

THE HISTORICITY OF JESUS  
AN ESTIMATE OF THE NEGATIVE ARGUMENT

SHIRLEY JACKSON CASE  
The University of Chicago

Did Jesus actually live, or is he only the pious fiction of a primitive religious imagination? This question is not new, but it has been discussed with renewed energy in Germany during the past year, and some leading New Testament scholars have participated in the discussion.<sup>1</sup>

At first sight the issue seems to be a purely historical one, yet the real point of interest for much of the discussion is not the data of history but the problem of Jesus' significance for the founding of Christianity as well as for the religion of modern times. The present denial of his existence is the extreme swing of the pendulum away from the older orthodoxy's interpretation of his place in

<sup>1</sup> The discussion was given special prominence early in the year when the Berlin division of the Deutscher Monistenbund, on the evenings of January 31 and February 1, debated this subject. Arthur Drews, professor of philosophy in Karlsruhe technical high school, led the debate for the negative and Professor von Soden, of Berlin, for the affirmative. Other speakers were F. Steudel, G. Hollmann, M. Fischer, F. Lipsius, H. Francke, T. Kappstein, and M. Maurenbrecher. The stenographic report of the whole discussion is now published as *Berliner Religionsgespräch: Hat Jesus gelebt?* Berlin and Leipzig (1910). Many other public discussions of the same theme have taken place. Of the most important publications, on the radical side are Drews, *Die Christusmythe* (1900, 1910<sup>3</sup>); the periodical *Das freie Wort*, edited by Max Henning; F. Steudel, *Wir Gelehrten vom Fach! Eine Streitschrift gegen Professor D. von Sodens "Hat Jesus gelebt?"* (1910); S. Lublinski, *Die Entstehung des Christentums aus der antiken Kultur* (1910), and *Falsche Beweise für die Existenz des Menschen Jesus* (1910); W. Schultz, *Dokumente der Gnosis. Mit einer ausführlichen Einleitung* (1910); on the negative, Bornemann, *Jesus als Problem* (1909); H. Windisch, "Der geschichtliche Jesus" in *Theologische Rundschau*, XIII (1910), 163-82, 199-220; P. Wernle, "Wider moderne Skepsis für den Glauben an Jesus," and H. Holtzmann, "Paulus als Zeuge wider die Christusmythe von Arthur Drews" in *Die Christliche Welt* (February 17, 1910), 145-60; von Soden, *Hat Jesus gelebt?* (1910); Beth, *Hat Jesus gelebt?* (1910); Jülicher, *Hat Jesus gelebt?* (1910); Weinle, *Ist das "liberale" Jesusbild widerlegt?* (1910); J. Weiss, *Jesus von Nazareth, Mythos oder Geschichte* (1910). A somewhat more complete citation of the literature may be found in the *Biblische Zeitschrift*, VIII (1910), 415-17. Much of it is of minor importance.

theology. The modern extremists say that not only is the rôle assigned to him by the older theologians untenable, but also the efforts of modern criticism are futile since the present world-view cannot permit any importance to be attached to a historical founder of religion. Drews, in closing the Berlin debate, formulated two questions which in his opinion were fundamental to the whole controversy: What is the secret of Christianity's origin in the light of which it can be revitalized for modern times? and, What can Christ be to us today? The last question is answered simply: "As a purely historical personality, *nothing*"; and regarding the first, not only is the significance of myth central for an explanation of the rise of Christianity but for its modern revitalization as well. Not the historical Jesus but Christ as an idea, as an idea of the divine humanity, is the ground of a new religion. "When we can and will no longer believe on accidental personalities we can and must believe on ideas."<sup>2</sup>

If one would avoid confusion, he must here distinguish three distinct problems: Was Jesus a historical person? In what sense can he be called the historical founder of Christianity? and, What is his significance for modern religion? The present discussion will be confined to the first of these three questions.

The present tendency to deny the historicity of Jesus has its antecedents in the skepticism of Bruno Bauer. In the controversy which followed the appearance of Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, Bauer found himself more in sympathy with Strauss than with the contemporary Christian apologists. Their religious world-view was for him impossible—true religion could not be conditioned upon belief in the special activity of a historical personality, so Bauer began a critical examination of the literature upon which his opponents relied as the authority for their position. His first effort was to show that the picture of Jesus given in the Fourth Gospel was unhistorical.<sup>3</sup> Then he turned to the Synoptic Gospels

<sup>2</sup> *Berlin Religionsgespräch*, 94 f.; also *Christusmythe*, p. xi: "the 'Christusmythe' has been written directly in the interest of religion out of the conviction that the forms hitherto prevailing are no longer sufficient for the present, that especially the 'Jesus-ism' of the modern theology is fundamentally irreligious and itself presents the greatest hindrance to all true religious progress."

<sup>3</sup> *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte des Johannes* (1840).

where he adopted the conclusions of Weisse and Wilke as to the priority of Mark. But if Mark was the principal source for the first three gospels then their testimony to Jesus was in reality supported by only one witness, and this, upon further examination, proved to be a work of fiction.<sup>4</sup> If Jesus was no such person as the gospels depicted perhaps he was not a historical character at all. Bauer turned to the Pauline letters as the only remaining evidence, and these he decided were also unhistorical.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly all proof of Jesus' actual existence vanished, and the origin of Christianity was not to be traced to any definite personal founder. How, then, did the new movement originate? In answering this question Bauer allowed his fancy free play. The new type of thought which received the name Christianity, after an evolutionary period of about fifty years, came to maturity in the time of Trajan and was a syncretistic product embodying elements from Judaism, Stoicism, and Platonic philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

The distinctive feature of Kalthoff's theory is his emphasis upon the social idea.<sup>7</sup> The starting-point of his thought is a reac-

<sup>4</sup> *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker*, 3 vols. (1841-42); 2d ed., *Kritik der Evangelien und Geschichte ihres Ursprungs* (1850-51).

<sup>5</sup> *Kritik der paulinischen Briefe* (1850-52).

