts are that we have a rather extended account of his birth, then he all but disappears until he is twelve years of age. Again there is a silence until he is about thirty years old after which appears a rather brief disconnected, and fragmentary account of his ministry.

1. warfield-Article on Jesus Christ-Schaff Herzog Ency. p.157.

Added to this is the fact that in the documents themselves we have no consistent portrait of Jesus. Certainly the figure that moves through the Synoptic Gospels is not the same in all respects as that in the Gospel of John, the former is a more human portrait, the latter is exalted. Again, if you compare what is said about Jesus by the evangelists even in the Synoptics themselves with that which Jesus said concerning himself, it is apparent that there is a difference. Most of the emphases upon the supernatural element in the character of Jesus is to be found in what the evangelists say concerning him. For instance, no record is given that Jesus claimed a supernatural birth or pre-existence, but the evangelists claim this for him. ✓

One can go even further than this. If you contrast what was the attitude of Jesus' followers regarding him during their fellowship with him in life, with their own attitude later, there is a difference. Even Jesus' closest disciples do not seem to realize the uniqueness of his character while they lived with him. They accepted his Cross as their defeat; Peter who lies and curses to escape from owning allegiance to a human Jesus suffers in order to preach a resurrected, divine Christ. The apostles

in the book of Acts certainly are (different men than) the same apostles previously when following the teacher from Nazareth. It becomes apparant then, that even in the gospel sources themselves there is given more than one portraiture of Jesus; here no doubt is to be found the secret of all the controveries that have raged around his person since his death.

Looking at the problem of what kind of a Jesus we have, from the viewpoint of present day thinking it would appear that we have not one but several pictures. Though there may be many deviations from, and combinations of these portraits, in the main, thinking of Jesus in terms of broad outlines, perhaps we could say there are three. These are : the traditional Jesus, the Jesus of the radical critic, and the Jesus of the liberal theologian. Let us briefly examine these three.

#### B. Specific Pictures.

##### 1. The traditional Jesus.

First, we will consider the Jesus of tradition. The key word here is Divinity. The chief emphasis lies on the thought of Christ's divinity, which is stressed usually even to the point where his human career and human character are almost completely lost.

One of the earliest tendencies in Christian history is that of Docetism, which Dr. Edmund Soper describes as the "theory that Jesus Christ was not a real man at all, but only seemed to be a man"<sup>1</sup>. If he acted and talked like a man, it was only because he was acting a part. This tendency never actually dominated Christianity to the point where the human side of Jesus was lost, but its influence is still felt.

As the key word in the traditionalistic picture of Jesus is Divinity so the characteristic expression of it is always found in miracle. By miracle here, we mean an act or event which has no counterpart or no explanation in human or natural experience. To the traditionalist, a miracle is a miracle precisely because its explanation can be found only as it is unnatural and attributed to the direct act of God. Jesus is Divine, this Divinity is attested by such miracles.

Consequently to the traditionalist, Jesus was pre-existent. He was sent by the Divine God to earth to assume human form, and make atonement for human evil. He was the fulfilment of Messianic prophecy. He was Virgin born, was a worker of miracles, was all powerful, all wise, sinless. He did God's will, not because he chose to do it, but because

1. What May I Believe-p.103.

he was himself that will. He never grew except physically, he was perfection from the beginning. He died on the Cross, rose again on the third day with his physical body and finally ascended into Heaven where he now resides at the right hand of God, judging the world, which position he shall hold until he comes again to establish the Millenium. The record of this Jesus is to be found in the infallible Scriptures which are the direct inspiration of God.

Such is the characteristic picture of the traditionalistic Jesus. Of course, for one holding such a view there is no critical or historical problem. No critical problem because the records are perfect and complete, no historical problem because the whole thing is accepted purely on faith.

## 2. The Jesus of the Radical Critic.

The extreme and opposite picture of Jesus is painted by the pen of the radical critic. His chief and only instrument for finding Jesus is reason, expressed in scientific, historical criticism. This critical method of course, is exercised on all records pertaining to the life and works of Jesus. He comes at his work, supposedly with no preconceived notions or prejudices. He tries to let the records speak for themselves.

The result is far from the Jesus of the traditionalist. In fact one would not recognize them as having any relationship to each other. Sometimes the radical critic ends with no Jesus at all, he has disappeared in the critical process as gasoline disappears in burning. In the main, though radicals cannot agree, where there is a Jesus left at all, he is either a mythical character, a psychopath, or a merely human character around whose life has sprung up these numerous legends and stories which many Christians today accept as facts.

b. Characteristic Pictures.

