

## Chapter 3

### Christ of Faith

Deprived of the Jesus of history and faced with the Jesus of fiction, the die-hard Christian theologians have had to console themselves and their remaining flock<sup>1</sup> in the West with what they proclaim pompously as the Christ of Faith. They are trying to cover their shattering defeat with a lot of casuistry and some mystagogic phrases from Greek. Shorn of this pretentious window-dressing, the exercise amounts to no more than smuggling in by the backdoor the garbage that has been kicked out from the front. Jesus of faith is the same old guy we have met in the gospels, though somewhat straightened out. Bigotry is back with a bang. Marauders who glorify themselves as missionaries can continue in business with a clean conscience. Before we start having a close look at this new-fangled fetish, we may put a few questions to the hawkers of this old wine in new bottles.

What has been your Jesus Christ except the Christ of faith, all these two thousand years? Have you ever tried to prove with the support of verifiable experience or honest logic that there is a True One God as opposed to False Many Gods, and that this God is the Creator and Controller of the Cosmos? Have you ever produced even an iota of evidence in support of your proclamation that this True One God sent down his Only-begotten Son in order to wash with his blood the sins of all mankind by mounting the cross? Have you ever cared to convince human reason or even common sense that the man who died on the cross rose on the third day, and that he has been present ever since in history in the form of the Holy Spirit? Have you ever come out with any moral justification in support of your much trumpeted right to impose your abominable superstitions on the rest of mankind by means of force and fraud? In short, have you ever bothered to face, fairly and squarely, any of the numerous questions which heathens in the ancient Roman world and rationalists and hu-

<sup>1</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century, people in the West were renouncing Christianity in large numbers.

manists in the modern West have posed before you vis-a-vis your dark doctrines and darker history? All that you have always come up with is a broth of paper and ink, eulogised as the Word of God, and backed it up with brute force, military or financial or both.

Tertullian (AD 160-230), the Bishop of Antioch and one of the famous post-apostolic Church Fathers, had been asked by Pagan philosophers in the Roman Empire to prove his case before he pulled a long face and fulminated in the foulest language against those who did not take seriously the Only Saviour he was out to sell. The only response from him was barefaced impudence. "God's son," he said, "died: it is believable because it is absurd. He was buried and rose again: it is certain because it is impossible."<sup>2</sup> As late as 1954, President Eisenhower harangued his people in the United States to have "faith in faith". When asked to define the faith, all he could manage was an equally stupid statement: "Our government makes no sense unless it is based on a deeply-felt religious faith — and I don't care what it is."<sup>3</sup> In other words, he admitted that he was talking arrant nonsense.

In fact, the search for the Jesus of history was launched, as we have pointed out earlier, in the hope that the results will fortify with hard facts and human reason the Jesus Christ whom Christians had so far accepted as a matter of faith. It was not the fault of history that the search proved negative, and instead of propping up the case led to its complete collapse. The salesmen of Jesus Christ should have thrown their discredited totem into the dustbin, and gone in for something more worthwhile. But what they actually did was the other way round. If history, they said, failed to fortify the Christ of faith, to hell with history! That became the stock argument of theologian after theologian. They knew that Jesus Christ was too indispensable for Christian-Western imperialism to be given up simply because straight logic demanded it.

The crisis that was brewing for Christianity had been antici-

<sup>2</sup> Will Durant, *op. cit.*, p.613.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Johnson, *op. cit.*, p.497.

pated by David Friedrich Strauss in his book, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History*, which he published in 1864. It was a sequel to the debate which had been provoked by his first *Life of Jesus* published in two volumes in 1835-36. As the gulf between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith continued to widen, in spite of heroic efforts to bridge it up with linguistic tricks like eschatology,<sup>4</sup> Martin Kahler rang the alarm-bell in 1892. In his book, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, published that year, he made a sharp distinction between the “historical” and the “historic”, and poured contempt on the former term.

“As far as Kahler is concerned,” comments James P. Mackey, “it is the business of the biblical documents to present us with a portrait of the historic Christ. The adjective ‘historic’, as distinct from its near-verbal neighbour ‘historical’, indicates not any particular data about the actual man in his time, but rather the impact he has had on the history of the world...<sup>5</sup> Kahler insists that the documents are faith documents, portraying and soliciting faith, that they were never meant to yield historical data about an individual, and that they can never do so in any worthwhile quantity. The tables are turned, but apparently only with the effect of defiantly establishing a thesis which was beginning to be dimly perceived, the thesis that history and faith can find no common ground in research in the origins of Christianity...”<sup>6</sup>

The next brave theologian to enter the lists and hurl similar “defiance” at history as well human reason, was Albert Schweitzer whose celebrated book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, was published first in German in 1906 and then in English in 1910. It has been reprinted many times and in several languages. It is by now regarded as a classic on the subject.