<sup>6</sup> *Christus und die Cäsaren. Der Ursprung des Christentums aus dem römischen Griechentum* (1877).

<sup>7</sup> *Das Christus-Problem, Grundlinien zu einer Sozialtheologie* (1902, 1903<sup>2</sup>); *Die Entstehung des Christentums, Neue Beiträge zum Christusproblem* (1904); *Was wissen wir von Jesus? Eine Abrechnung mit Professor Bousset in Göttingen* (1904); cf. Bousset, *Was wissen wir von Jesus? Vorträge im protestanten Verein zu Bremen* (1904). Kalthoff finds a natural following among socialistic writers, though Jesus' historicity is not always denied outright. K. Kautsky, *Der Ursprung des Christentums* (1908), also "Jesus der Rebell" in *Die neue Zeit*, XXVIII (1910), 13-17, 44-52, treats the Christian literature with so free a hand as to make Jesus a political and social revolutionist, a typical "Marxist." M. Maurenbrecher, *Von Nazareth nach Golgatha. Eine Untersuchung über die weltgeschichtlichen Zusammenhänge des Urchristentums* (1909), *Berliner Religionsgespräch* (1910), 89-93, takes the sources more seriously than Kautsky does. He combines historical method—he was formerly a theologian—and the philosophical ideas of Drews with strong socialistic tendencies. As a result, Jesus' life and death are thought to have been the indispensable incentive for the new religion, but the real secret of its origin is the activity of the Son of Man myth which fixed itself upon the person of Jesus after his death and in which the hopes of the common people found expression. Jesus had not put himself forward as Messiah, but he had spoken of the Son of Man in the third person, whose

tion against the individualism of modern religion, a feature, in his opinion, not to be found in primitive Christianity. This was purely a collective movement of the masses, and indeed so free from the individual element that the notion of a personal founder is entirely unhistorical, a later personification of the ideals and experiences of the community itself. On its positive side, Kalthoff's theory of the rise of the new religion is not essentially different from that of Bauer: Rome was the seat of its origin; Jewish messianism, Stoic philosophy, and the communistic clubs of the time supplied its source elements; its literature was a poetic creation projecting into the past the more immediate experiences of the present, as when the picture of a suffering, dying, and rising Christ typified the community's own life of persecution and martyrdom.

W. B. Smith varied the theory by assigning the origin of the Jesus-cult to pre-Christian times.<sup>8</sup> For Smith the whole subject is less a *problem* than it was with his predecessors and more a question of phrases. The two pillars of his argument are (1) τὰ περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ and (2) the word "Nazareth." From the statement of Acts 18:25 to the effect that Apollos was preaching "the things of Jesus" while he as yet knew only the baptism of John, Smith infers that prior to the gospel story there existed a "doctrine" concerning Jesus sufficiently definite and vital to form the background of a widespread propaganda. "Jesus" was in fact a pre-Christian theological idea connected with a cult widely diffused among the Jews and especially among the Hellenists between 100 B.C. and 100 A.D. Similarly the word "Nazareth"—the exact spelling does not greatly matter—was not originally the name of a place but an appellation meaning "guardian," "savior." The word "Jesus" originally had the same meaning, so that the association of the two names was a natural procedure. In the literature of Christianity the Jesus of the gospels was invented to personify the former of these terms, and the city called Nazareth—

coming he had believed near at hand. Jesus was moved mainly by the proletarian instinct, which also dominated the thinking of the disciples. The giving of themselves to this ideal after Jesus' death was the birthday of Christianity.

<sup>8</sup> *Der vorchristliche Jesus* (1906).

otherwise an unknown place—is a geographical fiction prompted by the latter; while “Christ” signifies the deity, especially if one reads *χριστός* as equivalent to *χρηστός* and compares Ps. 34:8, “taste and see that the Lord is good (*χρηστός*).”

Other investigators have drawn more largely upon data gathered from the so-called heathen religions to prove that “Jesus” is a product of mythological fancy. Already before W. B. Smith, J. M. Robertson had supposed that Jesus of the gospels was only a perpetuation of an old Ephraimitish sun-god, Joshua.<sup>9</sup> The representatives of the *religionsgeschichtliche* school are usually content with claiming that the heightened picture of Jesus given in the gospels contains many foreign elements,<sup>10</sup> yet many of their conclusions can readily be made to serve the purposes of those who argue that the so-called historical Jesus is entirely a creation of fancy.

Drews has drawn freely upon much of this earlier work, and the significance of the whole movement against the historicity of Jesus may be estimated from Drews’s work as a basis.<sup>11</sup> At the

<sup>9</sup> *Christianity and Mythology* (1900); *A Short History of Christianity* (1902); *Pagan Christs, Studies in Comparative Hierology* (1903).

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Gunkel, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments* (1903); Pfeiderer, *Das Christusbild des urchristlichen Glaubens in religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung* (1903); *Die Entstehung des Christentums* (1905); Jeremias, *Babylonisches im Neuen Testament* (1905); Brückner, *Der sterbende und auferstehende Gottheiland in den orientalischen Religionen und ihr Verhältnis zum Christentum* (1908); Clemen, *Religionsgeschichtliche Erklärung des Neuen Testaments* (1909; a convenient summary of the literature); Zimmern, *Zum Streit um die “Christusmythe”: das Babylonische Material in seinen Hauptpunkten dargestellt* (1910). Vollers, *Die Weltreligionen in ihrem geschichtlichen Zusammenhange* (1907), will go so far as to say that “no decisive argument for the historicity of Jesus can be produced; cf. Steck, “Das Leben Jesu und die vergleichende Religionsgeschichte” in *Protestantische Monatshefte* (1909), 329–37, 412–16, 447–54, who writes with special reference to Vollers and Drews.

