

Chapter 2

Jesus of Fiction

As the Jesus of History started fading away fast as a result of researches in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, the Jesus of Fiction came increasingly to the fore. The process was helped a good deal by the knowledge which the modern West was acquiring at the same time about the ancient world. India, China, Iran, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Palestine and Greece of antiquity were no more being seen through the glasses of Christian theology or in the light of the Christian missionary lore. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Library after the Second World War provided a new background for ancient Palestine at the period when Jesus is supposed to have functioned. “As a result, Jesus is no longer a shadowy figure existing in the simplistic fairy-tale world of the Gospels. Palestine at the advent of the Christian era is no longer a nebulous place belonging more to myth than to history. On the contrary, we now know a great deal about Jesus’s milieu, and far more than most practising Christians realise about Palestine in the first century — its sociology, its economy, its politics, its cultural and religious character, its historical actuality.”¹

Scholars and story-tellers have been using every bit of historical information, every contradiction and contrary hint, every faint figure, and even stray sentences in the gospels for presenting Jesus in novel and strange, even startling, ways.

Looking at the plethora of publications which have been pouring in during the twentieth century, we find two types of literature on the subject. A majority of writers think that no matter how heavy the theological rubble happens to be, the “real” Jesus buried under it can be rescued and made to live on the stage of history. On the other hand, there is a minority of scholars who feel that no matter whether a man called Jesus existed or not, the Jesus of the gospels is a synthetic product fashioned out of diverse materials floating in the Mediterranean

¹ Michael Baigent et al, *op. cit.*, pp.17-18.

world around the time he is supposed to have functioned. I give below a brief survey of the literature of both varieties that I have read or references to which I have noticed.

The “real” Jesus Stories

The ball regarding the “real” Jesus was set rolling by *The Aims of Jesus and His Disciples* by Hermann Samuel Reimarus, published posthumously from Brunswick (Germany) in 1778. Taking his cue from Jesus’ anguished cry from the cross — “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” — Reimarus had observed, “This avowal cannot, without violence, be interpreted, otherwise than as meaning that God had not sided with Him in His aim and purpose as He had hoped. This shows that it had not been His purpose to suffer and die, but to establish an earthly kingdom and deliver the Jews from political oppression — and in that God’s help had failed Him.”² His disciples, however, had become used to making a living by “preaching of the Kingdom of God” and “forgotten how to work”. They were not prepared to renounce “this mode of life”. They felt sure that they could “find a sufficient number of faithful souls who would join them in directing their hopes towards a second coming of the Messiah” and “share their possessions with them” in expectation of future glory. “So they stole the body of Jesus and hid it, and proclaimed to all the world that he would soon return. They prudently waited, however, for fifty days before making this announcement, in order that the body, if it should be found, might be unrecognisable.”¹

The next in the series of what Schweitzer names as “The Earliest Fictitious Lives of Jesus”, was *An Explanation of the Plans and Aims of Jesus* by Friedrich Barhdt, published in II volumes from Berlin between 1784 and 1792. The cue in this case was provided by Nicodamus who figures in John’s gospel and Joseph of Arimathea whom we meet in all the four gospels. They were, according to Barhdt, leading members of a Secret Brotherhood, the Essenes, which had its cells in all ranks of the

² Cited in Albert Schweitzer, op cit., pp 19-20

³ Ibid, p.21.

Jewish society at that time. The Brotherhood was out to destroy the false Messianic hopes harboured by the Jews, and thus foster a rational religion. They were in search of a character who could be made to masquerade as the Messiah, and give currency to the Brotherhood's teachings. They found in Jesus what they were looking for, and stage-managed him in a series of dramatic episodes. The miracles of Jesus were calculated frauds masterminded by the two string-pullers and foisted on a superstitions population with the help of the widespread Essenes network. They also tricked the Sanhedrin into trying Jesus for rebellion and condemning him to death. At the same time they saw to it that Jesus did not hang on the cross for long. Luke had stuffed him with drugs so that he did not feel the pain of crucifixion. In any case, he was instructed to cry aloud and hang his head after a short while so that he could be declared dead and taken down quickly. They put him in a tomb which had been prepared in advance. "Since the humours of the body were in a thoroughly healthy condition, His wounds healed very readily, and by the third day He was able to walk, in spite of the fact that the wounds made by the nails were still open."⁴ Jesus came out of the tomb and met Mary Magdalene whom he bade tell His disciples that he had risen, and was going to his Father in Heaven before long. He appeared to them several times from his place of concealment till he took leave of them at the Mount of Olives near Bethany. "From the mountain He returned to the chief lodge of the Brotherhood. Only at rare intervals did He again intervene in active life — as on the occasion when He appeared to Paul upon the road to Damascus. But though unseen, He continued to direct the destinies of the community until His death."⁵

More or less the same pattern in presenting the "real" Jesus was followed by Karl Heinrich Venturini who published anonymously his work, *A Non-supernatural History of the Prophet of Nazareth*, in 4 volumes from Copenhagen (Denmark) during 1800-1802. In his story too Jesus is stage-managed by a secret society in order to destroy the false Messianic hopes of the Jews.

⁴ Cited in *Ibid.*, p.43.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.43-44.