<sup>4</sup> “Since the word eschatological is probably the most abused word in contemporary theology, a kind of pseudo-verbal escape mechanism from all kinds of conceptual difficulty, it is not easy to say what it means. To say that it means that Jesus’ resurrection was ‘an event which occurs precisely at the end of history’, presumably in some anticipatory fashion, is probably the very plainest of plain nonsense” (James P. Mackey, op. cit., p.287, Note 8)

<sup>5</sup> James P. Mackey, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.44.

Schweitzer tried to be more sophisticated as compared to Kahler who was shooting straight from the shoulder. In other words, the frank honesty of the latter was replaced by the veiled dishonesty of the former. I have to quote Schweitzer at some length in order to illustrate the mind that was now struggling to surface in what became known as “radical” theology.

The volume of language consumed by Schweitzer in as many as 410 pages and the crafted style, creates the illusion of earnest scholarship. One is likely to think that his conclusions are drawn at the end of a meticulous attempt to understand the intricacies of the problem. He, however, assumes at the very beginning of his book, the proposition he is out to prove. “Moreover,” he says to start with, “we are here dealing with the most vital thing in the world’s history. There came a Man to rule over the world... That He continues, notwithstanding, to reign as the alone Great and alone True in a world of which He denied continuance, is the prime example of that anti-thesis between spiritual and natural truth which underlies all life and all events, and in Him emerges into the field of history.”<sup>7</sup> What he wants us to believe at the very outset is that history was groping in the dark before a non-descript Jew from Galilee got himself hanged. The conclusions that follow after he has gone over all important books on the subject published between 1778 and 1901 AD, are being given in his own words.

“The historical foundation of Christianity as built up by rationalistic, by liberal, and by modern theology no longer exists; but that does not mean that Christianity has lost its historical foundation. The work which historical theology thought itself bound to carry out, and which fell to pieces just as it was nearing completion, was only the brick facing of the real immovable historical foundation which is independent of any historical confirmation (*sic*) or justification.”<sup>8</sup>

“It was no small matter, therefore, that in the course of the critical study of the Life of Jesus, after a resistance lasting for two generations, during which first one expedient was tried and

<sup>7</sup> Albert Schweitzer, op. cit., p.2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 397.

then another, theology was forced by genuine history to begin to doubt the artificial history with which it had thought to give new life to our Christianity, and to yield to the facts which, as Wrede strikingly said, are sometimes the most radical critics of all. History will force it to find a way to transcend history, and to fight for the lordship and rule of Jesus over this world with weapons tempered in a different forge.

“We are experiencing what Paul experienced. In the very moment when we were coming nearer to the historical Jesus than men had ever come before, and we were already stretching out our hands to draw Him into our own time, we have been obliged to give up the attempt and acknowledge our failure in the paradoxical saying: ‘If we have known Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth know we Him no more.’ And further we must be prepared to find that the historical knowledge of the personality and life of Jesus will not be a help, but perhaps even an offence to religion.

“But the truth is, it is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen within men, who is significant for our time and can help it. Not the historical Jesus but the spirit which goes forth from Him and in the spirits of men strives for new influence and rule, is that which overcomes the world. “It is not given to history to disengage that which is abiding and eternal in the being of Jesus from the historical forms in which it worked itself out, and to introduce it into our world as a living influence. It has toiled in vain at this undertaking... The abiding and eternal in Jesus is absolutely independent of historical knowledge and can only be understood by contact with His spirit which is still at work in the world. In proportion as we have the spirit of Jesus we have the true knowledge of Jesus.<sup>9</sup> “For that reason it is a good thing that the true historical Jesus should overthrow the modern Jesus, should rise up against the modern spirit and send upon earth, not peace, but a sword. He was not teacher, not a casuist; He was an imperious ruler. It was because He was so in His inmost being that He could think of Himself as the Son of Man. That was only the temporally

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.399.

conditioned expression of the fact that He was an authoritative ruler. The names in which men expressed their recognition of Him as such, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, have become for us historical parables. We can find no designation which expresses what He is for us.