<sup>11</sup> *Die Christusmythe*; also *Berliner Religionsgespräch*, 15–34, 66–74, 93–95. Later writers of this school have had practically nothing to add to what Drews and his predecessors have written. For example, Lublinski’s *Die Entstehung des Christentums*, although containing 257 closely printed pages, is mainly a composite of ideas from earlier writers, and with no systematic acknowledgment of the obligation. Nor has this material always been taken over accurately. On p. 177 reference is made to “Benjamin W. Smith’s” citation from Epiphanius to prove the pre-Christian existence of the Nazarite sect, but Lublinski copies not Smith’s “vor Christus” but Drews’ “lange vor Christus.” See below note 14.

Berlin conference he presented for discussion five theses, which form a good epitome of his whole position:

1. Before the Jesus of the gospels there existed already among Jewish sects a Jesus god and a cult of this god which in all probability goes back to the Old Testament Joshua; and with this were blended on the one hand Jewish apocalyptic ideas and on the other the heathen notion of a dying and rising divine redeemer.

2. Paul, the oldest witness for Christianity, knows nothing of a "historical" Jesus. His incarnated Son of God is just that Jewish-heathen redeeming divinity, Jesus, whom Paul merely set in the center of his religious world-view and elevated to a higher degree of religio-ethical reflection.

3. The gospels do not contain the history of an actual man but only the myth of the god-man, Jesus, clothed in historical form, so that not only the Israelitish prophets along with the Old Testament types of the Messiah, a Moses, Elijah, Elisha, etc., but also certain mythical notions of the Jews' heathen neighbors concerning belief in the redeeming divinity, made their contribution to the "history" of that Jesus.

4. With this method of explanation an "undiscoverable" remainder which cannot be derived from the sources indicated may still exist, yet this relates only to secondary and unimportant matters which do not affect the religious belief in Jesus, while on the contrary all that is important, religiously significant, and decisive in this faith, as the Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection of Jesus, is borrowed from the cult-symbolism of the mythical Jesus and owes its origin not to a historical fact but to the pre-Christian belief in the Jewish-heathen redeeming divinity.

5. The "historical" Jesus as determined by the critical theology is at any rate of so doubtful, intangible, and faded a form that faith in him cannot possibly longer be regarded as the indispensable condition of religious salvation.

The first of these theses contains the positive side of the whole argument, and the remaining points can have but little force if this should be found invalid. What is the evidence for a pre-Christian Jesus?<sup>12</sup> Three pieces of documentary evidence are

<sup>12</sup> The argument is elaborated in *Christusmythe*, I-119.

produced to show the pre-Christian use of the word "Jesus": a passage in Hippolytus, another in Epiphanius, and another from a Paris papyrus of magical formulae. Hippolytus at the beginning of the third century A.D. mentions a hymn used by the gnostic sect of the Naassenes which represents Jesus asking the Father's permission to visit the earth and relieve the condition of men.<sup>13</sup> Both Smith and Drews use this in proof of their position but without any serious attempt to prove that the passage originated before the Christian era. Smith excuses himself from discussing the date, while Drews says "to all appearances pre-Christian" and cites a Babylonian parallel to the hymn, which, however, may only mean that Babylonian and Christian elements were both used in its composition. Whatever the antiquity of the sect itself may be, as Hippolytus thinks of it, it is a heretical *Christian* sect, and the supposition that this reference to Jesus is a pre-Christian feature lacks support.

Smith lays great stress upon the testimony of Epiphanius, who mentions a sect of heretics called *Ναζαπαίων* (*Haer.* 18) or *Νασαπαίων* (*Haer.* 29) "who existed before Christ and knew nothing of Christ," and Epiphanius further says, "all men called the Christians *Ναζωπαίων*."<sup>14</sup> How much worth can be attached to this evidence? Even admitting that the variations of spelling are merely accidental, it must be remembered that Epiphanius was writing at the end of the fourth century A.D., and that his treatment of the subject is very obscure. He cannot himself have thought of this sect as precursors of the Christian community, nor does he give the slightest intimation that they revered a cult-god, Jesus. It is only by liberal etymologizing that any connection with a pre-Christian Jesus can be established; for example, the word "Nazarite" or "Nazorite" signifies "guardian," "watchman" (Syriac *nasarya*, Hebrew *ha-nosri*) so originally it is practically identical in meaning with "Jesus," that is, "deliverer," "savior." Thus it becomes probable that this sect worshiped

<sup>13</sup> Hippolytus, *Philosophumena*, V, 10; cf. *Realencyklopädie*, XIV, art. "Ophiten," 404-13.

<sup>14</sup> These citations follow Smith's own rendering of the passage, *Der vorchristliche Jesus*, 60 and 63. Smith's "vor Christus (Christo)" becomes with Drews "lange vor Christus," *Christusmythe*, 26.

a god Jesus as guardian, savior, deliverer. But Epiphanius is not to be cited in support of such a conclusion. He has no thought of a pre-Christian Jesus; the word "Nazarite" he connects with the town Nazareth, and it is barely possible, in spite of Smith's objections, that the Old Testament name "Nazirite" is responsible for Epiphanius' reference to pre-Christian times.

The case is scarcely more favorable for the argument from the Paris papyrus. The pertinent passages are: *ορκίζω σε κατα του μαρπαρκουριθ' νασααρι* . . . . (l. 1549) and *ορκίζω σε κατα του θεου των Εβραιων Ιησου* . . . . (ll. 3019-20). Whether *νασααρι* in the first formula has any reference to the word Nazarite is doubtful, but in the second Jesus is clearly mentioned: "I adjure thee by Jesus, the god of the Hebrews." If the formula is pre-Christian it is positive evidence for the existence of an earlier Hebrew deity by the name of Jesus. But the manuscript is conceded to belong between 300 and 400 A.D., and although the original composition may have been much earlier there are no good reasons for placing it before the Christian era; it is better interpreted as a heathen composition in which the Jews and the Christians are not distinguished.<sup>15</sup>

The further supposition of secret sects in Judaism where an alleged cult-god, Jesus, could be worshiped is difficult to imagine; yet Drews asserts that not only have the world-views of Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks influenced Judaism polytheistically, but from the beginning, side by side with the priestly and officially accentuated view of the One God, went a faith in other gods, a faith which not only received constantly new nourishment from foreign influences but, above all, which seemed to be fostered in the secret sects.<sup>16</sup> That the main line of Judaism contained syncretistic elements is now generally recognized, but the perpetual and widespread existence of secret polytheistic cults among the Jews is not supported by any substantial evidence. The Jewish literature seems to know nothing of such a situation, and although these sects are supposed to have been "numberless," practically the only ones to be cited as possible examples are the Therapeutae

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten* (1908), 186, note 14.