(1) The Mythical Jesus.

Although Strauss never doubted Jesus' existence, he was really the one who started the line of thought which ended in denying Jesus' historicity. Strauss prepared the way for Bauer who, as we have said, having cast aside the gospels as evidence, had nothing left to show for Jesus' existence and so he concluded Jesus was merely Christianity's fictitious product.<sup>1.</sup>

Kalthoff, in his *Das Christus Problem*, presents the view that Christianity did not have a personal founder, but

1. Case-op.cit. p.37.

1.  
was merely a great social movement.

Prof. Jensen, of the University of Marburg, affirms most positively that the whole life of Christ is essentially a Jewish version of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epos. His main contention is stated in the following words:

"Practically all of the gospel narrative is purely legendary, and ~~that~~ there is no reason at all to consider anything that is told of Jesus as historical.... The Jesus legend is an Israelitish Gilgamesh legend.... As a Gilgamesh legend, the Jesus legend is a sister legend to numerous particularly to most, of the Old Testament legends."

In his concluding chapter, he writes: "Jesus of Nazareth, in whom, as (in) the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, Christianity has believed for nearly two thousand years, and who is regarded even by the most advanced scholarship of our own day as a good and great man who lived and died the sublime pattern of the ideal ethical life - this Jesus has never lived upon earth; neither has he died, because He is nothing but an Israelitish Gilgamesh."<sup>2</sup>

How shall we answer this? We may use two methods in doing so: one is to show the weakness of the argument by a critical comparison of the two stories - Case employs this method; the other is to reduce the argument to absurdity by similar wild assertions, wound around a familiar and well known modern figure; this is done by Bishop Nuelsen in his little book, Recent Phases of German Theology.

Case presents a series of parallels between the gospel incidents and the Gilgamesh story, but concludes that there is

1. Thorburn-op.cit. p.20.

2. Nuelsen-Recent Phases of German Theology. p.51.

no likeness between the individuals compared, that the resemblance between individual events is insignificant, and that the greatest weakness of Jensen's theory lies in his omission of large sections of both the gospel story and the Babylonian epic. Practically all of Jesus' teaching is overlooked and his career taken as a whole has no counterpart in the epic. "In no respect, does Jensen's hypothesis as a theory to explain the origin of the gospels without reference to a historical Jesus, seem to have any validity."<sup>1.</sup>

Nuelsen shows how absurd Jensen's conclusions are by applying the same principles and methods. He pictures Macaulay's famous New Zealander, coming to America and digging in the ruins covering the spot where the Congressional Library now stands. He finds literature which says that at the beginning of the twentieth century the head of the American nation was supposed to be a strong and influential man by the name of Theodore Roosevelt. But this scholar proves that Roosevelt was not an historical person. He is merely the result of tendencies and mythological traits dominant in the American nation. For example, he is pictured with a big stick, merely a trait borrowed from the Greeks and Romans, the thunderbolt of Jupiter. Pictures show him smiling and showing his teeth; this shows a strong African influence. He is pictured

1. Case-op.cit. pp. 77-85.

also as wearing a broad brimmed hat and large eyeglasses; a feature taken from Norse mythology - <sup>W</sup>oden endeavoring to pierce through the heavy clouds covering his head. Many contradictory legends have been told about him. He was a hunter and a rough rider, but also a scholar and an author. He was a leader in war, but also a peacemaker. Here we have simply the personification of prominent character traits of Americans, who at various stages in their development loved to hunt, to ride, to war, but reaching a higher type of civilization, began to study, to write, and to make peace. <sup>W</sup>We know that Theodore Roosevelt was no myth, but a living fact and a tremendous power in the life of our nation.<sup>1.</sup> Nuelsen concludes "And so is Jesus Christ."

J.M. Robertson has given us two books, Christianity and Mythology, and Pagan Christs, in which he tries to show that the whole gospel story is but a mixture of pagan and mythical elements. He parallels everything in the gospels with pagan mythology; for example our Jesus, the son of Mary, is nothing more than the Joshua, son of Miriam in the remarkable Arab tradition.

