

USSR ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

"Religious Studies in the USSR" Series

I. KRYVELEV

**CHRIST:
MYTH OR REALITY ?**

"Social Sciences Today" Editorial Board

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SOME INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Throughout the last two thousand years the name Jesus Christ has reverberated in the pages of history and in the lives of millions of people. It has penetrated every sphere of public and private life. Good and evil deeds have been committed in the name of Christ, as have acts of great charity and acts of unbelievable cruelty. Slaveowners, apologists of serfdom, capitalist entrepreneurs and colonialists had used it to cover up and sanctify their self-seeking ends, while the oppressed invoked it as they imagined punishment for the oppressors and dreamed of an ideal social order and a better life. The image of Christ that has formed in the memory of people spanning nearly two millennia is one that is multifaceted and contradictory.

On a subjective level, too, people's attitude towards the person of Christ differs widely, ranging from reverence and affection to contempt and hate. Between these two extremes are various shades of favourable and unfavourable opinions. Without enumerating them here I shall merely mention two diametrically opposite views.

For Ernst Renan Christ stands at an "inaccessible summit" of human grandeur. On the other hand, an uncompromisingly negative evaluation of Christ is found in the works of philosophers of the French Enlightenment. My purpose at this point is not to weigh the merits of one or another set of opinions, but rather to indicate how far apart they can be.

I wanted to call the first chapter of this book "The Image of Christ in the Memory of the People Over the Ages". But it soon became clear that it is impossible to write about the image of Christ as if the image were a single one. For there has never been one uniform concep-

tion of the personality of Christ in the consciousness of people or in literature, not even during one period. In our time, too, there is no single image of Christ, only widely divergent variants of it. I have therefore called the first chapter "The Many Images of Christ" and shall consider some of them in it.

This is not going to be easy, for different authors approach the question of the personality of Christ differently. One stresses Jesus' purely human traits; another regards him as an ascetic and prophet; a third, as a political leader, moralist and philosopher; and a fourth considers Christ to be a mythological figure. Each emphasises those features which fit in with his own interpretation. The works of these authors, therefore, give on the whole an impression of unusual diversity. But this is only to be expected: it reflects the diversity of views held by different people about the real or imaginary founder of Christianity.

Let us begin with the teachings of the Church on this subject.

I. THE MANY IMAGES OF CHRIST

Christ the Man-and-God (the Church's View)

There is a vast theological literature devoted to the subject of the image of Christ, and there we can find the most diverse interpretations of this image which often contradict one another. The only point on which they agree is that Christ existed and was the founder of Christianity and of the Christian Church.

According to the New Testament tradition Christ gathered around him a group of apostles and disciples who after his death brought the new teaching through missionary work to countries in the Mediterranean. And from there Christianity spread to the whole of Europe. According to Matthew's Gospel, Christ named the apostle Peter as his successor, who was to head the Church he founded.

In order to understand the Church's interpretation of the person of Christ, let us turn to the main official document on the Christian doctrine, the Credo, as well as some of the resolutions adopted by the ecumenical councils. The latter are also official documents of the Church and are regarded by it as absolute truth.

It should be said, not for purposes of criticism, but as a matter of fact, that the Church's doctrine on Christ is quite vague, and it is difficult to describe it in any logical, consistent manner. Christian theologians themselves do not deny this. In their writings they refer to some aspects of the Christian dogma concerning the founder of Christianity as being mysterious, unfathomable. In such cases they usually have recourse to the accepted Church formula: what cannot be apprehended by the mind must be believed as the supreme, ultimate truth. Let us

examine the doctrine on Christ which the Church holds to be true.

First, the Credo. The Credo was adopted at two ecumenical councils: the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) and the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381). The Council of Nicaea approved the first seven articles of the Credo, and the Council of Constantinople adopted yet another five articles. These twelve articles have remained intact despite the numerous impassioned debates over them that lasted several centuries and shook the Christian dogma and theology to the roots. And to this very day they are the foundations of Christianity in which none of the main Churches has ever voiced any doubt.

What does the Credo say about Jesus Christ?

In this basic document of the Christian dogma Jesus Christ occupies a central place: out of the twelve articles six (from the second to the seventh) are devoted to him. The Credo says that we must believe "in one Lord, Jesus Christ", who is "the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father". Here we are immediately confronted with certain difficulties. If Jesus Christ was begotten, even if of God, this must have occurred at a specific time and therefore not "eternally"; and if "eternally", then he had always existed and could not have been begotten.

This contradiction was noted by Arius (d. A.D. 336). He argued that since Jesus was begotten, it meant that Jesus emerged from nothing, that is, he was created. Arius concluded, therefore, that Christ is not everlasting. In other words, he is not God but was created by God, even if he were the most perfect of God's creatures. Arius' views were condemned by the Church as heresy.

The second article also says that Jesus is "Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father". In other words, Jesus is God, is begotten of God the Father and at the same time forms one being with the Father. And Jesus was also a human being, as the next articles tell us. "For us men and for our salvation" Jesus came down from heaven and became "incarnate" from the holy spirit and the Virgin Mary, and "was made man". So, Christ the God temporarily assumed human form and appeared on earth as the man Jesus.

He did this in order to save suffering mankind that had gone astray.

Christ fulfilled his mission by sacrificing himself: "For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried." In dying Christ atoned for the sins of mankind. However, he suffered and died not as God, but as a man in whom God was embodied. The fifth article of the Credo says that on the third day after his death Jesus rose again "in accordance with the Scriptures". Then, the sixth article tells us, he "ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father". Some time in future, says the seventh article, he will come again "in glory to judge, the living and the dead". And this time "his kingdom will have no end".

Thus, from the point of view of the Church, Christ is both God and man and embodies both a divine and a human nature. As God, Christ is the second person of the Trinity; his significance lies outside time, it is eternal. But as man, Jesus existed in time; he lived about thirty years on earth. But here is yet another complication.

The Church considers the human nature in Jesus to be eternal, just like his divine nature, though this contradicts the idea that he was born, that is, "was made man" at a specific moment. True, in future Jesus will again appear on earth, this time "in glory", which suggests that he will appear not as Jesus the man, but as Christ the God. Still, the Church takes the position that the two natures of Christ are indivisibly united in him. But then, inexplicably, the Church also holds that these two natures, while being indivisibly and inseparably united, were not "fused" together.

How did the Church arrive at this logical impasse? It did so in the course of its fight against "heresies" that emerged at its ecumenical councils.

At the first of these councils, the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), the views of Arius were declared heretic. At the third council, the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431), Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, was accused of heresy for saying that Jesus was not God but only God's messenger and that God inhabited the body of Jesus as he would a temple. At the next, Chalcedonian Council

(A.D. 451), a point of view opposite to that of Nestorius was strongly condemned. This is known as the Monophysite heresy. It was expounded by Eutychus who held that Christ has only one, divine nature in which his human nature is completely immersed. Subsequently, Monophysitism appeared in a compromised form known as the Monophyletic doctrine according to which Christ exists in two natures (one human and one divine), but has only one, divine will.

The three subsequent councils continued to be occupied with this question and tried to find a solution that would not correspond with either Nestorianism, Monophysitism or Monophyletism. This controversy over theological fine points probably reflected not so much a search for truth as the real relationship that existed between the interests of rival groupings. For the ruling elite it was important that its point of view should be upheld at all times so that it would appear infallible. Quite real material and political interests depended on this. Thus, in opposition to the groups whose ideological banner was Nestorianism it was said that in Christ two natures, one human and one divine, were indivisibly and inseparably united. At the same time it was necessary to oppose the Monophysites by insisting that these two natures were not "fused" together. In the end one had little choice but to accept the "mysterious" discrepancy.

On the whole, Christianity has retained the dogma that there are two "natures" and two "wills" in Christ. Without dwelling on this quite incomprehensible argument, we shall merely take note of it and go on to other points in the Church's doctrine on Christ.

As is said in the Credo, Christ is in heaven and has for nearly two thousand years sat on the right hand of God the Father, waiting for the moment when he will return to earth to judge the living and the dead. He died on earth as a weak, poor and humble man, but he will come again "in glory", as the Almighty and ruler of the universe.

What kind of mission did Christ carry out during his life on earth? According to the Church's teachings the mission was threefold: Christ was prophet, high priest and king.

The first of these functions is fairly clear. Christ

the God-and-man foretold the inevitable end of the world and his second coming. He taught people the truth of the religion which he founded.

Things are more complicated regarding the other two functions.

The main duty of the high priest was to offer sacrifices to God for the sins of men. Jesus as the high priest fulfilled this duty in an entirely new way. As a sacrifice, which was offered in the name of all mankind, he gave his own life. In so doing he expiated the sin of Adam and Eve and reconciled men to God who was in a state of conflict with them since the Fall.

On this point, too, the Christian doctrine is marked by certain ambiguities. Does Christ's sacrifice atone for the sin of Adam and Eve only or for all the sins mankind has committed after the Fall? Theological writings usually evade this question. If we assume that man's moral corruption originated in the sin of Adam and Eve, then its expiation through Christ's sacrifice would remove the general sinfulness of man which is a consequence of it. But in that case, why has not evil disappeared from the earth? The Church's answer to this question is rather vague: Christ's sacrifice removed only the curse from the earth and from God's creatures, while salvation will take place only after the second coming.

It is also difficult to understand Christ's role as king, the last of the three functions he performed on earth. If this refers to his universal duties as the second person of the Trinity, then no particular difficulty arises: God *is* the king of the universe. But here it is Christ's deeds on earth, deeds he carried out as a man, that are meant. So it would seem that in this life, too, Christ, though he was poor and persecuted, was nevertheless a king, and not only a "Judaic king", as is said in the Gospels (Christian theologians lay no particular stress on the "Judaic" nature of Christ's kingdom), but a king of all men.

This is how the authoritative theologian, Metropolitan Makarius, describes "the main actions in which Jesus Christ's kingship was revealed": first, the miracles whereby Christ "showed his power over all nature, speci-

fically, over hell and death; second, his descent into hell and triumph over hell; third, his resurrection and triumph over death; and fourth, his ascension...."¹

Apparently only the descent into hell needs some explanation, since it may be assumed that the reader is more or less familiar with the other deeds performed by Christ as king. This element of the Christian dogma is based on the following text from the First Epistle of Peter: "...Christ also hath once suffered for sins ... that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached into the spirits in prison" (3:18-19).

In theological literature a whole story has sprung up around this text. It is said that during the three days before his resurrection, while his body lay in the tomb, Christ, or rather his soul, travelled to hell. He conquered the devil and led all pious men from the Old Testament out of hell. In this way he showed his might and power as king.

So, in the Church's teachings the image of the crucified sufferer is interwoven with the image of the heavenly or even earthly king. On the one hand, Christ "suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps". On the other hand, Christ will come "to judge the quick and the dead"; he is the ruler of the world and holds us in awe by his greatness and might. Since the Church is Christ's representative on earth and as "the mystical body of Christ" functions and teaches in his name, it must emphasise those features which testify to Christ's power and grandeur.

This tendency is clearly reflected in the dogma and practice of the Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Popes call themselves "vicarius Christi", or Christ's deputies. For them, of course, it is important to emphasise those features of Christ's personality in which he appears not as a wandering preacher who suffered and was humble and full of mercy, but as the ruler not only of the hearts and minds of people but also of their earthly fate, a principle of strength and power that is superior to all earthly powers. As Christ's deputies on earth the Popes claim that they possess this superhuman strength and power.

There were times when the Popes not only claimed they had the power of "king" over the whole world, but came close to possessing this power. In the Middle Ages the Popes often held the monarchs of Western Europe in a state of subordination. Today, of course, there is no question of the Vatican ruling over any country, even if the majority of that country's population were Catholics. Nevertheless, the claim to the status of a "kingdom" is not abandoned: the Vatican exists as an independent state headed by the Pope. The ideological justification for this is that Jesus, who founded the Roman Church through the apostle Peter, was not only a heavenly king, but also a king on earth.

In the Orthodox Church--first the Byzantine and then the Russian Orthodox Church--the situation was somewhat different. Historical circumstances did not permit the Orthodox Church to claim supremacy over the secular authorities. In fact, over many centuries the Church was subordinate to the Byzantine emperors and Russian tsars and gave its blessing to the latter as the embodiment of the heavenly king. The role of the heavenly king itself still belonged to Jesus Christ.

In icons of the early Middle Ages Christ is portrayed not only as a poor man who suffered martyrdom, as described in the Gospels, but also as a king wearing a crown and wielding a scepter. The behaviour of the apostles and others around him conformed to the elaborate etiquette of the Byzantine court. In many icons Christ is shown together with an emperor, with the "king of kings" blessing the real king or placing a crown on his head. The title of the Byzantine and later of the Russian emperors included the expression "the anointed", which is "Messiah" in ancient Hebrew and "Christos" in Greek.

There is little of the forgiving and gentle Christ of the Gospels in the Church's representation of him. In its role of a mighty and terrible ruler, the support and sometimes the rival of the emperors, the owner of millions of serfs in the Middle Ages, and the executioner of those who thought differently from it and dared to show even the slightest sign of resistance (suffice it to recall the Inquisition), the Church had acted in the name of Christ. Therefore, it was not always advantageous for the Church

to speak of Christ's mercy, let alone nonresistance to evil. Church officials referred to this only when the oppressed and exploited became restive and it was necessary to pacify them.

The image of Jesus as a common man and a martyr, poor, forgiving and indifferent to worldly goods, is retained by the Church, however. It is part of its ideological armour. At times the Church even emphasises this image when the circumstances demand it. But this happens rarely, whereas Christ the ruler, the king of kings, most dread sovereign, has long occupied a central place in the Church's ideology and teachings.

This transformation of Christ in the practice and ideology of the Church was found unacceptable by many believers in the past, as it is still unacceptable to many believers today.

In the almost two thousand years of Christianity's existence many social movements against the Church have been launched under the call for a return to the Christ of the Gospels, poor, humble, gentle and all-forgiving. This call has retained its appeal even today.

In the last century the Church's teachings on Christ were opposed by such titanic figures on questions concerning man's spiritual life as the great Russian writers Fedor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoi.

Champion of Inner Freedom
(according to Fedor Dostoevsky)

Dostoevsky's views on Christ were most eloquently and powerfully expressed through the heroes of his novels. The fascinating and pure-souled Prince Myshkin of *The Idiot* accuses the Catholic Church of distorting the image of Christ: "Catholicism ... preaches a distorted Christ whom it has maligned and profaned, the very reverse of Christ. It preaches the Antichrist...."²

A similar view is expressed by Shatov in *The Possessed*: "Rome proclaimed a Christ who yielded to the third temptation and ... by telling the whole world that Christ could not stand up on earth without an earthly kingdom Catholicism proclaimed the Antichrist and ruined the entire Western world."³ The story of the "third tempta-

tion", as is told in the Gospels, is as follows: Satan took Jesus to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and said all these would be his if he would "fall and worship me". Jesus rejected the offer with indignation. For Shatov, this meant that the Christ presented by the Church was one who could not resist the temptation of worldly power and sold himself to Antichrist for a mess of pottage.

In *The Karamazov Brothers* Ivan Karamazov told his brother Alesha about his poem on the Inquisition. It has two heroes: the Grand Inquisitor and Christ.⁴ The Inquisitor was a cardinal, a 90-year-old monk, clever, cynical and fanatic. His fanaticism was rooted not in a belief in God or his crucified son, but in a proud consciousness of the greatness of the Church and its mission as leader of mankind. The second hero, Christ, appeared on earth 1500 years after his resurrection. He moved silently among the crowd, with a soft smile of infinite compassion; he was modest and completely defenseless, understanding everything and forgiving everything. Although he uttered not a word in the poem and performed only one deed—he raised a seven-year-old girl from the dead, while the cardinal spoke long and with great eloquence, the real hero of the poem is Christ the God-and-man. Through the cardinal's speeches the Church's view on Christ was disclosed, as seen by Ivan Karamazov. In the poem Christ appears before the reader in an entirely new light, and it is both interesting and important to look into this conception of the personality of Christ.

The event described in the poem took place in the Spanish city of Seville in the 16th century, at the height of the Inquisition, when every day people were burned at the stake "for the glory of God". By this time 1500 years had passed since Christ "promised to come in His glory" and since the prophet wrote "Behold I come quickly". But mankind awaited him with the same faith and with the same love. And on a holiday in summer, in the square in front of the cathedral Christ appeared before "the people who were tormented, suffering, reeking of sin, but who loved him". And they recognised him. Rushing towards him they surrounded him and followed him.

But at that moment the Grand Inquisitor appeared. He immediately ordered his men to place Christ under ar-

rest, and instantly the crowd prostrated themselves as one man before the churchman. That night the Grand Inquisitor confronted Jesus who was kept in solitary confinement and heaped reproaches and accusations on him. What chiefly incensed the cardinal was Christ's appearance on earth. Why have you come to interfere in our affairs, he asks Christ. You have already handed over to us, the Church, "the right to decide man's fate and of course cannot even think of taking that right away from us now". And since this is so, Christ is not needed on earth; indeed, his presence is harmful and highly dangerous, according to the cardinal. From the Inquisitor's indictment it would seem that Christ's first coming to earth, when God assumed human form, was equally harmful.

From the cardinal's point of view, Jesus' deeds on earth revealed a lack of understanding of the nature of man, who was a weak and rather stupid creature. "There are three forces on earth," said the Inquisitor, "only three, that can forever conquer and imprison the conscience of these feeble rebels for their own happiness, and these are: miracle, mystery and authority." Together they restricted the freedom of people, and that was good for mankind. For "there has never been anything more unbearable for man and human society than freedom", "there is nothing more worrying and tormenting for people than the search, once they are left in freedom, for something before which they can prostrate themselves". And Jesus rejected all three basic principles of the life of society which had given people the freedom that saved them from freedom. Instead, he called on them to follow him, enticing them with the idea that they could, with only his image before them as their guide, freely decide the question of what was good and what was evil. This was disastrous.

In what way did Jesus oppose miracle, mystery and authority? The cardinal regarded this opposition as an evil trend which incriminated Jesus. Jesus' opposition to authority seems clear enough: he rejected the authority of the Pharisees and the scribes, the Judaic high priests and lawyers. "Ye have heard that it was said.... But I say unto you....," he taught. As for mystery, by referring to it, one could teach people "to blindly obey, even against their consciences". Instead, Jesus had ap-

pealed to the free judgement of the heart based on love. And lastly, Jesus had discredited the idea of miracle by twice failing to perform one: he did not cast himself down from a high mountain when asked by Satan to do so; and he did not come down from the cross when the crowd taunted him and challenged him to come down and thus save himself.

For the past 1500 years, said the cardinal, the Church had repaired the damage Jesus had done: "We have rectified your deed and based it on *miracle, mystery* and *authority*." The Church had reinterpreted Jesus' deeds and using Jesus' name and authority had entered into an alliance with Satan, Christ's antipode. "Understand this," said the cardinal, "we are with *him*, not with you. Already for a long time, for eight hundred years we have been with *him*, not with you."

Why eight hundred years, and not one thousand and five hundred years? Apparently, Dostoevsky, or rather Ivan Karamazov, was not speaking about the Christian Church as a whole, but only about the Catholic Church. In his opinion, the unity of Christianity was shattered after the seventh council of churches, which the Orthodox Church regarded as the last ecumenical council. After that the Roman episcopacy broke away from the mainstream of Christianity and behaved in a most dubious way--it might have sold itself to the Devil. Of course, the Catholic Church thought the same about the Orthodox Church. But we are not concerned here with this aspect of the question, but rather with the idea that Jesus called on mankind to strive for freedom, thereby undermining faith which rested on miracle, mystery and authority.

How well-founded is this idea?

It is true that Jesus twice declined to perform a miracle, according to the Gospel narratives. But the same narratives tell us that he worked many miracles. Jesus' activity, if we do not include his preaching, consisted of miraculous healing, raising the dead to life, in other words, the performance of miracles.

Did Jesus do away with the mystery of faith? No. On the contrary, all his sermons are pervaded by an air of mystery. Jesus is the son of God and the son of man, who is to fulfil a mysterious mission of a divine nature.

For the people who had gathered to hear him preach his origin and his future and the future of his disciples were shrouded in mystery. True, Jesus talked about his mission, saying that he would suffer and die and later rise from the dead and then come again in glory. But all this was spoken in a veiled and enigmatic way, often in the form of parables and allegories. When the apostles asked Jesus why he spoke in parables, he replied that it was not his wish to unravel the mysteries to the people.

Did Jesus refrain from citing the authorities? Of course, not. In the Gospel narratives he constantly referred to what "is written" in the scriptures and to God his father. While supplementing or even opposing Old Testament commandments with new injunctions, Jesus at the same time insisted that the "law" must be obeyed: "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled". Thus, Jesus was far from having any nihilistic attitude towards authority, as is portrayed by the Inquisitor in Ivan Karamazov's poem.

It is true that in many respects the Christian Church, and not only the Catholic Church, but all of its other branches, had moved away from Christ's teachings as it is formulated in the New Testament. But the Grand Inquisitor's description of Christ's personality and his teachings cannot be considered historically authentic.

Dostoevsky laid the blame for the distortion of Christ's image at the door of the Catholic Church. It had betrayed Christ and continued to betray him, Dostoevsky was saying in the seventies and eighties of the last century. And he predicted that this horrible betrayal of Christianity would in future assume a new form--the preaching of socialism by the Catholic Church.

Dostoevsky had no sympathy for socialist ideas. But with that acute historical perceptiveness that was characteristic of him he foresaw the great influence they would have in future. The Catholic Church, according to Dostoevsky, had with a devilish cunning adjusted itself to the historical situation and adopted for its armament all ideas that proved popular with the masses. And it would also get adjusted to the idea of socialism. It would say to the people: "Everything that is preached by the socialists was also preached by Christ." Thus it would "once

again distort and betray Christ" since socialism was not Christ's ideal. The task of socialism "is to settle the fate of mankind not according to the way of Christ, but outside God and outside Christ".⁵

Dostoevsky even ascribed the emergence and spread of socialist ideas to the Catholic Church. For by "betraying" Christ it brought about a reaction in the form of materialism and atheism, thus giving rise to socialism. This somewhat bizarre idea was put by Dostoevsky as follows: "Roman Catholicism, which has sold Christ for worldly power and forced mankind to turn away from it and was thus the main cause of the rise of materialism and atheism in Europe, this Catholicism naturally gave birth to socialism in Europe."⁶ So, it would be easy for Catholicism to adapt the image of Christ and of Christianity to socialism.

In some ways Dostoevsky correctly foresaw the future trend of development. Socialism has indeed become the most powerful and influential ideological and material force in the world. And the Catholic Church is quite ready to flirt with it, using the methods of social demagoguery. But, of course, Dostoevsky's theory about the role of the Catholic Church in the rise of socialism and its historical destiny is not to be taken seriously.

With all his perceptiveness and penetration Dostoevsky was obviously blinded by certain reactionary ideas which took hold of him in the last period of his life. This blindness led him to consider that while the Catholic Church distorted the image of Christ the Orthodox Church preserved it. Alesha Karamazov told Ivan concerning the Grand Inquisitor: "The Orthodox Church had a different conception." Dostoevsky wrote in his diary: "The lost image of Christ has been preserved in all its luminous purity in the Orthodox Church."⁷ This was possible, said Dostoevsky, because the Orthodox Church, being subordinate to the state, could not lay claim to worldly power and had therefore to concentrate its attention on spiritual values. The foundation of these values was some kind of "Russian socialism" embodied in the image of Christ. It is hard to understand what is actually meant by this "socialism". At any rate, it was not about any radical changes in the life of people, but about a "ten-

der, reconciling and all-forgiving divine truth" as revealed in the state of mind and the views of the old man Zosima and Alesha Karamazov and of Makar Ivanovich in the novel *Adolescent*. And this "truth" must be based on a very vague and infinitely abstract image of Christ.

In opposing the Orthodox Church to the Catholic Church on the matter of interpretation of Christ's image, Dostoevsky was turning a blind eye to many historical facts which show that the difference between the two churches, both in their practical activity and in their teachings, is very little indeed. The Orthodox Church, too, was engaged in the suppression of heresy, though on a smaller scale than the Catholic Church. And if for the Orthodox Church "worldly power" was unattainable, it had "earthly possessions" including huge land property and hundreds of thousands of serfs which formed the economic basis of its authority for many centuries. It, too, had always given ideological and material support to the exploiters and oppressors of the people by interpreting the image of Christ in approximately the same way as exploiters in the West to whom the Catholic Church had "sold" Christ.

This situation was clearly seen by another great figure in Russian literature, Leo Tolstoi. In his writings the image of Christ is much more concrete than in Dostoevsky's, or at least more understandable.

An Ideal of Moral Perfection (according to Leo Tolstoi)

Until he was fifty years old Tolstoi's attitude to the personality of Christ was similar to that of the majority of his contemporaries, including his friends and relations. He had no particular quarrel with the Church on this matter, and the reason is probably he had not thought much about it. But later it began to trouble him he was tormented by doubt and argued with himself and with those around him. He plunged into a serious study of the problem. He improved his knowledge of Greek in order to read the New Testament in the language in which it came down to us, and studied the theological literature and a large number of historical works.

After he had done a colossal amount of research on the subject he felt he had found the answer to a question which he believed to be of the utmost importance to man, namely, who Jesus was and what he taught. To the end of his life, for a period of nearly thirty years, Tolstoi expounded his conception of Christ and Christianity in numerous articles, books and letters.

It was a conception that differed sharply from that of the Church. With characteristic straightforwardness and fearlessness Tolstoi rejected the authority of the Church as the interpreter of the Christian doctrine and as a social institution in general. "Christ," Tolstoi said, "had never established any hierarchy of the church in the sense theology understands it."⁸

It had never been the aim of the Church, said Tolstoi, to preserve the purity of Christ's teachings and to transmit them to the people. "The Church is just a word, a name for deception, a means through which some people try to rule over others. And there is no other Church, nor can there be any. Only on this deception have the hideous dogmas been formulated, which mutilate and conceal the teachings. And the deity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the Virgin Mary...."⁹ And the Church had always interpreted the Holy Scriptures in a way that suited it, and not in accordance with their true meaning.

Tolstoi did not consider the Scriptures to be holy as this word was understood by the Church. He spoke of the "impossibly contradictory texts of the Pentateuch, the Psalms, the Gospels, the Epistles, the Acts, that is, everything that is considered to comprise the Scriptures".¹⁰ Tolstoi criticised the approach of those theologians who tried to find "the least contradictory meaning" of the texts of the Scriptures that were obviously inconsistent. One must, said Tolstoi, read the Gospels on one's own, without the aid of the Church, and extract from them a clear conception of the personality of Christ and his teachings.

But what should we do when we come upon the many contradictory passages in the Gospels, when we discover that they "are full of errors" and are ambiguous in many places? Then, says Tolstoi, we must acknowledge that "the conception to which we are accustomed, namely, that all

the Gospels, all four of them with their verses and letters, are holy books, is, on the one hand, a vulgar delusion, and on the other, vulgar and harmful deception".¹¹ And they contain no special mysteries which the human mind cannot grasp. Even if we consider Jesus to be God who had come to earth from heaven, it is still hard to imagine that he revealed his truth to people with the aim of concealing it in texts that are obscure to the point of incomprehensibility. And "if Jesus is not God, but a great man, it is even less possible that his teachings should give rise to different interpretations".¹² In other words, we must find what is clear in the teachings of the Gospels.

Nevertheless, there is much in the Gospels that is obscure and contradictory. Tolstoi does not deny this. He says that we can overcome the difficulty this poses by interpreting the obscure passage in the light of those passages whose meaning is plain.

Such an approach is certainly not flawless, logically speaking. If, for instance, confronted with two texts which contradict each other in their meaning we consider one of them to be obscure and the other to be clear, we may be guilty of a certain degree of arbitrariness. For what may seem incomprehensible to me may appear clear and simple to someone else, and the other way round. And our choice will determine which text we are to regard as important and which text as being of secondary importance.

The starting point of Tolstoi's conception is therefore weak, and this is accentuated by the fact that Tolstoi declined beforehand to provide any proof that his point of view was a correct one: "...There can be no proof of the truth of my teaching. ...My teaching is light, and whoever sees it has light and life, and for him proof is needless. But whoever is in darkness must come to the light."¹³ This is, of course, a rather subjective approach. As we shall see later, Tolstoi's interpretation of Christ's personality and his teachings, which is based on such an approach to the Gospel narratives, is not free from subjectivity and arbitrariness. Let us now consider Tolstoi's point of view.

For Tolstoi Jesus was a good, kind and intelligent man, the first man in history who understood how people

should live in order to be happy and who explained his absolutely correct doctrine to them. Jesus was not God; he never called himself God. He spoke of himself as the "son of man" and of God as his father, but not in the sense these words were interpreted by the Church. Christ called all people sons of man, including himself. Christ "described his relation to God and that of all people to God as the relation of the son to the father.... The son of man is the son of God. In foretelling his union with God after his death he did not at all mean his rising to heaven and sitting on the right hand of God: 'I am not God's son; I am the son of God only in that I fulfil His will'."¹⁴ The union with God is symbolic rather than literal; it is "in the spirit". But then how did Christ the man become God?

There is a simple answer to this. On the one hand, the "crowd" was at fault with its "crude understanding"; and on the other, the Church had incorrectly interpreted the personality of Christ and had on this basis built up its well-being and its claim to power and wealth. When "the crowd began to follow the new doctrine", it was told that Christ was "a divine person and by his death gave us the law of salvation". But "from the whole doctrine the crowd understood above all that he is divine and is therefore God, and that his death has brought us salvation. This crude understanding becomes the possession of the crowd, is mutilated, and the whole doctrine recedes, as the first place is taken up by the divinity and the saving quality of his death.... This is contrary to the doctrine itself, but there are people--teachers--who undertake to reconcile and to explain...".¹⁵

What these "teachers" preach is not told in the Gospels. "In Jesus' teachings there is not even a hint that with his own blood he has redeemed the human race whose fall was brought about by Adam, that God is the Trinity, that seven sacraments are needed for salvation, that there must be two forms of communion, and so on." Moreover, "the theory about the fall of Adam and eternal life in paradise and about the immortal soul which God breathed into Adam was unknown to Christ who did not mention it or hinted at its existence by a single word".¹⁶ The same is true of the doctrine about the resurrection of the dead: it was rejected by Christ. When Christ spoke of "the re-

resurrection of the son of man from the dead, he did not mean resurrection in the flesh and his personal resurrection, but the awakening of life in the name of God".¹⁷ And the idea of a heavenly kingdom suggesting as it did that there was an afterlife was also rejected by Christ. "The belief in a future personal life is a vulgar and crude conception based on a mixing of dream and death and characteristic of all primitive peoples."¹⁸ It cannot be an inherent part of Christianity, or even of Judaism. There will be a heavenly kingdom on earth, not in the supernatural sense, but in the sense that "all people will be brothers", that the world will be one world and all people will flourish in prosperity during their life on earth which is their only life.

With such a rationalistic approach to the Gospel narratives, Tolstoi would have to reject all the stories about the miracles Christ and his disciples performed and the doings of the Devil, in particular, the temptations to which Christ was subjected. He would have to reinterpret all the Gospel texts on which the Christian cult is based and which were contrary to his own views. He devoted much effort to this task, but the arguments he put forward in support of his own point of view are not always very convincing.

Tolstoi obviously had difficulty in dealing with the question of miracles told in the Gospels. He ignores the Immaculate Conception, Christ's Resurrection and Ascension and many other similar stories. And he tries to explain some of them in a way that suggests there is nothing unusual about them. For instance, this is how he tells the story about Jesus calming a storm at sea: "They [the Apostles] roused him [Christ] and said, 'Teacher, do you not care that we will perish?' And when the storm subsided, he said, 'Why are you so fearful? You have no faith in the life of the spirit'."¹⁹

The story as told in the Gospel is as follows: "And he arose, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.... And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:39, 41). In a similar way Tolstoi interprets the story about the miracle of feeding five thousand people

with five loaves of bread and two fishes. Instead of a miracle Tolstoi treats the incident as something quite ordinary.

Still, the fact cannot be ignored that in the Gospels there are many stories about miracles. Tolstoi reluctantly admits this, as he also admits the fact that nothing is said in the Gospels against faith in miracles. Tolstoi deals with this problem by merely stating that the whole spirit of Jesus' teachings shows that Jesus did not rely on miracles to prove the truthfulness of his teachings. This is hardly a convincing argument. In the Gospels the miracles performed by Jesus are mainly significant as proof of his divine mission. Tolstoi is silent on this question.

Tolstoi's interpretation of the temptation of Christ in the desert provides a good example of the way in which he tries to remove the supernatural element from the biography of Jesus.

The first temptation: "And the voice of the flesh said to him ... [followed by a reference to Matthew 4:3]. But Jesus said to himself: if I cannot make bread from stones, then I am not the son of God's flesh, but of God's spirit. I live not by bread, but by the spirit. And my spirit can disregard flesh."²⁰ The story as told in Matthew's Gospel is as follows: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.... And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:1, 3, 4). So it was not the voice of the flesh that tempted Jesus, but the Devil himself!

The second temptation: "And it seemed to him that he was standing on the roof of a temple and the voice of the flesh said to him... [Luke 4:9]. But Jesus said to himself: I can disregard flesh, but I cannot get rid of it, because I was born of the spirit in the flesh." The story as told in Luke's Gospel is as follows: "And the devil brought him [Jesus] to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence.... And Jesus

answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Luke 4:9, 12). As we see, this is entirely different from Tolstoi's version.

The third temptation (in Luke this is the second temptation; Tolstoi had changed the order). Again the voice of the flesh is "at work": "To Jesus appeared all the kingdoms on earth and all the people, how they live and labour for the flesh, expecting a reward from it."²¹ The relevant passage in Luke's Gospel is as follows: "And the devil, taking him up into a high mountain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him. All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them.... If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan" (Luke 4:5-8; there is an almost identical passage in Matthew 4:8-10).

We have compared Tolstoi's versions with those in the Gospels not in order to convict the writer of misrepresentation. Tolstoi himself had said that he had struck out much in the Gospels which he found unacceptable. The point to be made here is that the criteria Tolstoi used in deleting some passages and the texts he provided in their place cannot be regarded as scientifically valid; they do not help us discover the objective historical truth of the matter in question. What we have here is in fact a gospel not according to Luke or Matthew, but according to Leo.

Tolstoi treated the parables, whose morals were obviously not to his liking, in much the same way. The famous parable of the talents (a talent was a unit of weight in gold or silver), according to which a slave must multiply the wealth of his master, is reworked by Tolstoi so that "the spirit of God in people" takes the place of money. Surely, to multiply the divine spirit in people is a much worthier aim than acquiring gold and silver. Tolstoi carefully avoids those passages in the Gospels that have to do with the foundation of the Church, the afterlife and the rewards and punishments in it, and the institution of a new cult with its rites and ceremonies.

It is interesting to see how Tolstoi treats the Gospel narratives about the last supper and the rite of com-

munion which Jesus taught his disciples. In the Gospels the description of these events is fairly concrete and clear. Jesus broke bread and gave it to his disciples saying: "Take, eat; this is my body." And he gave them wine and said "this is my blood". He also said to them: "...this do in remembrance of me."

This episode serves as the basis of the Christian sacrament of communion, which occupies a central place in the whole cult. But Tolstoi gives it an entirely different interpretation, and a very simple one. In his narration Christ says to his disciples as he gives them bread and wine: "Remember me by this bread and wine. When you take wine remember my blood which will be spilled so that you will live without sin; when you eat bread remember my body which I give for your sake."²² Just an act of remembrance, and nothing more. According to the Church's teachings, when the believer eats the ritual bread dipped in wine, a miracle takes place inside him: the bread turns into the body of Christ and the wine--into his blood. Tolstoi scoffed at the ritual, calling it the God-eating rite.

The only thing that interested Tolstoi about the Gospels and about Christianity as a whole was the moral teachings that can be extracted from them. "For me," he wrote, "the main question is not whether Jesus Christ was God and from whom the holy spirit came and so on. It is also unimportant and unnecessary to know when and who wrote which Gospels, and which parable can be ascribed to Christ. What is important for me is the light that has shone for 1800 years for mankind, which has shone and still shines for me..."²³ Here one cannot but be struck by the inconsistency in the thinking of the great writer. Tolstoi knew very well what vile and cruel acts had been committed in these 1800 years by people who considered themselves followers of Christ's teachings, and he had wrathfully condemned these acts. The "light that shines" had not in the least improved the morals or the life of people. But the moralist in Tolstoi refused to acknowledge this crucially important circumstance.

Ardently and tirelessly Tolstoi expounded the way of life, the laws and standards of moral behaviour which he believed Jesus Christ had bequeathed mankind. But even

then Tolstoi had to leave out some points and interpret others subjectively and arbitrarily. In the end there remained five commandments whose fulfilment, in Tolstoi's opinion, would ensure the salvation of man's soul. And for Tolstoi salvation did not mean delivery from the torments of hell, but the attainment by man of spiritual peace and the joys of life. They are: 1. "To offend no one, and by no act to excite evil in others, for out of evil comes evil." 2. "To be in all things chaste, and not to quit the wife whom we have taken; for the abandoning of wives and the changing of them is the cause of all loose living in the world." 3. "Never to take an oath, because we can promise nothing, for man is altogether in the hands of the Father, and oaths are imposed for wicked ends." 4. "Not to resist evil, to bear with offences, and to do yet more than is demanded to us; neither to judge, nor to go to law, for every man is himself full of faults, and cannot teach. By seeking revenge men only teach others to do the same." 5. "To make no distinction between our own countrymen and foreigners, for all men are the children of one Father."²⁴

Of these the fourth commandment is the most important. Tolstoi regarded nonresistance to evil as the central point of Christ's teachings. It "unites his teachings into one indivisible whole; it is indeed a key to open all doors", said Tolstoi.²⁵ In any situation, in any conditions, if someone wants to do evil to you, your family or your children, even to the weakest and most defenseless creature, and even if the evil will be an assault by robbers or a mad dog, the most you can do is to put yourself in the place of the one who is being assaulted. And if a dog bites you or your children, if a robber robs and kills you, there is no special harm in it. The important thing is that you must not violate Christ's commandment.

But, of course, no one in history has followed this commandment, though the Gospels are honoured by all Christian denominations. So the commandment is ineffective. Tolstoi knew this and had correctly indicated the reason why this is so. The commandment can be effective only when it is "not a dictum, but a rule which must be observed, when it is a law". The key that opens all doors works only "when this key is forced through the lock". On the other hand, "an acceptance of this principle as a

dictum whose fulfilment is impossible without supernatural help is the destruction of the whole doctrine".²⁶

But in order to get to the heart of the matter we must ask why is it that the Gospels' call for nonresistance to evil has remained only a dictum instead of becoming a law of behaviour. Is the imperfect human nature at fault here? And are there grounds for thinking that human nature will improve to such an extent that Jesus' commandments, even reinforced by Tolstoi's appeals, will be carried out and cease being mere words?

Many years have gone by since Leo Tolstoi made known his own conception of Christ's teachings. But the commandment on nonresistance to evil has remained an Evangelical dictum which no one applies in real life.

The same thing can be said of the other commandments of Christ as formulated by Tolstoi. Directly linked with the commandment on nonresistance to evil is the commandment not to give offence. According to Matthew's Gospel, "...whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement" (Matthew 5:22). What if there is "cause"? If one's "brother" behaves badly towards one and one's anger against him is not without cause, will be it right to be angry? No, says Tolstoi, the commandment to offend no one is unconditional, and the phrase "without a cause" got into the Gospel by chance or was placed there by ill-intentioned Church officials who were always trying to distort Christ's teachings.

The great significance Tolstoi attached to the commandment never to take an oath also deserves attention. Tolstoi said that at first he found this commandment puzzling: why indeed should not one confirm one's words with an oath, what is sinful about it? And is it not strange that Jesus should put this seemingly unimportant rule next to those having to do with the basic principles of human behaviour? After long reflection, however, Tolstoi found an interpretation of the commandment which, in his opinion, fully justified the significance given to it. The matter concerns not any oath, but the oath of allegiance which subjects give to the state, especially soldiers. Is it not the taking of this oath, asks Tolstoi, that is prohibited without which it would be impossible to divide people into states and there could be no military

estates? Soldiers commit acts of violence and they are the ones who take the "oath of allegiance". Tolstoi interprets the commandment as an anarchistic rejection of the state and people's obligations to it.

Thus, for Tolstoi Jesus was only a teacher and preacher of morals. And of all the ethical precepts attributed to Jesus Tolstoi accepted only those which coincided with his own views. As we have seen, there is much in the teachings and activities of Jesus, as told in the Gospels, that is contrary to the five commandments formulated by Tolstoi. This fact was used by theologians and ideologists of the Christian churches in their attack on Tolstoism. Of particular interest is the refutation of Tolstoism contained in the speeches of the well-known figure in the renovation movement within the Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Aleksandr Vvedensky. We shall consider this in the next section which deals with the conception of Christ as a social reformer and rebel.

Revolutionary and Rebel

(according to A. Vvedensky, K. Kautsky and others)

According to Metropolitan Vvedensky, Tolstoi had completely distorted the image of Christ by portraying him as a passive resister. "It is hard to imagine a more monstrous piece of calumny," said Vvedensky, "than the way in which Tolstoi has disgraced Christ." Tolstoism therefore presented a more serious threat to Christianity than atheism. Vvedensky poured scorn on the image of Christ drawn by Tolstoi: "A hero in the style of the German Gretchen", with "flaxen hair neatly parted in the middle, dressed in white, with pure white lilies and a gaze that notices none of the horrors of the social drama", and so on.²⁷ To Vvedensky, Christ appeared in an entirely different light: as a stern and formidable fighter, political leader and man of action.