<sup>16</sup> *Christusmythe*, 21 f.

mentioned by Philo, the Essenes described by Josephus, and the Naassenes (Greek "Ophites"). There is some doubt about the antiquity of the last, but they are assumed to have existed as a Jewish sect "if not before at all events contemporaneous with Christianity." Moreover the name of Jesus cannot be connected with these sects except by a doubtful process of word-derivation. The word "Therapeutae" signifies "physicians" (*θεραπευταί*) and with these the Essenes (whose name means "pious," "god-fearing") held many ideas in common. Further the name "Jesus" means in Hebrew "helper" or "deliverer," that is *curator*, *θεραπευτής*. Now "the Therapeutae and the Essenes looked upon themselves as physicians, especially as physicians of souls; it is therefore not at all improbable that they worshiped a cult-god under this name," that is, "Jesus."<sup>17</sup> A similar supposition for the Naassenes is based upon their possible kinship with the Essenes and the presence of Jesus' name in Hippolytus' citation of their hymn which, as already observed,<sup>18</sup> is not free from the suspicion of Christian influence. The supposition of the prevalence of secret religious sects among the Jews as well as the worship of a god bearing the name "Jesus" rests upon only very inadequate evidence.

Continuing the argument from likeness of names, a prototype of the Christian "Jesus" is found in Joshua. His name, like that of Jesus, signifies "deliverer" "savior"; his mother (according to an Arabic tradition!) was Miriam and the mother of Jesus was Mary (Miriam); he leads Israel out of distress in the wilderness into the promised land where milk and honey flow, that is, the land of the Milky Way and the moon, and Jesus also leads his followers into the heavenly kingdom; and all this is traceable to an ancient cult of the sun, the Greek legend of Jason forming the connecting link. Jason = Joshua = Jesus. Jesus with his twelve disciples passing through Galilee came to the Passover feast at Jerusalem; Joshua with his twelve helpers passed through the Jordan and offered the Paschal lamb on the other shore; Jason with his twelve companions went after the golden fleece of the lamb; and all originally was the myth of the sun's wandering through the twelve

<sup>17</sup> *Christusmythe*, 25.

<sup>18</sup> See above, p. 26.

signs of the Zodiac. Thus Joshua (Jesus) was an old Ephraimitish god of the sun and of fertility, worshiped among many Jewish sects as the hero-deliverer of ancient Israel and the future messianic savior.<sup>19</sup> But when one asks for the evidences of a Joshua-cult among the Jews, he finds no answer. Again, is there anywhere in Judaism an intimation that Joshua was ever the hero about whom messianic hopes were built? Here also evidence fails; and as for a resemblance between the Jesus of the gospels and this alleged cult-god, Joshua, it lies merely in the identity of name—a feature of no importance when one recalls the frequency of the name among the Jews.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, as an argument for a pre-Christian Jesus, it is urged that the idea of a suffering messiah is not a distinctively Christian product, but it was earlier a Jewish doctrine, having been taken over from the heathen notion of a suffering, dying, and rising God. To be sure, nature myths personifying the death of winter and revival to new life in the spring, and the like, are common in the heathen mythologies of Asia Minor, and acquaintance with these on the part of the Jews is possible, but evidence that these formed an important part in the construction of their messianic hope is scanty. Certainly a mere collection of isolated points suggesting similarities of ideas is not sufficient proof of borrowing, particularly when the Jewish literature shows so little to confirm the supposition. Isaiah, chap. 53, is the most favorable passage, and granting that the thought in this chapter may be of heathen origin and the significance messianic<sup>21</sup>—both doubtful points—it is still true that official Judaism did not interpret the suffering servant of Isaiah messianically nor did early Christianity which, *ex hypothesi*, represents the unofficial side of Jewish thought, make extensive use of the passage. Paul, whom Drews will concede to be a historical personality of primal importance for the new movement, does not use the idea of the “suffering servant” in his

<sup>19</sup> *Christusmythe*, 23, 46–48, 98 f.; *Berliner Religionsgespräch*, 25.

<sup>20</sup> Wienel says an argument based on the likeness of Jesus to Joshua is “simply grotesque.” They have nothing in common but the name, which belongs to no less than twenty different men in Josephus’ history (*Ist das “liberale” Jesusbild widerlegt?* 91).

<sup>21</sup> So Gressmann, *Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie*, 302–33.

interpretation of Jesus, but rather the idea of the offered victim in the Jewish sacrificial system; and, further, he testifies that a dying messiah is a stumbling-block for Jews as well as foolishness for the Greeks.<sup>22</sup> Moreover the gospels clearly show that nobody associated with Jesus anticipated for him a career that would end in death. The primitive Christians had too much difficulty in defending their faith in a suffering Messiah to allow us to believe that they found the idea current in Judaism or even that the heathen notion of a dying and rising divinity was recognized as having any essential similarity with their preaching about "Jesus Christ and him crucified."