“He comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake side He came to those who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: ‘Follow thou me!’ and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.”<sup>10</sup>

Comment on this desperate display of poetry, casuistry, verbiage and worse is superfluous. Nobody can beat the Christian theologians, not even Hegel, when it comes to camouflaging with pompous rhetoric and linguist tricks the complete collapse of their logic. In the case of Albert Schweitzer writing in 1906, there was additional reason for feeling confident about the ultimate triumph of Jesus Christ and the capacity of Christian theology to overcome the “temporary” crisis. Christian missions which had flocked to every corner of “heathendom” in the wake of Western armadas and big battalions, had just completed what K. Latourette names as *The Great Century* in the expansion of the faith. Christianity had never had it so good, after the conquest and devastation of the Americas by the soldiers of Christ. In the same year (1910) that Schweitzer’s magnum opus was published in England, the First International Missionary Council was getting ready to announce at Edinburgh “the evangelization of the world in one generation”.<sup>11</sup> Coffers of the Christian missions were overflowing with vast wealth, collected from Western governments and private patrons, who in turn had robbed it from the victims of evangelization. It would have been a miracle if smug Christian-Western chauvinists like Albert Schweitzer had not mistaken the mailed fist of Western gangsterism for the

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.401.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Johnson, op. cit., p. 457.

manifest spirit of Christ. He was not alone in this self-satisfied orgy of Jesus-mongering. The Western world at that time was brimful of such black-coated braggarts.

So Christian theology managed to “transcend” history, and abandoned the quest for the historical Jesus. The next problem it faced was more momentous — what to do with its stock-in-trade so far, namely, the Jesus of the gospels? Rationalists and humanists in the West had continued to point out that the Jesus of the gospels was quite an obnoxious character. Leading psychologists in the West had seen in this Jesus many unmistakable symptoms of mental sickness; in fact, some of them had nailed him as stark mad. For historians of Christianity, the Jesus of the gospels was a figure which stood soaked in the blood of countless innocents in all continents. For serious social scientists, the spirit of this Jesus had materialized in totalitarian ideologies like Communism and Nazism. The “faith documents” did not seem to be of much help for salvaging the Christ of faith.

### **Jesus of the Gospels**

The rationalists and the humanist had smiled at the wild claims advanced for himself by Jesus in the gospels, particularly in the gospel of John. But they had frowned at his sayings which divided the human family into two warring camps of believers and infidels. They had dismissed his miracles as stories meant for children or grown-up morons, but were pained by his lack of sense as well as sensitivity in drowning a herd of pigs and cursing the fig tree for not bearing fruit out of season. They had found his parables quite commonplace except those relating to the burning of weeds, the reallocation of vineyards, and the compelling of people to come in, which they thought revealed a vicious mind. For them, the ethics he preached was either sanctimonious humbug (Sermon on the Mount) which worked to the advantage of the bully and the robber and the spendthrift, or quite brutal and inhuman (pluck out your eyes, cut off your limbs). In any case, he himself had never practised what he had preached. He was intolerant, short-tempered, and foul-mouthed, and went about cursing everyone who did not applaud his tall

talk. His intemperate denunciation of the Jews had led to shrieking anti-Semitism down the ages. He was anti-work and did not want his followers to labour in the present or lay store for the future. He was also an anti-social character who asked his disciples to desert their parents, who disowned his own mother and brothers in public, and who proclaimed that he had come to set the son against his father and brother against brother. His behaviour in the temple at Jerusalem where he went violent, upturned the tables of the money-changers, and whipped people right and left, was cruel, reprehensible and uncalled for. The ugliest note he introduced in the belief system of his disciples was a cataclysmic end of the world, and eternal hell-fire for those who did not accept him as what his inflated ego had induced him to see in himself. Finally, his advocacy of missions for bringing the whole world into his fold, was a mandate for gangsterism and predatory imperialism.