His miracles are nothing more than cures effected by a “portable medical chest” which he carries secreted in his robe. His disciples are always ready at hand to distract the attention of the audience so that genuine medical treatments look like miracles. But the miracles failed to impress the Jews, and in due course Jesus also became disillusioned with the secret society. So the society decided that Jesus be taken to Jerusalem and made to proclaim publicly that he was the Messiah. He was hailed by the people of Jerusalem, but the Jewish authorities refused to change their notions about Messiahship. They arrested him all of a sudden and put him to death. Joseph of Arimathea who washed and anointed his body saw some hope in the fresh blood flowing from the wound in his side. So the body was not buried but kept under watch for twenty-four hours after which Jesus revived. He was removed to the Lodge of the secret society, and made to appear at intervals to his disciples. His strength, however, got exhausted after forty days when he took final leave of his disciples. “The farewell scene gave rise to the mistaken impression of his Ascension.”⁶

Charles Christian Hennell, August Friedrich Gfrorer, and Richard von der Aim (pseudonym of Friedrich Wilhelm Ghillany), whose works were published in Germany between 1831 and 1863, presented Jesus along the same lines as those of Barhd and Venturini. It was Ludwig Noack who struck a different note in his book, *The History of Jesus*, published in 1876. “Jesus’ temperament, according to Noack was pre-disposed to ecstasy, since He was born out of wedlock... Assailed in a thousand ways by the cruelty of the world, it would seem to Him as though His Heavenly Father, though unseen, was stretching out to Him the arms of consolation.” He became acquainted with Greek ideas about sons of God as also with Philo’s doctrine of the Logos.⁷ “Ambition, too, came into play — the high ambition to do God a service by offering up of Himself. The passion of self-sacrifice is characteristic of a consciousness such as this... From the first He was as much at home with the thought of death

⁶ Ibid., p.47.

⁷ Ibid., p.177.

as with His Heavenly Father.”⁸ His adversaries, however, refused to concede his claim that he was the Son of God. They tried to stone him to death so that he had to go into hiding. “Judas, the disciple whom Jesus loved, who was a man of much resource, helped Him to avoid being arrested as a disturber of the peace by arranging that the ‘betrayal’ should take place on the evening before the Passover, in order that Jesus might die, as He desired, on the day of the Passover. For this service of love, he was.... torn from the bosom of the Lord and branded as a traitor.”⁹ So Jesus really died, and did not rise on the third day. Like Earnest Renan who had published his highly sentimental *Life of Jesus* in 1863, Noack had no use for resurrection and ascension.

Towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century appeared some Lives of Jesus which presented him as a hypnotist or occultist. In his *Jesus of Nazareth* published from Leipzig (Germany) Paul de Regla stated that Jesus was born out of wedlock but was given shelter by Joseph because he was an exceptionally beautiful child. When he grew up, he attracted the Essenes as his disciples. “His preaching dealt with the rights of man, and put forward socialistic and communistic demands.”¹⁰ He knew hypnotism and used this art to stage miracles. He was not dead when he was taken down from the cross, and was reanimated by the Essenes.

Emile Lerou, a French lady, used a pseudonym, Pierre Nahor, when she published her *Jesus* in 1905. In this, a distinguished Brahmin from India had sizable property in Nazareth, and an influential following in Jerusalem. He took Jesus to Egypt and taught him Indian philosophy as well as hypnotism. Jesus cured Mary Magdalene, a distinguished courtesan of Tiberias, and thus acquired great hold over rich and pious ladies. They sent to him baskets of food which his disciples distributed to people. When Jesus came to know that “the priests were resolved upon His death, He made His friend Joseph of Arimathea, a leading man among the Essenes, promise that he would take Him down from

⁸ Ibid., p.178.

⁹ Ibid., p.179.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.325.

the cross as soon as possible and lay him in the grave without other witnesses". And while he was on the cross, "He put Himself in a cataleptic trance" so that he looked like dead, and was taken down quickly. He revived in the tomb, and appeared several times to his disciples. But he had been badly hurt. He dragged himself to Nazareth and died at the door of his Brahmin teacher from India.¹¹

The one thing which these "real" Jesus stories in the nineteenth century had in common was that they presented him as a great leader, on his own or as the mouthpiece of some secret society. The stories that started coming out in the twentieth century acquired an altogether different tone. Christian apologists continued to paint Jesus, historical or otherwise, in attractive colours. But the stories that stole the show had a character to the contrary. The "real" Jesus was more and more brought down to earth in a manner that proved pretty painful, even alarming, to the believing Christian. I am summarising some of these stories in a chronological order.

1905, G.L.Loostan, *Jesus Christ from the Psychiatrist's Viewpoint*, Bamberg (Germany), 1905.

1910, W. Hirsch, *Religion and Civilization*, Munich (Germany), 1908,

1912, C. Binet-Sangle, *Jesus Madness*, Paris, 1912.

"After a thorough examination of the Gospel narratives, they independently reached the same conclusion: Jesus was mentally ill and suffered from *paranoia*", a mental disease defined as "the sneaking development of a persistent and unassailable delusion system, in which clarity of thought and action are nonetheless preserved."¹²

1906, George Moore, *The Brook Kerith*, London, 1916.

The author "caused considerable scandal by depicting Jesus as surviving the Crucifixion, and being nursed back to health by

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.326.

¹² Koenraad Elst, *Psychology of Prophetism: A Secular Look at the Bible*, Voice of India, New Delhi, 1993, pp.78-79.

Joseph of Arimathea”.¹³ But Moore cited in support of his story some of the oldest Christian heresies and the Quran, all of which proclaimed that Jesus had not died on the cross.