An American, W.B. Smith, in his book Ecce Deus, sketches not a human Jesus but a divine one. Jesus for him is originally a god, or rather the name of the one god who was revered in

1. Nuelsen-op.cit. pp. 53-57.

similar cults under other names. The story that this god Jesus lived in Judea as man was but the result of giving the subject of the myth a human form.<sup>1.</sup>

Prof. Drews, considered the most remarkable supporter of the assertion that Jesus was not historical, but a mythological person, has given us the book Die Christusmythe, which he tells us has been written "preeminently in the interests of religion, from the conviction that its previous forms no longer suffice for men of today, that above all the 'jesusanism' of historical theology is in its deepest nature irreligious, and that this itself forms the greatest hindrance to all real religious progress."<sup>2.</sup>

In a debate which Prof. Drews held with Prof. Von Soden,<sup>3.</sup> the former stated his final position under five headings:

1. Before the times of the Jesus of the Gospels there existed among certain secret Jewish sects a cult-god named 'Jesus' probably identical with an old Israelite sun-god named 'Joshua'.
2. Paul knew nothing of an historical Jesus.
3. The gospels do not contain the history of an actual man but only the myth of the God-man Jesus, clothed in an historical dress.
4. The important, and for all religious purposes significant, matters in the gospels, i.e. the Baptism, the Lord's supper, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus, are all borrowed from the cult-symbolism of the mythical Jesus.
5. The 'historical' Jesus of modern critical theology has now become so vague and doubtful a figure in both theology and history that he can no longer be regarded as the absolutely indispensable condition of salvation.

1. Loofs-what is the Truth About Jesus Christ? p.6.  
 2. Drews-The Christ Myth. p.18.  
 3. Thorburn-op. cit. Appendix p. 305.

But the conclusions of Prof. Drews and others are by no means shared by the majority of the workers in the field of early religious beliefs and customs. In the department of mythology and religion, there is no greater authority than Dr. Frazer (so says Thorburn)<sup>1.</sup> He says:

"The historical reality of Christ has sometimes been doubted or denied. It would be just as reasonable to question the historic existence of Alexander the Great and Charlemagne on account of the legends which have gathered around them. The attempt to explain history without the influence of great men may flatter the vanity of the vulgar but it will find no favor with the philosophical historian."<sup>2.</sup>

Frazer in his book *The Golden Bough*, goes into detail about the rites and worship of Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis, and Attis and shows how the Christian celebration of Christmas, and Easter do coincide with the festive days of these cult worshippers but he explains it thus:

"Taken altogether, the coincidences of the Christian with the heathen festivals are too close and too numerous to be accidental. They mark the compromise which the church in the hour of its triumph was compelled to make with its vanquished yet still dangerous rivals."<sup>3.</sup>

The world cannot always live up to the level of its great men and so the shrewd ecclesiastical leaders thought to widen the 'narrow gate' of Christianity was necessary if they were to conquer the world.

The mythical characters with whom Jesus has been equated are all vague and unreal, so different from the natural and lifelike picture given us in the Synoptic gospels. We may

1. Op. cit. p300.  
 2. Thorburn-op. cit. pp. 300-301/  
 3. Frazer-p. 361.

therefore with all confidence conclude that Jesus is in the truest sense an historical personality of the period in which he is said to have lived.

1.

(2) The Jesus of the Pathographer.

To begin with, let us not rest content in the thought that the fruits of Jesus' life would render unthinkable the possibility of mental derangement. The impact of his personality upon human history proves nothing either one way or another so far as his mental life is concerned. Speaking of abnormal minds, Bundy says, "As often it has been the case that just their traits of abnormality account for their inexhaustible energy in accomplishment."<sup>2.</sup> We will not doubt this, but the fact remains, we would not care to choose such a one as a guide or leader in life. At any rate we concur with Bundy in his basic conclusion that the problem of the psychic health of Jesus is to be met and solved in the sources of Jesus' words and deeds. It is precisely here that most of the pathographers fail. "From the viewpoint of the historico-critical study of the New Testament those who pathographically diagnose the case of Jesus, with the exception of Rasmussen, are unacquainted with even the more general cause and conclusions of New Testament criticism."<sup>3.</sup> It seems that what strength their work has, comes apparently from their uncrit-*ical*

1. In view of the fact that the study of the mental health of Jesus lies in such a specialized field, all our quotations will come from Bundy, "The Psychic Health of Jesus."
2. Int. p. 12.
3. p. 269.

acceptance of New Testament material. There is a much better basis for making Jesus out to be a psychopath of one type or another if we are literalists in dealing with the Scriptures than there is if we are critical.

In the main, there are four pictures of Jesus from the pathographic point of view. He is asserted to be an epileptic, paranoid, ecstatic, or fanatic. Let us briefly consider each in the order given.