Drews has yet a few "proofs" of a sporadic sort for the existence of a pre-Christian Jesus. Smith's arguments from the phrase, "the things of Jesus" and from the supposed fictitiousness of the town of Nazareth are repeated. But the first point, as the context in Acts will show, merely implies that Apollos had previously been instructed by followers of Jesus who were not interpreting baptism in exactly the same way as it was being interpreted among the Pauline churches. The argument from "Nazareth" rests chiefly on the absence of the name in Jewish literature, but it cannot be very significant that a small Galilean town is not mentioned and, when we recall the apologetic difficulties it raised, it does not seem probable that it is a mere invention of the Christians. Another point is made from the type of Christology in the Book of Revelation and in the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles. The Jesus in these books is thought to have "nothing in common with the Christian Jesus" and to be "in all probability" taken over from a pre-Christian cult. But we have previously been told that the Christian Jesus also came from this source; then why the variation of form? Not only does the assertion that they have nothing in common seem ill-advised, but the explanation of the differences may easily be accounted for by conditions within the history of Christianity. Again, evidence for a long history of the name Jesus is found in the successful use of that name in magic already "at the beginning of the Christian propaganda," "an entirely inconceivable fact if its bearer had been a mere man." But the an-

<sup>22</sup> I Cor. 1:23.

cients who used magic were not given to critical skepticism in such matters; it would be quite sufficient for them to know that Jesus' followers believed him now to occupy a place of authority in the divine realm. Moreover, the date and extent of the magical use of Jesus' name are more doubtful problems than they are here assumed to be.<sup>23</sup>

Drews's second thesis, dealing with Paul,<sup>24</sup> proceeds upon the assumption that a pre-Christian Jesus is an established fact. Anything in the Pauline writings indicating the historicity of Jesus is explained in some other way or is called a later insertion; and, finally, it is asserted that "the Pauline letters contain no compulsion of any sort for the supposition of a historical Jesus and no man would be likely to find such there if it were not already for him an established assumption." Unlike most critics who deny the historicity of Jesus, Drews would save Paul in so far as the latter can be cited as the exponent of a religion built upon faith in an *idea*—the item which Drews regards central in all religion. As might be expected, the fundamental problems of Pauline study are scarcely touched and no fixed principles of critical investigation are followed. One takes from the literature what he pleases and leaves what he pleases. We are told at the start that no compelling proof for the authenticity of any of the letters can be produced and yet from them an elaborate and confident exposition of Pauline thought is derived.

Two main points are argued: Paul knew no "historical" Jesus, and his "Jesus" was none other than a heathen cult-god. At once several passages in Paul's writings demand explanation; for example, I Cor. 11: 23 ff., describing the last supper on the night of Jesus' betrayal. This seems to point to a specific event in the life of a historical individual, but the difficulty is avoided by assuming that "we have here to do with a clearly later insertion," at least the reference to the betrayal is "certainly inserted." Similarly the implication of a historical Jesus whose death was followed by

<sup>23</sup> Paul gives a hint of this practice in his day (Phil. 2:9 f.), and Acts, chap. 3, shows the early believers defending their right to use Jesus' name in this way; but how extensively they did this at an early date is not known.

<sup>24</sup> See also *Christusmythe*, 120-63.

certain appearances to his followers (I Cor. 15: 5 ff.) is either another interpolation, or else it refers to an ecstatic experience without regard to any definite historical person. It is a convenient elasticity of critical method which can allow these options. Again, the mention of "brothers" of the Lord, as in I Cor. 9: 5 and Gal. 1: 19, is to be understood in the sense of community brotherhood; yet we are not told why Paul in the same context should not have included Peter and Barnabas in this brotherhood. Moreover, brothers *in* the Lord, not brothers *of* the Lord, is Paul's mode of thought for the community relationship. These are fair examples of both the brevity and the method Drews uses in treating the positive side of the Pauline evidence. It is difficult to take such arguments seriously, particularly when they are presented so briefly and with no apparent ground of justification except the presupposition that a historical Jesus must not be recognized.

If Paul's gospel is not to be traced to an actual Jesus, what is its origin? The answer is a fanciful reconstruction of the historical background. In Tarsus the heathen religious movements of the time flourished and here Paul had heard of a Jewish sect-god, Jesus, yet Paul's own sympathies were with official Judaism and he studied to become a teacher of the Law. Now the gospel of "Jesus," which was originally "nothing other than a Judaized and spiritualized Adonis-cult" was first preached by men of Cyprus and Cyrene (Acts 11: 19 f. is the evidence!) but Paul opposed this preaching because the Law pronounced a curse upon everyone who hung on a tree. Then all of a sudden there came over him a great enlightenment; the dying Adonis became a self-sacrificing god, surrendering his life for the world. This was "the moment of Christianity's birth as a religion of Paul."

This entire treatment of Paul is inadequate and unfair as a representation of his testimony to the historicity of Jesus. It ignores the results of the recent "Jesus *versus* Paul" controversy in which the gap between the two has been shown to be less wide than, for example, Brückner and Wrede supposed;<sup>25</sup> it overlooks the seriousness of Paul's struggle with opponents who based their claim to superiority on their personal association with Jesus; and

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Jülicher, *Paulus und Jesus* (1907); J. Weiss, *Paulus und Jesus* (1909).

furthermore, the whole undertone of the Pauline letters with their incidental references to Jesus—the type of evidence which is in some respects the most telling—all passes for nothing. Moreover, to make the Adonis cult the historical background of the Pauline thought is especially open to criticism. On the one hand, many features of Adonis' career do not find a place in Paul's picture of Jesus; for example, the youthful god slain by the wild boar, or the mourning of his goddess sweetheart; nor are many important items in Paul's thought paralleled in the legend of Adonis: Jesus' human ancestry and family connections,<sup>26</sup> his association with disciples,<sup>27</sup> his righteous life<sup>28</sup> lived in worldly poverty<sup>29</sup> and self-sacrificing service,<sup>30</sup> his heavenly exaltation as a reward for obedience,<sup>31</sup> the circumstances of his death,<sup>32</sup> the awakening of faith through his appearances,<sup>33</sup> and finally the stress Paul puts on the Messiah's future coming, and his present significance for the spiritual life of believers.