What kind of activity was Jesus engaged in? In revolutionary struggle, replied the metropolitan, and the struggle was such a deep-going one that all subsequent history of revolutionary movement down to our own time was a mere continuation of it and an embodiment of Christ's teachings. Even Marxism was nothing but the "Gospel printed in atheistic letters". It was no use insisting,

as atheists did, on the opposition between Marxism on the one hand, and Christianity and religion in general, on the other. "The ideas which Marxism now refers to in opposition to Christianity," said Vvedensky, "such as the ideas of brotherhood, a classless status, ... the ideas of a classless state, classless humanity, the coming 'Zukunft' [future--I.K.], when all will be well for us, are also the ideas of Christ; they coincide with his teachings about the human brotherhood."²⁸

Vvedensky was not the first to consider Christ as a revolutionary and socialist. Such interpretation has a long history.

The anti-feudal and anti-clerical heretical movements in Western Europe in the Middle Ages derived their inspiration from the image of Christ as a rebel who called on the masses to take arms against the rich, to destroy the social order based on their power and to set up a new system on the principles of universal equality, including equality in the economic sphere. For the heretics there was no lack of material for such an interpretation of the image of Jesus, which they could readily find in the New Testament.

According to the Gospels, Jesus did not call on all people to follow him, but only the toilers and the oppressed. He had no sympathy whatever for the rich. "Woe unto you that are rich!" he told them. He also said: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matthew 20:24). The well-known parable about the rich man and Lazarus also reveals Jesus' attitude to the rich. Lazarus, the beggar, who sat at the gate of the rich man, lies in the bosom of Abraham after his death, while the rich man after his death suffers the eternal torments of hell.

Certain details of the life of Jesus have also contributed to his image as a leader and defender of the poor. For instance, he was the son of a carpenter, he led a humble life, and he died on the cross in the midst of ordinary people. He chose his disciples not from among the rich, but from simple fishermen.

What Jesus set out to do, as described in the Gos-

pels, may also be interpreted as a call for revolutionary actions against the oppressors. He said: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 11:34). And shortly before his arrest Jesus ordered his disciples to buy swords (Luke 22:36). In making armed assaults on the landlords, including those who were members of the clergy, the participants in the heretical movements believed that they were following in the footsteps of Christ and carrying out his teachings.

Of course, they could also find exactly the opposite themes in the Gospels. But in such cases the reader usually finds what he wants to find, what coincides with his interests and tastes and feelings. This applies to both individuals and social groups. Understandably, revolutionary masses filled with Christian piety would be attracted to the theme of rebellion and hatred for the rich in the New Testament rather than to the theme of nonresistance to evil.

In the mid-19th century the movement of Christian socialism emerged in Western Europe. Félicité Lamennais, who is generally regarded as its founder, was a Catholic priest who left the Church towards the end of his life. His thesis, which he stated in numerous works, is that the significance of Christianity lies in its call for the establishment of equality among men and for freedom in their mutual relations. All other aspects of Christ's teachings, according to Lamennais, are subordinated to the basic idea of rebuilding society on the principles of justice, equality and freedom. The personality of Christ, as presented by this eloquent and fiery advocate of Christian socialism, is an embodiment of these lofty principles.

Even utopian socialism, for such of its adherents as Etienne Cabet and W. Weitling, is linked with a "revolutionary-socialistic" interpretation of the image of Jesus. For instance, in advancing the idea of common property, Cabet wrote: "The moral of this new religion was ... common property.... Jesus Christ enjoined his disciples to propagate and preach this moral throughout the world. Later the apostles of the new god preached this new faith in Rome and the Roman Empire and to count-

less proselytes. Subsequently Christians formed thousands of communities and a vast republic which extended to the whole of the Empire and was based on the practice of brotherhood and common property."²⁹ In reality no such republic existed. The important thing for us to note here is that Cabot considered Christ to be the author of a programme for establishing common property.

In his poem *The Twelve*, which is about the working people's fight for liberation, the Russian poet Aleksandr Blok uses the imagery of a group of twelve Red Army men marching through "Wind ... wind .../Roaring the wide world over" to carry out a revolutionary assignment, and marching at the head of this group is none other than Jesus Christ:

... Onward still the Twelve go striding;
In their rear--a starving cur;
And with bloody banner bading,
Hidden by the howling storm,
Safe from human hurt or harm,
In a chaplet of white roses,
Stepping through the pearly snowdust,
Shrouded in the snowy mist,
In the distance--Jesus Christ.

For a long time the Church officialdom resisted the "revolutionary" interpretation of Jesus' personality. The Vatican strongly condemned those who accepted and approved of it. This can be seen in a number of Church documents going back to the 1930s and 1940s. In a radio address broadcast in February 1931 Pope Pius XI called on the oppressed and the oppressors to be guided by Christ and not to forget the spiritual wealth that had been accumulated over the ages. As regards material wealth, the Pope assured his listeners that Jesus had authorised the "propertied", that is, capitalists, to preserve and distribute it, and had commanded the poor "to submit" to the rulers as they would to God himself.

In Russia, before the 1917 Socialist Revolution, the Orthodox Church also strongly rejected any attempt to point out revolutionary tendencies in the personality of Christ and in his teachings. In books, pamphlets and articles and in lectures at theological seminaries, theologians tried to "expose" socialism and put an end to the

dangerous heresy which held that Christ was a socialist.

But already from the end of the last century the "revolutionary" interpretation of Christ's image gradually ceased to be unthinkable. In a resolution adopted by an Anglican conference in 1884 it was noted that much that was good and true in socialism could be found in the teachings of Christ. Such concessions to socialism were probably unavoidable: church officials could no longer ignore the popularity of socialist ideas among the broad masses in all countries. The interesting thing to note here is that the Anglican Church should considered it necessary under the circumstances to seek the roots of such ideas in Christ's teachings.

In recent years the ideas of Christian socialism are being more and more often publicised by the Church officialdom of all Christian denominations, including the Vatican. For instance, the Vatican readily points out the "proletarian" origin of Jesus and in honour of his father who was a carpenter even calls for the celebration of May Day, not as a day of solidarity of working people against the oppressors, but simply as labour day. However, there are serious differences among clerical circles on matters of political tactics and orientation, and therefore the image of Christ is also interpreted by them differently. Let us consider the motives for "revolutionising" Christ and Christianity which differ among different groups of clergymen and public figures.

Some of them believe that today, when socialism is not only a movement and an ideology, but also a powerful international economic and political force, it would be unwise for the Church to openly uphold its previous position and give unqualified support to capitalism. For them the image of Christ the socialist is a weapon against contemporary socialism: why should anyone struggle for socialism, so to speak, if two thousand years ago Christ had preached "real" and "true" socialism which now only needs to be translated into reality in accordance with the teachings of Christ the God-and-man, and not with what is taught by the Marxists?

The matter becomes more complicated, however, when it is seen in an historical perspective. Indeed, for almost two thousand years the teachings of Christ "the so-

cialist" have been preached and people have professed a faith in them, and yet their life has not really improved. Why? In reply to this question Church supporters resort to abstract arguments and vague theological discourse which in effect avoid the question at issue while creating an impression that the problem is solved. They assert, for instance, that God has relied on the free will of people, and they have to this day incorrectly understood Christ's behests, and so on.

Then there are progressive-minded people, including clergymen, who sincerely stand for peace and an improvement of the lot of the nations. And it is in this connection that they refer to the image of Christ, interpreting it in a revolutionary and socialist spirit. A prominent representative of this group is the late Dean of Canterbury Hewlett Johnson. He considered that the building of a socialist society in the Soviet Union was in full conformity with the spirit of Christ, and he did a great amount of work on an international scale to promote peace and socialism.

Views similar to those of Hewlett Johnson are held by the Lutheran theologian Emil Fuchs and F. Clark, an Englishman. From their point of view, the aims of the struggle waged today by supporters of socialism coincide with the teachings of Christ as set forth in the Gospels. They even maintain that the true followers of Christ today are the Communists and those who, coming after them, stand for a socialist transformation of society. And it does not matter whether they believe in God and in Christ as a divine person. Indeed, Fuchs and Clark are not inclined to regard those as Christians who are formally pious members of Christian churches but who in reality are engaged in predatory practices in accordance with the rules of capitalism and imperialism. Objectively, such views are in harmony with the call for giving support to the progressive aspirations and movements of our time.

But are there historical grounds for considering Christ a socialist, rebel and revolutionary? Arguments in favour of such an interpretation are summed up in the book *Origins of Christianity* by Karl Kautsky. An examination of these arguments may help us determine the extent to which such an interpretation is valid.

Besides the sayings of Christ that are critical of wealth and the rich, which are found in the Gospels and are usually cited in such cases, Kautsky paid special attention to the Acts of the Apostles which indicate that among the early Christians there was communal ownership of material goods. At the earliest stages of its existence, said Kautsky, the Christian community "was characterised by an effective, though undefined communism, a rejection of private ownership, and a striving towards a new, better social order in which all class differences would be eliminated through the division of property".³⁰ This communist spirit could only have been derived from the teachings of Christ which his followers accepted and carried out in practice.

Kautsky acknowledged and repeatedly pointed out, both in *Origins of Christianity* and in his other works, that the communism practised among the early Christians was of a rudimentary character. Thus, instead of common property there was more or less systematic division of property among members of the community. There was no question at all of public ownership of the means of production, for this communism was consumption-oriented and egalitarian in nature. According to Kautsky, the principle rejecting the institute of private property was the most important element.

Regardless of how we assess the system that existed in the early Christian communities, it would be far-fetched to think that it reflected the teachings of Christ. Here we must consider the conditions in which the early Christians lived. Surrounded by "pagans" they tended to unite into fairly close-knit communities and organised internal mutual aid on a large scale. But there was no reorganisation of the whole of society on new principles. This can be seen in the fact that members of the community were advised to sell their property and contribute the money from the sale to a common fund. Had there been a reorganisation of the entire social system, the question would arise as to who would buy the property.

Kautsky deduced the revolutionary and rebellious character of the teachings and activity of Christ from his role as the Messiah. Either Jesus thought of himself as the Messiah, in which case he had to take upon himself all

the responsibilities of a political, social and even military leader, or he regarded himself as a peaceful, suffering martyr. It had to be one of these two things. And Jesus quite definitely assumed the role of the Messiah!

But Kautsky could not ignore another aspect of the image of Christ, which consists in the fact that Christ preached nonresistance to evil and social passivity. How can these two diametrically opposite aspects be reconciled? Kautsky's answer to the question is as follows: the militant Messianic elements of the image of Jesus were the original ones, while an attitude of nonresistance and passive waiting came later. Jesus could not have appeared to people with such mutually exclusive features at one and the same time.

Such a conception can be considered valid only if it can be proved that the "rebellious" passages in the Gospels came before the passages on nonresistance to evil. But this has not been proved. Therefore, this whole conception remains purely conjectural, unsupported by any sound arguments.

There is yet another strong argument, in Kautsky's opinion, which supports the idea about the rebellious character of Jesus' teachings; namely, any other form of Messianism would not have enjoyed the success it did among non-Judaic groups. Could the other peoples in the Roman Empire have been inspired by a Messianism that concerned the Jews only? No, says Kautsky. The success of Christianity on an international scale can be explained if it is assumed that it advanced not so much nationalistic slogans and demands as class-oriented ones. Messianism and communism were united in the teachings of Jesus Christ, and only when they were united did they "become invincible". Only when the "Messianic aspirations" signified the "deliverance of all who are poor" could they have met with "a lively response among the poor of all nations".³¹ If Christ did not appear as a leader of the oppressed, regardless of their nationality, but as a strictly Judaic Messiah, his teachings, says Kautsky, would not have survived the terrible defeat which Judaism suffered in its national liberation wars and the decline in which the idea of Messianism itself fell following these wars.

This argument, too, is not well-founded and remains of a conjectural nature. Besides, it is inconsistent with Kautsky's general treatment of the question. He considers that Jesus' teachings, inherited by his immediate disciples, soon lost its revolutionary character. "The crucified Messiah, who came from the midst of the proletariat," says Kautsky, was able to conquer Rome and the world, "but he conquered it not for the proletariat." The dialectics of history was such that Christianity became the bulwark of social oppression, and this is quite understandable. "The crucified Messiah was not the first, nor was he the last conqueror who in the end turned the armies that had given him victory against his own people and used them to subjugate it." Kautsky recalls Caesar and Napoleon who, too, "grew out of the victory of democracy".³²

But if we accept the argument that the teachings of Jesus lost their revolutionary character soon after his death (this in itself is not impossible), we would not be able to explain the success they had among the non-Jewish population of the Roman Empire which was due precisely to their revolutionary character. For the spread of Christianity among the non-Jewish groups did not take place in the early period of its existence, but at a time when it would have lost its revolutionary spirit.

* * *

Metropolitan Vvedensky said during a debate with Anatoli Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar for Education, that everybody would like to have Christ in his camp. Lunacharsky replied: "But not we. We do not need Christ."³³ This is quite true. But, as Lunacharsky himself pointed out, this had nothing to do with the attempt to solve the problem of the historicity of Christ. As with any other scientific question, the important thing here is to establish the truth.

The classics of Marxism had on numerous occasions commented on attempts to find similarities between communism and primitive Christianity. The aim of such attempts is, on the one hand, to "christianise" the Communist doctrine, and on the other, to portray Christianity and its founder in a revolutionary-communist light. A typical example of such an attempt is the recently published book

Jesus and the Proletariat by H. Rolfes.³⁴ Its purpose is to show that the modern working-class movement is a mere continuation of the tradition that goes back to Christ. Pointing to similar attempts Engels noted that "one of the favorite axioms is that Christianity is communism". Those who hold this view "try to prove it by the Bible, the state of community the first Christians are said to have lived, etc.". But, said Engels, the general spirit of its doctrines is, nevertheless, totally opposed to communism.³⁵ Indeed, scientific communism does not need religious or any other kind of cover.

The Fascinating Hero-Sufferer
(according to Ernest Renan)

In Europe in the second half of the last century the interpretation of Christ was largely influenced by the portrait of Christ drawn by the French scholar and writer Ernest Renan in his book *The Life of Jesus*, which was first published in 1863. During the lifetime of Renan (he died in 1892) the book went through dozens of editions in different languages, including Russian. The spectacular success of the book is partly explained by the author's brilliant literary style and partly by the fact that Renan was able to create a complete and vivid portrait of Jesus the man with all the contradictions of a living human image. It was only later and with much difficulty that scholarly literature on Christ was able to free itself from the spell of this image and once again embark on a path of objective historical research.

When still a young man Renan abandoned his intention of taking orders and devoted himself to scholarship. His scholarly interests as a historian, however, were intertwined with the aspiration of an artist to recreate the past imaginatively. In him the erudite scholar not infrequently came into conflict with the gifted artist, and it was not always the scholar who emerged victorious. Thus, in *The Life of Jesus* it is the subjective artist rather than the impartial scholar who got the upper hand. Nevertheless, Renan's portrait of Christ remains significant if only because of the influence it had long exerted on the views of scholars in the field. It may be noted that Christian churches of almost all denominations (except for a few Protestant branches) sharply denounced the

book. Its publication led to a storm of protest against it and its author.

This is not really surprising. For in his account of the life of Jesus Renan totally rejects the supernatural elements. There is no place in it for the immaculate conception and the resurrection and the ascension of Christ. It begins with Jesus' birth and ends with his death. In his introduction to the 13th edition of the book Renan clearly states his position on this question: "Once we accept the supernatural, we place ourselves outside the realm of science. As a result quite unscientific explanations are tolerated, the kind of explanations which no astronomer, physicist, chemist, geologist or physiologist would accept and which no historian should accept either. We reject the supernatural on the same ground that we reject the existence of centaurs and hipogriffs: nobody has ever seen them. I reject the miracles that are told in the Gospels."³⁶

To say that one should reject supernatural phenomena because no one has ever seen them does not sound particularly convincing; there are more serious arguments than that in favour of such a rejection. But it is important to note here that Renan tries to adhere to a rationalistic point of view. Philosophically his position is close to that of positivism.

Thus, it is not Jesus the miracle-worker that attracted Renan, who did not believe in miracles. Renan was more impressed with the outstanding human qualities which he saw in Christ and above all with the colossal role which in his opinion Christ played in history. For Renan the rise of Christianity was the most important event in world history and Jesus Christ was the creator of that event.

Renan did not object to Jesus being regarded as the "Son of God". He believed that a "universal conscience has decreed the title of Son of God, and that with justice, since he has advanced religion as no other has done, or probably ever will be able to do".³⁷ But in order to properly appreciate this great man and his contribution to the history of mankind, it is necessary to rid ourselves of the many wrong notions with which churchmen and theologians had surrounded the image of Christ, distorting it as a result.

In the countless number of interpretations of the image of Christ contained in the writings of pious Christologists over a period of nearly 2000 years there is not the slightest attempt to establish historical truth. As far as Christians were concerned, as Renan noted, the most important thing was to prove that Jesus fulfilled all that was said in the Books of the Prophets and the Psalms which was thought to be related to the Messiah. To achieve this goal all means were considered acceptable. Thus, Old Testament texts were used to describe the life of Jesus, which was entirely arbitrary. Renan gave many examples of this. And, Renan noted, when Jewish theologians pointed out that their Old Testament texts contained nothing similar to that written by Christian exegetes they were told that they had distorted their texts out of sheer wickedness.

Renan himself had no need for such methods. This does not mean that all his arguments rest on a strictly objective basis. On the contrary, there is much in them that is arbitrary, subjective, hypothetical or simply untrue. For him, his own artistic imagination provided a sufficiently good basis for them. Thus, he ignored the Gospels narratives which appeared to him to be implausible (first of all, the stories about the miracles and about supernatural phenomena generally), and gathered up all the rest with a single thread of connected narrative, filling the gaps either with his own inventions or simply with elegant and fine writing. In this way he was able to create a fascinating image of a tragic hero who lived, suffered and died for an idea which after his death conquered the world. How closely this image corresponds to historical realities is another question, and we shall go into this later on.

According to Renan, Jesus was a man of his time, influenced by the geographical and historical milieu in which he grew up and in which his personality was formed. He shared the ideology of his time, including its illusions. He could not have had any success otherwise. For, said Renan, all great things are accomplished by the people, and no one can lead a people without sharing its ideas. Renan clearly hinted that even if Jesus did not believe everything he preached and resorted to deception

on occasion, this should not in any way make us feel that he had compromised himself. Deception did not always play a negative role in history: "Nothing great has been established which does not rest on a legend."³⁸

The fault here lies with man himself who wants to be deceived. This is particularly true of the peoples of ancient East, according to Renan. They had completely different notions of truth and falsehood from those held by Europeans. Renan writes: "Honesty and imposture are words which, in our rigid consciences, are opposed as two irreconcilable terms. In the East, they are connected by numberless subtle links and windings.... The literal truth has little value to the Oriental; he sees everything through the medium of his ideas, his interests, and his passions."³⁹ From such a point of view one can attribute behaviour that is not always correct or sincere to Jesus without casting any shadow on his moral image.

Such is Renan's approach to the Gospel stories about the miracles Jesus performed. Renan admits that these stories contain many legends which emerged later among the believers and were products of their mythical imagination. But he does not rule out the possibility that some of the legends corresponded to events that actually occurred. It is impossible in this case to distinguish between legends and real events. But though the description of the miracles may be "true", that does not prove that the supernatural events described really took place; it is rather a matter of Jesus consenting to play an "active role" in some of the miracles. What Renan is obviously trying to do here is to render more "acceptable" the thought that Jesus at times agreed to pretend that he had performed a miracle using means which, from our point of view, are not strictly honest.

But what was Jesus to do, exclaims Renan, if in his time miracles were considered an unmistakable sign of divinity and the symbol of prophethood? Jesus was faced with a dilemma: he had either to abandon his mission or to become a miracle-worker. He chose the latter. So, Jesus only yielded to the pressure of the time in which he lived. He became a miracle-worker and exorcist against his will.

But Jesus himself quite readily yielded to this

pressure. Clearly contradicting himself Renan declares that Jesus not only believed in the miracles he performed but had not the slightest idea about the natural order of things and its laws; Jesus knew no more about these matters than his contemporaries. He thought as they did about miracles, God, the devil, angels and evil spirits. In this respect Jesus was not different from his contemporaries.⁴⁰ Here one may note a certain combination of deception and self-deception which, according to Renan, is a general characteristic of most religions.

In the case of Jesus self-deception was also encouraged by the fact that he was indeed able to work miracles on some occasions, namely, in healing the sick. The very personality of the physician and the methods he uses, says Renan, can have a beneficial influence on the nervous system of a patient. Sometimes just a touch of the patient by someone special is worth more than all the medicines a pharmacy can offer. In the case of Jesus "the mere pleasure of seeing him cures".⁴¹

Such influence is especially strong when the patient is suffering from nervous diseases, which in ancient times were looked upon as a result of the devil's having entered the body of the patient. The nervous shock that came from the touch by someone known as a healer could cure one who was so possessed. And this could strengthen Jesus' faith in himself as someone special and encourage him to continue the practice of miracle-working.

As portrayed by Renan Jesus was a man of his time also in his personal character. As a true Galilean he, unlike the Jews, never made a show of his piety and moral uprightness. "He did not fly from pleasure; he went willingly to marriage feasts."⁴² Jesus was a simple, cheerful and kind man, a man of the people. He had none of the haughtiness of the Sadducees or the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. In some ways he was light-hearted and care-free, like all inhabitants of fertile areas with a soft climate, and Galilee, Jesus' homeland, was such a place.

Renan even tries to explain Jesus' attitude to labour ("Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed

like one of these" (Matthew 6:28-29) by referring to the effect of climate on Jesus' general outlook: "Labour in climates of this kind appears useless; what it gives is not equal to what it costs.... This contempt, which, when it is not caused by idleness, contributes greatly to the elevation of the soul, inspired Jesus with some charming apologies: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth'."43

Being a simple man, Jesus was not particularly well-educated. He did not know Greek, which was widely used among the Hellenised Sadducean elite, or Greek literature. Moreover, Renan thinks that Jesus was not well-versed in Judaic "Law" and was far removed from the Rabbinic school that was even then beginning to engage in scholastic casuistry from which the Talmud later emerged. But herein lies one of the important facets of Jesus' personality: his mind had preserved that fresh naiveté which usually wears off in the course of a broad education. Nevertheless, the lack of a good education and theological training proved to be an obstacle to Jesus' work as a preacher.

Nature had endowed Jesus with wit, resourcefulness and the gift of a brilliant conversationalist. But that was not enough for someone entering on the career of a preacher. When Jesus began to preach to a wide audience he was obliged to become a debater, jurist, exegete and theologian. He had to take part in noisy discussions, in endless scholastic battles. Renan is aggrieved to see his hero fall into such a situation. Even when Jesus went from defence to attack he was not always at his best: "We should have preferred not seeing him sometimes play the part of aggressor."44

Jesus' innate abilities sometime enabled him to emerge victorious from a difficult situation, though Renan is not particularly impressed by the logic of Jesus' arguments in such instances, which was weak. Nevertheless, on some occasions Jesus' handling of a difficult situation was brilliant. Renan cites as an example Jesus' answer to the crowd who wanted to know what they should do with a woman taken in adultery. The answer was a cunning and at the same time a thoughtful one: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8:7).

The preacher of the new religion was a kind and

friendly man. "His preaching," writes Renan, "was gentle and pleasing, breathing Nature and the perfume of the fields. He loved the flowers, and took from them his most charming lessons. The birds of heaven, the sea, the mountains, and the games of children, furnished in turn the subject of his instructions."⁴⁵ With his softness and charm and his good looks, as Renan imagined him, Jesus was an attractive man, especially to women. But when the situation required he could be severe and imperious. Usually mild in his manners, he became transformed at the slightest opposition. Then his natural meekness left him and his sternness inspired fear even in the apostles.

Renan is delighted with the sarcastic way in which Jesus devastated his enemies: "Masterpieces of fine railery, their features are written in lines of fire upon the flesh of the hypocrite and the false devotee. Incomparable traits, worthy of a son of God! A god alone knows how to kill after this fashion, Socrates and Molière only touched the skin. He carried fire and rage to the very marrow."⁴⁶ Clearly Renan is exaggerating here. There are only a few passages in the Gospels which suggest the brilliance of Jesus' sarcasm on which Renan heaps such high praise. What aims did Renan's hero pursue with all his extraordinary qualities of mind and character?

Jesus was the founder of a new religion, even though it was based on Judaism. He was a Jew and yet not a Jew. Judaism was intended for "the sons of Abraham". But Jesus said that all good men who followed him, irrespective of their nationalities, became the sons of Abraham. "He proclaimed the rights of man, not the rights of the Jew; the religion of man, not the religion of the Jew; the deliverance of man, not the deliverance of the Jew," declares Renan.⁴⁷ Within Judaism and Judaic society there had been many attempts to rouse the masses in the cause of new religious and political doctrines, but none were nearly as radical as Jesus' ideas. All those attempts were made in the name of the Judaic "Law". Jesus was the first man to oppose it.

The new religion was "a pure religion, without forms, without temple, and without priest".⁴⁸ Renan distinguishes two aspects of this religion, and his attitudes towards them are quite different.

On the one hand, there is The Revelation, the prediction that the end of the world was near, the call to repent in anticipation of Judgement Day. This is a "false, cold, and impossible idea".⁴⁹ On the other hand, there is the "Sermon on the Mount, the apotheosis of the weak, the love of the people, regard for the poor, and the re-establishment of all that is humble, true, and simple".⁵⁰ Renan felt deeply drawn towards this aspect of Jesus' teachings. And he greatly admired the way in which Christ made known his moral doctrine to the world: he did it "as an incomparable artist". And we should "pardon him his hope of a vain apocalypse, and of a second coming in great triumph upon the clouds of heaven".⁵¹ That is not the most important thing in Christ's teachings; what is important is a living and life-giving moral doctrine which is linked to certain social views.

But when it comes to describing this doctrine, Renan, who is usually articulate and even verbose, becomes quite laconic. What is the social message of Jesus' teachings? Renan's answer is: "Pure *Ebionism*--that is, the doctrine that the poor (ebionim) alone shall be saved, that the reign of the poor is approaching...."⁵² Saved in what sense, and from what, from the torments of hell or from sufferings on earth caused by social injustice? Apparently the latter. So, Jesus' aim was to bring about a radical improvement of the life of the poor and the deprived. But, as presented by Renan, with all his talent for inflating the slightest hint into a whole conception, Christ's social programme looks rather inadequate indeed.

As a spokesman and leader of the poor, Christ was of course opposed to social inequality, to the economic and political domination by the rich. He tried to destroy wealth and power. He was against any kind of power and in this sense he was an anarchist. For him, any official was a natural enemy of God's people and civilian government was nothing but abuse of power. To some extent Christ's negative attitude to secular authority was due to his being ill-informed since he was "a man of the people who had no idea of politics".⁵³ Still, the fact remains that Jesus was against any kind of authority.

But despite such an attitude to the powers that be,

Christ did not try to overthrow the existing authorities. He told his disciples that he would be persecuted and tortured, but he never thought of resorting to armed resistance. He had a similarly passive attitude towards the existing social order. "... He never shows any desire to put himself in the place of the rich and the powerful",⁵⁴ and he did not tell the poor who followed him to seize the possessions of the rich. Why? Renan is not very clear on this point; for he tries to ignore that aspect of Jesus' teachings that is connected with the idea of the apocalypse, for which, as he tells us, the founder of Christianity must be forgiven. Jesus paid no attention to the blessings of this world and to worldly power because he considered them to be unimportant and vain in the face of the approaching end of the world which was inevitable.

However, Jesus was not always consistent in his attitude to secular authority. For instance, he said: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" (Matthew 22:21). As regards the wealth of the slaveowners, we can find in the Gospels quite a few parables and sayings in which such wealth is regarded as quite legitimate. On this point, too, Renan is one-sided and fails to be objective.

Renan tried, though without much success, to unite into one whole the teachings of Christ as set forth in the Gospels. And in this attempt, to give him his due, Renan did not simplify the psychological picture of Jesus' sufferings and feelings during his brief life on earth.

As Jesus' preachings began to attract more and more followers, he found himself in an increasingly difficult position. He did not know what to do with the crowds of people who were ready to go wherever he led them. Soon he ceased to be master of the situation. "Carried away by this fearful progression of enthusiasm," writes Renan, "and governed by the necessities of a preaching becoming daily more exalted, Jesus was no longer free; he belonged to his mission, and in one sense, to mankind."⁵⁵ Jesus had to swim with the current that carried him.

The struggle in Jesus' mind between two principles, an apocalyptic and a worldly one, which was reflected in his behaviour, ended with the victory of the former. And

that meant not resistance and struggle, but martyrdom. Realising this, Jesus went through a spiritual crisis. In Renan's own words: "Sometimes one would have said that his reason was disturbed. His disciples at times thought him mad. His enemies declared him to be possessed. He suffered great mental anguish and agitation. The great vision of the kingdom of God, glistening before his eyes, bewildered him."⁵⁶ And finally he made his decision--he would go to his death.

This decision, according to Renan, brought about a change in his behaviour. From that moment on all hesitation, all tactical manoeuvring ended. "Henceforth we behold Jesus entirely himself; his character unclouded. The subtleties of the polemic, the credulity of the thaumaturgus and of the exorcist are forgotten. There remains only the incomparable hero of the Passion."⁵⁷

Here once again Renan interprets the Gospel narratives rather arbitrarily. For "the incomparable hero of the passion" appeared rather faint-hearted at the critical moment. True, Renan notes that at one point Jesus was overcome by fear and doubt and he was in a state of weakness which is worse than death itself. But, says Renan, that moment came before Christ made the heroic decision "to drink the cup to the dregs". After that Christ never hesitated.

On the whole Renan created a striking and rather complex psychological portrait of a man who lived a tragic life, and a very remarkable man, too. Indeed, Renan's Jesus had an aura of grandeur, and the purely human passions, contradictions and weaknesses that were inherent in his personality were also on a grand scale. Renan's portrait of Jesus is a psychologically plausible one. To some extent it is also a plausible one historically, though critics almost unanimously reproached Renan for having portrayed Jesus according to his own conception of a Parisian of the Second Empire: impetuous and sentimental, elegant and witty and not very consistent in his words and deeds. But it is undeniable that Renan had made a real effort to see Jesus against the historical and geographical background of his time.

The most important thing about Renan's portrait of

Jesus is that it is in a large measure based on the artistic imagination of a gifted writer rather than on the objective testimonies of historical documents.

Mentally Ill
(according to J. Meslier, A. Binet-Sanglé
and Ya. Mints)

It is hard to say who was the first to put forward such a disparaging view of Christ. The first clear statement of it is found in the book *Testament* by Jean Meslier, a French Catholic priest who lived at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century. It became known only after his death that throughout his life he had been an uncompromising atheist.

Meslier's attitude towards all religions, including Christianity, was totally negative and hostile. The tone in which he spoke of religion and of Christianity and Christ is exceedingly critical, and the language he used on such occasions is almost abusive. But his attitude is an understandable one. That was the time of the Inquisition when the Church had complete sway over the lives and fate of people, if not over their minds. Anyone who openly voiced opposition, however mild, to the Christian dogmas risked being burned at the stake. All his life Meslier had to keep his beliefs to himself while carrying out his duties as a rural priest. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should be seething with anger and could find relief only when he was alone with his manuscript. It was also a time when the social atmosphere was highly charged, as the contradictions grew between the feudal aristocracy, which had the backing of the Church, and the broad masses who were striving for change. In short, it was the eve of the French Bourgeois Revolution.

But not only Meslier, but also ideologists of the French Enlightenment regarded Christianity with undisguised hostility and contempt. Voltaire, Holbach, Diderot and others treated the subject of Christianity and Christ with great scorn, subjecting it to angry and merciless denunciation. Meslier spoke of Christ in the same vein.

He called Jesus Christ "an insignificant person, who had neither talent, intelligence, knowledge, nor cleverness, and was completely despised in the world".⁵⁸ Jesus

was not only a "pitiful fanatic and ill-fated hanged man", but also "a madman". By "madman" Meslier had in mind not just another term of abuse, but mental disorder. Meslier thought Jesus was mad in the clinical sense of the word. He often used the word "fanatic" as a synonym for "insane". In particular, he undertook "to prove and to show that he [Christ--I.K.] was really a madman, a fanatic".⁵⁹

As proof Meslier cites "first, the opinion of Christ held by the people; second, Christ's own thoughts and sayings; and third, Christ's deeds and the manner in which he acted".⁶⁰

Meslier thinks that he has found many passages in the Gospels showing that people around Jesus at times regarded him as mentally abnormal. Each time he said "something that is rude, foolish and nonsensical", the Pharisees and the scribes suspected him of being possessed by demons. When Christ "told the Jews that he was giving them his flesh to eat and his blood to drink", even some of his disciples left him, correctly concluding from this speech that he "is nothing but a madman!"⁶¹ True, there were sometimes differences of opinion regarding his personality: "Some said he was kind, others said no, he was a seducer of people, while the majority thought he was insane and said he was possessed by the demon and raved like a madman...."⁶² Jesus' relatives also suspected him to have lost his mind. Once, it is said in the Gospels, they went looking for him "because people say he has gone mad".

Meslier interpreted the meeting between Jesus and Herod Antipas in the same way. The tetrarch (a ruler of a fourth part of a kingdom) thought that a miracle-worker had been brought to him who would show him something interesting and entertaining and eagerly awaited his arrival. But after speaking to Jesus Herod realised that he had been talking to a madman and sent Jesus away. The Jews accompanying him mocked him as a lunatic who imagined himself a king, put a cane into his hand instead of a scepter and played other jokes on him. "All this is clear evidence," writes Meslier, "that people regarded him as a madman, a lunatic and a fanatic."⁶³

Meslier then referred to Jesus' thoughts and sayings as set forth in the Gospels to back up his thesis.

He cited Christ's statement which shows that Christ thought of himself as someone who was destined to accomplish what had never been accomplished before: he was to become king of the Jews and rule over them forever and at the same time save the whole world; he was to create a new heaven and earth where he would reign together with his apostles who, seated on twelve thrones, would judge all mankind; he intended to come down from heaven at the head of a crowd of his angels; he thought he had the power to resurrect all the dead and protect those who believed in him from death. In short, "he imagined himself to be the omnipotent and eternal Son of an omnipotent and eternal God". Meslier compares these fantasies with those of Don Quixote and says that the latter, "with all their unbalanced character and falsity have never been so exceedingly absurd".⁶⁴ The method used by Christ in interpreting Old Testament prophecies, in particular, the texts of the Book of the prophet Isaiah, is also, in Meslier's opinion, evidence of mental illness.

Another proof of Jesus' madness is said to lie in the contradictions between his sermons and his teachings. "One would have to be mad and insane," writes Meslier, "to utter such sayings and preach such sermons which contradict one another and cancel out one another."⁶⁵ Christ said that his mission was to teach people wisdom and give them the light of truth, and yet he preferred to speak not straightforwardly, but in parables and allegories and attributed this manner of teaching to a desire not to be understood by the people. He preached love, and yet at the same time he called on people who followed him to turn against their parents, brothers and sisters and all relations generally.

The arguments adduced by Jesus in his debates with his adversaries, in the opinion of Meslier, were so lacking in logic and substance that they in themselves are sufficient indication of mental disorder. For instance, in answer to the Pharisees who said that Jesus gave testimony about himself and therefore his testimony was not true, Jesus said that his testimony was true because he knew whence he came and where he was going and that his adversaries did not. Could any sensible person accept such argument as testimony, asks Meslier.

As for Jesus' behaviour, it was so inconsistent and lacking in purpose that it also suggests that he was mentally ill. Many of Jesus' actions and experiences can only be explained as being due to hallucination and "visionariness". From the mountain to which Satan led him Jesus saw "all the kingdoms of the world". But, says Meslier, "there are no such mountains on earth from where he could see even one kingdom all at once". This means that he saw them only in his imagination, and "such hallucinations are characteristic only of the abnormal, the visionary and the fanatic".⁶⁶

On the whole Meslier's argument is not a very convincing one. What he is saying is that if someone should appear on earth now and begin to speak and act as Christ did as described in the Gospels he would no doubt be regarded as mad. Meslier repeated this point many times but he failed to consider the fact that his time was not the time in which Christ lived or might have lived. Philosophers of the French Enlightenment lacked precisely a historical approach to the events they studied, applying the yardstick of their own time and the social customs familiar to them to everything they analysed. But what appeared to be insanity and madness on the eve of the French Revolution could very well correspond to the accepted standards of behaviour and consciousness one thousand eight hundred years ago.

The opinion that Jesus Christ was mentally ill has its supporters in our own time, and they are not philosophers or historians, but psychiatrists and psychologists. A major attempt to substantiate this conception was made by the prominent French psychiatrist A. Binet-Sanglé in his two-volume work *The Insanity of Jesus*.⁶⁷ And following in his footsteps and drawing heavily on his findings was Ya. Mints, a Soviet physician, who in 1927 published an article with the title "Jesus Christ as a Type of the Mentally Ill". Both authors base their diagnosis on Jesus' behaviour, origin, physical build and state of health as reported in the Gospels. Binet-Sanglé also uses material relating to this question which he finds in the works of early Christian authors. His general conclusion, which Mints fully accepts, is that Jesus Christ suffered from paranoia.

The definition of this illness given by Mints is taken from the famous German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin: "In a person suffering from this disease there is a peculiar psychopathic predisposition owing to which he is in a constant state of delirium while retaining a capacity for reasoning and thinking correctly."⁶⁸ A distinctive feature of paranoia, as compared to other psychiatric diseases, is that the patient suffering from paranoia retains for a long time following the onset of the illness a capacity for mental work; in all other areas of activity except that affected by the illness, he thinks and acts logically and on the whole reasonably. Therefore, unlike those who suffer from other psychiatric diseases, a paranoiac may, for a prolonged period or even to the end of his life, remain unrecognised as a psychopath. His mania can take the form of "a harmonious, logical and brilliant system bearing the marks of creativity".⁶⁹

The paranoiac usually has a fixed idea connected with his own person. To him, his own person is the centre of almost everything that happens in the world, and depending on the type of his mania he either thinks he is an object of persecution and evil designs on the part of almost the whole of mankind, or he considers himself to be the bearer of a great and lofty mission that is of decisive importance for world history. According to Kraepelin, a paranoiac may suffer from persecution mania, megalomania, mania of jealousy, eroticism, noble birth and so on. As for Jesus Christ, Binet-Sanglé and Mints consider it proved or at any rate highly probable that he was suffering from a paranoiac syndrome: he had delusions of grandeur, as may be seen in his self-deification and his belief that he, as the Messiah, was destined to save mankind by sacrificing himself.

On what basis did they arrive at such a conclusion?

According to the Gospels, Jesus thought of himself as the Son of God and the Messiah. He constantly spoke of his mission to save the world. All preceding history was to him a kind of prelude to his appearance on earth, and all that was said by the prophets related to him personally. This is just the kind of situation that is usual for a paranoiac: the whole world is filled with symbols that have to do with him only. In Jesus an egocentric me-

galomania was combined with a persecution mania and a feeling of doom; he was always speaking of his inevitable martyrdom. And this is reflected in his moods and his neuropsychological state which show a characteristic oscillation between elation and excitement and despair and dejection. For instance, Jesus was seized by a feeling of melancholy in the Garden of Gethsemane. In paranoiacs such fits of melancholy not infrequently alternate with feelings of exultation.

The miracles that surrounded Jesus and those which Jesus himself performed are regarded as hallucinations by Binet-Sanglé and Mints. When Jesus was baptised in the river Jordan, according to the Gospels, "the heavens were opened" and "the Spirit of God" appeared in the form of a dove, and there was "a voice from heaven". All this was a result of visual and auditory hallucinations. Jesus' relations with Satan during his forty-day stay in the desert (where Jesus was tempted by Satan, etc.) were also the outcome of hallucinations. The intensity of the hallucinations was also due to the state of exhaustion Jesus was in after his long fast.

There are many events and phenomena described in the Gospels which can be attributed to hallucinations, and Binet-Sanglé and Mints readily refer to them in support of their hypothesis. It should be noted, however, that according to the findings of psychiatry hallucination is not a characteristic symptom of paranoia. When defining the illness some specialists emphasise that it is related to "delirium without hallucinations" or that it is "usually unaccompanied by hallucinations". So, here is a weak point in the clinical description of Jesus' "illness" as presented by Binet-Sanglé and Mints.

In the opinion of these two authors, the behaviour of Jesus as described in the Gospels corresponds precisely to the classic symptoms of paranoia. So precisely, says Mints, that only modern psychiatrists and neuropathologists could have composed such a picture.

The conclusion is thus made that the Evangelists drew the portrait of Jesus from nature since they could not have been such qualified psychiatrists as to be able to describe the illness so accurately.

To back up their hypothesis about Jesus' mental deficiency Binet-Sanglé and Mints refer to his weak constitution. Judging from the image of Jesus in icons and crucifixes Jesus was physically weak, which is evidence of his poor health. According to the Gospels he could hardly carry the cross to Golgotha. When he was excited or emotionally disturbed he sweated profusely so that drops of blood fell from him to the ground. His poor health was also due to heredity. He lived all his life in Galilee where the inhabitants were mostly engaged in wine-making; the Galileans, including Jesus' parents, probably drank much wine. There are grounds for thinking that Jesus suffered from alcoholism inherited from his parents.

Both these arguments cannot of course be taken seriously. All portraits of Jesus were drawn after his death, and none of them can lay any claim to authenticity. As is noted in one of the following chapters, in the centuries-old Christian tradition there are two different conceptions of Jesus' constitution: according to one conception Jesus was physically weak and sickly, and according to the other, he had a strong, athletic build as may be expected from someone who is both man and God. As for alcoholism, one can equally attribute that to the inhabitants of any country where wine-making is practised.

Binet-Sanglé and Mints also think it probable that Jesus was impotent, and this, in their view, shows that Jesus was physically and therefore also mentally deficient. They find evidence of this not only in the fact that the Gospels make no mention of Jesus' sexuality but also in that Jesus remained a bachelor all his life. He lived with his parents at least till he was thirty years old and his parents apparently did not try to find a wife for him. This would be a grave sin in the eyes of Judaic laws.