The psychologists were not slow to note that the Jesus of the gospels was totally lacking in a sense of humour; he never smiled, not to speak of having a hearty laugh. He was suffering from megalomania when he indulged in all that tall talk about himself, and from melancholia when he feared persecution and death. The two moods are known to alternate again and again in serious cases of mental disorder. He struck a heroic pose before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, but broke down completely on the eve of his arrest as well as on the cross. In the psychological language of ancient Jews, he had been possessed by unclean spirits who had recognised him as soon as they saw him. We need not go into the details of the analysis to which the sayings and doings of the Jesus of the gospels have been subjected by a number of competent psychologists. It should suffice to say that most of the modern psychologists have found this Jesus an object of pity on account of his mental sickness, but an object of concern because he poses a serious threat to human brotherhood and social peace in the event of his teachings being followed by some fraternity or establishment. They cite the horrors of Christian history in order to clinch the argument.

Historians of Christianity saw the Jesus of the gospels inspir-

ing theocratic states which extinguished all human freedoms, church hierarchies which killed and burnt at the stake millions of men and women after denouncing them as heretics and witches, and military missions which massacred whole populations and wiped out whole civilizations in course of the holy wars waged against the heathens in Europe, America, Asia, Africa and the Oceania. They also noticed how he had been aped by Muhammad not only in advancing the same sort of wild claims but also in perpetrating atrocities which those claims entailed inevitably. The quantum of crimes committed by Muhammad's Islam was only slightly smaller than that of the crimes committed by the Christianity of Jesus Christ. Unlike the armies of Christianity, the armies of Islam had failed to ride roughshod over the whole globe. It was only in Iran and India that Islam could emulate the Christian record. So the Jesus of the gospels could rightly be credited with the greatest crimes over the longest span of time in human history. The nightmare was not yet over if one looked at Islamic lands in the enlightened twentieth century. Historians could not but conclude that the world would have been a happier and healthier place if there had been no Jesus Christ, real or invented.

Social scientists in the wake of the First World War saw close similarities in the Jesus of the gospels on the one hand and Lenin and Stalin on the other. Bertrand Russell characterised Communism as a Christian heresy. There were any number of indications in the gospels that Jesus would have done the same as Lenin and Stalin had done if he had the same power. Communism was the Christian Church and theocracy reincarnated — the dogmas, the popes, the priests, the inquisition, the suppression of freedom, the witch-hunting, the brain-washing, the hymns of hate, the wars of liberation, the large-scale killings, and the rest. Only the verbiage used for mounting the macabre campaign was different.

The parallel between Jesus and Hitler was seen as still more striking. The Nazi creed as laid down by Hitler, did not sound much different from the Christian creed as preached by Jesus in the gospels. "I believe," said the Nazi creed, "in the revelation of the divine, creative power and the pure blood shed in war and peace by the sons of the German national community, buried in the soil thereby sane-

tified, risen and living in all for whom it is immolated. I believe in an eternal life on earth of this blood that was poured out and rose again in all who have recognized the meaning of the sacrifice and are ready to submit to them... Thus I believe in an eternal God, an eternal Germany, and an eternal life.”<sup>12</sup> Nazism had substituted the German race for God, and the German blood for the blood of Jesus. But the spirit was the same, and the same horrors followed as had been witnessed for centuries after the advent of Christianity.

The Nazi copying of Christianity did not stop at the theological level. It percolated to the rituals as well. “There were special Nazi feasts, especially 9 November, commemorating the *putsch* of 1923, the Nazi passion, and crucifixion feast, of which Hitler said: ‘The blood which they poured out is become the altar of baptism for our Reich.’ The actual ceremony was conducted like a passion play. And there were Nazi sacraments. A special wedding service was designed for the SS. It included runic figures, a sun-disc of flowers, a fire-bowl, and it opened with the chorus from *Lohengrin*, after which the pair received bread and salt. At SS baptismal ceremonies, the room was decorated with a centre altar containing a photograph of Hitler, and a copy of *Mein Kampf*; and on the walls were candles, Nazi flags, the Tree of Life and branches of younger trees. There was music from Grieg’s *Peter Gynt* (‘Morning’), readings from the *Mein Kampf*, promises by the sponsors and other elements of the Christian ceremony; but the celebrant was as SS officer and the service concluded with the hymn of loyalty to the SS. The Nazis even had their own grace before meals for their orphanages, and Nazi versions of famous hymns. Thus:

Silent night, holy night,  
All is calm, all is bright,  
Only the Chancellor steadfast in fight,  
Watches over Germany by day and night,  
Always caring for us.

There was also a Nazi burial service.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Paul Johnson, op. cit, p. 486.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Johnson, op. cit., p. 486-87.