It is also doubtful whether the idea of the incarnation of the deity, which Drews thinks to be the fundamental item of the Pauline Christology, is really a primal feature in the apostle's thought. For him there is but one God, the activity of whose will is manifest in all things. Although Jesus was a pre-existent being who voluntarily surrendered his heavenly position, still it is God who sent him to earth, God raised him from the dead and delegates to him the conduct of the judgment, and to God at last he submits all things in order that "God may be all in all." It is true that Paul speculates about the activity of Jesus in the angelic realm in subordination to God, but the significance of this activity in man's behalf lies not in the abstract thought of an incarnated redeeming divinity but in an actual human life terminated by a violent death. Not some hypothesis about his *becoming* a man, but the way he lived and the *outcome* of his career as a man, his

<sup>26</sup> Rom. 1:3; I Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:19; 4:4.

<sup>27</sup> I Cor. 15:5; Gal. 1:17 f., etc.

<sup>28</sup> Rom. 5:18 f.; II Cor. 5:21.

<sup>30</sup> Rom. 15:3; II Cor. 10:1.

<sup>29</sup> II Cor. 8:9; cf. Phil. 2:5 ff.

<sup>31</sup> Rom. 1:4; Phil. 2:9 f.

<sup>32</sup> I Cor. 11:23; and numerous references to his crucifixion.

<sup>33</sup> I Cor. 5:5-8; Gal. 1:12, 16.

success in contrast with the first man's failures, his restoration of the ideal of a perfect man—these are the phases of his activity that make him truly the savior of men. His resurrection, through which he was “declared to be the Son of God,” and his present activity in the spiritual life of the community are the further assurance of his saving power. In all of this the thought of pre-existence is never the stress-point. The heavenly man, the earthly Jesus, the exalted Christ (Messiah), the heavenly Lord are all features of Paul's system; but the point of supreme importance for his gospel, that which he makes the central item of his preaching, is the transition from the second to the third, from “Jesus” to “Christ and him crucified.”

Turning next to the gospels, they are held to contain only the myth of the god-man. Here, again, there is no detailed handling of critical problems. The external testimony to the gospels' origin is unceremoniously set aside on the ground of Eusebius' “notorious unreliability.” Upon the fact, now widely recognized, that the evangelists combined interpretation with their historical narratives is based the broad generalization that all is fiction, and the efforts of critical study to determine more accurately the real historical background are characterized as a “half comic, half sad performance” and a “horrible fiasco.” Yet, apparently without any suspicion of the comic, we are asked to believe that so matter-of-fact a circumstance as Jesus' association with his disciples is merely a variation of the myth about Jason's search for the golden fleece.

The point of departure for the argument against the gospels is a citation from Wrede to the effect that Mark is an apologetic treatise aiming to prove to gentile readers that Jesus was the Son of God. Granting this, it is not the same as saying Mark was interested in showing that the Son of God was Jesus, nor is Drews justified in his conclusion that “in the [synoptic] gospels we have to do not with a deified man but much more with an anthropomorphized God.”<sup>34</sup> This does not truly represent the order or progression in gospel thought. What troubled the early Christian missionaries was not the reluctance of their hearers to believe that

<sup>34</sup> *Christusmythe*, 211.

a god had become a man, but their hesitation about believing that a man, especially an obscure Jew, was really the Son of God. The oldest type of synoptic tradition does not connect either Jesus' activity or his teaching with a deified past; at baptism he first appears as God's Son, and his conduct through life is interpreted with reference to his future; his teachings are not of any angelic world out of which he has come, but of the earthly life to be lived in spiritual fellowship with God. Belief in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus is the starting-point for the theological elaboration of the gospel tradition, and the interpreter's task was not to read the divine out of Jesus' career, but so to narrate the story of his activity that it might answer to the later faith in him as the exalted Messiah. Only in the later stages, as in the Fourth Gospel and the nativity stories of Matthew and Luke, does the process of elevation reach back as far as the pre-earthly side of Jesus' career. Hence the idea of a pre-Christian cult-god as the starting-point for the gospel literature does not at all answer to this situation; and a similar objection holds against Kalthoff's supposition that Jesus is merely the community's ideal personified to save it from perishing. On the contrary, gospel thought moves in the opposite direction, from the person to his idealization rather than from the ideal to its personification. The extent to which the gospel picture of Jesus is historical is another problem, but it must be admitted that this literary activity moves out from the idea of a historical Jesus who has become the heavenly Christ.

Jensen's explanation of the gospels' origin forms a phase of this skeptical movement not considered by Drews. According to Jensen Jesus is originally neither a personified ideal, nor an anthropomorphized cult-god, but a reproduction of the Babylonian hero (or heroes) whose exploits are narrated in the so-called Gilgamesh Epic.<sup>35</sup> The argument rests upon the parallels which are found

<sup>35</sup> P. Jensen *Das Gilgamesch-Epos in der Weltliteratur* (1906), 811-1030; *Moses, Jesus, Paulus: drei Varianten des babylonischen Gottmenschen Gilgamesch* (1909); *Hat der Jesus der Evangelien wirklich gelebt?* (1910). In the last-mentioned treatise (p. 4) the author protests against being classed with those who deny outright the existence of a historical Jesus, yet in effect his position is the same as theirs. He holds that Paul's letters as well as the gospels are wholly imitations of the Babylonian legend:

on comparing the epic and the gospels, much emphasis being placed upon agreements in the succession of events. The force of the argument can be estimated more accurately by citing a section of the most important parallels, preserving the order of incidents as arranged by the author:<sup>36</sup>

1. At the beginning of the Gilgamesh legend Eabani was created by a miracle at the command of the gods.

2. Eabani lived far from men in the steppe (wilderness).

3. Eabani (is hairy and) has long hair on his head. Presumably he is clad with skins.

4. Eabani lives as the beasts of the steppe (wilderness) on grass and herbs and water.

5. Gilgamesh dreams of a star resembling a host of the heavenly Lord who is stronger than he, then of a man (human being), and this star, as well as the man, is symbolic of Eabani who thereupon comes immediately to Gilgamesh.

6. To all appearances Eabani afterward flees into the steppe (wilderness).

7. The sun-god calls from heaven to Eabani in the steppe (wilderness) with kind words and speaks to him of delicious food or loaves and of the kissing of his feet by the kings of the earth.

At the beginning of the Jesus story John was produced by a miracle in accordance with an announcement by an angel.