Like Meslier, Binet-Sanglé and Mints also point to the fact that Jesus' contemporaries suspected him of insanity. Thus, according to Mark's Gospel: "And when his friends heard *of it* [the gathering of crowds of people around Jesus], they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself" (3:21). And Mints uses as the epigraph for his article this line from John's Gospel: "And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad..."

(10:20). In the opinion of Binet-Sanglé and Mints, Jesus' contemporaries were quite justified in thinking Jesus was mad. And if a person should now appear on earth and behave as Jesus did, he "would be handed over . . . to a psychiatrist and put in a psychiatric ward...".⁷⁰

Binet-Sanglé and Mints think that not only Jesus but nearly all founders of religions, prophets and leaders of religious movements are paranoiacs. They include Buddha, Zarathustra, Mohammed, Krishna and so on. From this point of view the history of religion is the history of the seduction of millions of healthy people by insane individuals, of the psychiatric infection of the broad masses by paranoiacs. There is hardly any need to refute this "crazy" idea about the history of religions. As regards the personality of Jesus, the superficiality and groundlessness of the "psychiatric" theory is quite obvious.

One of the Prophets of Judaism
(according to Leo Baech, Eduard Meyer, and
Joel Carmichael)

We have long been accustomed to thinking, and therefore consider it true, that Christianity is opposed to Judaism and Jesus is opposed to all the Old Testament prophets. True, these prophets seem to have predicted the appearance of Christ, but they regarded it as a completely new and extraordinary event. Among scholars, however, there is an opinion according to which Jesus is only one of a long line of Jewish prophets.

In 1966 the West German magazine *Spiegel* published a selection of comments and remarks by Jewish religious and literary figures who think that Jesus belongs to Judaism.⁷¹ The well-known theoretician of Neo-Hasidism Martin Buber says that since his youth he has regarded Jesus as his great and respected brother. All the other authors quoted in the *Spiegel* article say the same about Jesus who is usually thought to be the founder of Christianity.

For example, this is what Leo Baech writes: "Jesus was a Jew in every feature of his character; such a man as he could only grow up on Jewish soil, only there and nowhere else. Jesus was truly Jewish; his aspirations and actions, thoughts and feelings, sayings and silence, all bears the imprint of Jewishness, of Jewish idealism,

of all that is best in the Jews then and now, and in those days only in the Jews. He was a Jew living among Jews. No other people could have produced such a man, among no other people could he have found his disciples."⁷² Stripped of the nationalistic sentiments that pervade this passage, what it says is that Jesus was and remained a Jew and a Judaist.

From this point of view Jesus was not even the last of the prophets of Judaism. The writer Scholom Ben-Chorin regards Jesus as the forerunner of the founders and ideologists of Hasidism, a religious movement of the Jews which emerged in the 17th century in Galicia. "Jesus' place," he writes, "... is among those who called for a revolution of the heart and is on the side of Rabbi Israel Baal-Shem and other great leaders of Hasidism." Jesus was in the same position as the prodigal son in the famous parable he told. "He was himself a prodigal son who after 2000 years of wandering in alien lands returned to his father's home and to his Jewish people, and old Israel calls him."⁷³ In what role did he or should he return "to his Jewish people"? Not, of course, as God or even the Messiah, but simply as a "great and respected brother".

Modern ideologists of Judaism separate the "Jewish Christ" from Christianity. "Our Christ," writes Constantin Brunner, "has as little in common with the Christ of official Christianity as the constellation of Great Bear with the animal of the same name." Hence the demand: "Give us back our Jesus!"⁷⁴

Practically speaking, of course, it is not a matter of "tearing" Jesus away from Christianity, but of bringing the two religions together as much as possible. It was still in the last century when the Jewish publicist Claude Montefiore called for a coming together of Judaism and Christianity and "reconciliation with the Gospels". The New Testament, at any rate the Gospels, he said, should be regarded as part of Judaism, and Christ as a prophet in Israel. In the United States there is an institute whose aim is to bring Judaism and Christianity closer together. In 1947 a Society for Judeo-Christian Friendship was set up in the Swiss city of Selisberg. Its founder, Jules Issac, conducts an active campaign to

promote the idea of the unity of Judaism and Christianity based on the thesis that Jesus was one of the prophets of Judaism.

A comprehensive discussion of this idea is found in the three-volume work *The Origins of Christianity* by the German historian Eduard Meyer.⁷⁵ Let us examine his basic ideas concerning the question under consideration.

Jesus' religious outlook, says Meyer, does not go beyond the framework of the views held by the Pharisees of his time. The most important element in it is a dualistic conception of a kingdom of God with his legions of angels and a kingdom of Satan with his demons. Satan and the demons are constantly engaged in intrigues against people: they enter their bodies, inflict diseases on them and reveal their presence in the "possessed" by speaking loudly through their mouths. Both the Pharisees and Jesus believed in an afterlife and the posthumous reward of people with heavenly bliss or hellish torments. And both believed in the inevitability of the resurrection of the dead and Judgement Day. Jesus usually referred to Old Testament prophecies in his sermons. For example, he cited passages from the Exodus in support of his doctrine on the resurrection of the dead. He insisted that the "whole law" must be fulfilled. According to Meyer, Jesus' outlook was rooted in Judaism and did not go beyond it. This is also supported by the way in which the Gospels describe his behaviour, his relations with those around him, and the kind of instructions he gave the apostles.

Like the Old Testament prophets, says Meyer, Jesus considered the pagans only as an addition to the Judaic world. The pagans could receive their share of bliss only if they came to believe in Judaism, in fact, if they were converted to it. Jesus himself avoided coming into contact not only with pagans but also with the Samaritans. When a Syraphoenician woman appealed to him to cure her daughter he answered: "Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs" (Mark 7:27). This statement is quite unambiguous: Jews are the children of God, while the rest of the people are dogs. Since Jesus thought of his mission as a universal one, he had no doubt that in the end all peoples, not just the Jews, would gather

around him. True, the Gospels do not say that Jesus preached or intended to preach to the pagans. In fact he told his apostles: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6). The apostles violated this injunction; realising that their preachings had no success among the Jews, they concentrated their effort on missionary work among other peoples. But there was nothing at all in Jesus' teachings that would sanction such a step.

Jesus' views and the views of the Pharisees coincided only on the matter of the dogmas of the faith, says Meyer. When it came to the question of what constituted "the inner essence of the law and man's relation to God based on it", Jesus and the Pharisees stood opposed to one another. However, it was not a question of acceptance or rejection of "the law", but only of its more or less profound interpretation.

Meyer's ideas are further developed and largely supported by fresh arguments in the book *The Death of Jesus* by the US author J. Carmichael. The book appeared in 1963 and was soon afterwards translated into several languages.⁷⁶

Carmichael calls attention to the fact that in all the New Testament books, in particular the Acts of the Apostles, the followers of Jesus persistently called themselves Jews. The scene where the apostle Paul clashed with the Christians of Jerusalem is significant in this respect. They said to Paul: "Thous seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law." And they began to reproach him for telling the Jews living among pagans "... that they ought not to circumcise *their* children, neither to walk after the customs" (the Acts 22:20-21). The dispute on this subject became rather violent. What is important for us to note here is that the Christians rebuked Paul for ignoring the laws of Judaism and Paul had to defend his stand. The generation that was taught by Jesus himself was even more strongly convinced that it had ties with Judaism and its laws.

The struggle between the two camps in primitive Christianity, between those who tried to retain their

links with Judaism (the Petrinists) and those who boldly broke them (the Paulinists) is well known. But Carmichael is quite right in stressing that this shows the completely Judaic character of the earliest phase of Christianity and the matching character of Jesus' sermons.

Carmichael draws a similar conclusion regarding the question of the observance of Judaic rites. He refers to Chapter 11 of the Acts where Peter said proudly that "nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth" (11:8). This is clearly a reference to the Judaic laws which forbade Jews to eat certain foods. But further on in the chapter it was vaguely hinted that the bans regarding food were not important. But this has to do with a later period of the development of Christianity. There is no question of such liberalism in the earliest phase of this development.

However, Carmichael thinks that Jesus was critical of the ceremonialism of the 613 Judaic laws on the everyday behaviour of people. In his opinion, Jesus did not consider the observance of these laws to be necessary or sufficient for entering the kingdom of heaven. In this connection one may recall some of Jesus' sayings, for example, that the Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath, that what defiles a man is what not enters his mouth but what comes out of the mouth, and so on. Jesus differed from the Pharisees above all in his liberal attitude to the observance of the elaborate Judaic rites and rituals.

In support of his thesis that Jesus' sermons are of a purely Judaic character Carmichael points to the reaction of the Romans to these sermons. It is well known that the Roman authorities were on the whole rather tolerant in their attitude to religious faiths other than their own and did not persecute the followers of alien faiths. They were concerned not so much with religious as with political matters and movements. Why, then, should they consider it necessary to suppress Jesus if he were only the founder of a new religion? Obviously, says Carmichael, because Jesus represented a social, not religious, danger to them.

And Jesus could represent a social danger to the Roman authorities only because he adhered to Judaism, re-

taining his ties with the Jewish people and acting in some capacity as their religious and political leader. Carmichael regards Jesus as a prophet in the old sense, one who was inspired by God and who called on the people to follow the way of God and thus be prepared for the kingdom of heaven. Meanwhile, Christ in some ways separated himself from the ruling elite within Judaism. He tried to rely on the amme haarez, or people who were uneducated and ignorant. In other words, Christ was the leader of a democratic movement of the Jewish masses and he called on them to follow him as a prophet in the same line of prophets of the Old Testament who were known to them at least by name.

Carmichael concludes, therefore, that Jesus came to earth only for the sake of Israel; in his time it could not have been otherwise. It is only after his death, as Christianity developed further, that the movement lost its original character and its purely Judaic features were somewhat altered for reasons of creed.

In stating his case Carmichael is not free from bias in his interpretation and selection of material. It is true that on the whole a Judaic tendency predominated in the text of the Gospels. Jesus' teachings were aimed not against Judaism, but against the Pharisees and scribes who, according to the Gospels, misinterpreted the Mosaic law. Jesus wanted to ensure that this law was more strictly observed. But at the same time there are many indications that Jesus opposed his own teachings to those of the Old Testament. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time...", Jesus told his disciples, citing many of the Mosaic commandments and then setting against them his own precepts beginning with the phrase: "But I say unto you...." For example, it was said that "Thou shalt not kill", but Jesus said that one should not even be angry with others. It was said that "Thou shalt not commit adultery", but Jesus said whoever "looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already...". The Old Testament permitted divorce, but Jesus, referring to this, in effect condemned divorce. He also rejected such an important Old Testament injunction as "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"; in place of this cruel and clear-cut instruction Jesus preached nonresistance to evil: "whosoever shall smite

thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also". Here it is obvious that Jesus counterposed his own teachings to the Judaism of the Old Testament. Carmichael takes no notice of this side of the issue.

It can always be argued, of course, that passages which do not correspond to one or another scheme, in this case the scheme put forward by Carmichael, are of a later origin and were introduced into the text after Christianity was separated from Judaism. But such an argument needs to be proved. Carmichael offers no such proof while maintaining a silence on materials which contradict or do not support his own thesis.

Carmichael's assertion that the Roman authorities would persecute Christ only for social, not religious, reasons is also not very convincing. According to the Gospels, Pontius Pilate was against putting Jesus to death and agreed to it only under the pressure of the crowd incited by the elders; they were the ones who attached the utmost significance to the religious aspect of the matter. On the other hand, the social and political danger to the Roman Empire represented by Jesus would only increase, and not decrease, if the political demands should be backed by the ideological principles of the new religion or at least of the reformist trends in the old religion.

Carmichael also dismisses without sufficient grounds Jesus' claim to the role of the Messiah. We can find many passages in the Gospels in which Jesus spoke rather explicitly about his Messianic mission. This in itself would not put Jesus outside the boundaries of the Judaic religion. So, an acknowledgement of the Messianic features of Jesus' image by Carmichael would not detract from his general thesis.

Nevertheless, it seems clear that the traditional Evangelical image of Jesus Christ does not correspond to the conception of him as a Judaic rabbi and prophet whose mission in the world was to fulfil the predictions of the Old Testament prophets and to strengthen the religious principles of Judaism which had by then lost some of their former vitality.

Personified Heavenly Body
(according to A. Niemoyewski, A. Drews and others)

According to the Christian tradition Jesus was born on December 25. In other ancient religions the savior gods--Tammuz, Adonis and Mithras--were also born on December 25. A coincidence? And why precisely December 25? Can it mark some important event that occurred in nature or some important social event?

Yes, an important event occurred on that day, and it continues to take place every year. From about December 25 the day starts getting longer. It is the beginning of the winter solstice. In other words, on the night of December 24 the sun is "born" as it passes the lowest meridian in the constellation Capricorn. And the sun is the benefactor of mankind, its savior from winter cold and all adversities connected with it, the giver of warmth and of all growing plants, bread grain, grape and fruit, the protector and guardian of all living things. Could not the ancient peoples have regarded the sun as a savior god, and the savior gods whom they represented in human image as the sun? Perhaps this is true of the savior Jesus?

This possibility is suggested by the Gospel story about the birth of Jesus. The story can be interpreted according to the position of the stars on December 25 in the 754th year since the foundation of the city of Rome, that is, on the night Jesus Christ, according to Christian tradition, was born.

At this time of the year the constellation Virgo shines brightly in the eastern part of the horizon. Perhaps this is the "virgin" who gave birth to the holy infant? Not far away in the constellation Cancer in the upper meridian shines the Beehive--is this the manger in which the infant was born? In the western horizon is the Aries (ram), and that is the infant himself; for is not Jesus repeatedly referred to as the "lamb" in the New Testament? Nearby is the Milky Way--the Shepherds--are these not the shepherds who, having learned of the birth of the holy infant, made a pilgrimage in order to worship him? There were also evil forces which sought to destroy the newly born god: below the horizon, directly at the foot of the constellation Virgo lurks the constellation

Serpens; this is King Herod. Perhaps the story of the birth of Christ is a symbolic interpretation of the stars in the sky on a winter night in Palestine?

In that case, the whole biography of Jesus, and not just his birth, can be seen in a new light. That is, one should seek out the astral equivalent of every episode connected with the life of Jesus as told in the Gospels. And that, as it turns out, is not a very difficult thing to do.

Let us begin with the Annunciation. The archangel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary and told her that she would give birth to the Son of God. This was the moment of the Immaculate Conception. And if the child was born on December 25, the date of conception should be March 25. The pregnancy lasted the usual period of nine months. So, what took place in the sky on March 25?

On this night the Sun in the course of its annual "voyage" through the constellations of the zodiac enters into the constellation Virgo. If we identify the Sun with the Holy Spirit or with the archangel Gabriel, its entering into Virgo can serve as a "celestial" basic for the story of the immaculate conception of the infant Jesus.

If we follow the story of Jesus' birth as told in Luke's Gospel we will find that the parallel is still closer and more striking. There it is said: "... in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God ... to a virgin" (1:26-37). Why the "sixth month"? In the opinion of some scholars, the "house" of Gabriel, as ancient astrologers saw it, was in the constellation Pisces. In order to come into the constellation Virgo, the archangel had to travel halfway across the zodiacal circle, or across six constellations, and the Sun is known to remain with each constellation for one month. So the Sun (or Gabriel who symbolised it) had to travel six months before it reached Virgo.

And where was Joseph, Mary's husband? He, too, has his place in the sky. Next to Virgo is the constellation Bootes. It constantly accompanies Virgo, but its relation to the latter is an indirect one. Bootes is not part of the zodiacal circle and during the wanderings of the stars he remains an outsider, though a benevolent one.

This corresponds to the role which the Gospels assign Joseph, who in reality was not the father of Jesus.

All that has been said so far corresponds to the story of the Annunciation and the birth of Jesus as told in Luke's Gospel. We get a different picture if we try to interpret astronomically the same events as described in Matthew's Gospel. But here, too, we can establish an astral parallel. We only need to assume that the Sun is symbolised not by the Holy Spirit or the archangel Gabriel, but by Jesus himself. Such an interpretation is in fact closer in spirit to the events described, for in this case it is the Sun itself that is born. In this interpretation Gabriel plays the role of the Moon.

And if we look at the story of the birth of Christ as told in the Book of Revelation, the astral parallel would seem especially convincing. The relevant passage is as follows: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon ... and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron.... And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent.... And to the woman were given two wings of great eagle..." (12:1-5, 9, 14). Of course, the Revelation does not contain a clear account of the life of Jesus Christ, and the child whose birth is described in the passage just quoted is not mentioned by name. But obviously we are to understand that it was Jesus. The passage can be readily deciphered with the help of the position of the stars. The "woman clothed with the sun" is obviously the constellation Virgo; she is giving birth to a child. Even the two wings given to the Mother of God can be explained: in old drawings the constellation Virgo is often portrayed as a woman with two wings.

For every episode in the life of Jesus an astral explanation can be found. Take, for example, the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple where he was met

by an elderly man called Simeon and a prophetess called Anna. Who were they? Which star could assume their role? The constellation Gemini, of course, which is often portrayed as an elderly pair, a man and a woman. At a certain moment in its annual movement the moon enters the Gemini and is "accepted" by them. Scholars in favour of an astral explanation of the Gospels have found a "celestial" parallel to every part of the episode including such details as: Why did Simeon take Jesus into his arms? What is the origin of the name "Simeon" and "Anna"? Why did Luke's Gospel provide such specific information concerning the life of Anna--"the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher ... had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about four score and four years ..." (Luke 2:36-37)?

According to John's Gospels Jesus met and spoke with a Samaritan woman. When he said to her "Go, call thy husband" and she answered that she has no husband, Jesus said "... For thou has had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband" (4:16, 18). These words could refer to quite an ordinary situation in life. But for this episode, too, an astral explanation has been found. The Samaritan woman is the constellation Virgo. Five "planetary" husbands--Mercury, Mars, Venus, Jupiter and Saturn--pass through it in succession. They are followed by the moon who plays the role of "non-husband".

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus said that when a son "ask a fish, will he [the father] give him a serpent?" (7:10). Here the meaning seems clear and unambiguous and there is no need to search for any hidden meaning connected with the stars. But according to the "astral" interpreters of the Gospels this is just what we should do. Thus, we are to understand that the fish and serpent mentioned by Jesus are not real fish and serpent but the corresponding constellations of Pisces and Serpens. In Luke's Gospel Jesus gave the apostles "power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" (10:19). The astral explanation of this passage is this: over the constellation Serpens and Scorpius lies the constellation Hercules, and it can be easily imagined that the great Hercules treads on Serpens with one foot and on Scorpius with another.

Why did Jesus have twelve apostles? For the same reason that Jacob had twelve sons who became the founders of the twelve Israeli tribes. In both cases we are to bear in mind that there are eleven constellations of the zodiac of which one is a twin--the Gemini. The sun in its annual movement passes all these constellations in succession. In the same way Jesus the Sun rotates round the apostles who were the constellations.

Here are two more examples which show how fantastic and artificial the astral explanation can be.

It is said in the Gospels that Jesus fed a crowd of five thousand with two fish and five loaves of bread; just before he did this the apostles wanted to go and buy bread with 200 dinars. The astral explanation of this episode is as follows. When the constellation Virgo, portrayed as a woman holding a spike of grain, is in the eastern horizon, the constellation Pisces (two fish) is in the west, facing it. To cover the distance between them the Sun needs to travel 195-196 (about 200) days; hence the 200 dinars. Along the route lie five male constellations--Orion, Bootes, Auriga, Perseus and Cepheus; these suggest the crowd of five thousand men.

Even more fantastic is the astral explanation of the passage from John's Gospel where Jesus pointed to a temple and said that if it were destroyed he could raise it in three days and was told that it took forty-six years to build it. According to those who favour the astral explanation, the figure 46 does not in fact correspond to reality and they put forward their own explanation. If the circle formed by the sky immediately over the horizon is divided into four parts, they can be called by the corresponding Greek names: *Arktos* for the north, *Dusis* for the west, *Anatole* for the east, and *Mesembriya* for the south. The initial letters of the Greek names have the following numerical significance, respectively: 1, 4, 1 and 40, or 46 altogether.

Similar methods are used in explaining the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. The name Judas was a symbol of the constellation Leo among the ancient Jews. Jesus the Sun enters the constellation Leo (Judas) and then proceeds to the constellation Libra. Libra (balance) has always been a symbol of justice. From the "house of justice" Jesus

the Sun goes to the constellation Scorpius, or the "house of death". The starting point of Jesus on his way to death is therefore the constellation Leo, i.e., Judas. The notorious thirty pieces of silver can also be explained: it took Jesus the Sun thirty days to travel from Leo to Virgo which is situated on the path to Scorpius. By now the reader probably feels quite lost in the tangle of symbols and their explanations. The author can only commiserate with him. Here is one last piece of a fairly simple explanation put forth by the astral school. Why did Jesus rise on the third day after the crucifixion? Because during the period of the new moon the moon disappears for three days and then appears again, i.e., is "resurrected".

The complicated and artificial nature of the astral explanations is obvious enough. It is due to the fact that their authors are determined to find such explanation for nearly all the episodes described in the Bible. The Polish historian and writer A. Niemoyewski found an astral explanation for one hundred Biblical passages. The German writer E. Stucken produced astral commentaries for almost the whole of the Old Testament. There are a large number of books whose purpose is to prove that the Gospels are written according to a scheme based on the movement of the Sun or the Moon (the Sun in the case of Matthew's Gospel and the Moon in the case of Luke's Gospel) through the constellations of the zodiac.

The foundations of this theory were laid by the French scholars C.F. Dupuis and C.F. Volney at the end of the 18th century. They were later joined by many Western and Russian researchers including such prominent scholars as H. Winkler, A. Drews and A. Niemoyewski. Among Russian investigators the most zealous defender of the astral school was the well-known Narodnik revolutionary and versatile scholar Nikolai Morozov. In some ways he differed from the theoreticians of the astral hypothesis according to whom Christ was a mythical figure and nothing more, an embodiment of a heavenly body. Morozov, on the other hand, believed that behind this figure was a real historical personage; only he transferred him to a period three centuries later and identified him with the Christian theologian Basilii the Great. This, however, turned out to be not very important, for Morozov found

the same astral symbols in the biography of Christ as most members of the astral school.

Despite the fact that the works of those who represent the astral trend in Christology contain some sound ideas, the astral interpretation as a whole cannot be regarded as a correct solution to the problem regarding the origins of the image of Christ. Those who uphold the astral trend would all too often strain a point, arbitrarily drawing together phenomena which are totally unconnected with one another, and resort to specious reasoning (which at times resembles mental acrobatics rather than logical analysis); all this deprives the astral hypothesis of any scientific significance. Its very starting point lacks plausibility, which is that religious legends and myths reflect circumstances and events that took place not in real life on earth, but in some mysterious depths of the universe far removed from man, among the stars and planets, whose paths are favourite study of astrologers, lone scholars and priests.

Which Image Is the True One?

So, as we see, there is a whole gallery of different images of Christ which reflect different and often contradictory conceptions of his personality and teachings and his role in history. Our discussion probably does not cover all the images of Christ that exist, but it would be impossible to include all of them here. Supposing we limit ourselves to what is shown in our gallery, what answer can we give to the question stated in the heading of this section?

It is a difficult question to answer. The author has as far as possible avoided making a final judgement on any of the theories discussed above, confining himself instead to pointing out internal contradictions in one or another theory or noting that it fails to be backed up by facts. For the rest, it is hoped that the reader will sort out the issues himself, using the information provided by the author and some "pointers" which he admittedly could not refrain from giving. But to return to our question, what should our answer be, if we are not to evade it altogether?

None of the theories considered above is free of

some serious shortcomings. The most typical of them is a one-sided interpretation of the question at issue whereby some data are used while others that contradict them are ignored. The result is rather like a profile of someone whose face is not symmetrical or who has only one eye: from whichever side the profile is drawn, it will not show the sitter as he is. The only right thing to do in this case is to paint a full-face portrait. It will then show that the sitter has one eye or that his face is not symmetrical. But the portrait will be an accurate one. The trouble with the image of Christ discussed above is that their authors approach it from one side only, using one set of features of the image of Jesus given in the New Testament while maintaining a silence over the others or declaring that they are insignificant.

Thus, for Tolstoi, those features that characterise Jesus when he appeared angry and intolerant, when he spoke abusive words, resorted to threats and showed an intention to use the whip and the sword are insignificant and unacceptable. For Vvedensky, on the contrary, it is important not to stress Jesus' call for nonresistance to evil, his praise of the "poor in spirit" and defence of passivity. Kautsky leaves out Jesus' saying "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's". And Metropolitan A. Khrapovitsky turns a blind eye to Christ's condemnation of wealth and the wealthy. Such a one-sided approach is characteristic of all the authors whose views on the personality of Christ we have considered above. It is of course an inadequate one if we are to arrive at an objective solution of the question.

We should interpret the personality of Christ taking into account all its contradictions, regardless of whether we consider him a mythical figure or a real historical personage.

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II. DID HE REALLY EXIST?

For a long time the question of whether Jesus Christ is a historical or a mythical figure was a subject of heated debate. In the last few decades the debate seems to have somewhat subsided. Nevertheless, interest in the subject remains keen, as is seen in the fact that it continues to be discussed in scholarly writings as well as in popular literature. Since the subject of our study is closely related to this question, we should of course look into it. And the problem should be examined objectively, without preconceived ideas. Any attempt to impose such ideas on the reader only leads to overstatement and juggling with facts.

Unfounded Conclusions Based on Allegedly Ideological Considerations

Does the atheistic outlook necessarily imply a denial of the historical existence of Christ? No, not at all.

There was a time when the significance of this question was greatly exaggerated in Soviet publications. In some books and pamphlets put out in the twenties and thirties it was argued that the historical Christ never existed and could not have existed and anyone who believed he did was under the spell of priestcraft. One can understand how the development of the atheistic movement in those years led its participants somewhat further than scholarly objectivity would allow. But today, several decades later, we should be able to discuss this subject within the framework of such objectivity.

Indeed, why could not Jesus as a historical personality have existed? At different times there had lived

people with different names, and one of them could have been called Jesus, or Joshua, a common name among the ancient Jews. One of the founders of Christianity, perhaps even the most important of them, could well have been a man called Jesus.

It is possible that after his death his human image came to acquire in the minds of believers mythological or "divine" features. But that is altogether a different matter. It does not follow from this that a person round whom legends and myths had sprung up after his death could not have existed.

As for the relation of this question to atheism and materialism, any rigid counterposition--either atheism or recognition of the historicity of Christ--is, too, the result of a misunderstanding. Certainly, a recognition of Christ the God would contradict materialism and atheism. But there are no grounds for saying the same about Christ the man. We do not, for example, consider acknowledgement of the historical Mohammed or Saint Francis of Assisi as being incompatible with atheism. The important question for the student of history is not whether Christ the man could have existed, but whether there are grounds for considering that he existed.

This is quite definitely a historical problem, one that has no philosophical or ideological significance. But whether we deal with philosophical or historical problems we must try not to distort truth or to fit it into preconceived theoretical propositions. Our task, therefore, is to weigh all known facts objectively and establish whether there are grounds for thinking that new facts may be uncovered which could change our present conceptions on the subject.

We must determine what conclusions, on the basis of the present state of historical research and the available source materials, may be drawn regarding the question of whether Jesus Christ was a historical or a mythical figure. For it is quite possible that new discoveries will be made in future which could alter the picture we have now and the conclusions we have reached.

To deny without evidence that Christ the man existed

would be no more acceptable than to say without proof that he did.

Groundless Assertions Based on Religious and Theological Considerations

Many years ago I was present at a debate between Anatoli Lunacharsky and Metropolitan Vvedensky on the question of the personality of Christ. The debate was occasioned by the publication of two books on Christ by Henri Barbusse.¹

It was in the autumn of 1927. The hall of the Moscow Experimental Theatre was packed. The audience was a rather mixed one, but in one respect it could be divided into two camps. One of them consisted of members of the intelligentsia most of whom were nonbelievers. They were genuinely interested in sorting out the issues in the debate, which appeared to have scholarly and educational as well as ideological significance. The other camp was represented by believers and clergymen of the Orthodox Church and other denominations. As an apostate to the Tikhonite Orthodoxy Vvedensky was not a popular figure with the believers. But on this occasion he was speaking as one who was critical of the atheistic inroads made on church teachings regarding the personality of Christ, and so he was assured of the support of all believers and clergymen present in the hall.

The metropolitan did not express unqualified support for Barbusse. He stressed from the start that for him Christ was "absolute God, born of the flesh", though others might regard him as a dreamer, a successful or unsuccessful reformer, a moralist, and so on. Among those "others" was apparently Barbusse, for whom Jesus was of course not "absolute God". Nevertheless, Vvedensky made it clear that he was well disposed towards Barbusse, a communist and atheist, because Barbusse recognised the historical existence of Jesus and expressed love for him, even though Barbusse might not have understood Jesus' personality correctly. It is clear enough what Vvedensky was trying to say here: in our (so to speak) atheistic age, even this was not a bad thing. So, while disagreeing with Barbusse's general philosophical principles, Vvedensky made it his task to buttress up

the proposition that Jesus Christ had a real, historical existence.

Vvedensky did not analyse the relevant historical sources; nor did he try to refute the arguments of his possible opponents. He did not even meet head-on the arguments of Lunacharsky. Mainly he tried to win over the audience to his point of view by citing various authorities. He rolled off the names of Harnack, Soden, Klein, Sorel, Meyer and other historians, philosophers and theologians who accepted the historicity of Christ. Vvedensky's reasoning seems to be as follows: since such eminent people believed that Christ existed, how could you doubt it?

This line of argument was unconvincing even to Vvedensky's supporters, who felt somewhat let down. They were cheered up only when Vvedensky showed himself at his best--telling witty jokes, drawing brilliant comparisons and resorting to subtle irony, and then they broke into applause. Still, it was necessary for Vvedensky to prove at least some of his points and to refute some of his opponents' arguments in a logical manner. Just when he was declaring his firm conviction that Lunacharsky was wrong someone--it was not clear from which camp in the audience--shouted from the gallery: "Prove it!".

Vvedensky resorted to manoeuvring: he appeared to be warding off an attack while in fact he was trying to cover up his retreat. He said: "In order to prove a point beyond any doubt not only the lecturer but the audience as well should be equipped with a thorough knowledge of philosophy and theology. But this is not a seminar organised by the department of history and philology."

Since Vvedensky could not deny that Lunacharsky was well versed in philology, he was clearly hinting that his esteemed opponent was not a theologian. As for the public, the metropolitan assumed that it knew neither theology nor philology. Thus, he was not concerned to prove his case; it was sufficient to make a simple statement of it. And as if to stress the point that he was not obliged to cast pearls before swine, Vvedensky cited one more authority: O.D. Chwolson, author of a fairly

well-known book with a catching title *Hegel, Haeckel, Kassut und das zwölfte Gebot*. The important thing here is not the imposing list of names in the title, but the reference to a "twelfth commandment" according to which one should not speak of things one does not know thoroughly well. The implication was that only theologians could discuss the personality of Christ.

To start with, this is not true. Even if the matter concerns Christ the God, only the most fanatical believers would think that theologians have a monopoly on the subject. No one has the moral or any other right to forbid a person to decide what faith he should profess or whether he should profess any faith at all. In the debate Lunacharsky vs. Vvedensky the question was not about Christ the God but about Christ the man: was he a real person and if so who was he? A definite answer to this question can only be provided by the historian, not by the theologian. Even many theologians who wrote books on Christianity used the method of historical analysis (in this case they can be considered historians), which alone enabled them to produce work of scholarly value. Vvedensky's suggestion that theologians had a monopoly on the subject is therefore meaningless.

Supporters of the church applauded the metropolitan. The fact remains, however, that Vvedensky had clearly failed to take on the main issue in the debate.

It should be said, not for purposes of criticism or "exposure", but simply as a statement of fact, that those who uphold the canonical view of the Christian religion would have to uphold the historicity of Jesus, regardless of how the matter stands in the light of objective historical facts. An acceptance of the earthly existence of a man who had for a period of a few decades embodied the second person of the Trinity, and of his death and resurrection is essential to the Christian dogma. Without the historical Jesus there can be no Christian religion.

It is understandable that Christian theologians should try at all costs to uphold the historicity of the founder of their creed. But since there is insufficient proof of this, they are forced to take the position that such proof is unnecessary. Of course, to assert without

proof that Christ the man existed would be just as unacceptable as to deny without sufficient grounds that he did.

Is It Possible That He Did Not Exist?

Quite often the case for the historical existence of Jesus Christ is put this way: if he did not exist, it would be impossible to explain certain obvious facts. What are these facts?

One of them consists in the impression which the personality of Jesus Christ produces on us. A. Jülicher, a liberal Protestant theologian, writes: "The fascination of the life that had just passed away and that was still felt in the image of Jesus portrayed in broad strokes in the Synoptic Gospels, makes a mockery of all kinds of hypotheses according to which Jesus was no more than a product of religious-historical factors or was even a hero of a pseudo-historical novel. The impression produced by an extraordinary personality is nevertheless stronger compared to the numerous difficulties which we have to deal with in studying the history of the tradition about Jesus. It is not an idea or a dream, but a mysteriously great man that is present here, as is always the case where history is at a turning point."² In other words, any turning point in history is necessarily connected with the activity of a great personality.

We may interpret this point of view not in the idealistic sense, namely, that the actions of a great man are the cause of any historical upheaval, but in the sense closer to the Marxist view according to which ripening objective historical necessity finds expression in an outstanding personality and his activity. But even then we are not obliged to accept Jülicher's thesis that Jesus was a real person. The rise of Christianity could not have taken place without outstanding personalities; perhaps in this case we should turn our attention not to Jesus Christ, but to the apostle Paul or John the Baptist or the apologists of the second century?

There is yet another aspect to Jülicher's argument: the image of Christ, according to him, is characterised by an exceptional integrity and vividness. Such an image

could not have been invented. Jülicher writes: "Judaic imagination, which has allegedly created our Jesus with all his unusual individuality, would have been the greatest enigma with which the history of Israel has confronted us, or rather with which we have confronted ourselves out of sheer obstinacy."³ The charge of obstinacy can of course be dismissed, or be made against Jülicher himself or others who think the way he does. But the point about the vividness and integrity of the image of Christ is a relevant one and should be examined.

As we have already noted, artistic devices are sufficient for achieving verisimilitude in fiction and for creating vivid images full of vitality. In this respect the collective creative work of the popular masses is no way inferior to writings by professional authors and may even surpass the latter in latent power. Images that are vivid, inspiring and true to life can be found in great folk epics among nearly all the peoples. So why must one assume that a group of peoples of the Mediterranean region in the early centuries of our era should be so lacking in artistic imagination as to be incapable of creating the image of Christ?

The point about the integrity of the image of Christ also should not go unchallenged. In his book *Jesus the God. The Origin and Composition of the Gospels* A. Niemojewski gives a clear and on the whole correct description of the contradictions inherent in the image of Christ as portrayed in the Gospels. Niemojewski believes that speaking through Jesus were representatives of the most diverse political, religious and ethical groups and schools: "Israel, which adheres to the principle of 'an eye for an eye', declares that in dealing with others you must use the same weights and measures that are used by them in dealing with you, and that one should not go into the ways of the Gentiles but rather go and gather the lost sheep of the house of Israel. A beggar cries that Lazarus, who is in heaven, must not dip the tip of his finger in water in order to cool the tongue of a rich man who is being burned in hell.... The diplomat says that we must be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. Masters assert that servants must not sit down at the table before they themselves have eaten. Scholars say

that the pupil should defer to the teacher. The passionate propagandist calls on one to repudiate one's father, mother, wife, brothers, sisters and even one's individuality for the sake of an idea. The politician states that unnecessary civil strife leads to the destruction of families, cities and states. And the anchorite or ascetic preaches that one must free oneself from all temptations by mortification of the flesh. If we are to put all these admonitions into the mouth of one person we would have to find a casuist, a 'composite man', who speaks nothing but proverbs and aphorisms."⁴ So how can one talk about the integrity of the image of Christ?

To say that just because this image is unusually fascinating it must be based on a real prototype is also to indulge in purely subjective interpretation. The image of Christ as portrayed in the Gospels does not produce the same impression on all. One can find in literature highly critical remarks about Christ, about his hypocrisy, irritability and intolerance, his lack of will and so on. But we shall not concern ourselves here with the degree of fascination of Christ's personality as being irrelevant to the particular problem we are considering and from the scholarly point of view.

There is yet another argument that is often used to "prove" that Christ existed. If Christ did not exist, so the argument goes, it would be impossible to explain the rise of Christianity. Any social or religious movement, Christianity is founded by people. And since the Christian movement was, from the start, a great movement in terms of its ideas and principles, its founder could only have been a great and outstanding person. Christ, as we know him from the Gospels, was just such a person, one who could have founded Christianity. It is hard to imagine anyone of lesser stature fulfilling this role.

It is true that no social movement or ideology can emerge without people whose consciousness, will and activity embody the given social phenomenon. The rise of Christianity was undoubtedly associated with people of surpassing abilities and talents. But was the most important of them necessarily the one who bore the name by which we know him from the New Testament, who had lived through the events described in the Gospels, and the cir-

cumstances surrounding, whose life and death coincided with those of Jesus Christ of the Gospels? The answer is: it may be so or it may not be so. In that case the necessity of establishing whether Jesus Christ was a real person just because Christianity exists falls away. For Christ may have existed or he may not have existed.

We must, then, reject all *a priori* arguments, all points of view that are put forward before the relevant material is examined. A correct answer to this question can only be based on a careful assessment of historical facts.

Usually when there is little factual material to go on with, many variants emerge which are not very trustworthy or not trustworthy at all or are simply improbable. An analysis of such variants can be quite instructive.

Conjectures: the Possible and the Impossible

There is a whole trend in Christological literature according to which Christ was an Indian. One of the books belonging to this trend is called *Christus--ein Inder?* by T. Plange. Despite the question mark in the title the main idea of the book is that Christ was an Indian.

Plange referred to several historical studies by the well-known French writer Louis Jacolliot, which allegedly throw new light on the question of the origin of the image of Christ and of Christianity as a whole. Plange accepts Jacolliot's thesis that early Christianity was in fact Buddhism brought to Rome by Buddhist missionaries.

This thesis is based on a comparison of the life of Christ as told in the Gospels and Buddhist and Hindu legends about Buddha and Krishna. Numerous parallels are drawn which create an impression, if not of complete identity, at least of close similarities between Christ and the Buddha and Christ and Krishna.

The second person in the Hindu Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) is embodied in the person of Krishna, who was later called Ieseus (or Iisnu or Jisnu) by his disciples. The second person in the Christian Trinity is

also embodied in a human figure--the Son--whose name and nickname resemble the Brahmanic: Krishna sounds like Chrisna, and Kristos like Christ.

Both appeared in the world as its saviour; both were born of a virgin; in both stories the birth was marked by miracles, and the first to come to worship the infant were shepherds. Other parallels are: their persecution by a bad king (Kansa in the case of Krishna, Herod in the case of Jesus), the massacre of the innocents, the rescue of the infant by an angel, and their activity as saviours. Both gathered around them a group of disciples, worked miracles: healing the sick, restoring the dead to life and casting out devils from those who were possessed, and died as a result of intrigues of malevolent priests, their death being accompanied by signs of nature itself going into mourning. And both, having fulfilled their mission on earth, were carried into heaven.

Similarities between the life of Christ and that of the Buddha appear equally, and even more striking.

The Buddha was also born of a virgin, and in a cave. His birth was heralded by a star which led three kings to the holy infant in order that they could worship him. There were also shepherds, a voice from heaven and heavenly host. Indeed, the legends surrounding the birth of the Buddha are still more wonderful than in the case of Christ. Upon the birth of the Buddha all nature rejoiced, and the infant Buddha burst into speech, saying that he would destroy the devil and his army, make all people happy, and so on. Kings and princes offered their magnificent palaces to the holy child. An old man named Asita played a similar role as that of Simeon who, according to the Gospels, blessed the infant Jesus. True, unlike the wicked kings in the stories of Christ and Krishna, King Bimbisara, upon learning that the Buddha was born, would not persecute him but became his follower. Further on the story of the Buddha parallels that of Jesus as described in the Gospels: the presentation of the child in the temple, the incident in which the twelve-year-old boy remained in the temple while his parents looked for him, his fast, temptation in the wilderness and baptism, and his being unmarried and without a home of his own through-

out his life. There are even similarities in certain details. For instance, the Buddha's favourite disciple was called Ananda, while that of Jesus was called John; Judah, who betrayed Jesus, sounds somewhat like Devadatta, the man who betrayed the Buddha.

Plange maintained, and it was an opinion shared by many other authors, that all these parallels could not be accidental. Someone must have borrowed from someone else. Since the Brahmanic legends existed 3000 years and the Buddhist legend 500 years before the rise of Christianity, there can be no question of the authors of these legends borrowing from the Gospels. And in any case Plange did not think much of the Gospels as a historical source and attached much more importance to the sacred books of Hinduism and Buddhism in this respect. On the whole Plange had no doubt that the stories in the Gospels were borrowed from Brahmanic and Buddhist sources; more specifically, the Synoptic Gospels relied on Brahmanic sources and John's Gospels, on Buddhist sources.

Yet despite all this Plange saw no reason to deny the historical existence of Jesus. According to Plange, it is possible that in Palestine there lived a man called Jesus who was a national leader, but his life-story as told in the Gospels cannot be authentic since it was borrowed from Indian legends. The basic outline of Jesus' life can be traced in the life of Krishna, just as Jesus' moral principles can be found in the teachings of the Buddha. Whatever additions were necessary were taken from the writings of the Jews, from the Old Testament which repeatedly spoke of a Messiah. So, that which is original about the life of Jesus as told in the Gospels merely consists of certain "additions", while that which is basic is derived from Indian sources. The Jesus of the Gospels was not a Jew, but an Indian.