1929, D.H. Lawrence, *The Man Who Died*, London, 1929.

It was a short story originally named *The Escaped Cock*. “Jesus was taken down too early from the cross, revived in the tomb, petrified his followers, who assumed he was dead, ‘resurrected’, and slipped away to Egypt to enjoy conjugal relations with a priestess of Isis.”¹⁴ It was at the “climatic moment” in the “sexual congress” that he declared, “I am risen.”¹⁵

1931, R. Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, London, 1931.

Piecing together some scattered information in the gospels, the author presented Jesus as the leader of armed bandits. He relied on the Jewish tradition preserved in *Toldoth Jeshu*, particularly on a passage preserved in a fifth-century Hebrew version of Josephus, stating that “Jesus had more than 2000 armed followers with him on the Mount of Olives”.¹⁶

1946, Wilhelm Lange-Eichbaum, *Genius, Madness and Fame*, Germany, 1946 .

In a chapter, “The Problem of Jesus”, the author said that Jesus of the gospels betrays “quick-tempered soreness and a remarkable ego-centricism”, and that “what is not with him, is cursed”. Jesus “loves everything that is below him and does not diminish his ego” but “utters threats against everyone who is established, powerful, and rich”. He is also “a sexually abnormal man” and there is in him ““a lack of joy in reality, extreme seriousness, lack of humour, a predominantly depressed, disturbed, tense condition, coldness towards others insofar as they do not flatter his ego” including his mother and brothers. His “lack of balance” makes him “now weak and fearful, now with violent

¹³ Michael Baigent et al., op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁴ Ian Wilsm, op. cit. p. 118 and 171.

¹⁵ Michael Baigent et al., op.cit., p.37.

¹⁶ G.A. Wells, op. cit., p.172.

outbursts of anger”. The psychiatrist concluded that Jesus was suffering from paranoia.¹⁷

1946, Robert Graves, *King Jesus*, London, 1946. The author showed Jesus as surviving the crucifixion and living as a lover of Mary Magdalene.

1950, Morris Goldstein, *Jesus in the Jewish Tradition*, New York, 1950.

The well-known American Rabbi presented Jewish traditions vis-a-vis several Jesuses and inferred that the Jesus of Christianity could be the Jeshu who “was stoned and hanged because he practised sorcery and led Israel astray”. Nobody was prepared to defend him although “for forty days before the execution, a herald unsuccessfully urged people who knew anything in his favour to come forward”.¹⁸

1954, Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, New York, 1954

This was written by a Greek author who had won the Nobel prize in literature for his earlier work. In this novel, Jesus dies on the cross. “Before he does so, however, he has a vision of what his life should have been had he not voluntarily submitted himself to his final sacrifice. In this vision — a kind of ‘flash-forward’ in fantasy — Jesus sees himself married to the Magdalene (for whom he has lusted all through the book) and fathering a family upon her.”¹⁹ The plot also shows Judas betraying Jesus at the latter’s express command. Some critics thought that this was “a passionately religious, passionately devotional, passionately Christian” piece of literature. “Nevertheless, the novel was banned in many countries, including the author’s native Greece, and Kazantzakis himself was excommunicated.”²⁰

¹⁷ Koenraad Elst, op. cit. pp.80-81.

¹⁸ G.A. Wells, op. cit.. p.16.

¹⁹ Michael Baigent et al., op. cit., p.16.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

1956, Albert Camus, *The Fall*, Paris, 1956.

The famous French author had the following passage in a dialogue: “Say, do you know why he was crucified — the one you are perhaps thinking of at the moment? Well, there were heaps of reasons for that ... But, besides the reasons that have been very well explained to us for the past two thousand years, there was a major one for that terrible agony, and I don’t know why it has been so carefully hidden. The real reason is that he knew he was not altogether innocent.”²¹

1960, Hugh Montefiore, ‘Jesus, the Revelation of God’, in *Christ For Us Today*, London, 1960.

“Inspired by certain mysterious references such as the ‘disciple Jesus loved...: leaning back on Jesus’ breast’ (John 13:23-25), in the 1960s Anglican Bishop Hugh Montefiore put forward the idea that Jesus might have been a homosexual as ‘an explanation we must not ignore’.”²²

1961, Paul Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus*, Berlin, 1961.

He analyses the gospel materials in detail and proves that the Jewish authorities did not condemn Jesus to death, though they were quite competent to do so if they had found him guilty of blasphemy. They handed him to Pontius Pilate simply because they were afraid that his activities might lead to an insurrection and bring about a heavy-handed Roman intervention.

1963, J. Carmichael, *The Death of Jesus*, London, 1963.

He showed that Jesus was a guerrilla leader who first collaborated and then broke with another Jewish rebel, John the Baptist. John recognized his superiority when he seized the temple in Jerusalem as a preliminary to seizing the city and leading an anti-Roman uprising. But the Roman soldiers stormed the temple and Jesus had to go into hiding from where he was betrayed by Judas. He was then crucified by the Romans along with other leaders of the rebellion. He cites Sossianus Hierocles, the prefect

²¹ Cited in James P. Mackey, op. cit., pp.71-72.

²² Ian Wilson, op. cit., p.80.

of Egypt who wrote in the reign of Diocletian (245-315 AD) and who had stated that “Jesus was the leader of a band of highway robbers numbering more than 900 men”, and also a lost version of Josephus which stated that “Jesus had more than 2,000 armed followers with him on the Mount of Olives”.²³

1963, Hugh Schonfield, *The Passover Plot*, London, 1963.