### **The Gospels are the First Nazi Manifesto**

Apart from the various other features in which Adolf Hitler reincarnated Jesus Christ, the Holocaust in which millions of Jews were slaughtered in various ways was directly inspired by the Jesus of the gospels. The Jews had been denounced by him as snakes, as a brood of vipers, as sons of the Devil, as killers of prophets, as an adulterous nation, and as permanent enemies of his church simply because they refused to acclaim him as the Messiah. The Christian theology that followed, stamped them with a permanent guilt — they were killers of Christ. The Jews had been reduced to non-citizens, and subjugated to repeated pogroms all over Christianised Europe and throughout the centuries. Muhammad had also done the same after he failed to persuade the Jews to accept his claim of prophethood. He had massacred the Jews of Medina and his Muslims had followed the precedent wherever Islam prevailed. No one, however, had worked out the message of the gospels systematically, and blueprinted the final solution before Hitler arrived on the scene. Human emotions other than religious fanaticism had intervened frequently in favour of the Jews. In short, no one before Hitler had grasped completely the verdict passed on the Jews by the Jesus of the gospels. Small wonder that serious thinkers in the West came to look at the gospels as the First Nazi Manifesto.

Christian historians are now making herculean efforts to salvage the Jesus of the gospels from the history he has created. They are blaming on “non-Christian elements and forces” all brutalities committed by Christian churches and missions in Europe and elsewhere, and presenting Jesus as an embodiment of humility, charity, compassion, and peace. They are saying that the spread of Western imperialism and Christianity at the same time, was a mere coincidence, and that the purposes of the two should be perceived separately. But there are few serious historians who subscribe to this cult of “the disentangled Christ”. For most of them, the inspiration for crimes committed by Western imperialism in league with Christian missions, came from the Jesus of the gospels. James Morris put it bluntly when he said that “every aspect of the Empire was an aspect of Christ”.

All in all, therefore, by the middle of the twentieth century the Jesus of the gospels had become a thoroughly discredited figure in the modern West, and could hardly be presented as the Christ of Faith. Christian theology had to overcome yet another crisis, and save whatever could be saved of its tattered mantle. It was at this point that Rudolf Bultmann of the University of Marburg in Germany came forward with his “defiant manifesto on faith’s independence of the historians’ labours”.<sup>14</sup> As he is supposed to be the greatest theologian of the twentieth century, I shall present him at some length.

### **Christ of Kerygma**

To start with, Bultmann made short work of the gospels and proclaimed, as noted earlier, that the gospels did not preserve the actual doings and teachings of Jesus and that nothing could now be known of the Jesus of history. He dismissed the stories based on Old Testament prophecies as concoctions by the evangelists. He dismissed all miracles attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. He dismissed such of Jesus’ sayings as could be traced to Jewish thinking of Jesus’ time. “By a series of deductions he concluded that much of what appears in the gospels was not what Jesus had actually said and done, but what Christians at least two generations removed had invented about him, or had inferred from what early preachers had told them. Not surprisingly, Bultmann’s approach left intact little that might have derived from the original Jesus — not much more than the parables, Jesus’ baptism, his Galilean and Judaeen ministry and his crucifixion. Recognizing this himself, he condemned as useless further attempts to try to reconstruct the Jesus of history.”<sup>15</sup> Next, he invented a Jesus whom he named as the Christ of Kerygma.

Enquiry into what the real Jesus really believed or experienced inside himself, was ruled out. “Bultmann warned, in peremptory fashion: ‘the kerygma does not permit any enquiry into

<sup>14</sup> James P. Mackey, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Ian Wilson, op. cit., pp. 36-37 with reference to Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, Gottingen, 1923.

the personal faith of the preacher' (that is, Jesus)... He is both heir and defiant defender of a long century of growing scepticism about the ability of the New Testament texts to tell us anything at all certain about the historical Jesus. He is an equally staunch opponent of what in the Reformation tradition was known as psychologism, that is, the attempt to describe the inner mental states of Jesus... In his view, then, to try to find out if Jesus was himself a man of faith was a task both idle and possibly pernicious. The true kerygma, the true preaching of Jesus as Lord, simply forbade it. Faith in Jesus...rules out any talk about the faith of Jesus."<sup>16</sup>