In order to suggest that the Jews of the early centuries of our era could have borrowed Indian religious and folkloric subjects, it would be necessary to explain how contacts between Palestine and India could have existed at that time. Citing Pliny the Elder and Josephus Flavius, Plange said that there was regular trade between Rome and India in ancient times and that each year flotillas of merchants' ships sailed to India from where they

brought back no less than 50 million sesterces worth of pearls and precious stones as well as silk, ivory, dyes and so on. Indian ships carrying 500 passengers and their goods voyaged to Egypt, and there were always many Indian merchants in Alexandria. Trade was particularly lively between the West and Ceylon, the citadel of Buddhism. It should not be difficult to imagine that there was also active ideological exchange between India and countries belonging to the Roman Empire. It is entirely conceivable, therefore, that Brahmanic and Buddhist legends were drawn upon in creating the image of Jesus Christ and in formulating the Christian doctrine.

Are there grounds for taking this view seriously and accepting the Indian origin of the image of Jesus?

The answer is no. For there is not a trace of evidence of such borrowing in early Christian literature: there is not the slightest allusion in it to India and her history, to Indian historical personages, Indian gods and other figures of Indian mythology, her cults and rites. Could such allusions have been deliberately removed? This could have happened only if the whole of early Christian literature was compiled in an organised manner, if, that is, someone had issued instructions for the obliteration of all allusions to Indian material and the instruction were meticulously carried out. But such an undertaking was clearly out of the question. For the appearance of the Gospels and other books of the New Testament was a spontaneous process, just like the appearance of the writings of the apostles and other early Christian authors.

The coincidence of story lines also does not necessarily point to borrowing. The "migration" of story lines in world folklore is a well-known phenomenon, as is the recurrence of mythological motifs. In his book *The Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* James G. Frazer gives a large number of examples showing how stories in the Old Testament resemble folk tales and mythological stories that were widespread among different peoples of the world. He counts nearly 150 legends about the flood alone. If one were to follow Plange's approach one would have to conclude that the Biblical myth about the flood was borrowed from Australia, South America and Central Africa.

The same can be said of the notion that God made man out of earth or clay.

There was also a theory according to which the image of Jesus Christ originated not in South Asia but in Central Asia (regions east of the Pamirs). The author of this theory, Grigory Potanin, was a Russian traveller and ethnographer, and the theory found an ardent supporter and populariser in G. Ksenofontov, an ethnographer from Yakutia.

In 1912 Potanin read a paper on the "Origin of Christ" before a society for the study of Siberia in Petersburg. He was convinced that Christ was not a real person. He said that he had found a large number of parallels to the legends told in the Gospels in the Turko-Mongolian folklore of the peoples of Central Asia. He cited several legends and tales which all involved twelve characters and which bore close resemblances to stories in the Gospels. He also found similar subjects in Scandinavian sagas and Altaic tales. According to Potanin, for instance, crucifixion can be found in folk tales of all the peoples of North Asia.

The legend about Christ, so it would seem, could be found almost the world over. But where did it originate? Potanin had no doubt on the matter: "The main motif of all these legends and tales is of Central Asian or even Ordos origin." (Ordos was a locality in Western China--*I.K.*). Without taking the trouble to provide at least some proof of his thesis Potanin concluded: "Thus, we can see that the legend about Christ as told in the Gospels is based on the Central Asian shamanistic legend, and the image of Christ was created according to an image that had existed for many centuries in the depths of Asia."⁵

Potanin only considered it necessary to explain how a shamanistic legend got to Christian territory, and for him this posed no great difficulty. The legends of the East, he said, could have been brought to southern Russia by the Khazars and through them farther to the west and south. There were two groups of such legends. In one group the main character was portrayed as good and virtuous, while in the other--as grotesque and evil. Legends of the first group went into the books of the New Testament, while legends of the second group went into Talmudic

descriptions of Christ, specifically, in the mediaeval book *Toldot Ieshu*. "I consider this Jewish legend [set forth in *Toldot Ieshu*--I.K.]," declared Potanin without any attempt to substantiate his claim, "to be pre-Christian".⁶ Clearly there is no need to refute this rather fantastic hypothesis if only because it is not based on any factual material.

Ksenofontov tried to provide at least some proof of this hypothesis. He regarded Christianity and the legend about Christ as a variety of shamanism and drew a number of parallels between certain features that are inherent to all shamans and that are also characteristic of the image of Jesus Christ. Thus, a shaman's mission is that of a saviour; Jesus was a saviour. A shaman embodies benevolent spirits; Jesus was the human embodiment of the holy spirit. The most important social function of a shaman is to heal people with magic means; Jesus, according to the Gospels, was mostly engaged in healing the sick. "Some historians," said Ksenofontov, "consider Jesus to be a member of the early Jewish sect of the Therapeutae."⁷ Shamans had the gift of foresight and prophesy; Jesus was a prophet. Christ's Messianic mission is analogous to the "Messianic expectations of the peoples of the steppes who even now, through their descendants, the present-day Mongolian people, await a second birth of their great Genghis Khan, the only son of the blue heaven and a messenger from above".⁸

Ksenofontov's attempt to prove the North Asian origin of the legends told in the Gospels is clearly far-fetched and not to be taken seriously. The kind of parallels he drew can be found in the religions and myths of different peoples in different parts of the world. If one were to employ Ksenofontov's method--and the same can be said of Potanin's approach--one would have to conclude that the image of Christ was borrowed simultaneously from all the peoples of the world. The really puzzling thing is why to deny the myth-creating ability to the very peoples among whom Christianity found its first followers and converts.

The question about biographical data on Jesus is an extremely complex one. Apart from the Gospels, all the other New Testament books contain mere hints and isolated remarks and references concerning some events or circumstances of Jesus' life, but nothing very concrete. And the biographical accounts in the Gospels are in many ways incomplete and full of contradictions. In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke the account begins with the birth of Jesus, while in the other two Gospels it begins when Jesus was already a grown man and went to St. John who baptised him.

But even in the first two Gospels, after the story about the immaculate conception and the birth of Jesus, little is said about Jesus' infancy and childhood, and that is told as if in passing and lacks consistency. Thus, according to Matthew, Jesus' parents fled to Egypt in order to save the child from being killed by King Herod and returned only after Herod's death. But according to Luke, Jesus' parents almost immediately went to Nazareth where Jesus spent his childhood, adolescence and youth till he was thirty years of age. Of this period of Jesus' life Luke told of only one episode: when Jesus was twelve years old he came to the temple of Jerusalem where all those present were astonished by his wisdom and his learning.

One can find a more detailed and consistent account in the Gospels only of that short last period of Jesus' life when he taught and worked miracles, was persecuted and put to death, when he rose from the tomb and was carried into heaven. It is far from being easy to extract from it any material which can be considered historically authentic. There is a lack of inner logic on many important points; the behaviour of Jesus Christ was strangely inconsistent and often does not lend itself to rational interpretation.

Jesus considered himself to be a preacher and a teacher whose mission was to reveal the divine truth to people and to be their leader. Who were these people? Logically, they should be Jews. Jesus was the Messiah promised by God, and a descendent of King David. Yet Matthew's Gospel ends with these words spoken by Jesus

to his disciples: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). So it turns out that the mission of Jesus concerned all nations and not just Israel.

What did Jesus preach? The old Israelite law prescribed by Yahweh and embodied in the Old Testament, or a new faith founded by himself? Again we are confronted with two contradictory answers. On the one hand, the old law was inviolable. Jesus told his disciples: "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, then one tittle of the law to fail" (Luke 16:17); "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17); and "... one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18). But this is contradicted by what immediately follows it.

In the same chapter in Matthew's Gospel we find Jesus systematically refuting the ethical teachings of the Old Testament "law", using this formula: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, ... But I say unto you...." Thus Jesus expounded his own teaching on murder, adultery, divorce, swearing, retribution ("an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth") and so on. What he taught was not observance of the law, but a code of conduct that went against the law. Several other episodes described in the Gospels also show that Jesus did not strictly follow Old Testament injunctions. When his disciples plucked ears of corn on a sabbath, thereby breaking the law which forbade work on the sabbath day (a sin punishable by death according to the Old Testament), and when this was called to Jesus' attention, Jesus replied, referring to the precedent set by King David: "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Jesus healed people on the sabbath day, which was also a sin according to the old beliefs.

Accompanied by his disciples Jesus went about the country, preaching and working miracles. Sometimes he said that he performed miracles in order to reveal God's glory. This usually took place when large numbers of people had gathered. Yet for some reason Jesus more

than once enjoined those who witnessed his deeds to keep to themselves what they had seen and heard. He told a leper whom he had healed: "See thou say nothing to any man" (Mark 1:44). Instead of doing what Jesus bade him, the healed man "went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter", and as a result "Jesus could no more openly enter the city, but was without in desert places". But apparently they were not "desert places", for people "came to him from every quarter" (Mark 1:45). Jesus was soon back in the city: "And again he entered into Capernaum after some days" (Mark 2:1), where he preached and worked miracles before large gatherings of people. Jesus forbade his disciples to tell people that he was Christ, that is, the Messiah (Mark 8:30; Luke 9:21). On other occasions, however, he openly referred to himself as the Messiah.

Just before his arrest, foreseeing what would happen to him, he said to his disciples: "...he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one" (Luke 22:36). "And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, it is enough" (Luke 22:38). So the disciples were prepared to resist. But things took a different turn. When people came to arrest Jesus the disciples "saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him" (Luke 22:49-51). So it was not necessary to buy swords after all, and even those the disciples had were not really needed.

Ernest Renan has reason to say concerning this and similar episodes: "We must not look here for either logic or consistency."⁹ Indeed, the behaviour of Jesus as he appeared in the Gospels seems illogical. Can this be taken as an argument against the historicity of Jesus? Not exactly.

Throughout the ages, just as now, people at times did not act logically. Under the sway of emotions a person can do what is contrary to his beliefs and convictions. Indeed, one's beliefs and convictions may be

inconsistent and contradictory. Thus, a person may do what he forbids others to do, or, on the contrary, does not do what he says others should do. Such behaviour can hardly be regarded as honourable or praiseworthy, but unfortunately it can be observed in life, and not so rarely either. It is not hard to imagine that the historical Jesus acted in just such a way.

But the natural as well as social and historical environment in which Jesus lived and acted, as described in the Gospels, is altogether a different matter. In order to assess the Gospels as historical sources it is important to determine to what extent the description they give of that environment is accurate or at least plausible. And here we find that the course and sequence of events relating to the life of Jesus are portrayed differently in different Gospels and are in many places factually inaccurate or erroneous.

According to the Evangelical tradition, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a small town south of Jerusalem. But since Jesus' parents lived far in the north, in Nazareth, it is said that at the time of Jesus' birth they had come specially to Bethlehem where a population census was being taken: "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; because he was of the house and lineage of David" (Luke 2:1-4).

There is a whole literature on the subject of this census. In his three-volume study (1901) of the history of the Jewish people at the time of Jesus Christ, the well-known German historian Emil Schürer lists in his bibliography fifty-five works devoted to the above-quoted passage from Luke. After summing up their findings in a long chapter Schürer draws the following conclusions: "History knows of no general state census at the time of Augustus"¹⁰; "... in order to be included in the Roman census Joseph did not have to go to Bethlehem together with Mary"¹¹; "... in general no Roman census could have

been taken in Palestine during the rule of King Herod"¹²; "Josephus Flavius knew nothing about a Roman census in Palestine during the rule of Herod, and what is more, he spoke of a census taken in the seventh year of our era [i.e., three or four years after the death of Herod--*I.K.*] as something new and unprecedented"¹³; and "a census could not have been taken during the rule of Herod under Cyrenius, for Cyrenius was never the governor of Syria in Herod's lifetime".¹⁴ So the story about Jesus being born in Bethlehem must be discarded as untrue, and this story is of no small significance.

Some events described in the Gospels would certainly have been noted by contemporaries if they had really taken place. This does not refer to the earthquake and solar eclipse which supposedly occurred throughout the earth when Jesus was crucified, for these obviously belong to the realm of mythology. But some of the events described could have taken place, such as the slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem by orders of King Herod who thought that the newborn Jesus would be among them. We know from writings of that time that King Herod was a tyrant and was responsible for many bloody deeds. But there was no mention of this incident anywhere.

For the Evangelists it was necessary, however, that Jesus should be born in Bethlehem because a well-known prophesy in the Old Testament said: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). And since Jesus was to be a descendent of David he would have to be born in Bethlehem which, according to the Old Testament, was the seat of the house of David. But as we have seen, the story about the census which presumably brought Jesus' parents to Bethlehem, is not historically authentic.

Also lacking in historical authenticity is the city of Nazareth where Jesus is said to have spent his childhood and youth. The fact is that there was no such city at that time. Western archaeologists have again and again excavated the area where Nazareth should have been situated, but have found nothing apart from some insig-

nificant traces of human habitation--skulls and debris.

Some of the results of the archaeological search for the city of Nazareth are found in the book *The Bible and Archaeology* by J.A. Thompson. Thompson has no doubt that Nazareth existed in the time of Jesus. To support his thesis he includes in his book two photographs of ... modern Nazareth. The caption for one of the pictures says that it perhaps shows many places where Jesus could have walked.¹⁵ Thompson is enthusiastic about what he calls the exciting discoveries of modern archaeology which confirm the Biblical information, and as a result we now have all the proof that is required. But how about Nazareth? It existed and its geographical location can be easily established,¹⁶ although, Thompson concedes, present archaeological knowledge about Nazareth is limited. The undoubted fact is, Thompson acknowledges, that today Nazareth can give us very little reliable material about itself. Some authors, notes Thompson, even think that Nazareth of the New Testament could have been situated at some distance from the modern city of Nazareth.¹⁷ In other words, on the question of Nazareth there is little archaeology can offer that would support the theory that Christ had a historical existence.

The name Nazareth first appeared in the New Testament. There is no mention of it in the Old Testament, including among the tens of towns conquered by Joshua. It is not to be found either among the forty-five cities mentioned in the writings of Josephus Flavius. There can hardly be any doubt that at the time Jesus is said to have lived no such city existed, and that it was put into the biography of Jesus by the Evangelists some time later.

There are also many geographical errors in the Gospels. For example, it is said that there was "a great herd of swine feeding" (Mark 5:11) in "the country of the Gadarenes" (Mark 5:1) on the shore of Lake Gennesaret. But Gadarenes is situated far from the lake. Afterwards Origen (ca. 185-253/254) introduced a correction in the narrative by suggesting that the event took place in Gergesenes, which indeed lies on the shore of the lake. But in Mark's Gospel the place is called Gadarenes, not Gergesenes. The routes followed by Jesus

as he travelled in Palestine are also curious. For example, he went from Tyre to Sidon through Decapolis which was situated far from the road between these two cities. And the residence of Pontius Pilate was not in Jerusalem, but in Ceyzeriat.

Apparently the Evangelists did not know the geographical and natural conditions of Palestine, or knew them only by hearsay. In describing the travels of Jesus they used such general phrases as "to the sea", "to the mountain", or "on the way". Winter in Palestine can be quite cold, especially in the mountains, but none of the Evangelists spoke of Jesus feeling cold or being warmly dressed on any occasion. As for plants and animals, the ones mentioned in the Gospels were not then common in Palestine but were usually found in other Mediterranean regions. When mention was made of animals and plants that did exist in Palestine, the Evangelists' descriptions of them are obviously erroneous. For example, mustard, a herbal plant, was spoken of as a large tree with many branches (Luke 13:19).

The Evangelists were also unfamiliar with the customs and manners of ancient Palestine. Some of the episodes described in the Gospels could not have taken place or at least are not likely to have taken place in Palestine at that time. For instance, it is highly unlikely that the daughter of a queen would dance at a public banquet (Matthew 14:6; Mark 6:22), for such dances would be performed by "adulteresses", women of humble origin. Besides, it is a known fact that Salome, daughter of the queen in the episode described, was not a young girl but a widow.

The episode about Jesus casting out traders and money changers from the temple is also implausible. There were no traders and money changers in the temple, and no money changing took place there. Trading in sacrificial animals was carried out in streets near the temple, and this was necessary since the sacrificing of animals was part of public worship. In those circumstances no one would have allowed Jesus to act as he did; most likely Jesus would have been severely beaten or straight away killed for committing such an outrage.

The Gospels frequently mention Roman soldiers, le-

gionnaires. However, there were no legionnaires in Palestine at that time, only *auxilia*, or auxiliary soldiers recruited from among the local population. As for the legionnaires, they appeared in Palestine only during the Jewish War of 66-73. And it is certainly strange that Roman legionnaires should be acquainted with the Old Testament which they sometimes quoted (John 19:24).

The account of Jesus' trial, both in general and in some of its details, is implausible. Jesus could not have been tried either on the eve of the Passover or during it, for trials were not held at night and it was forbidden to hold trial either on religious holidays or on the eve of such holidays. In the period in question the Sanhedrin had no right to conduct trials; only the Roman authorities had such right. And in the days when the Sanhedrin still exercised such right, trials were held not in the house of the high priest, but in the temple. The instrument of execution was not a cross, but a post with a crossbeam in the shape of the letter "T".

The behaviour of Pilate as described in the Gospels is puzzling. He was informed that Jesus called himself King of the Jews, and Jesus himself did not deny it. It would seem that the Roman governor should be seriously concerned about this, for here was an insurrectionist who apparently wanted to overthrow Roman rule in Palestine and establish his own power. Yet the procurator of Judea found no fault with Jesus or with his intentions and in fact tried in every way to save him until the Jews threatened to inform the authorities in Rome about it. Pilate was known to be a cruel and ruthless man, and so his hesitation in dealing with Jesus and his attempts to save him seem strange indeed.

There are many points of difference between the Gospels as regards the life of Jesus, beginning with the question of his lineage.

If we accept the myth about the virgin birth, there is no question of genealogy at all: Jesus was the son of God through the agency of the holy spirit and there would be no need to discover who his ancestors were. But in the Gospels the genealogy of Jesus was nevertheless given, for it was necessary to show that Jesus was

of the lineage of King David. From the Christian point of view, therefore, the genealogy can only be fictitious, though it was still needed. There are in fact entirely different genealogies. In Matthew's Gospel the genealogy began with Abraham, and there were forty-two generations before Jesus. The nearest eleven forbears of Jesus were: Zerubbabel, Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Sadoc, Achim, Eliud, Eleazor, Mathan, Jacob and Joseph, father of Jesus (Matthew 1:13-16). In Luke's Gospel the genealogy began with Adam, and there were fifty-six generations between Abraham and Jesus, not forty-two as in Matthew. The nearest eleven forbears of Jesus were: Esli, Nahum, Amos, Mattathias, Joseph, Jamma, Melchi, Levi, Matthat, Heli and Joseph, father of Jesus (Luke 3:23-25). The two Gospels also differ as to the names of the other ancestors of Jesus up to Abraham. So here is an obvious contradiction.

Almost from the moment of Jesus' birth, his parents had to save him from the wrath of Herod: they fled to Egypt where they lived until Herod died. That is what Matthew's Gospel tells us (2:14, 15). In Luke there is no mention whatever of the flight to Egypt. Jesus and his parents lived in Palestine all their lives. And on this question, too, the Gospels give contradictory versions. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus lived in Galilee before he began his ministry at the age of thirty. In reading John's Gospel one gets the impression that Jesus lived all his life in Jerusalem.

According to Matthew (3:13-16) and Mark (1:9), Jesus was baptised by St. John. But according to Luke (3:20-21), Jesus baptised himself and St. John was in prison at that time. There are innumerable contradictions regarding details of Jesus' life as described by the Evangelists. What was the name of the twelfth apostle? "Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus", says Matthew (10:3). "Judas Iscariot", says Luke (6:16). According to Matthew, Jesus went to Jerusalem four days before Passover; according to John, the figure was five. In Matthew (27:44) both thieves who were crucified with Jesus insulted Jesus. In Luke (23:39-42) one of the thieves "railed" at Jesus while the other turned to Jesus with a prayer.

There is no agreement between the Gospels even on such an important event as Christ's appearance after his resurrection. In John, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and then to his disciples (20:14-24). In Luke, Jesus appeared first to two men previously not mentioned (the name of one of them is given as Cleopas) and then immediately to all the apostles, except Judas who had apparently hanged himself already (24:13-36). In Mark, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, then to two of the apostles and finally to all the other apostles (16:9-14). In Matthew, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and another woman called Mary (we are not told who she was) (28:1-9).

The examples cited above are probably sufficient to give an idea of the discrepancies between factual details concerning the life and personality of Jesus as told in the Gospels.

Year after year hundreds of scholars--historians, philologists and theologians--had persistently searched the New Testament, especially the Gospels, for material on the basis of which a biography of Jesus could be written. And in the end they came to a conclusion the gist of which is stated in none other than a Lutheran school textbook for the course "Introduction to the New Testament": "The Gospels are not a record of history either in the modern or ancient meaning of this word; they represent a special literary genre. The modern historian must investigate every episode connected with Jesus and every word spoken by him in order to determine whether they belong to the time when Jesus lived; and only in a few cases the investigations have yielded definite results."¹⁸ Yet tens, if not hundreds, of authors, using no other material than the Gospels, have published books purporting to be biographies of Jesus.

Are these books worth reading? The answer to this question may be sought in Albert Schweitzer's monumental work on Jesus, which was first published in 1906 and subsequently reprinted many times. And in all the editions, including the one which came out in 1966 (Schweitzer died in 1965), there is the following conclusion: "The Jesus from Nazareth who appeared as the Messiah, preached the morals of the divine kingdom, established

the heavenly kingdom on earth and died so that his deeds could be sanctified--this Jesus never existed. It is an image rejected by rationalism, resurrected by liberalism and dressed by modern theology in historical clothing."¹⁹ This image had been shattered. By whom? By ill-intentioned critics from among the rationalists?

No, says Schweitzer, "... it is not destroyed from without, but crumbled within itself, shaken and split by actual historical problems which have come up one after another during the last one hundred and fifty years in the theology about Jesus, in spite of all the tricks, art, artifice and forcing resorted to, problems which have been repeatedly solved and, just after having been buried, have reappeared, though in a new form."²⁰ The theologian acknowledges that "the historical Jesus can no longer serve modern theology". He is even ready to admit that "the historical foundations of Christianity, as they were understood by rationalistic, liberal and modern theologians, no longer exist".²¹

True, it is difficult to understand Schweitzer's position on the question of whether Christ is a historical or a mythical figure. On the one hand, he attacks the mythological school and rejects its conception of Christ; but on the other hand, he writes:

"Jesus is of some significance to our world, for from him flows a powerful spiritual current that pervades our time. This fact can neither be refuted nor validated by historical knowledge. There exists an opinion that Jesus can mean more to us if he came to mankind as a human being. But this is impossible. First, because this Jesus never existed. And also because historical research can throw light on the question of the spiritual life of Jesus, but it cannot call him to life."²²

So what material can be extracted from the New Testament, and first of all the Gospels, that can be used for establishing the historicity of Jesus? The reply given by Schweitzer, after making an analysis of all the literature on the question "from Reimarus to Wrede", is that there is none. The framework of the life of Jesus as given in the Synoptic Gospels is not authentic, and moreover, almost all the vital details necessary for a

biography of Jesus are not reliable.²³

Schweitzer's conclusion is corroborated by many modern theologians. Take, for instance, the German Protestant theologian W. Kümmel, a New Testament specialist.

Towards the end of the 19th century the opinion was widely held that Mark's Gospel was more reliable from a historical point of view than the other three Gospels. A careful study of Logos ("Sayings" of Jesus, a document of which only fragments have come down to us), previously thought to be the main source of Mark's Gospel, and research into the oral tradition which could have served as a basis of this Gospel, show, said Kümmel, that "the possibility to form a historically reliable picture of the life and teaching of Jesus on the basis of Mark's Gospel must be considered doubtful or limited".²⁴ Kümmel cited in this connection the opinions of the Protestant theologians M. Kähler and Rudolf Bultmann.

In 1892 Kähler published a book entitled *About the So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historical Biblical Christ*.²⁵ Its main idea is that it is impossible for theologians to derive Christ's teaching on the basis of his biography as told in the Gospels. It will be to little purpose, Kähler said, to use the unreliable and dubious results of research into the texts of the Gospels because there was simply no material in the texts for such research.

Such opinions are held mostly by Protestant authors. Formerly Catholic theologians accused such authors of rationalism, nihilism and other offences, but now they themselves are compelled to take the same position as regards the life of Jesus as told in the New Testament. The Polish religious scholar Z. Poniatowski has noted in this connection: "Of late Catholic Biblical scholars have also been stressing the fact that the Gospels do not give a biography of Jesus in the strict sense of the word."²⁶ And he refers to a book by V. Trilling which deals with the problems of the historical Jesus (Leipzig, 1965) and contains a chapter entitled "Why is there no 'Life of Christ'?"

What are Christian theologians to do then, the central figure of the Christian dogma being Jesus who was

both man and God? One obvious way out is to separate "holy history" from "real history", emphasising a "real" image of Christ, and that turns out to be not the image of the historical Jesus, the subject of modern research, but the image of Christ who preached through the apostolic witnesses. This in fact is an indirect admission that the accounts of Jesus the man as given in the Gospels are not historically trustworthy.

A few decades later the same idea was expressed by Rudolf Bultmann, who in several of his books "demythologised" the subject. He reinforced the notion of holy history, as a means of escape, with the notion of *kerygma*. According to Bultmann, there is no need to go further than *kerygma* for a reconstruction of the historical Jesus. The Lord is not the historical Jesus, but Jesus Christ preached by others, he said.²⁷

In citing such material Kümmel became apprehensive: will an open admission of the fact that the historical Jesus is an imaginary figure call in question New Testament theology and Christianity as a whole?

Kümmel acknowledged that this created an awkward situation. The question cannot simply be dismissed. The historian especially cannot evade it, for if he wishes to understand the origins of Christianity he will have to know something about Jesus. Even the ordinary believer would not readily agree to dismissing the question. For he "accepts the doctrine about the resurrection of Jesus Christ through the testimonies of the apostles and believes in it, and finds in it confirmation of the fact that the resurrected Lord is the Jesus from Nazareth and that some of the witnesses of the resurrection had been with him during his ministry on earth".²⁸ It follows that "faith, if it is to be aware of its message, that is, if it tries to comprehend itself in theological terms, is vitally interested in solving the question of to what extent any image of Jesus Christ based on the apostles' preaching is in agreement with the historical authenticity of this Jesus".²⁹

The conclusion is inescapable: "Today it is generally accepted that no biography of Jesus or the history of the development of Jesus' preaching can be written."³⁰ What is the way out of this situation? There follows a

long enumeration of various aspects of the problem. A comparison is made of parallel accounts and episodes in the Gospels; separate elements of tradition are analysed and differentiated, a formal historical distinction is drawn between different forms of narrative and speech, and so on. And all this indicates that auxiliary methodological tools are needed. But even they, said Kümmel, can give only "a comprehensible uniform image of Jesus and his sermons", but not a historically true one.³¹

Thus, what the Gospels tell us about Jesus is acknowledged even by some theologians to be inauthentic and unhistorical.

Information From Non-Evangelical Sources

Jesus as portrayed by the Evangelists was a man or man-and-god whose activity brought forth a powerful popular movement that swept the whole of Palestine in the early thirties of the first century of our era. But there was no such movement in those years; or if there were it was not widely reflected in the literature of the time or in the recollections of the peoples of Palestine.

In the historical novel *Sons* by Lion Feuchtwanger Josephus Flavius, while travelling in Palestine in the eighties of the first century, tried to gather information about the person whom the Minäers (or Christians) worshipped as the Messiah. Of course we are here dealing with a product of the writer's imagination. Nevertheless, in this case we have not just a work of fiction, but a historically plausible reconstruction of events based on a careful study of source materials. We shall use Feuchtwanger's narrative not as proof of any proposition, but solely for the purposes of illustration. In Feuchtwanger's book Josephus "assumed that he knew all about those who had been brought to trial as false prophets in the last ten years, but about Jesus of the Minäers he knew nothing".³²

Josephus heard rumours that "this Jesus was crucified under Governor Pontius Pilate".³³ The Jewish historian rather doubted this, for "crucifixion was a punishment meted out only to Romans".³⁴ The Jews would have decided on another form of execution. In his search for traces of Jesus, Josephus made inquiries

among local inhabitants who might either remember the events connected with Jesus or heard of them from the generation that had only recently passed away. "He inquired here and he inquired there. He inquired at Nazareth, where this man was said to be born, and he inquired on the shores of Lake Gennesaret. But in Nazareth and on the shores of Lake Gennesaret people said 'We know nothing about it', and in Magdala people said 'We know nothing about it'. 'We know nothing about it', people also said in Tiberias and Capernaum."³⁵ Finally Josephus found a man who was able to tell him something. Tachlifa, a Christian from Capernaum, said that Christ "performed signs and miracles. But the theologians did not want to see this, they were greedy and did not want to admit that by these signs and miracles their Yahweh was proclaimed to the whole world. They wanted to put Yahweh away as the usurer puts away his dinars received on promissory notes...". For this Jerusalem was punished: it was destroyed for having "killed the divine prophet and failed to recognise the anointed one".³⁶ That was all the information Josephus obtained, and a mere fifty years after the passing of such momentous events.

It was probably so in real life: at the end of the first century the inhabitants of Palestine, including writers and historians, knew almost nothing about Jesus Christ. This is also evidenced by the Qumran materials.

Judging from the contents of the documents so far deciphered and published, there is not the slightest trace in them of any of the New Testament books, nor is there any mention of Christ or the Christians.

Qumran is situated in the immediate vicinity of the localities where the main events described in the Gospels should have occurred. Its inhabitants belonged to the Judaic sect of the Essenes whose dogmas were fairly close to those of Christianity. Members of the Qumran community attached great importance to "scriptures", or manuscripts in which they set forth the principles governing their life and their theological and ethical teachings. At the site of their settlement a large library of such manuscripts as well as the remains of "printing shops", that is, places where the manuscripts were copied out, have been discovered. And the vast

literature that has been found there does not contain any hint of those great events which, if one were to believe the Gospels, took place only thirty to thirty-five years earlier in localities situated about twenty kilometres from the Qumran community.

It is hard to imagine that during the period of his travels in Palestine Jesus did not once visit the region where the Essenic community was situated. Could he have deliberately avoided the region? And if so, why? It is all the more strange in view of the similarity between his teaching and the entire spirit of the teaching and way of life of the Essenes. In the Gospels, it may be recalled, nothing is said about the Essenes, while in Essenic literature nothing is said about Christ. What can this mean?

In scholarly writings there are many conjectures as to why in the New Testament books only three religious-political parties in Judea are mentioned, the Pharisees, the Sadducces and the Zealots, while not a word is said about the fourth sect, the Essenes. Some scholars explain this by saying that the New Testament, in particular the Gospels, only speak of those trends of which Jesus was critical; as for the Essenes, they were close to him in their outlook and he had them in mind when he spoke of the righteous, the poor in spirit, and so on. But it is impossible to prove this. More likely the Evangelists said nothing about the Essenes because they knew nothing about them. This is quite conceivable if we assume that the Evangelists were not native inhabitants of Palestine or had not lived there at all and simply did not know the religious and social life of Palestine sufficiently well. Moreover, since they lived and wrote in the middle of the second century, when the Essenic movement had practically ceased to exist, they could obtain information about it only from the writings of Josephus, Philo or Pliny the Elder, and those writings or some parts of them could have escaped their notice.

Here we are interested, however, not so much in how much the Evangelists knew about the Essenes as how much the Essenes knew about the Evangelists. And it seems that the Essenes, living in the heart of Palestine in the sixties of the first century, knew nothing about

Jesus Christ or the religious and social movement his deeds had supposedly brought forth. Thus, Feuchtwanger had good grounds for considering that in Judea in the second half of the first century few people knew about Christ, about his deeds and his tragic death. This is yet another indication that the remarkable events and the great popular movements which should have been associated with Jesus Christ lack in authenticity. But the Evangelists described just such events and such a movement!

Now let us imagine that I have an opponent who wishes to take issue with me on this question.

Opponent: Let us look at the question from a new angle and consider some facts which you have failed to mention so far.

We know, for instance, that the word "Christian" did not appear before the middle of the second century, and it was not the name the followers of the new faith used in speaking of themselves. It was a name others gave them. In the first decades of the existence of Christianity the followers called themselves Ebionites; the word "Ebionite" is derived from the Hebrew word *ebyōn* meaning "poor". It is also the name the Qumranites used in referring to themselves. When Christianity was already widespread, among its many branches was a Judaistic Christian sect which had for several centuries existed under the name of Ebionism. Can we not trace here a direct line of descent of Christianity as a whole? The earliest Christians, from this point of view, were the Ebionites of Qumran. To be sure, it was still Christianity unseparated from Judaism, but then Christianity was originally Judaistic Christianity. Subsequently, as the new religion spread among the Gentiles and as Christianity became separated from Judaism, Ebionism ceased to be the main trunk of the religion and turned into a minor branch of it, into a sect which eventually faded out. If we accept such a version of the origins of Christianity, many of your arguments are no longer valid.

In that case it will be seen that in the Qumran documents Christianity appeared under the name of Ebion-

ism. The argument that Christ was a mythical figure, that his image changed from that of God to that of man, and not the other way round, in other words, that Christ was initially God, is also without foundation. The point is that the Ebionites regarded Christ not as God, but as a man. They rejected, in particular, the story of the immaculate conception and believed that Christ was born of earthly parents, like other men. What can you say in opposition of such a solution of the question?

Author: It sounds plausible. But let us see if it is based on incontrovertible facts.

It is true that the Qumranites often called themselves Ebionites in their documents, and considered poverty to be a necessary condition for a pious life. One may assume that the name "Ebionite" referred to members of the Qumran community, though that was not their only name. But did the early Christians come to be called Ebionites? That is very doubtful.

The phrase "the poor" occurs many times in the New Testament, but it does not denote any religious faith. For example, we read: "... sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor..."; "... when thou makest a feast, call the poor..."; "... there was a certain beggar named Lazarus..."; and so on. It is clear that in all these instances poverty in the usual sense of the word is meant. There is no evidence whatever that reference is being made here to any confessional status. And there are no other arguments to support the idea that the early Christians called themselves Ebionites. The trinomial chain of Qumranites-early Christians-Ebionites is weakest in the middle, although the first link is not very strong either. If that is so, the Ebionite conception of Christ as a mere man may well be characteristic not of the first stage of the history of the legend, but of one of its subsequent stages.

Opponent: Now here is a point that is worth considering. In the writings of the Fathers of the Church, which are the source of our information about Ebionism, mention is also made of the heresies of the Nazarenes and the Elkesaites, no sharp distinction being made between these three branches of Judaistic Christianity. In the Gospels Jesus himself was several times called a

Nazarite and a Nazarene. Of course the names are not derived from the city of Nazareth since the city did not exist then and, grammatically speaking, such a word derivation is unlikely. But what if we assume that from the very beginning the Christians called themselves Nazarenes, which is perhaps the same thing as calling themselves Ebionites? In that case the middle link in the above-mentioned chain would hold.

Author: Again you are talking about something that is purely conjectural. In the Gospels only Christ was called a Nazarite and a Nazarene, but the names are not used in speaking of his followers, not even of the apostles. And from where was the name "Nazarite" taken? From the book of Numbers (6:2) in the Old Testament: "When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the Lord" Then follows an enumeration of the person's obligations which amounted to the practice of an ascetic life. In two other Old Testament books (Judges and Amos) Nazaritism is also mentioned as a concept according to which a Nazarite was someone elected by God and was especially righteous. Later on, too, among the ancient Jews the word apparently meant someone chosen by God, a righteous person and an ascetic. So it is understandable that early Christians should call the real or imaginary founder of their religion by this name.

In later Judaistic tradition Jesus was often called, not *nazir*, which would mean "Nazarite" in the sense described above, but *nozri*, meaning an offshoot. Not surprisingly, the rabbis refused to associate Jesus Christ the man with the honoured Old Testament institution of Nazaritism; they used another word in speaking of Jesus, a word associated with the concept of an offshoot, a detachment, even a falling away.

But let us continue our discussion, which has twice been interrupted by the opponent's rejoinders.

As we know, there is no contemporary written evidence of the events described in the Gospels. True, we need to remember that a huge number of ancient documents were destroyed by the church and the clergy in the first century of our era and again in the early Middle Ages. Rabbis did the same, proceeding from their own religious

considerations. A colossal number of manuscripts perished in fires that destroyed the famous library in Alexandria. With its nearly 800,000 volumes, it was probably the world's largest repository of books at that time. And who knows whether it contained materials which, had they come down to us, would have resolved our doubts?

Since we do not know what was in the documents that had not survived, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that they contained materials about the historical Christ. But scholarship must not rest on conjectures. The loss of invaluable documents is certainly to be regretted, but the researcher must concentrate his attention on analysing materials that have been preserved. If so, he cannot but be struck by the extreme paucity of non-Christian evidences about Jesus; and they are not found in documents where one may reasonably expect to find them. Why, for instance, are most of the historical sources relating to the time of Jesus silent about him and about the events associated with him as told in the Gospels?

In the first century of our era, the time when we may suppose Jesus to have lived, there was already a rich literature written in Greek and Latin on the territory of the Roman Empire, and in Hebrew and Aramaic in Judea. It included literary as well as historical and philosophical works. To this period belonged several Jewish authors, among them the philosopher Philo of Alexandria (d. A.D. 54) and the historians Justus of Tiberias (second half of the first century) and Josephus Flavius (37-after 100); the versatile Greek writer Plutarch (40-120) and many Roman authors, among them the historians Tacitus (54-119), Pliny the Younger (61-113), and Suetonius (b. 75), the philosopher Seneca (d. 65), and the poets Lucan (39-65), Persius (34-62) and Juvenal (45-130), the versatile writer and scholar Pliny the Elder (23-79) and a host of other literary figures. It would be reasonable to ask what these writers have to say, if anything, about Jesus, who was a contemporary of theirs?

From which of the above-mentioned writers may we expect the most convincing historical evidence about Christ? Obviously from those who lived in Judea, for

they could have been eyewitnesses of Jesus' activity and of the events associated with his martyrdom.

But there is no such information. Now let us turn to the next generation, to people who might have heard about Christ from eyewitnesses. But they are silent on the subject. The whole century was silent.

Take one of the writers of that period, Justus of Tiberias, the author of a series of historical works, among them a history of the kings of Judea up to Agrippa II (the middle of the first century). It may be expected to contain descriptions of the reigns of Herod "the Great" and Herod Antipas which coincided in time with the life and activity of Jesus Christ according to the Christian tradition. Justus would certainly have known about Jesus' activity, especially since Tiberias, Justus' native city, was situated only a few kilometres from Capernaum where, according to the Gospels, a number of important events in the life of Jesus took place. Unfortunately, not a single line of Justus' writings has come down to us. Could it be that in his writings we would have found the crucial testimony of an eyewitness?

The answer is no. There is no mention whatever of Christ and his activity in Justus' works. We know this from the 9th-century Byzantine Patriarch Photius. He had a big library and had left us not only a catalogue of the books in it but also a large number of extracts from 279 of them on various subjects; to some of these extracts he had appended his own remarks and comments. His library contained a copy of Justus' *History of the Kings of Judea*, and in it Justus said nothing about Jesus, a fact which elicited a critical remark from the Patriarch.

Opponent: Your argument as regards Justus can be refuted. In 1964 an inscription from the island of Chios in honour of Justus the historian was published. There it is said that besides other honorary titles Justus was given citizenship of the city of Ephesus (in Asia Minor). This could mean that although Justus or his parents were natives of Tiberias, Justus lived all his life not in Palestine but in Asia Minor. In that case your argument about the "witness" who failed to confirm the existence of the historical Christ no longer holds. The reason is

simply that Justus could not have been such a witness.

Author: Unfortunately, your objection is not a valid one. The honorary title of citizen of Ephesus does not indicate that its recipient must necessarily have lived all his life in that city. According to the New Testament, the apostle Paul was a citizen of Rome, but this does not mean that Paul could not have spent a certain period of his life in Asia Minor and in Palestine. Justus could very well have been honoured by the citizens of Ephesus for his literary achievements. We know, for example, that the city of Ephesus had rich literary and philosophical traditions.

One may perhaps expect to find some material on the question that interests us in the writings of the ancient Jewish philosopher, theologian and political figure, Philo. That would not be the evidence of an eyewitness since Philo lived all his life in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, and not in Palestine. But Jews living in the Diaspora would of course hear of events, even those of minor significance, that took place in their homeland. And Philo was not out of touch with his compatriots but took an active interest in their life. For example, he led a Jewish delegation to Rome in order to petition Emperor Caligula in connection with affairs of the Jews of Alexandria. The name of Pontius Pilate, who according to the Gospels, played a fatal role in the life of Jesus, was mentioned several times in his works. Philo described in considerable detail the Palestinian sect of the Essenes and the Judaistic sect of the Therapeutae which was then widespread in Egypt. Both were similar to early Christianity in terms of dogma and rituals. In Philo's writings we also find information about several other Jewish sects, for instance, the Cainites. But there is no mention of Christ or Christianity.

This is all the more remarkable since Philo himself, owing to his spiritual inclinations, was sympathetic to the religious and philosophical teachings and movements of his time. His own philosophical and theological doctrine had provided much material for the formulation of the dogmas of early Christianity. Engels in fact called Philo the father of Christianity. And yet this father apparently knew nothing of his own progeny or of such an

important figure in the new religion as Jesus Christ.

The same, or nearly the same, can be said about the Roman philosopher Seneca. Seneca's ideological kinship with early Christianity is indisputable. Engels called him the "uncle of Christianity".³⁷ According to the Christian tradition, as recorded also in The Acts, there were many Christians in Rome already at the beginning of the second half of the first century. And it was in Rome that the apostles Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom in the sixties, a time when Nero persecuted the Christians on a large scale. Events of this nature could not have escaped the notice of Seneca who was an active figure in the social and literary life of his time. He would undoubtedly have heard much about Christ also from the Christians if, that is, everything happened as it did according to the Christian tradition. But Seneca said nothing about Christ or about Christians.

True, there is a whole series of documents in which Seneca spoke at length about his views on Christ. These are his correspondence with the apostle Paul. But not even theologians doubt that these are forgeries made in the Middle Ages.