This international best-seller of which more than three million copies have been sold shows that Jesus arranged his own mock crucifixion in order to pass as the Messiah according to the prophecy in the Old Testament. The crucifixion was arranged by Joseph of Arimathea who gave him a drug in a sponge in order to induce the appearance of death. The plan was to take him inside the well-prepared tomb, and revive him. But the plan misfired because of the lance-thrust by the Roman soldier in Jesus’ side. Jesus died and was buried secretly elsewhere. The man seen by Mary Magdalene standing by her side was not Jesus but someone else who had come to help in reviving Jesus. It was a case of mistaken identity. There was no resurrection.

1965, Samuel Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, London, 1965.

This Professor of Biblical Studies in the Jewish Institute of Religion in London, had protested indignantly against Paul’s view, parroted by Christian tradition, that the Jewish Law at the time of Jesus was sterile, and had become a burden so that Jews were ready to be liberated from it. He took great pride in the ancient Jewish Law, and dismissed Jesus as someone whom the Jews did not care to remember.

1967, S.GF Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, Manchester, 1967.

1968, S.GF Brandon, *The Trial of Jesus*, Manchester, 1968

This Professor in the University of Manchester, England, argued that Jesus was an ardent Jewish nationalist who led a rebellion against the Romans. The inscription — King of Jews — affixed to the cross was genuine because it occurs in all the

²³ G.A. Wells, op. cit., pp. 170-72.

gospels. He had many Zealots among his disciples, including Judas Iscariot. He failed, and was crucified by the Romans. This was the whole story. Jesus, the risen Christ and Saviour, was an invention of Paul for the consumption of Gentiles.

1969, S.S. Levin, *Jesus alias Christ*, New York, 1969.

He argued that “the miracles, ethical teachings, and warnings that the world will shortly come to a catastrophic end are wrongly ascribed to Jesus in the gospels, and in fact represent actions and sayings of John the Baptist”.²⁴ Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was a political demonstration, and his effort to clean the temple was an effort to seize it after surveying its defences. But the Romans foiled his insurrection, and crucified him. That was his end.

1970, Carlo Fuento, *Terra Nostra*, New York, 1970.

The Mexican novelist showed that Jesus survived the “fraudulent crucifixion” which involved a substitute, and was no saviour.

1970, W.E. Phipps, *Was Jesus Married?*, New York, 1970.

The author, a Professor of Theology, proved that Mary Magdalene was married to Jesus, particularly with reference to the recently discovered Gospel of Philip which preserves a tradition that she was his spouse.

1970, Carlyle Slaughter, *Magdalene*, London 1970.

It is a novel which presents Mary Magdalene as a lover of Jesus.

1971, Haim Cohn, *The Trial and Death of Jesus*, New York, 1971.

Cohn was an ex-attorney-general of Israel and a member of its Supreme Court when he wrote this book. He dismissed the Jewish trial and condemnation of Jesus as a ridiculous fiction. The Jewish authorities, in fact, had tried to save him by advising

²⁴ Ibid., p.173.

him not to proclaim himself as the Messiah. It was Jesus who invited death by such a proclamation before Pilate. So crucifixion is the central theme in the story of Jesus. He was killed by the Romans. And he was not buried because victims of crucifixion were not allowed that rite.

1973 Haim Maccoby, *Revolution in Judea: Jesus and the Jewish Resistance*, London, 1973.

He showed that the first-century generation of Jews which Christian tradition has blackened as “wicked” was, in fact, “the greatest generation in Jewish religious history”, and that “to dissociate themselves from this generation would be for the Jews to dissociate themselves from Judaism”.²⁵ For him Jesus was a Jewish revolutionary who “staged an uprising against the Roman” after the precedent set by Judas of Galilee in 6 AD. Kingdom of God meant an independent Jewish state. Pilate was cruel by nature, and crucified Jesus. The gospels were written by “death-worshipping mystagogues” who “exalted the Roman cross into a religious symbol” and “saw more meaning in Jesus’ death than in his life”.²⁶ He names Paul as the chief culprit in this conspiracy.

1973 W.E. Phipps, *The Sexuality of Jesus*, New York, 1973.

He says that according to the Mishnaic law an unmarried Jew could not be a teacher. So Jesus was married, and Mary Magdelene was his wife. Analysing John 20.17, he concludes that here Jesus asks Mary to cease from sexual intercourse in which they used to be engaged earlier.

1973, J.A.T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, London, 1973.

This Dean of Trinity College, Cambridge, says that Jesus’ birth through normal sex is not ruled out by the gospels. It is clear that Joseph was not the father of Jesus but it does not mean that there was no “prior intercourse between Mary and some unknown male which Joseph subsequently condones”.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., p.173.

²⁵ Ian Wilson, op. cit., p. 152.

²⁶ G.A. Wells, op. cit., 162.

²⁷ Ibid., p.8.

1973, Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and the Secret Gospel of Mark*, Harvard (USA), 1973.