By epilepsy, we mean, "a pronounced chronic disorder of the central nervous system which is characterized by frequently recurring attacks of cramps attended by loss of consciousness; only one point is to be emphasized, namely that the various disturbances appear independent of objective occasions."<sup>1</sup> The epileptic is likely to become depressed, pessimistic, morose, brutal, dangerous; he is egotistical, bigoted and hypocritical, or he may suffer from befogged states of consciousness with or without somatic convulsions.<sup>2</sup> Rasmussen finds in the public career of Jesus, instances of epileptic attack, for example, in Gethsemane and in the cleansing of the temple.

The answer to such is that in the first place, psychiatrists find great difficulty in diagnosing epilepsy in a living person. Since this is true, and since so few

1. Op. Cit. p.253.

2. Op. cit. pp. 254-255.

instances are found in Jesus where it might even be sus-  
 (pected)  
 picioned he was epileptic, it is a questionable thing to  
 put any value on such claims. The scene in the garden cannot  
 be capitalized because Jesus' fear, there, is not morbid,  
 it is natural.<sup>1.</sup> The cleansing of the temple is a question-  
 able foundation for such contention because the act itself  
 is challenged from the critical standpoint. Even if we accept  
 it, whip cords and all, the temple authorities do not object;  
 they only request credentials for such authority. There is  
 too little evidence to hazard even a guess that Jesus was an  
 epileptic.

Secondly, Jesus has been described as a paranoic.  
 Paranoia, simply described means a progressive development  
 of delusions without mental deterioration. These delusions  
 usually center upon the subject's personality. So far as  
 Jesus is concerned, his egocentric expressions do not center  
 upon himself as much as they do upon the Kingdom of God.  
 What Jesus really thought of himself remains a problem. He  
 does not appear to be much concerned about convincing others  
 of his exalted dignity. This is in direct contrast with what  
 we know of the true paranoic.<sup>2.</sup>

Again, Jesus is called an ecstatic. It is hard in a  
 single sentence to define an ecstatic, there are so many

1. Bundy - op. cit. p.179.
2. Bundy- op. cit. pp.278-279.

forms and manifestations of it. The ecstatic usually focuses attention upon one idea which is abstract, he loses normal self-control and general sensibility, and manifests emotional excitement. Habitual ecstatics usually flee society preferring to be by themselves with their hallucinations.<sup>1.</sup>

On these terms, Jesus cannot be an ecstatic. In all the gospels, we do not find a single instance of his emergence from a state of ecstasy, though we do of his disciples. The only possible material is found in the account of his baptism, but here the ecstatic elements seem clearly to be an expression of the evangelists' theology and Christology rather than an experience of Jesus himself. Jesus did seek seclusion, often, but not permanently; he always returned from it to practical service. Whatever of ecstatic nature there was in Jesus seems to have resulted in composure and self-control rather than in any form of intemperance.

Once more, Jesus is sometimes called a fanatic. Here is a term which from a strictly scientific point of view is hard to determine. Fanaticism is not necessarily a symptom of mental disease. Many of the geniuses of the world have been fanatics; it is doubtful whether they would have reached their goal had they not been. At the same time, we must recognize that fanaticism is frequent-

1. Bundy - op. cit. p.260.

ly the result of intense delusions so that persistent fanaticism arouses the suspicion of mental derangement.

Perhaps the charge that Jesus was a fanatic is the most popular among extreme critics. "From Reinhard (1781) to Wernle (1916) not one great life or character study of Jesus has left the question of fanaticism entirely untouched."<sup>1.</sup> Reinhard has defended Jesus against fanaticism as no other has, contending that Jesus is the founder of the religion of reason. The charge of fanaticism, so far as Jesus is concerned, rests chiefly on the contention, for instance, that his Kingdom of Heaven on earth with all that it involves, is an impossible dream.