There are other documents related to this subject which are also undoubtedly inauthentic. Among others, we may mention here the *Report of Pontius Pilate to Emperor Claudius*, the correspondence of the Edessan king Abgar with Christ and with the Emperor Tiberius, and the so-called Tibetan Gospel.

Of special interest in this connection are fragments from works by the Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus and the Jewish writer Josephus.

Suetonius mentions Christ in his *Twelve Caesars*, and Tacitus, in his *Annals*. Both works were written during the second decade of the second century. The references to Christ in these works became the subject of numerous analytical and critical studies.

Suetonius writes that "because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [*impulsore Chresto*] he [Emperor Claudius] expelled them from the city".³⁸ In interpreting this passage we need to take into account a number of circum-

stances which cast considerable doubt on its exact meaning.

Claudius was emperor from A.D. 41 to 54, which means that he became emperor eight years after Jesus is said to have died. This circumstance alone makes it doubtful that the person referred to in the passage quoted above is Jesus. And if we assume that Jesus lived for some time in Rome, this would call into question the trustworthiness of the Gospels where it is said that Jesus spent his entire life in Palestine. Of course, the words "at the instigation of Chrestus" can be interpreted as a reference to the influence of Christ's ideas on the course of events. This would mean that ten years after Jesus' death there was already a community of his followers in Rome who were expelled from the city for causing disturbances. The fact that Jews, not Christians, were mentioned in the passage does not make this explanation less plausible. For the Romans at that time might not make a distinction between Christians and Jews.

Should we attach great importance to the fact that Suetonius speaks not of Christ, but of Chrestus? On the one hand, this seems unimportant, for in the Greek names of that period the vowels "e" and "i" were often interchangeable. But, on the other hand, the name Chrestus was a very common one, especially among the freed slaves of Rome. So, the passage from Suetonius may well be referring to some other Chrestus who incited his compatriots in Rome.

The reference to Christ in the *Annals* of Tacitus is even more doubtful. Tacitus tells about a big fire which destroyed nearly all of Rome in A.D. 64. According to rumours, the fire was started by Nero himself so that he could enjoy the view of a great calamity. The emperor decided to put the blame for the fire on the Christians. Tacitus writes: "Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero rastedened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again

broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular." Further on it is said that "an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind". The convicted were put to death by various cruel means; some were turned into living torches that lighted up Nero's park during the night. In the opinion of Tacitus, the Christians deserved the punishment meted out to them, but expressed regret over the fact that they were exterminated "not for the public good but to glut one man's cruelty".³⁹

Should we regard this passage from Tacitus as genuine or as a later interpolation? Dispute over this question continues to this day. We shall not go into the various arguments adduced in favour of a particular point of view, for this question is not of great significance to our subject. Incidentally, it is not impossible that this passage was written by Tacitus himself, although many writers have expressed serious doubts about this.

What is of decisive importance here is something else, and this applies equally to Suetonius. Both these historians wrote their works more than eighty years after Christ is said to have died. By that time no contemporary of Jesus, no eyewitnesses of his activities, would be alive. Suetonius and Tacitus would already belong to the third generation, if we consider the contemporaries of Christ to be the first generation. It was therefore impossible for Suetonius and Tacitus to obtain information about the events they described from personal contacts with people who had lived at the time the event actually took place.

At the beginning of the second century there were already many Christians who transmitted by word of mouth the traditions and legends surrounding the death of Jesus. Both Suetonius and Tacitus could derive their information only from this oral tradition--no other source was available to them. In this respect their position was not much better than ours.

But perhaps both these authors had used documents from the Roman archives? Some researchers, in an attempt to prove the authenticity of Tacitus' information, main-

tain that the historian did use such documents. They point to the fact that Tacitus had as his patron the well-known Roman official Cluvius Rufus, who occupied the post of consul under Emperor Caligula and had free access to the protocols of the Senate. But a majority of historians, including those who acknowledge the historicity of Christ, strongly deny the suggestion that the original source of Tacitus' information was archival documents.

It is unlikely that the Roman Senate would receive from the faraway and not very important province of Judea a report about the execution of an artisan from Galilee. "This execution," says Drews, quoting Johannes Weiss, "was but one of numerous executions that were carried out at that time by the Roman provincial authorities, and it would have been most extraordinary if it were noted in any official document."⁴⁰

More than a hundred years ago, when discussing this subject Bruno Bauer cited with some sarcasm the evidence offered by Tertullian, who referred all those who doubted the truthfulness of the Gospels to the historical archives of Rome. This Father of the Church assured us that there we could find information about the solar eclipse which occurred throughout the globe in the hour of Jesus' death....

According to specialists in ancient historiography, no archival research was conducted in ancient times. There is no evidence whatever to support the view that Tacitus had at any time used documents from the archives. It is highly unlikely that Tacitus would turn to archival material for his brief description of the persecution of Christians under Nero, material which he never used when dealing with subjects of far greater importance to him.

A still greater problem is presented by a passage in the *Antiquities of the Jews* by Josephus. The passage reads: "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, and a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that had loved

him at first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them the third day, alive again, as the divine prophets had said these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."⁴¹ Here, it would seem, we have clear, unambiguous evidence. True, it was not an eyewitness account of the events, for it was written sixty years later. But even such evidence would be of considerable historical value--if, that is, a close analysis of the passage does not give rise to serious doubts about its authenticity.

Researchers have long noted that Josephus, who is known to have been a follower of Judaism all his life, in this passage appears to be a Christian. If Josephus, a pious Pharisee, were to write something about Jesus, he would no doubt condemn him as a blasphemer and an imposter who deserved the cruel punishment meted out to him. But in the passage just quoted we have something quite the opposite. And the place where this passage occurs in Josephus' work also raises questions. Josephus described in detail some insignificant events which took place in Jerusalem, events that had no serious consequences. And then, as if in passing, he told in just a few lines the deeds of Jesus which supposedly brought forth a big social movement; and these lines have no apparent connection with what precedes or follows them. All this is unlike the style of writing of Josephus, which is characterised by a notable consistency and coherence.

The above-quoted passage appears in all the manuscripts of the *Antiquities of the Jews* that have come down to us. In most of the extant manuscripts of another work by Josephus, *The Jewish War*, there is no mention of Jesus, but five of them contain the very passage with which we are concerned here. The passage appears in different places in the manuscripts: in an 11th-century manuscript it appears at the end; in a 14th-century manuscript it is found at the beginning, and in a 15th-century manuscript it is in the middle. In the latter the passage contains, in addition to the text that is found in all other manuscripts, a dozen or so lines in which the second coming of Jesus is foretold. At that time "all the righteous and the wicked will be judged

according to the word of God, for the Father had named him [Jesus] the judge".⁴² However, the fact that the passage appears in different places in the manuscripts is sufficient evidence that it was added by copyists who had decided on their own where it should be put.

Some scholars tried to solve the puzzle about this passage differently. They held that the passage was part of the *Antiquities of the Jews* and was written by Josephus himself, but that initially it did not have those elements of glorification of Jesus as are present in the version that has come down to us; those elements were later interpolated into the text by Christian copyists. This interpretation seems to have received some documentary support in our time. In 1911 the passage in question was found in an Arabic Christian manuscript of the 11th century. The text differs considerably from that known earlier. For some reason the newly discovered text attracted little attention from scholars at that time, and it is only in the 1970s that it came to be regarded as an important proof that Josephus knew about Christ and wrote about him. The text found in the 11th-century manuscript reads as follows: "At that time there lived a wise man called Jesus. He led an irreproachable life, and he was known as a virtuous man. Many Jews and people of other nationalities became his disciples. When Pilate condemned him to death by crucifixion, his followers did not repudiate his teaching. They told how he appeared before them alive three days after his crucifixion. Thus, he may be the Messiah of whom the prophets had spoken."⁴³ It does not follow from this text that Josephus definitely considered Jesus to be the Messiah. He probably would not even think this possible. But it cannot be ruled out either that what we have here is a "skeleton" text of the original version which Josephus wrote and which was later amended by Christian copyists according to their own faith. Even supposing this is the case, how can it help us solve the question of the historicity of Christ?

Such a supposition would no doubt strengthen the position of those belonging to the historical school, but only to a very small extent. The *Antiquities of the Jews* was written in about A.D. 94; by that time a definite

Christian tradition had taken shape, from which he could have obtained his information.

There is no real need to search for evidence of the historicity of Christ in the Gospels. Many of the events described there that are allegedly related to the life of Jesus would certainly have been noticed by the inhabitants not only of Palestine but also of other countries. The solar eclipse lasting three hours which supposedly occurred throughout the world when Christ was crucified must have struck the imagination of people everywhere, and we may expect to find it mentioned in the reminiscences of contemporaries. Not only Pliny the Elder, the natural scientist who left us a description of all the remarkable phenomena of nature which he had witnessed, but also many other authors of the time would have written about such an extraordinary event. The same can be said of the great earthquake that marked the death of Christ the man-and-God. And even some less momentous events described in the Gospels could not have escaped the notice of contemporaries.

And yet it would be wrong to say that none of the events associated with Jesus could have taken place. The miracles told in the Gospels are of course imaginary: neither the great earthquake nor the universal solar eclipse could have occurred at the moment of Jesus' death. And we would be going beyond the limits of scholarly objectivity if we were to insist on finding evidence of these events in the literature of that time. The same applies to information about natural but unlikely events, in particular, the slaughter of infants carried out under the orders of Herod.

Much is known about the cruelty of Herod the Great, who was indeed a bloodthirsty tyrant. But it seems unlikely that even Herod would issue orders that all male infants of an entire city be killed. On this subject the historians seem to have entered into a conspiracy of silence. But that which forms the backbone of the Gospel narratives consists of natural (not supernatural), events. They are: Jesus' ministry in Palestine and Galilee and the popular movement brought forth by it; the reaction towards it on the part of the ruling quarters of Jewish society and of the Roman administration, the

arrest, trial and death of Christ; and the movement which arose immediately after his death and led to the rise of a new religion. These events may well have occurred. One would expect to find references to them in the literature of the first century of our era. And if there are no such references, most likely the events did not take place.

In the first century B.C. and the first century of our era there was a religious community of Judean sectarians known as the Qumran sect, one of the branches of the Essenes. Its settlement was situated on the rocky northwestern shore of the Dead Sea, twenty kilometres from Jerusalem. In A.D. 68, under the pressure of attacking Roman troops, members of this community abandoned their settlement, after having carefully hidden in nearby caves many manuscripts that were obviously of great value to them. Among them were Old Testament books and commentaries (midrashim) to them, hymns of thanksgiving, documents relating to the administration and organisation of the community, and so on. All these manuscripts had lain in the earth until 1947 when an Arab shepherd came upon one of the caves and found the hidden manuscripts. An intensive search followed which led to the discovery of tens of thousands of parchment and papyrus fragments of texts in Hebrew and Aramaic and several whole manuscripts. Scholars were faced with a most complex task of piecing together and deciphering the texts, translating and publishing them.

To date only a relatively insignificant part of the discovered materials has been published. The difficulties arise not only from the complexity of the work itself. The fact is that a majority of the scholars taking part in the work are members of the clergy of one or another religion or are at least not indifferent to the interests of religion. Their religious bias has been one of the main reasons why publication of the manuscripts has been held back. At any rate, many of the documents are still inaccessible to scholars. So at present we are able to estimate the contents of the Qumran texts only on the basis of that part that has been published.

Some of the documents contain short and enigmatic references to a teacher of righteousness. In the com-

mentary to the Old Testament book of Habakkuk he is mentioned seven times, and in the so-called Damascus Document, also seven times; he is mentioned once in the commentary to the hymns and once in a fragment of a commentary to the Book of Micah. Here is an example. Habakkuk (2:2) reads: "... that he may run that readeth it". After this is the commentary: "By this is meant the teacher of righteousness to whom God has revealed all the secrets of the words spoken by his servants, the prophets."⁴⁴ Other references to the "teacher" are no less laconic and vague.

If we look at all the references to the teacher of righteousness found in the published Qumran documents, we get an image of a leader and perhaps also the founder of the Qumran community. He was a prophet whom God especially trusted. To him God explained the innermost secrets of all the Old Testament prophecies and told when Doomsday would arrive. It is not clear whether members of the Qumran community regarded him as the Messiah or a herald of the Messiah; in any case, he was considered to be an intermediary between God and men. The teacher was ruthlessly persecuted by a "wicked priest" and "man of the lie", and a group of people referred to as the "house of Absalom" was accused of standing by "in the hour of suffering".⁴⁵ In the Damascus Document the death of the teacher is mentioned twice, though we are not told whether it was a violent or a peaceful death. Since elsewhere in the documents he is said to have been persecuted one may assume that his death was a violent one. There has been a debate among scholars over whether members of the Qumran community awaited the second coming of the teacher. It is quite possible that they thought he was not dead but had gone into exile (indications about his death are somewhat vague) and were waiting for his return.

When texts in which a teacher of righteousness is mentioned were first published, they created a sensation. Some scholars thought that at last we had documents, apart from the Gospels, which contained historical information about Christ. But soon doubts arose as to whether the teacher of righteousness could be identified with Jesus Christ.

In many ways the dogma of the Qumran community co-

incides with that of primitive Christianity. Both sects originated in Judaism and introduced radical changes in it, and the changes are in many ways similar. Both believed that the coming of the Messiah as well as Doomsday was near. After that righteousness, piety and light would finally triumph over transgression of the Law, wickedness and darkness. In both, the central figure was an ascetic, one who was sent by God and who was persecuted by the followers of darkness and impiety. Both the Qumran sectarians and early Christians advocated poverty and common property and believed that wealth and the wealthy displeased God. There are also parallels in the rituals of the two sects: both rejected the rite of the offering of sacrificial animals; both practised ritual ablution (baptism among the Christians) and the taking of communal meals. These parallels suggest that the Qumranites could be considered early Christians. In that case the teacher of righteousness could be identified with Jesus Christ. However, such identification is made impossible because of certain essential differences between Qumran Essenism and Christianity.

Christianity was the first religion which claimed to have a universal, cosmopolitan following. The Qumran sect, on the other hand, was a closed organisation which jealously guarded the secret of its doctrine and intended to spread it among the Jews only. Christianity preached nonresistance to evil, while the Qumran sectarians were deeply committed to a struggle against the "sons of darkness" and only waited for a sign to launch a war against them. Christianity took a rather liberal attitude towards Old Testament rules and injunctions concerning rituals, while the Qumran sectarians observed them more literally than even Orthodox Jews. They were particularly strict about keeping the sabbath, which is not considered obligatory in the Gospels. Christianity did not prescribe celibacy among its followers, while the Qumran sectarians apparently did. And lastly, the Qumran community had a hierarchical organisation, while in early Christian communities equality was the rule.

Opponent (interrupting): The differences you have mentioned apply to Christianity when it was already formed as a creed. But much of what you said does not apply to an earlier stage of its development. For instance,

The Revelation is also filled with a hatred for the enemies, just like the Qumran documents. And like these documents, The Revelation was intended for the Judeans. Is it not possible that the spirit of Christianity at its initial stage closely resembled that of the Qumran texts, and only later, from the end of the first century of our era, did Christianity take the form which made it essentially different from Qumran Essenism?

Author: It is possible. But then we would have to date the history of Christianity not from the first century A.D. but earlier, at least from the second century B.C. Here, of course, much depends on one's approach: one can, if one likes, consider this period to be the prehistory of Christianity, or one can consider it to be the beginning of the history of Christianity. But let us see where your assumption would lead us as regards the figure of Jesus Christ.

In the opinion of most researchers, the relevant documents of the Qumran community date back at least to the middle of the first century B.C. This means that all references to the teacher of righteousness predate by at least a hundred years the time when the New Testament and the Christian tradition took shape. If so, it is quite impossible to consider the teacher of righteousness and Jesus Christ to be the same person.

Opponent: It is impossible only if one strictly links the figure of Jesus Christ with the New Testament in terms of chronology and in all other respects. But instead of doing this one may assume that the Evangelical legends are based on a real person who lived one hundred or even two hundred years before the rise of the New Testament tradition and that the portrait of him given in the Gospels already contained features born of fantasy over a period of many years following his death. Is this not possible?

Author: Quite possible. But we are not talking about any person in general, but about someone who was the central figure of certain historical works and of a whole tradition, in other words, about Jesus Christ. If we find a real person who was called Jesus and who lived at a time and in concrete historical circumstances corresponding to the New Testament narratives, we then can

say that this is the historical Jesus we have been seeking. But if the New Testament narratives are based on a person who lived at a different time and in different historical circumstances and who even had a different name, then obviously we have not found the person we have been looking for. It is conceivable that recollections about the teacher of righteousness became one of the sources of the legend of Christ. It does not follow from this, however, that they were the same person. Incidentally, some scholars have voiced the opinion that the teacher of righteousness himself may be a mythical figure.

From 1965 it was thought possible to identify Jesus Christ with yet another person who was briefly mentioned in some of the Qumran texts, namely, King Melchizedek. A Qumran document was published which may be tentatively called the "Melchizedek Midrash". It was recovered in a very bad state; it consisted of thirteen fragments which, thanks to the painstaking work of scholars, were pieced together to form a kind of running text, though there are still gaps. The document is thought to date back to the beginning of the first century A.D. It contains prophesies about the approaching end of the world and the role which a Melchizedek is to play in the forthcoming drama. Melchizedek is depicted as a majestic and exalted personage: he is supreme judge, avenger of all evil, herald of the coming salvation of the righteous and the main figure in the act of salvation, the Messiah, the redeemer and the leader of the "sons of light" in the final battle against the "sons of darkness".

The name Melchizedek is not entirely unknown. It is mentioned twice in the Old Testament. In the Genesis, Melchizedek is the king of Salem (probably later Jerusalem), the "priest of the most high God" (14:18). In one of the Psalms (110:4) God speaks of "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek". In the New Testament Melchizedek appears only in the Epistle to the Hebrews, whose author several times refers to "the order of Melchizedek", having in mind the same king of Salem. But while showing great respect for Melchizedek, the author gives no clear indication of the latter's relation to Jesus Christ or to any other personage. Melchizedek thus remains a mysterious figure, which enables some Christian

theologians to identify him with Jesus Christ or to at least suggest that such an identification would be legitimate.

In a Polish edition of the Bible published in 1965 the text on Melchizedek is accompanied by this note: "The mysterious pagan king of Salem is in fact the priest of the true God, the image of Christ in the Messianic Psalm 110:4 and in the Epistle to the Hebrews."⁴⁶ If Jesus Christ is identified with Melchizedek, then the above-mentioned Qumran Midrash can be regarded as the earliest evidence we have about the founder of Christianity, and, what is more, evidence from a completely new source. But are there grounds for such an identification?

If we disregard theological traditions in interpreting Biblical texts and look at the question objectively, we shall get a rather unexpected picture.

In the original Hebrew text of the Book of Genesis Melchizedek is presented not as a "priest of the most high God", but as a priest of El-Elion. The word "elion" was thought by translators of the Bible to be an adjective meaning "supreme", "the most high". Such an interpretation must be regarded as dubious since it runs counter to the whole Old Testament conception according to which Abraham and his kin alone knew the God-revealed religion. And here we have a "pagan" king who not only professed this religion but was even among the priests of "the most high". Theologians could get out of this difficulty only by suggesting that the situation is a mysterious one. In actual fact, however, things are much simpler and there is no mystery here at all.

The word "elion" is not an adjective but part of the name of the pagan god El-Elion, a name well known in the history of religion. In the texts unearthed at Ras-Shamra and other places in the 1930s the name Melchizedek, one of the many gods of the ancient Canaanite pantheon, is mentioned more than once. In the Book of Genesis Melchizedek is spoken of as a priest of El-Elion and not as a Judaic or any other "most high God". Hence, Jesus has apparently nothing in common with him. True, the Qumran sectarians, of course, could have regarded

him as a servant of the "most high" and identified him with their prophet and teacher.

The name of Melchizedek, which means "king of righteousness" or "king of justice", has something in common with *more hassedeq*, or teacher of righteousness. Perhaps in the minds of the Qumran sectarians the image of Melchizedek was linked with the teacher of righteousness. But this circumstance can have no bearing on the question of whether Jesus is a historical or a mythical figure. Theological conjectures apart, there are no arguments to support the thesis that any close relationship existed between Melchizedek and Christ, let alone their being the same person.

Now let us consider a number of conceptions that rest on firmer grounds.

A Possible Variant--"Someone Came By..."

We shall begin with a possible rejoinder by my opponent who rejects the argument from *saeculi silentium* (silence of a century).

Opponent: It is impossible to take this argument seriously. It implies that events that took place in a remote and not very important Roman province such as Judea had to become known almost immediately throughout the Roman Empire, and especially in Rome. This is to assess antiquity with the criteria of our time. Nowadays, thanks to the media, any local event that is of any significance is known the next day throughout the world. Events that took place in Jerusalem in the thirties of the first century A.D. might go unnoticed outside Judea. What is more, they might not even leave a deep impression on those who witnessed them or took part in them. This point has been convincingly argued by O. Chwolson.

Author: Now that is interesting. What does this erudite scholar, who strongly endorses the historicity of Jesus, have to say on the subject?

Opponent: He says that under Herod, Archelaus and the Roman prefects thousands of Jews were executed in Jerusalem, and so it would be difficult, if not impossible, for any historian to remember that among those thousands there was one called Jesus. In Chwolson's

opinion, it was only twenty years after the death of Jesus Christ that popular ferment began which led to the Jewish war. The defeat of the Jews in this war and the despondency that followed could have revived memories of the teacher who had been executed, and only afterwards would these memories find literary expression.⁴⁷

Author: If I understand you correctly, you are saying that one must not insist on the veracity of the Evangelical account of the life of Jesus, and that his ministry and death might not have been nearly as remarkable and dramatic as they are presented in the New Testament. But let us look at this point of view more closely, for it is fairly widespread in works of fiction as well as in scholarly writings. A brilliant artistic illustration of this conception is Anatole France's famous historical tale "The Procurator of Judea".⁴⁸

An old and sick man, Pontius Pilate came to a seaside resort for medical treatment. There he accidentally met his friend, Aelius Lamia, a Roman aristocrat, who in his youth had spent many years in exile in Palestine. In the hot southern sun the two old men reminisced about the past, recalling events in Palestine of which they were both witnesses. Lamia asked about the Samaritan uprising against Roman rule which took place on Mount Gerizim, and Pilate gave a detailed account of the insurrection and its outcome. The two men had so much to recollect that they decided to meet the following day in Pilate's house. There the two friends again recalled the time when they were both young and lived in barbaric Judea. Pilate did most of the talking, for Lamia was interested in Pilate's work in Judæa as administrator and procurator and wanted to hear all the details. Pilate said that he often had to sanction death sentences passed by a Jewish court:

"A hundred times, at least, have I known them, mustered, rich and poor together, all united under their priests, make a furious onslaught on my ivory chair, seizing me by the skirts of my robe, by the thongs of my sandals, and all to demand of me--nay, to exact from me, --the death sentence on some unfortunate whose guilt I failed to perceive, and as to whom I could only pronounce that he was as mad as his accusers. A hundred times, do I say! Not a hundred, but every day and all day.... At

the outset of my term of office I endeavoured to persuade them to hear reason; I attempted to snatch their miserable victims from death. But this show of mildness only irritated them the more."

This very much sounds like the trial of Jesus as told in the Gospels. And as one listens to Pilate's monologue one expects that at any moment Pilate would recall one such unfortunate man whom he had had to hand over to the fanatic Pharisees and scribes and let them deal with him as they pleased. But Pilate had no recollection of this most remarkable case, one which had such important consequences.

The friends then turned to other subjects. Lamia recalled a dancer, a Jewess of extraordinary beauty and charm, with whom he was in love. Their affair ended abruptly:

"One day ... she disappeared, and I saw her no more.... Some months after I lost sight of her, I learned by chance that she had attached herself to a small company of men and women who were followers of a young Galilean thaumaturgist."

The woman Lamia spoke of is apparently Mary Magdalene, and the "young Galilean" is undoubtedly Jesus Christ. Lamia continued:

"His name was Jesus; he came from Nazareth, and he was crucified for some crime ... Pontius, do you remember anything about the man?"

"Pontius Pilate contracted his brows, and his hand rose to his forehead in the attitude of one who probes the deeps of memory. Then after a silence of some seconds--

"'Jesus?' he murmured, 'Jesus--of Nazareth? I cannot call him to mind'."

Opponent: Do you not think that in this story Anatole France may have found the right answer to a question which has so far eluded scholars and historians?

Author: This is not ruled out. But in that case the Gospel narratives must be regarded as untrustworthy as a historical source. If the events connected with the life and death of Jesus Christ were so insignificant,

then the account of them given in the Gospels is, to put it mildly, inaccurate. There we are told of the popular movement in Galilee and Judea which was supposedly brought forth by Jesus' activity; of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem where he was met by "a very great multitude"; of Jesus' trial at night which was extraordinary in scope and in the way it was conducted; of the participation of large crowds in the torture of Jesus, and so on. All this loses credibility. I have already spoken of the miraculous happenings which, the Gospels tell us, accompanied the passion and death of Jesus Christ. If even one of them had really occurred, the whole story would have left an indelible impression on the memory of people.

Opponent: Let us not talk about the miracles, but keep our discussion within a historical framework. Supposing the Evangelists' account of events is not only exaggerated but also embellished with religious fantasy, it is nevertheless built around a historical kernel. Surely you are aware that this is a view held by the prominent Soviet historian N. Nikolsky, by the well-known French writer and communist Henri Barbusse and by the English scholar and communist Archibald Robertson? Yet you have not considered their views on the question we are interested in.

Author: That is just what I intend to do. Academician Nikolsky acknowledges the fact that we have but scant and contradictory historical information about Christ. Essentially, such information is found only in the Synoptic Gospels, but their analysis gives rather disappointing results. Nikolsky writes: "For the historian the conclusions are indeed not very encouraging, especially on the question of the life and ministry of Jesus." And if we disregard that which is contradictory and doubtful or even implausible in the Gospels, Nikolsky continues, "what is left of the account given in the Synoptic Gospels? There was a carpenter from Nazareth, Jesus, who seems to have performed miracles and preached, but what he preached we do not know for sure; then he was arrested by the Judean authorities and was executed. And that is all".⁴⁹ Nikolsky insists, however, that in this scant material lies the historical kernel from which subsequently the majestic tree of the Christian legend grew.

According to Nikolsky, we should reject those Evangelical evidences that contradict one another or do not inspire confidence in general, but not such pieces of information that agree with one another in substance. He writes: "When all sources--both the Gospels and the Apocryphal writings--are unanimous in saying that Jesus was from Nazareth and was a carpenter or the son of a carpenter, that his father was Joseph and his mother was Mary, then we are obviously dealing with generally known facts about which there was no disagreement." Elaborating on this thought, Nikolsky says: "If Jesus was not a real person but an invented figure, why then was he called a carpenter from Nazareth, why was there general agreement as to what his father's and mother's names were, and also the names of the cities and villages where he preached? To explain this, we have to assume that there was an imaginary story about Jesus which is shorter than the one told in the Synoptic Gospels, and that, for some reason, everyone accepted that story as solemn truth."⁵⁰

Nikolsky believes that the Gospels give a generally true picture of the historical circumstances in which Jesus carried out his activities. Thus, Pontius Pilate was indeed the ruler of Judea at that time and he was cruel and ruthless. The morals and customs and the locality described in the Gospels fully correspond to the realities of that period. For Nikolsky, too, the argument from silence is unconvincing.

Jesus' ministry, Nikolsky says, lasted for only a short time, perhaps no more than a year. During this time he did not become widely known. So, "before Jesus entered Jerusalem, the Roman authorities apparently never heard of him"; the Jews, of course, knew of him, but "to the ruling quarters of Judean society Jesus was only one of their enemies, and not even one of the main ones".⁵¹ Therefore, "if the Roman writers did not mention Jesus, this is to be explained by the silence of the Judean writers; the Roman writers obtained nearly all their information about Judea and the events occurring there exclusively from Judean sources".

Nikolsky also thinks that Jesus' sermons form an integral whole. He writes: "Despite some contradictions, Jesus' sermons, as is felt by all those who have read

the Synoptic Gospels carefully, are one in spirit, tone and content.... It is possible to invent some of the sayings and parables, but it is impossible to set them forth without any order, as it is done in the Gospels, and yet make the reader feel that behind them is a living preacher."⁵² Nikolsky is thus led to the conclusion that Jesus was a real person, one who had a historical existence.

In many respects Nikolsky's arguments are similar to those of Henri Barbusse, who also acknowledges the historicity of Christ. The arguments put forward by Barbusse, however, are more thought-provoking, more brilliant; they are part of an original conception regarding the rise of Christianity itself.

Like Nikolsky and some other authors, who recognise the historical existence of Christ, Barbusse does not deny the fact that historical sources tell us very little about Jesus. Barbusse writes: "Let us face the evidence ... and let us say: all the documents we have, both religious and secular, regarding the origins of Christianity up to the moment when the church canon established 'ne varietur' [scripture not subject to change--I.K.], that is, to the beginning of the 5th century, are almost without exception unreliable and do not in principle merit confidence. There is not a single line in them of which one can be sure, nothing that one can affirm, not even one name, not even one date."⁵³ The New Testament books tell us nothing definite about Jesus Christ. Barbusse stresses the fact that the authors of the Epistles and The Acts who, as apostles, must have known Christ better than anyone else, said nothing about Christ.

But if they knew Christ they would probably considered it their duty to relate what they knew. Barbusse writes: "Let us speak the plain language of common sense. If you and I could be in contact with God, if we had lived with him for a long time and had heard his voice for a period of several years and months, even if his word were transmitted to us by his contemporaries a few years after God has disappeared, we would consider it our duty to spread his teaching. Is it possible that we would utter one word or write one line without referring directly to some traits of this awesome, concrete reali-

ty?"⁵⁴ Withal, the apostles, in speaking of Christ, seem to have drawn on all other sources except their own recollections and impressions. They borrowed many terms and phrases from Old Testament prophets. For instance, they spoke much about the sacrifice of lambs, about the meek servant or child, but practically nothing about the real existence of Jesus the man or man-and-God. "It seems inconceivable," says Barbusse, "that while relying on the prophets these pastors [authors of The Acts and the Epistles--*I.K.*] never referred to the human reality of God with whom they had apparently been in contact. It should be stressed: it is inconceivable that they would not invoke this reality in every line they wrote."⁵⁵ It would be inconceivable, that is, if the authors of The Acts and the Epistles had indeed known Christ as a real person!

Nevertheless, Barbusse finds several starting points from which to build up a conception which implies, among other things, a recognition of the historical existence of Jesus. These starting points are the Gospels.

While acknowledging the fact that the Gospels contain many contradictions and a large number of quite late additions and changes, Barbusse nevertheless finds in the Gospels a kernel of historical truth. For him, the "many obvious contradictions which we find in the Gospels and which come from the pen of unskilled writers"⁵⁶ are proof that these writers did not invent all that they narrated. Later on the editors were unable to straighten things out when presenting this truth. With skilful editing, Barbusse believes, the divergencies in the Gospels would have been removed.

The very inconsistencies and contradictions in the narratives of the Evangelists are, for Barbusse, marks of historical veracity. Thus, Jesus the God often shows signs of human weakness. When accused of trying to attribute to himself divine qualities, he cited Old Testament texts in which ordinary people who heard the word of God were referred to as gods; in this way he practically denied he was God. Jesus admitted that he did not know the day and the hour when the end of the world would come, saying that God alone knew this. On many occasions Jesus went into hiding in order to escape per-

secution. His prayer--"remove this cup from me"--"proves magnificently his poor and naked humanity".⁵⁷ And his cry on the cross--"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"--is a cry of human sorrow and defeat. The Evangelists could not have invented all this; it would be pointless for them to do so.

Barbusse believes that many episodes described in the Gospels are lifelike and historically plausible. He writes: "Such sensational events as the casting out of traders from the temple and the trial of Jesus cannot be regarded as pure fiction. But what bears the stamp of verisimilitude is the precise and consistent features of character, the peculiarities of pictorial relief and the anecdotal episodes which, so to speak, are in themselves proofs and impart a measure of authenticity to everything. The details relating, for example, to the intractable character of the treasurer of the community, the ungracious behaviour of the brothers of the prophet, the slowness of understanding of the disciples, and the personality of Martha and Mary Magdalene cannot be regarded otherwise as being authentic. Who would invent these, and for what purpose? In all this there is something that cannot be invented.⁵⁸ In Barbusse's opinion, the manner of speech of Jesus as preacher, interlocutor and disputant is also something that cannot be invented.

Barbusse cites many of Jesus' sayings, for example, his "highly ingenious, original and correct verdict" on a woman taken in adultery, and notes their wit and conciseness. "These magnificent verbal crystallisations...", Barbusse writes, "are born of lips and a heart that are free, and do not come from the quill of a churchman yoked to his task."⁵⁹ The substance of Jesus' sermons, according to Barbusse, also tends to confirm the authenticity of the Evangelical narratives.

Jesus' teaching as set forth in the Gospels, says Barbusse, should not be regarded as being identical to the teaching of the apostle Paul who became the most important Christian theorist. If the personality of Jesus were invented, and especially if it were invented in the period when Paul's Epistles were already known, he would have been made to utter sayings and preach sermons in accordance with the spirit of Paul's teaching.

But since the specific features of the individuality of Jesus are retained in his sermons as given in the Gospels, it means that this individuality is not a mythological creation, but a reflection of a real historical personality.

The Evangelists' narratives, says Barbusse, merit a certain amount of trust. It would be irrational, in his opinion, to assume that these narratives are fiction from beginning to end. Deception on such a scale is in principle impossible, let alone such a wealth of imagination. With this in mind, what conclusions can one draw as regards the question of whether Jesus was a real person or a mythical figure?

Barbusse is cautious in formulating his conclusion, which comes to just three words: "someone came by" And the most that can be said of that "someone" is summed up in two brief sentences: "a poor man came by, for whom a need was found afterwards"; and "some obscure Jewish prophet came by, who preached and was crucified".⁶⁰

"...For whom a need was found afterwards"--these words sum up Barbusse's conception of the origins of Christianity, which entails a recognition of the historicity of Jesus.

For about twenty years, according to this conception, this obscure wandering preacher, who like many such unknown sufferers, was crucified, was completely forgotten. Later, social and historical conditions emerged which called forth vague and confused recollections about him. A process of Hellenistic reformation of Judaism took place. Rites and doctrines originating in Greek and Eastern religions and conceptions were grafted on to this religion. In order to spread this new religion among the people, what was needed was not so much abstract theological discourses as a watchword that would capture the imagination of the masses and influence the emotional aspects of social consciousness. The "gospel" (which means "good news") that "the Messiah has come" became such a watchword. It was convenient to present a resurrected Jesus as this Messiah. From here on it was a matter of embellishing the image of someone who had actually lived with the bright colours of mythological fantasy. This was historically so inevitable that

if Jesus had not existed it would have been necessary to invent him at this moment. But it had not been necessary to invent him since someone, a man from Galilee, who never knew the role he would be called upon to play, had already existed.

The historical Jesus was thus a real understudy of an ideal principle on which the first version of Christianity was constructed. Jesus did not think of himself as Christ; nor was he thought of as Christ by his contemporaries. It was only later that he became resurrected in people's memory as Christ, Messiah and Savior. Barbusse writes: "When Jesus appeared, there was not yet Christ, and when Christ appeared, Jesus had long ceased to be. Jesus Christ never existed."⁶¹

This conception fails to answer many questions. If Jesus were not crucified for having said that he was the Messiah and therefore King of the Jews, for what then was he crucified? If he were put to death for the same reason as were thousands of other wanderers like him, why did his name acquire such a significance and become the symbol of the new religious movement? Any fictitious name would have served the purpose just as well. It should not be important in this case whether the symbol represented someone who existed or someone who never existed.

One may also ask why the Evangelists had not removed or at least minimised this contradiction. They could have done it regardless of whether the Gospels were about a fictitious or an historical person. In either case the contradictions cannot but cast doubt on the trustworthiness of the narratives themselves. There must have been some other reasons why these contradictions could not be reconciled. Definitely it is not because the text was based throughout on historical truth. In the preceding chapter I have dealt with these reasons. But, so the argument goes, it would be strange for the Gospels to attribute to Jesus purely human characteristics if no such person existed. Not at all! The task of the authors of the Gospels was not to present an image of God but an image of someone who came to embody divinity. So the Evangelists must have used their creative imagination to humanise the personality of Jesus

to the utmost. More precisely, it is not so much a question of the imagination of the Evangelists as that of the imagination of believers who had created a portrait of their hero in accordance with their historically-evolved ideological requirements. What the authors of the Gospels did was to give literary form to this religious-folkloric material, interpreting it and no doubt introducing many changes in it. And this entire process could have taken place not only spontaneously but also with the deliberate aim of creating an image of Jesus the man to whom nothing human is alien.

Barbusse is delighted by the integrity and attractiveness of this image as portrayed in the Gospels, by the resourcefulness and wit shown by Jesus in some of his sermons and sayings. One cannot but agree with this, and even the contradictory behaviour of the main hero of the Gospels does not destroy this impression. On the contrary, it can only reinforce it. For in real life the behaviour of people is often contradictory both because of circumstances and because of the nature of human character. But can artistic imagination create a vivid image of a person without its having a historical prototype? Certainly there is no lack of such images in world literature. One need only recall Hamlet, Pierre Bezukhov and Egor Bulychev, for instance.

One can, of course, resolve the contradictions regarding Jesus' personality and his sermons as described in the Gospels by stratifying the different time-layers in the New Testament narratives, as is done by Barbusse. This approach, however, is not without its dangers, for one may be tempted to date these "layers" according to certain preconceptions. For example, if one wants to prove that Jesus was a revolutionary, he will assign those passages in the Gospels that lend themselves to this interpretation to the earliest period and the passages that contradict this view, to a later period. Or one may regard the words "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's" as belonging to the oldest part of the tradition and so endorse an opposite view. In any case, there is no logical necessity to consider that the tradition, whether an earlier or a later one, is based on the existence of a real historical person.

In a book published in the 1950s Archibald Robert-

son expresses the views that are similar to those of Barbusse. Let us consider that which is new in Robertson's arguments and which is not found in Barbusse.

Robertson, too, has his own conception of the origins of Christianity. According to him, the development of Christianity began with "a revolutionary movement led first by John the Baptist and then by Jesus the Nazoraean".⁶² At an early stage of the movement John the Baptist was executed by Herod Antipas. "A Nazoraean attempt to seize Jerusalem led to the crucifixion of Jesus by Pilate."⁶³ Following this, the movement broke into two branches. The name of Jesus the Nazoraean became associated with a popular Messianic movement which for a long time retained its revolutionary spirit. A second movement headed by Paul used Christ's name to cover up directly opposite social and political views. Later, following Paul's reconciliation with the existing order of things, the two movements merged into one.

So a new religion was born, which became officially established in the 4th century A.D. According to Robertson, this "was not the cult of a dead Jewish Messiah, but the cult of a redeemer-god who differed from others only in having a local habitation in first-century Palestine and a Jewish name with Messianic associations".⁶⁴ The bearer of this name, however, was a real person. During the following three centuries his image took on more and more mythological features: the immaculate conception and the miraculous birth of the infant, the numerous instances where Jesus healed the sick and restored the dead to life, and Jesus' own resurrection following his martyrdom. Robertson writes: "Somehow a historical individual of whom we know little, but whose existence we infer from the evidences of Tacitus and the Talmud and from an analysis of the Synoptic documents, became the subject of demonstrably mythical stories."⁶⁵ We have already considered such evidences in Tacitus and the Talmud. Let us now see how Robertson deals with the difficulties that arise in the attempt to prove the historicity of Christ that is based on the argument from silence.

Why did Seneca, Pliny the Elder, Juvenal, Martialis, Dion Chrysostom, Philo and Justus of Tiberias, all contemporaries of the early Christians, say nothing about Christ

or Christianity? Because, says Robertson, they were not historians.⁶⁶ Some of them were philosophers, while others were poets, rhetoricians or naturalists. This explanation does not seem very convincing.

There was no strict differentiation of ideological activity in ancient times. No clear-cut boundaries existed then between philosophy and historiography, between works with a social message and scientific writings as they do in our time. Therefore, to say that an author, just because he was a philosopher, could not have written about events related to the history of social and religious movements, would be to stretch a point. Besides, the figure of Jesus Christ and the movement associated with him cannot be considered within the framework of political history only. The whole question has much to do with religion and philosophy, in any case with ideology. Philo was very much occupied with ideological questions in his writings, and was particularly interested in religious movements. Since he wrote in detail about the Essenic sect, why did he not at least mention the Christians and their teacher? Robertson thinks it illogical to expect information concerning Christianity from these authors. On the contrary, I would say. It would be logical to expect such information precisely from these authors.

And what about Justus of Tiberias and Josephus, who are essentially historians? Here, too, Robertson finds a way out. In his *History of the Kings of Judea* Justus began with Moses and ended with Agrippa II. But during the time of Jesus there was an interruption in the succession of Judaic kings. Robertson therefore concludes that Justus had nothing to say about this period. This is of course a weak argument. For even though the rulers formally called themselves ethnarchs and tetrarchs ("governors of a province" and "governors of a fourth part of a province" respectively), in Jewish literature, including socio-political writings, they were referred to as kings. It is hard to imagine that in his chronicle starting from the ancient times to A.D. 92 (the year Agrippa II died) Justus would have omitted the period when, in accordance with the wishes of the Roman emperor, Judaic kings were not formally called kings. Incidentally, they were called kings in the Gospels.

As for the silence of Josephus, Robertson attributes it to the fact that the ancient historian systematically avoided discussing such sensitive issues of his time as the Messianic movement in Judea. In order "to retain the favour of his Roman patrons", says Robertson, "he has to insist that Jewish orthodoxy is politically innocuous. He therefore omits as far as possible any reference to the Messianic movement".⁶⁷ As a matter of fact, Josephus spoke of the Messianic movement in Palestine at least twice: once in connection with the name of Theudas, and again in connection with someone unnamed who wanted to find the holy vessels hidden by Moses in the Gerazim mountains. Josephus also tells about the movement of Judas of Gaulonite and other mass movements which, in their spirit, were akin to Messianism. Why then should he avoid describing the movement associated with Jesus Christ?