Jesus was simply to be presented as Lord without bothering about the basis and quality of that lordship. "Bultmann does not hold the same view of the divinity of Jesus as did Aquinas. Yet he is equally convinced that in the preaching of Jesus as Lord, if we are only open to it, God himself encounters us and enables us to make the faith-decision... Speculation about the personal faith of the historical Jesus is at best unhelpful to such an encounter with God in the preaching of Jesus as Lord. At best it will mislead us into thinking that Christian faith is merely a matter of imitating some mental states of Jesus presented to us now by some reliable historian."<sup>17</sup>

Bultmann's starting point was Kahler's thesis that the Gospels were "faith documents", and that they should not be subjected to historical scrutiny. But he carried the thesis much farther. "By the time Bultmann has finished developing Kahler's thesis, it is clear, the embargo on the quest of the historical Jesus is no longer based primarily upon the alleged inability of the historical method working on the sources at our disposal to paint a substantial picture of the historical Jesus. The point is made with mainly theological intent by Bultmann, as in his oft-quoted sentence: 'Faith, being a personal decision, cannot be dependent upon a historian's labours'... Clearly enough, the suggestion...is

<sup>16</sup> James P. Mackey, op. cit., p. 164 with reference to Bultmann, *Jesus and the World* (1926) and 'Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus', in Carl E. Brandon et al (ed.), *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ*, Nashville, NH (USA), 1964.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 165.

that Christian faith should not require the support of critical history.”<sup>18</sup>

He places a ban not only on history but also on philosophy. “The object of our faith, according to Bultmann, is the Christ of the kerygma (the Christ of Christian preaching or proclamation) and not the person of the historical Jesus, and the ‘Christ of the kerygma is not a historical figure which could enjoy continuity with the historical Jesus’. The Christ of Christian preaching is the risen Lord, not a historical Jesus. Bultmann would not want us to think that the faith by which our lives are literally saved is ‘mere knowledge’ or intellectual acceptance of a ‘theoretical world view’ that refers all existence back to a creator God. Rather, there is ‘an individual man like us in whose action God acts, in whose destiny God is at work, in whose word God speaks’. And to have faith in this one is to let God rule our lives and not let them be ruled by any human power or plan or any worldly possession. ‘What we are to learn from the cross of Christ is to go as far as to believe precisely this; and it is for this reason that Christ is our Lord, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.’”<sup>19</sup>

What is this kerygma or Christian proclamation? It is the cross rather than the gospels, says Bultmann. “But, of course, ‘in the kerygma the mythical form of the Son of God has appeared in place of the historical person of Jesus’...The man in whose action God acts, in whose destiny God is at work, in whose word God speaks, is the Son of God, not the historical Jesus. ‘The obedience and self-emptying of Christ of which he (i.e. Paul) speaks (Phil. 2.6-9; Rom.15.3; II Cor. 8.9) are attitudes of the pre-existent and not of the historical Jesus,’ ‘and the cross is not regarded from a biographical standpoint but as saving event...’”<sup>20</sup>

Who is to proclaim the kerygma or the proclamation? Bultmann’s answer is quite clear. “It is the proclamation of the

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 250, with reference to Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament*, sixth edition, Tübingen, 1968.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 251, with reference to Bultmann, *Existence and Faith* (1968) and ‘The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus’ (1968).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 251-52, with reference to Bultmann, ‘The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus’ (1968).

Christian community, not the repetition of the alleged preaching of Jesus or of the implications of his ministry, that can enable us, by God's grace, to confess Jesus as our present Lord, the crucified and the risen saviour, in the confession of whose name we contact that faith in God as the creator and giver of all life and existence by which we must then live. *Only the Christian preaching demands our faith in the fact that this once crucified man is Lord of the world*, and thus faces us with the awful paradox that the least likely of events is God's saving act in the world..."<sup>21</sup>

We are back to Tertullian: "It is certain because it is impossible." Whatever be the facts, the conclusions of Christian theologians remain the same. Christianity, they say, must retain its right to aggress against others, even if all evidences goes to show that its founder is a fiction, that the fiction is insufferably filthy, and that all its tom-tom in defence of that fiction is pure hogwash. Christian theologians will go on playing the game so long as the victims of Christian aggression do not tell them that their "risen Lord" and the rest is rubbish, pure and simple, and that the sooner they stop selling this junk, the better for their own morals and mental health. I am reminded of an observation which Mahatma Gandhi had made on the character of Christian theology. Talking to some Christian missionaries on 12 March 1940, he had said, "Among agents of many untruths that are propounded in the world one of the foremost is theology. I do not say that there is no demand for it. There is demand in the world for many a questionable thing."<sup>22</sup>

By the time he died in 1976, Bultmann had become far more famous than Schweitzer. The reason is very simple. Compared to the halting, half-yes-half-no, and mournful manner of Schweitzer, Bultmann was far more brazen-faced in his casuistry. It can be laid down as a rule that the more crooked and crafty a theologian, the higher the prestige he acquires in the eyes of those Christians who want to maintain that their abominable superstition is sublime truth, and that their aggression

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.254. Emphasis added.