The reply to this charge is that Jesus does not answer to the description of a fanatic except perhaps in zeal. He never, however, even with his zeal tried to force his truth on anyone as fanatics do. Jesus never spurned the common things of life, he never lost sight of the relationship he had to the rest of human kind; these things show mental balance not present in fanaticism. Reinhard sums up his defense in this statement, "The one observation that the predominant tone of his soul was not enthusiasm, not untamed zeal and tempestuous passion, but a calm rational composure which was not disturbed and interrupted by passing fits of ecstasy and fanatical fury; this single observation destroys all suspicion of fanaticism."<sup>2.</sup>

1. Bundy- op. cit. p.264.

2. Bundy -op. cit. p.265.

wernle sums up his defence in his simple statement, "The charge of fanaticism against Jesus collapses in the face of his elementary principle. Whoever doeth the will of God, shall enter into the Kingdom of God."<sup>1.</sup>

To sum up our estimate of the extreme critic's presentation of a pathological Jesus, we need go no further than to quote the words of Bundy at the close of his book. "A pathography of Jesus is possible only upon the basis of a lack of acquaintance with the course and conclusions of New Testament criticism...."<sup>2.</sup> That there are elements in the gospels which taken at their face value, out of context and historical setting, ~~which~~ give one the basis for believing in a pathographic Jesus, we will not deny. Taking Jesus' life as a whole, not in selected fragments, looking at him through records with discriminatory eyes, he is seen to be a man of sanity and sound reason.

### (3) The Purely Human Jesus.

The title here is enough to indicate what kind of a Jesus the radical critic gives us in this respect. It is a Jesus who was a man, born as we are, lived as we do, who died, and was buried. All miracle is denied, all thoughts of his supernatural person or actions are accounted for as

1. Bundy - op. cit. pp. 255-266.

2. Bundy - op. cit. p. 268.

mere tradition with no actual basis in fact. Jesus is regarded as a man of unusual wisdom, of unusual devotion and moral character, all on a strictly human basis. In fact, he was a good man, super only in his goodness. This does not mean perfection. He was subject to weakness, physical and mental, just as we are. Whatever he achieved, he won as we do. He was purely human. Soren Kurkegaard characterizes him as sheer man, albeit the greatest man that ever lived.<sup>1.</sup> Bousset says of Jesus, that the life of our Lord did not overstep the limits of the purely human.<sup>2.</sup> This in brief summarizes the thought of this purely humanistic school.

Here again there is no possibility of absolute classification. No two scholars think exactly alike or give us exactly the same picture. Any one would depart from what we might say in some respects.

### 3. The Jesus of the Liberal Theologian.

Between the pictures of Jesus as given us by the traditionalist, and that given us by the radical critic, we have another which contains elements of both, but which is not radical in either extreme. We call this picture, that of the liberal theologian. Perhaps we can summarize the position of such a one best from the three great bases of contention, the gospel records, the miracles and the person of Jesus.

1. Bornemann- Jesus as Problem- p, 13.

2. Sanday- The Life of Jesus in Recent Research. p. 189.

First, then, the gospel sources. In our statement of the Synoptic Problem, we have covered all that is necessary here. The liberal theologian does not hesitate to apply the modern critical methods. From the life of Jesus he separated all which has upon it the ear marks of legend, myth, or theological explanation. When he gets through, we have to admit that from the gospel record, there has disappeared much which has been the basis of contention between the conservative and radical schools through the years. The liberal theologian turns more to what Jesus said and did himself rather than to what has been said about him.

Referring to the miracle stories of Jesus, and the whole consideration of miracles, the turning point is to be found in the answer to the question of whether the miracle is consistent with the character of God as portrayed in the life and Teachings of Jesus. Or is it consistent with the character of Jesus himself?

The liberal does not quibble over the question of miracles because he does not rely upon them to establish for him the place of Jesus either in religion or life. In the highest sense he accepts miracles, declaring that both what Jesus said and what he was, is the greatest miracle of all. It is because of Jesus' character, being

what it was, that miracle stories could be attributed to him and believed. If Jesus performed miracles they were in keeping with God's laws, not violations of them, and were not for the purpose of demonstration but mere expressions of God's eternal will for needy humanity.

When it comes to the matter of the person of Jesus, the liberal does not claim to be on wholly certain grounds. Divinity in Jesus, established by a Virgin Birth, he rejects. In fact, a supernatural character in Jesus on the lines of traditional faith, he refuses to accept. He believes the Synoptic gospels, themselves, which are the real source of Jesus' life and character, present a Jesus, who grows into his God consciousness. The steps marking that growth are not clear, the mystery of it is not altogether to be understood, it is revealed however in the teachings and character of Jesus.

President Edmund Soper of Ohio Wesleyan University, at the close of his chapter on the question, "was Jesus Christ a Real Man?" quotes two little stanzas which epitomize the belief and faith of the liberal theologian.

"Christ,  
Most perfect man,  
And therefore perfect God.

Christ,  
Most perfect God,  
And therefore perfect man."<sup>1</sup>.