“In 1958...Professor Morton Smith of Columbia University discovered, in a monastery near Jerusalem, a letter which contained a missing fragment of the Gospel of Mark. The missing fragment had not been lost. On the contrary, it had apparently been deliberately suppressed — at the instigation, if not the express behest, of Bishop Clement of Alexandria, one of the most venerated of the early Church fathers.”²⁸ The fragment showed Jesus and Lazarus spending several days and nights together in a state of utter nakedness. The Bishop had received a complaint that this episode in the gospel was enabling some heretic sects to indulge in immoral practices. Professor Smith published the fragment with the historical background, and opined that the “whole episode refers to a typical mystery initiation”.²⁹

1973, G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, London, 1973

This Reader in Jewish Studies in the University of Oxford maintained that Jesus was very much a Jew in all his doings and sayings, and a great teacher. He was not a guerrilla leader. He could not have been tried by the Jews for blasphemy which he had never committed. The gospel accounts of a Jewish trial of Jesus must have been invented by Hellenized Jews like Paul. Jesus was persecuted and executed by the Romans.

1974, Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel*, London 1974.

“Dr. Smith has interpreted Jesus as a hedonistic libertine.

Smith imparts a heavy sexual innuendo to the nudity of the baptismal rite he believes Jesus to have practised, and suggests that, transported by his experiences of the Kingdom of God, Jesus thought himself above the constraints of the Jewish law, and able to do as he pleased.”¹⁰

²⁸ Michael Baigent et al, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, Corgi Books, London, 1984, p. 334.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

³⁰ Ian Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 82

1975, Donovan Joyce, *The Jesus Scroll*, London, 1975.

The author, an Australian journalist, claims to have seen a scroll stolen from the Masada excavations. “It was signed *Yeshua ben Ya’akob ben Gennesareth* who described himself as eighty years old and added that he was the last of the rightful kings of Israel. The name when translated into English became Jesus of Gennesareth, son of Jacob. Joyce identifies the author as Jesus of Nazareth.” It means that Jesus survived the crucifixion, and fought in the Roman siege of Masada during the Jewish revolt of 66-74 AD.³¹

1976. Mariana Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: Myth and the Cult of Virgin Mary*, London, 1976.

“Mary Warner begins with the gospels, noting the slight allusions to Mary and the curious confusions between the two women of that name. She points out the falsities, fables and manifest fabrications that have shaped mariolatry.”³²

1978, Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, London, 1978.

“Dr. Morton Smith depicts his protagonist as a typical wonder-worker of the age, a figure of a kind that thronged the Middle East at the beginning of the Christian era.”³³

1980, Liz Green, *The Dreamer of the Vine*, 1980. It is a novel about Nostradamus in which Jesus is shown as a married man who leaves a bloodline.

1982, Michael Baigent et al, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, London, 1984.

After examining critically a plethora of literature on the “real” Jesus, the authors conclude that Jesus was descended from King David and, therefore, a legitimate priest-king of Israel who came in conflict with the Romans. But his powerful friends “working in collusion with a corrupt, easily bribed Roman

³¹ Michael Baigent et al, *The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail*, op. cit, p.513.

³² Review reproduced at the back cover of the book.

³³ Michael Baigent et al, *The Messianic Legacy*, p 17.

Procurator, appear to have engineered a mock crucifixion — on private grounds, inaccessible to all but a select few”. Keeping the general population “at a convenient distance, an execution was then staged — in which a substitute took the priest-king’s place on the cross, or in which the priest-king himself did not actually die”. When it was sufficiently dark and visibility became low “a ‘body’ was removed to an opportunely adjacent tomb, from which a day or two later, it ‘miraculously’ disappeared”. He was already married to Mary Magdalene and he now escaped to some other place to live secretly and sire children who were moved to France and founded the Carolingian Dynasty. The disciples of Jesus and, later on, the Church suppressed the true story, and invented a Jesus who was made the founder of Christianity. So Jesus of history has very little to do with the Jesus of the gospels and the churches.

1983, Anita Mason, *The Illusionist*, London, 1983.

It is a novel in which Simon Peter is shown as a “simple, untutored Galilean fisherman and bully” who accepted literally Jesus’ statements about an imminent end of the world. When nothing happened after Jesus’ crucifixion, Peter was a tormented man — full of doubt and disillusionment himself, but sticking to his story before the other disciples of Jesus. Paul rescued Peter out of this predicament by inventing a new theology. It was on this theology that Peter founded his Church, which carried forward the conspiracy.

1984, Michael Arnheim, *Is Christianity True?*, London, 1984.

The author teaches at St. John’s College in the University of Cambridge. While travelling on a train, he heard a passenger declare that decimalisation of the coinage was one of the three “biggest ‘cons’ in history.” “What were the other two, I immediately enquired, and quick as a flash came the reply, the graduated pension fund and ‘JC. I was stunned. ‘JC I repeated quizzically. ‘Yes, Jesus Christ of course.’ And in what order should these three biggest-ever confidence tricks be placed? On this point my Mancunian fellow-traveller was equally forthcoming: ‘JC —

number One.”“ With this preface, the author examines the “historical improbability: namely that one particular man was no mere mortal but ‘the Christ’, whose death changed the course of human history for ever, and who continues to exist as ‘God the son’, part of an indivisible threefold godhead”. Going over the evidence produced by Christian theologians in support of this fantastic belief, the author concludes that the Messianic claim for Jesus cannot be reconciled with the claim that he is the Son of God, that there was nothing divine in Jesus, and that Christianity has been a Big Lie in telling which Adolf Hitler was the latest expert.

1984, Ian Wilson, *Jesus: The Evidence*, London, 1984.