John lived in the steppe (wilderness) near the Jordan.

John, as a Nazirite, wears his hair uncut and long. He is clad with a garment of camel's hair and girded with a belt of leather or skin.

John lives on what is to be found in the wilderness: on grasshoppers and wild honey, and, like a Nazirite, drinks no wine.

John knows (by revelation) and prophesies of Jesus' coming as the coming of a man who is stronger than he, and soon afterward this Jesus comes to John.

Jesus afterward flees into the wilderness.

Immediately before his flight into the wilderness the spirit of God descends from heaven upon Jesus and a voice from heaven calls him God's beloved Son. In the wilderness, moreover, someone (i.e., the devil) speaks with Jesus about bread (which Jesus should make from stones) and about the fact that Jesus should rule

"Of the career of the alleged founder of Christianity [Jesus] we know nothing or at least as good as nothing"; and "We serve in our cathedrals and houses of prayer, in our churches and schools, in palace and hut, a Babylonian god."

<sup>36</sup> *Moses, Jesus, Paulus*, 27-30.

8. Eabani returns from the steppe (wilderness) to his abode, the home of Gilgamesh.
9. The dominion of [the great serpent and] the great lion is conquered by a god who comes down on a cloud (?) to whom the dominion of the world is to be transferred.
10. [Conquest of the great serpent.]
11. A fever plague, Xisuthros intercedes for plagued humanity and in this way probably the plague was brought to an end.
12. Xisuthros builds himself a ship and keeps it ready.
13. On an evening Xisuthros, with his family and his nearest friends, enters the ship.
14. A storm arises and ceases.
15. Xisuthros lands with his family far from his abode.
16. Sinful humanity and most beasts, among them also the swine, are drowned in the flood.
17. On a seventh day, after an interview with three intimate persons, Xisuthros comes to the top of the high mountain of the deluge and then is deified.
18. The voice of the invisible Xisuthros out of the air to his ship companions says: You are to be pious.
19. Chumbaba adventure.
20. Gilgamesh reproaches Ishtar for her love affairs and the evils she has done her lovers.
21. The bull adventure.
- all kingdoms of the earth if he kissed the devil's feet.
- Jesus returns from the wilderness to his native place.
- The kingdom of heaven and of God is near, which is to be introduced by Jesus' coming on the clouds.
- Expulsion of the demon in the synagogue at Capernaum.
- Peter's mother-in-law is sick with fever and Jesus makes her well.
- A boat is kept ready for Jesus.
- On an evening Jesus with his disciples enters the boat.
- A storm arises and ceases.
- Jesus lands in Perea opposite his native place.
- Two thousand or more demons, and two thousand swine, are drowned in the sea over which Jesus went.
- After six or eight days, thus certainly originally after a week of seven days, Jesus with three most intimate persons went on to a high mountain and was glorified and called God's Son.
- The voice out of the cloud on the mountain of transfiguration says: You are to hear Jesus.
- [Apparently omitted but is in a new place.]
- John blames Herod for having married his second wife, Herodias, and for his evil deeds.
- [Apparently omitted but is in quite a new place.]

22. Eabani dies.

John the Baptist dies (at a corresponding place in the story).

. . . . .

And so on until the end of Jesus' career is reached.

39. [Gilgamesh dies.]

Jesus dies.

It is evident that no importance can be attached to any likeness between individuals. At first John is Eabani, then he becomes Gilgamesh and Jesus is Eabani (No. 5), then Jesus becomes Xisuthros (Nos. 11-17), then Xisuthros is God (No. 18). When John reproves Herod he is Gilgamesh (No. 20), but when he dies in consequence of this boldness he is Eabani (No. 22). In the uncited parallels which follow there is the same confusion: when Jesus starts across the lake with the disciples he is Gilgamesh; when the storm arises he is Xisuthros; again, Gilgamesh represents the rich young ruler, but in the immediately following incident he represents Jesus' disciples; Jesus is Xisuthros when he gives the loaves to the disciples and they are Gilgamesh, but in the very next parallel Jesus is again Gilgamesh; then Jesus is Xisuthros and Peter is Gilgamesh, though immediately afterward the rich man in hell is Gilgamesh and Lazarus in Abraham's bosom is Eabani, notwithstanding the correspondence between Eabani and John the Baptist at the time of the latter's death. It cannot be said that the life-story of any hero in the Babylonian legend parallels that of any New Testament character, and indeed, so far as the support of the argument is concerned, the proper names may as well be struck from the list.

As to the resemblance between individual events, it is insignificant and often trifling in content; for example, two characters are alike in that each is in the wilderness—among orientals a natural place for meditation; one has a hairy body, the other wears a garment made of hair; one eats grass, the other eats grasshoppers; and, finally, both die—hardly a remarkable fact when there is no resemblance in the circumstances attending their deaths. But what of the alleged "essentially similar *succession* of events"? This is not true of persons with whom the action is associated, for, as already observed, first one person and then another is intro-

duced without regard to orderly procedure. Moreover, it is not true that the action, as arranged in these parallels, preserves the order of events in the gospels. The reference to Jesus' coming on the clouds (No. 9) appears in the gospels not at the beginning of Jesus' preaching but toward the close. The connection between holding a boat ready (No. 12) and entering the boat (No. 13) is a misrepresentation of the gospel narrative. Xisuthros enters the ship that he prepares and holds in readiness, but the occasion on which a boat is held ready for Jesus (Mark 3:9) is entirely different from that on which he enters a boat to go across the lake (Mark 4:35), and an important part of his work in Galilee is done in the meantime. It is exceptionally irregular to place the transfiguration in connection with the story of the Gadarene demoniacs (Nos. 16-18). According to the gospel order a wide gap intervenes in which belong several incidents mentioned later in Jensen's series. Again, the order of Mark is violated when Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler is placed before Jesus' reference to the "loaves"; and the order of Luke suffers when the story of the rich young ruler is put before the parable of the rich man in hades.