According to Robertson, none of the ancient authors, whose writings are known to us, had any doubts about the historical existence of Jesus.⁶⁸ And this, in Robertson's opinion, is one reason for believing that Christ existed. This argument must strike the reader as being somewhat 'odd if only because the authors who have just been mentioned did not write about Christ at all. Surely they could not express doubts about the existence of Christ if they knew nothing about him. As for writers of the second century, their works voiced such doubts, although indirectly. True, we know of only one such instance. In the *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho* by the Christian apologist Justin Martyr, Trypho says, "You are following false rumours, you have invented Christ for yourself ... Even if he were born and had lived somewhere, he is completely unknown to anyone".⁶⁹ But this passage aside, it is quite possible that in the second century the Christian legend had taken sufficiently firm roots so that it was difficult to examine the conception of its central figure critically.

A rather curious point is Robertson's treatment of a passage from Papias of Hierapolis. Robertson quoted Papias as saying that he used to ask the elders about Jesus and his disciples. There is no need, says Robertson rather emphatically, to make a detailed analysis of this passage. But one may at least raise the question of whether Papias was asking the elders about mythical person-

lities. And further on Robertson says that it is in the scholarly interests to regard Jesus as an historical figure if only for the purpose of explaining passages like this.⁷⁰ Actually there is nothing to explain here. For Papias considered Jesus and his disciples to be historical persons and therefore made inquiries about them. But we are not obliged to accept Papias' opinion on this subject; nor is it necessary for us to refute it.

Thus, Robertson's arguments in favour of the historical existence of Christ are rather shaky. In his introduction to Robertson's book (in Russian translation) the Soviet historian S. Kovalev convincingly disproves Robertson's thesis. Incidentally, in several instances Robertson himself speaks about the historicity of Jesus without much conviction. "There is nothing improbable," says Robertson, "in the statement that Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea under Tiberius from A.D. 26 to 36, crucified Jesus the Nazoraean...."⁷¹ Of course there is nothing improbable about this, but hardly anyone would make a point of it. In his book Robertson draws a rather unexpected conclusion: "Round a crucified leader of this movement [Christian--I.K.] or, more likely, round confused traditions of more than one leader the original Gospel story was written."⁷² In other words, "someone came by ...", or rather several persons "came by". There is no need to take issue with such a conception. For many people participated in the Christian movement, as in any other social movement, and among them some played a more significant role than others. This much is obvious, but it does not follow that the most important person among them was the Jesus Christ of the Gospels.

Still, we cannot reject out of hand the version that "someone came by". It is not an improbable one. The whole question is one of degree of probability. Below we shall consider another, more probable, version in the light of the source materials available to us today.

The Most Probable Version

From the time the ancient Jews came to experience great sufferings they were confronted with a perplexing religious question: why were God's chosen people subjected to such terrible hardships? Yahweh had promised them

eternal protection; he would multiply them "as the sand which is upon the seashore" and give them prosperity and a dominating position in the world. All other nations would bow down before Israel and meekly serve it. Yet nothing of this had happened.

It was possible to leave aside the phrase about "sand which is upon the seashore" as a way of measuring the growth of the Israeli population. But the misfortunes suffered by the "holy people" both within their own society and as a result of actions by outside forces called for an explanation. Within the Israeli nation, apart from a handful of rich landowners, money-lenders and priests, the mass of the people were faced with perpetual hunger; the peasants had little land or no land at all, the artisans led a beggarly existence, and the slaves owned no property whatever. As in any class society, the rich plundered the poor and were not subject to any restrictions.

Powerful neighbours had inflicted heavy blows one after another on the Israeli nation. At the end of the 8th century B.C. one of the Jewish states (the Northern kingdom of Israel) was conquered by the Assyrians. Its entire population was driven into captivity while non-Israelis came to settle in this part of the "promised land". About a hundred years later a similar fate befell the other Jewish state (the Southern kingdom of Judah). It was conquered by Babylon at the height of its might. The most sacred shrine of the Jews, the Temple of Solomon, was completely destroyed, and the upper classes of Jewish society were removed to Babylon. When half a century later Babylon was conquered by the Persian kingdom and the exiles could return to their homeland, Judah remained enslaved. For several centuries after this the Jewish people were ruled by various conquerors: the Persians, the Macedonians, the Ptolemies of Egypt, the Seleucids of Syria and finally, at the time when Jesus Christ is thought to have lived and died, by the slave-owning Roman Empire. True, during this whole period there was nearly a century, from the middle of the second century B.C. to A.D. 63, when the Jewish state was independent and ruled by the Hasmonaeans. However, having their "own" state did not improve the lot of the mass of the people who remained impoverished as before. And their condition

worsened when Judah became further weakened under Roman rule.

All attempts to resist internal and external oppression failed. Repeated revolts were cruelly suppressed and their participants subjected to merciless repression.

How should Yahweh's failure to fulfil his promises be explained? Surely he could not be accused of unfaithfulness, let alone perfidy. The only explanation was that the people themselves were to blame. Their failure to carry out their duties before God had aroused God's righteous wrath. The people of Israel ceased to be holy; they had continually violated the terms of the covenant with Yahweh by worshipping other gods, by not observing the commandments given to them through Moses, by being guilty of all kinds of excesses and obscene acts. All the misfortunes that rained upon their heads year after year and century after century were God's punishment. The Babylonians, the Persians and the Romans were mere instruments in the hands of God.

What, then, was the way out? Was the nation of Israel doomed to extinction? Such an outcome was unacceptable from a religious standpoint, and so another solution was found. God's wrath was not everlasting. It must give way to mercy and forgiveness. Sooner or later the act of forgiveness would be performed, and this would be done through a Messiah.

The word "messiah" (from the Hebrew word "Mashiah") means the "anointed one". Among the ancient Jews the rite of anointing the head with oil was performed for one ascending to the throne. Thus, the Messiah was to be a king of the Jews who, as head of an independent Jewish state, would lead the chosen people to prosperity and well-being. All the other states, including those which had up to that moment ruled over the Jews, would suffer humiliation and submit to the will of the holy people. Expectations of such a happy event are vividly described in several of the Old Testament books.

The Book of Isaiah contains the following famous prophesy: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it.

"And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

"And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:2-4).

And there would be universal peace and prosperity only when the anointed one ("Christos" in Greek translation) made the entire world subordinate to the chosen people.

At first the anointed one was thought of as a real person, a statesman and military leader who would use earthly means to achieve his ends, and not as a supernatural being. To be sure, he would have the help of supernatural forces. Indeed, the time when he would appear in the world and perform his deeds, and the fact that he was chosen by God to fulfil the lofty mission was all decided by the heavenly powers. But that was all as regards the supernatural character of the mission of the anointed one.

Even in a relatively late Old Testament document, the Book of Daniel, which appeared in about 165 B.C., the prospect of a Messiah acceding to the throne was linked with a real military victory over the Syrian rulers of Judea.

With time, however, the figure of the Messiah came to acquire more and more supernatural features in the religious imagination of the Jews. His image increasingly resembled that of a heavenly being whom God had sent to earth and who in terms of rank was similar to an angel or came close to being God himself. In the Book of Isaiah the birth of the Messiah is described as some kind of mystery: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulders: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Here the Messiah is almost identified with

God himself. Further on, however, it is said that "the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:7). It is possible that the passage raising the Messiah to the highest rank is a later insertion into the Book of Isaiah, which dates back to the end of the 8th century B.C. In the apocryphal book of Enoch, which dates from the beginning of our era, the Messiah appears to have existed "from time immemorial".

Meanwhile, the image of the Messiah underwent yet another important change. Beside the image of a triumphant military leader who would unite his people and lead them to a decisive victory over all their enemies there appeared the image of a martyr who would by his sufferings atone for the sins of God's people and lead them to prosperity.

The image of the Messiah as a sufferer is outlined in the Book of Isaiah where mention is made of one who "hath no form nor comeliness" (Isaiah 53:2), who was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3), who was despised by people, not esteemed by them. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: ... we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted" (Isaiah 53:4). Up to now the sufferer had borne sorrows to which God had subjected him. Further on, however, men were said to be responsible for his sufferings. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). Finally, he was "stricken" and "he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death" (Isaiah 53:8,9). All this happened in accordance with God's will: "it pleased the Lord to bruise him" (Isaiah 53:10). For his sufferings the mysterious "he" would receive a rich award: "... he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. ... Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong...." (Isaiah 53:10, 12).

How is the change in the image of the Messiah to be explained? Here two sets of laws are at work: socio-historical and ideological, especially the latter.

As the pretenders to the role of the Messiah had all

suffered defeat or had been killed, as centuries passed and the dream of restoring the kingdom of Israel became clearly unattainable, it is only to be expected that the Messianic doctrine would undergo changes. Real, earthly factors must have given way in the minds of believers to supernatural forces capable of accomplishing what people could not achieve even with the help of God. The change in the image of the Messiah was especially noticeable during periods of social, military and political crises, when the masses were defeated in the class struggle and the whole nation was humiliated as its revolts and uprisings were crushed. Some scholars believe that the image of the Messiah as a human being was the longest preserved among the Jews of Palestine, and predominantly among the privileged classes, while the image of the Messiah as a heavenly redeemer spread more quickly and was more readily accepted in the Diaspora, especially among the least prosperous classes or sections of the Jewish population.

The same historical circumstances also account for the rise of the image of a suffering Messiah. The triumphant Saviour had failed to appear, and the correlation of forces at that time was such as to make his appearance unlikely. The idea of a triumphant Saviour clearly had not stood the test of time, while the idea of a suffering Messiah proved to be more attractive.

Messianic expectations lived on not only in the oral tradition, in the minds of people and the sermons of priests. They found literary expression in a number of documents and writings which have come down to us.

The Biblical books of the Prophets contain the following recurrent theme: wait, sons of Israel, a messenger from Yahweh will come and all God's promises to the chosen people will be fulfilled. Apocalyptic writings became widespread; none were later included in either the Jewish or Christian canon. They consist mainly of prophecies about the imminent coming of the Messiah.

An example is the apocryphal *Book of Jubilees*. The precise date of its composition is unknown; possibly it was written in the middle of the first century. The book contains a detailed description of the kingdom of heaven to be established on earth following the coming of the

Messiah. Satan and his army will disappear, and as a result people will no longer commit sins and therefore will no longer suffer. The righteous ones (that is, the people of Israel) will for ever enjoy all conceivable blessings, and the delight they derive from this will constantly increase as they witness the execution of God's enemies. A similar book is the apocryphal *Assumption of Moses*, which probably appeared during the first decade of our era.

An especially interesting monument of Jewish apocalyptic literature is the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*. Its authorship is ascribed to the Old Testament patriarch Enoch, the father of Methuselah. Enoch lived 365 years and was carried to heaven while he was alive. He came to know all the most important happenings in heaven and on earth and also the intentions of the Almighty. The book was probably written in the first half of the first century, with some chapters being perhaps added later. The *Book of Enoch* has much in common with New Testament books both in content and form.

No less interesting in the field of Messianic literature are the Sibylline books.

Among the Greeks and Romans in the last two centuries before our era there was a widespread belief in a mythical prophetess named Sibylla whose predictions were recorded in many books. Fourteen books of Sibylline oracles have come down to us. They were compiled over a period of about four hundred years--two centuries before and two centuries after our era. Some of them are of Greek (pagan) origin, while others are of Judaic and Christian origin. Of special interest for our subject are the Judaeo-Sibylline apocalypses.

The Judaic parts of the Sibylline books appeared in Alexandria in about 140 B.C. In terms of style and general message they are a combination of Greek and Judaic themes. The Messianic idea is clearly and vividly expressed in them. The author castigates Greece and the Greeks for their impiety and lawlessness, and contrasts those wallowing in sins with the pious who honour the temple of the omnipotent God with libations, offering of sacrificial meat, sacred hecatombs and the killing of fatted calves as sacrifices. It is to them that God will

send a leader whose appearance will mark a decisive turning point in world history.

Prophecies about the coming of the Messiah found in Biblical, apocryphal and Sibylline books are extremely vague. There are numerous variants woven around several main themes regarding the personality of the Messiah, the kind of deeds he would perform and the time of his coming. I will indicate here only some of the most important points that are common to all these variants.

As a rule, the coming of the Messiah is connected with a radical turn in the destinies of mankind. In fact, it would mark the "end of the world", that is, of the old world, the old order of things. Hence the idea of the inevitability of terrible cosmic cataclysms, the climax of which would be God's judgement on all the living and the dead. The wicked would be punished without mercy, while all the righteous would live in eternal bliss. Here one can see the democratic nature of the Messianic ideology. The wicked were first of all the rich and powerful who oppressed and humiliated the ordinary people. The oppressed, on the other hand, dreamed not only of a cosmic cataclysm but also of a social revolution, for the coming of the Messiah would bring about changes in the social system. It is not clear what these changes would be, but it may be supposed that as a result of the changes the poor would punish the rich for the wrongs the latter had done them over the ages.

When would this happen? When, at last, would the Saviour come and accomplish what the people could not achieve on their own? The answers varied, ranging from the near future to a relatively distant time. According to the Book of Daniel, which resorts to rather intricate computations, the hoped-for event would take place within forty-two months. Since the book was written in the mid-sixties of the second century B.C., by the middle of that century people would either have to acknowledge the fact that the prophecy had not been fulfilled or reinterpret the date with the help of casuistical argument and put off Doomsday to some future time. The *Book of Enoch* gives a fairly precise date of the end of the world-- 10,000 years from the creation of the world. In the *Assumption of Moses* it is said that from the day of Moses' death to the coming of the Messiah "two hundred and

fifty times" must pass. If "time" means seven years, as tradition had it, then the great event was to take place in 1750 years. But that time had passed during the first centuries of our era. It seemed more convenient then, instead of giving any definite dates, to express the idea in some mysterious phrases such as "at the end of times", "at the destined time" and the like. And the more critical the actual events, the more violent the upheavals people had to live through, the nearer seemed the day when the inevitable event, awesome but salutary, would take place, in the expectation of which one must repent one's sins and be prepared for God's last judgment.

In the Old Testament books of the Prophets there is yet another indication as to when the Messiah would appear: this momentous event would be preceded by the return to earth of the prophet Elijah who had been carried to heaven while he was alive. "Behold," it is said in the Book of Malachi, "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Malachi 4:5). Thus, the events connected with Doomsday were not expected to take place before the re-appearance on earth of the prophet Elijah. However, this did not prevent preachers from saying that the Messiah would come in the very near future or even that he had already come. For there had been no lack of people claiming to be Elijah the prophet. Some were real people--fanatics, cranks or frauds--while others never existed. But in order that the rumours that the Messiah would come soon or had already come would spread among the people, the appearance of Elijah was not necessary. It was enough if the awe-inspiring rumour spread from mouth to mouth that Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah, was already here on earth, preaching and calling on people to be ready to meet the Messiah, in other words, to repent their sins.

The situation has been well described by the French historian Albert Revill. He writes: "The misfortunes, humiliations and oppression suffered by the Jewish people during the last century before the birth of Christ and the first years after it would naturally lend a special significance to faith in the Messiah. This hope aroused great excitement, but at the same time it also induced a

feeling of calm, depending on the mood of those who were nourished by it."⁷³

During the first sixty years or so of the first century of our era Judea was seething with unrest. Things came to a head in the year 66 when the first Jewish war broke out. In an atmosphere of passive waiting for the Messiah, conditions were favourable for the emergence and spread of Messianic legends, more specifically, legends about Jesus, whether considered as a real person or a mythical figure. But even ardent expectations of the coming of the Messiah were conducive to the spread of the "gospels" about Jesus among the Jewish population of the Roman empire.

The terrible defeat sustained by the Jews in two successive national liberation wars, in A.D. 66-73 and 132-135, could not but further deepen a feeling of sorrow and disappointment and intensify hopes for supernatural salvation. Belief in an earthly Messiah declined among the Jews, at least for the time being, both in Palestine and the Diaspora, while hopes that a divine Messiah would appear and fulfil his great mission became more fervent than ever.

But it was not only the attitude that prevailed among the Jews that was important. Within a short time after Christianity sprang up among the Jews, it spread rapidly among other peoples of the Graeco-Roman world. Judaism did not turn into Christianity. On the contrary, it resisted the new religion, and more and more strongly as time went on. Soon the relatively small number of Judaeo-Christians and Christians from among the Jews were all but submerged in the mass of newly converted Christians from among heathens. Were the latter also historically and psychologically prepared to accept Messianic ideas? The answer is definitely yes. Such ideas were no less prominent in their ideologies and religions than in Judaism.

The basis of any religion is the hope that man, who is weak, can receive help from otherworldly forces, from a divine or at all events a supernatural saviour. But the role of the saviour is not apparent in everyday life: life is hard, the poor are denied justice and people have to bear all kinds of natural and social calamities. Hence the idea that for reasons known only to the higher powers

the divine saviour has not yet revealed himself and intervened in life on earth. Or perhaps he is not yet born; or, according to more widely held religious beliefs, he has not come down from his exalted "height", embodied in human form, to our long-suffering earth. In that case one must not think that the longed-for event would occur soon. Or perhaps the saviour is already here, but the good effects of his presence have not yet fully manifested themselves.

The idea that people will be saved after the inevitable victory of the supernatural forces of good over the supernatural forces of evil can be found in the religion of the ancient Persians. A decisive role here is to be played by Soošiiant, "son of a virgin". At an hour appointed by the good god Ahura Mazda, Soošiiant--it is possible that he was identified with the god Mithra--will appear on earth, and that will be the end of the old world in which the forces of evil are so powerful. In a fierce battle Soošiiant defeats the evil god Angra Mainyu and thrusts him and his army into hell. When this happens the dead will rise again and appear before the divine court. The sinners, together with Angra Mainyu and the army he heads, will be punished in hell for a thousand years, after which they will be pardoned, and even the evil god himself will be reconciled with the good god Ahura Mazda. Finally the kingdom of goodness and prosperity, for which suffering mankind has always yearned, will be established.

In ancient religious beliefs the personality of the saviour-god was associated with the idea of kingship.

In ancient Egypt the Pharaohs were considered living gods. In some myths the Pharaoh is even said to be of divine origin. To the young queen appears the greatest of gods in the guise of her husband. Awakened by the scent that surrounds him she smiles to him. He draws close to her, now in the form of the god that he is. He then leaves her with the promise that she will bear a son who will be the king of Egypt. Thus a god-king is born. And if there is no immaculate conception in this case the future king is nevertheless of divine descent. And his mother learns beforehand (the "annunciation") of the great event that awaits her.

Alexander the Great was also acclaimed as a god, and

with his full consent. And the diadochi, his successors to the thrones of the Hellenistic states that emerged after his death, followed in his footsteps.

Implicit in this Hellenistic cult of the god-king are certain ideas which in some ways bring it closer to Christianity than even the cult of the Messiah.

Here for the first time salvation was conceived of not only as saving one's soul. People began to feel anxious not only about the conditions of their earthly existence, but also about their life hereafter. Would they be able, after death, to escape the sufferings connected either with the coming reincarnation of their souls or with their punishments in hell for leading an impious life on earth? The believers' hope for salvation was based on the idea that their saviour-king would rule over them in the afterlife just as he did on earth, and though most probably they were not always satisfied with his rule it was in any event something familiar and therefore not so frightening.

Then there is the image of god the son. Every saviour-king was said to be born of a "real" god, and his mission was to mediate between god the father and people. Simultaneously, the idea of a woman considered worthy to be the mother of god also took shape. And with time the manner in which she came to conceive her child was spiritualised: the sexual act was transformed into immaculate conception.

Another idea in Hellenistic religions could have influenced the formation of the Christian image of the Messiah. And that is the idea of a deity embodied in human form. The deity had to traverse the whole path of human life on earth and only after death could join other members of Pantheon. It should be noted that the honour of being a receptacle of the divine essence was conferred on members of royal families only.

The cult of the god-king also became widespread in imperial Rome. Beginning with Julius Caesar, the emperors demanded that they be regarded as deities. Indeed, long before the empire was established the Romans were thought to be ruled by heroes and demigods, if not by gods themselves. Some of them accomplished feats comparable to those later ascribed to Christ in the Gospels. For

example, Romulus, one of the founders of Rome, suddenly disappeared in the presence of a senator and immediately rose to heaven where he could be seen to take his place among the gods. Nevertheless, the cult of the god-king became well-established only during the imperial epoch. Not only Caesar and Augustus, but also Caligula and Claudius, who were half insane, and Tiberius and Nero, who were bloodthirsty, and others like them, were considered to be gods. For our subject, however, it is the idea itself that is important, and not the concrete forms it took. And the idea is that a man becomes god and his mission is to save people, and therefore his very appearance on earth is "good news" (gospel) for all.

Even the terminology that had been worked out was later canonised by Christianity. An inscription (the year 9 B.C.) declaring the birthday of Emperor Augustus a public holiday reads: "This day has given the whole world a new aspect; the world would have been doomed to destruction if the happiness of all people did not shine in the person of the one born today.... Providence which reigns over the world ... has sent him to us and to future generations as the saviour.... The birth of this god was for the whole world the beginning of good news which comes from him; with his birth a new calendar should be established."⁷⁴ Even if we disregard the eulogy showered on Augustus by fawning courtiers and officials, the fact remains that here the language of prayer was used with respect to a human being. Such language was soon to be used by Christians with respect to Jesus Christ. It may be recalled that in the Gospels Christ is referred to as King of the Jews; in other words, the conception of the god-king is present here.

These examples taken from the history of the cult of a saviour-king all have to do with real persons who became deified through religious fantasy.

Even more frequently the role of the god-king and the Messiah was assigned not to living people but to mythological personages. In Egypt the Saviour was Serapis, also known as Osiris; the Virgin Mother was Isis, who was at the same time considered to be the wife of God. In Asia Minor the role of the Saviour was played by Attis, and that of the Virgin Mother by Cybele. Among the Baby-

lonians they were Tammuz and Marduk. According to the myths, they both died in spring and rose again. Upon their death there were elaborate funeral rites accompanied by loud lamentations of crowds of pilgrims. Among the Phoenicians the role of the Saviour was played by Adonis, and in Tyre by Melkarth. Similar myths and cults were known in a number of city-states in Asia Minor.

Especially widespread was the cult of the Phrygian god Attis. It is noteworthy that in A.D. 54 Emperor Claudius included this cult among the official religions of the Roman empire, as was reflected in the calendar of state holidays. Attis died as a result of intrigues by the jealous goddess Cybele and rose again three days later. Violent funeral rites began on March 22, followed three days later by noisy festivities to mark the resurrection of the god. (Incidentally, rites associated with this cult resemble the Easter rites of the Christian church.) A portrait of Attis was buried in his coffin, and then, at the moment when the resurrection of the god was supposed to have taken place, the temple became suddenly bright with lights and the coffin opened by itself, indicating that the god had risen. This was followed by tumultuous rejoicing. The myths about Attis and the cults connected with him had much in common with the mythological and religious festivals associated with Dionysus in Greece and with Osiris in Egypt. In the minds of people these mythological personages took on features of real people who had once lived on earth.

Opponent: Here is yet another weak point in your argument. The deification of a living human being was indeed widespread in the Graeco-Roman world. But the ascribing of human features to a god is a much more complex matter. Since this is so, the transformation of Christ the god into Jesus the man would probably be the only instance of its kind. It is therefore highly unlikely.

Author: "Since this is so," you said. But it is not so.

The religious and philosophical trend associated with Euhemerus, the Greek philosopher of the 4th-3rd centuries B.C., is well known. But the rationalistic doctrine that came to be called Euhemerism (according to which the origin of religion lies in the deification of real persons)

was not founded by him, it had existed long before him. As the French historian Gaston Boissier points out, Euhemerus "merely described the doctrine in a treatise which was highly readable and became very popular".⁷⁵ Its main idea is that all the gods of Olympus and the Roman Pantheon--Jupiter, Saturn, Cadmus, Venus and others--were once real people. For example, Cadmus was the cook of a Cydonian king; Venus was a sensuous woman who, in order not to appear different from other women in Cyprus, where she lived, led the entire female population on the island from the path of virtue.

But perhaps Euhemerism was an isolated, little-known trend in the Graeco-Roman world? Not at all. As Boissier notes, the Roman poet Ennius translated Euhemerus' novel and from then on this doctrine became well known among the Romans and was apparently completely accepted by them. This is seen in the fact that they began to vie with one another in attributing human features to their gods. There is no lack of factual material on this subject. Here is how Boissier characterises the Roman religion of the period: "Everything in it assumed an incredibly precise form. The most improbable fictions seemed not to differ from the most authentic narratives."⁷⁶ Imaginary earthly biographies of gods were not only passed on by word of mouth, but were also reproduced in great detail in literary works. In vividness of detail these earthly biographies of the Euhemeristic gods are in no way inferior to the life of Jesus as told in the Gospels.

In the history of ideology and, in particular, the history of literature one can find instances of striking similarity between Christianity and the image of Christ, on the one hand, and pre-Christian culture, on the other. Indeed, Christian theologians were compelled at times to accept certain traditions as Christian, though they unquestionably predated Christianity and were totally unrelated to it. A good example is the 4th eclogue of *Bucolics* by Virgil, the Roman poet of the first century B.C. and famous author of *The Aeneid*.

The 4th eclogue of *Bucolics* foretells the birth of a miraculous infant which will mark the replacement of an iron age with a golden age. The early Christian church all but considered the poem as a Christian work. St. Augustine, citing some passages from it, said that they

could only refer to Christ: to whom else could such words be addressed? In his speech at the Council of Nicaea (325) Emperor Constantine cited many lines from Virgil to support the idea of the divine nature of Christ. Is it possible that Virgil had in mind the founder of Christianity?

Unless we are to assume that miracles are possible, we will have to reject the idea that Christianity played any role here at all. Besides, Virgil foretold that the birth of the miraculous infant would take place in the same year when the eclogue was written. According to the Gospels, Christ was born 40 years later. "Such an error," Boissier remarks drily, "would be inexcusable in a prophet."⁷⁷

Virgil is regarded by the Christian Church, if not as a prophet, then at least as someone with great foresight. In the Middle Ages he was considered as important as Moses, Isaiah, David and other personages who supposedly foretold the birth of Christ. In reality Virgil merely voiced hopes and ideas widespread in his time. And of course, such literary works as the 4th eclogue of his *Bucolics* played a certain role, perhaps even a considerable role, in preparing the ideological ground for the spread of the doctrine about a new Messiah.

If the Fathers of the Church found that the 4th eclogue confronted them with some embarrassing questions, it was even more difficult for them to account for the many similarities between the stories told in the Gospels and in myths dating back to a much earlier period. Somehow this awkward fact had to be explained, for it essentially discredited the idea that Christianity was unique and that its rise owed nothing to other cultural traditions. Firmicus Maternus, for example, asserted that the heathens tried to introduce into their cults elements borrowed from Christianity and to substitute their own impious and superstitious tales for the truths revealed by God. Here Maternus obviously disregarded the fact, well-known even in his time, that "heathenism" was much older than Christianity. So if there was any borrowing it was the other way round. Tertullian attributed to the Devil's doing everything that detracted from the belief that Christianity alone offered salvation: the Devil, the

enemy of the human race, deliberately propagated among his followers ideas and views that anticipated Christianity in order to discredit it. This, of course, cannot be refuted, yet no one seriously interested in a scientific analysis of the question is likely to accept such an explanation.

There is another practice in ancient cults which could to an even greater extent facilitate acceptance of the legend about Christ; the offering by a father of his son as a sacrifice to the gods. For instance, the Phoenician god Moloch was propitiated by the sacrifice of children (children were burned in the hot maw of a copper statue of the god). In the Old Testament there are many indications that children, especially the first-born, were sacrificed and this was practised not only by the neighbours of Judah and Israel but also among the ancient Jews themselves. To us this may appear absurd, but in ancient times such practice was traditional and was therefore regarded as normal and acceptable. We may think it strange that God should sacrifice his own son. And what is a still more puzzling question, to whom could God offer such a sacrifice? But in those days people must have regarded it as nothing out of the ordinary, for it was customary for the head of a family to resort to such ritual practice when necessary.

In a study devoted to this subject, *The Suffering God in the Religions of the Ancient World*, Martin Brückner draws many analogies between ancient Eastern religions and the Christian legend about Jesus. In both cases, "in the centre of worship and the cult was a belief in the death and resurrection of a saviour-god who was subordinated to a supreme god". In some instances the saviour-god was considered to be the son of the supreme god. In both cases, "the death and resurrection of god had for the believers the significance of salvation". The believers thereby derived hopes for their own resurrection after death and eternal life. And in many instances the death and resurrection of the saviour-god occurred in spring, the resurrection taking place on the third or fourth day after the death of the god.⁷⁸

These analogies become all the more significant when we consider that the cults in question were particularly widespread in those localities where early Christian com-

munities existed. This means that the people of those localities were not only historically prepared to accept legends connected with Christ; they could also, perhaps, create similar myths on their own.

For the ancient Jews, too, the Eastern cults of a saviour who died and rose again were nothing new or unusual. There are many indications in the Old Testament that the Jews were acquainted with those cults and with the myths on which they were based. The prophet Ezekiel spoke of "women weeping for Tammuz" (Ezekiel 8:14), and they did so at a most inappropriate place, at the gates of the temple of Solomon. Thus, a heathen cult had penetrated the citadel of Judaism. Even King Solomon erred when he was led by his foreign wives into worshipping the gods of the heathen. Other kings of Judah and Israel, too, worshipped heathen gods, as the Old Testament shows. So, towards the beginning of the first century the Jews were undoubtedly familiar with the myths about these gods, specifically, the myths about saviours who died and rose again.

It does not follow from all the above that the Christian doctrine about Jesus was borrowed directly from an earlier religion. That would be an incorrect conclusion. The stories and legends in which the image of Jesus is revealed represent a whole complex of ideas of a new religion that was brought forth by life itself, by social, historical and other conditions. There are two points that should be kept in mind here. First, this new ideological complex could have embraced ideas and conceptions to which people had long been accustomed. Second, what emerged from the religious fantasy of primitive Christianity, which was moving in the same direction, followed the paths of long-existing popular beliefs. To one living in the second half of the first century the ideas of Messianism, just like the image of a god-king bringing salvation to mankind, would not appear strange or extraordinary. And when the social and historical situation gave rise to the corresponding ideological condition, the Messianic hopes of the oppressed and downtrodden found ready-made forms which further stimulated their religious fantasy. Here a definite role was played by the Old Testament Messianic doctrine as well as by many other beliefs and notions of the peoples of the ancient Orient and the Graeco-Roman world.

For the creation of a syncretic image of the Messiah that would have popular appeal, the religious fantasy of the peoples of the Mediterranean during the first centuries of our era had ample material to draw on. Such material could be found in pre-Christian beliefs going back to ancient times, and above all in Judaism. What was needed was the appropriate social and historical conditions that would push it in that direction. And such conditions were not lacking.

The social and historical conditions of all the peoples of the Roman empire, subjugated by the powerful slave-owning state, provided fertile soil for the development of Messianic ideas and legends.

The peoples living under the iron yoke of the Roman Empire had no hope whatever of freeing themselves by earthly means. Following the defeats of national liberation movements and uprisings of slaves, there emerged a realisation of the utter futility of armed resistance. People could only look to supernatural forces for help. During that period Messianic cults sprang up and flourished throughout the Roman Empire. Owing to a number of historical circumstances, of all these cults Judaic Messianism proved to have the broadest appeal among the populace of the Roman Empire.

The legend about Christ and the cult connected with it were originally one of several variants of Judaic Messianism. It was not popular among Jews, who were eagerly awaiting the coming of a Messiah-warrior promised by the prophets, an active and brave messenger of God under whose leadership the chosen people would sooner or later achieve their aims. But after being transferred to a "foreign" environment it quickly won acceptance among the broad masses. In the process it underwent significance changes so that essentially it ceased to be Judaic. Above all, it had to abandon the concept of Israel being God's chosen people; it became a cosmopolitan religious doctrine. The very motivation for the salvation of mankind by a Messiah also had to be modified.

In Judaic Messianism the mission of the Messiah was to save the chosen people from the consequences of their

sins committed against Yahweh. Among the Gentiles, however, this idea had to be expressed differently. So another doctrine emerged, according to which people suffered because of the curse they were under as a consequence of the original sin, and that the Messiah would come not to reconcile the Jews and Yahweh, but to atone for the sins of Adam and Eve and bring about reconciliation between the whole of mankind and a universal God. At the same time changes were introduced in the cult to make it possible for Gentiles to join the new religion: various Judaic laws, including ritual laws relating to food, as well as circumcision, were abolished. Thus, the new religion broke away completely from Judaism.

As it spread among the peoples of the Roman Empire, Christianity came to assimilate many mythological themes, religious ideas and rites that had previously existed among these peoples. This is seen above all in the image of Jesus as the Messiah, an image that was of Judaic origin. It became interwoven with elements of the images and cults of various local saviour-gods who also suffered, died and rose again. As a result, a mixture of many elements formed the image of Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, what is fundamental in this image is the Judaic Messiah. This is evidenced by the fact that the life of Jesus as told in the Gospels relies heavily on Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah.

Besides the general idea about the Messiah, many details in the evangelical narratives are borrowed directly from the Old Testament. Thus, Jesus enters Jerusalem "sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass" (Matthew 21:5). As noted earlier, it is not clear how anyone could sit on two animals at once. The source of this strange picture is the book of the prophet Zechariah: "... behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zechariah 9:9). The words with which people greeted the "son of David"--"Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord"--almost repeat a line from one of the psalms (Psalm 118:26). The price of thirty pieces of silver for which Judas betrayed Jesus was anticipated in the Book of Zechariah: "So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver" (11:12).

Even the way Judas disposed of this money--he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple--is found in the Book of Zechariah where it is said that in accordance with God's instructions "I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord" (11:13). The words spoken by Jesus at the last supper--"Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me" (Matthew 26:21)--echo Psalm 41: "yea, mine own familiar friend ... which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (41:9). The description of the crucifixion of Jesus also reminds one of passages in the Old Testament. Jesus on the cross was given "vinegar mingled with gall" (Matthew 27:34); in Psalm 71 we read: "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (69:21). Jesus' last words before his death are taken directly from Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1). Some details in the fantastic picture portrayed in The Revelation are also borrowed from the Old Testament, and especially from the book of the prophet Daniel: the beast "with seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy" and the leopard "and his feet were as the feet of a bear and his mouth as the mouth of a lion" (Revelation 13:2).

These coincidences can also be interpreted in a different way. For churchmen and conservative theologians they confirm the wisdom of the Old Testament prophets who had foretold what took place several centuries later. But a scientific approach excludes such an interpretation. Common sense points to another, rather obvious, conclusion. Some documents were written earlier, and others later, the earlier documents being known to the authors of the later ones; and so if there are coincidences between the earlier and the later texts it means that the authors of the later texts borrowed from the earlier ones. Therefore, historians and theologians who employ scientific methods are not too far from the truth when they say that much use was made of Old Testament texts in creating the biography of Jesus Christ as told in the Gospels. For instance, the Protestant theologian Martin Dibelius has said that the Old Testament texts "created history", meaning that the story of Jesus was built up on the basis of

the Old Testament. Admittedly, this is somewhat exaggerated, for the imagination of the authors of the Gospels was nourished by many other sources besides the Old Testament.

Indeed, towards the beginning of the first century the ideological and religious system of the Old Testament itself was no longer perceived only in its traditional and literal sense. From the time of Aristobulus, and particularly in the writings of Philo of Alexandria, an allegorical significance was ascribed to it.

Engels, like Bruno Bauer, called Philo the father of Christianity. What was Philo's contribution to the formation of the image of Jesus Christ?

The basic religious and philosophical tendency of Philo's works is Gnostic. According to Gnosticism, God, being the supreme deity, has no direct relationship with the material world, which is inferior. The link between God and the world is maintained through certain intermediary forces that are at once physical and spiritual and that, in some mysterious way, emanate from God. In these "hypostases", "aeons", "ideas" (Plato's terms), which assume physical form accessible to human perception, is embodied one or another aspect or property of the infinite and unfathomable divinity.

Among the various trends of Gnosticism, aeons or hypostases, or Sophia (wisdom) and Logos (word) in Greek, are the best-known. The concept of Logos plays an especially important role in Philo's philosophy. Philo regards Logos as the intermediary between God and the world; he characterises Logos as the interpreter of God's intent, God's deputy and messenger, the first-born son of God, and sometimes God himself or a second God. This conception is reflected in John's Gospel which begins with a reference to Logos: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

Logos is not a human being, but some mystical incorporeal being. At God's command it becomes incarnated and assumes human form. This peculiar quality of the Logos made it possible for Gnostic ideas to influence the Messianic doctrine. Under this influence the Messiah was easily transformed from a human being, even one vested

with supreme power, into a supernatural being in corporeal form. Accordingly, people's expectation of the Messiah's appearance also underwent a change.

Among the cults that contributed to that mixture of heterogeneous elements which together make up the image of Christ was Judaic Gnosticism. But the conception of the Messiah as the Logos could not in itself form the basis of this image. It was philosophically too subtle and abstract to be acceptable from a religious and mythological point of view. The religious consciousness of the masses needs something figurative and concrete, and not metaphysical abstractions. The Gnostic Logos could influence Christianity only in a form that was more down-to-earth. Engels pointed out that "the fact that it was popularised Philonic notions and not Philo's own work that Christianity proceeded from is proven by the New Testament".⁷⁹ He noted the "debased, vulgarised form" which Gnostic ideas assumed in Christianity. At the same time he stressed that in a study of the origins of Christianity these ideas must be taken into account.

To Orthodox Judaism the deification of a human being was unthinkable, for that would be blasphemy from the point of view of the Old Testament. To the modernised Philonian Judaism of that period, however, it would be the deification not of a human being but of something abstract which emanates from God and is enclosed in God himself. With the help of such reasoning the heathen notions about human beings who were at the same time deities and whose mission was to save mankind became "ennobled" and made acceptable to the Jews to a certain extent. But only to a certain extent, and as history shows, to a very small extent. For Christianity did not spread among the Jews. Christianity had to seek converts among other peoples of the Roman Empire, and in this it entirely succeeded.

Thus, elements of religious and mythological concepts that existed among different peoples about a Messiah-saviour "merged" to make up a more or less uniform image of Jesus Christ. We say "more or less" because the image did not really become a uniform one. Its obvious internal contradictions are evidence that it owed its origin to a great variety of sources. Nevertheless, something new did emerge, and this is the portrait of Jesus Christ as given

in the Gospels, which was afterwards canonised in the sacred books and dogmas of the Christian religion.

The image of Jesus Christ, as we have seen, did not spring up from nowhere. The ground for it was prepared by preceding developments. The same is true of his teachings. The prophecy about the approaching end of the world and the call to repentance, the exhortation to forsake earthly prosperity in order to save one's soul in the kingdom to come, contempt for wealth and the wealthy, love for one's near ones and peaceful nonresistance to evil as the basis of morals were all attributed to Jesus Christ by the Gospels. Yet it was found in religious and social movements and doctrines that preceded Christianity.

In the novel *A Reliquia* by the Portuguese writer Eça de Queiroz, the Rabbi Gamaliel says, referring to Christianity:

"Well, what is there that is new or special? Or do you imagine that a Nazoraean rabbi drew these dogmas from the bottom of his heart? But our creed is full of these dogmas.... Do you want to hear about love, mercy, equality? Read the book of Jesus, the son of Sidrah.... All this was preached by your friend Iokonan [a reference to John the Baptist--*I.K.*], who had ended so sadly in the prison of Makeros."⁸⁰

Indeed, the moral principles preached by the Rabbi Hillel, for example, who lived in the first century, were very close in spirit to the Sermon on the Mount. When he was asked about the essence of his creed, Hillel replied:

"What is unpleasant to thyself that do not to thy neighbour; this is the whole Law, all else is but its exposition."

But it is not without reason that Gamaliel mentions the heathens, though he does so somewhat contemptuously. For among the heathens, too, there were clearly formulated moral principles which resembled those set forth in the Gospels and which date back to an earlier period. We may recall in this connection the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca whom Engels for this very reason called the uncle of Christianity. This tutor to Nero expounded the moral of the parable about the rich man and Lazarus, although Seneca himself, a wealthy man, could surely have been the

rich man in the story. But regardless of the personal motives of Seneca, who unquestionably was an outstanding example of a hypocrite, his ethical teaching differs little from that of the Gospels. Incidentally, hardly any of Seneca's followers, either ancient or modern, is much inferior to Seneca when it comes to hypocrisy and divergence of words and deeds....

To sum up, we see that towards the beginning of our era the social thought of different peoples offered enough material for the creation of the image of Jesus. This material could have been used with the help of religious imagination to enrich the image of someone who really existed, or a mythological image of such a person could have been created. We have considered the first of these possibilities in detail. The second, it seems to me, is the more probable.

The most likely place for the rise of the Christian legend is not Palestine, but one of the countries of the Jewish Diaspora, in particular Egypt or Asia Minor. The earliest of the New Testament books, The Revelation, was addressed to all seven Christian communities in Asia Minor. The oldest fragments of the Evangelical manuscripts known to scholars were found in Egypt. There is no proof that the New Testament books were originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic. The only known text is in Greek, and the Greek text is replete with Aramaisms and Hebraisms. This can only mean that their authors were Jews living outside Palestine, within the boundaries of Hellenistic culture, and that their command of the language of this culture was not so perfect as to prevent their Jewish origin from being felt. It may be argued that the Greek language was sufficiently well known also in Judea at that time and so the New Testament books could have been written in Greek there. This, however, is a weak argument. The written language in Judea at that time was Aramaic, not Greek. Besides, these books were obviously intended for the ordinary people of Judea who, of course, could not read Greek.