It was published as a companion volume to a television documentary of the same name announced by David Rolfe in 1983. “The series took no position of its own, endorsed no particular point of view. It simply endeavoured to survey the field of New Testament studies and to assess the value of various theories proposed. Yet even before the project got under way, British pressure groups were lobbying to have the enterprise suppressed. When it was finished in 1984, it had to be screened, in a private showing, to a number of Members of Parliament before it could be cleared for transmission.” The author of the book adds a chapter, “The Real Jesus”, in which he says, “Here was nothing about a call for belief in himself as mankind’s saviour, nothing about a new religion that he wanted instituted in his name.” Jesus would not have endorsed the Nicene Creed “formulated in his name three hundred years later” because “the Jewish faith was the absolute bedrock of his belief. A special feature of this book is an attempt to explain Jesus’ miracles as feats of hypnosis. Even the resurrection is explained as the effect, on Jesus’ disciples, of a post-hypnotic suggestion.

1985, Anthony Burgess, *The Kingdom of the Wicked*, London, 1985.

The author carried forward Anita Mason’s thesis that Jesus of the gospels was invented by the Church which has been a

conspiracy of the wicked from the very beginning.

1985. Michele Roberts, *The Wild Girl*, London 1985.

The novel depicts Mary Magdalene as Jesus' lover and as the mother of his child. It invited the wrath of the Church in England and the author was threatened with persecution under Britain's blasphemy law.

1986, Michael Baigent et al, *The Messianic Legacy*, London, 1986.

The authors carry forward the theme they propounded in *The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail*. More stories about the "real" Jesus are examined and a tentative hypothesis is advanced regarding the formation of Christianity. One thing which comes out clearly is that Jesus the founder of a bloodline was not the founder of this faith.

1986, Herman H. Somers, *Jesus the Messiah: Was Christianity a Mistake* (in Dutch), Antwerp, 1986

The author is a renowned theologian who served in the Jesuit order for forty years. In due course, he developed serious doubts about the divine character of the Bible, grew out of his faith in Christianity, and left the Jesuit order. His study of Jesus is a part of his study of the psychology of prophetism, which he finds paranoid. The prophets of the Bible, he says, were mentally sick people, and Jesus was no exception. Jesus did not die on the cross. He was alive when he was taken down, and was revived. He went into hiding and wrote the Revelation or Apocalypse, the last and the most blood-thirsty book of the New Testament, credited by Christian tradition to John, the beloved disciple of Jesus. This book of the Bible leaves little doubt that its author was a mentally sick man.³⁴

1994, John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, San Francisco (USA), 1994.

³⁴ Somer's study has been summarised by Koenraad Elst in his *Psychology of Prophetism: A Secular Look at the Bible*, published by Voice of India in 1993.

The author is a Bible scholar at De Paul University in Chicago, Illinois, USA. “For Crossan Jesus’ deification was akin to the worship of Augustus Caesar — a mixture of myth, propaganda, and social convention. It was simply a thing that was done in the Mediterranean world. Christ’s pedigree — his virgin birth in Bethlehem of Judea, home of his reputed ancestor King David — is retrospective myth-making by writers who had ‘already decided on the transcendental importance of the adult Jesus,’ Crossan says. The journey to Bethlehem from Nazareth, he adds, is ‘pure fiction, a creation of Luke’s own imagination.’ He speculates that Jesus may not even have been Mary’s firstborn and that the man the Bible calls his brother James was the eldest child.” Jesus never cured anyone. He was a wandering teacher for whom Roman imperialism was demonic possession. “Believing that such wanderlust spread subversion, the Romans had him crucified. Jesus — a peasant nobody — was never buried, never taken by his friends to a rich man’s sepulcher. Rather, says Crossan, the tales of entombment and resurrection were latter-day wishful thinking. Instead, Jesus’ corpse went the way of all abandoned criminals’ bodies: it was probably barely covered with dirt, vulnerable to the wild dogs that roamed the wasteland of the execution grounds.”³⁵

Jesus as Synthetic Product

Many scholars in the modern West have noted that the entire paraphernalia — virgin birth, baptism by water, miracles, parables, anointing, twelve apostles, trial, last supper, betrayal passion, execution, resurrection, ascension — with which Jesus is equipped in the gospels can be traced back to magic rites, mystery cults, mythologies, religions, and philosophies prevailing in this or that country in the ancient world since long before Jesus is supposed to have been born. And they have concluded that Jesus was a myth manufactured by the early evangelists in order to serve the superstitious inclinations of various communities in the Roman empire. Some weight is lent to this proposition by the weak welding which holds together the different compo-

³⁵ *Time* weekly magazine, New York, 10 January 1994.

nents of the Jesus cult. It seems that the men who crafted the myth were neither precise in their design nor skilful enough to endow the finished product with a semblance of reality.

Volney of France was perhaps the first to propound in the eighteenth century that “Jesus was a solar myth derived from Krishna” of Hindu mythology.³⁶ He was followed by Ernest Renan, the famous Catholic theologian from France, who pointed out Buddhist parallels in the parables of Jesus in his *Life of Jesus* published in 1863. In 1883, Max Muller noted “startling coincidences between Buddhism and Christianity in his *India: What it can teach us*, published from England. He wondered about the channels through which Buddhist lore could have travelled to the Mediterranean world, but at the same time he drew attention to the fact that “Buddhism existed at least four hundred years before Christianity”.³⁷ Another French theologian, Ernest Havet, did the same in his study of primitive Christianity published in 1884. A stronger case along the same lines was made by Rudolf Seydel, Professor in the University of Leipzig (Germany), whose first book, *The Gospel of Jesus in relation to the Buddha Legend*, published in 1882, was followed by a more elaborate one, *The Buddha Legend and the Life of Jesus*, published in 1897.³⁸ Finally, J.M. Robertson, a British scholar and a Member of Parliament, revived the Volney thesis in 1900 by stating in his *Christianity and Mythology* that “the Christ-Myth is merely a form of the Krishna-Myth”.³⁹ Many more books on the myth of Jesus have come out since then, and we have yet to see the end of similar literature. I give below brief descriptions of the few books which I have read or references to which I have noticed.