The alleged points of likeness are even more insignificant when one views them in their original contexts. It is only by a generous omission of the main features of the narrative that a theory of resemblance can be made even plausible. To take a single illustration, the gospel story of Jesus' baptism and temptation tells of an individual with a new consciousness of his mission in life reflecting in solitude upon the means he will use for its accomplishment. Though he is hungry and has power to turn stones into bread, he will not, for God is more to him than bread; nor will he ask God to show him favoritism either in the display of unusual acts or in the granting of earthly dominion. These are all inferior motives—temptations of Satan—in contrast with the ideal of perfect submission to the will of God. On the other hand, the portion of the Babylonian legend, of which the gospel narrative is supposed to be a reproduction, pictures Eabani as a wild creature sporting with the beasts and protecting them from the hunter. The latter complains to Gilgamesh, the ruler of the city of Erech, who promises to lure Eabani away by means of a prostitute. The plan succeeds

and finally Eabani is persuaded to enter the city and live in friendship with Gilgamesh. Later (lacunae in the records leave the exact connection uncertain) follows the so-called temptation parallel, which, however, is no temptation at all but a speech of comfort and exhortation from Shamash the sun-god. Eabani is evidently restive under the restraints of civilization, and Shamash says, in effect, Why, Eabani, do you long for the harlot, the prostitute? Have you not been supplied with food and clothing at the court of Gilgamesh who will allow you to sit on an easy seat at his right hand and the kings of the earth will kiss your feet? And when the dawn of morning broke "the words of Shamash, the mighty, loosened the bands of Eabani and his furious heart came to rest." These narratives certainly have no essential feature in common, and a theory of the derivation of the gospel story from the Babylonian, when the argument rests wholly on internal resemblance, is nothing less than absurd.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of this whole theory lies in its omissions. Large sections of both the gospel history and the Babylonian epic have to be suppressed in order to establish even the faintest semblance of parallelism. Practically all of Jesus' teaching is overlooked and his career taken as a whole has no counterpart in the epic. There is no character there whose religious ideas, whose inner experiences, whose motives and impulses, whose attitude toward men and God, and whose relations in life have the least resemblance to these traits in the gospel picture of Jesus. In no respect does Jensen's hypothesis, as a theory to explain the origin of the gospels without reference to a historical Jesus, seem to have any validity.

When all the evidence brought against Jesus' historicity is surveyed it is not found to contain any elements of strength. The argument for a pre-Christian Jesus lacks any substantial support and all theories that would explain the origin of the New Testament literature as purely a work of fiction fail. Paul and the gospel-writers are seen to possess the firm conviction that Jesus was a historical personage. Still it may be asked, Were they right in this conviction? Is his historicity an absolutely provable proposition? As a mathematical theorem, perhaps not, but we may

also remark that such a proof that he was not historical is also out of the question. There is no one now living who can say from first-hand knowledge that there was, or that there was not, in the first century of our era, an actual person about whom Christian tradition gathered. In matters of history "proof" can mean only a reasonable certainty based upon the available data. These data, if taken at their face value, are very explicit and the efforts which have thus far been made to explain them as totally spurious seem altogether inadequate. True, no great worth can be attached to any testimony outside of Christianity itself—Tacitus is too late to speak from personal acquaintance with the period in question and the originality of the passage in Josephus is much in doubt;<sup>37</sup> but unless Paul's epistles can be shown to be falsifications throughout, the historicity of Jesus is a compulsory conclusion. If, for example, Paul's controversy with opponents as reported in Galatians or in the Corinthian letters is historical, it inevitably follows that there was a historical Jesus with whom the older apostles had been personally associated. Drews is less consistent than his colleagues when he tries to save Paul's historicity and denies that of Jesus, but they are not more successful in showing reasons for rejecting Paul. Jensen's attempt to derive the Pauline letters from the Gilgamesh legend<sup>38</sup> is even less worthy of consideration than his treatment of the gospels, and although W. B. Smith argues for the spuriousness of Romans he passes the other letters by without consideration. Only belief in Jesus' historicity seems adequate to explain the evidence which now lies before us. Otherwise the origin of the earliest features in the gospel tradition remains unexplained, while the stages of development in this tradition are seen to move away from Jesus, the man of Galilee, toward the heavenly Christ; and Paul not only makes the historical personality of Jesus the corner-stone of his gospel, but the whole situation in which Paul moves shows a historical background in which such a person is the central figure.

The fourth and fifth of Drews's theses are related only indirectly to the present topic and can here be allowed only a few concluding

<sup>37</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, 44; Josephus, *Ant.*, XVIII, 3, 3; cf. XX, 9, 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Moses, Jesus, Paulus*, 38 ff.

words. Regarding the fifth thesis which raises the question of Jesus' relation to modern religion, Drews does not correctly represent the attitude of the "liberal" theologians, if by "liberal" he means the leading representatives of New Testament study in Germany. They do not hold that "faith" in the historical Jesus is the sole ground of their religion and that it is "only through textual criticism in a philological way"<sup>39</sup> that religion today is to be explained and established. For them "salvation" is not an affair of belief but of life, and Jesus' significance lies not in the doctrines about him formulated by his early interpreters but in his own religious life. To discover with keener appreciation the content of this religious life from which so strong an influence went out into the lives of others is the aim of these scholars.

The fourth thesis is nearer to the historical question in hand, though it really carries us over to the problem of Jesus' historical relation to the founding of Christianity. Is it a fact that what Drews's theory leaves unexplained is only "secondary and unimportant matters"? The answer given to this depends upon one's understanding of what constituted the vital element in primitive Christianity. If this was doctrine and ritual then Drews's claim—had he successfully established his other propositions—might have to be granted; but if the essential item was a new religious impulse which used, among other things, theological notions and outward forms in its efforts at self-expression, then the features Drews leaves unexplained are the primary and all-important. On this interpretation the personal influence of Jesus' own life is not only the key to the origin of the new religion but also the incentive for the literary activity which produced the New Testament.

<sup>39</sup> *Berliner Religionsgespräch*, 93 f.