<sup>22</sup> *Collected Works*, Volume 71, p. 338.

against other people has a divine sanction. It is the misfortune of the victims of Christian aggression that they have not only to counter the aggression in various forms but also to wade through the stinking cesspit that is Christian theology. Those who do not know the wiles of Christian theology are most likely to walk into the missionary trap. Missionary language is no guide to missionary intentions.

Commenting on Bultmann's proposition that kerygma means proclaiming the risen Lord, J. Jeremias, Professor of theology at the University of Gottingen, observed that this amounted to saying that Christianity began "after Easter" (crucifixion), and that this was "comparable to the suggestion that Islam began only after the death of Muhammad".<sup>23</sup> Rev. D.E. Nineham, Warden of Keble College, University of Oxford, repudiated Bultmann's view that "if Jesus of faith is religiously satisfying, his historicity need not be insisted on", and replied that "such a standpoint reduces the gospel to a series of false statements about the life of a man who either never lived or was in fact *toto caelo* different from the statements about him'."<sup>24</sup> The Jewish scholar, Dr. Geza Vermes, made fun of the Bultmann school by commenting that they have "their feet off the ground of history and their heads in the clouds of faith".<sup>25</sup>

James P. Mackey suspects that "people who try to force upon me a too dichotomous choice between Christian faith and critical history are hiding from me, and perhaps from themselves, a very definite, and a very questionable presumption about the Christian faith", and that "when the question concerns the sources of this faith in our lives, the manner in which we can contract this faith, then Bultmann's presumptions begin to show, and then they are questionable".<sup>26</sup> He frowns upon the interdict which Bultmann has laid on all historical enquiry into the origins of Christianity. "Where does the Christian proclamation come from and where did it get this specific content, if not from the actual, historical life and death of Jesus of Nazareth?" he asks.

<sup>23</sup> G.A. Wells, op. cit., p.2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Cited by Ian Wilson, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> James P. Mackey, op. cit., p. 250-51.

“Clearly,” he continues, “Bultmann does not want such questions asked or answered. All attempts to raise and resolve such questions represent to him an illicit procedure, an attempt to ‘legitimate’ our preaching and our responding faith, an attempt to give ourselves ‘a good conscience’ about it. We are faced purely and simply with the proclamation which Bultmann has outlined... It makes no difference from what human words or deeds it came to us (*oddly enough the only one from whom we can be quite sure this proclamation did not come is the historical Jesus*).”<sup>11</sup> In simple language, Bultmann asks us to accept a self-evident falsehood as self-evident truth.

### **Christianity is a Big Lie**

Michael Arnheim is more forthright in presenting the plight to which Christianity has been reduced. I will quote him at some length. He writes: “By the early twentieth century the so-called ‘quest for the historical Jesus’ was bogged down in negativism. The Gospels, according to an influential schools of Protestant theologians, were to be taken as theological rather than as historical documents, and they could yield no authentic information about the life and deeds, or even the sayings and teachings, of Jesus. “Such a conclusion might have been expected to have a cataclysmic effect upon Christianity. For, after all, there could surely be no Christianity without Christ, and there could be no Christ without Jesus? But if Jesus were so shadowy a figure as to belong more to the realm of myth and legend than to that of history and fact, the whole edifice of Christianity must surely crumble?”

“Not so, said the radical theologians. The truth of Christianity was independent of historical proof, and historical evidence was therefore quite irrelevant to the validity of Christianity. “How then *is* one to decide on the truth or falsehood of Christianity? For Rudolf Bultmann, one of the most influential Christian theologians of the twentieth century, the key element in the religion was what he called an ‘existential encounter with

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 255. Emphasis added.

Christ', which did not depend upon any intellectual critical process, but rather on a leap into the dark — or, to put it more crudely, upon an acceptance of faith on trust.