Let us picture to ourselves the ideological climate in the cities of the Diaspora at the beginning of our era. Its chief element was the anxious waiting for the coming of the Messiah, which was linked with hopes of a radical

change in the entire existing order and restoration of the Judaic kingdom in all its power and glory. The hearts of the exiles and emigrants were turned towards Judea and Jerusalem where the Messiah, a descendant of the house of David, was to appear. And from time to time there were rumours from Judea that he had come or was about to come. But each time these exciting rumours proved to be unfounded. People felt discouraged and betrayed. Yet they continued to hope, for they had a strong yearning for freedom and prosperity, for deliverance from national and social oppression. Old rumours were succeeded by new ones. Some of them proved doubtful or failed to satisfy the ideological requirements of the moment and were soon forgotten, while others were found more acceptable and took root, attracting more and more followers who began to embellish the original legend with new elements. In this process of "natural selection" the legend associated with the name of Jesus Christ survived and eventually triumphed.

What made this legend so attractive? What enabled it to put down such strong roots?

Like all Messianic legends, the Christian legend was attractive because it inspired hopes for liberation from a seemingly hopeless situation. But it had another feature which assured it of a most important advantage: it could not be verified by practice. Anyone with Messianic aspirations would have to prove the legitimacy of his claims by real deeds, by military or other kinds of victories, by some achievements that would signify fulfilment of the will of Yahweh who had decided to forgive and save his chosen people and bring them glory. And when from faraway Judea came news that yet another Messiah had failed in his mission, the end of the legend was near. If this legend were based on an imaginary person, it too would inevitably be discredited. As years passed there would be less and less rumours about him, and since his "activity" had not led to any real results, the legend would die a natural death. The legend about Christ had a different fate.

Its main concept is that the Messiah should not triumph in the real, visible world, but should perish in it. The world sunk in the mire of evil would meet its "final

reckoning" only in some distant future. People were accustomed to waiting for this future: the whole Messianic ideology was built on such expectations. But here it was more than a matter of waiting. The legend made people feel that something had been fulfilled and accomplished, while at the same time there was still room for hope. The legend was all the more viable since the question of whether something had indeed been accomplished could not be verified.

If the Christian legend had originated in Palestine and were of a mythical character it could have been exposed. There would be demands for eyewitnesses and participants in the events and all "enthusiasts" to be brought forth. As for people who lived at the time in Jerusalem and other localities where, according to the legend, the events took place, they could easily refute it; they would simply say that nothing of the kind had occurred. But if the events took place in faraway Palestine several decades ago, there was no way of verifying them. The Messiah was born (in a miraculous way!); he preached and worked wonders; he was persecuted and crucified, then rose again and went to heaven; how could one verify all this if the events took place in a faraway place at an unspecified time? As for that which could be verified, it would take place only in the future. So one could do little except keep one's faith and wait.

True, here is the Achilles' heel of the legend. The second coming of Christ "in all his glory" was promised as a momentous event which should occur in the very near future, during the lifetime of that generation. The fact that it had not taken place could seriously undermine the new faith. Between the time when the foundations of the Christian legend were laid and the time when it was formulated as a system of dogmas several generations had passed. Meanwhile, the second coming had not taken place. Very likely a large number of followers of the new doctrine fell away as a result. But many--they could be the majority, but they could also be a minority--only became strengthened in their faith. This was in part made possible by the kind of arguments that were used: what was said was incorrectly interpreted, there was a mistake in calculations as regards the date concerned, and the like. Such arguments are still used in our time to rescue a

prophecy that had failed to come true. As is known, the Adventists to this very day continue to believe that Doomsday is near despite the fact that their calculations on the subject have obviously been wrong. So the vulnerable point of the Christian legend turns out to be not so threatening after all.

In a sense the legend about a Messiah who was born and died in faraway Judea could have originated and spread among the Jews living in the Diaspora "out of nothing", meaning that it was not based on a real person. But once the legend appeared among the Jews of the Diaspora it could have spread very quickly among those peoples with whom the Jews were in constant economic and cultural-ideological contact. As Robertson notes, "Jews and Gentiles were not mutually isolated, but mingled daily in the Mediterranean cities, the poorer Jews propagating their vision of a coming Messiah and in the process assimilating it to the poorer Gentiles' dream of a redeeming god triumphant over death".⁸¹ In the continual diffusion of ideas among the peoples of the Hellenistic cultural world the legend about Christ won over more and more followers with each decade. Meanwhile, it was being constantly enriched by what the new followers brought to it from their own historical and religious experience.

Of the two possible variants why do I consider more likely the one according to which the Evangelical legend does not have a historical kernel in the form of a real person?

The other variant has too many weak points; there is too much in it that cannot be explained. It is not merely a question of the "silence of the century", although this of course is of considerable importance. No less significant is the fact that the history of the image of Jesus reveals a fairly clear picture of an evolution not of God from a man, but of a man from God.

The earlier the date of the composition of a New Testament book or document, the more clearly Jesus Christ appears in it as a god, as the sacrificial lamb brought to the slaughter to take away our sins forever, as Logos, as a supernatural abstract principle, and not as a man of flesh and blood with an historically concrete biography. And reversely, the later the date of the composi-

tion of the New Testament book or document, the more elements of an earthly biography of Jesus it contains. Obviously, later generations could not recall what preceding generations did not know. From what depository of memories could they draw this information? The only source of such information was the people's religious imagination which was constantly stimulated by the historical situation and by the social conditions of those social and national groups among whom the beliefs and myths of primitive Christianity took shape.

One of the most prominent theorists of the mythological school, Arthur Drews, has written: "The non-historicity of Jesus is as firmly established scientifically as the non-historicity of Lucurgus [An early Spartan hero--I.K.], Romulus and Remus, the seven Roman kings, Horatius Cocles and William Tell."⁸² One could agree with this, but with one reservation, notably, given available sources today, and this is all the more so since there is serious doubt among scholars that some of the personages named by Drews were mythical. One should not discount the possibility that some time in the future new materials and documents might be discovered which would call for a fresh look at the question about Christ. True, the possibility is small, for the picture we now have is sufficiently clear.

The view that Jesus Christ did not exist as an actual historical personality rests on a rich and long-standing tradition in historical literature. This tradition can be traced as far back as the first centuries of Christianity. In his *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho* Justin made his opponent say:

"You are following unfounded rumours, you have invented a Christ for yourself.... Even if he were born and had lived somewhere, he is at any rate completely unknown to anyone."⁸³

Subsequently many authors have in separate comments and remarks expressed doubt about the historicity of Christ. But a mythological interpretation of the image of Christ appeared as a definite trend only at the end of the 18th century.

In their studies of the history of religion C.F. Volney and especially Charles François Dupuis, participants

in the French bourgeois revolution, expressed the conviction that Christ was a mythical figure and substantiated their view on the basis of what was then known to historical science.⁸⁴ Both authors considered the image to be a representation of the Sun god, the concept of which was borrowed by Christianity from previous Graeco-Roman and ancient Oriental religions.

The next landmark in the development of the mythological school was the works of the outstanding German New Testament scholar, Bruno Bauer (1809-1882). Bauer's views on the subject underwent a rather drastic change. In his early works he did not doubt the historical existence of Christ, though even there the groundwork was laid for an opposite point of view. Already in the third volume of his major work *A Critique of the Evangelical History of the Synoptics and John's Gospel*, Bauer formulated the principles of a mythological interpretation of the image of Christ.⁸⁵ On the basis of a thorough analysis of the Gospels he showed that they were entirely unreliable as historical sources. In his many works published subsequently Bauer made a similarly painstaking analysis of the remaining books of the New Testament, which reinforced his conviction that the image of Christ was mythical in origin.

Engels considered Bauer's studies to be highly important. They showed, Engels wrote, that "... almost nothing from the whole content of the Gospels turns out to be historically provable so that the historical existence of a Jesus Christ can be questioned".⁸⁶ As we see, Engels did not take a categorical position on the question of the historical existence of Christ, which for him remained only doubtful. He expressed the hope that future discoveries and research would throw more light on the subject.

At the turn of the present century the mythological interpretation of the personality of Christ received fresh support from scholarly research. In Germany, the Netherlands, France, Britain and other countries there appeared a large number of works in which various authors expounded the mythological approach.

From the 1870s many researchers in the Netherlands unequivocally rejected the view that Christ was a real

person. The first of these was A. Hoekstra, who in 1871 published *The Christology of the Canonical Gospel of St. Mark*.⁸⁷ In it he substantiated the thesis that the Gospels are not a historical document but works of symbolic poetry and therefore all the personages in it can be considered merely as the product of literary imagination. This point of view was thoroughly examined and carried further by another Dutch scholar A. Pierson, in *The Sermon on the Mount and other Synoptic Fragments*, which appeared in 1878.⁸⁸ An interesting work in terms of conception and manner of presentation is *Tough Nuts* by C. Naber, another representative of the Dutch school.⁸⁹ Naber addresses to the orthodox theologians forty questions relating to the interpretation of Paul's epistles and other New Testament books. Naber believed, and quite correctly, that those questions would be "tough nuts" for the theologians to crack.

Subsequently, other Dutch scholars contributed to the literature on Christology. In many of their works they set forth on the basis of a thorough analysis of the New Testament books the thesis about the mythical origin of the image of Jesus Christ (A.D. Loman, W.C. van Manen and G.J. Boland). In 1912 G.A. Berg published a book summing up the views and achievements of the Dutch mythological school, with the title *Radical Dutch Critics of the New Testament*.⁹⁰

The same period saw the publication of a series of works by British and US supporters of the mythological school. From 1900 a number of studies by J. Robertson and T. Whitethacker (Britain), W.B. Smith (the United States) and others were published. In his numerous studies J. Robertson traces the pre-Christian history of the image of Christ, showing the genetic links between it and the old Hebrew cult of Iegoshua and other cults with roots stretching back to ancient times. W.B. Smith shows that the image of Jesus first took shape as an image of God, and not of man. One of Smith's major works is called *Ecce Deus*,⁹¹ in contrast to the Evangelical phrase "Ecce Homo".

At the beginning of the 20th century official Christian theologians waged a fierce campaign against German scholars who upheld the mythological conception. The

latter included A. Kalthoff and Samuel Lublinski, followed by Arthur Drews,⁹² probably the best-known among them. One could say without exaggeration that the name Drews almost became synonymous with the mythological school. Lenin said that Marxists should establish "an 'alliance' with the Drewses",⁹³ referring of course not to a community of political and ideological views, for there was no such community, but to a common approach to the question of the historicity of Christ.

In his numerous works, the first of which is *The Myth About Christ* (1909), Drews sums up all the previous arguments against the historicity of Christ and sets forth his own views on the subject. His approach to the origins of Christianity involves the hypothesis that Gnosticism had a decisive influence on the rise of the Christian doctrine and also that this doctrine could be traced to astral sources. This hypothesis is not sufficiently well-substantiated. But in his criticism of the basic "historical" conception of Christ the man, Drews is on firm ground, adducing materials and arguments that are indisputable.

Drews' studies evoked a sharp reaction from the custodians of official theology. When the free-thinking "Union of Monists" held two public discussions in Berlin on the question of the historicity or mythical origin of Christ, the theologians took it as a challenge and decided to carry their battle from the pages of the scholarly press to the arena of public debate, which took place at a circus and a cathedral.⁹⁴ They failed, however, to present any serious arguments against the mythological conception. The main point of their argument was that Drews was not a theologian and was therefore an amateur on matters relating to religion. This argument did not, of course, sound very convincing.

At the beginning of the 20th century supporters of the mythological trend also appeared in other countries. They included A. Niemoyewski (Poland), P.-L. Couchoud, Prosper Alfaric and Edouard Dujardin (France), and Georg Brandes (the Netherlands).⁹⁵ Works of this trend were also known in Russia before the October Revolution of 1917, although they were not widely circulated owing to censorship. When Drews's book *The Myth About Christ*,

translated into Russian by Nikolai Morozov, a well-known revolutionary and a member of the Narodnaya Volya, was published in 1910, the censors had the entire printing burned. A. Niemojewski was jailed for one year for publishing his books in Russian.

In Soviet historiography the mythological school holds an important place as regards the subject of the origins of Christianity. True, the first work on this question published after the revolution, in 1918, argued in favour of the historicity of Christ. The book, *Jesus and the Early Christian Communes* was by Nikolai Nikolsky, a well-known and progressive-minded scholar.⁹⁶ His argument, however, was weak and did not really come to grips with the main propositions of the mythological school. In the same year a book with the title *The Rise of Christianity* by Robert Vipper, an outstanding historian of our time, was published.⁹⁷ After examining all the literature on this subject Vipper came to the conclusion that the conception of Jesus as a concrete historical personality lacked serious documental proof. Since then Soviet historiography has firmly taken a position that rejects the historicity of Christ.

A large project was undertaken to translate and publish in Russian several works by authors belonging to the mythological school. *Jesus the God* by A. Niemojewski was published in 1920, followed three years later by his *Philosophy of the Life of Jesus*.⁹⁸ From 1924 several books by Arthur Drews were published, including *The Myth About Christ*, his principal work, and *Rejection of the Historicity of Christ in the Past and at Present*,⁹⁹ which is a study of the history of the mythological school. Besides these publications, there appeared in Russian translated works by P.-L. Couchoud, E. Moutier-Rousset, E. Hertlein, G. Brandes, C.F. Volney and others.¹⁰⁰

Some works by authors belonging to the historical school were also published. *Jesus versus Christ* by Henri Barbusse¹⁰¹ aroused lively comment in the Soviet press. Later, *The Origins of Christianity* by Archibald Robertson, the English specialist in religious history and a communist, came out in two editions. In articles that accompany the book the Soviet historian S. Kovalev expressed views opposite to those of Robertson.¹⁰²

Over a period of several years, starting from 1924, a multivolume work called *Christ* by Nikolai Morozov was published.¹⁰³ This is a curious work. In substance, Morozov rejects the entire history of antiquity as an invention of the Middle Ages. The Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels, according to Morozov, did not exist, but there lived a person in the fourth century known as Basilii the Great and it is he who should be identified with Jesus Christ. Morozov's thesis is based on a rather rash and arbitrary comparison of historical data and astronomical phenomena, which are supposedly symbolised in these data and on an equally arbitrary interpretation of the meaning of names that appear in historical sources. For example, the Greek name Basilii (*basilevs*) means "king"; the Gospels repeatedly mention Christ as the King of the Jews. Morozov regards this coincidence as sufficient grounds for identifying Basilii the Great with Christ. In his astronomical comparisons Morozov followed to a certain extent the arguments of Volney, Dupuis and Niemojewski and to a considerable extent those of Drews and the Soviet historian N. Rumyantsev. Incidentally, Rumyantsev dissociated himself from the extreme views of Morozov and took issue with the latter. On the whole Morozov's views were not accepted by Soviet historiography.

Soviet historians and specialists in religious history based the mythological interpretation of the image of Christ on a careful study of source materials as well as on classical writings on the subject by foreign authors. In this connection special mention should be made of the studies by N. Rumyantsev, A. Ranovich, R. Vipper, S. Kovalev and Ya. Lentsman.¹⁰⁴ In them the mythological explanation of Christ is linked with the general Marxist conception of the origins of Christianity and with an analysis of the social and class roots of this religion. Soviet research on this question rests on Engels' studies of the history of early Christianity and on methodological principles indicated by Lenin.

It should be noted that of late some Soviet authors tend to reject the mythological interpretation. For example, in the book *From the Commune to the Church* I. Svetsitskaya regards the historical existence of Christ, founder of Christianity, as an established fact that does not need verification.¹⁰⁵ Svetsitskaya de-

clares that "archaeological excavations have shown remnants of a settlement" in the area where Nazareth was situated in the time of Jesus, but does not say who carried out the excavations or where the results of the archaeological work are published. Earlier we have considered passages from the book by Thompson which clearly indicate that such remnants have not been found.

Thus, the main arguments of the mythological school remain valid. Let us sum up.

First, historical sources of the first century contain no mention of the personality and activity of Christ, even in those instances where, it would seem, the figure of Christ and his life could not but attract the attention of authors of historical, philosophical and publicistic works or be reflected in some official or semi-official documents. Second, in early Christian literature the image of Christ evolves chronologically according to the scheme "from God to man". The earlier the document, the less concrete the image of Christ as a man, the sketchier his earthly biography and the closer his image to that of God.

Until at least single testimony to the existence of Christ is found, a testimony that goes back to the first third or not later than the middle of the first century and that came from an eyewitness of or a participant in the events described in the Gospels or from one directly transmitting the testimony of an eyewitness, until then, the historicity of Christ remains assertions unsupported by facts and resting solely on the Christian tradition which took shape at the turn of the second century. As for the thesis on the evolution of the image of Christ, it not only remains valid but has in recent years acquired still greater relevance.

Of the four Gospels, St. John's Gospel was thought to be the latest, chronologically speaking. It is probably the only Gospel that would contradict the above-mentioned scheme of evolution since in it the earthly and human features of the image of Christ are less pronounced than in the Synoptics. In John's Gospel there is no description of the birth or childhood of Jesus, the emphasis of the entire narrative being on the Word (Logos): "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,

and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Now, in view of the fact that St. John's Gospel is close to the Qumran documents in spirit, and also in the light of John Rylands' discovery of a papyrus, some authors consider St. John's Gospel to be the earliest of the four Gospels. If we accept this hypothesis, the aforesaid objection to the thesis on the evolution of the image of Christ falls away. In fact, the thesis may be said to be reinforced. For in this case John's Gospel fits "neatly" into the logical scheme of development of the Christian legend between the Epistles and the Synoptics, and this can only confirm the thesis about the evolution "from God to man".

Future discoveries may possibly disprove all the logical considerations that have so far supported the mythological theory. New facts can give rise to "new logic" and thus lead to different conclusions from those we have reached. But only a person with a biased and tendentious approach would proceed from "possible" future discoveries while ignoring the indisputable facts we now possess.

In the light of the present stage of historiography, the problem of the origins of Christianity should be approached without reference to the personality of Christ and his activity, which, from the traditional theological viewpoint, is the starting point of the history of Christianity. What is of interest here is only how the image of Christ gradually took shape, how it became historicised and transformed from the mystical lamb and the Word into a real human being with a concrete biography.

In the evolution of the image of Jesus one can see two component parts of the Christian dogma. First, the Messiah has already been on earth and will come again some time in the future. And second, with all his holiness and divinity the Messiah was a human being with a real earthly biography, one who was born in this world and died (or at any rate whose existence came to an end). Both aspects of this process of historicising found expression in the New Testament documents of the second century, namely, St. Paul's Epistles and the Gospels. And if we assume that this process began with the Epistles, it seems to be completed in the Gospels.

In order to understand the process whereby Christ was

transformed into a historical personality, it is necessary to establish the ideological reasons (which are socially conditioned) for the need of such a transformation. Why could not Jesus remain in the imagination of his followers a mystical lamb or God who only had to come down to earth some time in the future and appear not as a man but as a divine being?

Owing to historical circumstances such a variant of the new religion would be inadequate. The new religion was in constant struggle against Judaism. The Christian dogma must be seen to contain new elements, and they had to go further than the orthodox Judaic expectation of the coming of the Messiah. The doctrine that the Messiah had already come and had essentially fulfilled his mission was a new element that attracted the early Christians. It became especially significant at a time when the liberation movements were suppressed by Rome, when hopes for the coming of a militant and victorious Messiah were frustrated by the most convincing argument, that is, life itself. But if the Messiah had already come, then one only had to know how it happened, in what way his deeds were carried out, what kind of a personality he was, where he was born and how he died, and so on.

The enemies of Christianity demanded more and more new arguments that would confirm its truthfulness. If the Messiah had come, they said, what did he do, where did he live, what did he teach, how and in what circumstances did he find himself in the supernatural world? The early Christians could ward off these blows only by working out a biography of Christ with the help of imagination.

A cult was formed, and new rites, which were often borrowed from "foreign" religions, emerged and became consolidated. In the minds of the Christians, however, their explanation or justification had to flow from a new mythological environment. There arose new etiological myths which had to be linked to the personality of Christ and become part of his biography.

The position of the clergy--the institution of presbyters and bishops--was growing ever stronger; the formation of the Christian church was under way. But it was not enough that the church had concentrated in its hands

economic and administrative power. It needed ideological sanction. It was necessary to prove that Christ had disciples, the apostles who laid the foundation of the church and as their sacred duty handed over their authority to the next generation of church officials. In an episode described in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus instructs the apostle Peter to build the church and rule over it (Matthew 16:18-19). This provides a basis for the claims by bishops and presbyters that they were successors to Christ, his authoritative representatives. But for such sanction to be convincing it must be part of a complete biography of Christ.

The same applies to the ethical system of the new religion. The moral principles prescribed by it would command respect if it could be said that they were taught by Christ himself. But the question of when and in what circumstances he taught them could only be answered by referring to corresponding episodes of his biography. This provided an additional stimulus to embellishing the biography by the imagination of the followers of Christianity.

This, however, does not explain why it had to be the biography of a human being and not of God. For it would seem that sermons and teachings would be more authoritative if they came from a deity rather than from a human being.

Here the new religion was influenced by what its followers brought with them from older faiths and cults. In Judaism and the religions of the Hellenistic world the divine saviours are often both gods and men, and not "pure" gods. According to the Old Testament the Messiah must be a descendant of King David and be a king himself; in other words, a human being. In another version of Judaic Messianism, founded on the fifty-third chapter of the Book of Isaiah and other Old Testament sources, the Messiah is conceived of as one who suffers and sacrificed himself for the sins of man. Here, too, the Messiah is a human being with his weaknesses and sufferings. As is known, in Hellenistic religions the cult of saviours who die and rise again was widespread. Beginning with Prometheus, these saviours are both gods and men, heroes and demigods with carefully elaborated earthly biographies.

Faith in Jesus the man made Christianity especially attractive to people. The humanity of Jesus, his limitations and weaknesses, his capacity for experience, for suffering, his defenselessness and in some instances his helplessness--all this brought him, both as god and man, much closer to those who believed in him than an inaccessible, infinitely aloof and perfect God who dwelled in a state of bliss. Believers no doubt felt particularly drawn to one who was persecuted, who suffered and was crucified. To them he was one of their own kind and could therefore understand the needs of those who suffered and were oppressed.

Herein lies one of the paradoxical aspects of religion. Logically speaking, the god who cannot save himself from suffering is unlikely to be able to deliver mankind from it. But this is a contradiction inherent in any religion. The corresponding fantastic ideas took shape historically and gradually became crystallised, and since people are accustomed to them they are not struck by their obvious inconsistency.

In working out an earthly biography of Jesus Christ, the early Christians in the second half of the first century drew on various Judaic beliefs and on the mythology of all the lands of the Hellenistic world, many of whose people joined Christian communes. A big role here was played by the cults, widespread in the Mediterranean region, of a god who suffered, died and rose again. However, in the religious documents, namely, the books of the New Testament, where the biography of Christ is set forth, references are made only to the Old Testament and the prophecies it contains.

The basic material with which the early Christians built up a biography of Jesus the man was borrowed from the Old Testament. This trend of biographical myth-making can be seen in Paul's Epistles (Gal. 3:8; 1 Cor. 15:4).

This trend is more consistently followed in the Gospels. Jesus was that Judaic king from the house of David whom Yahweh had repeatedly "promised" his people through the prophets (Isaiah 11:4; Dan. 7:13-14). He was born in Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2); and so the Evangelists made his parents undertake a strange journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem where a census was being taken. And Nazareth was

needed in order to justify calling the Messiah a "Nazarene" (Judges 13:5, 16:17; Amos 2:11). Here, however, the Evangelists apparently failed to understand that the word "Nazarene" is not etymologically derived from the name of the city Nazareth. In the biography of Jesus as given in the Gospels we find a number of references and allusions to passages in the Old Testament, including some which sound somewhat odd. Thus, Jesus rode on two asses as he entered Jerusalem, a parallel to a passage in the Book of Zechariah (9:9); Roman soldiers quoted the Old Testament when they tore the coat of Jesus and divided it (Psalm 22:18; John 19:24), and so on.

Paul's Epistles were of such great importance in the shaping of the Christian dogma that, according to some Protestant historians, it is Paul, and not Christ, that was the founder of Christianity. There is much truth in this. For it is impossible, on the basis of Christ's sermons, aphorisms and parables, to construct the dogmas that became the foundation of the Christian faith and of all subsequent Christian theological elaborations. But it is possible to derive such basic principles from Paul's Epistles.

According to one of these principles, Christ appeared in the world in order to decide the fate not only of the Jewish people but of all mankind. As Christianity came to acquire a universal character in the first half of the second century, it was necessary to change its main dogmatic postulate. This meant a break with the doctrine of the exclusiveness of the "chosen people" and with the nationalistic Judaic doctrine of the Messiah. And if the Messiah would come in order to save the whole of mankind from suffering, a new explanation of the causes of the suffering was called for. It could no longer be a matter of the Jews committing sins against their God Yahweh and of their worship of "other people's gods". It would have to do with a universal factor of significance to all mankind. The most important of these factors was the Old Testament myth about the Fall of Adam. It is to atone for Adam's disobedience that the son of God must die on the cross (Roman 5:12-19). It is difficult to describe the underlying conception of this basic principle of Christianity in any logical way. From the point of view of common sense everything here is illogical, start-

ing with the Fall of Adam and Eve and ending with its atonement. Nevertheless, this conception was formulated and affirmed in Paul's Epistles in the second century and has remained a basic Christian conception ever since.

There is a vast literature devoted to the authenticity of Paul's Epistles and the historicity of Paul. The most radical wing of the mythological school considers Paul as well as Christ and all the other apostles to be mythological figures. In our opinion, this conclusion is not well-grounded. The number "twelve" undoubtedly had symbolic significance. It is found in many ancient religions, especially Judaism. We may recall the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of the Israelites. However, one fact is not in doubt: an important role in the propagation of Christianity in those days was played by migrant preachers who travelled throughout the Mediterranean region, sought converts and formed communes. Whether among them there were persons with "those very names" or whether the names were later attributed to them to lend them authority is of no major importance. Where there is no direct evidence against the authenticity of a particular name; there are no grounds for not accepting it. As for Paul, he probably has a better claim to historicity than any of the other apostles.

With respect to the others, the fact that they are given the role of companions and collaborators of Christ in the Gospels may well make us doubt whether they had a real existence. In considering Christ to be a mythical personality we are to some extent considering his companions to be mythical personalities as well. In the case of Paul, matters stand somewhat differently. Paul "saw and heard" Christ only in an ecstatic state, which could mean that he was in a state of hallucination. The personality and activity of Paul at crucial stages of his life seem quite plausible. There are no grounds for doubting the existence of someone who lived and preached at the end of the first century and during the first decades of the second century, that he was a fanatic and, at the same time, a talented adherent of the new religion and had not only organised religious communes throughout a large region in the Mediterranean but had also systematised its dogmas. His name could be Paul, or Saul in Hebrew. But this does not mean that all the episodes in

his biography as described in the Acts and the Epistles are historically authentic. Nor it impossible that Paul was the author of the epistles which he addressed to Christian communes and their leaders.

NOTES

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III. CHRISTOLOGY IN MODERN THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL LITERATURE

"The Collapse of an Image"

Most modern authors writing on the subject will admit, some more readily than others, that all attempts to reconstruct a historical image of Christ have failed. It has become quite usual for theologians, whose piety is beyond doubt, to speak about the collapse of the image of Christ.

Albert Schweitzer, better known as a humanist and public figure than a theologian, though highly respected in the field of theology, sums up the attempts to build an image and a biography of Christ as follows: "There is nothing more negative than the results of the research into the life of Jesus."¹ As noted in the preceding chapter, Schweitzer's position on the historicity of Jesus is somewhat puzzling. Still, it is Schweitzer who makes this rather categorical statement:

"The Jesus of Nazareth who appeared as the Messiah, preached the morals of the Kingdom of God, established a heavenly kingdom on earth and died in order to sanctify his deeds--this Jesus never existed. It is an image discarded by rationalism, resurrected by liberalism and altered by modern theology by means of historical studies."

Schweitzer goes so far as to say that "the historical foundation of Christianity no longer exists".² True, he makes it clear that he is not saying that Christianity in general is without any historical foundation, only that this foundation is not to be sought in the image of Jesus Christ.

What has caused the collapse of this image? The

malice of the enemies and critics of Christianity? No, says Schweitzer, "... this image is not destroyed from without, but crumbled by itself, shaken and split by factual historical problems that have come up ... in spite of all the tricks, art, artifice and forced interpretation resorted to in the last one hundred and thirty years".³

Schweitzer wrote this in the early part of the 1900s, and so the 130-year period he referred to goes back to the second half of the 18th century. In those years literature and social thought were very much dominated by French philosophers, German rationalists and English deists, whose views were sharply opposed by the Church and by theologians. Today the situation is different: even the most ardent defenders of the Christian dogma have to admit that it is futile to try and construct a historically authentic image of Christ.

The fact is that the main source materials on which such an image can be built, namely, the Gospels, are unreliable. The Protestant theologian Ernst Barnikol has made a study of the passages from the Gospels which most scholars regard as inauthentic and as later additions. He finds twenty-six such passages in John's Gospel and concludes that "almost the entire non-Synoptic part" of this Gospel is "unhistorical". But even in the Synoptic Gospels Barnikol counts forty "unhistorical" passages.⁴ The magazine *Der Spiegel* has given a selection of the sayings and aphorisms of Jesus found in the Gospels which most Lutheran theologians consider inauthentic. There are at least fifteen of them, and they include some that are of fundamental importance: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs ..." (Mat. 7:6); "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even to them ..." (Mat. 7:12); "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased ..." (Luke 14:11), and even the passage on the basis of which the Catholic Church lays claim to supremacy in the Christian world: "... thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church ..." (Mat. 17:18).

The Gospel accounts of certain stages in the life of Jesus, especially the story about his death, are also rejected as inauthentic. For example, according to the Catholic theologian Carl Schelke, "the story about the

last days of Jesus is a residue which cannot be dissolved by historical and theological interpretation, a fact which is not disputed even by conservative theologians".⁵

Thus, it is somewhat amusing to read in theological works references to recent "discoveries" which confront theology with complex new problems. For instance, Hans Conzelman has established that "what the Gospels tell us about the trial of Jesus is not authentic". Hans-Werner Bartsch concludes that the description of the interrogation of Jesus is a "most powerful, novelised scene", in short, excellent fiction. Joseph Geiselman finds that the trial of Jesus is a complete misunderstanding. Martin Dibelius and Hans Freiherr have "established the legendary nature of the immaculate conception".⁶ What is presented here as an achievement of theological thought has in fact been discussed in great detail and on a sound scientific basis by David Strauss and Bruno Bauer and thoroughly studied and analysed by scholars of the mythological school--D. Robertson, A. Kalthoff, A. Drews, A. Niemoyewski and others--at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

It is hard to believe that prominent Christian theologians today can be ignorant of the great amount of historical research that has been done on the New Testament and of its findings. Apparently they prefer to appear as pioneers whose discoveries call for a reappraisal of values. For otherwise it would seem that Christian theologians have up to now concealed from believers important results of scientific investigations. In the end, however, facts that are highly unpleasant and, from the point of view of the Church, "tempting", have to be acknowledged.

One can find many statements by theologians to the effect that we know in fact nothing about Jesus. The authors of such statements usually take the position that the founder of Christianity was a real person but that nothing definite can be said about him. Back in 1910, at the World Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress, Wilhelm Bousset, while maintaining that Christ had a historical existence and that the mythological theory was "utopian and disproved by scientific facts", said:

"What we know about his life in logical sequence is so little that it can be written on a single sheet of paper. Jesus's sermons and the Gospels are at times a tangle of tradition of the community and possibly authentic words of the teacher."⁷

Similar views on the subject were held by the German theologian and Biblical scholar W. Brandt who, like Bousset, upheld the historicity of Christ. Commenting on Brandt's views Arthur Drews wrote:

"There is no reliable information whatever about the life of Jesus besides the fact of his death and resurrection. Brandt shows that the story about the sufferings of Jesus is made up of elements borrowed from the Old Testament and from mythology."⁸

The prominent author Rudolf Bultmann, whose general conception was condemned by the Lutheran Church in 1952, says emphatically that we know practically nothing about the life and personality of Jesus Christ and that we cannot know with any certainty whether any of the sayings attributed to him were indeed his.⁹ A statement like this can of course be dismissed as being untypical of modern theology as a whole, for after all its author is regarded as a heretical thinker. However, a similar point of view is expressed in a semi-official publication of the Evangelical Church, the encyclopaedia *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Religion in History and in Modern Life).

The stages of the biography of Jesus are seen here as a result of literary editing or reworking of the Gospels. The conclusion is therefore drawn that it is no longer possible to establish the sequence of events in the life of Jesus, to write his biography and depict his image. The passage quoted below briefly sums up the view of the formal-historical school, but on the whole the author of the article (from which the quotation is taken) does not dissociate himself from this view: "Thus, a greater part of the tradition cannot be used for establishing precisely particular moments in Jesus' life. We no longer know the sequence of events, and, moreover, cannot reconstruct their external and internal development. Not only the Gospels as a whole, but also separate elements of the tradition are a religious document. They

are therefore of no interest for a 'portrait' of Jesus. Nothing is known about the external appearance of Jesus, or about his character as a man, about his habits and details of his everyday life. Such is the nature of the tradition, and when this is acknowledged, much of the psychological and biographical significance of a greater part of the material is lost. This is especially true of the epiphanies [Episodes about the "manifestation" of Christ--*I.K.*] which tell us nothing about the inner state of Jesus. They are sketched in accordance with the faith of the community, with the post-Easter perspective [According to the Christian tradition the crucifixion of Christ took place during the Jewish Passover holidays--*I.K.*]. The same applies to the prophecies about Jesus' sufferings. They do not throw light on the situation. They are rather dogmatic statements about inevitable sufferings as was imagined by the community after Jesus' death."¹⁰

This passage sums up the view of the theologians of the formal-historical school, whose outstanding representatives are K. Schmidt, M. Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann. The Protestant encyclopaedia does not repudiate this view, though it tries to play down somewhat its significance by seeking out some "reliable points of rest". These "points" are found in the narratives in the Gospels that are not part of Judaistic thought or of the faith of the community that emerged later. These "points", however, must be regarded as rather weak, and the balance as unreliable.

Paul Althaus, a strong defender of the historicity of Jesus, rather doubts the historical authenticity of the source materials for Christological studies. For instance, he finds in John's Gospel only "theological meditations" in the Gnostic style. The sayings of Jesus cited by John are in fact not Jesus' own words (*verba ipsissima*), but a "response of the faith" to certain circumstances in the life of Jesus the God-and-man, and these circumstances are also unknown to us. Even in the Synoptic Gospels not everything is historically authentic. The information they give, says Althaus, citing Bornkamm (a follower of Bultmann), "derives from dogma or is at least interwoven with dogma". And in general, "the tradition of the four Gospels confronts us with difficult

problems and even with the question of whether Jesus of Nazareth lived at all".¹¹

Theologians must somehow solve these problems. The main difficulty for them is that they cannot solve them by acknowledging straightforwardly that Christ is a mythical figure, as this would undermine the Christian dogma.

Commenting on the rejection by Bultmann's followers and other modernists of such episodes in the life of Jesus as his death and resurrection, the conservative leader of the Lutheran Church Walter Künneth writes:

"We ask a simple question: what is in fact left of Easter? From the point of view of these existentialist theologians, absolutely nothing is left. Absolutely nothing!"

Künneth insists that "the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of Christianity, on which everything, all reality rests".¹² Thus, a dilemma arises: "Either rejection of Christ's resurrection, which means the end of Christian theology, the end of the Christian Church, or an acknowledgement of it." If Christ's resurrection is in doubt, the very existence of Jesus Christ is called into question. With regard to the modernist interpretation of Christology E. Heitsch says: "If this is legitimate from the point of view of Christian theology, there is no basis whatever for Christians to remain Christians."¹³ Those who wish to remain Christians would have to uphold the historicity of Christ and the whole biography of Jesus as told in the Gospels, including Christ's resurrection and ascension. E. Barnikol sums up the point of view of conservative Protestantism on this question as follows: "Without a 'life of Jesus', there is no 'Jesus', and without 'Jesus', there is no 'Christianity' or 'Christian piety' (*Christlichkeit*)."¹⁴ Thus, the problems of Christian faith should be solved on the basis of a thorough knowledge of the sources of scientific criticism, both positive and negative, on the subject, while at the same time Christian piety must be preserved which rests on a firm belief that Christ lived and it is possible to compile his authentic biography.

Conservative theologians and churchmen insist that Christians should believe not only in the historicity of Jesus but also in the immaculate conception and in the miracles Jesus performed--healing the sick and raising the dead to life, his own resurrection and ascension. In their view, no one can be called a Christian who does not believe in the "empty sepulcher" (the "sepulcher of the Lord" which became empty after the ascension of Christ).

Supporters of Christian orthodoxy in the Federal Republic of Germany have launched a movement against any concessions to modernism on the question of Christ, including his historicity and the supernatural phenomena connected with his birth, life and death. The movement is called "No Other Gospel!" ("*Kein anderes Evangelium!*"). Its members include the clergy and theologians as well as laymen. It holds mass meetings at which speakers denounce the followers of Bultmann and others whom they call the partisans of atheism. By mobilising the ignorant and fanatic elements of the "community" the movement seeks to put pressure on the Church leadership and prevent it from making concessions to the "new trends" in Christology. As for the Church leadership, they have to resort to manoeuvring. On the one hand, they must not do anything that would offend conservative church-goers and churchmen themselves, while on the other, they cannot ignore scientific criticism of the Gospel narratives. The situation they have to deal with is a complicated one indeed.

The conservative trend in Christology is still stronger among Catholics. About one hundred years ago the First Vatican Oecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1869-1870) reaffirmed in emphatic terms the inseparable link between Catholicism and a belief in the historicity of Jesus and in all the miracles he performed. The miracles, the Council resolution said, should be considered to be fully authentic and in conformity with the understanding of the signs of divine revelation. Under threat of excommunication the Council forbade anyone to interpret the miracles as "legends and myths". At the beginning of the 20th century the Vatican strongly condemned modernism as heresy whose dissemination would

inevitably be the ruination of the Christian. The founders of modernism and its theoreticians headed by Alfred Loisy were excommunicated. Actually the modernists only refused to believe in the miracles associated with Jesus, but not in the historical existence of Christianity's founder himself. Modernism is still being condemned by the Catholic Church which, from time to time, expresses its displeasure couched in pious formulas.

At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1966) opinion was not as undividedly conservative as it was at the First Vatican Council. Large and influential groups of senior members of the clergy adopted a more flexible position. But the conservative wing headed by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani took a hard line on the basic question of faith, in particular, on the question of Christology.

After the Council the conservative wing continued its battle against its opponents. It strongly criticised a Catholic catechism published in Holland in 1966 which clearly showed modernist leanings. In fact the bishops of Holland, with whose blessing the catechism was published, were rather cautious with regard to the legends associated with Jesus as told in the Gospels. In a pastoral letter they called on all Christians to exercise maximum caution in carrying out theological investigations and in preaching. After stating somewhat vaguely that some changes in interpreting a number of problems relating to the Christian faith are inevitable, they warned the modernists not to hasten to accept scientific criticism and thus rock the foundations of the Christian faith. The bishops noted that faith in the Church must be strengthened, above all with regard to questions of dogma. As for themselves, they believe in the divine nature of Christ, the immaculate conception and Christ's resurrection. In short, the point is again about faith in Christ the man-and-God and all the supernatural deeds attributed to him by the New Testament.

This position is insisted on with particular vehemence by Cardinal Ottaviani. As head of the Congregation of the Propagation of Faith he sent, in July 1966, a pastoral letter to the bishops and other Church officials in which he listed ten points calling for condemnation. One of them is aimed against those who hold that Christ was

a mere man who only gradually became aware of his being the Son of God. According to the cardinal, the immaculate conception, the miracles, and even Christ's resurrection are all strictly natural events. He would not even concede that at one period of his life Christ existed as a mere man. For Cardinal Ottaviani, of course, there is no place at all for scientific research into the subject.

In these circumstances is such research necessary and is it possible to conduct it? The zealous guardians of the traditional view realise that they cannot prohibit it altogether. All they can do is to indicate its limits so that the faith itself will not be put into jeopardy.

For instance, the French historian Jacques Colin made a study of the trial of Jesus Christ. Drawing a number of historical and ethnographical parallels he shows that some details about this trial, which have aroused controversy, can in fact be considered as probable. These include the participation of crowds in deciding the fate of Jesus and the role played by Herod Antipas, the Roman tetrarch of Galilee, in the conviction of Jesus. Well, such research certainly does no harm to faith. On the contrary, properly used it can only strengthen it.

Even more desirable from the point of view of the Church is the type of work done by the German Catholic theologian Uta Ranke-Heinemann, lecturer on religion and methods of Catholic education at the Teachers' College in the city of Neuss. Its purpose is to show that Christ's mother remained a virgin to the end of her life. But how can this be reconciled with the fact that the New Testament refers seven times to Jesus' brothers and once to a sister? This has been a subject of much theological controversy. One explanation is that Jesus' brothers and sisters were Joseph's children by previous marriage. Ranke-Heinemann, however, finds an ingenious way of dealing with this question.

In St. Mark's Gospel the names of Jesus' brothers are said to be James, Joses, Judas and Simon. But in another passage in Mark and also in several other Gospel narratives the mother of James and Joses is called "another Mary". In one of these narratives the father of James is said to be Alpheus, not Joseph. And nowhere in the New Testament is there any mention of the "children

of Mary and Joseph". Moreover, just before his death Jesus entrusted his mother to the care of John. This would have been strange if Mary had other sons besides Jesus. But how is one to understand the following passage from Luke: "And she brought forth her firstborn son ...?"¹⁵ The answer is that this is an incorrect translation by the Protestants; the Lutherans, being heretics, were capable of anything. Instead of the "firstborn son" it should read the "firstling"; Jesus could be called a "firstling" whether or not Mary bore other children besides Jesus. An excellent subject for research indeed. And especially since it can distract attention from more important problems relating to the person of Christ.