1903, G. R. S. Meade, *Did Jesus Live 100 B.C.?*, London, 1903

“The author compares the Christian tradition with the Jew-

³⁶ Hector Hawton, in his Introduction to a reprint of *Pagan Christs* by J.M. Roberston, New York, 1966, p.5.

³⁷ Albert Schweitzer, op. cit., p.290.

³⁸ Ibid., p.290 fn.

³⁹ Ibid., p.290-91fn.

ish, and finds in the latter a reminiscence of a Jesus who lived in the time of Alexander Jannaeus (104-76 B.C.). This person was transferred by the earliest evangelists to the later period, the attempt being facilitated by the fact that during the procuratorship of Pilate a false prophet had attracted some attention.”⁴⁰ Josephus, the historian of the Jews, had written that Alexander Jannaeus used to crucify Jews. G.A. Wells observes, “Jannaeus’ crucifixion of eight hundred Pharisees left a particularly strong impression on the Jewish world...In this connection it is of interest that the dating of Jesus as a heretic who was put to death for misleading people about 100 BC, under Jannaeus, is ‘one of the most persistent elements of the Jewish tradition concerning Jesus’ and ‘goes back to the floating mass of tradition’ from which the Talmud drew. Mead allows that this dating may have originated as a result of controversy between orthodox Jews and Christians of Pauline type whose Christianity comprised a ‘minimum of history and a maximum of opposition to Jewish legalism’.”⁴¹

1903, J.M. Robertson, *Pagan Christs*, London, 1903.

“Robertson’s most distinctive thesis is that the Gospel story of the Last Supper, the Agony, the Betrayal, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection was a mystery play which came to be accepted as an account of real happenings. The origin of this ritual drama is an ancient Palestinian rite in which an annual victim known as ‘Jesus (Joshua) the Son of the Father’ was actually sacrificed.”⁴²

1912, William Benjamin Smith, *Ecce Deus: Studies of Primitive Christianity*, London, 1912.

“In the development of the drama of salvation there were many mythologic elements that lay at hand, not a few venerable in their antiquity, descended from Nippur and Babylon, from the Tigris and the Euphrates, and possibly from the Indus and the Ganges. It would be strange if these had not suggested or shaped

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 327.

⁴¹ G.A. Wells, op. cit., pp. 198-99.

⁴² Hector Hawton, op. cit., p. 5.

or coloured some of the incidents and delineations and even thought-elements elaborated in the Gospels, in the New Testament, in early Christian literature, faith and worship.”⁴³ What was needed was a cult round which these components could cluster. “There must have been a pre-Christian cult of a pre-Christian divinity. This hypothesis is absolutely unavoidable. It meets you full in the face whatever way you turn. Moreover, it is overwhelmingly attested by the New Testament itself which clearly shows that the cult was esoteric long before it became exoteric...”⁴⁴

1944, W.L. Knox, *Some Hellenistic Elements in Primitive Christianity*, London, 1944.

The author sees the birth of Christianity in the decline of communal or national and the rise of personal religion in the Graeco-Roman world. “Knox notes that the same idea can be found in the pagan mystery cults of the period; and he infers that the concern of both Christian and pagan cults with personal religion was leading in the theology which explained them, to the independent development of such metaphors.”⁴⁵

1948, H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, Chicago, 1948.

1951, H. Frankfort, *The Problem of Similarity in Ancient Near Eastern Religions*, Oxford, 1951.

The author was Director of the Warburg Institute. His thesis was that in hot climates the withering and blooming of Nature in quick succession created the idea of gods who died and rose again. This idea lost its connection with Nature when transplanted among impoverished urban populations, and gave rise to a religion of resurrection.⁴⁶

1953, Sir H. Idris Bell, *Cults and Creeds in the Graeco-Roman Egypt*, Liverpool, 1948 Reader in Papyrology in the University of Oxford, this au-

⁴¹ William Benjamin Smith, op.cit., p. 66.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 74-75.

⁴⁵ G.A. Wells, op. cit., p. 181.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 180-81.

thor repeated the thesis of W. L. Knox but emphasized that the cults prevalent in ancient Egypt provided the central substance to the Jesus myth.

1955, B.M. Metzger, ‘Mystery Religions and Early Christianity’, in the *Harvard Theological Review*, 49, 1955

This Professor of New Testament at the Princeton University observed that “in the East three days constitute a temporary habitation, while the fourth day implies a permanent residence” and inferred that Paul’s formula may be to “convey the assurance that Jesus would be but a visitor in the house of the dead but not in permanent resident therein”.⁴⁷ He saw in the Christian eucharist a parallel with initiation in Mithraism.