“Knox and Nineham, two leading British theologians, similarly reject the possibility of basing Christian faith upon historical evidence but resort instead to the Church as the basis of faith, thus becoming caught in a circular argument. As Donald Guthrie remarks: ‘...Neither Nineham nor Knox has recognised the inconsistency of appealing to the testimony of the Church when they have already denied the historical accounts, which they regard as the products of the Church.’

“With this we are back to square one: by what criterion may the truth or falsehood of Christianity be judged? To base one’s acceptance of a religion upon blind faith or unsupported trust gives one no right to claim the superiority of that religion over any other religion, nor does it entitle one to assert the truth of that religion.

“And yet there is no religion in the world which is more insistent than Christianity upon its claim to truth or more confident of its superiority to all the other faiths.”<sup>28</sup> The only other criterion on which Christianity can and does base its claim to superiority is the fact that it has been a great success story, having imposed itself over large populations in every part of the globe. I shall quote Michael Arnheim on this point as well. He says:

“A creed religion like Christianity... is constantly competing against all other religions — and, what is more, doing so on their own home grounds. Its success is measured in terms of the number of converts it makes.

“There can be no doubt of the success of Christianity by this criterion, but it is strange to find the same criterion used not as a measure of success but also a proof of Christianity’s truth. “The basis for this may be the assumption that ‘you can’t fool all the people all the time’ and therefore that the wider the acceptance that an idea or belief enjoys the truer it must be! But perhaps Adolf Hitler’s remark about the effectiveness of the ‘big

<sup>28</sup> Michael Arnheim, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

lie', a subject on which he must be acknowledged an expert, is nearer the mark.

"Yet the equation between popularity and truth persists in the common mind... If Christianity were not true, runs the common line of argument, then why should it have prospered as it so obviously has?

"The argument of course rests four-square upon the assumption that the success of a religion in attracting adherents and amassing wealth is a mark of divine favour and an endorsement of its truth.

"But Christianity took a long time to become successful, and the argument of 'truth from success' would therefore simply not have served the interests of the early church fathers. Despite the occasional bouts of persecution by means of which the Roman imperial government (inadvertently) boosted the number of converts to Christianity, after three hundred years the number of Christians in the Roman Empire, according to modern estimates, amounted to no more than 10 per cent of the total population. It was only in the fourth century after the conversion of Emperor Constantine that Christianity became a major religion in numerical terms. It is now quite clear that it was not the success of Christianity which attracted Constantine to it but Constantine's conversion which led to the religion's success. The emperor's conversion naturally gave Christianity an aura of respectability which it had previously lacked, but, perhaps even more important, the statute book was soon bristling with laws discriminating against non-Christians."<sup>29</sup>

Arnheim does not deal with the subsequent stages of Christianity's success story. He assumes that the readers for whom he is writing are conversant with the criminal history of Christianity in Europe and all other countries. That history has been documented by Western scholars, and is available to all those who care to know what Christianity has meant to peoples whom it chose to evangelize.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 198-99. It may be pointed out that people in the Asian, African, and European provinces of the Roman Empire were attracted to Christianity, not because it impressed them as a superior religion, but because it represented a revolt against Roman imperialism.

Finally, Arnheim comes to theologians like Bultrann who stick to the superior claims of Christianity in spite of it having been found out as a fraud based on a total falsehood. He concludes:

“These are people who cannot accept the Gospel claims as literally true but also cannot bring themselves to admit that a rejection of those claims is a rejection of Christianity. They want to regard themselves as Christians without accepting the basis of the Christian faith. Hence the resort to high-flown jargon and the many attempts to explain the Gospel accounts away as mythical or figurative representations of a transcendent and not easily intelligible set of truths.

“ ‘Truth in matter of religion,’ said Oscar Wilde, ‘is simply the opinion that has survived.’ It is in this sense, and in this sense alone, that Christianity can be said to be true. The only problem is that this definition of truth brings it dangerously close to what can only be called — the big lie.”<sup>30</sup>

The merchants of the Big Lie that is Christianity were able to sell their goods over a large part of the globe and for a long time, not because they possessed any superior skill, but simply because they concentrated on assembling big arsenals, floating big fleets, and marshalling big battalions for terrorising the sceptical or the unwilling buyers. “Go out into the highways and among the hedges, and compel people to come in” (Lk. 14.24) was, for a long time, the only method they knew of increasing the number of their clients. They would not have renounced this method willingly or voluntarily, had they not been found out for what they were, and exposed in their own homelands — Europe and North America.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 201.