But no matter how deep-seated is the tendency to dismiss outright any doubt on the subject, no matter how strongly conservative churchmen and theologians insist on the necessity of blind faith, there is an ever increasing desire among theologians to reconcile somehow a belief in Christ with the findings of historical research. Let us consider the works of other authors and see how well they succeed in coming to grips with the difficult situation facing them.

Some of them resort to fairly usual methods of historical argument. Thus, in an attempt to put an end to the crisis of Christological theory, they adduce arguments in favour of the historicity of Christ.

The first of these arguments is that the Gospels, regardless of the degree of historical authenticity of the information they provide, do create an atmosphere of Palestine of that period. One can feel, so to speak, the breath of real life and this is something that cannot be invented. There is nothing new about this argument, of course. We have considered it at some length in the preceding chapter. Such an approach is obviously subjective.

In the Gospels and Sayings there are several passages which contradict the views of the later, "Pauline" church. According to some theologians, one should consider the former to be based on the actual life of Jesus. These are passages from the Gospels which cast a shadow on the personality of Christ, whether considered as a mere man or as God. Thus, in Nazareth Jesus the man-and-

God failed to perform any miracles. Jesus hid from his enemies in Bethany and other places. He seems to show cowardice on the cross. Some of the sayings of the founder of Christianity do not appear to be particularly impressive. He says, for example, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine" (Mat. 7:6), implying that all Gentiles are dogs. In another passage he says, "Why callest me good? *there is none good but one, that is God*" (Mat. 19:17). In the opinion of some theologians, these passages show that the oldest parts of the New Testament contain a historical kernel which can be revealed if the later additions are removed. This argument, too, does not seem to us to hold water. All that these older texts tell us is that the conception of the personality of Christ underwent a certain evolution. But that does not mean that the initial stage of this evolution was related to first-hand impressions and recollections about a real person.

There is another point of view according to which even if we are dealing with legends here, legends are also source materials for historical research. This is true enough, but we cannot, on this basis, conclude that Christ was a real person or depict an image of Christ by using the Gospel narratives. In some instances a legend provides material for forming a conception precisely of that epoch in which it emerged and of the social milieu that created it. And this is exactly what we have in this case.

And lastly, it is argued that the Gospel narratives are historically authentic because they provide a chronological framework for a life of Jesus. There are at least three facts which may serve as major reference points: the baptism of Jesus by John, the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, and his death in Jerusalem. This "argument" hardly calls for refutation since any legend can be placed within a chronological framework without there being the least ground for considering this framework to be a historically authentic one.

Of interest in this connection is the book *The Death of Jesus* by J. Carmichael, published in 1963. Carmichael notes that many elements of the legend as told in the Gospels contradict the Christian tradition that took shape

subsequently, and it is these elements that should be regarded as historically trustworthy. One should, however, approach these elements with caution, for after Jesus' death a whole generation was to pass before the Gospels were written. Carmichael does not merely state in a general way that different parts of the legend emerged at different times, but distinguishes five stages marking the rise of the Christ legend which, in his opinion, reflect the different stages whereby Jesus was gradually transformed in the minds of his followers.

At the first stage Jesus was born in a natural way into a poor family in Galilee. Then his person was elevated and associated with Messianic missions. At the third stage Jesus was said to be of royal lineage. At the fourth stage his birth was thought to be of a supernatural character and Christ almost became a deity. Only at the last, fifth stage, of its evolution did the image of Christ come to acquire all the features of God. Carmichael notes two different interpretations of this divine image, one found in the Gospel of John and another in the Epistles of Paul.

It is an attractive thesis, one with a logic of its own. The only trouble is that the logic here is not backed up with sufficiently sound historical analysis. Let us assume that the evolution of the image of Christ proceeded precisely in the manner described and that the Gospels gradually came to include texts corresponding to the five stages indicated above. But we can equally assume that the evolution took place in the opposite direction. The historical approach seeks to establish not what might have occurred, but what actually did occur.

To some extent Carmichael's conception is in line with the views of the well-known German Protestant theologian Helmut Thielike. In his book *Ich Glaube* (I Believe), published in 1965, Thielike also notes the large number of contradictions and divergencies in the New Testament books but maintains that they are evidence, not of the unreliability of the books as historical sources, but, on the contrary, of the trustworthiness of the information they provide about Jesus. Different people have different perceptions of one and the same thing. "One person, when he gets a slap in the face, for example, has a buzzing in

his ears, he sees stars.... Another in the same situation hears a rustling sound, a third--the sound of bells; one person sees sparks, another--a rainbow."¹⁶ The real cause of these different impressions is, however, the same and it is something real. Similarly there is a real, historical nucleus in the contradictory information about Jesus which we find in the Gospels. But how can we get to the essence of a phenomenon about which the sources tell us different things? Apparently all that can be said is that something took place, but what exactly no one knows. Such an approach by a theologian to the main sources of the Christian dogma, no matter how good his intentions are, cuts the ground from under the Church dogma concerning the Scriptures. Indeed, one of their authors heard bells, another saw sparks....

Besides scholarly research, Thielike takes an active part in propaganda work. He delivered a series of lectures in a hall in one of the largest stadiums in Federal Germany, and, as reported by the Catholic journal *Herder Korrespondenz*, was able to expound his views in such a way that they were understood by all. For a contemporary theologian, this is an achievement indeed. In theological literature one often comes across complaints that theological ideas in our time have become so complex that not only the layman but also the student of theology has difficulties in understanding them.

Thielike attaches little importance to the miracles described in the Gospels. In his opinion they were created only afterwards as a collection of illustrations (*Bilderbuch*) to the text of Jesus' sermons, as a demonstration of God's might. But this was not really necessary since faith cannot be based on miracles. Faith lives by the word of God only. Our image of Christ must, therefore, be based on the word of God. In Thielike's opinion, this has not been done correctly up to the present time, with each new generation forming an image of Christ in accordance with its own views derived from contemporary trends of thought.

Thielike says that throughout the history of the Church Jesus Christ had been crucified again and again. He was always being amputated so that he could be fitted into the Procrustean bed of transient human conceptions. He had constantly disappeared in the sepulcher of human

notions and systems of thought, from which he had risen again. Elegantly said indeed, but the meaning is not very clear. Let us assume that Christ's image has indeed been subjected to such a cruel treatment. And Herr Thielike is determined to restore it to its original purity. The result is certainly worth waiting for. But it seems that Thielike has done nothing to translate his good intentions into reality. For the prominent theologian merely says that the image of Christ has been distorted but not how we are to regard the image now, following the research conducted by Thielike himself. That remains a secret.

The Protestant theologian Paul Althaus is less critical of what the "community" has done to the image of Christ. Althaus is known to have rather pessimistic views concerning the Gospels as historical sources. But strangely enough he is able to combine mutually contradictory conceptions in his writings. Thus, he considers St. Mark's Gospel to be written by eyewitnesses including the Apostle Peter. Like E. Hirsch, he believes that St. Mark's Gospel was later heavily edited and embellished, although both think that this had not been necessary since a whole biography of Jesus can be found in it. It would seem, then, that all is well and there are no difficulties whatever in reconstructing the image of Christ. Nevertheless, for Althaus the difficulties are there.

For instance, what are we to do with the fact that the image of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels was very much altered afterwards by the "theology of the community"? On this question Althaus disagrees with the liberal theologians. According to the latter, "what has been done to the image of Jesus by the theology of the community is something alien and has little to do with Jesus himself". Their position is as follows: "Away from the dogmatic theology of the community and back to the simple preaching of Jesus about the Kingdom, Heavenly Father and the eternal life of the soul! Above all away from Paul and back to Jesus, to the real Jesus whose image and mission can be traced in the contours of primitive Christianity. Away from dogma and back to the man from Nazareth who is outside dogma."¹⁷ Althaus does not accept this point of view although it "has been loudly proclaimed for half a century now and is coming to the fore again". Not without reason he declares the "liberal image of the prophet

Jesus who is outside dogma" to be "an abstraction".¹⁸ Althaus is more impressed precisely by the image that emerged from the theology of the community. He finds the true reality of Jesus Christ not in an abstraction of some "historical Jesus" who is outside dogma, but in Christ of the original Christian mission propagated by the community. What Althaus is apparently saying, to judge from his rather nebulous statements, is that we should without further ado accept the traditional image of Christ.

On the one hand, Althaus has to acknowledge that "the state of the sources is such that we can give neither a chronology of the life of Jesus nor a factual account of it", and that "we always see Jesus only through a veil". On the other hand, through this veil "we are in a position to trace the main features of the image of Jesus sufficiently clearly".¹⁹ True, this is only "in the spiritual sense", for only the moral makeup of Jesus the man-and-God is meant here, and not his real human image. Althaus also speaks of Christ's self-awareness, his mission and his manner in dealing with people and so on. But even here the emphasis is not on any "definite utterances" of Jesus, but on "his general behaviour and activity". Althaus himself has described such evasive, equivocal writings as "indirect Christology".²⁰

When the basic material is lacking for a direct investigation of the question, the theologian who has not sufficient courage has to resort to "indirect" methods. There is plenty of room here for subjective casuistical interpretation of the concept of historical authenticity. Thus, we find Althaus saying that even the inauthentic (*unecht*) can have authenticity (*die Echtheit*). He writes: "We differentiate concepts of authenticity: even those narratives and sayings which in terms of historical research are 'inauthentic' and fail to convey what actually took place can in some important sense be authentic--as an expression of the real significance of what took place or of a historical person. In this sense everything that reflects the cognised meaning of the essence and significance of Jesus Christ, no matter how he was refracted through the individuality of the eyewitness and the methods of expression that were characteristic for his time, is authentic."²¹

Althaus applies the same approach to those passages in the Gospels which he himself has called inauthentic (he puts the word in quotation marks). "These passages," he says, "should be read not historically, but expressionistically: they express the essence and significance of Jesus by poetic means in order to make history appear more vivid."²² This method, in his opinion, is used predominantly in the narratives of the last days of Jesus' life. Such unhistorical narratives are authentic in a deeper sense since they try to convey the mystery of the existence and advent of Christ.

In a sense any narrative is historical--it testifies to the existence of its author and to the social and ideological climate in which it was written. But the Gospel legends to which Althaus attributes historicity and which at the same time he acknowledges to be inauthentic cannot of course be considered historical: they say nothing at all about the historical Jesus. Althaus' attempt to extract from them something that can be regarded as historical looks very much like sophistry.

The same system of thought appears more complex and more carefully rounded out in the works of "left" theologians and Christologists, especially those belonging to the school of Rudolf Bultmann.

"Suprahistory" Instead of History

In 1959 the German Protestant theologian Hans Conzelmann made this rather remarkable statement: "The Church lives only because the results of research into the life of Jesus are little known within it."

Four years later Otto Kuster, citing these words, offered this consoling thought both to his colleague and to himself: "It seems that this [i.e., the dissemination of scientific information about the life of Jesus--*I.K.*] will come about gradually."²³

In other words, the Church still has time, for the present century at any rate, to resort to various defensive tactics and manoeuvring. Only a few years later, however, the magazine *Der Spiegel* noted that such hopes were dashed. Both in the Church and in the "community" a heated debate was under way. In this debate two factors

were at work. On the one hand, there were the results of research into the life of Jesus which tended to detract from faith. On the other hand, there was a desire to retain by whatever means the foundation of the Christian faith. Since the former cannot be dismissed off-hand, Christianity found itself in a difficult position. Incidentally, not only Christianity but all religions are in the same predicament.

We have already discussed the arsenal used by the conservative and traditional camp. Their position is so weak that more and more theologians are abandoning it. The latter, however, do not give up the dogma of their religion completely, in particular, its main point--the image of Jesus Christ. They only wish to make this image somewhat more plausible both for themselves and for that part of the "community" which is no longer satisfied with the traditional and usual explanations and is seeking some new, more intelligent solutions. Apart from the most conservative churchmen, this is what most theologians are now working on. The trouble is that, as in all crisis situations, the search for new solutions proceeds in many different directions. As a result, in modern Christological literature an impression of chaos and disorder is created.

The followers of Schweitzer insist on interpreting the image of Christ strictly on the plane of eschatology, a doctrine concerning the ultimate destiny of the world. In their view the biography of Jesus is not really important, especially since it cannot be reconstructed. The only important fact is that at some moment in the history of the ancient world there appeared a man or man-and-God who declared himself to be the Messiah and announced the imminent end of the world. He became known in history as Jesus Christ. His teaching even today instills in us hopes for a happy future, which will come after the great eschatological promise has been fulfilled. There is a whole trend in Protestant theology that is oriented to this perspective. Its views are set forth in the books of Jürgen Moltmann who speaks of a "theology of hope". Relying on Schweitzer, Moltmann offers an eschatological interpretation of the image of Jesus and paints a happy, optimistic picture of the coming of the end of the world as proclaimed by Jesus.

The image of the man Jesus can only be established with the help of historical research. But the results of this research prove disastrous for the quest of this image. What we have, then, is a kind of vicious circle: the mystical Christ the God is unacceptable to our scientific and secular age, while the prolonged search for Jesus the man in remote antiquity has ended in failure. To find a way out of the situation the more "sophisticated" and philosophic-minded theologians resort to muddling up the very concepts of historical truth and real historical facts, the essence and tasks of the historical science.

One way of passing off myth as reality and falsehood as truth is to erase the borderline between fact and fantasy, reality and hallucination, history and mythology. In modern bourgeois philosophy, 19th-century positivism which sought to establish only what really occurred in history is dismissed as "naive" and held in contempt. The principle of positivist historiography--to describe what actually took place--formulated by Leopold van Ranke is mocked and rejected. According to those who support subjective-idealistic historiography, one need not consider "naked facts", but should seek something more essential. For theologians, that something "more essential" lies in serving the interests of their faith. Here they are ready even to lean on authors whose views have little to do with faith but create certain possibilities for apologetic manoeuvring.

It turns out that there are two different kinds of history. In modern German theology they are given different names: *die Weltgeschichte*, or world, secular history; and *die Heiligengeschichte*, or sacred, salvational, divine history. For theology both are apparently important, for both deserve to be considered history as distinguished from phenomena occurring in nature.

Occurring ... well, the most important thing is to find out what has occurred and what has not occurred; in terms of history, this means ascertaining what has and what has not occurred at a certain time. But if one is to mix the two things up, one must construe concepts that would create the possibility of such mixing. And it is not difficult to think up names for them. The flexibility

of the German language, the possibility of using in this language not only the roots of German words but also those of Latin and even Greek words can impart a nebulousness to discourse and give it an aura of both pseudo-science and of mysticism which befits the subject of religion. Rudolf Bultmann resorts in this case to the dual terms of *die Geschichte* and *die Historie*, using the former to designate secular, world history, and the latter, "sacred history", or history on a higher and more in-depth plane.

Actually this is not history, but some kind of supra-history. From this point of view there is really nothing to discuss and no reason why anything should be discussed. And so it is not clear why Bultmann should consider it necessary to devote hundreds of pages to analysing documents in terms of their historical value, and to study and compare different points of view. After all, Jesus is above everything--documents, facts, history, reason, sense....

With such a solution of the problem theological discourse inevitably loses its pseudo-scientific aura. But this must not be allowed to happen. To preserve such an aura references are made to Kant, Kierkegaard and other existentialist philosophers.

Beyond the world of naked and crude facts, which are recorded in *die Geschichte*, is another world which cannot be apprehended or be the subject of scientific inquiry. If history, like nature, cannot be cognised, we are not in a position to establish the reality or unreality of any events that are the subject of ancient tales. It is also impossible to reveal the objective significance of these events. Since this is so, what faith and the Church tradition tell us about Christ is all we need to know about him.

This conclusion is most fully developed in the works of Bultmann. Philosophically it is based on the theory of existentialism.

According to this theory, the primary element for analysis is not the objective essence of things, which is something mysterious, but only existence or, more precisely, man's experience of his existence. This means that what is important is not objective reality, in this

case historical reality, but only man's perception and experience of this "reality". Religious subjects should be approached in the same way. There is no need to interpret them objectively. In Christianity only faith is important, which is not objectified in myths.

Bultmann is not adverse to acknowledging the historicity of Christ. In fact, he thinks that there are no grounds whatever for doubting it and any arguments that call in question the historical existence of Christ do not even deserve a rebuttal. Bultmann is equally certain that Jesus founded the movement which gave rise to the Christian community in Palestine. As to the extent to which this community was able subsequently to preserve the image of Christ and his original teaching, that is altogether a different question. But Bultmann is not particularly interested in it. What interests him is not Jesus as a historical personage, but the faith in him that emerged in the Christian community. For Bultmann, what is truly historical is not the mythology connected with the name of Jesus or even the natural events described in the Gospel biography of Christ, but only the kerygma, or the apostolic proclamation of the Christian Gospel. For example, this is how he interprets Easter: "Easter, since it can be called a historical event, is nothing else but the birth of faith in the resurrected.... Only the birth of faith in Easter among the first disciples can be regarded as an historical event."²⁴

Although Bultmann acknowledges the historicity of Christ, he in fact avoids giving a direct answer to the question of Christ's personality. Of central importance to Bultmann is not the personality of Christ but only its reflection in the Christian faith. While considering it possible that the original material, which formed the basis for future myth-making, subsequently underwent radical changes through the religious fantasy of the believers, Bultmann fails to say anything definite about the nature of that material.

The work of this apostle of demythologisation has attracted the widest attention. Bultmann has many followers not only among Protestant but also among Catholic theologians. His conception has become part of that theological trend which shifts the main emphasis of religious

faith from canonical dogma to the sentiments and experience of the individual believer. Drews characterised this trend as applied to the problem of Christology as follows: "The theology of the life of Jesus came to be replaced by the so-called experiential theology which maintains that since the historical existence of Jesus cannot be demonstrated by reason, his authenticity can be perceived intuitively, through inner experience."²⁵

Bultmann's views do not quite fit into the framework of "experiential theology", but they are close to it. Both try to turn away from historical facts and carry the discussion of the whole question into the realm of kerygma and its perception by the community as a whole and especially by the individual believer.

This trend is obviously at odds with the main dogmatic principles of Christianity. If it were possible to prove the historical existence of Christ and delineate his image on the basis of trustworthy historical documents and material, it is doubtful that "experiential theology" would have many followers. But in the existing situation it is attracting more and more theologians and laymen interested in theological matters.

Right and Left Trends in Christology

For the moment supporters of the left trend in Christology are coming up against increasing resistance. The forms and the scope of this resistance vary widely. A clear expression of anti-modernism is the above-mentioned "No Other Gospel!" movement, which is widespread in the Federal Republic of Germany. There, besides the publication of books and articles on the subject, mass meetings are held at which the followers of the "new Gospel" are wrathfully condemned for regarding the "empty sepulcher", the immaculate conception and so on merely as elements of kerygma, and not as facts of history. At a mass meeting held in Dortmund in March 1966, the views of Bultmann and his supporters were said to be incomparably more dangerous than those of the German Christians in the 1930s. This is a reference to the trend in the Lutheran Church which tried to make Christianity serve the interests of the Hitlerite regime and its ideology.

It is not surprising that conservative theologians

should make fierce attacks on Bultmann's conception. Not without reason they cited the well-known saying of Luther: "He who rejects something rejects everything." To reject some elements of the Gospel legend is to invite doubt concerning any other of its elements. The danger of such a development is fully understood by leading Christian theologians of our time.

Modernist Christology is criticised and condemned, though in a restrained manner, at all Lutheran conferences. At the Fourth Synod of the United Lutheran-Evangelical Church of Germany, which met in the summer of 1967, much was said about the need for "self-critical soberness" in solving the problems facing the Church. What Church leaders fear most is that the situation might lead to the collapse of faith in Jesus Christ which has so far been preserved among church-goers.

And indeed in this respect things do not look very encouraging. But Church leaders are not laying the blame for the decline of the religious spirit among the masses on the activity of modernist theologians. "That the churches today are empty all the time," said Bishop Heintze at a session of the Fourth Synod, "can hardly be attributed to the preaching of 'another Gospel'." A much more important reason, according to the bishop, lies in the "many outwardly correct but boring sermons and lessons which fail to interpret and explain reality".²⁶ And the main thing is that "the profound and ever deepening scientific insights into and understanding of the world through the mastery of technology are raising fundamentally new questions, which can no longer be disposed of by referring to traditional religious formulas". In citing these words a Catholic observer makes this rather wistful comment: "A familiar problem for the Catholic clergy!"²⁷

Thus, both the Protestant and Catholic clergy are aware that in our time it would be unwise to insist on the absolute truth of the Christian dogmatic system and its central point--the historicity of Jesus Christ the man-and-God. It is for this reason that "experiential theology" is not condemned outright even though it comes close to denying the historicity of the founder of Christianity. It is possible that as time goes on the Church

will move still further towards the "left" on this crucial point of the Christian dogma.

For the moment the Church is taking a wait-and-see attitude. From time to time it makes ringing statements about the firm foundations of the Christian dogma. However, Church leaders are not doing anything about those theological conceptions that are undermining these very foundations, and even defend those conceptions from especially violent attacks. What lies behind such tactics?

First, it is difficult for the Church in its present position to take any definite decision. Second, the Church apparently hopes that gradually it will be possible to prepare the clergy and the church-goers for decisive changes in the dogma. The time may not be far off when such an "elucidation" will be introduced in the Credo and in the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon in the light of which Jesus Christ will cease to be both man and God, but become either God or man only. And it will apparently be announced at the same time that this "elucidation" does not at all mean that the Church has gone over to the position either of the Monophysites or of Arianism, though in fact it would mean precisely that.

Hans Küng on the Problem of Christ

Father Hans Küng is a remarkable figure in the field of Catholic theology. At the age of thirty-four he was asked by Pope John XXIII to take part in the work of the Second Vatican Oecumenical Council as an expert and personal advisor to the Pope on theological matters. After the Council Küng published several voluminous works. In his theological conceptions Küng, a Catholic priest and professor at the well-known Tübingen University, is fairly consistent: he calls for a radical renewal of both the theological doctrine of Catholicism and the organisation of the Church. Because of his unorthodox views Küng was forbidden by the Vatican, under Pope John Paul II, to teach theology at Tübingen University.

In a survey of the history of Christianity (in his book *Christ sein*) Küng finds in it a large number of different religious, socio-political and ideological phenomena: "Centuries of small communities followed by centuries of large organisations. The persecuted became the

rulers, and the other way round. The underground church became the state church; after the martyrs under Nero came the court bishops under Constantine. Periods of amity between monks and scholars alternated with periods of hostility between them--those were the Church politicians.... Centuries of Papal synods and centuries of reformist councils aimed against the Papacy. The golden age of Christian humanists as secularised people of the Renaissance and reformers of Church orthodoxy. Centuries of Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy and centuries of evangelical awakening. A time of adaptation and a time of resistance. Centuries of innovation and centuries of restoration, of doubt and of hope..."²⁸ How should we find our bearings in this kaleidoscope of events in the 2000-year history of the Church? What is the most important, the determining factor in it?

Until recently, as our discussion on the subject has shown, there is no clear-cut answer to this question either in the teachings of the Church or in theological literature. Now an answer is given in Küng's book.

The decisive factor in Christianity is the personality of Jesus Christ and nothing else. We only need to explain what this image consists in and we will know what it means to be a Christian. But this turns out to be a difficult, if not impossible, task.

Küng carefully considers all possible solutions to the question of the image of Jesus. Should we regard Christ as piety personified? As a dogma personified? As dreamers or as men of letters would have him be? There are countless variants of these images; even the canonical image is so varied that it becomes extremely vague. It is apparently easier to say what Christ was not than what he was. And Küng proves to be master of the negative definition. Thus, Jesus was neither a priest, a theologian, a revolutionary, a monk, a member of an order, an ascetic, nor a law officer; he did not withdraw from the world, nor did he divide the world into two parts as the Qumranites did; he did not recognise the hierarchical order. Küng strongly denies that Christ had any interest in social revolution. True, Christ expected the imminent end of the world, but he never considered it possible that the world would be destroyed by human means. He

"preached a revolution of nonviolence", and as his parallel one may consider, not Che Guevara or Camillo Torres, but Gandhi and Martin Luther King (pp. 181-182). At this point the reader expects that K ng would finally say what Christ was. But no, Kung continues in his former vein: "Christ was neither a philosopher nor a politician, neither a priest nor a social reformer. Was he a genius, a hero, a saint or a reformer? But was he not the most radical of reformers?" (pp. 198-199). He was more moral than the moralists, more revolutionary than the revolutionaries. "One thing is clear: Jesus was something else!... He could not be compared with anything, either then or now" (p. 203).

It is impossible to extract anything from all this that would help resolve the question of what it means to be a Christian. K ng himself realises this: "All that has been said thus far delineates the image of Jesus more in a negative way" (p. 205). In the next chapter of his book K ng addresses himself to the question of how to define the essence, the centre (*die Mitte*), of Christ's teaching.

This "centre" is Christ's prediction about the forthcoming Kingdom of God. It is not clear whether this kingdom will be established in heaven or on earth. At any rate, "it is not a territory or a domain of rule ... it is God's power" (p. 205). Resorting once again to the negative definition, K ng tells what the Kingdom of God is not. "It is not a temporary sovereignty which God at the beginning of creation gave to the hierarchs in Jerusalem.... It is not a religious-political theocracy or democracy set up by Zealot revolutionaries by violent means.... It is not a court of revenge in favour of an elite of perfect people like the Essenes and Qumranite monks ..." and so on. Each of these formulas contains a positive counterthesis, but nothing very definite is said. The whole point seems to be about "the approaching Kingdom of God at the end of time". But again it is not clear whether this kingdom will be in heaven or on earth. In any case, in this kingdom God's sovereignty will be direct, limitless and universal (p. 206). This is a rather puzzling statement, for no religion has ever set limits to God's sovereignty in the world. Other "positive" points mentioned by K ng are equally lacking in substance:

"The joyful annunciation of unlimited good and of the boundless mercy of God. A kingdom where thanks to Jesus' prayer the name of God will indeed be sanctified, his will manifested also on earth, people will be fully requited according to their due, all faults forgiven and all evil overcome..." (p. 206).

And at last in this verbal desert there appears an oasis of social content: "A kingdom where, according to Jesus' promises, the poor, the hungry, the weeping and the oppressed will finally be satisfied, where sufferings and death will disappear" (p. 206). However, Küng does not say in what concrete way the hungry and oppressed will be satisfied. So the oasis turns out to be a mirage.

Küng himself realises that his description of the Kingdom of God is not very intelligible. As he launches into another discussion of abstract concepts ("complete justice, limitless freedom, indestructible love, universal reconciliation, eternal peace") he admits that "the kingdom cannot be described, but only represented in images". And the images are: "A new union, crops that are coming up, ripe harvest, a great repast, a royal festival" (p. 206). Here the boundary between the positive and the negative fades away, for neither the one nor the other has any real meaning.

The most difficult question for Küng is when we may expect this desirable, if somewhat mysterious, Kingdom of God to appear. At first we get a laconic, enigmatic answer: "In the absolute future" (p. 208). In other words, an indefinite period of time may elapse before the Kingdom of God will be established. But Jesus had foretold that it would be established during the lifetime of his generation. This prediction did not come true then and has remained unfulfilled throughout the following two thousand years. Was Jesus mistaken? With surprising forthrightness Küng admits that the situation was a confusing one, but then promptly goes into a discussion of abstract issues from which it may be understood that pious Christians have nothing to fear. To err is human and "if Jesus of Nazareth were indeed a human he could also make mistakes". This is followed by attacks on those theologians who "are more afraid of mistakes than sin, death and the Devil" (p. 208).

Still, it is necessary to conceal the fact that the founder of Christianity could make mistakes. Küng begins a long casuistical discussion of whether the concept "mistake" is applicable in this case. For the subject here concerns "cosmic knowledge", and a mistake at this level should not be considered as an ordinary error. Our planet and mankind had a beginning, which is confirmed by science, and so they must have an end which is no doubt connected with the coming of the Kingdom of God. And if this is so, "the concept of 'mistake' is undifferentiated and simply inapplicable in this context" (p. 209). That is how black can be said to be white, and the other way round.

So, regardless of whether Christ was mistaken about the time when the Kingdom of God would come, the important fact is that it will eventually come. This apparently would mean that evil, the cause of so much suffering in the world, will disappear. Here we are faced with a question that had always been a stumbling block for theologians, and it also prevents Küng from completing his theological edifice. The fact that there is suffering in the world is incompatible with the doctrine that this world was created by a perfect God and that man's sins have been atoned for and people saved as a result of the advent of Jesus Christ. Now, two thousand years later, has life become any less hard? Küng admits that it has not.

"From the time of Job to our day" man has asked: why do I suffer? It is a question that casts doubt on the whole doctrine about God and his design and also on the dogma about man's redemption through the suffering of Jesus Christ. Küng has accurately and poignantly characterised the condition of suffering mankind: man "cries to heaven--no, he cries against heaven!" (p. 419).

Things got to a point where people decided that they must take their future into their own hands. Instead of relying on a Saviour God they must become their own saviour and liberator; man, not God, should become the subject of history. Küng does not like this. To him, no technological or socio-political revolution can save mankind. He devotes quite a number of pages in his book (pp. 28-47) to expounding the idea (which he nevertheless fails to back up with any convincing arguments) that it

is futile for people to try and put an end to social and other evils.

Who, then, should save mankind? According to the Christian dogma, it is God's will that Christ should do this by assuming human form and sacrificing himself. But how did this come about? On this point Küng has considerable doubts.

First of all, it is not clear why this should be necessary. Küng admits that it is somewhat strange that the consequences of the original sin should be removed through the sacrifice of Jesus. St. Augustine and Pope Gregory the Great regarded Jesus' death as the price God the Father paid to the Devil. St. Anselm of Canterbury put it in a juridical form: since a crime has been committed, punishment must follow. This would do as far as ancient and mediaeval juridical concepts are concerned. But then what about love, mercy and so on which are spoken of in the Gospels? What we have here is not a revelation of divine truth, but a reflection of the fact that people's ideas are historically limited by the epoch in which they live. And we live in a different epoch! It turns out that the Christians of our time, according to Küng, are not obliged to believe in this.

Yet Küng insists that Jesus lived and that the heart of the Christian doctrine is to be sought in the personality of Christ and in his preaching. But regardless of how we are to deal with the factual aspect of the matter--Küng himself repeatedly says that the factual aspect means little to him--the modern believer would want to know what exactly has happened to the object of his worship.

What Should We Do About Jesus' Biography?

Küng rejects the dogma of the immaculate conception. He formulates his thesis in a cautious, roundabout way: "No one is obliged to believe in the biological fact of the immaculate conception or of the birth" of Jesus (p. 447). Should the Church acknowledge its error on this point? No, says Küng, the dogma of the immaculate conception should be given a "Christological-theological, not a biological-ontological interpretation" (p. 446). The fact that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke speak of

the immaculate conception and birth of Jesus poses no difficulty here, for they are not the essence, the main idea of the Gospel teaching. Nothing is said about the immaculate conception in the Gospels of Mark and John or in the Epistles of Paul. It is also not necessary to keep silent on this point. One should in fact speak about it, but "honestly and in a differentiated way", and at the same time remember that we need "to mark the boundaries of demythologisation" (p. 447). And where are these boundaries? Küng says nothing definite on this question.

To judge from the Gospels, Jesus' activity took two forms: he preached and he worked miracles. One can, by resorting to sophisticated means, explain away the contradictions in Jesus' sermons and give these sermons a certain unity. Things are more complicated with regard to the miracles. Küng repeatedly points out that a belief in miracles is unacceptable for the modern man and, should the Church continue insisting on such a belief, it runs a grave risk: the believers may cease to take the teachings of the Church seriously. This "inconvenient" and "unpleasant" problem would somehow have to be dealt with.

Küng begins his analysis of the problem with a frank admission: one of the sections in his book dealing with this subject is called "Masking a Difficult Situation". The very concept of "miracle" is indefinite and vague, but this, says Küng somewhat ironically, is a good thing for theologians (including himself). By using it properly theologians have "elegantly masked" the whole problem of the New Testament miracles (p. 217). Küng examines various approaches to this problem and finds all of them unsatisfactory. What does Küng himself have to say on the subject? Actually Küng fails to come to grips with the problem and has no specific solution to offer.

Küng formulates the question in a fairly straightforward way. The Gospels are quite definite about the miracles performed by Jesus: healing the sick, casting out demons, three cases of restoring the dead to life, and seven "natural" miracles including calming the wind and storm and changing water into wine. There is nothing vague about them, and the only question is if anyone at any time could have performed them contrary to the laws of nature. For all the verbosity of Küng and others,

for that matter, who have tried to define the word "miracle", the issue only gets more confused instead of being clarified. The Gospel narratives about the miracles performed by Jesus Christ allow of only one interpretation: they are what they are said to be, namely, deeds and events which contradict the laws of nature. Is this possible?

Küng has no answer to this question.

Some details concerning the miracles, says Küng, may well reflect what actually took place. Thus, when we consider the stories about Jesus healing the sick we should keep in mind the possibility of psychotherapy. For many illnesses are of a psychogenic nature and in some cases psychotherapy could indeed be effective. But what about the miracles which are not connected with illnesses? In that case, too, says Küng, there might be "circumstances" giving rise to the legends. For example, the story about Jesus calming a storm on the sea may be based on a real incident in which people prayed to God to save them from drowning and the danger receded by coincidence. Such coincidences could provide the "historical circumstances" that gave rise to the Gospel stories about the miracles performed by Jesus. But in that case nothing is left of the religious teaching according to which a miracle is a supernatural event that takes place contrary to the laws of nature.

Küng practically rejects, too, the teaching about the most important miracle in the life of Jesus: his resurrection. Belief in this miracle is central to the Christian faith, for Saint Paul said: "And if Christ be not risen, then *is* our preaching vain, and your faith *is* also vain" (I Corinthians 15:14). How does Küng deal with the difficulty raised by this statement?

Here we have a classical example of casuistical theological discourse which is almost devoid of all meaning but which has a semblance not only of piety but also of profound thinking. There was resurrection, yet there was no resurrection. And the other way round: resurrection did not take place, yet it did take place. What is averred on one page is refuted in the next, and the whole exercise goes on for dozens of pages.

In German theological literature the events connect-

ed with the resurrection and ascension of Christ are denoted by the word *Ostergeschichte*, or "Easter story", and a belief in Christ's resurrection is linked with the idea of the "empty sepulcher". Küng plays upon these notions, but in such a way that they are divested of all meaning. And it would be quite correct to say that he has excluded them from the Christian dogma. He does this, however, extremely "elegantly", to use his own expression.

He begins by substituting the concept of raising from the dead for the concept of resurrection. Christ was not resurrected on his own; he was raised from the dead by God. But is the "raising from the dead" a historical fact? Küng's answer to this question may be seen in the following passage: "If we consider the raising from the dead as an act of God, there can be no question of its having a strictly historical meaning and of the possibility of establishing this meaning with the help of the historical science and historical methods. The raising from the dead is not a miracle that contradicts the laws of nature and is verified by the inner world, that can be located and dated as a supernatural intrusion into space and time" (p. 338). Then follows an attack on the sciences (history, biology and so on, including theology), which "see only one aspect of a multifaceted reality". But if we look at all aspects of the story of the resurrection, we find that both in the case of the resurrection and of raising from the dead "it is a matter of metaphorical, figurative terms" (p. 339). The image of the resurrection is based on the idea of rising, awakening from sleep and returning to a previous state, to an earthly and mortal life. In the case of Jesus, however, it is a resurrected Jesus entering into a completely different state which is not earthly, mortal life, but something else altogether. To make his point Küng even uses a Latin phrase--*totaliter aliter*--completely different. But what is it exactly?

Again Küng resorts to his favourite method: the resurrection of Christ is not this or that, yet it is this and that. It is "not a phantom and nevertheless it is not tangible; it is visible and invisible, it is material and immaterial; it is on this side of time and space and beyond them" (p. 340). Given this, it is not surprising to learn that the resurrection of Christ is both of a

corporeal and an incorporeal nature. Resurrection did not take place if body (*der Leib*) is "naively interpreted" as being identical to body (*der Körper*)" (p. 340).

If we are to make any sense out of this, it is that the resurrection of Christ as the Evangelists understood it did not take place.

Things do not work out so well with the "empty sepulcher" idea. Küng devotes many pages to the subject but never really tackles it directly. It turns out that the teaching about the empty sepulcher is not so important after all: "it is neither a dogma of the Christian religion, a basic principle, nor an object of belief in Easter" (p. 355). Here Küng has to acknowledge that "historical criticism and the natural sciences", which he attacked earlier, look at the "empty sepulcher" idea critically. And he decides that there is no need to commit oneself to "accepting the physiological conception of the resurrection".

Küng deals with the other parts of the Easter story in a similar fashion, in particular, with Christ's ascension after forty days of wandering on earth. Once again Küng finds room for manoeuvring. What is heaven really? Of course it cannot be a seven-story edifice where Jesus Christ is seated on the throne at the right hand of God-Father. "The heaven of faith is not the heaven of the astronauts," says Küng. It is not a firmament, nor is it in general a spatial concept. It is "not a place, but a form of existence". Thus, "it stands to reason that Jesus did not undertake any trip in space". He simply went to "a mysterious invisible Kingdom of God that is past understanding", as a result of which he became "part of the magnificence of the Father" (p. 342). And if we do not accept the idea that the heaven to which Jesus went is a mysterious, invisible and unfathomable place, then we will have something of which there are many precedents in the history of religion and mythology. When speaking of Christ's ascension Küng recalls Elijah and Enoch of the Old Testament and Heracles, Empedocles, Alexander the Great and Appolonius of Tyana. Would you as Christians, Küng seems to ask, believe in these deities, too?

But if we discard everything from the New Testament account of the life of Jesus except a mist of something

abstract, elusive and mystical, what is to nourish the faith of the ordinary, unsophisticated Christians? For his faith rests on a concrete image of Christ, one that is understandable to him. All that Küng has to offer is this: Jesus lived and, what is most important, he was crucified. In a summing-up Küng avoids mentioning the resurrection and other fantastic things, and lays the main stress on the fact of crucifixion.

Thus, nothing is left of the Jesus of the New Testament, of the Church dogma, of the First Council of Nicaea and the First Council of Constantinople. And it is clear that Küng goes through such a painful undertaking not out of any passionate commitment to truthfulness, but only because "faith in Easter" is becoming increasingly untenable.

It would be possible, Küng thinks, to ignore the miracles and try to reconstruct the biography of the man Jesus. There have been many such attempts, but they all failed. For "it is impossible to write a life of Jesus of Nazareth" (p. 142) primarily because of the scantiness of source materials. The only source is the Gospels, and it proves to be an untrustworthy one. Küng speaks respectfully of the Evangelists as "original theologians" each of whom had his own conception and had not intended to compile "a stenographic record". But this is what makes their information unreliable. The Evangelists were "engaged" witnesses who "from beginning to end tried to portray Jesus in the light of his resurrection as the Messiah, Christ, the Lord, the Son of God" (p. 145). Their information cannot serve as a basis for writing a biography of Jesus, or even for building "a generally finished image of him, whether traditional, speculative, liberal or consistently eschatological" (p. 151).

Küng's disparaging remarks about historical veracity seem to be nothing but sour grapes. "Restoration, reconstruction [of historical truth--I.K.] are the wrong words. For positivist historiography it is necessary to establish facts" (p. 151), whereas for the Christian faith it is necessary to have ... faith.

NOTES

- 1 A. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, München and Hamburg, 1966, Vol. 2, p. 620.
- 2 Ibid., p. 621.
- 3 Ibid., p. 620.
- 4 E. Barnikol, *Das Leben Jesu der Heilsgeschichte*, Halle, (Saale), 1953, pp. 334-336.
- 5 *Der Spiegel*, 1966, No. 5, p. 89.
- 6 Ibid., p. 86; Ibid., No. 14, p. 109.
- 7 A. Drews, *Die Leugnung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, Karlsruhe, 1926, p. 168.
- 8 Ibid., p. 85.
- 9 E. Barnikol, op. cit., p. 186.
- 10 *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Tübingen, 1959, Vol. 3, p. 623.
- 11 P. Althaus, *Der gegenwärtige Stand der Frage nach dem historischen Jesus*, München, 1960, pp: 5, 6, 7.
- 12 *Der Spiegel*, 1966, No. 16, p. 88.
- 13 Ibid., No. 14, p. 101.
- 14 E. Barnikol, op. cit., p. 189.
- 15 *Der Spiegel*, 1966, No. 7, p. 89.
- 16 Ibid., No. 16, p. 78.
- 17 P. Althaus, op. cit., pp. 12-13.
- 18 Ibid., p. 12.
- 19 Ibid., p. 15.
- 20 Ibid., p. 17.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 17-18.
- 22 Ibid., p. 18.
- 23 *Der Spiegel*, 1966, No. 14, p. 92.
- 24 Ibid., No. 16, p. 84.

- 25 A. Drews, op. cit., p. 219.
- 26 *Herder Korrespondenz*, 1967, No. 8, p. 317.
- 27 Ibidem.
- 28 H. Küng, *Christ sein*, Munich, 1974, p. 113. Further on in the text references to and quotations from Küng's book are indicated by page numbers given in parentheses.

IV. IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION

Some readers of this book may feel that they have not been given clear and definite answers to many questions regarding the personality of Christ. We want to know, they will say, that history tells us about Jesus Christ, and it turns out that in fact it tells us nothing or almost nothing about him. But how can this be? After all, there is a vast literature in all languages of the world devoted to this subject.

Yes, but this literature only tells us about what people at different periods of time had thought about Jesus Christ, and then those were later periods than the one in which Jesus supposedly lived. As for the historical material belonging to the period of Jesus, well, we will have to take pot luck, so to speak. And it seems that we are not particularly lucky here.

Better an "unpleasant" truth than a "comforting" lie. But as a matter of fact there is nothing unpleasant about acknowledging a scientifically established truth, just as there is nothing comforting about rejecting it even if some people may not like it.

In one respect, I hope, the reader will not find the book wanting, namely, in an unbiassed approach to the personality of Christ and to the problems related to it.

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