1958, Rev. E.O. James, *Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East*, London, 1958

In the opinion of this Professor of History and Philosophy of Religion in the University of London, the ancient Middle East abounded in gods like Osiris and Tammuz who had been on earth to suffer, die and rise again. This provides “an intelligible origin of religious ideas which are otherwise hard to explain”.⁴⁸

1958, S. G. F. Brandon, ‘The Myth and Ritual Position’, in *Myth, Ritual and Kingship* edited by S.H. Hooker, Oxford, 1958.

The author was a Professor of Comparative Religion in the University of Manchester and wrote several remarkable books on the subject of Jesus Christ. He saw in Christianity concepts which were alien to the Jewish religion but akin to the cult of Osiris in ancient Egypt, and concluded that Osiris “the vegetation god *par excellence* of Egypt” became “the Saviour to whom men and women turned for assurance of immortality”. He also pointed out that the Christian baptismal ritual was patterned after the Osirian ritual.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 181 and 184.

1963, A.E. Jensen, *Myth and Culture Among Primitive Peoples*, Chicago and London, 1963.

This Professor of Anthropology in the University of Frankfurt (Germany) saw the origin of the Christian eucharist in primitive cannibalism.

1963, S. G.F.Brandon (ed.), *The Saviour God*, Manchester, 1963.

This book carried articles by Professor Brandon and Professor M. Simon, Professor of History of Religion in Strasburg University. Professor Simon saw in the story of Jesus a parallel to the story of William Tell who never existed but who was nevertheless regarded by many as a historical person. The two professors together developed further Brandon's recurring idea that Jesus was invented after the pattern of ancient saviour gods.

1965, R.H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, London, 1965.

The author, a Professor of New Testament in the University of Evanston, Illinois, USA, rejects the contention that the pagan cults of saviour gods rose only in second and third centuries of the Christian era. He argues that "this attractive suggestion 'does not quite fit the facts', since mystery cults were active in the very areas missionized by first century Christians: Antioch was in close contiguity with the Adonis cult, Ephesus with the Cybele and Attis cult, Corinth with the Elusinian mysteries".⁵⁰

1970, John Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, London, 1970.

This specialist in Oriental Studies in the University of Manchester "argues in all seriousness that Christianity began as a secret cult of the sacred mushroom, and that the name 'Jesus' was a code-word for this".⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 182-83.

⁵¹ Ian Wilson, op.cit., p.46.

1979, James P. Mackey, *Jesus the Man and the Myth*, London, 1979.

He is a Professor of Theology in the University of Edinburgh, England, and assumes airs of superiority to the rest of the tribe which is busy with Jesus. But he concedes: "Palestinian Jews sometimes envisaged a better future in messianic terms... Hellenistic Jews, the Jews who had gone abroad into an empire which was Greek in culture...had naturally less interest in messianic or apocalyptic hopes, so they favoured more titles such as Lord, a title which could be conferred on anyone from a freeman, through a Roman Emperor, to a divine saviour of one of the mystery religions, and which was often used in Greek translation of Jewish scriptures for Yahweh himself. Hellenistic Jews would also be familiarized by the Greek scriptures....with the personification of Wisdom as a kind of intermediary between God and this world. Philo, a part contemporary of Jesus, and a very philosophical Jew of Alexandria, had personified the Word or Logos of God and even referred to it as the elder son of God. Finally, in purely Graeco-Roman cultural circles, the conventions of emperor worship...had some of these emperors proclaimed Lords, Gods, Sons of God (if only by apotheosis after death) and Saviours, the gospels or good news of whose coming were heralded by annunciations. There was more, much more; but this gives some idea of the variety of titles which lay ready to hand for preachers of Jesus as they spread out from Palestine to convert the known world to his cause."⁵²

1984, Michael Arnhem, *Is Christianity True?*, London, 1984.

The author raises a question: "If Jesus was not the Messiah, what was he? Even his claims to being a great teacher, prophet and ideal human being will not stand up to scrutiny, as we have discovered in the previous chapter. What then is left?" His answer is: "Jesus clearly was the leader of some sort of religious group within Judaism, though how big it was is hard to say. It certainly was by no means the only group of its kind, that of

⁵² James P. Mockey, op. cit., pp. 197-98

John the Baptist being another. That Jesus himself claimed to be the Messiah is more than likely. But in this regard too he was not exceptional: there was no shortage of Messianic claimants at the time, and the Baptist may possibly have been one too...”⁵³ And he concludes, “Why then did Christianity become a new and separate religion? Precisely because the bulk of the Jews were not persuaded of the truth of the claims made for Jesus... Why then were these claims so much more attractive and acceptable to pagan non-Jews? Because pagan religions were not concerned with historical truth and it was in any case a matter of indifference to non-Jews whether Jesus (or anyone else, for that matter) was or was not the Jewish Messiah. What is more, the polytheistic pagan mind did not see the concepts of ‘man’ and ‘god’ as separated by the same great and unbridgeable chasm as appeared from the strictly Jewish vantage point. The way was now open for the development of a number of totally un-Jewish and frankly pagan features in Christianity... One distinguishing feature of the new religion which may seem difficult to trace back to polytheistic paganism is Christianity’s extreme intolerance....”⁵⁴

The Jesus of Christian theology had continued to spread terror for several centuries. It was quite a relief when critical history abolished him, and emancipated his victims. The Jesus of Fiction proved quite entertaining. People in the modern West have become too fascinated by this human Jesus to care for frowns from the churches and the missions.

⁵³ Michael Arnheim, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-55.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-55.