1. What May I Believe- p.115.

## SUMMARY

The whole question of the historicity of Jesus arises with, and is based upon the critical approach to Christianity and its authoritative basis. The importance of the question is seen when it is realized that in the person of Jesus is found both the authority and reason for Christianity.

The documents to be examined are the extra-canonical and the canonical. When we turn to the extra-canonical material, we find it is scanty, the matter being gathered almost entirely from certain Roman and Jewish writers, such as Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny and Josephus; also the Agrapha and the Apostolic Fathers. From these writings we are justified in drawing certain conclusions. First that Jesus lived and died in Judea, during the time of the Roman occupation, that he was an unusual personage, and that no early pagan antagonist questioned his existence.

When we turn to the canonical sources, we find them to be three in number; the Pauline writings, the Synoptic gospels and the gospel of John.

The Pauline writings have been bitterly assailed by critics who have declared them to be pseudon<sup>o</sup>mous. The extra-biblical evidence for the genuineness of the letters is slight; nevertheless, what we do have is convincing. For the most part, we have to turn to internal evidence for proof. Fortunately, here we have more adequate proof.

We find, for instance, that the pseudonymous claim falls before the fact that the writer expresses ideas prevalent in the first century which were discredited at the time the pseudonymous writers were supposed to appear. The details of the letters also are handled too minutely and naturally to be accredited to nameless writers of later times. Paul's personality rings true in these writings; we see here not a made-up character of the stage but an actual person.

It is true that there are few references in Pauline writings to events in the life of Jesus, but there was no necessity for them; these things were taken for granted, because they were well-known. The charge that Paul's Christianity was nothing more than an Adonis cult is absurd because so highly fanciful and incomplete. A careful examination of Paul's writings will reveal the fact that an actual Jesus is a prerequisite to Paul's Christian life and work.

The Synoptic gospels we see are the primary source of knowledge of Jesus' life and work. We recognize the fact that these records are fragmentary, that there are numerous disagreements as to time, persons, and place in their records; we recognize in them the hand of the theologian and the apologist at work: nevertheless, in them we see a core of

writings in which moves a Jesus who is real. The two-source theory of the scholars, arrived at by critical analysis of the Synoptic problem gives us this core of genuine work, in which we discover the real Jesus. No matter what the faults of the gospels may be, and there are many, nevertheless, they do present a Jesus who is true to life.

From the external evidence, we learn that the gospels were all in existence before the second century, that they were canonized, and that they had been given first place in the New Testament canon. Moreover, out of the gospel records, we get a group of early believers who later formed the beginning of the Christian church. This group presents a strong argument in favor of Jesus' historicity.

The gospel of John, we find to be of no vital importance to this discussion for two reasons. First its historical nature is too much a matter of debate among reputable scholars, and then, even if it be accepted, it adds nothing of vital concern to our problem.

As a result of critical evaluation of our documentary sources, we have a disagreement as to what is genuine and what is not. This leads to various portraits of Jesus, the picture depending on what is accepted and what is rejected.

The traditionalist purports to accept all the records as truth, proceeds to fasten his attention chiefly upon the

emphasis of the Divine elements in Jesus and presents us with a miracle working Son of God.

The radical critic arrives at his picture with more difficulty. He may emerge with a Jesus, who is purely mythical, with one who is demented, or with a purely human Jesus.

The liberal theologian is satisfied with neither extreme view. He finds more of the human elements in Jesus, than does the traditionalist, and more of the Divine than does the radical critic. At any rate, Jesus' life and personality were a natural growth such as ours is, though more complete. The God-consciousness of Jesus, he is apt to recognize but he rests content in calling it, in the final analysis, a mystery. So far as miracle is concerned the greatest miracle of all is Jesus himself who is adequate for our needs.

Finally, we have to admit that while the evidence for the historical Jesus is not as abundant as we might wish it to be, it is nevertheless, as complete as might be expected by one who understands, even in part, the historical setting and circumstances under which it has come down to us. The marvel after all, is not in the scantiness of the sources, nor in the accretion of untrustworthy matter that has come down to us with the genuine; the marvel is in the completeness of what we have and in its ability to stand the acid test, not only of wear and tear, but of scrutinizing and

demanding criticism. If the continuance of Christianity depends upon the historical reality of Jesus, we believe it is secure. Perhaps in the end, the fruits of such critical investigation will abound to the good of the Christian religion, strengthening it in its innermost part by re-discovering the real truth of its founder, the historical Jesus.

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